

Interpretation – Chapter 2

July 12, 2018

Let's summarize what we learned in chapter 1:

We found this rebellious prophet Jonah running away from God because he didn't like what God was going to do with the people of Nineveh. Jonah wanted them to be judged by the wrath of God, but he knew the Lord was full of mercy. Because of his own rebellion, he ended up being tossed overboard from the ship into the open mouth of a great fish that prepared to swallow Jonah alive. After that, "dive, dive, dive," as a submarine captain would say.

I hope that y'all remember the outline we made at the beginning of this Book, especially chapter 2:

- God hears Jonah's prayer – 2:1–2
- God disciplines Jonah – 2:3
- God honors Jonah's faith – 2:4–7
- God accepts Jonah's confession – 2:8–9
- God restores Jonah's ministry – 2:10

A. GOD HEARS JONAH'S PRAYER

I said this often, but when we study the Bible, we need to keep this in mind. Though the original manuscripts in Greek and Hebrews of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit, chapter divisions were not. As you can see, there are many wrong placements of chapter divisions throughout the Bible. A case in point, chapter 1 v17 should have been included in chapter 2. Actually, 1:17 is included in chapter 2 in the Hebrew Bible. So, let's go back to v17 to set the stage:

Jonah 1:17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2:1-2 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. 2 And he said: "I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, And He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice.

How long did Jonah wait before he decided to pray to the Lord?
Why did he wait that long?

Some Bible students think that Jonah cried out to the Lord for all three days and nights from the moment he was swallowed by the great fish. But knowing his track record, I really doubt that. I wouldn't doubt that he pouted and was stubborn enough to keep his mouth shut until he could no longer bare it. Finally, in v1, Jonah broke down and cried out to the Lord.

Can somebody tell me what the difference of Jonah's mindsets was between chapter 1 and chapter 2? In chapter 1, Jonah was running away from God, but chapter 2, he was running to God in prayer.

Did you notice that the majority of Jonah's prayer was quoted out of the Book of Psalms? Some say, "I don't know how to pray well." There is no secret of the method in praying. After all, it is a conversation between God and us, so we should pray the way we talk to someone whom we love. Use His word to remind His promises from the Bible to Him. God loves to hear that His children are depending on His promises.

Speaking of prayer, let me ask you another question: When do you pray to the Lord? If you only pray to the Lord when you want or need something from Him, your prayer is based on affliction, like Jonah here, not on affection.

Jonah cried out to God because he was in danger, not because he delighted in the Lord. But better that he should pray compelled by any motive than not to pray at all. It's doubtful whether any believer always prays with pure and holy motives, because our desires and God's directions sometimes conflict.

In my opinion, prayer is one of the constant miracles of the Christian life. To think that our God is so great He can hear the cries of millions of people from around the world at the same time and deal with their needs individually and personally. God is able to provide for all His children, no matter where they are or what their needs may be. We can pray to Him from anywhere, anytime, and in any condition. The best part of the whole thing is that He listens to His children's prayers and answers according to His perfect will.

By the way, can you imagine the fish story that Jonah would tell his friends? "Once I was caught by this big fish."

At the beginning of our Inductive Bible Study, I mentioned it to you that one of the necessary items for the inductive study is a good Bible dictionary. We now have a word that we need to know clearly:

- 'Sheol' is a Hebrew word with the idea of the "place of the dead." It has no direct reference to either torment or eternal happiness. The idea of Sheol is often accurately expressed as "the grave."
- 'Hades' is a Greek word used to describe the "world beyond." In the Bible, it has generally the same idea as Sheol. It is a holding place for all the lost sinners until the Great White Throne Judgment.
- 'Abyss' is mentioned in Revelation 9:1. It is a prison for certain demons – Luke 8:31, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6. Or more generally, it is considered part of the realm of the dead. Romans 10:7 uses it in the sense of Hades.
- 'Gehenna' is a Greek word borrowed from the Hebrew language. In Mark 9:43-44, Jesus speaks of hell 'gehenna'.
- 'Hell' is a Greek translation of the Hebrew "Valley of Hinnom," a place outside Jerusalem's walls desecrated by Molech worship and human sacrifice according to 2 Chronicles 28:1-3 and Jeremiah 32:35. It was also a garbage dump where rubbish and human waste were burned. The constant smoldering fires and festering worms of the Valley of Hinnom made it a graphic and effective picture of the fate of the damned.
- 'The lake of fire' prepared for the devil and his angels according to Matthew 25:41. When the Bible says those who don't accept Christ as their Savior and Lord, this is the final destination. Men only go to this place prepared for the devil and his angels if they reject God's salvation and condemn themselves.

