

Message #4

Jonah 1:8-16

When we come to this section of Jonah, there is a powerful lesson to be seen and learned:

WHEN GOD SOVEREIGNLY SENDS HIS CHASTISING STORMS AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE, IT WILL MAKE A STATEMENT FOR HIM EVEN AMONG HEATHENS.

In this passage, several lost heathen Phoenician sailors come to realize that this terrible storm is one sent by God against Jonah. When all is said and done, these unsaved Gentiles are standing in awe of the God of the Bible.

SEGMENT #1 – The questions of the sailors to Jonah. 1:8

When the sailors saw that the lot had fallen to Jonah, they immediately started asking him questions. They wanted to know his perspective as to the reason for this calamity. They wanted to know his occupation. They wanted to know his origin, his place of residency and his nationality.

What all of these questions tell us is that Jonah had certainly not been a witness to these men. Here was a rare Jewish prophet on board who had a true relationship with the living God of the Bible and he had kept completely quiet. These men didn't know anything about him or his God. Jonah had kept his citizenship quiet. He had not testified of anything.

When a man is in rebellion and sin, he will never testify and witness for God. He will keep his mouth shut. He cannot be an effective witness for the Lord when he is in rebellion, so he will remain silent. Truth is Jonah will be thrown overboard and leave these sailors with a totally distorted concept of God and salvation.

SEGMENT #2 – The answers of Jonah to the sailors. 1:9

We learn that Jonah told these men three things:

1) He told them he was a Hebrew. **1:9a**

Non-Israelites knew the Israelites by the term "Hebrew" (Gen. 40:15; Ex. 1:19; I Sam. 4:6, 9; 14:11). When Jonah used this term, these sailors would have realized this is one who is from Palestine who worships a God who has done many powerful and miraculous things.

2) He told them he feared the LORD God. **1:9b**

It is interesting that Jonah identifies the LORD God as the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. It is very clear that Jonah did not really believe he could flee from the presence of God. Apparently this storm had brought him back to a true theological reality.

He knew that he could not run from the presence of the Lord, because this was the LORD God of heaven who made all the sea and all the dry land.

3) He told them he was on the run. **1:10**

Jonah told these men he was running from God and from His presence. What a humiliating thing for Jonah to have to do, to admit he was a Hebrew running from the will of God and the Word of God.

SEGMENT #3 – The response of the sailors to Jonah. **1:10-11**

There is no doubt that these men believed Jonah. When he spoke, they sensed he was telling them the truth.

As we can see, there are two ways the sailors responded:

Way #1 - They responded emotionally. **1:10a**

The men became “extremely frightened.” The thing that added an extra dimension to the fear was the realization that the God of the universe was behind this storm. Prior to this, the sailors were afraid (1:5), but it was the realization that the God of the heaven and earth was specifically causing the storm that made them “extremely frightened.” The Hebrew text indicates the fear of these men had been taken to a whole new level.

When an earthquake, or hurricane or tornado comes to an area, everyone is afraid. But once it is revealed that it is a direct judgment of God, fear takes on a whole new dimension. For example, during the Tribulation when cosmic calamities hit and people realize these are judgments of God, they are so afraid that they literally ask mountains to fall on them (Rev. 6:15-16).

Way #2 - They responded verbally. **1:10b-11**

Primarily, there were two verbal responses these sailors made to Jonah, both of which are in the form of a question:

(Response #1) - The question of how Jonah could do this. **1:10b**

These men could not believe that Jonah, a Hebrew prophet, could run from God. These sailors can't believe Jonah could do such a stupid thing—run from the LORD God and put all of them in jeopardy.

J. Vernon McGee said when these sailors were asking these questions, Jonah must have turned three or four different shades of red (p. 747). He must have been totally humiliated and embarrassed that lost heathen sailors could rebuke him.

(Response #2) - The question of what they should do to Jonah. 1:11

There is manifested in this question a kind of respect for this rebellious man of God. They did not try to solve the problem themselves, but they knew if anyone had an answer as to how to get out from the judgment of God, it would be a true prophet of God.

These men did not know the God of the Bible. They did not know about Him tracking people down. They did not know about judgment and, as we shall see, they certainly didn't know anything about grace. But they did know that they didn't have the answer to this dilemma, so they asked Jonah what to do.

SEGMENT #4 – The response of Jonah to the sailors. 1:12

Jonah's response to the men was that they should pick him up and throw him overboard. This certainly was one option, but there was also another. According to Leviticus chapter 5, Jonah could have fallen down before God, confessed his sin, asked God to calm the storm, gone back to Joppa and on to Nineveh. Jonah could have appealed to the God of grace to give him another chance to obey and God would have, by virtue of His own Word.

However, Jonah was in such a state of rebellion that he would rather die than to go to Nineveh to preach. Think for a moment the message he is sending to these lost sailors. He is informing them, by his own request, that God can only be appeased by his death. But God's grace could have been demonstrated by his repentance.

Jonah would rather be thrown overboard and drown than go to Nineveh to preach. He would rather commit suicide than witness. He was a troubled, rebellious prophet totally out of step with the Word and will of God.

SEGMENT #5 – The response of the sailors to Jonah. 1:13-14

In this section there are three responses of these sailors. There are three ways they tried to resolve this judgment:

Response #1 – They tried to resolve it by rowing. 1:13

These sailors did not want to throw a man overboard. So their first response is to try harder to row the boat to shore. But their best human efforts could not stop the judgment of God.

When God's judgment comes, man's best human efforts and best human motives won't stop it.

Response #2 – They tried to resolve it by prayer. 1:14

These men were no longer praying to their false "god," they were now praying to the true God of the Bible.

This whole experience has caused them to turn to the living and true God. Specifically, they asked God not to destroy them because they were going to throw this man overboard.

Now keep in mind these men are responding to what Jonah, himself, has told them to do. They don't realize Jonah can repent and stop this storm. All they know is God is tracking down Jonah and he told them they needed to throw him overboard.

God, through His sovereignty, has stepped, via storm, into the world of these heathen sailors and He has made things so miserable for them that they are now forced not only to acknowledge Him, but to cry out to Him.

Response #3 – They resolve it by obedience. **1:15**

The men obeyed the prophet Jonah; they threw him overboard and the storm immediately stopped.

The men feared the LORD, the men offered a sacrifice to the LORD and the men made vows to the LORD, but they still had no idea about repentance. When Jonah went overboard, they lost their only contact with a Jewish prophet who could have helped them grow in truth.

Some commentators see that these sailors did become believers here. Having seen God's potential judgment, they willingly made a sacrifice and then vowed to serve the living God for the rest of their lives.

Key questions to ask ourselves:

1. Do we broadcast our citizenship or do we keep it quiet like Jonah?
2. If people close to us knew we loved God and His Word, would we be ashamed?
3. Are we in such rebellion that we don't even think biblically anymore?
4. Are we leaving people with a positive witness for God?
5. Do we communicate the whole truth of God—positive and the negative?