

Running in Rebellion

Jonah 1

MPS God calls people for His glory and pursues us in our rebellion to save us by His relentless grace.

OBJ Every person should trust God's relentless grace because of Three Realities about rebellion and repentance.

INTRO Rebellion is a wasted exhaustion of self-supremacy, but God's grace is relentless to turn us to the only One who can bring peace with God. Rebellion is real for each one of us, but can make it really hard to confess and repent.

God calls people for His glory and pursues us in our rebellion to save us by His relentless grace.

READ Jonah 1:1-3

*Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” ³But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. **Jonah 1:1-3***

“Who was Jonah?” is the most important issue to begin with. Was Jonah a real person or a fictitious character? This is important because many have tried to discredit this book by reducing it to little more than a fable, at best. Without the time necessary to go into all the arguments, allow me to cut through the chase and provide the answer. Jonah was real. This story really happened. And those who say otherwise are dead wrong.

Here's some evidence to substantiate our position. Jonah was a real person from a real place, Gath-hepher, and a real family, the son of Amittai, his father, and of the tribe of Zebulun. Jonah had a real ministry. 2 Kings 14:25 tells us he was a servant of the Lord who prophesied. One Jewish legend even affirms that Jonah was the son of the widow Zeraphath, who had been raised from the dead by Elijah for future ministry.¹ Jonah would have ministered as a contemporary of Elisha, 8th century. But most important, we know Jonah was real because Jesus said he was the sign given to an evil and adulterous generation. (Matthew 12:38-40)

The word of the Lord came to Jonah; *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”* This account, most likely, occurs later in Jonah's ministry when he is more experienced in serving the Lord. *“Arise”*, is the first imperative given by the Lord. The meaning of the word is not so much in the action it states, but in the urgency it denotes. In other words, the Lord says, *“Don't delay, go and get'er done! Hustle!”*² The Lord commands him to go to Nineveh, an ancient city located very near modern-day Mosul, Iraq, in the very northern part of the country. From Jonah's hometown of Gath-hepher, near modern-day Nazareth, this would have been a 1300km / 800 mile journey to the Northeast. And the Lord commands him to call out against it because He has noticed their evil.

The context for the whole story is set in the first three verses. The Lord speaks to his experienced servant with simple, yet clear and concise commands to proclaim His message. This is the very thing one would expect the Lord's servant to desire to do. All that remains is for Jonah to obey. **TRANS** But no good story is absent of tension, so we come to verse 3.

“But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish” *“But”* is a word that denotes “turning away”, opposite of what was just mentioned. It is one of the most encouraging words in Scripture when the Lord's Name follows it. But if ANY word other than God's Name follows “but” in the text, it is not going to be good! ***“But” is never a right response to God's command, and whatever follows is not going to work out!***

¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Man Overboard: The Story of Jonah*. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015) 7.

² Donald J. Wiseman, T. Desmond Alexander, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 26, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 108. Alexander writes, “Jonah is not necessarily being ordered to get up; he is, however, being instructed not to delay his departure for Nineveh.”



Scholars do not know exactly where Tarshish is located. Locations range from locations in Africa, to Western Turkey, all the way to Cadiz, Spain, on the Atlantic side, north of the Strait of Gibraltar. What we do know is that Tarshish ships were “the most impressive seagoing vessels”³ famous for their size to haul great loads of cargo over very long distances. Coupled with Jonah’s initial direction being opposite of God’s command, we see his intent was clear. [The closest Jonah came to obeying God was that he “rose” with the urgency, but then he paid to flee in the opposite direction of God’s presence.](#)

OBJ First, I want us to see [Three Realities about rebellion against God.](#)

Reality #1: Running from God is rebellion, and it is always a costly endeavor.

READ Jonah 1:4-6

⁴But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.” **Jonah 1:4-6**

Verse 4 brings another change of direction, but this one is God’s good work. God sends a wind and stirs up a storm, and the ship is threatened by it. Fear strikes the sailors such that they cry out to their gods. They took immediate action to lighten the load, but nothing was working. And when they got to the lowest part of the ship, they found Jonah fast asleep; not just dozing or even dreaming, but in near coma, beyond stage 5, where a man wars to mute his conscience deep sleep.

