

**A Really Fishy Story  
Jonah, the Fish, and Hard Lessons  
Jonah 1:17 – 2:10**

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When last we left Jonah, he was discovering what it meant to be thrown overboard into a stormy ocean and was busy working on his water treading skills. Access to Tarshish has been totally blocked.

The situation that Jonah is in is one of his own making. He knows the clear word from God, he knows what he is to do, and he not only refused the assignment, but he also made a significant financial investment and then headed off in the opposite direction.

He is supposed to be going northeast to Nineveh, instead, he is now treading water somewhere in the Mediterranean.

God is involved in all the details of this, and His grace will extend even to a prophet on the run. God is not done with Jonah; He is not done with you either. As long as He gives us breath, there is more to do, “the Bible says that God has a reason for keeping us here; if He didn’t, He would take us to Heaven far sooner.” (Graham 2011, 8)

Jonah is to be disciplined for his disobedience to the clear word of God, but he will be supernaturally provided for and cared for. He will not have to tread water for long. God has an intervention in store for Jonah.

Yahweh allows Jonah to disobey. Why he allows this is unknown. Yahweh could have stopped Jonah at any point along the way. He could have stopped him in Joppa before he boarded the ship, or even before he took that first step to flee. Instead Yahweh chose to allow Jonah to get on the ship and begin his journey. Perhaps one reason Yahweh allowed this is that he wanted to use Jonah's disobedience to teach the sailors about himself (cf. Rom 8:28). Or perhaps he knew Jonah needed to go through the discipline before he would be open to change. Jonah's rebellion shows that Yahweh allows disobedience, but he does not ignore it. Our theology of disobedience also needs to include the truth that our disobedience can greatly harm other people (e.g., the sailors), yet Yahweh can also use it for his glory (e.g., the sailors learned about him). (Hoyt 2018, 450)

But for us as believers, when we willfully disobey, we are damaging others. Most notably...we grieve the Holy Spirit. For that to happen, a love relationship must exist at first and that begins for us when we come to Christ.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 how we should behave once we are in Christ and he also tells us that when we disobey, we can become a cause of suffering, of pain to the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:25–32

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (ESV)

They are words that should ring in our ears day and night, in all our temptations to do unholy things; in our personal lives, in our home life, in our social life, in our business life, in our church life. Reflection upon these words will help us to solve many perplexing problems. Ought I to do this thing? many a Christian has often to ask. Always settle such questions in the light of the text, Will it grieve the Holy One of God, or will it delight the Holy Spirit of God if I do it? (Torrey 1901, 387)

Jonah made his decision and had given up on God, abandoning Him and His calling on his life. God though had not given up on Jonah.

God is intent to have Jonah repent of his sin and rebellion. He has not done that yet. He was willing to die and take the ship and the crew with him, but God wants him to come to his senses and repent.

To do that, the creator of the universe appoints a member of His creation with a very specific task. Go pick up Jonah, or rather, swallow him whole, and take him back to shore. God will use a fish to close of the gates of death. But it may feel like he went there.

Jonah 1:17

“And the LORD designated a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights.” (NASB 2020)

Jonah has accepted his fate; he is going to drown, and he has gone down so far spiritually as to appear to be okay with that. As we drift away from the Lord and walking with Him, we begin to think that those things we would never do are not that bad of an idea after all. The prodigal son provides that wisdom for us. This is an example provided by Jesus of a young man who thought he could have it all and could only do so by leaving the Father's house.

Just as Jonah had rejected his relationship with YAHWEH, the prodigal son rejected his relationship with his father and by demanding his inheritance up front prior to the death of his father, was even rejecting his entire family. A serious sin in the eyes of the culture of the day.

He takes the money, leaves the family, and runs off elsewhere to live a life away from the presence of the father. He follows a new lifestyle, “laissez les bons temps rouler.” They don’t, and things were so bad he went to work on a pig farm. Not a good choice for a young Jewish man, but for the prodigal, at times the only thing that will turn us around.

Luke 15:13–16

“After a few days, the younger son gathered together all he had and left on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth with a wild lifestyle. Then after he had spent everything, a severe famine took place in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and worked for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He was longing to eat the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.” (NET 2nd ed.)

He is now poor, starving, in a gentile culture, and feeding pigs. In fact, their food is looking really good to him right now.

