



## JONAH RUNS FROM GOD

Week #2; July 27, 2025



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### REVIEW:

- We began our series in the book of Jonah last week, and we laid a broad foundation in that lesson.
- We explored the cultural, political, and spiritual background to this OT biography. I think we learned some things we did not expect to. Among those:
  - Jonah was a bona fide OT prophet. He was not a fraud; he was the real deal.
  - Jesus referred to him as a ‘prophet’ in **Matt. Ch. 12**, and he is called “God’s servant” in **2 Kings 14:25**.
  - The facts show Jonah was a ‘good’ prophet during the time of a ‘bad’ king. He helped keep Israel’s spiritual condition on track while the king ‘*did evil in the sight of the Lord*’ (**Cf. 2 Kings 14:24**).
  - Scholars believe Jonah was a contemporary of Elisha, Hosea, and Amos – if so, it’s not unreasonable to imagine he knew those other prophets.
  - Jonah – apparently - did a lot of things right, and he served God well, but we don’t know much about all the good things he did.
  - What we DO know is Jonah’s ‘dirty laundry.’ We know the bad stuff. This book which bears his name details a chapter of his life where he ‘bottomed out.’
  - The Bible shows us both sides of Jonah. On one hand, it shows him DOING what God wanted him to do. On the other hand, it shows him NOT doing what God wanted him to do.
  - So – he’s just like you and me. Jonah had spiritual highs followed by spiritual lows. He had success, then failure. But we can also see that he learned from that.
  - Because Jonah is the divinely inspired author of this book, and because he laid bare his mistakes for all to know, this argues that he grew from his challenges.

This week, we’re looking at **vss. 2 and 3 of Ch. 1**. Here, God gives Jonah a command:

*“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to*

*Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.*

**NOTE: Every now and then, an ‘ordinary’ passage like this one comes along in the Bible.**

- You’ve read it before; you know it well. It was probably part of your ‘Children’s Bible Stories’ books, and it doesn’t seem to say much that’s profound.
- You could probably quote these kinds of passages from memory - or get close. They tell a story, and we usually remember those things well.
- But sometimes these ‘basic’ passages contain info we need to pay closer attention to. There are things in them that are easy to miss.
- (And so) we need to pause here and take a second look, because these two verses check those boxes.

Let’s dive in and unpack what we’re reading here...

**A. Three locations are stated: Nineveh, Joppa, and Tarshish. We’ll learn something about each one:**

**1. First, we have Nineveh –**

- To set the stage here, Jonah is IN Israel. He’s doing his job. Things are going well for him. That’s what we learned last week in **2 Kings 14:25**.
- And now he receives an instruction from God to leave Israel and go northeast into Assyria – into the heart of Israel’s pagan enemy.
- In fact, it’s only about 30 years after the book of Jonah was written that Assyria would violently invade and conquer Israel.
- But it gets worse for Jonah. He’s specifically told to go to Nineveh, the biggest city in the world at that time.
- According to **Gen. 10:11-12**, Nineveh was founded by Nimrod – the first Biblical type of the antichrist - shortly after God confused the languages at Babel. So, a very bad man founded a very bad city.
- Nineveh was, by Jonah’s time, more than 1,000 years old. At that point, it was the greatest city in the greatest monarchy in the entire world. (SIDE NOTE: Nineveh is largely encompassed by the modern city of Mosul, Iraq.)
- I said it was a big city. Nineveh was roughly 60 miles in circumference, and it contained streets about twenty miles long. Its walls were – by some estimates – about a hundred feet high. They were so wide that three chariots could be driven side-by-side along their top.
- Its population was probably over 700,000. It was renowned for its brutal and indescribably inhumane tortures of people. (Those details do not need to be mentioned, but it was so bad that **Nahum 3:1** describes Nineveh as “*the bloody city.*”)
- Like most Mesopotamian civilizations of that time, Nineveh’s culture was immoral and terrifying—temple prostitution, child sacrifice, abortion, and infanticide, just to name SOME...

