

Jonah 2:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

Analysis

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. Jonah continues describing his near-death drowning with increasingly desperate imagery. "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul" (afafuni mayim ad-nafesh, אַפִּפּוּנִי מַיִם אֲד־נֶפֶשׁ) uses afaf (אָפֵף), meaning to surround, encompass, or enclose. The phrase "even to the soul" (ad-nafesh) indicates the water reached his very life-breath—he was drowning, moments from death. Nafesh (נֶפֶשׁ) means soul, life, or throat, often associated with breathing and vitality.

"The depth closed me round about" (tehom yesoveneni, תְּהוֹם יְסֻבֵּנִי) uses tehom (תְּהוֹם), the primordial deep or abyss—the same word used in Genesis 1:2 for the chaotic waters before creation. This connects Jonah's experience to cosmic chaos, death, and un-creation. The verb sabav (סָבַב—"surround") appears again (see verse 3), emphasizing complete encirclement with no escape. The waters weren't just around him but closing in on every side.

"The weeds were wrapped about my head" (suf chavush leroshi, סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי) adds vivid detail. Suf (סוּף) refers to seaweed or reeds—perhaps the same word used for the Red Sea (Yam Suf, "Sea of Reeds" in Exodus). The verb chavash (חָבַשׁ) means to bind, wrap, or wind around. As Jonah sank, sea vegetation entangled his head, pulling him down and threatening to strangle him. Every detail emphasizes utter helplessness—he was beyond human aid, sinking toward death with no

possibility of self-rescue.

This imagery of drowning, darkness, and entanglement prefigures Christ's descent into death. Jesus bore the full weight of God's wrath, sinking under the flood of divine judgment against sin. Jonah experienced physical drowning as discipline; Christ experienced spiritual death as atonement for our sins.

Historical Context

Ancient Mediterranean cultures, especially Israelites, viewed the sea with fear and associated it with chaos, death, and evil powers. The imagery of waters surrounding "to the soul" and weeds entangling the head would have evoked primal dread. This language echoes Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15), where waters were instruments of both judgment (Egyptians drowned) and salvation (Israelites passed through). Jonah's drowning reverses the Red Sea miracle—instead of waters dividing, they close over him.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Jonah's drowning imagery help us understand Christ's bearing of God's wrath on the cross?
2. What does the completeness of Jonah's helplessness ("closed me round about," "wrapped about my head") teach about our inability to save ourselves?
3. How does the language of chaos and the deep (*tehom*) connect Jonah's experience to broader biblical themes of creation, fall, and redemption?

Interlinear Text

אָפּפּ וני	מַיִם	עַד	נָפֶשׁ	תְּהוֹמוֹת
compassed me about	The waters	H5704	even to the soul	the depth
H661	H4325		H5315	H8415
יִסְבֶּבֶנִי	סוּף	חָב וְשׁ	לְרֹאשִׁי:	
closed me round about	the weeds	were wrapped about	my head	
H5437	H5488	H2280	H7218	

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 3:54 (Parallel theme): Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off.

Psalms 40:2 (Parallel theme): He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.