

phrases as 'the day after to-morrow,' 'the day before yesterday.' (I Sam. 30:1; I Sam. 30:12; Esth. 4:16)." K & D say, "The three days and three nights are not to be regarded as fully three times twenty (four) hours, but are to be interpreted according to Hebrew usage, as signifying that Jonah was vomited up again on the third day after he had been swallowed (cf. Esth. 4:16 with v. 1 and Tob. 3:12, 13)." McGarvey, in "Jesus and Jonah," says, "It was the invariable custom of Hebrew writers to count a fraction of a year, or a day, at the beginning of a series and at the end of it, as each a year, or a day. This can be demonstrated by many examples . . . (I Kings 15:1, 2, 8, 9; 15:25, 28; 15:33; 16:6, 8, for years, and cf. Gen. 42:17-18; Esth. 4:16; 4:1; Acts 10:3, 7, 8, 9, 23, 24, 30; Matt. 27:63, 64 for days)." McGarvey points out that "After three days," and "on the third day," were simply equivalent colloquialisms of the Hebrew people (cf. Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:34 with Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Lk. 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46). If, then, Jesus could at one time say in strict compliance with Jewish usage, that he would rise *after three days*, He could with precisely the same meaning say that He would be in the grave *three days and three nights*. Neither assertion, says Mr. McGarvey, would be true according to modern usage, but both would be strictly true according to the usage of the Hebrews. For more study on this question see *The Gospel of John, Vol. II*, pg. 405-408, by Paul T. Butler, pub. College Press.

QUIZ

1. Where did Jonah get the idea that he should be cast into the sea?
2. Why didn't the seamen thus throw Jonah into the sea immediately?
3. What finally persuaded the seamen to throw him into the sea?
4. Make a list of the unique characteristics of the book of Jonah.
5. What did the sudden calming of the sea prove to the sailors?
6. Is the account of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish incredible? if not, why not?
7. What is the meaning of the phrase "three days and three nights?"

GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING TO GOD— THE PRAYER OF JONAH

TEXT: 2:1-6

- 1 Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly.
- 2 And he said, I called by reason of mine affliction unto Jehovah, And he answered me; Out of the belly of Sheol cried I, And thou heardest my voice.

- 3 For thou didst cast me into the depth, in the heart of the seas, And the flood was round about me; All thy waves and thy billows passed over me.
- 4 And I said, I am cast out from before thine eyes; Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.
- 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; The deep was round about me; The weeds were wrapped about my head.
- 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed upon me for ever; Yet hast thou brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my God.

QUERIES

- a. How could Jonah pray while in the belly of the fish?
- b. Where is "Sheol?"
- c. What does Jonah mean by "the bottoms of the mountains?"

PARAPHRASE

Then Jonah turned his heart and mind to the Lord his God and prayed from his heart in the belly of this great fish. He prayed, It was my affliction which caused me to call upon the Lord, and the Lord heard me! When I was in the embrace of death and the very grave itself I cried unto the Lord and You, O Lord, heard my plea. You cast me down into the very depths of the sea and I was surrounded by the waters. The raging waves and billows you sent to arrest me, Lord, passed over me. Then I realized that I had been banished from Your protecting love and care because of my sin; yet in faith I look forward to the hope that I would once again come into Your presence to worship You in Your holy temple. Yes, I was so sure that the sea was my grave that I despaired even in my soul. I sank beneath the waves and death was very near. The waters closed above me; the seaweed wrapped itself around my head. I sank to the very bottom of the sea where the foundations of the mountains are found. The way back to the earth was barred to me as a door of escape is bolted; yes, O Lord, My God, you rescued my life and brought me up from the very grave itself!

SUMMARY

Jonah's "soul was sorrowful even unto death" (cf. Matt. 26:38) and he "despaired even of life itself" (cf. II Cor. 1:8). He was so close to death that he considered himself actually dead. Yet the Lord delivered him back to life.

COMMENT

According to the destructive "higher critics" of the Old Testament this book we know as the book of Jonah was written by an unknown composer who took legends and mythological fairy-tales and formed it into the present book of Jonah. In the course of time this composition is supposed to have received certain changes, the most notable of which was the inclusion of the "thanksgiving song" (2:3-10) with 2:2 as an introduction to this song. Those who believe that chapter 2 contains a psalm from a different source than the rest of the book of Jonah give the following arguments:

- a. In 2:1 it is said that Jonah prayed, but what actually follows is not a prayer but a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance. And furthermore, they say, this psalm which suggests its connection with Jonah's experiences. One critic was sure that verse 5 excluded the idea that Jonah was in the fish's belly, because "weeds do not grow in a whale's belly."
- b. The critics say, lastly, that the text reads smoothly *without* this psalm, if 2:10 be placed immediately after 2:1, this proves it is not a part of the original.

