

Jonah 2:1-10

Jonah 1:17 – **“And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”**

1. Jonah ends up at the bottom of the sea where a fish delivers Jonah by swallowing him.
2. What Jonah anticipated as a sure death turns into deliverance in his final moments of consciousness at the bottom of the sea.
3. Canaanite religion assigned a variety of sea monsters to the control of the sea god Yamm.
4. Why 3 days and 3 nights?
 - a. That may have been the time needed to return Jonah to the shores of Israel on the Mediterranean coast.
 - b. A person is considered truly dead after three days. They have reached the underworld by way of the grave. So, Jonah would have been on the threshold of death, or right at the doors of Sheol.
 - c. It requires a three day journey to reach Sheol. This is recorded in Amorite and Babylonian documents which record the going to Sheol and a return from Sheol.
 - d. In context three days was the time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish being transported from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea back to the coast of Israel (or, from the Gates of Sheol to the presence of the Lord). This matches the understanding of the ancient Middle Eastern cultures that it takes three days to travel back from Sheol to the land of the living.
5. Jonah is inside the fish. He doesn't get to view the fish. Jonah didn't see the fish coming towards him in the deep darkness of the sea. Jonah may or may not have gotten a look at the fish when he was vomited out. It is safe to assume Jonah and the fish didn't exchange parting glances as Jonah crawled for the safety of the land out of the regurgitated substances he had spent 3 days engulfed in.
6. This psalm from the belly of the fish must be Jonah's own words:
 - a. It is specific in its nature. It clearly applies to Jonah's situation and not merely a general psalm of deliverance and thanksgiving.
 - b. This psalm's specifics make it useless in its application to a general deliverance situation. Many psalms are general. In fact the character of thanksgiving psalms and deliverance psalms is to maintain generality about them so they can be sung and presented by many worshippers coming to the Temple out of a variety of situations over a wide span of time and cultures.
 - c. This psalm of chapter 2 cannot be removed from this book without leaving a huge gap:
 - i. In the deliverance of Jonah
 - ii. The context of the sailors, Jonah and the people of Nineveh all experiencing the same thing concerning disaster, calling out and deliverance
 - iii. Jonah has a change of heart, but the details would be missing
 - iv. Jonah's time in the fish would be left to the readers imagination (much still is). We know Jonah was thankful. The fish was considered to be deliverance. Jonah was conscious. Jonah was hopeful and expressing thankfulness in the fish. Jonah was anticipating deliverance and a visit to the temple.
 - v. The main theological point of the book would be understated without chapter 2. God is merciful. God will respond. God is able to deliver even from the Gates of Hades.

Verse	Text	Location/Focus
2:1	Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,	Inside the fish after having sunk through the water to the bottom of the sea. Jonah prays this prayer inside the fish which will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recount Jonah's experience in the water his approach to death and Sheol recount his cry for help (his prayer of 2:7) his thanksgiving for being delivered from Sheol (not from the fish yet, since he is still in the fish being thankful since Jonah considers the fish an answer to his prayer.) include his vow he intends to fulfill at the Lord's temple
2:2	I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me	At the bottom of the sea...Jonah prayed.
2:2	out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice	At the bottom of the sea near the point of death. Jonah considers himself hopelessly having entered Sheol...but, Jonah cried out to the Lord
2:3	For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,	At the top, where it all began. Jonah recalls being thrown into the sea.
2:3	and the flood surrounded me;	Sinking through the waters. Jonah is surrounded by the waters of the sea
2:3	all your waves and your billows passed over me.	At the bottom. Deeper and deeper into the depths. Jonah realizes the waves of the sea and the vast volume of the waters above him
2:4	Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight;	Jonah realizes it is over. The Lord has driven Jonah from his presence
2:4	yet I shall again look upon your holy temple	But, wait! Jonah is delivered by the Lord! Jonah now assumes full restoration even to the point of worshipping in the temple in the land of the living again
2:5	The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me	At the top, where it all began.
2:5	seaweed wrapped about my head	Sinking through the waters Jonah's head is surrounded and wrapped in seaweed
2:5	at the roots of the mountains.	At the bottom
2:6	I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever	At the Gates of Hades or the bars of Sheol where Jonah will now spend his eternity
2:6	yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God	But, wait! Jonah is delivered by the Lord! ("the Pit" is the Syrian name for the city of the god of the underworld.)
2:7	When my life was fainting away	Jonah is losing consciousness...Jonah is dying...
2:7	I remembered the LORD	With his final functioning brain waves Jonah prays!!
2:7	and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple	From the Gates of Hades Jonah's prayer reached the Temple of the Lord (in Heaven or in Jerusalem or in Samaria where the Lord's presence was.
2:8	Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love	Those who hope in idols are hopeless because their gods do not have this kind of power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sailors turned from idols to the Lord and were spared with the same deliverance as Jonah.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pagans of Nineveh will turn to the Lord and also be spared with the same deliverance as Jonah and the Sailors. • Three are spared and delivered from tragedy in this book: 1) Sailors, 2) Jonah, 3) Nineveh • Idols (false religion) would have led all three to be overcome with destruction.
2:9	But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord	Because this salvation belongs to the LORD, Jonah will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice thanksgiving to the LORD • Sacrifice to the LORD • Pay vows to the LORD
2:10	And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land	Jonah deliverance is complete. Jonah can now start again. Jonah had three days and three nights to use his prophet's training (words, phraseology, lyrics, rhythm, music, singing, theology, etc.) to compose this very typical, yet very specific, psalm of Thanksgiving in the belly of the fish.

