

Jonah: The Grumpiest Missionary

Week 4: Chapter 2:1-6

Last week, we left Jonah in the belly of the fish/whale with one more question to answer in connection with the last sentence of Jonah 1:17 - *And Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.*

1. Turn to **Matthew 12:38-41** to see the significance of this timeframe as voiced by Jesus himself. Does anything strike you in these verses?
 - a. Fun fact: Jonah is the only prophet to whom Jesus compares himself. There will be more connections to Jesus as we get into Jonah's prayer today.

Verse 1

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו מִמְעַי הַדָּגָה׃

So Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

2. We don't get a timeframe for when this prayer happened ("After the second night, Jonah prayed..."). It could be that after some stewing—and realizing that he is miraculously NOT being digested—Jonah is moved to pray to his God. Let's say, for the sake of discussion, that Jonah did sit for at least two days before praying. What kinds of thoughts or questions would be going through your mind if you were in Jonah's place?
 - a. Perhaps these are similar thoughts and questions we have when we are at a crossroads in life; or when we have a near-death experience; or our life "flashes before our eyes."

Verse 2

וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֶל־יְהוָה וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי׃

And he said, "I called out from the distress that was mine (my distress) to the Lord and he answered me. From the belly of Sheol I cried out for help—you heard my voice.

3. If this prayer sounds familiar, that's because similar words are found in the Psalms.
 - a. **Psalms 18:6** - In my distress I called to the Lord. To my God I cried out. He heard my voice from his temple. My cry came before him. It reached his ears.
 - b. **Psalms 120:1** - In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.
 - c. **Psalms 86:13** - For great is your mercy toward me, and you have delivered my soul from "the lowest hell." (We'll talk about "the lowest hell" in a little bit)
 - d. We could simply say that this is the Spirit working to inspire a similar message in the psalmists and Jonah. And that is certainly true. There is likely another factor at play, though. What do you think that is? *Hint: it's something we still encourage among Christians.*
 - e. This is true for much of Jonah's prayer—you can find connections from each part to other parts of the Scriptures, particularly the Psalms. That tells us a few things about prayer:

- i. It is simply repeating back to God what he has said to us in his Word.
 - ii. A person who reads their Bible will have prayers that are more “in tune” with the Word of God.
 - iii. Prayer, most importantly, connects us to God; it also connects us to the experiences of believers past, present, and future. As you pray about a hardship, you can know that someone else has used those same words in a similar way. You are not alone, even if the person whose experience you share is separated by decades or centuries.
4. The question of Sheol—the grave, the depths, the underworld. This term could refer to hell, but that’s not always the case. In general, it’s the place where people go down to—the depths. There are almost always connotations of death involved, too. It could just be the depths of suffering or a near-death experience, much like Jonah would have gone through in the sea. This word will come up again in a few verses.
 5. Jonah is still inside the fish when he offers this prayer—rescued from the sea, but not yet safe on dry ground. How, then, does he speak in the past tense, saying that the Lord “answered” and “heard” him? Look at verses like **Isaiah 53:4-6** or **Romans 8:30** for a similar thought.

Verse 3

וּתְשִׁלֵּנִי מִצִּוְלָהּ בְּלִבָּב יַמִּים וְנָהָר יִסְבְּבֵנִי כָּל־מְשַׁפְּרִיךְ וְגִלְיָד עָלַי עָפְרוּ:

For you hurled me to the depths, into the heart of the sea and the currents surrounded me; all your breakers and you waves swept over me.

The word for depths here is not Sheol. While some might say it refers to the physical depths rather than emotional/spiritual depths, that seems to be too strong an assertion.

6. Again, these words are seemingly taken right from **Psalm 42:7** – “Deep calls to deep in the roar of your rapids. All your breakers and your waves have swept over me.” And **Psalm 88:6** – “You have put me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the depths.”
 - a. While Jonah would certainly be talking about the physical water that was surrounding him, this kind of picture language matches many prophecies, illustrations, and songs throughout the Bible. For instance, the first words of this verse (וּתְשִׁלֵּנִי מִצִּוְלָהּ) speak about the Lord hurling Jonah into the depths. Physically, God was responsible for Jonah being thrown into the actual sea; God was also responsible for the misfortune that had come into Jonah’s life, even though Jonah was the one who ran away in the first place. This really gets down to the place of evil within the plan of God. How would you explain that to someone? Perhaps verses like **Deuteronomy 32:39** and **Amos 3:6** would be helpful.
 - b. Which is most accurate? God wants evil things to happen OR God allows evil things to happen OR God causes evil things to happen. Discuss.

