

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

מָה אֵלֹא יִתְאַמֵּר וְאֵלֹא יִתְאַרְאֶה
afraid Then were the men H3373 exceedingly and said H413 H4100

זֶה אָתָּה עַשְׂתָּה יְדָעָה וְאֵלֹא יִדְעֶה
H2063 unto him Why hast thou done H6213 knew H3045 Then were the men H582 H3588

מִלְפָנָגִים וְאֵלֹא יִהְיוֹת בְּרַכָּה
from the presence of the LORD H1931 that he fled H1272 because he had told H5046

לֹא
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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