Can you imagine Jonah being suddenly awakened from his rebellious slumber with the same word that drove him there to begin with, “Arise”? But this time it was a man demanding he call out to his God to save them. Jonah was a man fleeing God. All while people who didn’t even know his God were telling him to call out to him! They were right to blame Jonah. Rebellion never makes sense, not even to those who do not know God, because you say you believe one thing, but you fail to trust and honor the Lord in the way you live. For the Christian, the road of rebellion always leads into a storm of God’s stirring. And the deepest hole you dig for yourself to sleep by muted conscience will never be deep enough to hide from God’s tempest. **Christian, learn this from Jonah; God will never be idle toward His children in our rebellion.**

Reality #2: Rebellion always thrusts you into a tempest, a place where peace is disrupted because you are running from God’s presence.

READ Jonah 1:7-16

⁷And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” ⁹And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” ¹⁰Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

¹¹Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹²He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” ¹³Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴Therefore they called out to the LORD, “O LORD, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.” ¹⁵So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. **Jonah 1:7-16**

³ Lowell K. Handy, “[Tarshish](#),” ed. John D. Barry et al., The Lexham Bible Dictionary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).



They cast lots to determine who is responsible. The lots point to Jonah, and the inquisition begins. They want to know everything about him. He tells them he is a Hebrew, which answers all but the first of their questions. **Can you imagine the fear that struck these men who were polytheist idolaters, who had prayed to every god in their friend list to no avail, when they heard that Jonah worshiped the God of the sea?** And they knew he was fleeing from God because he told them. But that didn't matter, until now when it did. **The storm of Jonah's soul, in which he managed to sleep, cast a great suffering of harm and loss on all those around him.**

They immediately ask what must be done to quiet the storm. Jonah gave them the only answer that would suffice. But the sailors had too much mercy to treat him in such a way. They finally acquiesced when it became obvious their strength and plan would not suffice. When it became obvious that was the only thing to do, they threw Jonah into the sea and immediately the sea ceased its raging. And the sailors offered a sacrifice to the Lord.

Jonah slept so well in the bottom of the ship because he had all the other people carrying his burden of the tempest for him. Acts of faith, especially in repentance, never make sense to the unbeliever, especially when self-salvation is all the human mind knows. But man's every effort will never earn us anything with God. The farther and longer we run from God, the more troubled the soul's storm becomes, and the deeper into the hull of our stronghold we must go to try and find peace, and the more people that are adversely affected by it. What the sailors did not want to do in throwing him over, Jonah knew was the only right response. **Rebellion is so miserable to the soul, that any threat against safety or security for correction is negligible, because all you want is peace within.**

Reality #3: Rebellion strives to mute Holy Spirit's conviction, all the while demanding others to carry it's burden of havoc, hurt, and suffering.

READ Jonah 1:17

¹⁷And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. **Jonah 1:17**

We don't know exactly where Jonah was at when the fish swallowed him. Some say it was the Strait of Gibraltar, between Spain and Tangier, Morocco. Here's what we do know. God appointed the fish to swallow him, and ultimately return him to where God wanted him. We do know it took three days for God to return Him where he was supposed to be. **This last verse is our great comfort because it reminds us that God is in control of all things, and He has made a way for our salvation.**

TRANS The storm God stirred put Jonah in a place where he would know running from God in rebellion was ruinous and futile. And Jonah 1 screams that message to you and me today too.

REBELLION and the GOSPEL

Jonah is a feature story of sinful rebellion. Rebellion costs you more than you want to pay, takes you further than you want to go, entangles you in things you never wanted to be involved with, drags you more deeply in than you ever imagined you could be, does more damage than you ever could have ever imagined, and carries consequences beyond your control that you never intended to happen, and gives you what you did not want to begin with. **Rebellion is always futile and ruinous. God's relentless grace is always pursuing and near.**

God calls people for His glory and pursues us in our rebellion to save us by His relentless grace.

OBJ **Three Realities of repentance when rebellion meets God's relentless grace.**

#1: Rebellion hardens the heart toward God, but His relentless grace brings peace with God.

