

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Jonah 1**
“The Cycle of Sin”

God used the prophet Jonah to spark an incredible revival. Yet sadly, oftentimes Jonah chose to be a stubborn man who didn't even want revival—not in Nineveh, anyway. In chapter 1 of Jonah, we will look at the cycle of sin as it plays out in the life of this prophet.

1: The sin (v1-3). Jonah blatantly disobeyed God's command to preach. Perhaps he was a "popular" and "positive" prophet, well-known in Israel for prophesying how Israel would regain part of its land (II Kings 14:25). He may have even been a bit of a celebrity. Yet now, God wants him to cry *against* a city (v2)? Maybe Jonah didn't want to be "one of those" types of prophets.

(v3) I can imagine Jonah as he **fled** from God's presence, perhaps as though he were in trouble with the law, maybe under cover of darkness. Perhaps his friends saw him as he fled and asked, "What's wrong, Jonah?" If we're not right with God, we are fleeing **from the presence of the LORD** also—ignoring the Bible, avoiding godly people in our lives, or trying to stay away from holy conviction by drowning it out with sinful entertainment, parties, or alcohol and drugs.

Perhaps as Jonah arrived at the shipping dock in **Joppa**, he scanned the list of possible ships and their destinations; and, as it turns out, there's one going exactly where he wants—**Tarshish!** Satan will try to pave the way for sin, making it much more convenient than it otherwise would be. He will position sin within just a couple of clicks on the internet, or within a quick drive to the dollar store on the alcohol shelves; and he will bring deceitful friends into your life who will encourage you to sin.

Jonah had to **pay the fare** to board the ship. He was a prophet, probably not very wealthy. He may have spent up his life's savings for this trip. Please don't forget about the fare that sin charges. Its price is high; it has hidden

fees; and it has false advertising. If you're planning to dabble in satanic or dark things, don't forget the high price. If you're tempted toward a deceitful and lying tongue, don't overlook the massive price tag that comes with it. If you're planning to get caught up in indecent or profane movies, don't forget the "side effects"; it pollutes the mind, ruins marriages and families, and leads to yet worse sins.

2: The uncovering (v4-7). I imagine as Jonah left the dock, the sky was likely clear, and perhaps the sea breeze felt good. If only he could have seen the approaching hurricane-force storm on radar! And if only he could have used sonar to see the whale which may have already been swimming below the ship. Poor Jonah; when we run from God, we're **like to be broken**; and the wicked are like the troubled **sea** (Isaiah 57:20; Jude 1:13).

(v5) The storm hits; and if even the seasoned **seamen are afraid**, then it's time to be afraid! Sadly, they had custom, "made-to-order" false **goods** which couldn't deliver them. Don't be like that; and don't think you can avoid God's judgment by throwing a few things overboard in your life. You need repentance—a fundamental change in *direction*, or turning the ship around. But anyway, how could Jonah sleep through this storm? Maybe he was utterly exhausted and depressed from his journey to the shipyard. Running from God is wearying (Isaiah 50:11).

(v6) Imagine Jonah's surprise as a probably rough, burly sea captain abruptly wakes him up, makes fun of him, and dubs him with a new nickname similar to our modern "Sleepy-Head"! **(v7)** These seasoned sailors know that this isn't a natural storm, so they want to find out who is to blame by **casting lots**. It's a good thing that no one has thrown the dice overboard yet with all the other stuff. As Jonah will find out, and as others and I have personally seen, God is capable of using seeming "coincidence" to work miracles in our lives.

3: The confession (v8-10). These sailors don't follow Robert's Rules of Order; they just start blasting poor Jonah with questions from all sides, asking him for everything except his social security number. Yet they give him the

benefit of the doubt by suggesting that, perhaps, he's not *personally* responsible for the storm.

(v9) Jonah is probably the only **Hebrew** on board; and he describes God's power in a way that these seamen uniquely understand, saying that He is the **Maker of the sea and dry land**.

(v10) Sometimes, the world actually wants us to remain faithful to God (though not always). Some people want to see Christians who are "real" and who actually obey God. Apparently, Jonah had already **told them** of his disobedience. Can you imagine that conversation? Maybe they thought he was joking when he said he was **running away from God**, but now it's clear...he's not joking, and this storm is certainly no joke!

4: The consequence (v11-17). I picture this entire scene to be full of chaotic shouting as rough sailors grab railing or rope to balance themselves on the reeling ship, as waves crash on board and ocean spray gets into their eyes. There is an urgency, yet they don't kill Jonah; they want to make sure they handle this the right way. I think they want to appease God.

(v12) Jonah knows he must be thrown overboard, but instead of just jumping out of the ship, he asks these sailors to throw him out. He admits that this whole thing is his fault, which is the first step to getting things right.

(v13) Does it surprise you that these seamen, who were probably rough and hardened, don't throw Jonah overboard right away? You'd think they would say, "Well, you asked for it!" and then just toss him over the edge before he could change his mind. Yet they bravely try to bring the ship to land (maybe they hadn't gone very far at all). Yet now the sea seems to be angry **against them** personally, as the waves perhaps crash violently against their oars, and one thing after another goes wrong.

(v14) These pagan seamen pray a pretty good prayer! It would be really weird to throw someone overboard, even if that person asked for it. Is Jonah just nervously waiting for them to make up their minds? **(v15)** You can almost hear them saying, "Sorry, man," as they toss him over, and I would imagine Jonah probably didn't put up much of a fight. And what a scene the seamen saw! I'll bet the turbulence stopped

instantly; maybe there was a little leftover rocking back and forth, but all the violent energy of the sea was suddenly absent. And maybe it was calm soon enough for the men to see what happened to Jonah...

(v16) Now they know without any doubt that God was behind this storm! Maybe the sun is shining again and the sea is glassy calm in a matter of minutes (or even seconds). Most people make **vows** to God when they are going through a storm, and when the storm is over, they forget all about their vows. Not these seamen! They didn't have a "foxhole conversion"; they really meant it, and they made vows *after* the storm was over and they were safe again. They apparently had some animals on board for a sacrifice. But it seems that everywhere Jonah goes, revival breaks out: not because of him, but in spite of him.

(v17) Perhaps God had this **great fish** swim below the ship from the time it left the dock; or maybe God had this fish keep an appointment for this spot of water at this time. But whatever happened, this whale (Matthew 12:40) literally **swallowed up Jonah**. I think God is giving Jonah a taste of hell, perhaps so that Jonah will feel some compassion for the Ninevites and want them to be saved. Perhaps it would do us good to think more often on the horrors of hell so that we will have more of a drive to win lost souls for Jesus Christ. Maybe that will help us have a more fervent desire to see our family members, co-workers, and neighbors saved.

That's the "cycle of sin" in Jonah's life; first, he flatly disobeyed God, but then God uncovered his sin (Numbers 32:23). Thankfully, Jonah confessed his sin (I John 1:9), but he still had to pay the consequences. Let's strive to avoid this entire cycle by staying as close to Jesus Christ as possible. And let's try to do a better job reaching the lost, not running from *our* commission (Matthew 28:18-20).