

*When did people start praying? The Bible tells us that men began to call on the Name of the Lord after Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve became a father. Genesis 4:26. The word “prayer” is over verbalized today and would seem to be one of the most underperformed and misunderstood privileges in our lives. Prayer is often acted out to be “asking the great Genie God in the sky for a wish.” Prayer is misunderstood chiefly because of incorrect and unclear ideas about God. God does not answer our prayers always the way you and I want. Who would be god if that happened? The Bible tells us that God is good. God is perfect in all His ways. God does not lie. God can be trusted. God loved us enough to die in our place. God has our highest and best in mind when He answers our prayer. God’s ways are not always understood by man because His thoughts are higher. He chooses to give us greater things over lesser things. Last week, we left Jonah wanting to just be thrown into the sea. He wanted to end his life. He saw his value not as blessing but as a mere problem to those around him. But thank God that Jonah’s rebellious prayer, for God to leave him alone, was not answered Jonah’s way! J.D Greear, a local pastor, stated: “Sometimes God answers our prayers by giving us what we would have asked for if we knew what he knew.” The setting of Jonah 2 illustrates this exactly! Jonah resigned as a prophet and literally chose to die, but the Lord provided a fish. The storm and the fish were not what Jonah wanted, but Jonah’s prayer (Jonah 2:1-10) reveals hindsight that God gave him exactly what he needed. Chapter two moves from the sour to the sweet! Just like the popular sour patch candy. Let’s look closer at “Sour Patch Repentance”.*

#### **A new scene – Under the Sea in the Stomach of the Fish.**

#### **How did our prophet get to this place? (cf. Jonah 1)**

Can you recall a situation in your life where you “woke up” and evaluated how you got there?

#### **Jonah 2:1 (NASB95)**

**<sup>1</sup> Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish,**

#### **Observations:**

1. Hebrew word “prayer” = “to intervene or mediate”.
2. “the Lord, His God” – the word used for “God” in the text is Elohim (Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning “Elohim” created the heavens and the earth”). The word Elohim has a suffix that clearly identifies YHWH Elohim, (the Lord God) as his (Jonah’s) God. **Note: Jonah does not change to pray to a different deity. (In actuality there is no other but God.)**
3. **Jonah, for the first time since fleeing, breaks his rebellious stonewalling to speak with his God.**

#### **Jonah 2:2 (NASB95)**

**2 and he said, “I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.**

#### **Observations:**

1. Jonah calls out - an appeal to, an invoking of God.
2. In my “distress” (word transliterates MISSARAH compare our word misery)– the word usage brings this definition: “an oppressive state of physical, mental, social or economic adversity.”<sup>1</sup>

3. “He answered me” and “You heard my voice” – How amazing is this! God hears and responds to Jonah while he is in the belly of the fish.

**What does this say about the where, when and how of prayer?**

*A believer cannot come to a place so abnormal that he cannot not pray to God there.<sup>2</sup>*

4. “I cried for help from the depth of Sheol”
  - a) From the depth – womb, inmost part
  - b) Sheol – underworld where the dead reside.
  - c) **Literally this says “the womb where the dead reside.”**

#### **Insight:**

The use of “Sheol” correlates to the phrase “three days and three nights” used in Jonah 1:17.

*Three days and three nights is a special phrase used in the ancient world with the meaning ‘long enough to be definitely dead’.<sup>3</sup> Jonah was probably near drowning (2:3, 5–6) as he sank to the bottom of the sea. Jesus compared his own impending death and resurrection with Jonah’s “three days and three nights” in the fish (1:17; cf. Matt. 12:39–40; 16:4; Luke 11:29–30). The time periods were essentially the same, and both ended with a surprise—Jonah delivered and Jesus resurrected.<sup>4</sup>*

**This phrase “depth of sheol” helps the reader determine the timing of this prayer of repentance to be later rather than earlier in the stomach of the fish. This is a third day prayer. Why do you think it took Jonah this long?**

The fish is more than a merciful submarine it is also God’s chastening in Jonah’s life.

