

The Bulwark

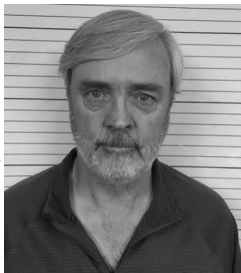
7054 Winnetka Avenue, Winnetka, CA 91306 (818) 795-5566 www.winnetkachurchofchrist.com

Bruce Evans, Minister (818) 795-5566 e-mail: wbe@wolfenet.com

July 26, 2026

DESERTERS...

For all intents and purposes, July 18, 1983 was just another day, unless you happened to be USAF Captain William Hughes Jr.. Stationed at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico when you made the decision to simply disappear. Which you did for thirty-five years. There was no trace of you. But then using the fictitious persona of Barry O'Beirne you were discovered living in Daly City, California. You were taken into custody and tried as a deserter. All those years of looking over your shoulder and living in the "shadows" had finally come to an end. When pressed as to why he opted to just up and leave, the only reason Hughes/O'Beirne cited was he was "depressed about his job" according to a New York Times article.



In reading over that story I couldn't help but think back to a couple of "deserters" in the Scriptures. One of which was John Mark, as Luke records in Acts 15:38-39. *"But Paul was of the opinion that they should not take along with them this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. Now it turned into such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus."* But why did he desert?

With the case of the other "deserter", the reason is fairly clear. Jonah was directed by God to go and preach to the people of Ninevah in the hope they would repent and God would relent as to what He was going to do to them. Jonah didn't want any part of that. If truth be told he wanted God to unleash His power on them and bring them to their knees. He thought he would flee to Tarshish, far removed from Ninevah. After boarding the ship and setting sail, the Lord issued a mighty tempest on the sea. So great were the waves the ship was about to be broken to pieces. Jonah had shared with mariners that he was fleeing from God (see Jonah 1:10) and they asked what could be done to perhaps save the ship and themselves. Jonah told them to throw him overboard. At first they were hesitant, but then relented when the storm didn't abate (see Jonah 1:12-17). Clearly Jonah wasn't afraid.

While Jonah may not have been afraid, nevertheless it is certain he was on the run. But how do you out run God? The events that then ensued are well known; he was swallowed by "a great fish" where he remained for three days and during that time he prayed to God and affirmed, *"I will pay what I have vowed..."* (Jonah 2:9) He was regurgitated by the fish on to dry land where once again the word of the Lord came to him directing him to go to Ninevah. The message he carried to the people resulted in their repentance and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would rain down on them.



Many of you may be wondering what all this has to do with Christians in the 21st century? Think about it for a minute, haven't there been times when we have turned our back on doing something that needed to be done for the cause of Christ? Couldn't that be seen as spiritual desertion? So the two deserters, John Mark and Jonah each one had his reason as to why he opted to desert; to run away, flee as it were. Mark's reason is veiled in history. But it can be surmised that fear came into the picture as Paul and his companions were about to sail to Pamphylia which was known to be a highly dangerous area and noted for piracy and coastal raids. Jonah was stubborn and didn't want God to spare the Ninevites. So I have to ask myself the same question I pose to you, why are there times when spiritual desertion enters into our hearts?

But also with the two Bible "deserters" there is a message of hope that is seen. Jonah was given another chance and God exercised great patience with him. Jonah longed for death because the Ninevites had repented and God had forgiven them. Jonah's anger consumed him, but God was patient with him and tried to get him to see his prejudice and lack of compassion (see Jonah chapter 4). Whereas with Mark, Paul directed Timothy to *"Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service."* (2 Timothy 4:11) Reconciliation is indeed beautiful; whatever was in the past is past, so it is with us embrace the now and press on to the future. (wbe)