

# Jonah

## The Story of a Rebellious Man

or How not to Catch a Fish

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<sup>1:1</sup> Hello,

My name is Jonah, and my father was Amittai. I am in heaven now, but while I was still on earth I was a follower of Jehovah God. I loved Him and found great satisfaction in going to the temple to worship, but once I got to heaven I came face to face with the sin I had carried throughout my life. I am ashamed of the way I lived, but I want to tell you about my rebellion against God so that you can learn from my mistake. That way you won't have to endure the same hurts and heartaches I experienced. You see, God told me to do something, and I flat-out refused to do it. I now realize that it was a grave mistake, but at the time I thought I was a good and godly man. I felt that because I didn't agree with God I didn't need to do what He told me. So, I refused. I didn't realize it then, but I was nothing more than an arrogant, egotistical fool. Who did I think I was trying to tell the God of the universe that I knew better than Him? Well, my rebellion cost me a lot, and I lived with that rebellion to my dying day. I share my story with you so that you won't have to make the same kind of mistakes I did. It is clear to me now that rebellion breeds disaster and is never blessed in the end. Follow along as I tell you my story, and note any area of conduct or thought that shows that you are just like me.

## 1) The cost of rebellion

<sup>2</sup> One day while I was going about my daily activities God came to me and said,

“Get up, and go to an extremely wicked gentile city called Nineveh, and tell them that God has seen the way wickedness has completely permeated the populace. Tell them that I am going to destroy them if they don't repent.”

<sup>3</sup> Well, I was amazed that the God of heaven was actually speaking to me, but there was no way that I was going to go to people as evil and wicked as those heathen gentiles. I knew that God is a loving God and that He is gracious and forgiving when people are genuinely repentant. Nonetheless, I felt I deserved God's grace because I was a Jew, but those heathens were so cruel that they deserved God's wrath, not His grace and mercy. I didn't know it at the time, but I had no concept of what love is, and I certainly didn't show it. So, I refused to do as He commanded. I thought I knew better than God, so I got angry with Him for even suggesting that I warn them. The more I thought about it the more angry I became. So, I turned and ran in the opposite direction from Nineveh. I took the shortest route to the seaport of Joppa and located a ship that was sailing to Tarshish, the farthest destination possible. I purchased a ticket and boarded the ship. As I went onboard, the crew asked me why I was making the journey, so I frankly told them that I was running from my God. My reason for travelling didn't seem to matter to them at the time, so I turned and went below deck.

<sup>4</sup> When we set sail I thought I was getting away with my little plan, but God had other ideas. We hadn't sailed far when God caused hurricane force winds to blow, and they generated huge swells. They were so large that the ship was about to break in two, and any other ship in the vicinity would suffer the same fate. <sup>5</sup> It was so bad that the sailors were afraid they were going to die. Out of desperation every crew member started crying out to his god to save him. Then they threw all of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship, but that didn't do any good. By chance, the captain of the ship went below deck and found me lying there sound asleep. <sup>6</sup> He woke me and yelled out,

“Why are you down here sleeping when we're all about to die in this storm? Get up, and pray to your god. Maybe he will hear your prayer and save us from destruction.”

At the time I didn't see what this storm had to do with me. Besides, the captain didn't know it, but I had no desire to pray to God. He was the reason I was in this mess, and I didn't want anything to do with Him.

<sup>7</sup> Well, the storm kept getting worse and worse. Things got so bad that the sailors didn't know what to do, so they decided to throw dice to see whose sin had brought this storm upon them. When they did, the dice indicated to everyone onboard that I was the guilty one. I was shocked that I had been found out even though I knew I was guilty. The dice merely confirmed my sin. <sup>8</sup> They wanted to know all about me, so they asked about my occupation, my country, my nationality, and what I had done to cause the storm.

<sup>9</sup> I told them,

“I am a Hebrew, and I believe in the God of Israel. He is the One who made the sea and the dry land. He commanded me to do something, and I refused. So I ran away like I told you when I first boarded this ship. This is the reason the storm has come upon us.”

<sup>10</sup> When they heard this they became deathly afraid because they remembered me telling them at the start of the voyage that I was running from my God. They excitedly asked, “How could you do such a thing and put our lives in danger as well as yours?” Well, what could I say? I didn’t have an answer. It was then that I realized that running from God was futile, and I had to admit to myself how my sin had adversely affected others as well as me. <sup>11</sup> They didn’t know what to do, so they asked me what they should do to me so that the sea would become calm once again. They had to do something because the storm was still getting worse. <sup>12</sup> It was then that I realized I was going to die no matter what, so I said to them,

“This storm is my fault. I shouldn’t have tried to run from God. I am not sorry that I ran from God, but I am sorry that I have been caught. I’m also sorry that my sin has so adversely affected all of you. Listen, I’m going to die either way, so as I see it, the only recourse you have is to throw me overboard. Once you do, the storm will stop.”