Many of us have family who have run away and become prodigals. A prodigal includes “those who deconvert (including atheists, agnostics, and “nones,” those who say they have no religious affiliation) and those who switch to another faith.” (Kinnaman and Hawkins 2011, 66)

We pray for them and look for those opportunities to speak to them about the Lord. But for many, a Jonah moment of hitting bottom may be the only way it happens. We need to pray for our prodigals and be ready for that moment they have their Jonah experience.

Prodigals today “are more defined by and committed to their distance from Christianity than they are to their current spiritual perspectives. In other words, one of the identity-shaping characteristics of prodigals is that they say they are no longer Christian.” (Kinnaman and Hawkins 2011, 66)

Jonah has arrived at this point. His actions do not reflect the law, they do not reflect the Shema, they do not reflect loving your neighbor at all. He was forced to admit he was Jewish, and his disobedience was used by YAHWEH to convert the ship crew.

For the prodigal son that Jesus speaks about in Luke, he finally came to his senses and returned home intent on repenting and being treated like a slave. But his father forgave him completely and restored him.

Luke 15:20–24

“So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way from home his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him. Then his son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Hurry! Bring the best robe, and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Bring the fattened calf and kill it! Let us eat and celebrate, because this son of mine was dead, and is alive again—he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.” (NET 2nd ed.)

Luke 15:10

“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (ESV)

The promise of restoration is something that the people of Judah experienced personally when they repented after being devastated by locusts. They were restored completely as promised, but only after they repented.

That is what God wants for Jonah.

#### Joel 2:25–27

“I will make up for the years that the ‘arbeh-locust consumed your crops— the yeleq-locust, the hasil-locust, and the gazam-locust— my great army that I sent against you. You will have plenty to eat, and your hunger will be fully satisfied; you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has acted wondrously in your behalf. My people will never again be put to shame. You will be convinced that I am in the midst of Israel. I am the LORD your God; there is no other. My people will never again be put to shame.” (NET 2nd ed.)

For Jonah to come to his senses, he needs some serious alone with God time. Just him and the Lord.

For that to happen, YAHWEH mounts an interesting rescue operation for this prophet on the run, the solution, uniquely God’s idea and His sense of humor coming into play, not only provides Jonah the alone time he needs, but also provides transportation needed to be where he can pick up and move forward. God knows he is going to repent.

Jonah is sinking fast, literally, and is rescued “at the last moment from a seemingly inescapable plight. Yahweh mounts a special rescue operation: an enormous fish plays the astounding part of a submarine to pick up Jonah from the murky seaweed at the bottom of the ocean and transport him safely to the mainland.

The fish stands for the amazing grace of Yahweh, which came down to where he was and lifted him to new life. The Lord of the sea is Lord also of its creatures, and his providential control extends over both. Contrary to all expectation Jonah does not die. He is spared the due reward of his sins.” (Allen 1976, 213)

It is at this point in Jonah, that many today stop believing this is a historical event but is rather allegory, because they cannot accept it as a fact. Jesus did though.

#### Matthew 12:38–41

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!” (NRSV)

Jesus himself refers to Jonah and states the event involving the fish not only as a fact, but also as a prophetic sign to be paid attention to by the Jews living during His ministry on earth. “The historical character of the man Jonah is vouched for by Jesus Christ (Mt. 12:39–41), as also that his preservation in the great fish was a “sign” or type of our Lord’s own entombment and resurrection. Both are miraculous and both are equally credible.” (Scofield 1917, 943)

Yes, the story seems to be fantastical. Yes, it is history. It happened just as described.

Whatever the nature of this creature, it is represented as being more obedient to the Lord, both here and in 2:10, than Jonah was. (Price and Nida 1978, 73)

The fish is faithful and obedient to YAHWEH, Jonah, not so much.

The sea creature literally swallowed Jonah; the event really occurred. Several factors support this. First, descriptions of Nineveh fit all the facts known from historical study. Second, the entire context is one of extraordinary control of nature, as the wind, the sea, the lots, and in chapter 4 the plant, worm and east wind. Besides these are the repentance scenes of the sailors, Jonah, and the Ninevites. Third, Jesus Christ gave His own word of authority on Jonah being in the sea creature, as a historical event (Matt. 12:40). (Rosscup 2008, 1353)

Although studies could be done on gullet sizes of various species that regularly inhabit the Mediterranean, the text's insistence on the Lord's direct involvement suggests that we should not expect that there was anything regular or ordinary about the fish. In the beliefs of the ancient world, large sea creatures represented the forces of chaos that were overcome by the creator deity in the act of creation. Here, as always, Yahweh is portrayed as in complete control of the sea creatures—this one is simply doing his bidding. (Matthews, Chavalas and Walton 2000, Jon 1:17)

Come on Ken, there is no way anyone could survive such an event. This cannot be history.

