



# *On The Run*

*Reflections of Rebellion*

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# Introduction

Rebellion in the life of a believer is not uncommon. This study mirrors what rebellion looks like in Jonah and those who have a living and vital relationship with the Lord God Almighty. Jonah loved God, was used mightily by God, and ran from God. Sound Familiar? Unfortunately for me, it does.

Rebellion may take place in baby steps or giant leaps. Either way, turning or running from God leads to a downward spiral.

I once heard that a transparent teacher/speaker will engage an audience more readily with real life experiences than a thousand textbook examples. When students identify with the teacher they quickly become learners. Because I believe this statement is true, I pray the students of this Jonah study understand that the author has struggled with the very same problems Jonah did: fear, anger, rebellion, sarcasm, and self pity.

Does God call only perfect people to carry out His plans? No! Jonah certainly displays that God uses whom He chooses for whatever task He wants to accomplish. God uses each one of us not in spite of us but because He loves us. He wants to redeem us from all that holds us captive. His power is displayed in the uncovering of our weaknesses. Until a person understands the depth of their depravity, they will only grasp a minute portion of God's redemptive love.

Throughout the Bible God uses unlikely characters for mighty tasks. His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Is. 55:9). To believe that God could and did use a man like Jonah means that God continues to use people like you and me. God uses people who struggle with sin.

The journey with God doesn't always feel safe. However, we learn along the way that God is trustworthy. Risk takers receive rewards beyond their wildest imagination. Full surrender to the Savior enables the mission to be accomplished with "a peace that passes all understanding." Unfortunately, not surrendering leads to chaos and turmoil on the inside and the outside. This author has been on both sides of the coin and has determined the surrendered side yields a much greater reward.

Once on a much needed get away with God, He spoke and I listened. My Creator told me I was developing a heart like Jonah. I wept as He showed me the rebellious heart I was cultivating while on mission with Him. I was in ministry and had learned to disguise the ugly places to everyone except the One who knew me most. Gratefully I received what He had to say and started on a new path!

I pray you enter this study with a teachable heart. Be willing to plunge to uncomfortable depths, soar to exhilarating heights, and experience an incredible love. May the journey be worthwhile.

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# WEEK ONE

## Day One

### Chapter One

#### ***A GOD WHO SPEAKS***

Before we begin our journey with Jonah let's do a background check. Many claim he is a fictitious character. Sadly to say some people have a hard time digesting the story of Jonah. The great fish prepared by God did not digest Jonah therefore the skeptics cry the whole story is not palatable either. So just what credence is there in the story of a man named Jonah and his place in the Bible? Why is it when people cannot wrap their minds around an incredible story they dismiss it altogether and all the surmountable evidence? Right now I am finger pointing at "those of little faith." However I must admit, I too often hear some news or read a great story and raise an eyebrow, shake my head to and fro, and a cynical expression captions my face.

To believe only parts of the Bible is to only partially believe in God. He is who He says he is and His Word is Truth. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Thus Jonah was recorded as part of God's story and is to be believed just as any other book in the Bible. So let us look up everything we can find about Jonah.

Turn to 2 Kings 14:23-25. What do you find out about Jonah here? \_\_\_\_\_

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This is our first mention of Jonah. His name means "dove." In Psalm 55:6 David cried out, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest..." Unfortunately Jonah tried to flee like a dove and never found rest in his fleeing!

Jonah's occupation was a prophet. Vine's Expository Dictionary defines a prophet as one who speaks forth or openly.<sup>1</sup> The relationship that a prophet had with God was a Divine intimacy. Jonah's prophetic words came from God alone. Jonah is also described in 2 Kings as a servant. "It is instructive to observe that Jonah is also called a 'servant' as well as a 'prophet' in the II Kings text. This is the way it is in experience. Before you become a prophet, you must first become a servant. If you are unwilling to be a servant, then you will not be a true prophet. 'Servant' speaks of sacrifice, labor, and humility. 'Prophet' speaks of position, privilege, and status... Failure to be willing to be a servant disqualifies from God's service."<sup>2</sup> At the time of 2 Kings, Jonah served the Lord by speaking forth the truth. The words he prophesied were fulfilled, thus deeming Jonah a true prophet.

