

JONAH IS SAVED: HE PRAYS AND REPENTS JONAH 01:17–02:10

Introduction

As we walk throughout life, many of us will have a near-death experience: a serious accident, a grave illness, a terminal disease or any number of other health-related emergencies. In other cases some will be robbed or assaulted and still others will face the danger of combat and war. Whatever the life-threatening crisis may be, our only sure hope is to turn to the LORD and trust Him. The LORD will do one of three things for all who truly trust and follow Him:

- => He will save us *from* the imminent danger.
- => He will walk with or deliver us *through* the danger.
- => He will carry us *above* the danger through the experience of death to live eternally in His presence.

Being saved through a terrible crisis is the subject of the present Scripture. Remember that Jonah was fleeing from the LORD's call upon his life. He had booked passage on a ship heading for Tarshish, Spain. Nevertheless, the LORD was determined to keep His dear prophet from throwing his life away. The LORD would do whatever it took to lead Jonah to repentance and submission to his new call. Thus the LORD caused a great storm to arise, a storm so violent and turbulent that the ship was literally about to break up. Jonah knew the terrifying storm was not a natural event but instead the hand of God disciplining him. The prophet also knew that he deserved death...

- because he had refused to go preach to the multiplied thousands of souls in Nineveh
- because his refusal to accept God's call had doomed thousands to death and separation from the LORD

For these reasons, Jonah was convinced that if the sailors removed him from the ship by throwing him overboard, the LORD would calm the sea and save the sailors. And he was correct. But as Jonah would later discover, the LORD would also save His prophet's life and restore his ministry. This is, *Jonah Is Saved: He Prays and Repents*, Jonah 1:17-2:10.

- I. The LORD saved Jonah (v. 1:17).
 - II. The LORD heard Jonah's prayer and cry of repentance (vv. 2:1-9).
 - III. The LORD gave Jonah a new life: had the fish spew him out after three days and nights — a type of Christ's death and resurrection (v. 2:10).
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I. *Jonah 01:17 The LORD saved Jonah from Drowning — Symbol of Christ's Death*

The LORD saved Jonah from drowning and from destroying his life and ministry. God *provided* — prepared or appointed (manah or manahl) — a large fish to swim by the ship for the express purpose of swallowing His prophet. The word *provided* is used four times in the book of *Jonah*. In each case, God is said to have provided or prepared something in a miraculous way:

=> He provided a great fish (1:17).

=> He provided a vine (4:6).

=> He provided a worm (4:7).

=> He provided a scorching east wind or a desert storm (4:8).

In working each miracle, the LORD used something already existing and well-known to people: a fish, a vine, a worm and the wind to create a desert storm. The miracles demonstrated God's great power over the world — over all life and nature. So far as life is concerned, God clearly showed that He controls both human life (Jonah) and animal life (the fish and worm) as well as the life of all vegetation (the plant). So far as nature is concerned, He demonstrated His control over the wind and the dust of the earth by stirring up a desert storm.

1. In the present Scripture, the LORD provided a huge fish to swim by the boat just as Jonah was thrown overboard into the turbulent seas. With the enormous, convulsive waves being tossed about by the raging storm, it would have been impossible for Jonah to swim. Obviously, the prophet went under water immediately, struggling for his life. Seaweed was even wrapped around his body, preventing him from any attempt to swim (v. 5). Within just a few minutes at most, Jonah would have drowned except for God. As Jonah's prayer indicates in the next point, he was crying out to the LORD as soon as he fell into the swirling, storm-tossed sea (v. 7). And God heard His dear prophet's prayer. God led a very large fish — probably a sperm whale or a whale shark — to swallow Jonah.
2. As Scripture clearly states, the LORD kept Jonah alive in the fish for three days and three nights. This does not necessarily mean three 24-hour days. However, the exact number of hours is of no consequence, for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself confirmed this account of Jonah's surviving in the fish for three days (Mat 12:39-40).

How is it possible for a person to survive being swallowed by a fish and to live inside its stomach for three days? By the power of the LORD, the same God who created the heavens and the earth and the very beast that swallowed Jonah. Only the power of God Himself could cause such a miraculous deliverance. There is no other explanation. Nothing on earth — not a human being or any other force — could work such a miracle.

As a person reads various commentaries on Jonah, he or she will find scholars who discuss at length both the possibility and the impossibility of the Jonah account. Of course, those who believe the Bible have no problem accepting the fact that God was able to perform such a miraculous deliverance as Jonah's. Those who do not believe in miracles try to prove that such an event is absolutely impossible. Whatever position a person takes, one truth stands out above all others: since God truly exists and actively controls the universe, He is certainly capable of doing anything He wishes. He could have enabled Jonah to walk above or across the storm-tossed sea — somewhat like Christ and Peter did (Mat 14:22-33, esp. vv. 25-31). But this was not the way the LORD chose to deliver His prophet from death. Instead, God chose to deliver Jonah by having a huge fish swallow him.

