



## The Belly of Hell

### The Consequences of Disobedience

By David Wilkerson  
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"The word of the Lord came unto Jonah...saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:1-3). We know Jonah's story. He's the man who tried to run away from God. The Lord gave Jonah a mandate to preach judgment to the city-nation Nineveh. But instead of warning Nineveh, Jonah fled.

This story was validated by Christ himself. Jesus said, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). In other words, Jonah's story was as certain as Christ's own burial and resurrection.

So, why did Jonah run? Why did he refuse to obey God's clearly revealed Word? We know he was a godly, praying man. After all, the Lord speaks clearly to those who commune with him. And the Lord doesn't choose his servants carelessly. Evidently, he saw something in Jonah. Maybe God chose this man because of his gifts: a powerful voice, or a sensitive ear to hear the Spirit.

We do know that Jonah prophesied in Israel. He was a contemporary of other prophets of the time. So, clearly, this man was gifted and chosen by God. Yet, in this one instance, Jonah ran from God's call. Indeed, he fled God's very presence, shutting off communion with the Lord. Why? What caused such blatant disobedience?

It's unclear how much time elapsed between Jonah's call to speak judgment and his decision to run. It could have been weeks or even months. Moreover, the distance from Jerusalem to Joppa was thirty-five miles. If Jonah traveled by foot, he had plenty of time to reconsider his mission. One thing is sure: Jonah heard the Holy Spirit's voice ringing in his ears, every step of the way. The Holy Ghost is the hound of heaven, and when he calls us to service, he doesn't let us go. No doubt, Jonah heard words like these:

"Remember Adam's example, Jonah. Consider the consequences of his disobedience. Think also of Moses. That meek, holy man spoke with God face to face. But the Lord rebuked him for a single act of disobedience, keeping him out of the Promised Land. Think too of David, a praying man after God's own heart. Remember the awful sufferings he faced for his act of disobedience. You can't disobey God's Word and get away with it. Go back, Jonah."

The fate of multitudes depended on Jonah's obedience. But instead of going to Nineveh, "[Jonah] went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down

into it, to go...from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3).

I believe Jonah disobeyed because  
he had no righteous fear of God.

How could such a prayerful man drift away from his calling and fall into disobedience? It begins with a partial, incomplete knowledge of God's nature.

Jonah was given a powerful revelation of God's grace and mercy. He testified, "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of evil" (Jonah 4:2). He was given the same revelation Moses received, when God revealed his glory to Moses on the mount.

Jonah claimed this revelation was the reason he ran away: "Therefore I fled unto Tarshish" (4:2). By his actions he was saying, "Lord, you so easily forgive all who repent. Every time you pronounce judgment, you are overcome with mercy. I know you're not going to judge Nineveh. As soon as I prophesy, they'll repent, and you'll pour your grace on them."

Do you see the problem with Jonah's reasoning? He's describing only a partial revelation of God's nature. And he's accusing God of being soft on sin. Of course, God is everything Jonah describes here: long-suffering, willing to forgive, ready to pour out abundant grace. I thank God for this marvelous revelation of his nature. It has been the most life-giving truth I've ever known. I love preaching mercy to God's people.

But the Bible also speaks of God's holy, righteous nature. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). Surely Jonah knew this side of God. How could he neglect it? I believe Jonah had no understanding of the fear of God. If you think of God only as merciful, you'll find it easy to disobey his Word. You'll believe he esteems his warnings lightly, that he doesn't mean what he says. I believe this was the root of Jonah's disobedience.

Every true servant has to lay hold of a revelation of the fear of God. I don't mean a fear induced by man, manipulating people to obey. I mean the divine revelation of holy fear as revealed in God's Word: "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7). "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long" (23:17).

Such fear has to be sought diligently. And it must be implanted in us by the Holy Spirit: "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (2:4-5). Like God's mercy, the fear of God is life-giving: "The fear of the Lord is strong confidence" (14:26). "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (14:27).

There are dire consequences to all who disobey God's Word.

Jonah's disobedience proves this in three ways:

1. We experience disorder, chaos and confusion on all sides.

"The Lord sent out a great wind...and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them" (Jonah 1:4-5).