But it is.

One more event for you to consider.

*In Feb. 1891, the whaling ship "Star of the East" was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands and the lookout sighted a large sperm whale three miles away. Two boats were launched and in a short time one of the harpooners was enabled to spear the fish. The second boat attacked the whale but was upset by a lash of its tail and the men thrown into the sea, one man being drowned, and another, James Bartley, having disappeared could not be found. The whale was killed and in a few hours was lying by the ship's side and the crew were busy with axes and spades removing the blubber. They worked all day and part of the night. Next morning they attached some tackle to the stomach which was hoisted on the deck. The sailors were startled by something in it which gave spasmodic signs of life, and inside was found the missing sailor doubled up and unconscious. He was laid on the deck and treated to a bath of sea water which soon revived him.... He remained two weeks a raving lunatic.... At the end of the third week he had entirely recovered from the shock and resumed his duties.*

*Bartley affirms that he would probably have lived inside his house of flesh until he starved, for he lost his senses through fright and not from lack of air. He remembers the sensation of being thrown out of the boat into the sea.... He was then encompassed by a great darkness and he felt he was slipping along a smooth passage of some sort that seemed to move and carry him forward. The sensation lasted but a short time and then he realized he had more room. He felt about him and his hands came in contact with a yielding slimy substance that seemed to shrink from his touch. It finally dawned upon him that he had been swallowed by the whale ... he could easily breathe; but the heat was terrible. It was not of a scorching, stifling nature, but it seemed to open the pores of his skin and draw out his vitality....His skin where it was exposed to the action of the gastric juice ... face, neck and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness and took on the appearance of parchment ... (and) never recovered its natural appearance ... (though otherwise) his health did not seem affected by his terrible experience. (Wilson 1927, 636)*

Jonah was swallowed by a big fish, God is God, get over it. Again, Jesus attested to the historicity of the event.

Is Jonah at rock bottom? Hey, he got swallowed by a fish. The fish starts heading to the next appointment that God has for Jonah, but Jonah, he is a bitter and sullen man who has now been placed on hold by God.

The thing we must remember is this. Even though Jonah is on the shelf, in the stomach really, the Lord is still moving on his behalf.

There are going to be times where we are waiting on the Lord and He seems to be millions of miles away, yet He is still moving and will take whatever measures are required in order to have us ultimately be in the spot where He can use us powerfully.

Psalm 33:18–22

"Look, the LORD takes notice of his loyal followers, those who wait for him to demonstrate his faithfulness by saving their lives from death and sustaining them during times of famine. We wait for the LORD; he is

our deliverer and shield. For our hearts rejoice in him, for we trust in his holy name. May we experience your faithfulness, O LORD, for we wait for you.” (NET 2nd ed.)

Proverbs 3:5–6

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight.” (NET 2nd ed.)

Was Jonah waiting on the Lord? Hardly. He was running from the Lord and now he is in a place only God can get him out of. But how long does he remain stubborn?

Three days and three nights. Why so long? Because all of us are stubborn. The fish swallowed Jonah to protect and transport him to his assignment. Jesus tells us it was an illustration provided for unbelieving Jews.

For Jonah to be in the fish for that long and then be spit out on a beach, the right beach, right where he needs to be to continue with his assignment, is nothing short of a miracle. So is the resurrection of Jesus Christ when He walked out of the grave.

Why three days and three nights? We are not told in the text of Jonah. Jesus draws that together for us when He refers to Jonah as an example of His soon coming death and resurrection.

There is the story of the Descent of Inanna (Ishtar) to the Underworld and back was a trip of three days. “With that notion in mind, the readers of Jonah would have seen the fish as representing God’s rescue from the underworld, that is, death.” (Smith and Page 1995, 241-242)

Although the phrase “three days and three nights” may have had a variety of connotations both from other Old Testament passages and from extrabiblical writings, no compelling reason exists to disbelieve the literal span of time indicated. In fact, none of the Old Testament allusions of a similar nature are necessarily figurative. The major point is that God, through the fish, could sustain this pouting prophet during “unbelievable” circumstances and return him to the place where he could renew his commission to serve. (Smith and Page 1995, 242)

After three days and nights, Jonah now gets it. God is God and he isn’t. God is protecting him for the mission he has been assigned and now he repents.