- But this passage in **Jonah** says Nineveh was so great in its wickedness that this had climbed up to the very throne of God. (Do your research. Look up the sordid sins and frightening brutality of Nineveh). Nineveh's sins were SO off the charts, that Las Vegas looks saint-like by comparison.
- But here's the big picture: God interrupted Jonah's routines with this most unexpected command to go to Nineveh.
- It's the last place Jonah wanted to go. It's the last place he thought God would send him to. Jonah didn't see this one coming.

But it gets worse...

- God didn't just tell Jonah that he needed a change of scenery; He also told Jonah to DO something once he got there: **PREACH AGAINST IT.**
- With this command to go to Nineveh and confront its sins and behaviors, Jonah must have felt God was giving him a certain death sentence.
- Nineveh had a reputation for extreme evil and bloodthirstiness. It was famous for the brutal tortures and deaths of anyone it didn't like.
- And God not only wanted Jonah to go THERE - - He also wanted Jonah to publicly confront Nineveh's sins. **For just a moment, let's put ourselves in Jonah's shoes....**
- To understand Jonah's response, let's think about basic sinful human nature, because that's the backdrop here:
  - People don't LIKE to be told they're wrong. They don't LIKE to have their sins confronted. They don't WANT accountability.
  - They don't WANT to acknowledge their own obvious evidence that they have – in fact - rejected God.
  - In the end, they want to do what they WANT to do. They WANT to believe what they WANT to believe.
  - And so, they'll argue all day long against the facts, because facts don't matter to them.
  - These kinds of people don't value the truth, and so they fight against it all the time in every way.
- It's about their personal choices. As the Bible says in **John 3:19**, *"....men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."*
- IMPORTANT: People choose to defend what is wrong because admitting what is right exposes their bad choices.
- Or as **Romans 1:32** clarifies about those who reject God: those who have rejected His standards, His truth, His divine order of things – (etc.)
  - **Romans** says these kinds of people not only choose their depravity, but they'll openly applaud others who practice it.
  - Misery loves company - - and so does sin!
- And because humanity has not changed from before Jonah's time to now, such people will resort to violence to shut down any message of truth.

- They hate the truth, and they loathe any laws or any reminders of that truth. And if necessary, they'll even try to eliminate the messenger.
- Ultimately, it comes down to a rejection of the One True God. The Bible is very clear. **And THIS is the situation Jonah was facing.**
- Sometimes we need to pause and think about what's really happening in the bigger picture. When we consider those details, we can begin to understand why Jonah felt and reacted as he did.
- I'm not defending Jonah's responses and actions; I'm merely explaining them from another point of view.
- And so, Jonah ran away from the Lord. He tried to flee from his duties. At some level, I think we can understand why....

## 2. The second location to consider is Joppa –

- Joppa was a major harbor city in the northern part of Israel. It's roughly 40 miles northwest of Jerusalem.
- It's mostly called Jaffa today and it is part of the modern city of Tel Aviv.
- But in Biblical times, Joppa was an important port and center of trade and travel. It would have been then like the ports of Los Angeles or New York.
- Here in our text in ***Jonah***, in the OT, we see Joppa mentioned. It was an old city.
- It's mentioned in the NT too. Joppa is notable as the home of Simon the tanner which was "*by the sea*" in ***Acts 10:6***. (Most likely, he received the animal pelts from this port, he processed them, and then they went out by the same port.)
- We also read in ***Acts 9:32-43*** that the apostle Peter stayed with Simon the tanner while Peter ministered to believers throughout Joppa.
- Here's where things get interesting - - here's a 'hmmm' moment.
  - It was on Simon the tanner's rooftop, in Joppa, that Peter had his vision of unclean animals being lowered from the sky in something resembling a sheet.
  - Likely, Simon worked with the pelts and skins of various unclean animals from a Jewish perspective. God used this vision of unclean animals to jolt Peter out of his routines and redirect his ministry to the Gentiles.
  - Remember, there was also this Gentile Roman centurion, Cornelius, who is described as a devout believer in ***Acts Ch. 10***. Cornelius was directed to go and find Peter, in Joppa, at Simon the tanner's house.
  - Peter subsequently left Joppa and went to be with Cornelius, and the Bible records the beginning of a great ministry to the Gentiles.
  - We often associate Paul as forging the great Gentile outreach in the NT, but that started before Paul. It started with Peter - and that began in Joppa.