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<sup>1</sup>. W.E. Vine. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 222.

<sup>2</sup>. John G. Butler. *Jonah: The Parochial Prophet* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 1994), 16.

Jonah's hometown was Gath Hepher in Galilee. His father Amittai was also a prophet.

About Jonah's character – God will unveil that throughout this study.

### **THE GOD OF THE WAY (Calls, Commands, Commissions)**

In Jonah chapter one, verse one, there is a call. God called Jonah. The God of the universe spoke to Jonah. Obviously Jonah had heard God speak before as mentioned in 2 Kings. Jonah spoke at that time only words God had given him. Jonah knew the voice of God. The question I have for you is – do you know the voice of God (as opposed to your own voice or that of Satan's trying to pull you in a defying direction)?

Read 1 Samuel Chapter 3. Who spoke? \_\_\_\_\_ Who heard? \_\_\_\_\_ Where was the listener at the time of the message? \_\_\_\_\_

At an early age Samuel was given a message by God. Even though the message God spoke was difficult Samuel revealed it. Often God speaks to us with uncomfortable instructions. Samuel's obedience enlisted him to a life long service to God.

Can you recall a time when God spoke to you? \_\_\_\_\_

Read John 6:63. What are the words of God? \_\_\_\_\_

In what ways can God speak to you? See Hebrews 13:7 for at least one but list some others. \_\_\_\_\_

Read 1 Kings 19:11-13. God spoke in a "still, small voice" or a "gentle whisper." To hear either one of those descriptions what would be required? Think along the lines of silence and reverence. We live in the age of noise. From televisions and radios to internet and all kind of phone devices, distractions cry out to us. Better to "Be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10)" than for God to have to take drastic measures to make us be still. C.S Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." May we be roused just by the sound of His voice.

Let me pose a question here. Why would a sovereign God who knew what Jonah would do call on him to undertake this assignment? In our human reasoning we would have picked a different prophet – one with an obedient heart. Stop right there! God chose Jonah because his heart needed to be changed. As a servant and prophet he had proven himself successful in the eyes of men. Somewhere along the way Jonah had allowed pride, bigotry, self will, anger and other sins to make a nest in his heart. Maybe even Jonah wasn't aware of the depths of his depravity until the call was made.

## CONDITION CAN HURT POSITION!

I emphasize this point because I have experienced this statement first hand. When sin is smoldering below the surface there will come a day when that sin will finally raise its ugly head. The lava that erupts may damage not only yourself but anyone in any proximity. God will do whatever it takes to deal with the sin. A private dealing may thwart a public humiliation. Is there anything in your heart right now that needs to be dealt with?

In verse 2 there is a command. Let's break down this verse into parts. Some translations say, "Arise" while other say "Get up." Any way you read this, the meaning is clear. God said GO! God did not ask Jonah if he would mind doing something of great importance. He (flat out) gave Jonah a specific command. The word arise means with haste. Lethargic people hate the word hurry. Procrastinators cringe at its very sound. The status quo crowd rolls their eyes when commanded to do anything. Lethargy, procrastination, or desiring status a quo position does not seem to be Jonah's problem. The problem is much deeper within his heart.

The word arise is the "what to do" of the command. Nineveh is the "where to" destination. Why Nineveh? "Nineveh was one of the greatest cities of the world, situated on the east bank of the Tigris, 400 mile from the Mediterranean. It was the capital of Assyria (Genesis 10:11-12). The stronghold of the city was about thirty miles long and ten miles wide. It was marvelous in appearance. Five walls and three moats (canals) surrounded it. The walls were 100 feet high and allowed four chariots to be driven abreast. The palaces were great and beautiful with the finest of gardens. Fifteen gates guarded by colossal lions and bulls opened into the city. Seventy halls were decorated magnificently in alabaster and sculpture. The temple in the city was in the form of a great pyramid that glittered in the sun. The city was as great in wickedness as it was in wealth and power. Intellectual attainments were almost incredible."<sup>3</sup>

