

Jonah's Rebellion – Part I

Whom Shall I Fear

(Jonah 1:1-3)

Introduction:

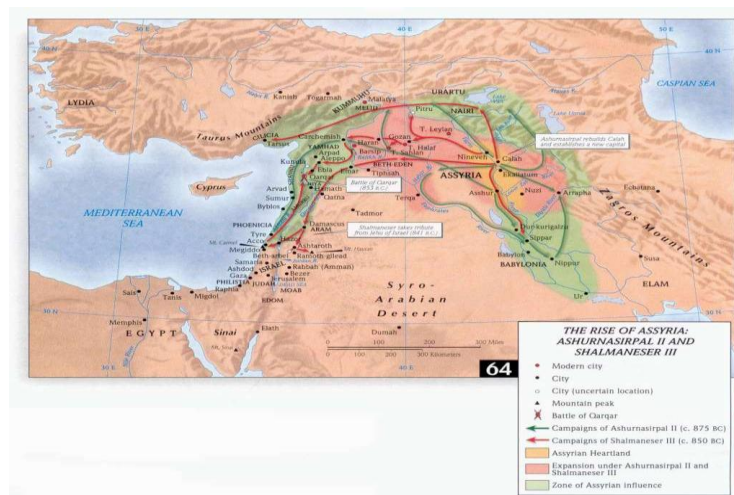
1. We have already established in our previous lesson that Jonah was a prophet. (Jonah 1:1)
2. In addition to that; in our “overview” we were able to see the “big picture” of God’s redemptive plan.
3. In this lesson I want us to look a little more closely as to why Jonah fled from the God whom he knew was All Powerful, All Knowing, and Everywhere.
4. While it is true that Jonah rebelled against God; he also knew that the same God whom he rebelled against was capable and willing of saving his life and empowering him for the task which he (Jonah) was called to do.
5. His task was not an easy one as one Pastor said; “It would be like going to Moscow during the height of the Cold War and proclaiming that God would destroy the Soviet Union”.
 - Although Assyria (of which Nineveh was the capital) was currently in a weakened state it was still a formidable opponent to Israel and the Middle Eastern world at that time.
 - For Jonah to go there and preach repentance meant he was aiding and abetting the enemy (of his people) who would one day carry them into captivity.
6. How about you; have you ever run from God?

Run Jonah Run (Jonah 1:1-3)

1. Jonah's call
 - The fact the “The word of the Lord came to Jonah” is evidence that God was speaking to Jonah and had something that He required him to do.
 - If you look at the various Old Testament prophets you will find this “calling” as a standard model. Although it might be recorded slightly different in each prophetic book; the evidence of a calling is usually found there in the first few verses of the record (the Book) itself.
 - 1) Some of the more obvious ones such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel provide us with a vision that describes God “setting them apart” for a specific task or ministry.
 - 2) Others such as Amos, Hosea, and in this case Jonah; state what the message is and who it is to. In other words these prophets had a more specific task and their calling was directly related to that task.
 - 3) The key component that we don't want to miss is the fact that this is how God works; He calls and when He does we need to respond.
2. Look at Jonah's response to God's call (Jonah 1:3) and compare it to Isaiah's response (Isaiah 1:6). Without being too critical of Jonah, what differences do you see?
3. We are all capable of doubting God, and certainly capable of thinking we can do things our own way.....what makes us think we can get away with it?

4. What was Jonah afraid of that made him think that problem was somehow greater than the consequences of disobeying God?

- The _____ Empire was the greatest threat to the Northern Kingdom.
 - 1) _____ was the capital of that empire
 - 2) The northern most borders of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) were under the constant threat of this great empire and Jonah knew this even though under Jeroboam II they had been secured and fortified.
 - 3) Jonah, a contemporary of Hosea and Amos; would have been aware of their prophecies concerning the demise of the Northern Kingdom. He would also have known of the coming advance of this Empire upon them which would result in their eventual destruction and captivity.
 - 4) The Assyrian Empire for some time had been a formidable opponent to both the Southern Kingdom (Judah) as well as the Northern Kingdom (Israel) for during the reign of some of the previous and future kings of Israel they were forced to pay tribute to Assyria for protection from others or to avoid war with them.



