

# Becoming a Jonah

## Introduction

1. Among sailors when one is referred to as a “Jonah,” he is said to be one who brings bad luck, as it were, to the rest of the crew aboard the ship.
  - a. This term got its meaning from the prophet Jonah in the Old Testament.
  - b. According to the scriptures, when Jonah fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord he boarded a ship to make the journey. While at sea the Lord caused great storm to toss the ship to and fro. Knowing that the storm was a result of the fact that he fled from the Lord, Jonah told the men aboard the ship to throw him overboard. When they did the sea ceased from its raging.
  - c. Thus, anyone who is believed to bring bad luck aboard a ship gets their name from Jonah.
2. In this lesson, however, this is not what is meant when someone becomes a Jonah.
3. Rather, we are going to look at Jonah’s attitude toward the commandment of the Lord when he was first told to go to Nineveh to preach to the people there.

## Introduction

### I. Jonah and the Command of the Lord.

- A. God has a specific purpose for Jonah.
  1. Think on this principle, for it will be most important to the lesson under consideration.
  2. He wanted Jonah to go to a specific people and to preach a specific message (read [Jonah 1:1-2](#)).
- B. In response, Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord.
  1. Jonah had heard the commandment of the Lord and he understood it.
  2. But rather than fulfilling the purpose that God had given him, Jonah chose to travel away from Nineveh.
    - a. Nineveh is located around 400 miles east of Judea.
    - b. But Tarshish is located around 200 miles west (in the opposite direction) from where God wanted Jonah to go.
    - c. What was Jonah doing? Why, he was trying to get as far away from Nineveh, even as far away from the presence of the Lord as he could get.
  3. God had a specific purpose for him, but Jonah did not want to fulfill that purpose.
    - a. He was a prophet of God.
    - b. When aboard the storm tossed ship Jonah even confessed that he did indeed “*fear the Lord, the God of heaven*” ([Jonah 1:9](#)).
    - c. Yet he fled in order to avoid fulfilling the purpose of the Lord.
- C. God did not accept Jonah’s decision.
  1. When Jonah fled, God was not pleased with his actions.
    - a. We see in the story that God did not appreciate Jonah disobeying His commandment.
    - b. He was not pleased that Jonah decided to do something other than fulfill the charge placed upon him.
  2. Even though Jonah thought he could flee from the presence of the Lord, God would not let him.
    - a. When Jonah was on the middle of the ship God was there and He knew what he was doing.
    - b. What Jonah was thrown into the water, God was there.

- c. When Jonah was in the belly of the fish those three days God was there.
  - d. No matter where Jonah was, no matter what he was thinking, no matter what he was doing he could not escape from the presence of the Lord.
  - e. And nothing could change the fact that he was in disobedience to the Lord.
- D. Finally, Jonah turned his heart back to the Lord.
- 1. While Jonah was in the belly of the fish and, as he put it, “*in the belly of sheol*” (Jonah 2:2), he cried out to the Lord.
  - 2. Read his prayer in Jonah 2:2-9.
  - 3. God heard his prayer and delivered him.
  - 4. Then, God commanded Jonah a second time to go and preach to the people of Nineveh and this time Jonah obeyed.
  - 5. But why did Jonah disobey the commandment of the Lord in the first place? Why did he flee from the presence of the Lord?
    - a. Jonah says why in Jonah 4:1-3.
    - b. After the people repented of their sins in response to Jonah’s preaching he became angry.
    - c. You see, he knew that if the people repented God would be gracious and spare them, and he didn’t want them to be spared.
    - d. In summary, Jonah did not long for the same outcome as did the Lord. He wanted something else for the people of Nineveh.
    - e. He chose to disobey the commandment of the Lord because he knew that his obedience would be about an outcome that he did not want.
  - 6. But in response to his fit of anger, God simply told Jonah, “*Is it right for you to be angry?*” (Jonah 4:4).

## II. Becoming a Jonah Today

- A. Whether they realize it or not, there are many people who follow the same pattern set by Jonah when he fled from the presence of the Lord. Many have become Jonahs today.
- B. How can this be?
  - 1. As with Jonah, God has given His people a very specific mission, charge or commission that they are to fulfill today.
    - a. Granted, we have not been sent to preach to the people of Nineveh, for how could we. That people has long since been destroyed.
    - b. But we still have a purpose that God has shown us in the scriptures that we must fulfill as His people.
  - 2. First of all, all men have a responsibility to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Eccl. 12:13). This is the purpose of all men.
  - 3. But for Christians, we are told, “*But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our Lord God*” (1 Cor. 6:11).
  - 4. Again, Paul wrote of God, “*who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began...*” (2 Tim. 1:9).
    - a. As one washes tools and utensils in order to prepare them for a specific task, so we have been washed by the blood of Jesus for a specific task.
    - b. God has sanctified us, that is to say He has made us holy and purified and has set us aside in order to accomplish His purpose.
    - c. And as Paul so clearly stated in 2 Tim. 1, we have been called, just as Jonah was called, we have been called to do the will of the Lord.