B. GOD DISCIPLINES JONAH

Jonah 2:3 For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

Who cast Jonah overboard? If it was the sailors, why did Jonah say that the Lord cast him into the sea?

Another question: Why did the Lord put Jonah into the belly of the great fish? What could he possibly learn from being inside of the dark, hot, and humid fish dungeon?

As the Lord dropped Jonah into the depths, He was reminding him of what the people of Nineveh would go through if the Lord would not extend His mercy toward them and end up in hell. They were helpless and hopeless.

Let's face it, folks. It is no fun that we have to get disciplined by God, parents, or even civil authority like getting pulled over for speeding. Spiritually, it is up to us how we respond to God's disciplines we get. We can choose to continue with our attitude and get more spankings or repent quickly and learn from our sins and run to our loving Father's arms that would embrace us.

What happens when God wants a person to do something, but the person doesn't want to do it? The Book of Jonah shows us that God has a way of bringing us to the place where we become obedient to do what He wants. That is one of the important principles about the sovereignty of God.

C. GOD HONORS JONAH'S FAITH

Jonah 2:4-7 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' 5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. 7 "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple.

What kept Jonah alive in the pitch dark belly of the fish? His faith in God's promise. Which promise? The promise that involves his prayer going up to God's holy temple.

Here is a Treasury of Scripture Knowledge moment: Where in the Bible does a king pray to the Lord about the temple?

When King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, he asked God for this special favor in 1 Kings 8:38-40:

1 Kings 8:38-40 whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: 39 then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men), 40 that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

Jonah claimed that promise. By faith, he looked toward God's temple, though he could not know which side was toward the temple from the inside of the belly of the great fish.

Because of this prayer by king Solomon, when the orthodox Jews pray, they pray toward east, "Mizrah" in Hebrew, where they consider Jerusalem is located, more specifically the temple is located. If the Jews want to be technically correct, they should direct themselves toward the Land of Israel; in Israel, toward Jerusalem; in Jerusalem, toward the temple; and in the temple, toward the Holy of Holies.

Another Treasury of Scripture Knowledge moment: Can you tell me where else in the Bible do you find a well-known prophet prayed toward Jerusalem?

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

D. GOD ACCEPTS JONAH'S CONFESSION

Jonah 2:8-9 "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

OK, I have more questions to you guys:

What did Jonah mean when he mentioned, "worthless idols"? I see two idols in his heart: Jonah's intense nationalism for Israel and a concern for his own reputation which we are going to find out in chapter 4.

Why did Jonah say, "Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy"? Which portion of the Scripture parallels with this verse?

He acknowledged that he was forgiven by the mercy of God, but he also realized that because of his hatred toward the Ninevehites, he was not merciful to them. I am sure that this should jog your memory of one of Jesus' parables, the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, from Matthew 18:21-35.

Jonah knows that his salvation is of the Lord. He also now knows it in the big picture. Salvation is not limited to a nation of Israel or a race of the Hebrews, or not of man of himself at all. Salvation is of the Lord and salvation belongs to our God.

It is easy for us to think that we should drop nuclear bombs in Afghanistan and Iran to remove all those extreme Muslim terrorists and make those countries into parking lots. But what about many lives who don't know Jesus Christ as no more than ancient Nineveh people or many 21st century anti-God and anti-Christian people in America? They need Jesus, too. They need salvation from the Lord like once we were. We need to pray for their salvation instead of wishing them to die and go to hell. I am guilty of that often as well.

Jonah truly repented for now and God set him free.

E. GOD RESTORES JONAH'S MINISTRY

Jonah 2:10 So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. The Lord spoke to the fish, the fish spewed out Jonah like a torpedo.

I see two things here:

1) The fish didn't resist the will of God like Jonah or we often do.

Sometimes we don't have much of a choice about how God will deliver us. Jonah should be appreciated that God didn't use the other end of the fish.

2) Jonah's deliverance came after three days and nights had passed, providing a foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection.

Matthew 12:40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

By the way, it is commonly thought that Jonah was vomited out on the shores of Nineveh. We are not told that this was the case, especially since Nineveh was about 375 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. If Jonah did walk into Nineveh right from the belly of the fish, it would have been a miraculous projection of the fish's vomit.