Dr. Edward J. Young, in *Introduction To The Old Testament*, pp. 280-282, gives a conclusive defense of the unity of the book of Jonah. We include here his defense of chapter 2:

- a. In the first place, if 2:2-9 be removed from the book of Jonah, the symmetry of the book is most certainly destroyed.
- b. There is no conflict between the statement that Jonah prayed, and a psalm of thanksgiving—for is not thanksgiving of the very essence of prayer??
- c. Of course weeds do not grow in whale's bellies, but this is *not* a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance from a whale's belly, but of deliverance from drowning in the depths of the sea.
- d. The prayer *does not* take place *before* the deliverance when we realize Jonah was saved when he was swallowed by the great fish and that his prayer was made then.
- e. That there is nothing in the psalm which connects it with Jonah's experience is so absurd as to merit no answer!

There are some who explain the prayer as simply a fragmented collection of the book of Psalms interpolated here in Jonah's book by an unknown redactor (editor). Moeller makes the following comparisons:

*Jonah 2**Psalms*

3b	18:7; 120:1
4b	18:6; 30:4
5	42:8
6	31:23; 5:8
7	18:8; 69:2f
8	18:17; 30:4; 103:4
9	142:4; 143:4; 18:7; 5:8
10	88:3; 31:7; 26:7; 50:14, 23; 42:5; 116:17

This is no evidence, whatsoever, for an unknown redactor interpolating excerpts from the book of Psalms into the book of Jonah. It is evidence that Jonah, the prophet of God, was a student of the Hebrew Scriptures and had written the word of God upon his heart and when in extreme circumstances was able to lift himself up by having hidden this Word of God in his heart.

v. 1-2 THEN JONAH PRAYED . . . I CALLED BY REASON OF MINE APPLICATION UNTO JEHOVAH . . . AND HE ANSWERED ME . . . It was because of his affliction that Jonah was led to cry unto God. This is the purpose of chastening. Our Heavenly Father knows that we have need of chastening and of endurance (cf. Heb. 10:32-39; 12:3-11). We should rejoice when it comes (cf. James 1:2-4). It is a school wherein we are trained (cf. II Cor. 1:3-11). It is only when we see our own helplessness and hopelessness that we are able to turn to God (II Cor. 1:8-9). It is when we are *made* weak that we become strong (cf. II Cor. 12:7-10). The salvation of Jonah was the affliction the Lord placed upon him.

Prayer is "an act of worship which covers all the attitudes of the soul in its approach to God." Some think there are certain postures necessary for prayer but the Bible shows by example that men may pray in any posture; kneeling (I Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5); standing (Nehemiah 9:5; Lk. 18:13); bowing down upon the earth with face between the knees (I Kings 18:42); lying in a sick bed and turning the face to the wall (II Kings 20:2); falling prostrate upon the ground (Matt. 26:39); walking along or standing in public (Jn. 11:41-42; 12:28-28). Prayer is more an attitude than it is a formula or a ritual. Jonah could easily have prayed in the belly of the great fish without even opening his mouth. We are to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17) and the only way this can be done is to be in an attitude of praise, thanksgiving, supplication and dependence upon God at all times whether, silent or aloud, whether lying down, sitting up or standing, wherever we may be.

Sheol is the Hebrew word usually translated in the Old Testament "hell." It is also translated "pit" or "grave." The context helps to determine the best translation. The etymology is uncertain. It may have been derived from a root word meaning "a hollow place." *Sheol* means "underworld," or "nether-world," and is equivalent to *Hades* in the New Testament. In fact, the Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament, uses the word *Hades* in Jonah 2:2. Jonah cried out from the very grave!

v. 3-4 . . . THOU DIDST CAST ME INTO THE DEPTH . . . THE FLOOD WAS ROUND ABOUT ME . . . I AM CAST OUT FROM BEFORE THINE EYES; YET I WILL LOOK AGAIN TOWARD THY HOLY TEMPLE. Jonah was as good as dead! He had resigned himself to it! As far as he was concerned there was no possibility of saving himself. And this is exactly where God wanted him! One of the great paradoxes of God is that we must die before we can live (cf. Jn. 12:20-26).

