

# Salvation is of the Lord

## A Study from the Book of Jonah No. 2

*Please read Jonah 2*

Jonah had fled toward Tarshish in an effort to run away from the duty of going to Nineveh. In the first chapter of Jonah, Jonah demonstrated how God cannot be mocked by any man. The principle still stands that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). Because Jonah had tried to run away from God, he reaped a stay in the belly of a great fish. “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17). Jonah could not get away from God who is sovereign in His universe.

Can a person actually believe the story of Jonah? Those who believe in the God of the Bible have little difficulty in believing that such a miracle is possible. If the God of the Bible can raise up Jesus Christ from the dead, He can certainly perform this miracle. Indeed, God is a miracle—working God. He is still performing miracles every day, the greatest being that of transforming lost and dying sinners into children of righteousness. No one has gone so deeply in sin that he cannot be transformed. There is no life God cannot change.

Dr. Harry Rimmer told of his early years in the ministry when he worked in a rescue mission in California. Late one night, while on his way home, he saw a drunken man lying in the mud and filth of the gutter. Doctor Rimmer helped the drunk to his feet several times, but it seemed useless, for each time he fell to the ground in a heap. Finally Dr. Rimmer lifted the helpless derelict onto his back and headed for the mission. Soon the man was cleaned up and tucked into bed. Doctor Rimmer says that when he brought the drunk into the mission, his fellow workers told him that they had never seen a more disgusting sight.

The next day Doctor Rimmer talked to the man at length from the Scriptures. After listening carefully to the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, he fell on his knees and called on the Lord in humble repentance. Was his conversion real? Absolutely! It was another in the endless chain of the mighty miracles of God. It seems almost incredible, but six months later this man who had been rescued by the power of Christ from the lowest depths of sin, became the superintendent of that rescue mission.\*

Being cast into the sea did not bring an end to Jonah’s life or his ministry. The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And at the right moment, God had that fish swim into the right position so that when Jonah was thrown overboard, he was swallowed by the sea monster.

Jonah testified that he fainted in the monster’s belly, yet he was conscious at least a part of the time. He remembered how disobedient he had been to the call of God and the result of that disobedience. Jonah learned a valuable lesson which applies to us today. God never makes a mistake in what He calls us to do. We ought never to question His wisdom or love when He calls us to do certain things for Him.

Perhaps some of us have been following a path of disobedience, and calamities have come that seem to swallow us up. We must not despair. Jonah, out of the belly of the fish, cried to God, and God marvelously and miraculously delivered him.

## **1. Jonah's Prayer**

Jonah recognized that the hand of God was heavy upon him and that the billows of the waves, the storm, the belly of the fish, and all these things were due to the hand of God upon him. So he prayed to the Lord his God. Even though he had shifted into a reverse course, Jonah knew where to turn when he could go no further.

The Lord heard Jonah's prayer. Isn't it wonderful to note that even though Jonah had strayed from the Lord's directive, God still heard Jonah when he prayed? God will hear us too. He will always hear His children when we pray like this, regardless of what our circumstances might be. No matter where we are or what the conditions may be, God declares that we are to pray. He says "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1); "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17); "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6).

This prayer of Jonah's is a remarkable prayer. Jonah does not utter one petition for himself. He calls to God, and does not justify himself, but God. He recognizes that God is right in what He is doing. There is no distress about having been swallowed by a fish, nor any question about what his fate would be, nor any prayer for deliverance from the fish.

The prayer is honest. So often Christians come to the Lord trying to overlook some circumstances that He has caused, ignore some sin that He has highlighted, or obtain some request that He has already clearly rejected. Some of our prayers are attempts to get God to change His mind, but this should not be the primary purpose for prayer.

Jonah not only acknowledged his misery, he acknowledged that it was God who had caused it. Not circumstances! Not the mariners! It was "Thy billows," and "Thy waves." Jonah was in a desperate situation, and God was the One who had put him there.

