

**Message #3****Jonah 1:3-7**

If you know there is blatant rebellion in your life and your life is smooth sailing—you have every right to question your relationship with God.

**WHEN A BELIEVER RUNS FROM DOING THE WILL OF GOD, GOD WILL SOVEREIGNLY SEND RELENTLESS STORMS INTO THE BELIEVER'S LIFE THAT WILL AFFECT EVERYONE CONNECTED TO THE REBELLIOUS BELIEVER.**

A believer can run from doing what is right. A believer can refuse to obey the Word of God on any issue. But no believer can ever run from God. We can be certain of this that when a believer blatantly rebels from God's Word and will, life will not be smooth. God will sovereignly send one storm after another until that believer is either broken or dead.

That is clearly what happened to Jonah. Jonah specifically knew the will of God. Jonah specifically knew the Word of God. This was not fuzzy, this was specific—God commanded him to go to Nineveh and Jonah flat out said, “I’m not going to do it.” Pure, blatant rebellion. He had been a successful Jewish prophet and he was not about to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to give them an opportunity to repent. Jonah's decision to reject and rebel against the Word of God brought a major storm into his world. It not only affected him, but all around him.

Now in order to understand this portion of Scripture, we would like to examine it by pointing out three specific reactions in these verses:

**REACTION #1 – The reaction of Jonah to the Word and will of God. 1:3**

When Jonah heard God's Word and knew specifically what God wanted him to do—he reacted. He “rose up” alright, just as God commanded him, but he did not “rise up” to do the will of God, he arose to run from doing God's will.

There are two specific acts of rebellion or spiritual defection that we see in this verse:

**Rebellious Act #1 - Jonah rebelled physically. 1:3a**

When Jonah rebelled against the Word and will of God, the first thing he did was try to get as far away as physically possible. Joppa (modern day Jaffa) was located about 50 miles southwest of Gath-hepher and approximately 35 miles to the northwest of Jerusalem. Joppa (Jaffa) is a port city that sits on the Mediterranean.

The reason Jonah went to Joppa was so that he could get on a ship that was going to Tarshish. Now Tarshish was a Gentile city located some 2000-2500 miles to the west of Joppa in southwestern Spain. It was a “far away” commercial city known for its legendary wealth (Jer. 10:9; Ezek. 27:12, 25). It was the city that was in just the opposite direction of where God wanted Jonah to go and it was the extreme opposite.

When people are running from the will of God, you can expect to see a physical defection. What I mean by that is they will get as far away as they possibly can from the convicting power of God. They will run from a godly home and church. People out of step with the will of God will run to other places as quick as they can. They will stop coming to the church that is proclaiming the truth and bringing them under conviction.

### **Rebellious Act #2 - Jonah rebelled theologically. 1:3b**

You will notice that three times in these verses a prepositional phrase shows up “from the presence of the LORD” (1:3a, b, 10). This important prepositional phrase tells us that Jonah had become so far removed from sound theology that he truly believed God’s presence did not exist anywhere else in the world except in Palestine. Jonah knew full well that God was sovereign, omnipresent and omniscient (Ps. 139:7-12). But Jonah was so out of step with God’s Word and will that he developed a false theology which said God’s presence isn’t anywhere else in the world except in Palestine, therefore if I can get out of Palestine, I can get away from the presence of the LORD.

When people are running from the Word and will of God, their theology will be fuzzy. They will have all kinds of distorted concepts about God. For example, I know of a believer who ran from God’s Word and will in deep sin and would always talk about the love and grace of God and never mention the judgment, the justice, the wrath and the rewards of God. Their rebellion distorted their theology just like it did with Jonah.

### **REACTION #2 – The reaction of God to a rebellious Jonah. 1:4**

No one can run from God’s Word and will and expect their life will be smooth sailing. You can bank on the fact that if one is a believer, in His time and in His way, God will send His storms. Peace and tranquility come to the believer who is right with God and storms come to one who is running from God.

In this case, God sent a physical storm that was so violent that the ship was about to break and experienced sailors were totally afraid (1:5). From a human perspective, this is a traumatic storm, but from a divine perspective this is a transforming storm, for it will be this very storm that God will use to turn the rebellious prophet around. When a child of God is out of step with the will of God, God has His ways and can send storms in order to get His rebellious child’s attention. In the carnal Corinthians case, God sent weakness, physical sickness and even death. God can send financial ruin, physical catastrophes and even spiritual deadness to those who run from Him.

Let us put this in perspective. The LORD did let Jonah go so far. He let him leave Gath-hepher. He let him get to Joppa. He let him get on a ship and head out into the Mediterranean. For awhile, things appeared to be smooth sailing. But then, in one instant, God said that is enough—time to bring my prophet to repentance and obedience and He sent the storm.

We may sin against God for awhile and appear to be getting away with our rebellion. You may think that you are getting away unnoticed and unpunished. Don't make the mistake of thinking God won't step in. In His time and in one instant He will send a devastating storm into your world; He will get your attention.

This ship was out at sea and there was no escape from this storm. The timing was perfect, God was tracking down His rebellious child and there was no way out.