- And so, the city of Joppa presents you and me with a story of contrast. We see a contrast in obedience here.
- Jonah was directed to go preach to the Gentiles. He ignored that command, and Joppa was the point from which he left and **disobeyed** God.
- Peter was directed to go minister to the Gentiles. He listened to that command, and Joppa was the point from which he left and **obeyed** God.
- Both Jonah and Peter were commissioned by God to redirect their focus. Jonah and Peter were doing something different before.
- But then God directed each of them to reach out to their enemies: Jonah was sent to the Assyrians, and Peter was sent to the Romans.
- There are similarities in the two stories. But there is also a BIG difference.

### 3. The third, and last location I want to look at is Tarshish –

NOTE: Right off the bat, there is a big debate about Tarshish. Where is it?

1. There are two schools of thought:
  - The first says Tarshish is Spain, or the region around Spain and Portugal.
  - The second says Tarshish is the British Isles (England).
2. Does it really matter which one it is? Yes, it does.
  - There are ramifications for having the right view, just as there are ramifications for having the wrong view.
  - Moreover, every detail in the Bible is divinely put there by God. We don't have a right to qualify God's Word.
  - If we are tempted to rank Scripture and say, 'These things are important, but these things over here are not' - - - or, 'These doctrines matter, but those really don't,' or maybe we are tempted to simply say, "This stuff is a waste of time," then we have subordinated the divine authorship of God's Word to our own biases.
  - That's a counterproductive and dangerous position to find oneself. The best posture is to treat ALL of Scripture with the same respect (that's the point of **2 Tim. 3:16**).
3. What are some things the Bible tells us about Tarshish?
  - Tarshish was essentially the fringe point of the civilized world at that time. So, Jonah was trying to get as far away from God and God's command as he could possibly get.
  - Tarshish was always associated with 'ships' and 'fleets of ships,' and sea trade, and so on.

- **1 Kings 10:22** says King Solomon had *"a fleet of ships of Tarshish,"* together with his ally, King Hiram of Tyre. *"Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks."*
- Similar elements about Tarshish are echoed in **2 Chronicles 9:21, Jeremiah 10:9, and Psalms 72:10.**
- Tarshish, clearly, was a maritime center of great importance, linked with the middle east and with contacts as far west as the ancients went. This gives us some clues for identifying Tarshish.
- However, a particularly insightful verse about Tarshish shows up in **Ezekiel 27:12** which helps us to identify where Tarshish is located. It reads:

*"Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of goods; they exchanged silver, iron, tin and lead for your merchandise."*

Here we see Tarshish was also the source of various metals, including tin, which was essential for bronze production. It was therefore worth a fortune in eastern markets.

- The Phoenicians used to call the British Isles *'baratanac'* which means 'the land of tin.'
- There were very few places in the ancient world that produced and exported tin, and the British Isles was the best of those.

**NOTE:** An intriguing story made media headlines in 2019 showing that isotope analysis of bronze artifacts from the 13th and 12th century in Israel proved that the tin in them came from Cornwall, England.

- This is the era of King David and Solomon. This is the same timeframe as these verses we noted from **1 Kings** and **2 Chronicles**.
- I could continue with these kinds of details and analyses, but I think it is safe to say - insofar as the question, "Where is Tarshish?" is concerned, Tarshish was the British Isles.
- Jonah, in trying to run from God, tried to sail to England. He was intent on going in the opposite direction, as far as possible.