7. This came up last week, but it's worth touching on again. There are some who say that there's no way Jonah could have survived a torrential storm and being swallowed by a fish, no matter how big it is. So, they label Jonah as a parable or myth—something that is worthwhile for the moral of the story but didn't actually happen. There are also those who, a bit like we did last week, bend over backwards to prove that men can be swallowed by sea beasts and survive. They do this to disprove those who view Jonah as fable by showing how God can do miracles. Imagine you're in a discussion with people of both views; how would you address the points each person is making?

8. Jonah is such an example of how we tend to operate with God. We may not think we need God when things are going well; we'll do things our own way but, as soon as things go poorly, we turn to God. God calls us to do that (**Psalm 50:15** – Call upon me in the day of trouble; **1 Peter 5:7** – Cast all your anxiety on him). However, what reminder is here for us in regard to our prayer life?

Verse 4

וְאָנֹכִי אֶמְרָתִי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ אַךְ אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל-הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ:

So I said, "I have been cast out from your sight (lit. "from in front of your eyes"); yet I will look again (lit. "I will add to looking") toward the temple of your holiness (or "your holy temple").

- Cast out (נִגְרַשְׁתִּי)– Same word is used for Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden of Eden
 - The “I will add to looking” is (אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט) a unique Hebrew feature. It's their way of saying something will happen again.
 - “Holy temple” (הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ) is literally translated as “temple of your holiness.” It ends up being the same thing. The temple was where God's holiness dwelled. Praying toward the temple or looking toward the temple was a sign of hope and a way for people to remind themselves where their hope and strength come from.
9. Jonah does not sound like someone who wanted to get away from the presence of the Lord not too long ago. Some translations say, “I have been banished” to get the connotation of “cast out” across in our language. For what reasons does being out of God's sight bother Jonah now?

Psalm connections to verse 4:

- **Psalm 5:7** - But as for me, by your great mercy I will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple with reverence for you.
- **Psalm 18:6** - In my distress I called to the Lord. To my God I cried out. He heard my voice from his temple. My cry came before him. It reached his ears.
- **Psalm 27:4** - One thing I ask from the Lord. This is what I seek: that I live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple.
- **Psalm 31:22** - In my alarm I said, “I am cut off from before your eyes!” But you heard the sound of my cry for mercy when I cried out to you.

Verse 5

אַפְפוּנִי מֵיַם עַד-נְפֶשׁ תְּהוּם יִסְבְּגֵנִי סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי:

Waters encompassed me at my throat; the deep surrounded me. Reeds (seaweed) were bound to my head.

This is an odd use of נְפֶשׁ which is that “life force” word I talked about last week. It’s the word that is translated “throat” here. The idea is easy to get but translating it in a way that makes sense and grasps the full meaning of the word is difficult to do.

Psalm connections to verse 5:

- **Psalm 18:4** - The ropes of death entangled me. Floodwaters of destruction rolled over me.
- **Psalm 69:1-2, 14-15** - Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.
²I sink into the deep mud, where there is no place to stand. I have entered deep waters, and the rapids rush over me. ¹⁴Rescue me from the mud, so I do not sink. Let me escape from those who hate me and from the deep waters. ¹⁵Do not let the rapids rush over me. Do not let the deep swallow me up. Do not let the pit close its mouth over me.

Verse 6

לְקִצְבֵי הָרִים יָרַדְתִּי הָאָרֶץ בְּרִתְיָהּ בְּעַדִּי לְעוֹלָם וַתַּעַל מִשַּׁחַת תִּנִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי:

To the extremities of the mountains I have gone down; the earth, her bars were upon me forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, Lord my God.

- Extremities of the mountains – The word for extremity is not used anywhere else in Hebrew. But it’s the place where hardly anyone can go or touch. So “roots” of the mountains works well.
- The phrase about the earth and her bars does not have a verb in Hebrew. This often happens and you simply rely on the context. The EHV does a nice job getting the idea across, “The earth locked me behind its bars forever.”

10. While it might have been brought out in previous conversation, let’s make sure we’re talking about it here. Put into your own words what Jonah is praying about.

- a. In what circumstances could someone use the words of Jonah’s prayer as their own?

Psalm connections to verse 6:

- **Psalm 18:5** - The ropes of the grave wrapped around me. The traps of death threatened me.
- **Psalm 28:1** - O Lord, I keep calling to you. My Rock, do not be deaf to me.
If you remain silent to me, I will become like those who go down to the pit.
- **Psalm 30:3** - Lord, you snatched my life from the grave.
You kept me alive so I did not go down into the pit.

Closing Prayer CW 812 Christ, the Sure and Steady Anchor v. 2

**Christ, the sure and steady anchor while the tempest rages on—
when temptation claims the battle and it seems the night has won,
deeper still then goes the anchor, though I justly stand accused;
I will hold fast to the anchor; it shall never be removed. Amen.**