

A Hebrew I am, and I Fear ADONAI, the God of Heaven, Who Made Both the Sea and the Dry Land

1: 8-10

DIG: How are the sailors pictured here? How did the sailors and Jonah communicate with each other? What had the sulking messenger left out of his story? Why do you think he left out those details? Why was Yonah's declaration that he was a Hebrew important? What details about their current circumstances and the Jewish prophet's description of his God may have begun to change the sailors' hearts? How do you think Jonah felt after talking with the sailors? How do you think they felt about him?

REFLECT: Have you ever been embarrassed to reveal to someone that you are a believer once he or she has seen the way you've acted? If so, what were the circumstances? How are you known to the pagan world? Do you have to wear your faith on your sleeve? If you were arrested for being a believer, would there be enough evidence to convict? It's been said that if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. Jonah had dug himself a pretty deep hole. How long does it take you to stop digging?

Commentary on scene two: The sailors are described in a favorable manner. In the midst of the storm at sea they are calm, reasonable and fair men. Even though the lot had fallen on Jonah, they do not immediately assume his guilt, nor are they immediately ready to throw him overboard. They give him a chance to say something about himself in his own defense.⁴⁶

The sailors and Yonah continued to try to communicate as best they could. When the sailors speak to God's servant, they say the same thing to him that they had just said to each other in Hebrew: So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for [ba'aser lemi] making all this trouble for us?" In a little while, Jonah will use the same expression to admit his fault, and he uses the sailors' Aramaic: I know that it is my fault [beselli] that this great storm has come upon you (1:12b).⁴⁷

Presumably Yonah previously had some time to talk to these sailors, but he didn't tell them much of anything about himself. He certainly was no witness for the LORD. Someone out of the will of God can never be an effective witness. Notice what Jonah *didn't* tell them when the sailors fire a barrage of five questions at Yonah. The first question, which some have seen as irrelevant: Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?

gives **Jonah** the opportunity of denying the accusation. But **the closet prophet** said nothing so **they** continued, **their** interrogation: **What is your job?** He hadn't told **them** he was a prophet of **ADONAI**. **Where did you come from?** He didn't tell **them** he was from **Gath-hepher** in the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. Nothing about **his** hometown. **What is your country?** He hadn't told **them** that he was a citizen of **Isra'el**. **Who are your people (1:8)?** He didn't explain that he was a prophet who represented **the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**, and who had been called to go to **Nineveh** to bring a message of hope and salvation. He hadn't said any of that. Why? Because he was entirely out of the will of **God**.⁴⁸

Now, for the first time in the story, **Jonah** speaks. As the author of the story, **Yonah** puts the spotlight on **his** speech by placing it at the exact midpoint of **scene two** (see **AI - Jonah and the Violent Storm**). I can't help but wonder if **Yonah** - the Israelite and **the prophet** - was a little ashamed to speak the name of **God** in conjunction with **his** own. **Then Jonah said to the Gentile sailors, "A Hebrew I am"** (the literal word order). That was very significant because this was the name of the Israelites among the Gentile nations (**Genesis 39:14 and 17, 40:15; Exodus 2:7, 3:18**). **The Hebrews** were known to be monotheistic; that is, **they** worshiped one **God**, never an idol. **Jonah** was clearly a creationist, for he declared: **I fear ADONAI, the God of heaven who made both the sea and the dry land (Jonah 1:9; also see Exodus 14:21)?** In other words, **Yonah** said, "The Creator of **the heavens, the sea and the land** is responsible for this **storm** and **I** am **His** prophet!"⁴⁹ With those words, **they** knew **they** were in trouble. After all, who runs away from **the God of the sea** on a ship?

At this point **Jonah** has answered only the last of the questions put to **him (Who are your people?)**, saying nothing about **his** occupation, home, or country. While **the sailors** did not ask about **his** religious preference, **he** had volunteered that information in a confession of faith in **the LORD who made the sea and the dry land** although **Yonah's** words had to have had an extremely hollow ring to **them** in light of **his** willful disobedience. Let this not be true of us.

In **1:5** **the sailors** indicated that **they** were afraid because of **the storm**. Now the description of **their** fear is intensified. **At this the men were terrified** because now **they** recognized who was responsible for **the storm**; **they** understood which **God** **Yonah** was running from. Intuitively **they** knew that this was the **One** true **God**. **They** couldn't believe **their** ears, saying, "Are you crazy?" **What is this that you have done to us (1:10a)?** **The sailors** seem to grasp the seriousness of **his** disobedience more than **the prophet** did. How could anyone who claims to know **the Creator God** have the audacity to defy **Him**? How could this **closet prophet** be so indifferent to **God's** power to pursue **him**? **The sailors** feared **their**

gods, and to **them**, **Jonah's** cool defiance of **God** must have been extremely confusing. **Yonah** now has to consider **his** guilt in the potential death of **the sailors** in the storm.

For the men knew he was trying to get away from ADONAI, since he had told them (1:10b). This half of **verse 10** is a good example of **Jonah's** method of supplying some necessary information that **he** might have recorded earlier in the story but didn't. In this way he singles it out and makes it more memorable. **He** ran from **his** call to **the Ninevites**, but now **he** is face to face with pagan **sailors**. What will **he** do? **The sailors** and the original readers of the story want to know.⁵⁰

When we cry out, *Oh God*, how can I get out of this mess I've gotten myself into. **He** says to us, "Repent. Say you're sorry. Turn around and go in a different direction. Come back to **Me**." And many times in our lives then we say, "Oh **Lord** . . . is there *another way* I can get myself out of this mess?" Why do we wait until we're in **BIG** trouble to call out to **the Lord**? Why do we keep trying to do it our way? Why don't we respond the first time **God** calls us?

We should note that **Jonah** does not answer the question put to **him**, "**What is this that you have done?**" So **the sailors** follow up with another question . . .