

Jonah 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Jonah's response is immediate rebellion: "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." The Hebrew repeats "from the presence of the LORD" (milifnei YHWH, מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה) twice—emphasizing Jonah's foolish attempt to escape God's presence.

"Tarshish" (תַּרְשִׁישׁ) was likely in Spain or coastal Mediterranean, representing the farthest western point known to Israelites—opposite direction from Nineveh (east). Jonah doesn't merely delay obedience; he runs the wrong way as fast and far as possible. The verb "went down" (yarad, יָרַד) appears three times (went down to Joppa, down into the ship, and in 1:5, down into the ship's hold). This descent becomes spiritual metaphor—running from God is always downward movement.

The phrase "from the presence of the LORD" shows theological confusion. Psalm 139:7-12 asks: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" The answer: nowhere. Yet Jonah, despite being a prophet who should know better, attempts the impossible. Perhaps he hoped distance from the land where God commanded him might nullify the commission. Or maybe he feared that if he preached and Nineveh repented, God's mercy would spare Israel's future destroyer—exactly what happens and what Jonah later admits motivated his flight

(4:2).

"He paid the fare thereof" (vayyiten sekarah) indicates Jonah financed his rebellion—using personal resources to fund disobedience. Sin always costs, and running from God is expensive. The irony deepens: Jonah pays to flee from God's commission, while the pagan sailors (verse 5) pray to their gods. Throughout chapter 1, pagan sailors display more spiritual sensitivity than God's prophet—they pray, Jonah sleeps; they fear properly, Jonah remains callous; they show compassion, Jonah accepts death rather than obey.

Historical Context

Jonah son of Amittai prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kings 14:25), around 780-760 BC. God commanded him to preach repentance to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria—the brutal empire that would later destroy Israel (722 BC). Assyrian kings were notorious for extreme cruelty, boasting in their inscriptions about impalement, flaying, and mass deportations. For an Israelite prophet, preaching salvation to Assyria was like asking a Holocaust survivor to evangelize Nazi Germany. Jonah's flight to Tarshish (opposite direction) reveals both ethnic prejudice and theological confusion about God's mercy extending to pagan nations. When Nineveh repented and God relented, Jonah became angry, preferring their destruction. The book concludes with God's gentle rebuke, revealing His compassion for all people.

The book of Jonah stands as a rebuke to narrow nationalism and an anticipation of the gospel's universal scope. Jesus referenced Jonah's three days in the fish as a sign of His death and resurrection, while condemning His generation for not repenting like Nineveh did (Matthew 12:39-41). The early church struggled with the same prejudice Jonah displayed when Gentiles began believing in Christ.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Jonah 1:3 deepen your understanding of God's character, particularly His holiness, justice, and mercy?
2. What specific attitudes, thought patterns, or behaviors does this verse call you to examine and change in light of the gospel?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and His redemptive work, and how should that shape your worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּקָּם	יֹנָה	לִבְרֹחַ	תַּרְשִׁישׁ	יְהוָה	מִלִּפְנֵי
rose up	But Jonah	to flee	to Tarshish	from the presence	of the LORD
H6965	H3124	H1272	H8659	H6440	H3068
וַיֵּרָד	יָפוֹ	וַיִּמְצָא	אֶנִּי הָאֵל	לֵב וָאֵל	תַּרְשִׁישׁ
and went down	to Joppa	and he found	a ship	going	to Tarshish
H3381	H3305	H4672	H591	H935	H8659
וַיֵּתֵן	שְׂכָרָהּ	וַיֵּרָד	בָּהּ	לֵב וָאֵל	עִמָּהֶם
so he paid	the fare	and went down	H0	going	H5973
H5414	H7939	H3381		H935	H8659
מִלִּפְנֵי	יְהוָה				
from the presence	of the LORD				
H6440	H3068				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 4:16 (References Lord): And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

Joshua 19:46 (Parallel theme): And Me-jarkon, and Rakkon, with the border before Japho.

Acts 9:36 (Parallel theme): Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

Isaiah 23:1 (Parallel theme): The burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them.

Jonah 4:2 (References Lord): And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

1 Kings 19:3 (Parallel theme): And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.

Isaiah 23:10 (Parallel theme): Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength.

Isaiah 23:6 (Parallel theme): Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle.

Acts 26:19 (Parallel theme): Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

Acts 9:43 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.