

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO JONAH 2

This chapter contains the prayer of Jonah, when in the fish's belly; the time when he prayed, the person he prayed unto, and the place where, are suggested in (~~311~~Jonah 2:1); and the latter described as a place of great straitness and distress, and even as hell itself, (~~311~~Jonah 2:2); The condition he was in, when cast into the sea, and when in the belly of the fish, which is observed, the more to heighten the greatness of the deliverance, (~~311~~Jonah 2:3-6). The different frame of mind he was in, sometimes almost in despair, and ready to faint; and presently exercising faith and hope, remembering the goodness of the Lord, and resolving to look again to him, (~~311~~Jonah 2:4,7). The gracious regards of God to him, in receiving, hearing, and answering his prayer, and bringing up his life from corruption, (~~311~~Jonah 2:2,6,7). His resolution, let others do what they would, to praise the Lord, and give him the glory of his salvation, (~~311~~Jonah 2:8,9); and the chapter is concluded with the order for his deliverance, and the manner of it, (~~311~~Jonah 2:10).

Ver. 1. *Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly.*] Though Jonah had been a praying man, being a good man, and a prophet of the Lord, yet it seems he had not prayed for some time; being disobedient to the will of God, he restrained prayer before him; all the while he was going to Joppa he prayed not; and how indeed could he have the face to pray to him, from whose face he was fleeing? and as soon as he was in the ship he fell asleep, and there lay till he was waked by the shipmaster, who called upon him to arise, and pray to his God; but whether he did or no is not said; and though it is very probable he might, when convicted of his sin, and before he was cast into the sea, and as he was casting into it; his not recorded; but when he was in the fish's belly, "then [he] prayed"; where it is marvellous he should, or could; it was strange he should be able to breathe, and more strange to breathe spiritually; it was very wonderful he should have the exercise of his reason, and more that he should have the exercise of grace, as faith and hope, as it appears by the following prayer he had. Prayer may be performed any where, on a mountain, in a desert, in

the caves and dens of the earth, and in a prison, as it has been; but this is the only time it ever was performed in such a place. Jonah is the only man that ever prayed in a fish's belly: and he prayed unto the Lord as "his God", not merely by creation, and as the God of nature and providence, the God of his life, and of his mercies; but as his covenant God and Father; for though he had sinned against the Lord, and had been sorely chastised by him, yet he did not take his lovingkindness from him, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail, or break his covenant with him; covenant interest and relation still continued; and Jonah had knowledge of it, and faith in it; and as this is an argument the Lord makes use of to engage backsliders to return unto him, it is a great encouragement to them so to do, (²¹⁸⁴Jeremiah 3:14,22). In this Jonah was a type of Christ, who, amidst his agonies, sorrows, and sufferings, prayed to his Father, and claimed his interest in him as his God, (³⁸⁰⁷Hebrews 5:7 ⁴²⁷⁴Matthew 27:46). What follows contains the sam and substance of the prophet's thoughts, and the ejaculations of his mind, when in the fish's belly; but were not put up in this form, but were reduced by him into it after he was delivered; as many of David's psalms were put into the form and order they are after his deliverance from troubles, suitable to his thoughts of things when he was in them; and indeed the following account is an historical narration of facts, which were before and after his prayer, as well as of that itself.

Ver. 2. *And said*, etc.] Not unto the Lord in prayer, but to others, to whom he communicated what passed between God and him in this time of distress; how he prayed to him, and was heard by him; what a condition he had been in, and how he was delivered out of it; what was his frame of mind while in it, sometimes despairing, and sometimes hoping; and how thankful he was for this salvation, and was determined to praise the Lord for it:

I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; or, "out of my strait"¹⁴⁹; being straitened in his body, and as it were in a prison in the fish's belly; and straitened in his soul, being between hope and despair, and under the apprehensions of the divine displeasure. A time of affliction is a time for prayer; it brings those to it that have disused it; it made Jonah cry to his God, if not with a loud voice, yet inwardly; and his cry was powerful and piercing, it reached the heavens, and entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts, though out of the depths, and out of the belly of a fish, in the midst of the sea:

out of the belly of hell cried I, [and] thou heardest my voice; or, “out of the belly of the grave”^{f50}; out of the midst of it; that is, out of the belly of the fish, which was as a grave to him, as Jarchi observes; where he lay as out of the land of the living, as one dead, and being given up for dead: and it may also respect the frame of his mind, the horror and terror lie was in, arising from a sense of his sins, and the apprehensions he had of the wrath of God, which were as a hell in his conscience; and amidst all this he cried to God, and he heard him; and not only delivered him from the fish’s belly, but from those dreadful apprehensions he had of his state and condition; and spoke peace and pardon to him. This is a proof that this prayer or thanksgiving be it called which it will, was composed, as to the form and order of it, after his deliverance; and these words are an appeal to God for the truth of what he had said in the preceding clause, and not a repetition of it in prayer; or expressing the same thing in different words.

Ver. 3. *For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas*, etc.] Though the mariners did this, yet Jonah ascribes it to the Lord; he knew it was he, whom he had sinned against and offended; that he was he that sent the storm after him into the sea; that determined the lot to fall upon him; that it was not only by his permission, but according to his will, that he should be cast into it, and overcame the reluctance of the men to it, and so worked upon them that they did it; and therefore Jonah imputes it to him, and not to them; nor does he complain of it, or murmur at it; or censure it as an unrighteous action, or as hard, cruel, and severe; but rather mentions it to set off the greatness of his deliverance: and by this it appears, that it was far from shore when Jonah was cast into the sea, it was the great deep; and which also is confirmed by the large fish which swallowed him, which could, not swim but in deep waters; and because of the multitude of the waters, called “seas”, and “in the heart”^{f51} of them, as it may be rendered; and agreeably Christ the antitype of Jonah lay in the heart of the earth, (^{<124>}Matthew 12:40);

and the floods compassed me about; all thy billows and thy waves passed over me; which was his case as soon as cast into the sea, before the fish had swallowed him, as well as after: this was literally true of Jonah, what David says figuratively concerning his afflictions, and from whom the prophet seems to borrow the expressions, (^{<141>}Psalm 42:7); and indeed he might use them also in a metaphorical sense, with a view to the afflictions of body, and sorrows of death, that compassed him; and to the billows and

waves of divine wrath, which in his apprehension lay upon him, and rolled over him.

Ver. 4. *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight*, etc.] Or, “from before thine eyes”^{f52}; the Targum, from before thy Word; as David also said in his distress, (^{<4912>}Psalm 31:22); not but that he knew he was in the reach and under the eye of his omniscience, which saw him in the fish’s belly, in the depths of the sea, for nothing can hide from that; but he thought he was no longer under the eye of his providence; and that he would no more care for him, but leave him in this forlorn condition, and not deliver him; and especially he concluded that he would no more look upon him with an eye of love, grace, and mercy, pity and compassion: these are the words of one in despair, or near unto it; and yet a beam of light, a ray of hope, breaks in, and a holy resolution is formed, as follows:

yet I will look again toward thy holy temple; not the temple at Jerusalem, towards which men used to look when they prayed, being at a distance from it, (^{<1029>}1 Kings 8:29); though there may be an allusion to such a practice; for it can hardly be thought that Jonah, in the fish’s belly, could tell which way the temple stood; and look towards that; but he looked upwards and heavenwards; he looked up to God in his holy temple in heaven; and though he was afraid he would not look down upon him in a way of grace and mercy, he was resolved to look up to God in the way of prayer and supplication; and particularly, for the further encouragement of his faith and hope, he looked to the Messiah, the antitype of the temple, ark, and mercy seat, and for whose sake he might hope his prayers would be heard and answered.

Ver. 5. *The waters compassed me about, [even] to the soul*, etc.] Either when he was first cast into the sea, which almost suffocated him, and just ready to take away his life, could not breathe for them, as is the case of a man drowning; or these were the waters the fish drew into its belly, in such large quantities, that they compassed him about, even to the endangering of his life there. So the Targum,

“the waters surrounded me unto death.”