If God chooses to come after you in your rebellion, it will come when you least expect it and there will be no place to run or hide. His storms will make your life chaotic and rough and there will be no escape.

### **REACTION #3** – The reaction of the sailors to the storm of the Sovereign God. **1:5-16**

It is more than just a passing coincidence to observe that when God was tracking down Jonah, His storm did not only affect Jonah, but it affected everyone around him. As Hugh Martin said, when God sends His storms to His rebellious child, it will affect all who sail with that rebellious child (p. 95).

Now there are at least four responses of these sailors to the storm:

#### **Response #1** - The emotional response. **1:5a**

These were experienced sailors. The Phoenicians were known for their ability to build strong, stable and secure ships. These sailors had seen many storms on the Mediterranean, and there weren't too many that would really faze them. But this storm was different. It left them "afraid." The particular Hebrew word used here indicates that these sailors were afraid in the sense that this was a terrible and dreadful experience (Gesenius, p. 364). The word also suggests that they knew this storm was from God.

Even though there was an outpouring of emotions, it did not change nor stop the plan of God. God was sovereignly tracking down His man and not even the fear and dread of other people would change that.

I cannot help but be reminded by the reality described in Proverbs 1. There will come a time when the lost will call on the Lord and emotionally be in total dread and God will laugh and mock at the calamity He is sending (Prov. 1:25-28).

#### **Response #2** - The religious response. **1:5b**

The typical heathen religions feature a polytheistic belief system—the belief in many gods. In this case, each sailor was crying out to his own god. In Greek mythology for example, Poseidon (Neptune) was both the god of the sea and the god of the earthquake.

In the Phoenician system of religion, which probably these sailors were, they would have cried out to Baal or Melqar, their god of rain and thunder. These men didn't know the true God who really controlled the wind and the waves, so they were just crying out the best they knew.

What a tragedy that they have a Jewish prophet on their ship and he is sleeping and not defending the doctrine of the One and only true God.

**Response#3** - The desperate response. **1:5c**

As we have said, these were experienced sailors. They knew that if they were to have a chance of surviving such a storm, they needed to lighten the ship. In dangerous storms, it was common to throw cargo overboard, hoping that a lightened ship would not sink. Very skilled sailors did exactly the same thing during the days of the Apostle Paul (Acts 27:18-19).

Now of course this was a desperate last act. Sailors would only throw their cargo overboard if they believed it were truly a life/death situation. This shows us that the storm God sent was violent and it shows us that these men were desperate.

**Response #4** - The ordained response. **1:5d-16**

Now really, the whole point of this storm sent by God is to track down Jonah. The sailor's emotional, religious and desperate responses were all logical, but when they finally turned to Jonah, their response was ordained. God was focusing this whole storm on Jonah, so when things turned toward him, things were moving in exactly the direction God wanted.

Now while the others were topside, panicking and throwing things overboard, Jonah was down in the ship, sound asleep. What this tells us is that when a believer is running from God and when a believer is out of the will of God, he may initially have somewhat of a peace about him. The will of God cannot be determined by an initial feeling of peace. For example, when Jesus Christ was in Gethsemane, totally in the will of God, He had a real inner struggle and was in such turmoil that He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. When Jonah was sleeping in the ship, he was totally out of the will of God and he had a temporary peace about him so that he could go sound to sleep in the middle of a ferocious storm.

There are two different actions that occur in regard to Jonah:

**(Action #1)** - The action of the captain. **1:6**

Jonah was the only man on board who hadn't prayed to his god and he was also the only man on board who potentially could pray to the true God. What a disgrace. These godless sailors were spending more time in prayer than one who is godly, who knows the true God. The captain could not believe Jonah was sleeping, so he woke him up and told him to get praying.

**(Action #2) - The action of the sailors. 1:7**

The sailors decided to cast lots to see if they could determine who it was that was responsible for this terrible disaster. This shows the sovereignty of God for He even controlled the “roll of the dice.” The lot fell to Jonah. Proverbs 16:33 says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”

Think about this for a moment. Apparently Jonah was willing to let himself and these Gentile heathens perish, rather than call out to the God of Israel. There is no hint that Jonah was going to repent, confess and pray. These sailors came to realize Jonah was the problem by casting lots.

The casting of lots in a case to find an answer was common in Israel and other countries (Lev. 16:8; Josh. 18:6; I Sam. 14:42; Neh. 10:34; Es. 3:7; Prov. 16:33; Acts 1:26). It is probable that one of the lots were specially marked so that when they were taken out, the marked lot fell to Jonah.

When we run from doing the will of God, we not only let God down and ourselves down, but we let down everyone close to us.

When we run from doing the will of God, not only will our theology be distorted, but so will our testimony. If we persist in our rebellion, we can be certain in His time and in His way, God’s chastising storms will track us down.

Several things to think about:

- 1) It is a very foolish thing to know God’s Word and will and to blatantly refuse to obey it.
- 2) We can never get away “from the presence of the Lord,” no matter where we go or what we do.
- 3) God will send terrible storms into the life of His people who are rebellious and on the run.
- 4) When a believer rebels, his rebellion affects all who are close to him.