Did pagans scared out of their minds and fearful for their lives get him to pray...no. But a personal encounter with the God of the universe using a fish as a tool of rescue and discipline...yes.

Finally, prayer from Jonah to YAHWEH.

Jonah 2:1

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish,” (NASB 2020)

Jonah is in a hopeless helpless situation created by his own disobedience. He had seriously invested in his sin spending most likely all his resources on a failed attempt to run from God. After spending some me time in the fish, he prays. Reality has set in. I’m in a fish somewhere in the Mediterranean. He prays...finally. What should we do we do when we find ourselves neck deep in messes of our own creation? James provides the answer.

James 5:13

“**Are any of you in trouble? You should pray.** Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.” (GNB)

Jonah has arrived at that spot of being in trouble. He turns to the only person who can fix the situation he is in.

That seems to be the way the Lord operates. We can choose to approach the throne in repentance and prayer, or we can continue in our bitterness and anger. Discipline is not fun, repentance is hard, the joy of the Lord...forever.

He would encourage us to come to the throne. He loves you and me and He wants the best for us.

Hebrews 4:12–16

“The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart. There is nothing that can be hidden from God; everything in all creation is exposed and lies open before his eyes. And it is to him that we must all give an account of ourselves. Jesus the Great High Priest Let us, then, hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we have a great High Priest who has gone into the very presence of God—Jesus, the Son of God. Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us have confidence, then, and approach God’s throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it.” (GNB)

Just as Jonah will experience, the first step to returning to the Lord is calling out to Him in our distress. Even if it is all due to our own pigheadedness. “Therefore, change your hearts and stop being stubborn.” (Deuteronomy 10:16, NLT) But three day and nights?

When we’re in a place where we know we have rebelled against the will of the Lord and we’re in a tight spot because of it, we think, “No doubt I have blown it so badly and grieved God so deeply that He won’t listen to anything I say. Therefore, why pray? If I were God, I wouldn’t listen to me, either.” We have the mistaken idea that God hears the prayers of “good people” but turns a deaf ear to those who are in a place of rebelliousness or weakness. (Courson 2006, 817)

But here is the thing, there are no conditions attached to 1 John 1:9. Zero. Just confess which means prayer.

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (NKJV)

To pray is to admit that Another Reality, One which is distinct from our own, exists. It is a Reality which is different from ours and possibly therefore threatening. It is a Reality which constantly seeks to be in relationship with us. The Lord God is this Reality. Yahweh is the only safe hiding place, the only secure refuge. Only here may we acknowledge and expose our total defencelessness, powerlessness and vulnerability. To unmask ourselves in prayer is to begin to discover who we really are in the presence of this faithful One. In prayer the heart, eyes and ears of the human soul are opened to the possibility of being touched and healed by this Other Reality, the brooding Holy Spirit of God. Prayer is the breath of life. It is Jonah’s last hope. (Nixon 2003, 137)

He is led to renew contact with the Lord not by the threatening waves, but by the closed belly of the fish; his mouth is not opened by the fear of death, but by the powerlessness of an in-between state that is neither life nor death. (Simon 1999, 15)

Jonah is absolutely helpless. Now he is ready to turn back to YAHWEH, the same person he was running from earlier.

Jonah 2:2–9

“and he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I called for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. ‘For You threw me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current flowed around me. All Your breakers and waves passed over me. ‘So I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ ‘Water encompassed me to the

point of death. The deep flowed around me, Seaweed was wrapped around my head. “I descended to the base of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, LORD my God. “While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. “Those who are followers of worthless idols Abandon their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With a voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.”” (NASB 2020)

Jonah’s prayer reflects that initially, he thought that judgement rather than discipline was taking place and he was to die. But he didn’t. As he was sinking into the water, he believed it was all over and he called for help. Interesting how suddenly we are jerked back to reality and all we can say is “save me Lord.” He did that. He had no idea that God had already put His plan into action. By faith, he knew God would answer him. “This shows that Jonah had faith and that God can give us a total peace and assurance that our prayers are answered, even before the actual answer comes.” (Guzik 2000, Jon 2:1-2)

God saved him in His grace, with a fish.

Jonah does not blame the sailors for his situation, he knows better than that. He sees the Lord’s hand in it all.

Jonah 2:3

““For You threw me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current flowed around me. All Your breakers and waves passed over me.” (NASB 2020)

Down he went into the Med. He recognized that he was responsible for where he was, and God was the one acting to return him to his senses. His situation is dire, sin does this to us, we sink into the muck and mire of it. Jonah recognizes his sin made this happen and being thrown into the ocean, he experiences all the power that God has evident in the actions of the sea. But he is repenting or is he bargaining.

