

JONAH'S PRAYER



In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Aim

- ❖ Give BREIF overview of the book of Jonah, remember that most students will know Jonah's story, therefore the servant's main aim is to provide a fresh outlook by drawing on different themes within this famous tale
- ❖ Emphasis is on Jonah's prayer while in the 'belly of the fish'; Chapter two is what Jonah prays while still conscious in the fish. He recounts his cry of distress in the water and lifts a voice of thanks for deliverance.
- ❖ Theme: God's awesome ability to forgive man's wretchedness
- ❖ Focus: The similarities between our behavior and Jonah's, towards God

Key verses

1 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.*

*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.

*4 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.*

*8 " 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."*

10 So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.



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- ✓ Read - as a class Jonah 2: 1-9 (Do **not** read the entire book; the focus must be on the prayer)
- ✓ Outline – the below outline is for the servant. A more general, i.e. quicker, outline of the book of Jonah should be given, keeping in mind students ALREADY KNOW the story
- ✓ Talk – should focus on God's awesome ability to forgive us and answer us during times of distress. There are seven major points in this discussion (this is the bulk of the talk)
- ✓ Handout – this covers the seven major points, allowing students to move through the points with you

Lesson

An Outline of the Book of Jonah (760 BC)

I. Jonah Flees From God's Will. 1:1-17

- 1) God commissions Jonah 1:1-2
- 2) Jonah runs from God 1:3
- 3) God stops Jonah from running 1:4-17
- 4) God sends a storm 1:4-8
- 5) Jonah admits his failure 1:8-17
- 6) Jonah is swallowed by the Great Fish 1:17



II. Jonah Turns Back to God. 2:1-10

- 7) Jonah's Prayer. 2:1-9 → *today's focus*
- 8) Jonah is delivered by God 2:10

III. Jonah Preaches God's Message of Repentance 3:1-10

- 1) God again commissions Jonah 3:1-2
- 2) Jonah obeys God 3:3
- 3) Nineveh repents 3:5-10

IV. The Sinful Condition of Jonah's Heart Surfaces 4:1-3

V. God's Response to Jonah's Harden Heart 4:4-11

- 1) God seeks to comfort Jonah 4:4-7
- 2) God rebukes Jonah 4:8-11

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Comparative Table

JONAH	NINEVITES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disobeyed God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They were sinful people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> God put him under the threat of destruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same like Jonah
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jonah cries out in his distress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repented upon his calling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> God saves Jonah & gives him a new lease on life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> God saves the people of Nineveh & gives them a second chance

After being swallowed by the 'fish' Jonah is conscious long enough to realize that God had saved him from drowning in the sea. And during this period of consciousness Jonah prays.

Chapter two is what he said. So when you read this prayer, keep in mind that when **Jonah refers to the distress of the past he means the time he spent in the water, not the time he spent in the fish. The water is the threat of death. The fish is the refuge of salvation. The cry of distress is past tense (in the water!); the voice of confidence and thanks is present (in the fish). Let's look at the prayer.**

Jonah 2:1, 2: "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 'I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me.'"

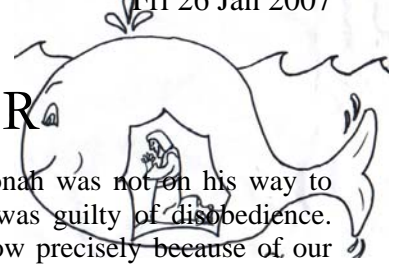
There is the simple statement that sums up what happened when Jonah sank in the water: he cried out to God and God answered him by sending the fish.

There is a lot of encouragement for us here that I want you to see. The general point I want to make is that God answers his children when they cry to him in distress. Then I think the text gives us some specific pointers to how and why God answers us when we call on him in distress:

1. God answers us in spite of our guilt.
2. God answers us in spite of his judgment.
3. God answers us and delivers us from impossible circumstances.
4. God answers us in the nick of time.
5. God answers us in stages, not all of which are comfortable.
6. God answers us in order to win our undivided loyalty and thanks.
7. God answers us in our guilty distress to help us become merciful like He is.

We should view these things as encouragement to call on God with more confidence.

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1. God answers our cry of distress even when we are guilty. Jonah was not on his way to Nineveh when he fell overboard. He was running from God. He was guilty of disobedience. That's why he was in the water. Some of us are in trouble right now precisely because of our disobedience. And if we are wondering, "Is there hope? Will God have mercy on me and hear my cry of distress?" take heart from Jonah. His distress was the fruit of his guilt, but God answered him and gave him another chance.

That is not an isolated teaching in Scripture. Listen to the same scenario in Psalm 107:10-15. Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in affliction and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High [like Jonah]... Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress; he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men!

If our disobedience is the cause of our distress, let's repent and cry to the Lord. And He will answer us in spite of our guilt.

2. God answers us in spite of his judgment. Notice verse 3: "*For You cast me into the deep.*" According to 1:15, it was the ship's crew who picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea. But Jonah knows that it was all of God. God was angry at Jonah's disobedience and he was going to require chastisement. I suppose nothing makes us despair in our distress like the thought that God put us there because he is angry with us. And I guess most of us might say if God has put me in this rotten situation because he is displeased with me, then there is no point in praying for his help. But Jonah ventured to pray for deliverance from the very God who threw him into the water. And the God who threw him in heard his prayer and performed a miracle to save him.

