

## Jonah 1 – Jonah Ran Away 11-5-17 PM

The prophet Jonah labored during the reign of King Jeroboam II in Israel (2 Kings 14:23-25). This was sometime around 780BC, about 60 years before Israel was destroyed by Assyria. The book of Jonah begins with God calling Jonah to go to Ninevah (the Assyrian capital) and preach to them repentance. However, Jonah instead flees on a ship. The ship is overtaken in a storm, and it is determined that Jonah is the cause of the storm. He is cast overboard and swallowed by a great fish.

Why wouldn't he go? While the reason is not stated, through the book we get an image, especially at the end of the book. It is clear that Jonah saw the people of Nineveh as enemies. As his enemies, he did NOT want them to receive mercy from God. It might simply be that he despised Gentiles; this was common even in the New Testament. But the more likely reason is that he saw what they would one day do to his nation. One of the prophets from around the same time, Hosea, spoke about what the Assyrians would do in Hosea 10:6-7. Consider that God is sending Jonah to save the people who will ultimately destroy his nation. When Elisha anointed Hazael king of Syria in 2 Kings 8:11-12, he wept, knowing what this king would do to Israel. So perhaps Jonah cannot stand the idea of saving the nation that will destroy his own.

There are many people who are called to do things by God, and then won't do it. God called Moses to lead Israel out of slavery, but Moses declined. It seems that he saw only his failings (Ex. 4). His self-doubt was his greatest problem. When the people wanted to make Saul king, he hid among the supplies (1 Sam. 10). Earlier in the chapter we see that the people had been very critical of his being chosen king; perhaps this criticism caused him to lose confidence. In the New Testament, the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22 saw many guests who declined to come to the invitation. It says that they had other things they preferred to be doing.

There are lessons for us to learn in Jonah's fleeing. Consider that God still calls men (through His word) to His kingdom; He calls us to serve Him, to honor and glorify Him, and to sacrifice to Him. God calls us to go to the world much like Jonah was sent to the Ninevites. We need to learn that you cannot escape God. There is no where can you flee to be away from His calling. Secondly, you need to know that God reveals our iniquities. He is not content to leave our refusal alone; He desires that we might change.

Finally, an important theme throughout Jonah is this simple truth: You must be able to love your enemies. Jesus taught us this in Matthew 5:43-48. Ultimately, Jesus said this is what it is to be like God.