Rebellion is the process of heart petrification, a continual hardening until its very substance is changed without hope of returning. Rebellion only hardens the heart, both in reaction against and by indulgence in the stronghold that it pushes one further into. Rebellion is the heart asserting its dominance of self-nature to serve self's wants and desires. In this way, the



heart is deceived to think it is fighting for freedom, all the while it is building its own dungeon-prison stronghold. [The Bible's root word for rebellion is pride, which according to the ancient theologian Augustine, is the mother of all sin.](#)

ILLUS Rebellion is like a bottle where the pressure inside has become so great it made unscrewing the top feel impossible. That's how rebellion hardens the heart so that the person doesn't feel like they can open it to God.

The one caught in rebellion's stronghold will either be saved by God's relentless grace that comes through His Word piercing to the division of soul and spirit, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart that breaks the stronghold and brings repentance. (Heb 4:12) Or, they will be crushed by the rebellion's demand of sovereignty but they are not capable to withstand.

#2: Rebellion takes many forms and exacts a high cost, but repentance means grace calms the storm and makes a way to be with God.

One typical concept of rebellion is the loud, open reaction of outraged defiance in response any expression of authority. But an opposite expression is just as common; the quiet, sometimes smiling, agreement that appears to concede or accept, all the while the simmering and smoldering within is covered to conceal from detection. Covered rebellion may not be as visible or obvious, but it is as equally defiant to the Lord and leads to the same stronghold away from God. [Rebellion is a matter of heart inclination long before it births any action, and while it takes many different forms, it is always self-exalting / self-defending to reject authority or perceived threat to self-sovereignty.](#)

Beware, Christian, lest you think rebellion is not something that tempts you! Jonah was God's seasoned servant. Rebellion is a constant threat even for those who know God; it bloats by knowledge of God that does not become obedience, reduces serving to an attempt to leverage God, substitutes our strength for dependency on God, and deceives to replace His command with our will. Sinclair Ferguson warns us of rebellion's delusion when he states, "No past privilege nor all past privileges together; no past obedience, nor fruition in service, can ever substitute for present obedience to the Word of God. Great blessings only bring present fruitfulness when they are met with continuing obedience."⁴ How many Christians plead to hear from God, for Him to speak, until what He says doesn't please what they want to hear! Rebellion always begins in response to God, "But Lane...", "But (insert your name)". And very often, our rebellion against God is cloaked by our resistance toward people He has placed in our lives or figures who represent His authority to us; parents, or boss, and sometimes pastor or elder. But no matter who it comes through, our resistance is always first and foremost, rebellion against God. (Psalm 51:4) [No one is absent of rebellious tendencies and temptations active in life – it is only a matter of how deep into the hull of a "stronghold" you have buried yourself to "sleep" in numbness and hardening toward God.](#)

#3: Rebellion will never reverse course, but God's relentless grace comes near for surrender by repentance.

ILLUS Magnets repel by same poles [Do you know why two magnets repel from each other, and will not magnetize unless it turns around?](#) Magnets repel because the same poles (s/s, or n/n) are facing each other. One must turn to show the opposite pole for magnetism to work. And so it is with rebellion, always repelling itself from God as long as the person holds that they are sovereign over their life.

Rebellion always turns away from God's Word, instead of running to it, drawing from it, trusting in it, and walking in obedience by it. God's relentless grace is the only power that can break rebellion's repulsion and turn you. And even as the natural bent of magnets is to turn to make things right, so it is in rebellion to; grace will turn you, even as rebellion is driving you, to turn to the Lord.

⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, Man Overboard: The Story of Jonah. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015) 8.



CLOSE Some of you today seem to be perfectly at peace in life. Yet all the while your soul is incomplete torment as a tempest is threatening to break up your whole life. And you know it, but you are trying to sleep it off. You've managed to ignore the tempest, but that word keeps returning to startle you by "Arise"! Surrender unto Obedience is the only answer to rebellion. Only God's relentless grace is greater than sin's rebellion. *Let today be the day of your "arise" to the Lord!*

God calls people for His glory and pursues us in our rebellion to save us by His relentless grace.