Jonah 2:4

““So I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’”” (NASB 2020)

The reference to the temple is the key to understanding what is going on in Jonah’s heart as he prays to the Lord, It was in the temple, in Jerusalem, where God manifested himself to his people. There the glory of God appeared between the cherubim of the ark of the covenant (Exodus 37:1–9; 1 Samuel 4:4) and there sacrifice was made for the sins of the people. The temple signified the Lord’s purpose of redemption for fallen humanity. In the New Testament, it is no accident that Jesus Christ identifies himself as the Temple (John 2:19–21; Revelation 21:3, 22) or that believers in Christ are called, individually and corporately, temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21). Christ is the true once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27). Looking to the temple signified for Jonah what looking to Christ as Saviour means for the New Testament believer—nothing less than an accomplished redemption. (Keddie 1986, 60)

What a turn around for this man. It took three days and nights to bring him to this point, and now everything changes for him. The same for those who have taken advantage of the three days and nights that Jesus Christ spent in the grave before triumphantly walking out of the grave, resurrected and defeating death on our behalf.

Three days and nights have changed everything for the entire planet.

Jonah 2:5–6

““Water encompassed me to the point of death. The deep flowed around me, Seaweed was wrapped around my head. I descended to the base of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, LORD my God.”” (NASB 2020)



Jonah recalls for us what was happening prior to being picked up by the fish. He was seriously struggling to stay above water, he was drowning. He visualized himself dying and begins to describe what Sheol would be like, but God's grace stepped into the situation.

Jonah's determination to run from the presence of the Lord was a flight to death. By God's mercy, the great fish swallows Jonah, rescuing him from death by drowning—but in its belly, the belly of Sheol, the place of the dead, he discovers the God from whom he has fled waiting to meet him. (Nixon 2003, 145)

Nearly dead in his sin, Jonah, at the right moment, is rescued by God. God is still in that business today.

Romans 5:6–9

**“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.** Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. **But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.** Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.” (NRSV)

Christ did not die for people who were naturally inclined toward God or who expressed a desire to cease from their enmity against him. In particular, he died for...Helpless ungodly sinners, enemies. Jesus died for spiritually impotent people (cf. Rom. 3:10–12). He died for people who were helpless to prepare themselves, helpless to prove themselves worthy, helpless to do or think or say anything that might attract God's love. (Storms 2016, Ro 5:6-8)

Jesus died for us, His enemies.

He found himself at death's door. The gates of hell prevailed against him, clanging shut with a terrible finality—or so it seemed. He had reached the land of no return: what awaited him but inescapable death? But God has wrought a miracle. (Allen 1976, 217)

God saved him and now the prodigal prophet, the runner, will run no longer.

Jonah 2:7

““While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple.”” (NASB 2020)

Jonah tells us that as he was beginning to fade away, he was saved by YHAWEH and, in the process, finally, remembered the Lord.

Jonah thought he could run away from the presence of the Lord, by now he understands that is impossible. Here he is, in a fish somewhere in the Med, he has turned to YAHWEH in prayer and now he understands that prayer went directly to God in His holy Temple. Not the copy in Jerusalem, but the original in heaven.

This prayer clearly shows him turning back to the Lord. This verse echoes the initial summary statement in v. 2 of Jonah's distress and his prayer, which the Lord answered. It is accurate to call Jonah an Old Testament prodigal. (Smith and Page 1995, 250)

When he says, “I remembered the Lord,” he is clearly stating that the selfish motivation that led him to this point, was over. The prodigal returns and is now focusing on YAHWEH.

Jonah knows that his prayer has reached its intended destination. He gets it now about not being able to run away from God. He knows he serves the living God and makes a comment in the next verse about those who do not.

His comment is one of the results of discipline at the hands of YAHWEH. He understands just how worthless the idols truly are.

He has gone through a time of trouble, of his own making too, and he KNOWS how reliable YAHWEH is.

Jonah 2:8–9

““Those who are followers of worthless idols Abandon their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With a voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.”” (NASB 2020)

But why the comment about idol worshipers in verse 8? Is this a straightforward comment or is he still bargaining with God or excusing his own actions.