What kind of wickedness existed in Nineveh? "Nahum says that Nineveh was guilty of (1) evil plots against God (Nahum 1:9), (2) exploitation of the helpless (Nahum 2:12), (3) cruelty in war (Nahum 2:12-13), (4) idolatry, prostitution, and witchcraft (Nahum 3:4)."<sup>4</sup>

The sin of that great city was detestable before God. The people within the city were worshipping everything but the God of the universe. God hates sin yet desires for Nineveh to repent. God wants Nineveh to have a chance to hear His commands and turn from their wicked ways. Unfortunately Jonah doesn't share the same sentiment. God's desire is for Jonah to go to a city whose wickedness made its way up to God. One translation says that the sin smelled all the way up to heaven. I wonder if that is where the saying "stinks to high heavens" comes from.

"And 'the mind of the flesh is death.' The flesh has about it 'the smell of infernal association. It stinks.'"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> . Henrietta C. Mears. *What the Bible Is All About: Bible Handbook* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998), 316.

<sup>4</sup> . *Life Application Bible, Notes and Bible Helps*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.1988, 1989, 1990, 1991), 1560.

God commissions Jonah to preach to Nineveh. Jonah's charge was to preach against Nineveh. Whenever God calls an individual to perform a task He goes with that person to the assignment. The prefix "co" means with. One of the definitions for "mission" in Webster's Dictionary is, "a course of sermons and services given to convert the unchurched or quicken Christian faith." If God calls us to go and share His love, the promise to be with us is a given.

List the promises of God in the following verses:

Isaiah 41:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 42:16 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 1:7-8 \_\_\_\_\_

Joshua 1:5, 9 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 3:12 \_\_\_\_\_

Deut. 1:30-31 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 28:19-20 \_\_\_\_\_

Has God called, commanded, commissioned you for any specific service? At this moment I want you to stop and spend time with the same God who called out Jonah. Ask Him if you are where you are supposed to be doing exactly what He wants you to do. If there is a gnawing feeling that there is a Nineveh He wants you to go to (could be a person, place or situation) then turn up the volume on your hearing aid and listen. In the blanks below write out any way you may be hearing God direct.

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If God seems to be silent just keep your heart open as you work through this study. He rewards those who seek Him with diligence (Heb.11:6). As you close today's lesson be intentional about listening for the voice of God. He often speaks at unusual times and in unusual places.

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<sup>5</sup> L.E. Maxwell. *Born Crucified* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1973), 84.

## Day Two

As we begin day two I would emphasize the need to re-read Chapter one. The chapters in Jonah are short but the meaning of the story is dominant in each verse. People generally have to hear a message about five times before they can fully grasp it. Verse three has a dramatic word that shifts the focus off the voice of God and onto to the feet of Jonah.

What is the first word in verse 3? \_\_\_\_\_

Hopefully your translation says “but.” The old days of English classes have long since passed from my mind. However, I do remember the word “but” is called a conjunction. A conjunction is used to link words, phrases, or clauses together. Using the word “but” implies an exception to the previous thought. When people use the word “but” in an apology (example- I’m sorry, but...) they often negate the whole apology to the recipient of that apology. I have found in life that there are little “buts” and big “buts.” The fact that God spoke “but” Jonah ran appears to be a very big “but.” The story progresses when an even bigger “but” will trump the fact “but Jonah ran.”

From whom did Jonah run? \_\_\_\_\_ What city did he head for? \_\_\_\_\_

A little geography lesson is essential here. Supposing that Jonah heard God speak in his hometown of Gath Hopher (near Nazareth in Galilee), Jonah’s trip to Nineveh would have been about 500 to 600 miles. The fact that Jonah headed for Tarshish is a very dramatic fact. While scholars dispute the actual location of Tarshish, most likely it is a port in Spain. That means Jonah was heading about 2500 miles in the opposite direction from Nineveh! Jonah went “down” to Joppa, a city on Israel’s coast to board a ship and flee. Note that Jonah’s direction was down. Upon arrival at Joppa there was a ship heading just for the port of Tarshish!