Jonah 2:1 – **Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish,**

1. This was a prayer of thanksgiving, not a prayer for deliverance. The prayer for deliverance had already taken place and the answer to that prayer (the fish) had already manifested. This prayer of thanksgiving recounts the earlier prayer.
2. There are four typical elements of a psalm focused on thanksgiving:
 - a. Introductory summary of answered prayer. . . . 2:2
 - b. Reports of the personal crisis. 2:3-6
 - c. The divine rescue is recognized. 2:7
 - d. A vow of praise. 2:8-9

Jonah 2:2 – **saying,**

**“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.**

1. Here Jonah recalls his first prayer cried out while in the sea. (This is different than the current prayer.)
2. This earlier prayer for help was answered by the Lord.

Jonah 2:3 – **“For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows
passed over me.**

1. The Lord is considered the one ultimately responsible for Jonah being cast into the sea since the sailors had tried to resolve the issue:
 - a. first by prayer to the gods (1:5), and then, to the Lord himself (1:14)
 - b. second, by man power attempting to rowing to the shore (1:13)

- c. ultimately, according to Jonah's words (1:12), the sailors' resignation to this fate (1:14) and the Lord's instant response (1:15), the only thing the Lord was willing to accept was Jonah being thrown into the sea. (Although the Lord did not reach down and throw Jonah into the sea himself, the Lord had forced this situation to occur.)

Jonah 2:4 – **“Then I said, ‘I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.’**

1. Being “driven away from your sight” or being “banished from the presence of deity” implies Jonah had been disqualified from accessing the sacred precincts of the temple (in Jerusalem or in Heaven). Jonah's act of rebellion had made him ritually impure and disqualified him.
2. Being swallowed by the fish was Jonah's deliverance from death.
3. Deliverance by the fish gave Jonah hope that he would once again be able to appear before the Lord's presence in the Temple (in Jerusalem) or one of the high places of worship dedicated to YHWH in Samaria or Bethel.
4. The fact that the Lord did not let Jonah die at the bottom of the sea and instead sent a fish to swallow Jonah is enough to convince Jonah that he is on his way to being delivered.

Jonah 2:5 – **“The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head**

1. Jonah again details the trauma of his sinking and drowning in three steps:
 - a. In the water (top of the sea)
 - b. Sinking through the layers of the water (middle of the sea), sea weed wrapping him
 - c. At the bottom of the water (bottom of the sea), at the roots of the mountains
2. “the deep” – Hebrew *tehom* – refers to the primeval ocean, the primeval flood, one of the prominent elements in creation (this is before the Flood of Noah) Genesis 1:2 and Psalm 104:6
 - a. The water that surrounded and covered the entire earth at the beginning of creation week
 - b. The waters that burst forth in the flood of Noah

Jonah 2:6 – **“at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord my God.**

1. “bars”

- a. In the ancient Near East there was the understanding that there were gates to the underworld (sheol, the netherworld)
- b. The ancient world view considered the underworld a city with walls and gates.
- c. Ugaritic literature (Ugaritic is the extinct dialect of Amorite language of Semitic people living in Syria from 1400 BC) records the city of *hmry*, “the Pit”, is the city of Mot, the god of the underworld.
- d. The OT identifies a city in the Sheol with gates:

- i. Job 38:16-17 – ““Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?”
- ii. Isaiah 38:10 – “I said, In the middle of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years.”

- e. An unfinished Babylonian boundary marker (stele) attributed to the reign of Melishipak, 1186–1172 B.C made of yellow limestone shows the underworld city with tall gates that are guarded by a serpent-like creature.

- f. Jonah saw these bars (walls, gates) as an indication that once he entered this underworld city he would never return.
- g. Jonah considers himself to have arrived at the “gates of Sheol” or the “bars” of the underworld by having passed through the depths of the waters of chaos.
- h. Consider that meaning in this verse in Mathew 16:18 – “I will build my church, and the **gates of Hades** (Sheol) shall not prevail against it.” Or, “the bars of Sheol shall not prevail against” the church.”



3 images of the Babylonian stele showing the walls of the underworld.

