

# THE PROPHECY OF JONAH

## Chapter 2

Family Camp – August 20, 1997

Humanly speaking, the life of Jonah should have ended when he was cast out of the ship and into the sea by the mariners. We would not have been surprised if that had been the result of his rebellion against God. Plus, we often here it said that if we don't do what the Lord wants us to do, He will get someone else. That is what we might have thought of in the case of Moses. And surely this should have been the judgment that David faced because of his sins. And who of us would have been inclined to go on with Peter in the face of Peter's intense and profane denial that he even knew the Lord. But it is clear from the Scriptures that failure does not necessarily mean that we will be replaced. Instead, we need to think in terms of Phil. 1:6. That was true in NT times, but it was also true in OT times, and it is still true today. It is true, as Mordecai told Esther when she expressed her fear that the king might not hold out his golden scepter to her if she came into his presence without being asked,

13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther 4:13-14).

The Lord is going to accomplish His will regardless of the obstacles that may stand in his way, but instead of seeking a replacement, His usual plan is to work with the servants He has chosen until they become willing and useful instruments in his hands.

It is impossible for us to overestimate the importance of prayer in our lives. There is no record in chapter 1 that Jonah prayed about his decision to go to Tarshish. There is no record that Moses prayed before he killed the Egyptian, and hid his body in the sand. There is no record that David prayed before he committed adultery with Bathsheba, or before he had her husband put in the front of the battle where he would be killed. And we have definite evidence that Peter did not pray before his denial of the Lord. He and James and John slept in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Lord had asked them to watch with Him in prayer.

So we all need to be very careful not to let times of prayerlessness enter into our lives. It is one of the first indicators of spiritual decline when we don't pray, or when we don't realize how much we need to pray, or even when our times of prayer get crowded out because of the busyness of our lives. This is one thing we need to guard against at camp. Our normal schedule gets set aside. We are with people from the time we get up until we go to bed at night. And so it is easy for us to neglect our times with the Lord. It is not always the amount of time we spend, but the quality of the time we give to the Lord. There are times when we need to pray more than we normally do, but the important point I am making, and it is surely made in Scripture, is that we pray! Our Lord prayed faithfully and He prayed much, sometimes spending whole nights in prayer. And, as many have recognized, if He needed to pray, how much more do we need it.

We can tell from Jonah's prayer that he was not a stranger to prayer. We can tell also from his prayer that he was not a stranger to the Word of God because most of his prayer has its roots in Scripture, especially the Psalms. He was a man well acquainted with the Word of God, and I am sure that if we had known Jonah, we would have been amazed that he was capable of such flagrant rebellion against the will of God. By the way, there is no indication, as I have said that Jonah prayed about his decision. But neither is there any indication that he had talked with some other believer about his dilemma. We need to do both: pray, and seek counsel from people whose spiritual judgment we trust. Jonah has most certainly read those words of Solomon in

which he said, “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14).

When we fail to pray, the Lord often brings us into circumstances where we realize very keenly that only the Lord can help us in our need. That is what he did with Jonah. And so when he prayed, his prayer was a pouring out of the Word from his heart as he sought the blessing of the Lord. Let me trace for you how he did it.

Looking at verse 2, listen to the way David prayed in Psa.18:5-6:

5 The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.

6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.

Or Psa. 22:24,

For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.

Also Psa. 120:1: “In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me.”

It obviously was an encouragement to Jonah to know that the Lord had heard and answered others who were afflicted and in distress. And this should be an encouragement to all of us too.

Let us move on to verse 3.

How interesting and how good it was that Jonah looked beyond the men who reluctantly had cast him overboard, and he saw the hand of the Lord in what had been done. He was a strong believer in the sovereignty of God. Notice in the last part of verse 3: Jonah said, “Thy (the Lord’s) billows and Thy (the Lord’s) waves passed over me.” As Dr. Feinberg said in his commentary on Jonah,

It was God Who had cast him into the sea. The sailors were only executing the punishment God had designed for him. Paul never called himself a prisoner of Nero or Rome..., but of Jesus Christ. It is blessed to be enabled to push beyond circumstances and see the mighty loving hand of God in all the affairs and changes in our lives (p. 24).

In verse 4 we see that Jonah did not really want what he had said that he wanted, “to flee...from the presence of the Lord.” Here in verse 4 he was lamenting the fact that it seemed from the fish’s belly that he was out of the Lord’s sight. So we can see how Jonah’s emotions were fluctuating—up and then down. Isn’t that the way it often is with us? Perhaps as Jonah concluded this verse he was thinking of Psa. 5:7:

But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.

Jonah could not go to the temple, but in his heart he could return to the Lord’s house where the presence of the Lord was manifested to his people. And Jonah had enough knowledge of the truth to know that even then it was not a person’s geographical location that determined his fellowship with God, but it was what was going on in his own heart.

He was like Daniel in the words describing what he did when no man was to pray to God nor to ask any request from any man except Nebuchadnezzar for thirty days:

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime (Dan. 6:10).

