

But Jonah Arose to Flee
By Trey Sullins

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” This was the word of the Lord that came to Jonah in Jonah 1:2. Immediately following this Jonah’s reaction was to try to flee “from the presence of the Lord.” As we consider the actions of Jonah there are some great lessons and parallels that we can learn from.

The first thing we notice is that when called upon by God, Jonah fled. The Bible makes it clear what his motivation was for doing this; he was trying to escape from God. Notice the great length he goes through to accomplish this goal. First, he travels to Joppa and finds a ship. He then travels in that ship to all the way to Tarshish. Tarshish is roughly 2500 miles away from Joppa and in the complete opposite direction from the city of Nineveh. Jonah’s opinion on God’s request was very clear. After fleeing, Jonah was comfortable enough in his decision to be fast asleep even during a storm!

When we consider our own lives, have we been doing this spiritually? Are we running from the responsibilities that God has put before us? One example to consider is all those people that we meet on a daily basis. How many of them do we tell about Christ? Are we guilty of laying down when we should be spiritually standing up or doing the work that God has called us to? Ephesians 5:14 says “Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.” The implication here is that when you are sleeping and you do not away, then you don’t have the light of Christ. Furthermore, we know what happened when Jonah tried to flee so certainly, we should never be found doing the same thing!

Second consider how Jonah did not try to pass the blame. In verse 8 the men on the ship with Jonah ask who he is. They were trying to understand why this great storm had come upon them. Jonah simply tells them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” It is interesting to consider that a man who is in the process of running from God would be so honest about who was coming after him. Perhaps Jonah knew, as any God-fearing person should, that lying to get away from God is pointless. In any case, Jonah could have said many things here. He could have blamed God, blamed the sailors, or even blamed Nineveh. Instead, he tells them the truth (Jonah 1:10).

Hopefully this description matches us. We should be willing to take responsibility for our actions and especially so when it comes to spiritual matters. Think about some of those silly arguments you might get into with your spouse at different times. If left unchecked these arguments can turn into situations where neither side is willing to take the blame for the current battle. While in these kinds of physical relationships we might be able to get away with this behavior, the Bible makes it clear that we will not escape responsibility with God.

One final lesson is in Jonah 1:14. Here we find the other sailors crying out to the Lord and praying! Can you believe it? In this moment it seems as if the sailors have a stronger faith than Jonah. It is also important to recognize that these unbelievers were showing a good example to Jonah.

Has this ever happened in your life? At a restaurant in the past, I remember eating my food and

looking over at another table to notice a family with heads down praying. I then remembered that we had forgotten to pray! Sometimes situations arise where we see people of various denominations or religions showing a great deal of piety. These moments should help us to recognize where we can improve and be better examples for all around us.

There are many lessons from Jonah that we can learn, but when you think about these few how do you stack up? Do we find ourselves running to God, passing the blame, or letting our lights fade? As Christians we must make sure that we always keep our lives in check so that hopefully we will never have to say “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you” (Jonah 1:12).