

# Jonah 1: Why Do We Run Away From God?

## I. Introduction

Even the most religious can run away from God. How can someone who knows so much about God run away from Him? Why do we run, what's behind it? How does God respond, does He get angry? And why do things get even worse when we run from Him?

## II. We're All Capable of Running Away from God, Often We Don't Even Realize We're Running

**Who is Jonah?** Jonah prophesied during a time when the nation of Israel was divided in two, the northern kingdom ("Israel") and southern kingdom ("Judah"). And although it was a time of military and economic success, spiritually Israel was in great decline, especially the northern kingdom. Jonah was prophet to the northern kingdom and this played a role in why he refused to go when God told him to go prophesy to the brutal nation of Assyria. Little is known of Jonah personally: his father was Amittai, his hometown was Gath Hopher (3 miles from Nazareth in the northern kingdom and part of the tribe of Zebulun), 2 Kings 14:25.

**Jonah runs away from God, Jonah 1:1-3,** God tells Jonah to go to the capital of Assyria, to Nineveh, and preach against it. Why? Because of their wickedness. Aside from their idolatry, they were brutal to the people they conquered (Nahum 3:1-3). But Jonah refuses and runs away from God. He was supposed to go East (N. Iraq), but he goes as far West as possible (Spain).

How do we run from God? Sometimes we unknowingly walk away from God because life gets the best of us; we don't mean to fear or be anxious, but we are. This is running from God. How so? Well, didn't God tell us not to worry, not to be anxious, that His peace can sustain us through anything (Philippians 4:6-7)? If our circumstances have gotten the best of us and we're now anxious, then we've unwittingly walked away from God's promise of peace. Then again sometimes like Jonah, we're defiant and we run, but there's something behind this too.....why does this happen, why do we run?

Why do we run from God? Why did Jonah run? He didn't want to go to Nineveh, Assyria's capital, because he knew from the prophet Amos that Assyria was going to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel and Assyria's brutality was now going to be Israel's (though Assyria is not mentioned by name in Amos, they're the nation God is talking about in Amos. He uses them to destroy Israel, e.g., Amos 3:11-15; 5:27, a prophecy that's fulfilled in 2 Kings 17:5-6). Jonah didn't want the Assyrians to repent; he wanted them to die. Would you go to ISIS and prophesy against it after God told you that He was going to use them to destroy the USA? But Jonah is a prophet, doesn't he know that he can't run from God? Yes, he knows that. But does he *know* God? Do you *know* God? "Well, yea, I know God. I learn something about Him every Sunday."

It's not enough to know facts *about* God. You have to know God personally. If God wants another nation to conquer Israel, then it will happen and it will be just. If God is love, justice, mercy and compassion, then so are ALL His actions. Jonah may've known God personally in many other areas of his life, but not when it came to this one. On this issue, all he could see is Israel's demise and therefore God's decision as wrong. This is how we run from God. Life happens, all it takes is the next crisis and all of a sudden we're a million miles from God. Knowingly or not, we start to redefine Him by our circumstances, by our fears, by our anxieties and before we know it, we're far away from God and His salvation...with no hope in sight.

**God chases Jonah, Jonah 1:4-9**, Jonah doesn't get far before God takes chase and catches him with a hurricane. The storm is so bad that it's about to tear the ship apart. The sailors are so terrified that they cry out to their gods and toss their cargo overboard. Meanwhile Jonah is fast asleep! The captain gets wind of this so he goes to the bottom of the ship to wake him up and find out why he's not praying to his gods to spare their lives. None of this is working, so they decide to cast lots to find out who is the cause of all of this. The lot falls on Jonah (Proverbs 16:33), they interrogate him, and he confesses that he's the reason for the storm.

*What does God do to stop our running?* Jonah knew facts about God. He knew that he couldn't run from him. He knew what the psalmist wrote about Him, that no matter how far you run, God is there, Psalm 139. So why did he run? This is the result of having a lot of doctrinal information without a personal relationship with the God behind all those doctrinal facts. So even though Jonah knew that he couldn't actually run from God, those facts didn't stop him. All he could see is a calamity coming upon his people and he wanted no part of it. How does God get our attention? Things go wrong; storms hit us. This is how life works. Every time you run away from God, every time you try to live your life apart from God, you're going to run into resistance. Every time you do your marriage, your job, anything without God, things will not go well.

By the way, it's not that God is angry. It looks like God is angry, like He's trying to kill Jonah, is He? No, He's actually trying to save Jonah, trying to give him a second chance.

**Jonah stops running, Jonah 1:10-16**, when the men discover that it was Jonah's God who had caused the storm, they were terrified even more because Jonah's God was the creator of the universe including the storm that was about to kill them. So they ask Jonah what they needed to do to calm the sea. He tells them to toss him overboard. This scares them even more because they dare not kill the Lord's prophet. So now, the sailors start to run away from God, they try to row to shore, but God makes the sea grow worse. They give up and cry out to God not to kill them nor to hold them guilty for tossing Jonah overboard. Then they throw Jonah into the sea and it goes calm, which scares them even further and causes them to take vows and offer sacrifices to God.

Sometimes people don't stop running away from God until they hit rock bottom. This was Jonah. Not only was his life in danger, but so were many others. So he realized that he had to stop running from God. And this begins a personal encounter with God that will last the rest of the book. God is about to show Jonah the areas of his life where he's kept God out. And unless he had this personal encounter with Him, he would have kept running. Where is God missing from your life? Have you kept God at a distance? Do you know only facts about Him or do you actually live life with Him? Have you invited Him into every corner of your life?

**God gives Jonah a second chance, Jonah 1:17**, long before the sailors threw Jonah in the sea, God had prepared a giant fish to swallow him up. Why did God do this? It was Jonah's second chance. The fish wasn't there to kill Jonah, it was his life preserver. Do you see the life preserver God is holding out to you or does it look to you like He's trying to kill you?

### III. Conclusion

*So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging..... Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*