<sup>13</sup> That’s what I knew must happen, but the sailors were moral men and didn’t want to see me die. So, they rowed as hard as they could hoping to get to shore, but the wind was so strong that they had to give up in despair. <sup>14</sup> It was then that they prayed earnestly to my God instead of their heathen gods. They said,

“LORD GOD, we now realize that You are the true God. Please don’t let us die because of what this rebellious man has done, and please don’t hold his death against us when we throw him overboard. We now see that You have caused this storm in order to punish Jonah and make us face the fact that You are the only God worth following.”

<sup>15</sup> I was scared because they were actually going to throw me overboard, and I didn’t know how to swim. So, when they grabbed me I took a deep breath, and without hesitation, they threw me overboard. As soon as I hit the water the sea became calm. <sup>16</sup> When the sailors saw the sea become calm so quickly they fully realized that the LORD was the only God who could have done such a miracle. As a result, they were converted to the One true God, and they offered sacrifices to Him with a promise that they would serve Him in the future. I’m glad they came to know the LORD, but I am disappointed that it took my disobedience to bring about their conversion.

<sup>17</sup> Well, I knew I was going to drown, but within seconds of hitting the water I saw a huge fish with its mouth wide open, heading straight for me at full speed. At that moment I was more scared than I had ever been in my life. In an instant it swallowed me whole, and I was sure I was going to die. All I knew from that point on was complete darkness. In fact, it was so dark that I couldn’t see my hand in front of my face. I expected to experience a quick death in the fish but was surprised when I realized that I could breathe in that confinement. I didn’t know it then, but God had prepared that particular fish so that it could hold me for three days and nights without causing my death. I wondered if God was doing something special and if He might not be through with me yet.

## 2) The foxhole prayer of a rebellious man

<sup>2:1</sup> There I was, all alone with my thoughts in the darkness of that watery prison. I couldn’t sit up or turn around. All I could do was roll over, and I felt like I was trapped in a coffin. There was no way to tell whether it was daytime or nighttime, and I had no idea where we were. It wasn’t long before I started to feel a burning sensation on my skin from the digestive acids in the fish, and I realized the full gravity of what I had done by running from God. With nothing to do but think, I couldn’t get the whole situation out of my mind. It soon became apparent to me that God had put me in the fish to teach me a lesson. Otherwise

I wouldn't still be alive. I also realized that there was nothing I could do to escape from my confinement. Time dragged on for what seemed like an eternity (although it had only been a little more than two days), and after evaluating my situation over and over again in my mind I decided to pray to the LORD from the belly of that fish. I didn't pray because I loved Him or intended to obey Him but because I was desperate, and prayer was my only recourse.<sup>2</sup> This was my prayer:

LORD God,

"I am calling out to You, and I hope that You will hear my plea for help.<sup>3</sup> You put me in this fish, and it is swimming deep in the ocean far below the waves on the surface.<sup>4</sup> I wanted to run away from You in order to be out of Your sight, but because of my rebellion You have used this fish to drive me out of Your sight. In spite of all that has occurred, I still hope that somehow I will once again be able to worship You in the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>5-6</sup> Right now, though, my head is entangled with rotting seaweed, and the waters of the sea completely surround me. Being so deep in the water should have killed me, but You, my God, have rescued me from destruction by putting me inside this fish.<sup>7</sup> I see now that You had to put me in a place where I thought I was about to die before I would see the severity of my rebellion. It forced me to remember to pray to You, and I am confident that You heard my plea for help. I now see that I need to obey You regardless of whether I agree with You or not.<sup>8</sup> Those who worship false gods forfeit their opportunity to experience Your tender love and kindness.<sup>9</sup> They can do as they wish, but I will offer sacrifices to You out of a heart of thanksgiving. In addition, I will obey Your command and do what You have told me to do even though I don't want to do it. I now see that I have no choice but to obey, because salvation only comes from You, my LORD."

<sup>10</sup> Praise God, after I prayed, the LORD made the fish nauseated, and it vomited me out on dry ground. It could easily have vomited me out in the middle of the ocean, but that in itself is a miracle. I was so relieved that I could have kissed the ground. My skin had been etched white from the acids in the fish, but I didn't care how I looked. I was alive, and that was all that mattered.

### 3) The reluctant obedience of a rebellious man

<sup>3:1</sup> Once the LORD had my attention, He came to me a second time and said,

<sup>2</sup> "Get up, and go to an extremely wicked gentile city called Nineveh, and tell them that God has seen the way wickedness had completely permeated the populace. Tell them that I am going to destroy them if they don't repent. Now do what I command you."

<sup>3</sup> This time I knew better than to disobey God, because it was certain that He would do something worse to me in order to get me to obey. I still didn't think it was right for God to show grace and mercy to those wicked heathens, but I got up and went to Nineveh anyway. I didn't go because I wanted to but because I had to go. The city was a large one. In fact, it was so large that it would take three days to walk from one side of the city to the other.<sup>4</sup> I must have been a sight with my skin etched white, but that didn't matter to me. So, I walked one day's distance toward the center of town, and then I started yelling out that in forty days God was going to destroy the city and everyone in it. (All the while I was saying to myself, "I hope you wicked people get what you deserve.")