Even when God is displeased with us he never brings us into affliction merely for the sake of punishment. His purposes always include redemption. Adversity is redemptive, not merely punitive.

Job 36:15 says, "God delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity."

Even if you have felt as though the very hand of God is against you in your distress, do not despair to call upon him. He answers his children in spite of his own judgment.

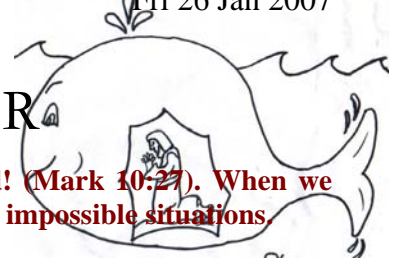
3. God answers us and delivers us from impossible circumstances. Verses 5 and 6 describe the extremity of Jonah's plight:

"Wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains, I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever."

It would be a terrible thing to fall overboard and be left behind when the sea is placid. How much worse to be thrown into a raging storm with twenty or thirty foot waves and feel yourself sucked so deep you know you're done for. And, as if that were not enough, as you struggle toward the air you hit a mass of seaweed and it tangles all around your head and neck. It's a terrifying scene. God let the circumstances become impossible before he delivered Jonah.

I don't know for sure why it is, but it seems that in our life distresses and troubles come in batches. They don't get spaced out in proportion to our powers to cope. Often circumstances develop to the point where we can't see any way out. But then we need to

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remember Jonah's plight. It was impossible. But only with God! (Mark 10:27). When we cry to the Lord in our distress he answers us and delivers us from impossible situations.

4. God answers us in the nick of time. Verse 7 says,

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You into Your holy temple."

More starkly we would say, "As I was losing consciousness I remembered the Lord." Jonah was still praying without an answer in sight just before he blacked out. In fact, he probably did black out and regain consciousness, realizing he had been spared in the belly of a fish. God often answers our prayers at the eleventh hour. Many a saint has groaned, saying, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?" But Jonah gives us courage to be unrelenting in our prayer, to keep on crying out to God even as we go unconscious, and to believe that God will answer in the nick of time.

5. God answers our cries of distress in stages, not all of which are comfortable. We must get out of our head the all or nothing notion of answered prayer. We can be fairly sure that when Jonah cried out to God he did **not** say: "O God put me in the belly of a fish for three days!" He probably said, "God save me, I am cast out from your presence, have mercy!" But God's answer came in stages. **The belly of a fish hardly seems like salvation. But it was: Jonah is granted enough consciousness to realize he has been spared from drowning and that there is hope.** He does not complain about his surroundings. He accepts God's first stage of salvation as a guarantee of dry land, and concludes his prayer in the fish's belly with the great affirmation, *"Deliverance belongs to the Lord."*

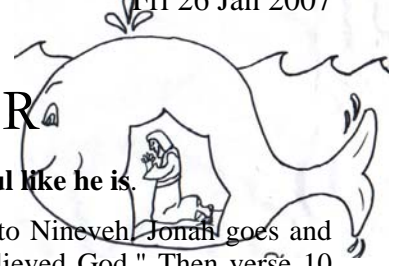
Don't disregard the partial works of God. If he chooses to save and to heal by stages he has his good purposes, and we ought to be grateful for any improvement in our condition. A fish's belly is better than weeds at the bottom of the sea, even if it is not yet perfect. God answers us in stages, not all of which are comfortable.

6. God answers our cry of distress in order to win our undivided loyalty and thanksgiving for his mercy. Verses 8 and 9 show how a prayer to God after deliverance should end:

"Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their true loyalty (or: forsake their mercy). But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!"

The answer to Jonah's prayer has produced its proper effect. It has filled Jonah with wonder that anyone would forsake the Lord and keep idols. **God taught Jonah that if you leave the Lord you leave mercy.** And he has filled Jonah's mouth with thanksgiving. **God answers prayers in order that thanksgiving will abound to his glory,** Which means that people who have a spirit of thanksgiving are the best candidates for answered prayer (Phil. 4:6). **St. Paul said in 2Cor 1:11, "You must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessings granted us in answer to many prayers."** And the Lord said in Ps 50:15, **"Call upon me in the day of trouble; and I will deliver you and you shall glorify me."**

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7. God answers us in our guilty distress to help us become merciful like he is.

In chapter three, after Jonah is back on land, God sends him again to Nineveh. Jonah goes and preaches judgment. And in 3:5 it says, "The people of Nineveh believed God." Then verse 10 gives God's response, "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it."

God showed mercy to Jonah so that Jonah would learn to show mercy to the Ninevites.

The book of Jonah has a message that is loud and clear about God, namely, his mercy is not confined to Israel but extends to any people who will trust him and repent of their sin. What saves is not nationality but faith. That's a great gospel message coming out of the Old Testament. The ultimate lesson about prayer in the book of Jonah is that God answers us in mercy to make us merciful.

Glory is to God, forever. Amen.