At times, even godly people face disorder in their lives. Suddenly, everything turns chaotic. But God doesn't keep them in such situations. He delivers them, bringing their lives into his divine order, with joy, peace and comfort. Or, he supplies them with grace to endure.

However, the servant who walks in disobedience faces crisis after crisis. Consider the chaos that Jonah's sin caused. An incredible storm broke out, and the sea began to roar. Sailors dashed about the ship in a frenzy, throwing cargo overboard. They watched in despair as their livelihood sank into the sea. If there were other ships in the area, they had to do the same, fearing for their lives.

Oh, the terrible disorder caused by one believer who lives in stubborn disobedience to God's Word. What is disobedience? It's walking contrary to God's revealed Word. This includes every love commandment in the New Testament, from Jesus' words to his apostles'.

Consider these passages on adultery and fornication: "No whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5). "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). The Greek word for whoremonger is porno, where we get the word pornography.

I was shocked to learn there are now over 200,000 porn sites on the Internet. Worse, I know ministers who freely indulge in this filth. Some are involved in affairs. Many have lost their ministries and families. I receive letters from distraught wives describing the effects on their children. The kids see their father's example and can't handle it. They no longer respect him. Some even forsake their faith, turning to drugs, alcohol or sex.

Where does such disorder come from? Not from the devil, but from God letting down the protective wall. He stirs up storms to awaken his servants, as he did with Jonah: "The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea" (Jonah 1:4).

2. Stubborn disobedience brings a spirit of slumber and apathy.

Jonah was oblivious to the chaos and pain he was causing. Throughout the storm, he "was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep" (Jonah 1:5). Do you see his condition? He was a prisoner to his own disobedience. His sin had started the storm, and now he was helpless to stop it. So, what did he do? He drifted into a spiritual stupor. He gave in to guilt-ridden sloth.

I recall the director of one of our Teen Challenge programs years ago. He was a dedicated servant and a good preacher. A former addict, he was respected by the men in the program. But he fell into adultery with a former prostitute enrolled in the program. He ended up leaving his wife and resigning from the ministry.

The disorder caused by this man's sin was tragic. His wife attempted suicide and ended up in the care of a mental institution.

The addicts in the program despaired. They thought, "He was so holy. If he couldn't make it, what chance do I have?" Many left and returned to drugs.

I later talked to this man and woman. They'd gotten married and had gone back to smoking pot. They told me they'd stopped reading the Bible and no longer had any spiritual hunger. The man admitted, "We're prisoners. We made our choice, and there's no escape for us." But as I was leaving, he said, "One thing I learned from your ministry is that God is merciful. I know he forgives sin. We just need some time."

Five years later, I saw the man again. He was now a drug pusher, driving a new Mercedes. I told him I'd been praying for him all those years. He replied, "Oh, I still need some time." What he was really saying was, "God won't judge me. He'll wait till I'm ready to give up this good life and come back to him." My heart sank. That drifting man had lost all fear of God. And he had turned God's grace into lasciviousness.

Think of the runaway divorce rate in the church. Consider the adultery taking place in both pulpit and pew. Christians have become numb to the increase of immorality in society. HBO and other cable networks are now competing to "push the envelope" of filth. Their goal is to see how far they can stretch moral limits. And Christians are being seduced along with the world.

How could this happen, you ask? It's the result of a prevailing message of "grace only" in the church. This message is only a partial truth of God's nature. Preachers today ignore the doctrine of the holy fear of God. And it's lulling his people into a spiritual stupor.

3. Our disobedience portrays God as weak and powerless.

"The shipmaster came to (Jonah), and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not...Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; what is thine occupation? And whence comest thou? What is thy country? And of what people art thou?"

"And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them" (Jonah 1:6-10). Jonah's disobedience made the Lord seem vindictive. It appeared that if you crossed Jonah's God, he would hunt you down and scare the daylights out of you. Yet this wasn't the case at all. It was a total misrepresentation of God's nature.

So, was God mad at Jonah? Was this his revenge on a rebellious servant? Was he saying, "You failed, Jonah. You had your chance, but you've disqualified yourself. Now you're being judged"? No, God wasn't angry with Jonah. He may have been disappointed in him, but he wasn't finished with him. Not in the least.