You might be listening to all of this and still be thinking, "Steve, this is a bunch of information that's not that important. How does it apply to us now?"

(a.) Knowing the past accurately helps us to know the future accurately. A key passage about Tarshish is in **Ezekiel 38:13**. This passage concerns a forthcoming prophetic conflict often referred to as 'the War of Gog and Magog.' That passage reads:

*“Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all her villages will say to you, “Have you come to plunder? Have you gathered your hordes to loot, to carry off silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods and to seize much plunder?””*

(b.) In quick review, **Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39** describe a time coming when Russia, Iran, Libya, Turkey (and probably Somalia and Germany, and a few others) will mount an all-out invasion of Israel.

(c.) It's significant that major political and military alliances are already forming between Russia, Turkey, Iran, and Libya already. (Signs of things to come...)

(d.) This War of Gog and Magog is likely an event that shortly follows the Rapture. We cannot be certain about that, but this is the most likely scenario, and here's why:

- **First**, God supernaturally defeats these invading armies. The time after the Rapture will be a paranormal timeframe. Things go from natural to supernatural after that point. The Bible is clear.
- (And) the text of **Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39** make this very plain. Israel does not defeat these invading armies through conventional means, but God supernaturally intervenes instead.
- **Second**, the context of **Ezekiel 38 and 39** suggests that the invading armies perceive an opportunity. Something has changed in the global geopolitical landscape, and they try to take advantage of Israel during this window.
- **But third**, and for our 'Tarshish' intentions today, we see **Ezekiel 38:13** mentioning *“the merchants of Tarshish and all her villages.”*
- If you do a deep dive on this phrase, you find that it is a Hebrew idiom meaning nations that have come out of Tarshish.
- So, because we took a quick look at the backdrop here, and because we tried to understand the past, we can now begin to understand the future.
- All the evidence suggests that Tarshish is Britain, and *“all her villages”* are all the nations and colonies that came out of her; that includes America.
- So - - during this massive future invasion of Israel, when Russia, Iran, Turkey, Libya, Germany, and others will collectively seek to invade Israel, what is America going to do about it?
- Nothing. The Bible says that America, being one of Tarshish's *“villages,”* is only going to whimper and issue a protest. That's another clue that something very big has changed on the world scene.
- All sorts of folks obsess and engage in all manners of irresponsible Bible interpretation to support notions that America is key in Bible prophecy, or a lot of Bible prophecy is ABOUT America. That's simply not true.
- There are only a couple passages where a hint of America is buried within the context, and this passage in **Ezekiel 38:13** is one of those.
- It is fascinating to me that – if we take the time to understand the details of God's Word, it not only opens the storyline of the past, but it gives us clear glimpses into the future. We can see the prophecies of the Bible starting to take shape even now...

Here are a few applications for you and me from things we have touched on today. In no particular order, here they are:

**1. FIRST, EFFECTIVE SERVICE AND BIBLE KNOWLEDGE IS NO GUARANTEE AGAINST WRONG CHOICES.**

- What I mean is, you can be right in the thick of great and wonderful things. Things are going great. You are being used by God. This was Jonah's situation!
- You can know God's Word inside and out. Jonah did! You can even rub shoulders with the movers and shakers of great ministry. Again, Jonah did!
- You can DO what's right, KNOW who's who, and KNOW what's right yourself - - and STILL choose what's wrong.
- Again, this is what happened to Jonah. And that's why his example serves as an important caution for you and me.
- In **Jonah 1:3** we read that "*Jonah ran away from the Lord.*" Some translations say he tried to '*flee from the Lord,*' or he tried to '*get away from the presence of the Lord.*' Same thing.
- But Jonah knew better. He knew one could not '*flee from God.*' Besides his flagrant disobedience, he also knew the Scriptures.
- He knew the **Psalms** which emphasize one cannot escape God. God is everywhere according to **Ps. 139:7-10**.