<sup>5</sup> As I had feared, revival broke out, and the people of Nineveh believed God and wholeheartedly repented. From the least to the greatest they all fasted wearing sackcloth, and it was obvious that they were committed to trusting in and following the LORD.<sup>6</sup> Word of the coming disaster reached the king, and he, too, sat in ashes wearing sackcloth.<sup>7-9</sup> Then he made a proclamation. It read,

“By decree of the king and his nobles, neither man nor animal is to eat, drink, or taste anything, but let both man and animals be covered with sackcloth. Then let everyone call out to God Almighty in prayer asking Him to spare our city and her people from destruction. Everyone is to repent of their sin, and abandon both their evil ways and the violence they have been committing. Who knows, maybe God will hear us, and maybe our repentant prayers will appease His fierce anger. Then He would certainly change His mind about annihilating our people.”

<sup>10</sup> I hated to see it happen, but when God saw how they believed in Him and had a genuine desire to abandon their sinful practices, He changed His mind, and did not destroy them. That was what I was afraid would happen if I went to warn them.

#### 4) The disappointment that results from rebellion

<sup>4:1</sup> Yes, God accepted those repentant people, but I was extremely angry about what had happened. I still felt that those wicked gentiles deserved God’s punishment rather than His kindness. <sup>2</sup> So, I prayed to God and said,

“Isn’t this what I told You would happen when You first tried to get me to go and declare Your intention of destroying them? I knew that You are a merciful God and that You take a long time to get angry. I also knew that You would be gracious to those wicked people even though they don’t deserve it. That is the very reason I tried to run from You. <sup>3</sup> Since You have abandoned Your plan to destroy them, kill me, because it is better for me to die than to live with the fact that I had a part in saving those wicked people.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD answered me by saying,

“Do you really think that you have a right to be angry because I have shown kindness to these people? You know better than that.”

<sup>5</sup> Well, I didn’t answer Him because I didn’t want to hear any more about how God was going to save Nineveh. I had to get away, so I ran away again. I was angry. I left the city and went up on a mountainside. There I made a makeshift shelter to provide partial shade so that I could watch to see what would become of the city. <sup>6</sup> While I was sitting there I was thrilled and amazed to see a plant grow up at an amazing rate providing shade from the sun. The shade from the plant was substantially more comfortable than the partial shade of my makeshift shelter. I didn’t know it then, but God had put that plant there and caused it to grow so quickly. <sup>7</sup> When I awakened the next morning, the plant started to wither and die, and the comforting shade disappeared with it. I didn’t know it then, but God had put a worm inside the plant so that it would die. <sup>8</sup> Once the sun came up, God caused a scorching east wind to blow. That combined with the sun beating down on my head made me weak and faint. In this condition I became depressed, and all I wanted to do was die. I felt it would be better to die than to have to live with the exhaustion I was experiencing, not to mention the disappointment I was experiencing having to watch God save people I thought deserved to die. <sup>9</sup> While I was having a pity party, the LORD asked me why I was angry about the plant dying. Well, I answered him by saying,

“I have every right to be angry about the plant dying. In fact, because of the repressive heat and Your kindness to those wicked gentiles I am so angry I want to die.”

<sup>10</sup> God wanted to teach me a lesson, so He said,

“Jonah, you didn’t lift a finger to plant the seed or make it grow. It grew on its own, and perished on its own. You’re only angry because you don’t have the shade. What a selfish reason. <sup>11</sup> Face it, you have pity on this lowly plant, so why shouldn’t I have pity on 120,000 people who don’t know right from wrong.

These are people I created, and I am thrilled that revival broke out so that they would love and serve Me. I am glad I will not have to destroy them or their livestock. Jonah, listen to Me, you've been a rebel throughout this whole ordeal, and you don't have a concept of what real love is all about. You feel you deserve My grace and mercy while you feel others don't. You need to get your heart right so that you won't disobey Me in the future. My desire for you is that you would repent and serve me from a willing heart."

## Application for today

It is interesting to note that Jonah was an angry and bitter man primarily because of his bias against gentiles. He did not know how to love sinners to the LORD, so he was convinced that he was doing the right thing by turning his back on the LORD. When he got to heaven I'm sure he learned all too well that rebellion has disastrous consequences, and I am sure that he was ashamed of his actions. Unfortunately we will never know this side of heaven whether Jonah truly repented and trusted God to lead him no matter what. The text simply does not say. Therefore, I must assume that Jonah was a rebel until his dying day.

You and I can and should learn from Jonah's error. Let me ask you, do you serve the LORD out of duty, or do you serve Him out of a heart of love? Are there things in Scripture that you don't do or don't want to do because you don't agree with them or view them as unimportant? Are there people you avoid because you don't want to associate with them? Do you love sinners enough to show them Christ's love and lead them to saving faith in Christ? Each one of us needs to be sure that we serve the LORD willingly no matter what, otherwise troubles await us somewhere in the future. Examine yourself, and see if you are like Jonah in any way. Then repent of your sin, and start serving the LORD out of a heart of love. Great rewards will result if you will.

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