This whole story is one of mercy and grace. Yes, God had brought on the storm. But he did it to bring Jonah back to himself. The Lord was saying, in essence, "I'll turn nature upside down to restore my disobedient servant. You may be running from me, Jonah, but I won't give up on you. I still love you. And I have called and chosen you. You're still my man for this work."

Note that the captain had to wake Jonah. In this crisis, God's messenger was caught unaware. Jonah tried to testify of God's power, but he had no credibility with the crew. They knew he was living in disobedience, having "fled from the presence of the Lord" (1:10). Jonah's sin had found him out. Likewise, every servant who lives in disobedience loses credibility with the world. They see he has no spiritual authority.

When Jonah urged the crew to cast him overboard, they ignored him: "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to land" (1:13). Their actions said, "Why should we listen to you? While we called out to our gods, you were sleeping. We've got to try to get ourselves out of this."

Jonah was utterly powerless. Even if he was spared from this storm, he was in no condition to prophesy to Nineveh. Why would they respect his word, if the ship's crew didn't? Scripture tells us, "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (1:17).

Jonah described his ordeal as hell.

"Out of the belly of hell cried I" (Jonah 2:2). Why did the Lord take Jonah so low? He was in the belly of a living hell, suspended in darkness, hanging between life and death. Why would a merciful God put a servant through this? I believe Jonah's story shows us how God deals with disobedient servants.

Jonah was in this hell for three days and nights. Yet in all that time, he never prayed. The storm hadn't brought him to his knees. Neither did his brush with death in the whale's belly. Only after three days and nights do we read, "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly" (2:1).

Why didn't Jonah pray before this? It was because he was convinced, "I am cast out of thy sight" (2:4). He described God as having mercy for Nineveh, but Jonah couldn't believe the same mercy for himself. He thought, "I'm a dead man. I can't fall any lower. God has turned his back on me. He hates me for what I did."

Nothing could have been further from the truth. When Scripture says, "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah," the word for prepared means enrolled. God had picked out a huge whale and put an urgency in that creature. So, when Jonah went overboard, the fish was there, ready to swallow him. The Lord was still at work.

Yet the devil had succeeded in deceiving Jonah. Who rules the regions of hell, but Satan? Jonah cried, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy" (2:8). The literal Hebrew translation reads, "They who protect or defend a deceiving lie rob themselves of the receiving of mercy." This is what happened with Jonah. His deception had robbed him of any hope of God's grace. For three days and nights, he was under a horrible delusion. Satan told him, "You've failed. Now life has ended for you. Your disobedience has cost the lives of many who would have turned to the Lord. Not even God can rescue you now. Even if you survive, you'll have eternal regret."

The truth was, God was speeding Jonah on his way to Nineveh. Soon the prophet would be walking in sunlight again. He would preach boldly in the streets as a chosen messenger. What did God intend through Jonah's belly-of-hell experience? It shows how he allows disobedient servants to face total isolation from everything

holy and pure. For a season Jonah knew what it was like to feel dead. He couldn't pray. God had hidden his face, and the prophet had no one to turn to. Hell for Jonah wasn't the seaweed sweeping over him, or being pounded back and forth. It was the sense that God had lifted his hand from his life.

It was all meant to test Jonah in his disobedience. God wasn't demanding, "Now will you obey me, Jonah?" Rather, he was asking, "Whose word will you believe in this awful hell, Jonah? Mine or the devil's?" Finally, we read, "Then Jonah prayed" (2:1). "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee" (2:7). Jonah rushed back to God's loving arms. Then he testified, "Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice" (2:2).

Over the years, I have met many Jonahs. I've ministered to these chosen servants who disobeyed God and fell into gross sin. Some eventually gave themselves over to Satan's lying vanities. Some were lost and died in their sin. But others repented out of the belly of their hell, and were restored. Today, God is using them mightily again, as pastors, teachers, evangelists, lay workers. In every case, these restored saints gave themselves to prayer, crying out to the Lord.

Jonah is also a type of the disobedient church.

In every period of extreme wickedness, God calls his church to warn society of coming judgment. His Spirit commands us all, "Rise up and warn your city, your family, your nation. I have endured enough of this wickedness." This is why God sent me to New York City fifteen years ago. Our ministry was to raise up a godly remnant of believers, and to warn society of coming judgment.