And we can add to this verse (4) Solomon’s prayer for the people of God at the dedication of the temple:

37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be;

38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)

40 That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers (1 Kings 8:37-40).

When Jonah had decided to go to Tarshish, he was leaving behind the land, the temple, and had hoped that he was leaving the Lord behind, too. But in his trial he saw immediately that if he did not have the Lord and His blessing, he had nothing that was really sufficient for him.

In verses 5 and 6 we see the dire circumstances of Jonah. He had gone down to the bottom of the sea. He felt that he was going to die. The weeds which grew at the bottom trapped him so that he could not set himself free. It is a completely hopeless picture. Some expositors feel that Jonah actually died, and that he was resurrected from the dead. But it is not necessary to believe that in order for the figure of Christ in His death and resurrection. I think it is more accurate to say that he was near death, and that his rescue was just like a resurrection from the dead. At this point he must have been thinking of David's Psalm, 16. It was prophetic of our Lord, but it was also an expression of deliverance(s) which David had experienced in which he had been delivered from death. You probably know this passage very well, found in Psa. 16:8-10:

8 I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

In Psa. 30:3 we also find these words:

O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

It is interesting that the word translated "corruption" in verse 6 is actually the Hebrew word for "pit." (Re-read the verse above.)

And then in verse 7 we find some more ties with the Word of God. (Read.)

Here Jonah could have been thinking about Psa. 143:4-6:

4 Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.

5 I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.

6 I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.

The word "overwhelmed" means *fainted*, as Jonah said in verse 7. Jonah had wanted to leave his prophetic ministry. He had wanted to leave the Lord behind. But it took a fainting soul for him to remember the Lord and all of the blessings that he had had in the Lord. And when he remembered the Lord, then he prayed again. Remember we are reading here the prayer of a prophet of God, a man called of God to proclaim the Word to his generation. If such declension can take place in the life of a prophet, it can happen to any of us. How said it is when the Lord has to take such measures to bring us back to himself. To have a *fainting soul* is not a happy experience, and we need to avoid it like a plague (because that is what it is).

In verse 8 Jonah looked on what he had done in a new light.

What are "lying vanities"? This is an expression for idols, worshiping other gods besides the true God. If Jonah left the Lord, there was no other place to go except to "lying vanities." Jonah realized, as Matthew

Henry pointed out, that such people “stand in their own light; they turn their back upon their own happiness, and go quite out of the way of all good” (Vol. IV, p. 1290). But “lying vanities” could also be what Jonah had done, turning his back on the Lord, giving up the precious calling which God had given him to be a messenger of blessing to the people in his generation who had never known the joy in the Lord that he had known. To pursue “lying vanities” is like chasing a cloud that is going to disappear. Jonah could see that at this point better than he had ever seen it before, *and this led him to the conclusion which he stated in verse 9*, which is the end of his prayer.

The thoughts expressed in verse 9 surely had their roots in Psa. 50. Listen to these two verses from that Psalm: “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High” (Psa. 50:14). And the other verse is Psa. 50:23: “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.”

In my Bible the margin in the Bible indicates that Heb. 13:15 is a quotation from Jonah 2:9. Heb. 13:15 says this:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Jonah was in a place where he could not get to the temple, nor could he offer the sacrifices which he must have offered many times before, but there is one sacrifice he could bring to the Lord, a sacrifice which he had neglected to bring for longer than we know. It is the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the sacrifice of praise. Wouldn't you love to know how Jonah praised the Lord?

But he did more than praise the Lord; he made a vow, or vows, to the Lord. What is a vow? It is a promise. It would be interesting to know what promises Jonah made to the Lord, but the Spirit of God has concealed this from us just as you don't know about my promises to the Lord, and I don't know about yours. These vows are between us and the Lord. But they are worth anything unless the Lord enables us to keep them.

Before Jonah's day Solomon wrote this message about vows:

4        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.

5        Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay (Ecc. 5:4-5).

And then Jonah concluded with one of the grandest statements in all of Scripture: “Salvation is of the Lord.”

Obviously this had to do with Jonah's deliverance from the whale. Only the Lord could save him. The Lord had prepared a big fish to swallow him and to keep him from drowning. He had also kept the whale from digesting Jonah. The stomach of the whale was turned into a prayer room where God was dealing with His servant, restoring him to fellowship, bringing him back to his work.

So “salvation is of the Lord” was also a reference to the Gospel. Just as the Lord saved Jonah from drowning, and He was the only One Who could do that, so the Lord is the only One Who can save souls from eternal judgment. It is “of the Lord”—and to add the words of Paul at the end of Romans 11, it is *through the Lord*, and it is *to Him*. See Rom. 11:36. The Lord is the One Who determined that there would be a salvation. He determined Who would be the Savior. He determined what the cost of the salvation of sinners would be. And we know that He has even chosen those whom He intends to save.

How thankful we should be that God has included us in this glorious salvation, just as He did Jonah. Jonah was saved through the Redeemer Who was coming. We are saved through the same Savior, but we know now that He has come. This was the message that Jonah was to carry to Nineveh, the simple message that sinners

need to be saved, and that the Lord is that Savior.

What was the result of all of this?

The Lord spoke to the fish, and the fish obeyed the Lord more readily than Jonah did. The fish didn't dump Jonah into the sea, but he vomited him out on dry land, and the prophet was safely back in the land.

What are some of the lessons for us?