

Jonah 2:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

Analysis

From the depths of the fish, Jonah finally prays: "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly." The Hebrew vayyitpallel Yonah el-YHWH Eloahav mimei hadagah (וַיַּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֶל-יְהוָה מִמֵּן הַדָּגָה) marks Jonah's first prayer in the book—he didn't pray when fleeing, or on the ship, or when thrown overboard. Only from inside the fish does he call on God.

"Prayed unto the LORD his God" (vayyitpallel... el-YHWH Eloahav) uses the reflexive hitpallel (התקפַּלְלָה), intensive form indicating earnest, heartfelt prayer. The possessive "his God" shows restored relationship—despite rebellion, Yahweh remains Jonah's covenant God. This demonstrates a crucial truth: God doesn't abandon His rebellious children but pursues and disciplines them until they return (Hebrews 12:5-11).

"Out of the fish's belly" (mimei hadagah, מִמֵּן הַדָּגָה) locates prayer in the most unlikely place—inside a sea creature's digestive system. Yet God hears from there as readily as from the temple. Psalm 139:8 declares: "If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." No place is too remote, no condition too desperate, for God's presence and help. Jonah's prayer (verses 2-9) is largely composed of phrases from various Psalms—even in extremity, Scripture shaped his prayer.

The fish becomes tomb and womb—place of death that births new life. Jonah thought he was finished, yet God preserved him for renewed mission. This prefigures Christ's tomb and resurrection—death couldn't hold Him, and He

emerged to fulfill His mission. It also illustrates that God's discipline serves redemptive purposes—bringing us to the end of ourselves so we'll return to Him.

Historical Context

Jonah son of Amittai prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kings 14:25), around 780-760 BC. God commanded him to preach repentance to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria—the brutal empire that would later destroy Israel (722 BC). Assyrian kings were notorious for extreme cruelty, boasting in their inscriptions about impalement, flaying, and mass deportations. For an Israelite prophet, preaching salvation to Assyria was like asking a Holocaust survivor to evangelize Nazi Germany. Jonah's flight to Tarshish (opposite direction) reveals both ethnic prejudice and theological confusion about God's mercy extending to pagan nations. When Nineveh repented and God relented, Jonah became angry, preferring their destruction. The book concludes with God's gentle rebuke, revealing His compassion for all people.

The book of Jonah stands as a rebuke to narrow nationalism and an anticipation of the gospel's universal scope. Jesus referenced Jonah's three days in the fish as a sign of His death and resurrection, while condemning His generation for not repenting like Nineveh did (Matthew 12:39-41). The early church struggled with the same prejudice Jonah displayed when Gentiles began believing in Christ.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Jonah 2:1 deepen your understanding of God's character, particularly His holiness, justice, and mercy?
2. What specific attitudes, thought patterns, or behaviors does this verse call you to examine and change in light of the gospel?

3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and His redemptive work, and how should that shape your worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּתְפֵּל לְיְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִמְּעָן אֶלְפָתָן בְּצֶבָּה:
prayed Then Jonah unto the LORD his God belly out of the fish's
H6419 H3124 H413 H3068 H430 H4578 H1710

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 91:15 (Parallel theme): He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

Job 13:15 (Parallel theme): Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

Isaiah 26:16 (Prayer): LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.

Psalms 50:15 (Parallel theme): And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

James 5:13 (Prayer): Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

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