

Introduction

Illustration

C. S. Lewis was a devout skeptic and devout atheist. When Lewis wrote about his conversion to faith, he wrote about it as being incapable of escaping from the reality of God. He wrote, “You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England” (*Surprised by Joy*).

Main Idea

C. S. Lewis may have denied the existence of God, but he still could not live away from the presence of God. Not even alone in his room. You and I are no different. We may run from God’s presence and God’s will, but we still live in his presence. The opposite may be true; you may be seeking God, but feel like you are unable to find Him. Let me assure you, God may seem far away, but the Lord is always present.

[Jonah 1](#) describes God’s call to Jonah to go warn the city of Nineveh of judgment. But Jonah’s response was to run away from God. The **main idea** of [Jonah 1:1-16](#) is that **No one is beyond God’s presence**. Today, we will read [Jonah 1:1-6](#) that shows us that the Lord is God in Nineveh, and Israel, and anywhere else that Jonah may go. As we read, consider this - *Are you pursuing God’s presence or running from it?* **No one is beyond God’s presence**.

Lord in Nineveh

First, we read that the Lord is God in Nineveh. Nineveh did not acknowledge the Lord, but He was their God nonetheless. [Jonah 1:1-2](#) “1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.””

Jonah

Who was Jonah? The Old Testament only mentions Jonah once outside of this book ([2 Kings 14:25](#)). First, Scripture says that Jonah was a prophet ([2 Kings 14:25](#); [Matt 12:39](#)). A prophet is not someone who predicts the future - he is not a fortune-teller. A prophet is someone through whom God reveals His word. The Old Testament was written by prophets to whom God revealed His written word. The New Testament teaches that God spoke by prophets in the past, but now He speaks through Jesus ([Heb 1:1-2](#)). We should immediately hesitate to listen to anyone who claims to be a prophet.

Second, Scripture describes Jonah as an Israelite ([Jonah 1:9](#)). He was from the city of Gath-Hepher ([2 Kings 14:25](#)), which was in the northern part of Israel, within the tribe of Zebulun ([Josh 19:13](#)). Jonah's Israelite heritage influenced his theological views in positive and negative ways. That is, he knew the truth about God, but he had trouble considering that God could love Gentiles.

The word of the Lord

How did Jonah know God's will? [Jonah 1:1](#) indicates that God revealed His will directly to Jonah. Throughout Scripture God revealed His will through prophets and apostles. [Hebrews 1:1-2](#) suggests that the time-period of God revealing His word concluded with the coming of Christ and the lifetime of those whom Jesus appointed as apostles. So, this is not the kind of revelation we should expect today.

How can we know God's will today? We know God's will through Scripture. Scripture is the written word of God through prophets and apostles, whom the Holy Spirit directed what they should write ([2 Tim 3:16](#); [2 Pet 1:21](#)). We know God's will by reading Scripture.

We should be careful to not downplay or misunderstand the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, guides us into knowing truth, and shapes us into new creations in Christ. However, the Holy Spirit is not revealing new truth to us; He is pointing us to Scripture ([Eph 6:17](#)).

Against Nineveh

Who were the Ninevites? [Jonah 1:2](#) describes Nineveh as a great city. Nineveh was built along the Tigris River in modern-day Iraq. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire until the Assyrians were conquered by the Babylonians in 612 B.C. The Assyrians were enemies of Israel. They conquered the northern tribes of Israel, but God prevented them from conquering the southern tribes.

According to [Jonah 1:2](#), Nineveh was an evil city. Historically, the Assyrians were known for impaling, dismembering, and decapitating those whom they conquered. This is the people group Jonah was supposed to speak against.

Why did God send a prophet of Israel to Nineveh? The Ninevites were polytheists; they worshipped many gods, primarily Ishtar. They had no interest in the Lord. [Jonah 3-4](#) reveals God's plan for Nineveh. God gave Nineveh an opportunity to repent. The Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh because He is not just the God of Israel; He is the God of all nations ([Rom 3:29](#)).