Jonah expresses here the opinion that those who worship idols will discover in times of trouble how impotent they really are, and as a result will no longer show loyalty, or love, to their supposed gods. Those who worship the Lord, however, will always find him trustworthy and reliable. Thus it seems best to translate the verse as follows: ‘Those who cling to worthless idols will abandon their loyalty to them.’ (Wiseman, Alexander and Waltke 1988, 129)

But why the comment? Is it possible that the original prejudice Jonah had about the people of Nineveh is still there? Is he still a bit self-righteous and believes that gentiles are only worthy of fueling the fires of Sheol?

Jonah’s desire that the Ninevites not be shown mercy motivates his actions throughout the book. Given Jonah’s self-righteous attitude evidenced throughout the book, it is very fitting to read this as his condemnation of the Ninevites when he should be praying for forgiveness for himself. (Hoyt 2018, 468)

So, Jonah may not be fully repenting just yet. There is more to come in the book but remember why he ran in the first place. Prejudice. Hatred.

The people who have “empty faiths” are the ones who “forsake the opportunity of receiving [Yahweh’s] mercy.” Jonah’s every movement in the story is motivated by a deep desire not to allow the Ninevites a chance to receive mercy. Further support for this interpretation is found in Jonah 4:2, where Jonah gives his (partial) reason for refusing to prophesy to Nineveh. He refused to go because he was fully aware of Yahweh’s character, and one of the traits he lists is *נְרִב־חֶסֶד* abundant mercy. Jonah did not want the Ninevites to receive Yahweh’s mercy, and in this psalm—while he has just received Yahweh’s mercy of deliverance by a fish and still needs to repent—Jonah condemns others who need Yahweh’s mercy. The Ninevites, from Jonah’s perspective, do not deserve Yahweh’s mercy because their pursuit of false gods/faiths marks them as undeserving. Jonah’s choice to condemn the Ninevites during his prayer from the belly of the fish reveals how deeply he desires to control when and to whom Yahweh gives mercy. (Hoyt 2018, 469)

So even though Jonah is praying, he is a lot like us and a lot like the pharisees. He knows the truth, those gentiles in Nineveh do not. He knows the assignment cannot be refused, but he doesn’t have to be happy about it.

He is thanking YAHWEH and praising Him for saving him. But has he truly repented yet? Many read verse 9 as Jonah repenting and now agreeing to go along with the plan. But verse 8 sounds a lot more like bargaining with God and a reminder from Jonah to God about just how bad those nasty old people in Nineveh which I will now go to, truly are.

Jonah 2:9

“But I will sacrifice to You With a voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.” (NASB 2020)

Jonah may be repenting, but in context with the why he ran and some of the self-centeredness of his prayer, I wonder. Is he contrasting his faith in YAHWEH with that of the people YAHWEH wants him to go visit? Is he making himself out as more holy than they are and more deserving of the mercy of God than they are?

The words are orthodox (deliverance is from Yahweh), but the attitude is self-righteous, and the application is wrong. He asserts that he deserves Yahweh's mercy, Yahweh's deliverance, while the pagans have given up their chance to receive Yahweh's mercy. Jonah is certain that he will be delivered from the fish, just as he was delivered from the sea, because he is worthy, unlike the pagans. (Hoyt 2018, 470)

Whether or not deliverance for Jonah meant only rescue from drowning, it is clear that YHWH saved his life for a purpose. (Timmer 2021, 66)

Yes, God can and will use anyone. Even grumpy bigoted prophets with a chip on their shoulder. God is still working on Jonah, just like He is working on us. We are all in the process of being sanctified. None of us have arrived just yet. We all have more to do.

I am glad that Jonah is imperfect, yet God chooses to use him. He still has lessons to learn as we all do. But this chapter for Jonah is now done, the transportation system chosen by YAHWEH has arrived and Jonah has experienced the grace of God and is willing to go. The gentile sailors got there first, now Jonah is there and ready to go.

Jonah 2:10

"Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land." (NASB 2020)

All this time Jonah has been in the fish travelling back to dry land. Now the journey is over. Yahweh speaks to the fish, his instrument of salvation for Jonah. It obediently and doubtless gladly spews up this indigestible object and swims off with a flick of its tail, its distinguished mission accomplished. (Allen 1976, 220)

So how are we doing considering what we just learned in Jonah. Are we in need of returning to the Lord or are we in need of encountering Him for the very first time.

For those coming back, don't wait until the last minute then sulk like Jonah, just exercise 1 John 1:9 and come back into fellowship.

If you have never experienced knowing Jesus at all, there is no better time than now to come to Him.

Romans 3:21–24

"But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins." (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."" (NLT)

### **ABC's of Salvation**

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.

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