*"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."*

- Jonah even quoted **Psalms** while he was in the great fish, like **Psalms 18:6** which reads, "*In my distress I called upon the Lord.*"
- The bottom line is, if Jonah could have such a great ministry and impact, if Jonah knew the Scriptures and their applications so well, and if Jonah could still make wrong choices, then you and I need to be careful.
- As we've learned, we need to '*build ourselves up in our most holy faith*' and '*keep ourselves in God's love*' according to **Jude 20 and 21**.
- We need to remain vigilant, prayerful, and alert, because effective service and Bible knowledge is no guarantee against wrong choices.

**2. SECOND, WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST BEING FRUSTRATED WHEN GOD DOES NOT PUT OUR OPPONENTS IN THEIR PROPER PLACE.**

- This is a much bigger deal than most of us are willing to admit. I don't know if 'opponents' here is the right word, but it gets the point across.
- We talked last week about the fact that we all have prejudices and biases. We ALL do. If you say you don't, you're lying.



- And sometimes that animus we have is directed at people whom we feel don't deserve God's mercy and grace.
- Maybe these are folks that have hurt us, who have disparaged us, who have tried to tear us down, or they've made us look bad, or whatever. Maybe these are people who have done so many wrong things to themselves and to others that we can hardly stand them.
- Secretly, underneath it all, we want God to send down a lightning bolt from heaven on these people. We want them to get zapped. We want them to pay for who they are, what they say, and what they do.
- That's pretty much where Jonah was at – and while I'm getting ahead of myself – I think it partly explains why Jonah '*ran away from the Lord.*'
- Jonah knew God had great mercy and grace, and he didn't want that extended to his enemies. He wanted his own selfish ideas of justice to play out instead.
- In **Jonah 4:3**, where we see that God showed compassion on the Ninevites, Jonah got really upset. We read,

*“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*

- Was Jonah afraid of the Ninevites as we discussed earlier? Without a doubt. Did he despise them for their values and their deeds? Most certainly.
- But here we can see a bigger picture. Jonah knew that if he preached to the people of Nineveh, God might grant them forgiveness. He might show His great grace and mercy.
- Part of the reason Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh is because he despised the Ninevites so much that he did not want any upside for them. He didn't want God to forgive them. He didn't want God to be God.
- And – honestly – as much as this is uncomfortable to hear, I think we see ourselves in Jonah here too.
- We have all hoped from time to time that God would do things our way, that He would not be so gracious and merciful to folks we can hardly stand.
- We want to see the consequences. We want others to pay, and so on. We are just like Jonah.

### **3. AND THIRD, WE RISK VERY IMPORTANT THINGS WHEN WE RUN FROM GOD.**

- This point is nothing short of obvious, but let's quickly note a few details of **vss. 2-3** here.
  - **Jonah risked his reputation.**

- Likely, he was well-known throughout Israel by this point. He had made the news. He was God's prophet. He had served the king.
- Now he's running from God, trying to explain why he's going to Tarshish.
- **Jonah risked his welfare.**
  - His job, his provision, his network, his home, etc. - - it was all in Israel.
  - And here he's paying for a one-way ticket to the ends of the earth. Everything that defined and took care of him up to that point was put on the line.
  - I doubt he was headed to Tarshish to interview for a new job. His own welfare was compromised because he refused to listen to God.
- **Jonah risked a right relationship with God.**
  - This is not hard to see; the Bible says he *'ran away from the Lord.'*
  - He didn't run towards God; he ran away from God. He went as far as he – humanly – could go.
  - His rebellion and his wrong attitudes threw a veil over his better judgment. He knew the Scriptures, but he was angry and fearful.
  - In his compromised state of heart and mind, he did not listen to God, he did not heed God's Word, and he did not obey God.
  - Jonah reached a pivotal moment here where he risked everything, including a right relationship with God.

**NEXT WEEK:** "God Sends a Storm" (we'll see God's pursuit of Jonah, and what Jonah does)

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Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God's Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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