- d. Each individual Christian is called unto salvation, not according to his own works. God does save us because we do something great and awesome. He does not save us because we deserve it. He saves us so that we can fulfill his purpose.
  - e. It is according to His purpose that we are saved. It is to fulfill His purpose that we are made righteous and are able to worship Him as we do here today.
5. But this principle is not limited to individuals only. For the collective body of people who are sanctified by the Lord are one body, the church, and like the individual are called to function together in such a way that they fulfill the purpose of God.
    - a. Just as the individual must conduct him or her self in such a way that they fulfill the purposes of God, so much the church conduct itself in such a way that she fulfills the purposes of God.
    - b. Consider the words of the Holy Spirit as recorded by Peter in 2 Pet. 2:4-5, “*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but **chosen** by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are **being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***”
    - c. And by Paul in Rom. 12:2, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, **that you may prove** what is that good and acceptable and perfect **will of God.**”*
    - d. This is our purpose. This is why we have salvation in Christ. This is why we are here today.
  6. But what happens when men forsake the purpose of God after receiving His salvation and His commandment?
  7. They become as Jonah, fleeing from the presence of the Lord.
- C. Every individual that chooses not to obey God because they do not like the things that He has commanded is a Jonah.
1. There are so many things that God has commanded today that men refuse to obey because they do not like the outcome desired of the Lord.
  2. Jonah did not want Nineveh to be spared. In contrast, men today do not like the idea of any person being made to feel as if they are in the wrong. Therefore they refuse to practice God’s principles for church discipline.
  3. Many individuals do not want to have to attending all of the services of the church because it might cause them to miss out on something else that they want to do.
  4. Some who have the ability to teach do not want to teach because they feel as if they have paid their dues (see Tit. 2:3-5).
  5. On the other hand, there are some who want to teach even though God has forbidden it (1 Cor. 14:34; Tit. 1:10-11).
- D. Every congregation that chooses to do things different that they way the Lord ordained because they do not like the outcome that the Lord desires.
1. There have been commercials for the United Church of Christ showing that they will accept any and all—no matter their spiritual condition.
  2. God commands that we “not keep company with anyone names a brother, who is sexually immoral...” (1 Cor. 5:11), but some churches, like Jonah, forsake the purpose of God because they do not like that outcome.
  3. We see it in worship with the addition of instrumental music.
  4. We see it with those who use the funds that God has designated for a specific purpose to do things according to their own purpose.
  5. There are churches that have completely forsaken any resemblance of fulfilling the purpose of God.
    - a. One might say that, like Jonah, they are in fact fleeing from the presence of God.

- b. The Lord's church is the pillar and ground for the truth, but many churches have forsaken the truth because it is "too harsh."
  - c. The Lord's church is made up of God's faithful, but many churches want to include every body and anybody lest they be considered "too exclusive."
  - 6. Therefore it is written of them, *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry"* (2 Tim. 4:2-5).
- E. We have seen the dangers of forsaking the purpose of God in the story of Jonah.
- 1. Let us understand that such dangers still exist.
  - 2. God is not pleased when we forsake His commands for any reason whatsoever.

### **Conclusion**

- 1. The exhortation is to all to be watchful, lest you find yourself fleeing from the presence of the Lord.
- 2. How are you approaching your life as a servant of God? What is your attitude toward the commandment of God?
  - a. Are you running toward them in an effort to fulfill His will with all of your might?
  - b. Or do you find yourself fleeing from the commandment of God, making excuses, making commitments that interfere in order to avoid the feeling of accountability.
- 3. Whatever your situation, know that you cannot escape the presence of the Lord. No matter what you believe, no matter what you say or where you Go, God will know.
- 4. But, as Jonah found even when he was in the depths of Sheol, it is not too late to turn back to the Lord.
- 5. If you find that you are tossed and tried by the tempest of sin and doubt, turn your heart to God. Cry out to him as Jonah did and He who is faithful will hear your prayers.

*November, 2005*

<p>Avondale church of Christ          1606 Glen Willow Rd., P.O. Box 421, Avondale, PA 19311          Phone: (610) 268-2088          Email: <a href="mailto:info@avondalechristians.com">info@avondalechristians.com</a>          Website: <a href="http://www.avondalechristians.com">www.avondalechristians.com</a></p>
---

©David Phillips, 2005