However, note this fact: even proving scientifically (as so many scholars attempt to do) that a person can be swallowed and survive for a period of time within a fish does not necessarily prove that the account of Jonah is true. Jonah's deliverance was a miraculous act of God, an act that supersedes human experience. Miracles performed by God are beyond the natural world, acts that cannot be duplicated or explained by human beings. If they could be humanly duplicated or explained, they would not be miracles.

Therefore, the course of wisdom for true believers would seem to be as follows: to guard against being caught up in an attempt to prove the miracle and to focus upon why Jonah was swallowed by the fish. There seem to be at least four reasons why God delivered Jonah in this manner (Mat 12:40).

First, the LORD used the huge fish or whale to keep Jonah alive while at the same time giving Jonah *a sense of being in Hades*, in the very pit of death and hell itself (2:2, 6). When Jonah was thrown overboard, he immediately began to drown in the tumultuous waters. Most likely, he was unconscious, as drowning victims who survive often testify. Thus when Jonah awoke from unconsciousness, he had already been swallowed by the gigantic fish and was still alive in the creature's stomach. Imagine the pitch-black darkness and unbearable smell of rotted and decaying fish, seaweed and other creatures — all being broken down and dissolved by the huge fish's own gastric juices. Think of the nausea Jonah must have endured not only from the rank odours but also from the creature's constant movement — swimming up and down, twisting and turning, speeding up and slowing down — doing this time and again throughout the three days. Jonah had no light and no way to know that he was in the belly of a fish. As the prophet shares in the next point, he thought he was in *Hades*, actually living within the pit of death and hell itself (v. 6).

Second, the LORD used the large fish to specifically give Jonah a sense of *Hades* — the pit of death and hell — to which the prophet was dooming the 120,000 souls of Nineveh. By refusing to go and preach to the Ninevites, Jonah was personally

responsible for dooming them to the world of darkness. The LORD obviously knew that Jonah needed to sense the horrible darkness and the terrifying hopelessness of Hades in order to arouse him to go share God's message with the doomed Assyrians.

Third, the LORD used the large fish to deliver Jonah from death in order to demonstrate His amazing love and mercy. God would go to any limit to save the doomed souls of Nineveh — even to the point of sending Jonah through the experience of *Hades* — death itself. Through this traumatizing experience, the LORD taught Jonah the depth of God's love, not just for him but also for the Ninevites. The prophet had to go and preach to the Ninevites in order to save them from the pit of death and hell that Jonah himself sensed he was experiencing within the stomach of the creature (v. 6).

Fourth, the LORD used the huge fish (whale) to swallow and later expel Jonah as a type of Christ's death and resurrection. The LORD kept Jonah within the dark, smelly stomach of the fish as a type of His burial in the grave. The LORD then had the fish vomit Jonah out as a type of His resurrection (Mat 12:39-40).

Thought 1. Jonah was saved from death and from ruining his life and ministry by the power of God. It was God's power alone that kept him alive for three days and three nights in the stomach of the huge fish. And it is God's power that saves us through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our only hope for salvation is the LORD. Through the power of His death on the cross for our sins, we are saved from sin and its penalty, which is death. Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins. Christ died *for us, in our behalf, in our stead, in our place, as our substitute*. Any and all who truly trust the LORD will be forgiven their sins and saved from sin and death. God will count the death of Christ as our death. Or, to put it another way, He sets us free from sin and death through the death of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the same power that raised up Christ from the dead will raise us up to live eternally with the LORD. Listen to what God's Holy Word says:

Mat 12:39-40 *He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

Mark 8:31 *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*

John 3:14-16 *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. That everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Luke 9:22 *And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*

John 11:25-26 *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

John 14:2-3 *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*

Acts 24:14-15 *However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*

Rom 1:4 *And who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.*

1 Cor 15:3-4 *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

1 Cor 15:20-23 *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

Gal 1:4 *Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

Eph 1:7 *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

1 Th 4:13-18 *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

2 Tim 1:10 *But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

Titus 2:14 *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Heb 2:14-15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

Heb 9:28 *So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

1 Pet 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

1 Pet 3:18 *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

II. *Jonah 02:01–09 The LORD Heard Jonah’s Prayer, Cry of Repentance*

The LORD heard Jonah’s prayer and cry of repentance. As stated above, when Jonah was thrown overboard by the sailors, the churning sea immediately pulled the prophet under water. He was struggling to survive. But survival in a stormy, turbulent sea was next to impossible. Within minutes Jonah would have drowned if the LORD had not saved him. Once he was within the smelly black darkness of the fish’s stomach, however, there was no way Jonah could tell where he was. His prayer indicates that he sensed he was in the depth of *Hades*, which Jonah described as...

- the stomach of Sheol or of death and hell, the world of the dead
- the place where the bars of the *earth beneath* imprison the dead (v. 6)
- the pit of death and corruption (v. 6)

Having gone through the experience of near-drowning and regaining consciousness in such an environment was bound to arouse Jonah to pray and seek the LORD. As Jonah prayed, he graphically described what he felt during the life-threatening ordeal:

1. Jonah called on the LORD, not on some so-called god (v. 2a). The false gods that had been worshipped by the sailors and most other people would have been no help to

Jonah. All so-called gods are mere creations of people's minds. They are lifeless, unable to hear people's cries. Consequently, they are completely helpless in coming to people's rescue and in meeting their needs. Jonah knew that the LORD was the only living and true God and that He alone was able to help him in his desperate plight.

