

**Text:** Jonah 2:1-10

**Title:** Jonah in the Fish

**Truth:** When in distress, cry out to God and reaffirm your trust in Him.

**Date/Location:** July 3, 2022 at FBC

## Introduction

The account of Jonah's trip from Gath Hopher to Joppa to the boat on the Mediterranean to the storm is the story of a man who knew God but disobeyed Him. Things were deteriorating. From the boat he was thrown into the water, and how long he was afloat (or not) we do not know. From the prayer, we gather that he had a serious struggle to survive even before the large fish caught him. While inside the fish, Jonah prayed to God.

Our imagination is stretched to think of the utterly awful condition that he was enduring while making this prayer—one which would kill most people within minutes or make them want to die within minutes. The choking, drowning, smelly, dark, claustrophobic, slimy, acidic environment was beyond wretched.

### I. The Cry of the Afflicted Soul, v. 1-2

- A. The affliction caused Jonah to turn to God. "I cried out to the LORD *because* of my affliction." Sometimes God brings affliction into our lives because He would like to hear from us. Even if that is not the specific case in your situation—say because God regularly hears from you already—affliction should cause us to turn to God (2 Chron. 16:7, 12, Isaiah 30:2, 38:2).
- B. Jonah found that God answered him. This is a common refrain in the Psalms and other places. When people truly turn to God, He answers them, somehow, some way, at some time.
- C. In a parallel statement, Jonah says that he cried to God and God heard him. Here is the parallel: I cried...He answered // I cried...You heard.
- D. Jonah called to God out of the belly of Sheol. Some take this to mean that he was dead. Sheol is often used in connection with death because it represents the grave and thus the entry portal

into the realm of the dead (Psalm 16:10, Prov. 1:11-12). But it is a word also used by people who are in fear of imminent death because their circumstances are so bad. Consider 2 Samuel 22:1-7 (esp. v. 6) for example.

I do not believe Jonah died, because I do not see enough evidence in the book that indicates it. Jonah seems alive while he is praying! Granted, this episode in Jonah's life became a sign of the Lord's death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40). It is a *likeness* or sign, not an exact replica or equivalent to what Jesus did in dying and rising again. From the perspective of those topside, Jonah certainly seemed as good as dead, and then was brought back to the land of the living. This is the extent of the likeness in my view. If it is true that he died and God raised him, the sign is all the more fitting; yet again the evidence is scant for that. Jonah seems to have had some conscious awareness of his dire situation.

## **II. Jonah Recognizes Who Put Him in This Situation, v. 3-4**

- A. Jonah did not blame the men on the boat for throwing him overboard. He said God was the one responsible for his predicament. I do not sense that Jonah is mad at God, however. He is not blaming God for doing something wrong to him. Instead, 1:12 indicates that Jonah is experiencing repentance: "I know that this great tempest is because of me." Jonah knows that it was *his own fault*, not God's.
- B. Therefore, in praying that "You cast me into the deep," Jonah is saying that God is disciplining him for his outright disobedience. He knows it, and He knows better than running away from God.
- C. Jonah acknowledges that the waves of the sea belong to God. He is the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land (1:9). "Tho' the angry surges roll on my tempest-driven soul, I am peaceful, for I know, wildly though the winds may blow, I've an anchor safe and sure..." Or "When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed, when you are discouraged, thinking all is lost..."
- D. The language of being cast out of God's sight is the language of covenant punishment for disobedience. See 2 Chronicles 7:19-20; Jeremiah 7:12-15, 15:1. God cannot look upon wickedness

(Habakkuk 1:13) and He does not regard the prayer of the wicked (Prov. 15:29). During the time between Moses and Malachi, if you were not able to see or go to or even pray toward the temple in Jerusalem, and if you were concerned about the things of God, you would feel far from Him, and rightly so.

- E. Jonah had hope that he would once again be in God's favor and pray toward the temple. That is because he was now repenting—and God does hear the prayer of the penitent, because being repentant toward Him *is* righteous.

### III. The Misery of Jonah, v. 5-6

- A. The pattern of the prior two verses is now repeated. That pattern was “I am in a bad situation, but I believe God will rescue me.”
- B. Verse 5-6a is the “I am in a bad situation.” Drowning is bad enough, but having seaweed tangled around your head makes it even worse. He sank to the bottom of the sea, he says, near the foundation of the earth. The prison of the earth closed him in. This is how it felt. His language is somewhat hyperbolic, but not much. Give him some poetic license to express a situation that is beyond words.
- C. Verse 6b is the “but I believe God will rescue me” part of the parallel. Jonah says it in terms that you might expect to have heard from him *after* the fish vomited him onto land. But it may be that the fish is what rescued him, so that he could say—even while in the fish's belly—that God brought his life up from the pit.

### IV. When You are in Distress, Remember the Lord, v. 7-9

- A. Unlike Asa at the end of his life, or Israel many times throughout their history, Jonah turned back to God instead of continuing to run away. He came to the end of himself (“my soul fainted within me”) and turned in prayer to the Lord. There is nowhere else realistic to turn in this life. Particularly for Christians—what other *better* source of help do you have?
- B. Verse 8 expresses this in other words: those who go after idols for their help have forsaken the One who gives true mercy. Today in the west, those idols are humanistic things: people, medicine,

science, psychology, education, etc. In the east there are still many physical idols. Demons influence both types of idolatry.

C. Jonah recommitted himself to follow his Old Testament religious responsibilities.

1. He was going to offer **sacrifice** to God—and he certainly needed to do so for his sin.
2. He was going to come before God with **thanksgiving** instead of complaining against the will of God for him to go to Nineveh.
3. He was going to **pay his vows**. He might have made prior promises to God that he had not yet fulfilled; or he made new ones while in the sea or in the fish. Either way, he was going to do what he said (Psalm 116:14).

Notice that Jonah is doing what the sailors before him did—1:16 says that they feared God, offered a **sacrifice**, and took **vows**. It is about time Jonah caught up with these pagans!

D. Jonah gives one final great statement in the prayer: **Salvation is of the LORD**. This is specifically true in Jonah's case. It was not just chance that the fish came by and swallowed Jonah. God arranged it. It may have looked like good luck, but there is no such thing. And it was not just chance that the fish vomited Jonah out. God arranged that too.

The statement is generally applicable as well. Spiritual salvation comes from God, starts in our lives with God, and ends with God. He oversees it, not us.

## Conclusion, v. 10

God did indeed rescue Jonah. He commanded the fish as only God can do. Just like He prepared the fish (1:17) and sent the storm (1:4), God is sovereign ruler of all things. Jonah had to experience one final unpleasant situation, but undoubtedly, he was glad for it—being vomited out of the fish. He had a few other consequences to deal with for some days, like needing a serious bath, food, sleep, etc. At least he was back in “the land of the living.” He would have another chance to obey God. MAP