

Biblical Exegesis

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Exegesis Research Paper

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### God's Salvation Personally Believed In Jonah 2

The book of Jonah is an amazing book that describes God's salvation despite humanity and even prophet's failures to turn back to God. It is a narrative fitted in between the major and minor prophets, and it fits also in the whole canonicity of the Bible leading to the perfect story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jonah is only a foreshadow of the true and perfect prophet, Jesus Christ. It implicitly yet powerful displays God's grace and salvation throughout its story as personally received and believed upon in chapter 2 of Jonah.

The focus of study for this paper is Jonah 2. It takes up one fourth of the book, and it consists only of a prayer that Jonah expresses to God. "Apparently, Jonah did nothing for three days and three nights in the belly of the fish; it was only after that period was over that he prayed the prayer following" (Enduring Word). It is first important to note the setting of where this prayer takes place. It seems that Jonah is at the end of himself. Chapter 2 opens with, "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish," (Jonah 2:1) The conjunction "Then" is so important because it most likely shows how Jonah was at the end of himself when confessing this prayer.

It is important to also note the other Old Testament references Jonah uses to express his cry of prayer. Verses to Psalm 18:6, Psalm 42:7, and Psalm 31:22 are alluded to as Jonah expresses his calling out to the LORD in distress, out of the belly of Sheol God hearing his voice, the deeps and seas surrounding and passing over Jonah, and God hearing Jonah's voice throughout it all. A commentator from Working Preacher notes, "Rather, it is something like a theological short story; and this means that the really difficult thing to believe in the Book of Jonah is that God cares about the Assyrians, a brutal and hated enemy that was responsible for destroying the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE (see the Book of Nahum)." This comment is in reference to why many people have a difficult time processing how a fish, whale can literally swallow Jonah up and a person survive that kind of physical situation.

While the book of Jonah's main purpose is to show the beauty of God's salvation despite faithfulness on the part of creation and how it is a historical narrative, the physical details in the story are just as true as the theological counterparts. Our God is a God who is above creation and our spiritual brokenness as is evident throughout the book, and it would do justice to also believe in the physical settings of the book. Verse 3 is pivotal in the book of Jonah. The conjunction "For" is a further description of the prayer that Jonah begins in the belly of the fish in verses 1 and 2. Jonah comes to the end of himself in verse 1 and starts praying in verse 2. Verse 3 shows the depths of depravity that Jonah was rescued from with the usage of the conjunction "For" in verse 3. Before salvation come, Jonah was cast into the deep, the heart of the seas with the flood surrounding him, and God's waves and billows passing over him. It is important to note that verse 3 uses "your waves and your billows" because it shows that God is the one who commands and is in complete control of nature.

Then Jonah's heart cry of genuine repentance is uttered in verse 4 with the conjunction "Then". Only when Jonah came to end of himself in the belly of a fish, cried out to God, and was thrown to utter despair in the depths of the oceans, Jonah confesses, "I am driven away from your sight" (Jonah 2:4). But with this confession it is tied with a semi colon and another conjunction "yet" that ties Jonah's genuine cry of repentance with God's holy temple. Blue letter Bible states, "That which he supports himself with the hope of is that he shall yet look again towards God's holy temple." This holy temple is the same holy temple that King David was familiar with in the Psalms, and it is this very holy temple that Jonah refers to for salvation. This is a stark contrast to the belly of Sheol. Sheol was a dark place where there was no God, and people went for the after life devoid of God's purpose and presence forever.

Where there seems to be a glimmer of hope, the prayer continues with Jonah's deplete and broken situations in verses 5 and 6. Jonah continues to describe how the waters are overtaking him. "The world of the dead was like a prison with many bars. Nobody could ever hope to escape" (Easy English Bible). Jonah elaborates this world of the dead where no one can ever hope or think to escape with his metaphors to the waters, deeps, weeds, and bars closing, surrounding, wrapping, and bringing him down to the land. But in the midst of this darkness, there is another semi colon with a conjunction "yet" where Jonah confesses the salvation and hope of the Lord. "yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God" (Jonah 2:6b). This is the second reference of hoping in God's salvation in the middle of Jonah's prayer. The first comes out in verse 4 where Jonah mentions God's holy temple. Now again, in the midst of his darkness, he brings up his life being brought up from the pit by "O LORD my God".

