



TURNOVER ON DOWNS

Going for it on 4th down is either the best or worst decision ever—depending on how things work out. Only hindsight reveals a brilliant tactician or a fool. As we open the book of *Jonah*, notice God’s call, “**Arise...their evil has come up before me.**” So, let me ask you, where is God located, not in a theological sense because he’s everywhere at once, but in a literary sense? In the story, God is *up*! So, where does Jonah go? *Down, away from the presence of the Lord*—or at least, that’s the attempt.

Jonah’s first three downs puts him in a worse position than he could have imagined. He went **down to Joppa, down into** [the ship], and finally **down** in the belly of a giant fish. Jonah succeeded, going literally as far from God as a person could get. Now, a fate worse than death stared him in the face.

As we begin our study of the Minor Prophets, you will be challenged to “Arise,” and follow God’s call on your life revealed in his Word. Jonah was in 4th-and-impossible about to turn it over on downs,. But. let’s rewind to see how he got there and what we need to know to never get there.

JONAH 1–2 (SELECTED)

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

⁴ But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea... ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea...But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶ So 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.”

⁹ And 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.” ¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!”

^{2:6} “I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. ⁷ When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple... ⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Jonah is one of the most well-crafted stories in the whole Bible. It's a shame that the athlete's study not have the space or time to really dive into the history, literary brilliance, or several other things that would increase our appreciation for the book. However, your coach is participating in a much larger study, meaning that you should definitely ask questions. In the meantime, scan the QR-code for a little more insight.



DISCUSSION

How does your attitude on obedience change when you really believe the person has your best interest in mind?

1. What did God tell Jonah to do and how did Jonah respond? (1-3)

2. How did Jonah describe himself to the sailors? (9)

3. Describe Jonah's circumstances and his response. (7)

4. In what ways does Jonah's response indicate a rebellious heart?

5. Describe the contrast between the pagan sailors and Jonah.

6. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being running *to God* and 1 being running *away from God*, where are you and why?

On a scale of 1-10, how sure are you that when you die you'll spend eternity with Jesus in heaven? If your answer is anything less than 10, don't wait. Talk to your coach about a relationship with Jesus Christ.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION



STUDY NOTES

RUN, FORREST, RUN

Forrest Gump is one of the greatest movies ever made. It's especially entertaining if you understand the historic events depicted in the film—from teaching Elvis his dance moves to inadvertently blowing the lid on the Watergate scandal. But, one theme carries throughout, running! He started as a boy that couldn't run, then transformed into a man whose running propelled him to success and even saved his life.

Not so for the prophet, Jonah. Like the movie, we need to understand a bit of history to appreciate the book of *Jonah*. However, Jonah's running nearly led to his demise. And although we read of Jonah running physically, as we will soon see, his rebellious heart had already been running for a while.

HOPE LIVES FOR REBELS

After God called Jonah to **"go to Nineveh,"** Jonah fled. Why? Nineveh was the capitol city of Assyria. The Assyrians were bad news. The Assyrian war-machine thundered through the ancient world unstopably conquering every enemy they faced. In the book *Prodigal Prophet*, Tim Keller records, *"After capturing enemies, the Assyrians would typically cut off their legs and one arm, leaving the other arm... so they could shake the victim's hand in mockery as he was dying. They forced friends and family to parade with the decapitated heads of their loved ones on elevated poles. They pulled out prisoner's tongues and stretched their bodies with ropes so they could be flayed alive... Those who survived the destruction of their cities were fated to endure cruel and violent forms of slavery."* As we will see next Week, it wasn't just his own death that Jonah fled (which we would understand), he was also afraid that the Lord would save the Assyrians.

Drawing near to the presence of the Lord means sharing his heart. Jonah's heart was far from the Lord's. And oh by the way, he was a prophet! This guy was supposed to be the Lord's representative to the people. He was the best and brightest the northern kingdom of Israel had to offer. Yet, in tremendous irony, instead of God's prophet pointing people to the One True Lord, it's the pagan ship **captain** who **came and** repeated God's command, pointing Jonah to God, **"Arise [aka "Get up," and stop going down], and call out to your god!"**

Through the process of casting lots (which probably isn't a great example to follow for making choices) the ship's crew identified Jonah as the reason they were facing the worst storm these experienced sailors had ever seen. Notice what

Jonah said when confronted, **"I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."** Wait, what? First, putting your national identity in front of your identity in the Lord is backwards. Second, you fear who? The captain was afraid. The crew was **exceedingly afraid**. But Jonah was literally asleep a moment ago.

The unrelenting storm spelled doom for the ship and her crew. Jonah proposed the only solution he could think of, **"Pick me up and hurl me into the sea."** The crew did **everything** they could to save the ship until finally they fulfilled Jonah's request.

REBELS CAN REPENT

There's a couple unanswerable questions about this moment in the story. First, did the sailors see the fish? Although, the whole Jonah-swallowed-by-a-fish is a single verse in a four chapter book, it's the one thing most people know about the story and little else. But, did the fish jump up and catch Jonah alley-oop style, where the sailors saw it, or did Jonah sink to the bottom and then get swallowed. Probably the latter, based on the reference to the seaweed in chapter 2, which means they they thought they had killed Jonah. But either way, the sailor's perspective on this scene is wild!

The moment Jonah flew overboard, the storm stopped. The sailors knew Jonah's God saved them. Whereas Jonah said he feared the Lord, now these rebels truly **"feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered sacrifice"** (16). God used Jonah to save these men both physically and spiritually without any help from the prophet himself.

Finally, at the lowest point a person can possibly be, Jonah finally prayed to God. He **"remembered the LORD,"** which is synonymous with repentance. This isn't just intellectual. It's a complete heart surrender. Jonah finally understood that whatever might happen in Nineveh, **"Salvation belongs to the LORD."**

It's here, in the moment of repentance, that the fish vomited Jonah out on dry land. This leads to my second unanswerable question—what would have happened if they simply turned the ship around? Jonah only considered repentance after death had eluded him; while he sat in total darkness smelling a fish from the inside, hearing sounds of breathing, swallowing, digesting, etc., as his **life was fainting away**.

Here's the question for you—how many downs do you need before you remember and repent? Learn from Jonah's example that running from the Lord will take you where you want to go, but it's not where you'll want to be. It's far better to run to his presence by surrendering your heart to his in repentance.