- Nineveh was becoming a powerful and influential city
 - 1) Nineveh was originally built by _____ (Genesis 10:11), and he was credited with the founding of the earliest of the recorded imperial world powers in Babylon and Assyria. Ironically he went on to establish a number of powerful cities and those inhabitants would later become major enemies of Israel.
 - 2) Nineveh was a large city and second in size to Babylon
 - 3) Nineveh wasn't the capital of the Assyrian Empire until after the time of Jonah. It actually became the capital under the reign of Sennacherib 705-681 B.C.
 - 4) The people in the city were rather carefree (Zephaniah 2:15) and they considered themselves invincible.
- Nineveh was a wicked city and Jonah knew of their debauchery:
 - 1) They were well known for their _____, and worshipped a number of pagan deities such as Nabu, Assur, Adad, and the goddess Ishtar who was the female deity of love and war. Many of these same deities were worshiped by the various Middle Eastern and near eastern cultures of that time.
 - 2) They were well known for their cruelty. Here is the closest (PG) quote I can give you that helps to describe their atrocities; "I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I died the mountain red like wool.....the heads of the warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire – Ashurnasirpal II – 883-859" (**Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. 1: page 148)**)

- 3) The Prophet Nahum (who will later prophecy of the fall of Assyria) called Nineveh the “city of blood” (Nahum 3:1), and “a city known for its cruelty”. (Nahum 3:19)
- 4) Nineveh and the entire Assyrian empire were heavily influenced by the Babylonian culture which itself was grossly idolatrous. The national god of Assyria was Assur and the ruling king was considered the high priest and representation of that deity.
- 5) Nineveh will later be judged for her atrocities to the surrounding nations, including Israel and Judah (Nahum 1:15). They will be conquered by the combined efforts of the Nabopolassar a Babylonians king and Cyaxeres a Mede.
- 6) *If this city was so wicked and their eventual path leads to destruction because of continuous disobedience; why did God send Jonah to call them to repentance knowing they would fall right back into their wicked pursuits?*

5. *Although the call to repentance was issued to Nineveh; that same call to repentance was issued to God’s people as well. Is there something for us to learn from this?*

- Is it wiser to fear the worst persecution that man can bring upon us or to fear the wrath and punishment of God?
- Is it risky to tempt God (either nationally or personally) with an attitude that sees no need to repent or ignores God’s call to repent?

6. Jonah decides to disobey God (Jonah 1:3)

- The message that the Lord gave to Jonah was very clear so he couldn't claim ignorance or that the message was not accurately communicated or somehow lost in translation.
 - 1) The wrath of God against Nineveh would have been easy for Jonah to grasp – for they were a wicked and cruel people.
 - 2) The problem arose when God chose to display His compassion for the Ninevites in calling them to repentance – this created a real dilemma for Jonah.
 - 3) Jonah chose to ignore his responsibility and allowed his patriotic duty to overshadow his spiritual obligation to do God's will.
- The decision here by Jonah to flee instead of obey is a classic example of thinking our way is better than God's way.
 - 1) The instruction by the Lord was for Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach or “cry against it”; so as to get them to see their wickedness and repent.
 - 2) Jonah could not have known the complete outcome or results but perhaps assumed that he would be aiding and abetting the enemy.
 - 3) What should Jonah have actually done here?

- Jonah chose to go in the complete opposite direction and instead of going east to Nineveh; he boards a ship and heads west.

- 1) We are told that he boarded a ship at Joppa (which is the modern port city of Jaffa near Tel Aviv) located some 35 miles from Samaria.



- 2) The ship that he boarded (The Whales Tales Cruise Line) was headed for Tarshish (aka Tartessus) which was located some 2500 miles west of Joppa in southern Spain. It is believed that Tarshish was a Phoenician colony and Phoenicians were known for their seagoing vessels.
 - 3) The area that Jonah fled to was probably the most distant place known to Israel at the time.
- This of course is not a good move for Jonah and we will see the results of his decision in our next lesson.

Concluding Thoughts – Can We Run From God? (Psalm 139:7)

1. Have you ever tried to run from God? What were the results?
2. Why does it (at times) seem so hard for us to obey God?
3. What lessons do you find in knowing that running from God has its consequences?