

## jonah : God's outrageous grace

### jonah 2

Last time we saw God call Jonah to preach against the great city of Ninevah. We saw Jonah's disobedience, because he hated the idea that God might warn and possibly even spare Ninevah. So he ran away, hiring a boat to take him to the other end of the Mediterranean. But we also saw God's power and sovereignty as he caused a great storm which only died down once the sailors had thrown Jonah overboard.

The opening verses of the book of Jonah ask big questions about God's power and His grace, and what our response should be. In chapter 2, we see how Jonah responds to the punishment and the grace he receives.

#### chapter 2

Chapter 1 ended with Jonah being swallowed by a huge fish (v17), where he stayed for three days. Even this was an act of grace – God did not abandon Jonah to his fate, but provided a means of escape.

Chapter 2 is a prayer in the form of a poem, apparently composed by Jonah while he was inside the fish. Verse 1 says that Jonah called to “his God.” Despite Jonah's disobedience, there is still a relationship there, and the word “his” highlights that.

Verse 2 gives us an overview of what this poetic prayer is about. Jonah called out to God and he answered. (Notice how verse two says the same thing twice in two slightly different ways. This is called “parallelism,” which is a common feature of Hebrew poetry – see how often you spot it next time you read the Psalms). Jonah is in a distressing situation, caused by his disobedience, but he is confident that God will rescue him. Jonah was as good as dead, but he called to God and God listened.

The rest of the prayer is in three parts – v3-4, v5-6 and v7-9. Each part begins with Jonah's hopeless situation, but ends on a note of hope as Jonah turns back to his God.

#### v3-4

Notice who Jonah says threw him into the sea. Although the sailors physically threw him overboard, Jonah knows that God is behind it all. The language in v3 is supposed to communicate the idea of the vast ocean being completely overwhelming. And as the “waves and breakers” sweep over him, Jonah knows they belong to God.

Jonah realises that his punishment is from God – he says “I have been banished from your sight.” But he also knows there is the hope of deliverance. He says he will look again towards God's temple, which is a sign of God's presence with his people. In this horrible situation, he will remember God's faithfulness and will trust him. Jonah doesn't doubt God's grace – he never did. Remember, he refused to preach to Ninevah because he was sure God would rescue them. But now he's relying on the grace he didn't want the Ninevites to receive.

#### v5-6

Imagine being in Jonah's situation – how would you feel? He sank so far that the seaweed on the seabed was wrapped around his head. He really was engulfed and threatened by the water, and it must have seemed as if there was no chance of rescue. (It was commonly thought that mountains were connected to the seabed). Jonah says “the earth barred me in forever” – he was trapped at the bottom of the ocean with no escape. But God rescued him and brought him up from the pit. He was facing certain death, but God rescued him. The fish itself is part of God's rescue.

#### v7-9

At his lowest point, on the verge of death, Jonah turns to God in prayer. He gives thanks for the fact that he knows the Living God, and that he doesn't depend on worthless idols. Instead, he intends to renew his commitment to God by offering sacrifices. It has the sense of being an ongoing commitment, rather than a one-off sacrifice should he get out of this mess. And he isn't bargaining with God – he knows this is the right response to an all-powerful yet gracious God. He has been rescued by the fish, and he trusts that God will bring him through. So he looks forward to worshipping God, when he will be able to declare, “salvation comes from the Lord.”

#### v10

The final verse goes back to the prose of the main story, and Jonah is vomited onto dry land at the Lord's command.

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# questions

Remember, these are **suggestions** – feel free to add, remove or change them!

#### v1&2

**discover** How do these verses talk about the relationship between Jonah and God?

**understand** What effect did Jonah's circumstances have on his relationship with God?

**respond** What is your first response to distressing circumstances? Is it the same as Jonah's?

#### v3-4

**discover** Who does Jonah hold responsible for his situation?

**understand** How does Jonah deal with his situation? Is this surprising?

**respond**

#### v5-6

**discover** How does Jonah's description of his situation make you feel?

**understand**

**respond**

#### v7-9&10

**discover**

**understand** Why does Jonah start talking about idols? How does his situation compare?

**respond** Do we ever fall into worshipping things other than God? What is the warning to us from Jonah?

### where does Jesus fit in?

This whole chapter is full of the idea that God delivers his people from the just punishment for their sin. God's grace is obvious as he delivers Jonah from certain death. This should immediately make us think about the way God has graciously delivered us from death through the Lord Jesus.

#### Did this really happen?

This is possibly one of the oddest events in the Bible – a man living in a fish for 3 days. So did it really happen, or is this just a colourful story?

There is lots of speculation about what species of fish could swallow a man. Some believe the events are impossible, and they are content that the book of Jonah is just a story which teaches a moral lesson. However, if we believe in an all powerful God, then the events could easily have happened, and there is no real reason to believe they didn't.