## **2. Jonah's Repentance**

Repentance means a change of mind and a complete turn about. Jonah certainly needed both and that is exactly what he did. "I will look again toward thy holy temple" (verse 4). "I remembered the Lord" (verse 7). "I will pay that which I have vowed" (verse 9). Jonah finally turned to the Lord. It makes one wonder how harshly God will have to deal with us before He can bring us, as His people, back to the place where He wants us.

Jonah thought that if he did not take the message of warning to Nineveh, and if Nineveh was not warned, the city would go down under the judgment of God, and his own nation of Israel would be spared. He deliberately set himself against God's desires in these matters. He looked on the Ninevites as enemies, and decided that he would stand by his own nation and people rather than obey God. It is a good thing to be faithful to those with whom we fellowship, but our primary faithfulness belongs to

God. We must remember that He has other sheep, and He wants them to hear the Gospel message through us. He wants all people to know the good news of Christ.

It is well for us to remember that before God casts off any of us as useless, He reproves us in order to bring us to our senses. That is what God did with Jonah. Jonah's idea was to be thrown into the sea and die. That was not God's purpose. He wanted His servant to be in the path of obedience. Jonah knew better and God judged him according to his knowledge.

Jonah had some very trying experiences. He speaks in the prayer—of the floods and the waves going over him. He thought that he was now so far away from God that he was out of God's sight. "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever" (verses 5,6).

It was when Jonah went down, and kept going down, that he found God's hand heavy upon him, but it brought him to his senses and then came the repentance. Jonah came to himself when he realized that those who "observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy" (verse 8). He saw himself as he was, and he stopped running away from God.

Jonah acknowledged that everything that had happened to him, while caused by God, was nevertheless his own fault. He deserved it. This is the meaning of verse 8. A "lying vanity" is an idol; therefore, anything that takes the place of God. Jonah is saying that whenever a believer puts something else in the place of God and thereby turns from Him, he inevitably also turns from that mercy which God constantly shows him.

God waited for Jonah's response, and the prophet's words were, "I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving" (verse 9). How remarkable that God could so work in the heart of His servant that even in the body of a great fish, where he passed through severe tribulation and anguish, Jonah cried out to God in thanksgiving. He simply thanked God that in His mercy He had spared his life. God had turned him from his rebellion and had caused him to call once again upon the Name of the Lord. Then Jonah completely dedicated himself and said, "I will pay that which I have vowed" (verse 9).

Have we paid the vows we have promised to God? Perhaps as a mother or father, we made a promise to God when one of the children was sick. It might even have been a promise to surrender the life to God for whatever He wanted us to do. Or some young person might have given himself or herself unreservedly to God at one time, but now has turned away from Him because of love for some other person. Have you kept the vows you made to God?

Jonah makes the greatest statement when he says, "Salvation is of the Lord" (verse 9). He is admitting God's absolute sovereignty and recognizes that only God could deliver him from the awful situation in which he found himself.

Jonah is now ready to take his place alongside the ungodly. Earlier he had indicated that since he was a Jew, he did not want to preach to the heathen. Now he was willing to take a place beside them as one

who needed God's mercy and who indeed found it. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

A drowning boy was struggling in the water. On the shore stood his mother in the agony of fright and grief. By her side stood a strong man seemingly indifferent to the boy's fate. Again and again the suffering mother appealed to him to save her boy, but he made no move. By and by the desperate struggles of the boy began to abate. He was losing strength. Presently he arose to the surface weak and helpless. At once the man leaped into the water and brought the boy in safely to the shore. "Why did you not save my boy sooner?" asked the now grateful mother. "Madam, I could not as long as he struggled. He would have dragged us both to a certain death. But when he grew weak and ceased to struggle, then it was easy to save him."

