

# Jonah 1:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

## Analysis

**Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.** This verse captures the pagan sailors' desperate recognition that Jonah's God controls the storm. The phrase "the sea wrought" (holek vesoer, הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר) literally means "going and storming"—a Hebrew construction indicating intensification. The storm wasn't subsiding but escalating, adding urgency to their question.

"What shall we do unto thee" reveals remarkable moral restraint. Though they had cast lots proving Jonah caused the calamity (v. 7), and though throwing him overboard would save their lives, they seek his consent rather than acting violently. This contrasts sharply with Jonah's callous disobedience to God's command to show mercy to Nineveh. The pagan mariners display greater compassion than God's prophet—a deliberate irony highlighting Jonah's spiritual bankruptcy.

"That the sea may be calm" (veyishtok, וַיִּשְׁתַּקֵּט—literally "be quiet, silent") uses terminology suggesting personal agency. The sea must be appeased or commanded, not merely waited out. The sailors recognize supernatural causation requiring supernatural solution. Their question implies submission to Yahweh's will mediated through His prophet, even though this prophet had fled that very will. This scene foreshadows Christ's greater storm-calming and substitutionary sacrifice.

## Historical Context

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Jonah prophesied during Jeroboam II's reign (793-753 BC), a time of relative prosperity for Israel but moral decay. Nineveh, capital of the brutal Assyrian Empire, epitomized Israel's enemies. Assyrians were known for extreme cruelty—impalement, flaying, and mass deportation. Jonah's reluctance to preach repentance to Nineveh reflects natural ethnic hatred and theological confusion about God's mercy toward Gentiles.

Ancient Mediterranean seafaring involved significant risk. Sailors typically engaged in religious rituals before voyages, invoking protection from various deities. The book describes a Phoenician or merchant vessel, likely manned by polytheistic crew worshiping multiple gods. Their initial response to the storm was predictable—each crying to his own god (v. 5).

However, casting lots and consulting the suspected curse-bearer reflected common ancient practice for discerning divine will. The lots falling on Jonah convinced these pagans that Yahweh, not their gods, controlled this storm. Their subsequent conversion and sacrifice to Yahweh (v. 16) demonstrates that God's salvific purposes extend beyond Israel to all nations—a theme Jesus highlighted (Matthew 12:41). This narrative occurs approximately 760 BC, about 40 years before Assyria would conquer Israel's northern kingdom.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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1. How does the pagan sailors' compassion expose Jonah's hard-heartedness and our own?
2. What does this passage teach about God's concern for all people, not just His chosen people?

3. Why might God use natural disasters or difficult circumstances to reveal truth?
4. How do we reconcile God's mercy toward enemies with our desire for justice?
5. What parallels exist between Jonah's sacrifice and Christ's substitutionary atonement?

## Interlinear Text

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|                        |             |            |                                |         |               |
|------------------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| וַיֹּאמֶר ו            | מֶה         | אֵלָיו     | בְּעֹשֶׂהָ                     | לָךְ    | וַיִּשָּׁתֵּק |
| Then said              |             |            | they unto him What shall we do |         | may be calm   |
| H559                   |             | H413 H4100 | H6213                          | H0      | H8367         |
| הָיָה                  | מַעַל יָנוּ | כִּי       | הָיָה                          | הוֹלֵךְ |               |
| unto thee that the sea |             |            | unto thee that the sea         | wrought |               |
| H3220                  | H5921       | H3588      | H3220                          | H1980   |               |
| וַיִּסְעַר:            |             |            |                                |         |               |
| and was tempestuous    |             |            |                                |         |               |
| H5590                  |             |            |                                |         |               |