Jonah had first to realize his estrangement from the Father before he could in all humility and dependent faith turn to the Father for help. Jonah, the "Prodigal," recognized this when he said, "I am cast out from before thine eyes." But then Jonah's heart turned to God's Word for its "great and exceeding precious promises" and in faith cried out that he would, God willing, be restored to the presence of Jehovah.

v. 5-6 THE WATERS COMPASSED ME ABOUT, EVEN TO THE SOUL . . . THE WEEDS WERE WRAPPED ABOUT MY HEAD . . . BOTTOMS OF THE MOUNTAINS . . . EARTH . . . BARS CLOSED UPON ME . . . YET HAST THOU BROUGHT UP MY LIFE FROM THE PIT . . . The weeds are probably the reeds and grass, the vegetation on the very bottom of the sea. Jonah was down as far as one could go! The word translated *bottoms* is from a verb which means to "cut off," or to "shear". It signifies the extreme end. Jonah was at the very bottom of the sea where it seems as if the very foundations of the earth are to be found. That he lived through this experience is indeed a miracle when one considers the short time it takes to drown and the death that can come from extreme pressures of the oceanic depths. The "bars" of the earth had clanged into place and he would not be permitted access there now. Jonah thought of the earth as a walled city with its gate shut and locked with a bar, preventing him from ever again entering. From all outward appearances, and as far as he could determine, he would never again see the earth.

Yet the Lord did bring up his life. He was resurrected from the grave—saved out from death. Thus he became a sign to his generation and a type of the Messiah Who was a Sign to His generation and all

generations. We shall deal more with Jonah's typical relation to the Messiah later.

QUIZ

1. Show that chapter 2 is not an interpolation by an unknown editor.
2. Why is it possible that Jonah's words may be quotations of the Psalms?
3. What purpose does affliction serve?
4. What is Sheol?
5. How extreme was the condition of Jonah in the sea?

GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING TO GOD— THE PROMISE OF JONAH

TEXT: 2:7-9

- 7 When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah; And my prayer came in unto thee, into thy holy temple.
- 8 They that regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy.
- 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of Jehovah.

QUERIES

- a. What does Jonah mean by his "soul fainting within him?"
- b. Who are the "they" of verse 8?
- c. What had Jonah vowed that he felt obligated to pay?

PARAPHRASE

When I found no strength in myself to save myself, I remembered the promises and power of the Lord to save. Then I turned to God in prayer and my earnest prayer went to You, Lord, in Your holy temple. Salvation and deliverance are found only in Jehovah and those who worship false gods have turned their backs on the only hope they have for mercy. As for me, I will worship only You, O God! I will give thanks to you with my lips and by obediently keeping the vows and commitments I have determined in my heart to do. The only salvation is to be found in such a relationship to Jehovah!

SUMMARY

Jonah's experience leaves him with only one place to turn for salvation—the merciful promises of God. To Him Jonah turns pledging himself to keep the vows he made to God.

COMMENT

v. 7 . . . MY SOUL FAINTED WITHIN ME, I REMEMBERED JEHOVAH; . . . As we pointed out earlier, only when a man is convinced that he cannot save himself—that all other ways, systems and helps are insufficient for his needs—only then will he turn to God. It is the authoritative statement of God's Word that all men are lost and condemned in sin unless they believe and obey God's Word. The primary objective of Christians then is to convince men of the authority of God's Word, the Bible. This has to be done by presenting the empirical, historical evidences that the Bible is the Word of God. God, by providential acts upon the course of events, oftentimes brings men and women to know their impotency and insufficiency. Then they are ready to turn to Him, but if they do not accept the Bible as His word, how can they trust in the promises of it? Jonah knew the Lord—he knew the Word of the Lord was true. Now he realizes his insufficiency so he turns back to the promise of the Lord. He prays in his most extreme hour of need and finds the peace which passes understanding. Christians have an even surer "confidence" and are commanded to "come boldly" to the throne of grace (cf. Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-25).