<sup>1</sup> Logos Bible Sense Lexicon mis-sa-rah

<sup>2</sup> Smith, J. E. (1994). *The Minor Prophets* (Jon 1:17). Joplin, MO: College Press.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart, D. (1994). Jonah. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 819). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (pp. 346–347). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

The New Testament book of Hebrews points out a loving Father God who brings hardship and chastening in the life of a believer who has turned away as Jonah did from following the Lord. “According to Hebrews 12:5–11, there are several ways Christians may respond to the chastening of God: *we may despise it, as Jonah did for three days,*<sup>5</sup> This prayer describes Jonah’s steps to repentance.

1. Jonah began talking with God.
2. Jonah acknowledged God was in charge of it all.

Jonah 2:3–10 (NASB95)

<sup>3</sup> “For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me.

*Do you find it interesting that although Jonah told the sailors to throw him into the sea that here he points to God being the one in charge of all those circumstances?*

When it comes to our vision of life, hindsight is 20/20! Jonah had some time to review the circumstances as he lay in the acidic slimy lining of the stomach.

3. Jonah saw “HOPE” in God’s way.
- <sup>4</sup> “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’

The Hebrew reading portrays Jonah expressing hope that he will survive and return to worship at the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Think about it – when Jonah applies the truth that God is sovereign, the specific fish that swallowed him whole, reveals hope that God wants to save him, not kill him!

Jonah 2:5-7 “<sup>5</sup>Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup> “I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. <sup>7</sup> “While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple.

What do you make of Jonah’s statement “But you have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God?” Is this Jonah’s moment of seeing God on His side?

4. Jonah makes a heart decision-“turn and follow the Lord”
- <sup>8</sup> “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, <sup>9</sup> But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord.” <sup>10</sup> Jonah is following the god of “his own way” and by the way how is that god treating him?

- a. Jonah verbalized a decision to the Lord. He repents, realizing that following his own way is leading him to destruction. He acknowledges that the Lord’s way, albeit hard to understand, is best. So Jonah prays and makes a decision.
- b. In Jonah’s day, this was praying toward the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Today, this side of the cross, it is praying directly to God the Father in the Name of Jesus Christ.( Read Hebrews 4:14-16).

- c. Jonah acknowledges “salvation is from the Lord”. That has not changed. Acts 4:12 (NASB95)
- <sup>12</sup> “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

Jonah 1:10 Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

God is the reconciler and rescuer, the only one who can forgive sin and set the sinner free! How? God made a way through God the Son. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB95)

<sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jonah’s way was through Him and our way is through Him! Looking at this passage from a literature view:

The Bible is God’s Word written by the Holy Spirit as He bore along people to write each specific word still using their own ability and style. (II Peter 1:21) The Bible is also literature. Literature at its’s best. Note the use and contrast of Jonah’s prayer presented in the following literature analysis.

Jonah’s prayer in chapter 2 constitutes a hinge text in the sense that it both looks back, reinforcing 1 :4-16, and looks ahead anticipating 4: 1-4... the fish’s belly is a new and unique environment in the narrative. Thus far the narrative has moved from dry land to ship to the depths of the sea—a geographical movement that, in the Semitic worldview, symbolizes transition from the orderly world of human habitation to the disorderly and inhospitable realm of chaos and death. The fish, however, functions as a means of deliverance and transportation from the murky depths back to the orderly realm of dry land. In this respect, the fish is the antithesis of the ship, which carried Jonah from the orderly realm of dry land out to the chaotic, deadly sea. Correspondingly, Jonah’s disposition and activity in the fish is the antithesis of his disposition and activity on the ship. Whereas Jonah pays out of his own pocket for passage on the ship, the journey in the fish back to land and life is free, courtesy of YHWH. Whereas Jonah sleeps deeply in the innards of the ship, in the belly of the fish he is alert. Whereas Jonah is reticent and ‘prayerless’ on board is a negative, transitional environment belonging to Jonah’s rebellious flight. It carries Jonah away from YHWH’s presence and, therefore, away from the well-ordered realm of human habitation and divine-human communion. The fish, however, is an instrument of YHWH’s salvation and a symbol of his free, undeserved grace.<sup>7</sup>

Life at its’ best is found in God’s provision of salvation.

NEXT BIBLE STUDY NOON IN THE CHAPEL

July 11 – STAFF BIBLE STUDY

<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Jon 2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>6</sup> Brannan, R., & Loken, I. (2014). *The Lexham Textual Notes on the Bible* (Jon 2:4). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>7</sup>Youngblood, Kevin, Jonah: *God’s Scandalous Mercy*,94-95