2. Jonah called upon the LORD when he needed help (vv. 2b-3). And more than ever before, the prophet needed help that only the LORD could give. He thought he was in the depths of Hades — death and hell itself. Now, note Jonah's wonderful testimony when he was writing this account of his experience: he had called for help, and the LORD heard his cry. In verse two alone, Jonah mentions twice that the LORD heard his prayer.

Note also how Jonah stressed the LORD's control over the entire experience. It was not the sailors but rather the LORD who had thrown Jonah overboard into the stormy sea (v. 3). The sailors were merely the agents used by the LORD to discipline His prophet. Jonah suddenly found himself being swirled about by the raging currents and the waves breaking over him. Interestingly, Jonah stated that the turbulent waves breaking over him were God's waves and breakers (v. 3b). They, too, were simply instruments in the hands of God as He disciplined Jonah because of his horrible sin.

3. Thankfully, Jonah did the right thing: he repented (vv. 4-6a). Sitting there in the belly of the fish, Jonah felt cut off from God, completely cast out of the LORD's presence. Jonah felt he had been banished to *Hades*, the world of the dead.

At last, the prophet reached the point of repentance. He vowed to turn back to the LORD and to look once again toward the LORD's holy temple. Remember that Jonah had fled from the promised land and was heading toward Tarshish, Spain, the farthest point of the earth in the minds of the Jews. Jonah had wished to get as far away as possible from everything that reminded him of the LORD, including the LORD's temple in Jerusalem. But there in pitch-black darkness in what he thought was Hades, Jonah promised to return home to the promised land and to serve the LORD once again.

It is also important to note when Jonah repented: only after his life was threatened by the engulfing waters and the seaweed wrapped around his head. To his shame, the prophet was willing to repent only after he had suffered the near-death experience of drowning.

4. Jonah received deliverance from the pit of death (vv. 6-8). The LORD saved His dear servant from the prison of the earth beneath, but note the three reasons that stirred the LORD to save Jonah:

⇒ Because Jonah remembered the LORD, which means that he made a recommitment to the LORD (v. 7a). Although Jonah waited until the last moment, until his life was slipping away, the LORD had mercy and saved him.

⇒ Because Jonah prayed and sought the LORD and vowed to return to the LORD's holy temple.

=> Because Jonah called on the LORD — the only living and true God — not a worthless idol. As Jonah said, all who cling to worthless idols reject and turn their backs on the LORD's mercy. By worshipping false gods, people forfeit God's mercy and lose the privilege of being saved by Him.

Jonah praised God and promised to keep his vow of repentance (v. 9; also see v. 4). He promised to faithfully worship the LORD through sacrificial offerings and service. Lastly, the prophet acknowledged that salvation could come only from the LORD. The LORD had saved him by showering His mercy upon him when he was in desperate straits. Jonah finally understood that the LORD also longed to save the Ninevites who were doomed to the pit of death and hell (Hades) — doomed to be separated eternally from the LORD. Now Jonah was ready to go to Nineveh to proclaim the hope of the LORD's salvation through faith and repentance.

Thought 1. The LORD will hear and help us when we face critical situations.

However, we must first truly repent of our sins and call upon His Name if we want to become acceptable to Him. The LORD accepts no person who lives in sin — whether prophet, priest, pastor, teacher, believer or unbeliever. Thus if any of us continue in sin, rejecting the LORD or repeatedly disobeying His Holy Word, we will be rejected by the LORD. The only hope of being saved is to genuinely repent and to call upon His holy Name. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about repentance:

Mat 3:2 *And saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

Luke 13:3 *I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.*

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

Acts 8:22 *Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.*

2 Chr 7:14 *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Psa 34:18 *The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Psa 51:17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

Isa 66:2 *"Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."*

Ezek 18:21 *But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.*

Ezek 18:31 *Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?*

III. Jonah 02:10 The LORD Gave Jonah a New Life

The LORD gave Jonah a new life, a new beginning, a second chance. Just as the LORD led the fish to swim by the boat to swallow Jonah, so the LORD led the fish to spew Jonah out somewhere close to shore. The dirty, smelly, haggard prophet undoubtedly stood on the beach with the stench of his own body nearly taking his breath away. Nonetheless, the prophet had finally been humbled to the point of repentance. Now he was to go forth and relaunch his ministry. He was to obey the LORD and go to Nineveh to proclaim the Word of God to the doomed people. The point to stress is the fact that Jonah's three days and three nights in the fish's stomach pointed to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mat 12:39-40). It was through Jonah's three-day experience that he was given a new life and a new beginning. So it is with us. Through the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we too can receive a new life, a new beginning, a brand new start, a second chance.'

Luke 15:24 *'For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* So they began to celebrate.

Rom 8:11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you*

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Gal 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

Eph 2:1-9 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Eph 4:22-24 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col 3:9-10 *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices. And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour; so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

Psa 51:10 *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ■*