

Jonah 1:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

Analysis

"So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." The pagan captain rebukes God's prophet—stunning role reversal. The question "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" expresses shock at Jonah's indifference. The command "arise, call upon thy God" assumes Jonah has special access to deity. The phrase "if so be that God will think upon us" (Hebrew 'ulay yit'asheth ha-'Elohim lanu) means "perhaps God will give us a thought"—desperate hope that Jonah's God might intervene. The irony is rich: pagans recognize the need for prayer; God's prophet must be commanded to pray. This teaches that external religion without internal devotion is worthless. Jesus condemned such hypocrisy (Matthew 23:27-28).

Historical Context

Ancient sailors, facing death, would exhaust all religious options. The captain's instruction to Jonah assumes that more gods prayed to increases survival chances. He doesn't yet know Jonah's God is the only true God or that Jonah is fleeing Him. The scene's irony would have shocked Jewish readers—their prophet worse than pagans. It still shocks: how often do nominal Christians show less spiritual concern than secular people show ethical concern?

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. When have unbelievers had to rebuke you for spiritual indifference or hypocrisy?
2. What does it mean that pagans sometimes display greater concern for others than professing believers?

Interlinear Text

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|------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----|
| וַיָּקָם ב | אֵלָיו | כ ב | הַחֵבֶל ל | וַיֹּאמֶר | ל ו | מָה | ל ו | לָב |
| came | H413 | So the shipmaster | H2259 | to him and said | H0 | H4100 | H0 | |
| H7126 | | H7227 | | H559 | | | | |
| נִרְדָּם | | | | | | | | |
| unto him | What meanest thou | | O sleeper | arise | call | H413 | if so be that God | |
| H7290 | | | | H6965 | H7121 | | H430 | |
| י | אֵלָיו | וְיִתְעַשֵׂה ת | הַאֱלֹהִים | לָנוּ | וְלָא | נִאָּבֵד: | | |
| H194 | will think | if so be that God | H0 | H3808 | upon us that we perish | | | |
| | H6245 | H430 | | | H6 | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Jonah 3:9 (References God): Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

2 Samuel 12:22 (References God): And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

Amos 5:15 (References God): Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

Acts 21:13 (Parallel theme): Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Ephesians 5:14 (Resurrection): Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.