2. "pit"
 - a. In the OT "Pit" is part of the vocabulary for the realm of the dead.
 - b. (*as mentioned above:*) - Ugaritic literature (Ugaritic is the extinct dialect of Amorite language of Semitic people living in Syria from 1400 BC) records the city of *hmry*, "the Pit", is the city of Mot, the god of the underworld.
 - c. Ezekiel 28:8 – "They shall thrust you down into the pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas."
3. Sheol, Underworld, Hades, Realm of the dead,
 - a. Isaiah 14:9-11 –

"The realm of the dead below is all astir
to meet you at your coming;
it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—
all those who were leaders in the world;
it makes them rise from their thrones—
all those who were kings over the nations.
They will all respond,
they will say to you,
"You also have become weak, as we are;
you have become like us."
All your pomp has been brought down to the grave,
along with the noise of your harps;
maggots are spread out beneath you
and worms cover you."
 - b. Isaiah 38:11-12 and 17-18 – Hezekiah says:
"I said, I shall not see the LORD, the LORD in the land of the living; I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world. My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end...Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness."

Jonah 2:7 – **"When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.**

1. "life was fainting away" refers to Jonah's final moments of consciousness or brainwave activity.
2. In the last moment Jonah:
 - a. Remembered the Lord
 - b. Prayed to the Lord
3. "your holy temple"
 - a. This could be referring to the temple in Jerusalem, or some shrine in Samaria (N. Israel)
 - b. Likely, this reference to "your holy temple" has Heaven in mind. There has been a shift from the earthly temple in 2:4

- c. Also, it could be noted that the throne in the Temple in Heaven extends all the way into the earthly temple in Jerusalem:
 - i. Isaiah 66:1 – “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?”
 - ii. Acts 7:49 – “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?”
 - iii. “The temple is the place on earth where God rests his foot – it still belongs to the heavenly sphere: Yahweh sits on his throne in heaven as well as in the temple” – R. Knierim
- 4. From just outside the Gates of Hades Jonah’s prayer was heard in God’s Temple in Heaven

Jonah 2:8 – **“Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.**

- 1. Allegiance to an idol is folly since the idol can do nothing. Alliance with an idol instead of the Lord means you have turned your back (“forsaken”) their only hope of a covenant relationship with the real God.
- 2. Israelites, such as Jonah and the people in Northern Israel during his day, have forsaken the “steadfast love” or covenant relationship with the Lord. This is foolish.
- 3. In this story the sailors and the people of Nineveh (both Gentiles) find a covenant relationship with the Lord by forsaking their idols. Jonah realizes it in his final moments. Northern Israel never did.

Jonah 2:9 – **“But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”**

- 1. “vow”
 - a. Normally a vow was some material gift.
 - b. This “vow” is not to be understood as Jonah repenting of his disobedience and promising (or, “vowing”) to go to Nineveh.
 - c. Jonah likely vowed a gift of thanksgiving to the Lord for having been spared of certain death.
- 2. Three prayers of Jonah - Jonah’s present prayer in chapter 2:
 - a. Looks back at his past prayer for help in the water recounted in 2:1 and 2:7
 - b. Looks forward to his future prayer of thanksgiving promised in 2:9 which will take place in the Temple when he fulfills his vow.
- 3. It is possible that this prayer of thanksgiving in Jonah chapter 2 which was composed in the belly of the fish was also the prayer Jonah recorded and recited when he fulfilled his vows in the Temple of the Lord. Thus, that is why we have the text of this poem.
- 4. Jonah announces in the belly of the fish a victorious shout: “SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LORD!”

Jonah 2:10 – **“And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.**

- 1. For three days and three nights the fish had been swimming.
- 2. The fish had been swimming back to the presence of the Lord (in Israel) from the bars of Sheol or the gates of Hades

3. Jonah had not been in the fish's mouth. Jonah had been swallowed, thus Jonah would need to be vomited.
4. How protected had Jonah been in the fish? Had the digestive process began? Would Jonah's skin have had signs of bleaching? Would this have affected the way the people of Nineveh would respond to this foreign prophet? Did Jonah include part of his experience in the fish with his preaching or in his communication with the leaders in Nineveh

Parallels between Jonah and the Sailors:

1. Both faced a crisis at sea
2. Both cried to Yahweh
3. Both were physically delivered
4. Both made vows and, apparently, kept their vows.

Because of Jonah's observation of the pagan sailors and because of Jonah's own personal experience of divine deliverance from the bars of Sheol Jonah now has every reason to:

1. Understand the people of Nineveh
2. Sympathize with the people of Nineveh
3. Anticipate the positive response of the people of Nineveh
4. Rejoice the sparing of the people of Nineveh
5. Fearfully worship a God who can turn his wrath into mercy and covenant blessing
6. Reconsider his invitation, or command, to preach to the people of Nineveh

But, no, Jonah will be angry.

This very happy, joyful, victorious chapter is sadly the highlight of this book concerning Jonah and his relationship with the Lord.