It is when we cease from depending upon our own works to save us, and when we fall helplessly upon God that we realize how perfectly able He is to save without any aid from us. Salvation is possible only because God makes it possible. This thought was a blessing to Jonah and it should be even more comfort to us who live this side of the Cross of Jesus Christ. For this is what the name "Jesus" means. When the angel explained the meaning of the Name to Joseph, he said, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus (Jehovah saves): for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). "Salvation is of the Lord!"

### **3. Jonah's Deliverance**

By a divine means of communication, the Lord informed the great fish that his mission was accomplished, and that he should deposit Jonah on a certain shore. Immediately, the mighty monster of the sea responded. The Lord needed to speak only once and the fish obeyed instantly. How unlike Jonah! Even worse, how unlike you and me. Have there not been many times when the Lord spoke once, twice, and even many more times, and we turned a deaf ear to His voice?

Can you imagine Jonah's surprise in suddenly being discharged from the fish's mouth and deposited on the shore? Probably he stood on his feet, brushed off the seaweed, washed, looked all around, and after taking several deep breaths of fresh air, simply bowed his head and said, "Thank you, Lord."

God delivers those who are repentant when they cry to Him. King David affirmed, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalms 51:17). Jonah's heart was broken and his spirit melted into contrition (sorrow and remorse) over his shameful disobedience to his God and his awful failure as one of God's prophets. So when he cried to the Lord, the Lord heard and delivered him.

Where are you today? Are you under a divine call? Have you been obeying, or are you (like Jonah) running away? Are you a Christian in reverse? Ask God to have mercy upon you and deliver you. If you cry to God out of a broken heart and with a determination to do the will of God from now on, He will deliver you just as He delivered His own servant Jonah.

Early on the morning of June 5, 1946, fire swept through the twenty-two story Hotel LaSalle in Chicago. Within minutes the main outside exits and stairway exits from the floors above were blocked by flames. Most of the eleven hundred patrons had retired to their rooms. The fire raged for three hours. It was

Chicago's worst hotel tragedy, and it was the most serious hotel fire in the nation in more than thirteen years. Over two hundred persons were injured and sixty lives were lost. Smoke, panic, and intense heat claimed most of the victims. At least ten persons leaped to certain death from windows high above the street. Fire commissioner Michael J. Corrigan said, "Many of the deaths were tragically unnecessary."

A few moments before the fire occurred, a Chicago merchantman telephoned his wife from the hotel to say he was playing bridge there with friends. His wife said afterwards, "I asked him when he would be home, and he said he would come home as soon as he finished the hand they were playing." But that was not soon enough. His wife identified his body at the county morgue later that day. One hand of bridge cost this man his life.

How often when one is asked (in the spiritual sense), "When are you coming home?" he answers, "After I do this, that, or the other thing." And before he is aware of it, death has overtaken him and he is ushered into a lost eternity. God says, "Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart" (Psalms 95:7,8). "Behold, now is that accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation" 2 Corinthians 6:2).

Miss Anita Blair of El Paso, Texas, a blind lecturer, was on the eleventh floor of the LaSalle Hotel at the time of the fire. But she followed her seeing eye dog, Fawn, to safety. Following Fawn into the hallway, she related, "He made the way through the noise, smoke, and confusion to a window and down eleven floors of an outside fire escape."\*

For all spiritually blind persons, faith is the seeing eye needed to go through all the noise, smoke, and religious confusion of the day. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). If you possess any doubt whatever regarding your soul's salvation, at this very moment let God deliver you from your prison of misery and grief. God's grace is sufficient. Whatever your spiritual need, Jesus Christ is adequate.

Obedience produces blessing, while disobedience results in curse. Are you living under the blessing of God or under a curse? For many days Jonah had been living under a curse, but (praise God) as we see him now he is back under the blessing.

The theme of the Bible is "Salvation is of the Lord." All of us have some time or another tried to run away from God—but none need perish. God Himself has provided the way into eternal life through the death and resurrection of His beloved Son.

-H. Stanley Martin

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\*Illustrations adapted from LIVING OBEDIENTLY by J. Allen Blair  
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