WHEN GOD MAKES A WAY FOR US, SATAN WILL SURELY MAKE A WAY OF ESCAPE.

If Tarshish represents a run away assignment from God, and Joppa the escape route, name some abandoned assignments and escape routes you have taken from God:

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Perhaps your escape comes in the form of shopping, internet activities, the cell phone . . . the list could span for pages but only you can identify your own.

Why did Jonah run? One can only speculate at this point if you are reading verse by verse. If you read the book in its entirety you understand the reason for the run. Up to this point, one may imagine that preaching destruction against such a great and fortified city would be almost laughable. Jonah certainly would not have desired humiliation.

Could he preach against such a wicked city and expect conversion? (Next to impossible.)

Was he afraid for his life? Would the declaration bring about his demise?

While all these assumptions are plausible they do not shed light on the dark shadow in Jonah's heart.

Three-D mistakes of Jonah:

Jonah disliked God's message.

Jonah doubted God's sovereignty.

Jonah disobeyed God's command.

In his disobedience, Jonah made a quick run to Joppa and just as quickly found a ship departing for his destination. "But though it was so spontaneous, it was not without cause: for a sudden spiritual demise does not happen accidentally. Spontaneity in disobedience does not occur unless much ground work has been laid for it. We sin inwardly in thought, desire, and will before we take a single bad step outwardly. There will be a number of little falls before a great fall occurs in one's life."<sup>6</sup>

How do the following verses advise us to prevent making three-D mistakes?

Jeremiah 7:23-24 \_\_\_\_\_

Colossians 3:18-22 \_\_\_\_\_

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Peter 1:22 \_\_\_\_\_

Joppa provided an escape to disobedience. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 who makes a way of escape and from what can one escape? \_\_\_\_\_

Jonah took a gamble that God wouldn't do anything about disobedience. Have you ever taken a gamble that maybe God will overlook your sin and maybe there won't be any consequences? All punishment for sin took place on the cross. However, there are consequences to sin.

Before verse 3 is finished Jonah's desire to flee from God's presence is mentioned twice. Jonah must have had a brain lapse. He knew God is omnipresent. What does Psalm 139 say about the presence of God?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

YOU CANNOT OUTFRAN OR OUTSMART GOD.

\_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>6</sup>. Butler, 30.

“The presence of God is intolerable to a rebellious spirit. Therefore, we are not surprised to read that Jonah’s disobedience took him ‘from the presence of the Lord.’”<sup>7</sup>

Why did Adam and Eve hide from God in Genesis 3:8? \_\_\_\_\_

Satan’s underlying message to the first man and woman was to disobey. Satan is alive and well whispering the same message to men and women across the planet. After any disobedience there comes a desire to hide from God or to run from His presence. Often the desire stems from guilt and shame. What follows is a drifting, a deferring the blame on someone else or God, or a denial of any wrongdoing at all. What a physical toll that takes on a person physically, mentally and spiritually. The fare Jonah was noted to have paid cost him way more than money. “Disobedience becomes quite liberal in spending to help its pursuit, but it tightens up the purse strings ever so tightly for expenses that support obedience.”<sup>8</sup>

Do you think Jonah notified any family or friends about where he was going? Probably not. Generally we try to sin in secret. We can persuade ourselves that no one will know except God (as if that isn’t enough). Discerning friends and family can read our faces and even catch a faint whiff of anything that smells fishy with us. Before long Jonah would reek from an odor any innocent bystander could detect. What does Numbers 32:23 say? \_\_\_\_\_

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Jonah would have been wise to seek counsel at this point in his life. Face it folks, when we are in rebellion, make up our mind to sin, and run from God’s commands, we don’t go searching for wise counsel. Counseling offices are filled with people who seek out advice after “the tea party is over” as my mama used to say. Jonah is heading for a sea party instead, one that has a surprise waiting for all on board.

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7. Ibid., 33.

8. Ibid., 38.