Jonah now connects these two hopeful references from verses 4 and 6 in verse 7 now. He writes, "When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you,

into your holy temple” (Jonah 2:7). The beginning of verse 7 shows everything that has been happening: how Jonah’s life has been fainting away. But right after that, there is a comma that expresses how Jonah remembered the LORD. And his prayer came to God, in God’s holy temple. The holy temple and God’s presence are brought into one sentence to show that salvation is found in the LORD and is found in God’s holy temple. “Jonah reflects on the favour of God to him, when he sought to God, and trusted in him in his distress” (Christianity.com). This is exactly what is happening in this section. Jonah reflects on God’s favor and how God has wrought salvation into his life.

He contrasts the salvation of the LORD with those who pay attention and give hope to idols with the conjunction “Those” in verse 8. Jonah compares and contrasts God’s salvation with the vain hope of idols by comparing idolatry to the opposite of God’s “steadfast love” (Jonah 2:8). What is brought to idols, Jonah now brings to God with the “voice of thanksgiving” being sacrifice and “vowing” to pay what only belongs to God in verse 9. Now the main idea of the whole chapter 2 and of the whole book is clearly stated, “Salvation belongs to the LORD!” (Jonah 2:9b) When this is recognized and powerfully stated, the chapter ends. And the book moves on in its story because the author, main character, and author’s audience now has seen where salvation truly belongs: Only to the LORD! “And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land” (Jonah 2:10). The LORD is only able to command the fish to spit Jonah out now because everyone within and outside of the story sees God’s salvation being clearly worked out by Him and Him alone. Giving “highest priority to the immediate context when determining the meaning of your passage” shows this main idea being proved in this chapter and throughout the whole book (Grasping God’s Word 153).

God's salvation being worked out is clearly shown throughout the whole book of Jonah, and God shows that He is the one in control of everything- physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. The book of Jonah starts with God's words being given to Jonah, but Jonah being immediately faithless to God's command. It takes extreme measures to thwart Jonah's plan by hurling him into the sea, having a big fish make him come to the end of himself, and Jonah finally seeing, realizing, and fully confessing God's salvation through the prayer in chapter 2. There are a lot of theological lessons to be learned from the book of Jonah and especially from chapter 2. First, God will never give up on his plans for our lives. Even if it takes a big fish or life circumstances crumbling completely before us to humble us before God's grace, love, and salvation, God will do it. God will accept us at any time even if it is forced because God is bigger than our failures. Some may feel like they can only turn to God in their righteousness, but we see that true righteousness can only be given, realized, and received as in the prayer of Jonah in chapter 2. This can encourage us to approach God even in the worst and most sinful times of our lives to experience God's true salvation being worked out into our lives.

Another theological teaching and application have to do with where God can be approached. It is at the least, definitely, through two ways: Scripture and God's holy temple. Jonah directly refers to the prayers of David found in Psalms to bring relevance and a voice to his troubling situation in chapter 2. The holy temple is contrasted with the belly of Sheol. And Jonah confesses that is where he finds God. As New Testament believers, we do not need to go to a physical holy temple to experience and find God now. Just like how Jonah refers to the holy temple but is in the belly of a fish when confessing this prayer, we can have faith in God's presence just like how Jonah did through the holy temple through our faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This shows that genuine faith is not a physical place, but it is the posture of

our hearts before our God. God looks at our hearts, and we must check our hearts more than our physical behaviors when approaching God.

There are so many theological teachings and applications from this prayer, but one last thing to be highlighted is how when Jonah realizes, accepts, and believes God's salvation, he gives a true sacrifice and vow which is his thanksgiving and commitment to God. This shows that even in the Old Testament there is God's grace and true personal relationship with God from the bottom of our hearts through genuine thanksgiving and whole commitment to God in our lives. It is when this is personally realized that God speaks to the big fish in our lives and spits us back unto His plans for us: His salvation. Chapter 2 of Jonah is very important in experiencing this personal salvation of God in our lives because it is not until Jonah gets and accepts it personally for his life that his life moves on. In a similar way, God desires that we experience salvation personally. It is not enough that we intellectually know about God and His salvation. We must also come to a personal realization and acceptance of God's salvation for us to fully experience God, His salvation, and His plans for our lives.

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