In this Jonah was a type of Christ in his afflictions and sorrows, which were so many and heavy, that he is said to be “exceeding sorrowful”, or surrounded with sorrow, “even unto death”, (^{<403>}Matthew 26:38); see also (^{<491>}Psalm 69:1);

the depth closed me round about; the great deep, the waters of the sea, both when he fell into it, and while in the belly of the fish: thus also Christ his antitype came into deep waters, where there was no standing, and where floods of sin, and of ungodly men, and of divine wrath, overflowed him; (see ^{f50}Psalm 18:4,5 69:2);

the weeds were wrapped about my head; the sea weeds, of which there are great quantities in it, which grow at the bottom of it, to which Jonah came, and from whence he rose up again, before swallowed by the fish; or these weeds were drawn into the belly of the fish, along with the water which it took in, and were wrapped about the head of the prophet as he lay there; or the fish went down with him into the bottom of the sea, and lay among those weeds; and so they may be said to be wrapped about him, he being there, as follows. The Targum is,

“the sea of Suph being over my head;”

the same with the Red sea, which is so called, (^{f51}Psalm 106:9); and elsewhere, and that from the weeds that were in it; and R. Japhet, as Aben Ezra observes, says the sea of Suph is mixed with the sea of Joppa; that is, as a learned man^{f53} observes, by means of the river Rhinocorura, through which the lake of Sirbon mingles with the great sea; and which lake itself is so called from the weeds in it; yea, was anciently called Suph, and the sea of Suph, or “mare Scirpeum”, hence Sirbon: and the same writer thinks that the father of Andromede, said to be devoured by a whale about Joppa, had his name of Cepheus from hence.

Ver. 6. *I went down to the bottom of the mountains*, etc.] Which are in the midst of the sea, whither the fish carried him, and where the waters are deep; or the bottom of rocks and promontories on the shore of the sea; and such vast rocks hanging over the sea, whose bottoms were in it, it seems are on the shore of Joppa, near to which Jonah was cast into the sea, as Egesippus^{f54} relates:

the earth with her bars [was] about me for ever; that is, the earth with its cliffs and rocks on the seashore, which are as bars to the sea, that it cannot overflow it; these were such bars to Jonah, that could he have got clear of the fish’s belly, and attempted to swim to shore, he could never get to it, or over these bars, the rocks and cliffs, which were so steep and high:

yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God; notwithstanding these difficulties, which were insuperable by human

power, and these seeming impossibilities of, deliverance; yet the Lord brought him out of the fish's belly, as out of a grave, the pit of corruption, and where he must otherwise have lain and rotted, and freed his soul from those terrors which would have destroyed him; and by this also we learn, that this form of words was composed after he came to dry land: herein likewise he was a type of Christ, who, though laid in the grave, was not left there so long as to see corruption, (^{<91610>}Psalm 16:10).

Ver. 7. *When my soul fainted within me*, etc.] Covered with grief; overwhelmed with sorrow; ready to faint and sink at the sight of his sins; and under a sense of the wrath and displeasure of God, and being forsaken by him:

I remembered the Lord; his covenant and promises, his former mercies and lovingkindness, the gracious experiences he had had of these in times past; he remembered he was a God gracious and merciful, and ready to forgive, healed the backslidings of his people, and still loved them freely, and tenderly received and embraced them, when they returned to him:

and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple; into heaven itself, the habitation of God's holiness, the temple where he dwells, and is worshipped by holy angels and glorified saints; the prayer the prophet put up in the fish's belly, encouraged to it by remembering the mercy and goodness of God, ascended from thence, and reached the ears of the Lord of hosts in the highest heavens, and met with a kind reception, and had a gracious answer; (see ^{<9106>}Psalm 3:4 22:6).

Ver. 8. *They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*] They that worship idols, who are nothing, mere vanity and lies, and deceive those that serve them, these forsake the God of their lives, and of their mercies; and so do all such who serve divers lusts and pleasures, and pursue the vanities of this life; and also those who follow the dictates of carnal sense and reason, to the neglect of the will of God, and obedience to his commands; which was Jonah's case, and is, I think, chiefly intended. The Targum, Syriac version, and so Jarchi, and most interpreters, understand it of worshippers of idols in general; and Kimchi of the mariners of the ship Jonah had been in; who promised to relinquish their idols, but did not; and vowed to serve the Lord, and sacrifice to him, but did not perform what they promised. But I rather think Jonah reflects upon himself in particular, as well as leaves this as a general instruction to others; that should they do as he had done, give way to an evil heart of unbelief, and

attend to the suggestions of a vain mind, and consult with flesh and blood, and be directed thereby, to the disregard of God and his will; they will find, as he had done to his cost, that they forsake that God that has been gracious and merciful to them, and who is all goodness and mercy, (^{-434B}Psalm 144:3); which to do is very ungrateful to him, and injurious to themselves; and now he being sensible of his folly, and influenced by the grace and goodness of God to him, resolves to do as follows:

Ver. 9. *But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving*, etc.] Not only offer up a legal sacrifice in a ceremonial way, when he came to Jerusalem; but along with it the spiritual sacrifice of praise, which he knew was more acceptable unto God; and thus Christ, his antitype, upon his deliverance from his enemies, (⁻⁴⁹²²Psalm 22:22,25 69:30,31);

I will pay [that] I vowed; when he was in distress; as that he would sacrifice after the above manner, or behave in a better manner for the future than he had done; and particularly would go to Nineveh, if the Lord thought fit to send him again:

salvation [is] of the Lord; this was the ground of the faith and hope of Jonah when at the worst, and the matter of his present praise find thanksgiving. There is one letter more in the word rendered “salvation”,^{f55} than usual, which increases the sense; and denotes, that all kind of salvation is of the Lord, temporal, spiritual, and eternal; not only this salvation from the devouring waves of the sea, and from the grave of the fish’s belly, was of the Lord; but his deliverance from the terrors of the Lord, and the sense he had of his wrath, and the peace and pardon he now partook of, were from the Lord, as well as eternal salvation in the world to come, and the hope of it. All temporal salvations and deliverances are from the Lord, and to him the glory of them belongs; and his name should be praised on account of them; which Jonah resolved to do for himself: and so is spiritual and eternal salvation; it is of Jehovah the Father, as to the original spring and motive of it, which is his grace, and not men’s works, and is owing to his wisdom, and not men’s, for the plan and form of it; it is of Jehovah the Son, as to the impetration of it, who only has wrought it out; and it is of Jehovah the Spirit, as to the application of it to particular persons; and therefore the glory of it belongs to all the three Persons, and should be given them. This is the epiphonema or conclusion of the prayer or thanksgiving; which shows that it was, as before observed, put into this form or order, after the salvation was wrought; though that is related

afterwards, as it is proper it should, and as the order of the narration required.

Ver. 10. *And the Lord spake unto the fish,* etc.] Or gave orders to it; he that made it could command it; all creatures are the servants of God, and do his will; what he says is done; he so ordered it by his providence, that this fish should come near the shore, and be so wrought upon by his power, that it could not retain Jonah any longer in its belly. It may be rendered^{f56}, “then the Lord spake”, etc. after Jonah had finished his prayer, or put up those ejaculations, the substance of which is contained in the above narrative:

and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry [land]; not upon the shore of the Red sea, as some; much less upon the shore of Nineveh, which was not built upon the seashore, but upon the river Tigris; and the fish must have carried him all round Africa, and part of Asia, to have brought him to the banks of the Tigris; which could not have been done in three days’ time, nor in much greater. Josephus^{f57} says it was upon the shore of the Euxine sea; but the nearest part of it to Nineveh was one thousand six hundred miles from Tarsus, which the whale, very slow in swimming, cannot be thought to go in three days; besides, no very large fish swim in the Euxine sea, because of the straits of the Propontis, through which they cannot pass, as Bochart^{f58} from various writers has proved. It is more likely, as others, that it was on the Syrian shore, or in the bay of Issus, now called the gulf of Lajazzo; or near Alexandria, or Alexandretta, now Scanderoon. But why not on the shore of Palestine? and, indeed, why not near the place from whence they sailed? Huetius^{f59} and others think it probable that this case of Jonah gave rise to the story of Arion, who was cast into the sea by the mariners, took up by a dolphin, and carried to Corinth. Jonah’s deliverance was a type of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead on the third day, (⁽⁴²⁴⁾Matthew 12:40); and a pledge of ours; for, after this instance of divine power, why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?