Summary

William Carey, a baptist pastor, once pleaded with other pastors to send missionaries to India. They refused. One pastor said, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine." Every unbelieving person and nation is the Lord's. The Lord was God in Nineveh, even if they rejected Him. The people of India belong to God. The people of China belong to God. The people of Greenbrier belong to God. **No one is beyond God's presence.**

Jonah fled

How did Jonah respond to God's word? [Jonah 1:3](#) "3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord." **Jonah ran from God's will.**

Jonah's plan

Where did Jonah go? Verse 3 says that Jonah traveled to Joppa to take a ship to Tarshish. Nineveh was east of Israel, by the Tigris River. Archaeologically, the location of Tarshish is unknown, although many scholars speculate it was in southern Spain. Joppa was a port city on the east side of the Mediterranean Sea. Whenever Scripture mentions Tarshish, it emphasizes the ships of Tarshish ([1 Kgs 10:22](#); [22:48](#); [2 Chr 9:21](#)). So, Tarshish is likely a port city somewhere across the Mediterranean Sea. The reason this matters is because it shows us that Jonah went the exact opposite direction from Nineveh.

Jonah's Purpose

Why did Jonah go the opposite direction from Nineveh? [Jonah 1:3](#) states twice that Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Now, if we read this in context, it is clear that Jonah is fleeing from God's will. He did not flee until God told him to go to Nineveh. Jonah knew God's will, but he did not want to obey God's will.

Summary

[Jonah 1:3](#) presents fleeing from God's will as fleeing from God's presence. Let that comparison shape your life. You cannot be in fellowship with God while fleeing His will. If you want to know God and have fellowship with Him, then you must accept and pursue His will.

Lord in the Sea

Why didn't Jonah succeed in fleeing from God's presence? [Jonah 1:4-6](#) "4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 6 So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."”
Jonah could not flee God's presence, because **the Lord is God in all places**.

God throws a storm

How did God rebuke Jonah's rebellion? [Jonah 1:4](#) says he threw a storm at Jonah. The storm was so strong, it threatened to break up the ship. [Jonah 2](#) clarifies that God does not intend to kill Jonah; He intends to save Jonah. The purpose of the storm was to move Jonah back into God's will.

Response to the storm

How did Jonah and the sailors react to the storm? Jonah slept through the storm. Scripture doesn't say **why** he slept, but [Jonah 4](#) indicates that Jonah was more content with death than he was concerned about God's will. The sailors attempted to save the ship in two ways. First, they threw cargo overboard to lighten the ship ([Jonah 1:5](#)). Second, they prayed to their various gods for help ([Jonah 1:5](#)). The irony of their prayers is that they did not pray to the God who had sent the storm - the one whom they had authority to remove it. [Isaiah 45:20-21](#) "... They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save. 21... there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me."

Omnipresence

Why couldn't Jonah escape the Lord's presence? There is no place Jonah could go that would be beyond God's presence. The Lord was with Jonah in Gath-Hepher. The Lord would be with Jonah in Nineveh. The Lord is with Jonah in the Mediterranean Sea. The Lord is in Tarshish if Jonah makes it there.

Scripture teaches that God is omnipresent. This is different than **Pantheism**. Pantheism is a false teaching that the universe and god are indistinguishable. God is everything and everything is god. This conflates the Creator and the creation. God is not creation; He is the eternal Creator.

Omnipresence means that God is present in all places at all times. [Psalm 139:7-12](#) “7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.” This Psalm is clear; **there is no place beyond God's presence**. Jonah fled God's presence ([Jonah 1:3](#)); [Psalm 139:7](#) asks, “where shall I flee from your presence.” Jonah describes sinking into the sea as Sheol (meaning into death) ([Jonah 2:2](#)); [Psalm 139:8](#) says “If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” Jonah fled to the sea ([Jonah 1:3](#)); [Psalm 139:9-10](#) says “If I ... dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”

Where can you go beyond God's presence? Although you may want to run from God's will, there is no place you will hide from Him. [Jeremiah 23:23-24](#) “23 “Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? 24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.” Just because the Lord is present in Gath-Hepher does not mean that He is not present in Nineveh. He is **at hand and far away** (cf. [Heb 4:13](#)).

Summary

Jonah could not flee from God's presence as he intended. God is omnipresent; He is present in all places at all times. We cannot flee God's presence. We cannot hide from God. We cannot escape God's will.

Conclusion

Why is it so important for you to know that God is omnipresent? First, the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin and their need to repent and believe in Jesus. If you are resisting God's conviction, you cannot escape Him by waiting out the church service and going home. He is at your home as well. Do not resist the calling of God.

Second, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of God's people to conform you to God's will. You may resist God's will and whatever He is pushing you to do, but you will not escape His presence. You cannot have fellowship with God while resisting His will.

Third, you may think that you are so far removed from God that there is no way He would forgive you. Remember what God said to Jeremiah - He is God near **and** far away. You are not beyond the presence of God. You can know God through faith in Jesus.

Closing Scripture: [Psalm 73:23-28](#) "23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. 28 But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works."

No one is beyond God's presence.