v. 8 THEY THAT REGARD LYING VANITIES FORSAKE THEIR OWN MERCY. Jonah is here refering to the heathen who worship idols. When men refuse to have God in their knowledge they become vain in their reasoning (cf. Rom. 1:18ff; Eph. 2:1ff). The Bible speaks of the gods and idols of man's invention as "vain," (cf. Isa. 40:18-23; 41:21-24; 44:6-20; Acts 17:22-29, etc.). The word translated "lying" means, literally, "a vapor" or "a breath." "Vanity" means empty, void, worthless, useless. The gods men invent are dumb, speechless, powerless, useless, false and deceitful! This is also true of religious, theological, philosophical systems invented by men which do not conform to the revealed will of God in the Bible. When men worship or put their hope in such gods and systems they "cut off their noses to spite their faces." They willingly turn their backs on the only hope of mercy which is found exclusively in Jehovah God. We do not believe Jonah had specific reference to the heathen sailors with whom he had just parted company. The statement of verse 8 forms what is known in Hebrew poetry as an antithetical parallelism. That is, Jonah is stating his praise for Jehovah God in the negative. Jonah's reference to the nothingness of dead idols was calculated to heighten his praise of the living God! In verse 9 he makes the positive statement of his parallelism of praise.

v. 9 . . . SACRIFICE UNTO THEE WITH THE VOICE OF THANKSGIVING . . . PAY THAT WHICH I HAVE VOWED . . . SALVATION IS OF JEHOVAH. The sacrifices with which God is most pleased, offered by Jonah here, are the fruit of lips given to praise Him and a life surrendered, committed to His service, (cf. *Psa.* 51:15-17; *Heb.* 13:15-16). Jonah's vow was not extraordinary or peculiar; it was common for Jews to make vows in time of need, with the expectation of keeping the promise after relief was granted. Vows were never regarded as a religious duty even in the O.T. (cf. *Deut.* 23:22). But when a vow was made God considered it binding (cf. *Deut.* 23:21-23; *Judg.* 11:35; *Eccl.* 5:4; *Psa.* 66:13). Vows *as such* are not required in the N.T. neither are they prohibited. Jesus mentions vows only to condemn the abuse of them (*Matt.* 15:4-6; *Mk.* 7:10-13; *Matt.* 23:16-22). But we most certainly must *surrender* and *commit* our entire being to the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Rom.* 12:1-2) and we must *confess with the mouth* that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father (cf. *Rom.* 10:9-10). If this is vowing then vow we must! The Hebrew word for "salvation" is the same word which we translated *Joshua* for it is a contraction of *Jehoshua* which means "Jehovah is salvation." The Greek rendering of *Joshua* is *Jesus*. Jonah now knew by experience that the help he needed could come only from the Lord!

QUIZ

1. What two things are necessary, oftentimes, before men will turn to the Lord?
2. Why are gods and systems of men "vain?"
3. With what type of sacrifices is God most pleased?
4. Should Christians make religious vows?

GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING TO GOD— THE PRESERVATION OF JONAH

TEXT: 2:10

- 10 And Jehovah spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

QUERIES

- a. How does God communicate with fish?
- b. Where did Jonah land?

PARAPHRASE

And the Lord commanded the fish to spit up Jonah on the beach and the fish obeyed the command of the Lord.

SUMMARY

Jonah is delivered with a second opportunity to carry out his commission from the Lord.

COMMENT

v. 10 . . . JEHOVAH SPAKE UNTO THE FISH, AND IT VOMITED OUT JONAH . . . God has set the whole creation, except man, to function through orderly laws and instincts imposed upon it by His will. Man He created in His own spiritual image with a will free to make moral choice. But God, impells by a certain divine and secret power, as Cyril says, animal and inanimate creation to do His will in a miraculous way when it serves His purpose to do so, (cf. Balaam's ass, Num. 22:21-30; the star of Bethlehem, Matt. 2:2, 9). The land upon which Jonah was "spewed out" is not known for certain but we assume it to be the coast of Palestine or Syria (K & D think it was near Joppa where he boarded the ship to run away).

QUIZ

1. Cite other incidents where God has imposed His will on animals to use them miraculously.
2. How long was Jonah's life preserved by God in the belly of this fish?

GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING WITH GOD— THE COMMISSION RENEWED

TEXT: 3:1-3

- 1 And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying,
- 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.
- 3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of three days' journey.

QUERIES

- a. Why was Jonah now ready to go to Nineveh?
- b. What is the meaning of a ". . . city of three days' journey"?