Today, the wickedness in America far exceeds that of Nineveh. Those ancient people weren't tempted by pornography, the Internet or sordid TV. Nor was there a gospel presence in their midst, to present truth to them. They had no Bible, no churches, no Christian media. By contrast, America is saturated with such wonderful things. Still, our society is rapidly being overcome with evil. How could this be, you ask? It's simple: God's servants have fallen asleep. The church has fled from his presence, having lost godly fear.

In Jonah's day, the ships of Tarshish represented prosperity. Solomon built a Tarshish fleet of ships to increase Israel's wealth. But God destroyed those boats. Today, like Jonah, many believers are slumbering aboard America's ship of prosperity. But now the Lord has brought a storm upon our nation, shaking our ship of state. We saw this vividly on September 11, when the symbols of our government and economy were in flames.

America is still living with fear. Even the heathen are praying. Senators and Congressmen broke up their meetings to gather on the Capitol steps for prayer. (Minutes before, many had been making laws to promote abortion and outlaw God's name from public places). Lately, I've received news clippings describing mass prayer meetings called by Muslims and Hindus.

Now is clearly the time for God's praying, discerning servants to rise up and warn of judgment. Like the crew on Jonah's ship, masses of ungodly people are asking Christians, "Why is this storm happening? Where is God in all this?" Yet, tragically, the church has lost its credibility in the eyes of the world. To many, Christianity is all about TV preachers begging for money. They see Christians sleeping on the ship of prosperity.

When a word does come forth from the church, it's often from a compromised shepherd, crying, "God isn't behind the present storm. It's the devil's work. Our loving God wouldn't judge this nation." Such men don't know their Bibles. Nothing happens to any nation without God's permission. After all, it wasn't the devil who destroyed Sodom. He didn't call down fire and brimstone from heaven. The Lord brought that righteous judgment upon wicked Sodom. Nor was it Satan who brought the flood in Noah's day. God himself opened the heavens and sent the terrible torrent of rain.

But the Lord has his way of waking his church and bringing it to prayer. Right now, we're only seeing the storm. Very soon, our nation will enter the belly of the whale.

Another great fish is being enrolled by God in the troubled waters under our ship of prosperity.

America is about to be cast overboard and swallowed up by an economic hell. You may remember a message I prophesied five years before the Gulf War. I said bombs would drop on oil wells in the Middle East, causing 500 Kuwaiti fires. Later, Saddam Hussein's army set fire to 503 wells. I also have written of foreseeing 1,000 fires burning in New York City. I now believe those fires will come from an economic collapse.

Two years ago, the stock market was at 12,000 points. Experts said it would hit 30,000 before the boom ended, and that we were immune to recession. But after September 11, the market tumbled.

What has this storm of events produced? Very little, in my opinion. I see no signs of Nineveh-like repentance. Instead, five states have now legalized adoption for homosexual couples. And a school in California insists children attend school dressed as Muslims and carry a Koran, to learn about Allah. Meanwhile, Bibles are still banned.

I know many readers don't want to hear this kind of message. We'd all rather believe we'll somehow be given a lifeboat and avoid going into the belly of suffering. But in reality, the whale's belly is God's ultimate act of mercy. He has tried to bring us to repentance by his goodness, showering America with blessings. But we've grown fat in our prosperity and forsaken him even more.

Now the Lord is saying, "I don't know how else to save you except through this kind of dark hell. Maybe in the belly of a broken economy you'll wake up. Perhaps as you face a time of panic and fear, you'll return to your calling."

God isn't trying to destroy America. I believe he's trying to save it. He's also trying to get his church back to its mission. His desire is that out of this time in the whale's belly, families will turn back to him. Ministers will stop their sin and foolish preaching, and churches will come alive. A praying remnant will emerge with biblical values, to go into the world and preach with true authority.

The storm we're in is meant to teach us God means what he says. It's all about getting a revelation of his fear as well as of his mercy and grace. If you're walking in disobedience, run to him now. Quickly repent, and pour out your soul to him. He won't keep you long in the whale's belly. He's a loving God who longs to restore you.

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