

Jonah 1:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The sailors' response: "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." The phrase "exceedingly afraid" (yir'u yir'ah gedolah) literally means "feared a great fear"—Hebrew superlative indicating terror. These pagan sailors understood immediately: you don't flee from the universal Creator-God who made sea and land. Their question "Why hast thou done this?" expresses shock at Jonah's folly. Fleeing God is irrational, impossible, and dangerous to everyone nearby. Psalm 139:7-12 elaborates: there is no escaping God's presence. The sailors grasped what Jonah ignored: rebellion against this God endangers not just the rebel but everyone around him. Sin's corporate consequences appear throughout Scripture (Achan—Joshua 7; Ananias and Sapphira—Acts 5). Individual rebellion affects communities.

Historical Context

Ancient sailors were religiously devout, knowing their survival depended on divine favor. They'd pray to multiple gods, perform rituals, and avoid angering deities. Jonah's revelation that he was fleeing the Creator-God terrified them—they were caught between the sea and an angry deity who controlled it. Their subsequent reluctance to throw Jonah overboard (v. 13) despite his guilt shows remarkable moral character. These pagans display greater righteousness than God's prophet.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does your sin affect those around you, not just yourself?
2. What does it mean that fleeing God is both impossible and dangerous?
3. How do unbelievers sometimes demonstrate greater moral sensitivity than professing Christians?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּרָא ו	הָאֲנָשׁ יִם	יִרְאָה	גְּדוֹלָה	וַיֹּאמֶר ו	אֶל יו	מָה
afraid	Then were the men	H3373	exceedingly	and said	H413	H4100
H3372	H582		H1419	H559		
זֶאת	עָשׂוּ יְתָ	כִּי	יָדַע ו	הָאֲנָשׁ יִם	כִּי	
H2063	unto him Why hast thou done	H3588	knew	Then were the men	H3588	
	H6213		H3045	H582		
מִלִּפְנֵי י	יְהוָה	ה וּא	בָּרַח	כִּי	הֵגִיד	
from the presence	of the LORD	H1931	that he fled	H3588	because he had told	
H6440	H3068		H1272		H5046	
לָהֶם:						
H1992						

Additional Cross-References

Jonah 1:3 (References Lord): But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and 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 with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Job 27:22 (Parallel theme): For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand.

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