

Jonah 1:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

Analysis

Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows. The sailors' response to the miracle constitutes genuine conversion. "The men feared the LORD exceedingly" (vayir'u ha'anashim yir'ah gedolah et-YHWH, ייראו פָּאָנָשִׁים וַיַּרְאֶה גְּדוֹלָה אֶת־יְהוָה) uses the same intensive construction as verse 10 ("feared a great fear"). But whereas verse 10 describes terror at Jonah's rebellion, this verse describes reverential awe and worship of Yahweh Himself. The object shifted from fearing consequences to fearing God—this is saving faith.

"And offered a sacrifice unto the LORD" (vayizbechu zebach laYHWH, וַיִּזְבְּחُ זֶבַח לְיְהוָה) indicates they performed sacrificial worship, likely slaughtering animals on board and dedicating them to Yahweh. This demonstrates covenant commitment—sacrifice in Israel's religion signified dedication, atonement, and fellowship with God. These Gentiles, witnessing God's power and mercy, responded with whole-hearted devotion.

"And made vows" (vayideru nedarim, וַיִּדְרֹו נְדָרִים) uses nadar (נְדָר), meaning to vow or make solemn promises to God. Vows involved pledges to God requiring future fulfillment (Genesis 28:20-22, Judges 11:30, 1 Samuel 1:11). These sailors committed themselves to ongoing worship of Yahweh, not merely momentary crisis religion. This stands as one of Scripture's clearest Old Testament examples of Gentile conversion, anticipating the gospel going to all nations.

The irony remains devastating: pagan sailors converted while God's prophet remained rebellious. Chapter 4 reveals Jonah angry about Nineveh's repentance, wishing them destroyed. These mariners demonstrate what Jonah refused—genuine fear of the Lord, sacrificial worship, and covenant commitment. Jesus referenced this pattern repeatedly: Gentiles often respond better to revelation than covenant people (Matthew 8:10-12, 12:41-42).

Historical Context

This conversion scene anticipates the Great Commission and Gentile mission throughout Acts. The sailors' journey from polytheism (1:5—"every man unto his god") to exclusive worship of Yahweh (1:16) models the pattern of Gentile conversion: crisis reveals impotence of false gods, true God demonstrates power and mercy, response includes repentance, faith, sacrifice, and covenant commitment. Paul's missionary preaching follows this template (Acts 14:15-17, 17:22-31, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do the sailors' conversion and commitment challenge nominal Christianity that lacks sacrificial devotion?
2. What does this passage teach about God's concern for all peoples, not just ethnic Israel?
3. Why might God sometimes use disasters to reveal Himself and draw people to salvation?

Interlinear Text

לִירָא	אֶת	גָּדוֹל	הַ	יִרָּא	וְ	יִרָּא	וְ
feared		exceedingly				the LORD	and offered
H3372	H376	H1419	H853	H3068	H2076		
לִיהְיוֹת	אֶת	גָּדוֹל	הַ	יִרָּא	וְ	לִירָא	וְ
a sacrifice	the LORD	and made	vows				
H2077	H3068	H5087	H5088				
לִיהְיוֹת	אֶת	גָּדוֹל	הַ	יִרָּא	וְ	לִירָא	וְ
לִיהְיוֹת	אֶת	גָּדוֹל	הַ	יִרָּא	וְ	לִירָא	וְ

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 107:22 (Sacrifice): And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.

Psalms 50:14 (Parallel theme): Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

Genesis 8:20 (Sacrifice): And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Isaiah 26:9 (Parallel theme): With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

Acts 5:11 (Parallel theme): And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

Psalms 116:14 (References Lord): I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.

Mark 4:31 (Parallel theme): It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:

Ecclesiastes 5:4 (Parallel theme): When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

Jonah 1:10 (References Lord): Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

2 Kings 5:17 (Sacrifice): And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.

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