

Appendix

Words and Motifs that are evident in chapter 2 and present in the whole story- (at least includes):

- casting 2:3,4 cf. 1:5,7,12,15;
- coming/going 2:7 cf. 1:3,8; 3:4
- crying out 2:2 cf. 1:2,6,14; 3:2,4,5,8;
- descent 2:6 cf. 1:3,5
- come/bring up 1:2 cf. 4:6,7
- mercy 2:8 cf. 4:2
- sacrifices 2:9 cf. 1:16
- sea 2:3 cf. 1:4,5,9,11,12,13,15
- soul 2:5,7 cf. 1:4; 4:3
- life 2:6 cf. 4:3,8
- vowing 2:9 cf. 1:16

#2 A great storm & A great salvation

Jonah-
Reluctant to Serve

Introduction

Jonah 1:1-3

*1 The word of the LORD came to
Jonah son of Amittai:*

2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh

*and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before
me."*

3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD... (NIV)

Recap

Jonah is the most unusual of the so-called "Minor Prophets" in that he is the most reluctant to serve God at His call. He is the runaway prophet. God called him to those outside the Hebrew nation in Nineveh of Assyria, to tell them to repent before judgment may come.

At the end of chapter 1 we learned Jonah's fate as a fugitive on a ship, on the run, in a storm:

"Then the sailors took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm....But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights."

Jonah 1:15, 17



A great fish

There is no doubt that most people know very little except this one thing about Jonah; it's even often referred to as Jonah and the Whale. The Bible never actually refers to a whale; rather it is a great fish. The fish is also not to be confused with the great Leviathan of ancient myth and biblical stories as in the book of Job. There are in fact only three mentions of the fish in the entire Jonah story, yet to many it takes centre stage and potentially obscures the story's main points. The mention of the great fish also throws some intellectual objections into the mix that cause people to miss the meaning. How could a man possibly survive being swallowed by such a creature they say? Certainly we should ask how Jonah might compose so eloquent a prayer as in chapter 2 while being engulfed in stomach juices! But one must ask, hasn't the bible to this point chronologically speaking already presented us with a number of "fantastic" accounts? Isn't God a God of incredible miracles and historical interventions long before Jonah's time. As one writer puts it: "The fish didn't let Jonah stick in his throat; so don't let the fish stick in yours!"

In one sense, the original author probably wouldn't really understand what all the fuss is about regarding the historicity of the text. The historicity of this book of the bible has been the subject of many arguments and differences of opinion. For example, Origen, one of the Alexandrian church fathers of the 2nd Century AD affirmed that the Bible incorporates many different kinds of literature such as poetry and parable, narrative



indeed a relieve to him. However, the continuing irony is that there is no escape from the task he has been called to. The church too is called to bring "Good News" to the world, in word and action.

How would you respond to someone who makes the following claims?

- There is a greater need to serve in evangelism overseas than in Australia?
- God is concerned for asylum seekers and drug addicts at least as much as he is concerned for my family?
- Even the trials I face are in God's control and care?
- God has a plan for the nations of the world today?

2. The Sovereignty of God over all creation, not just the people of Israel is an important topic in this book. The old King James Version of the Bible translated a verse in the book of Romans inaccurately and in a misleading manner to read:

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28 KJV

The New International Version renders the Greek more accurately as:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28 NIV

Q. What significant differences may apply to our faith and discipleship if we follow one rendering over the other of the verses above?

3. It is one thing to raise our hands and voices in a Sunday service and make bold declarations about our faith in God, and another when we stand by those words in the face of hostility or apathy or challenge. Jonah’s great escape from the deep and from the bowels of the fish are

and apocalyptic. He believed that Jonah was an allegory. But Augustine of Hippo, a couple of hundred years later was convinced that the account about Jonah in the Bible was literally and historically true. Perhaps we might find a way forward by suggesting that this book has truly historical people and events behind it, but is of a genre and nature that intends to convey a message about God and His Kingdom ahead any eye witness style journalism. In a sense, it is a prophetic narrative.

What matters is how we respond to the issues about God and us that are raised by the text.

Chapter 2 opens with Jonah still in the belly of the fish that God sent to swallow him up as he was tossed overboard at his own request. His noble act (or was it a further act of running from God rather than facing his calling?) is the cure for the storm and has caused the sailors to sacrifice to Adonai.

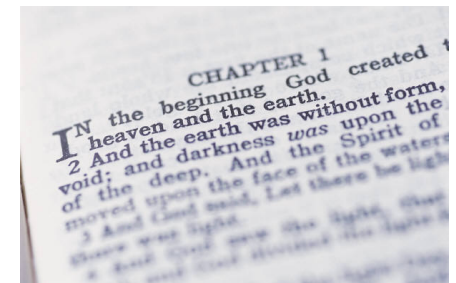
Study— Chapter 2

2:1 "Jonah prayed"

The word suggests an intercession or supplication, but the text that follows has the rhythm and meter of a psalm or song, much like a lament. Strangely, the content is more like a thanksgiving.

The lyrics of the song/prayer seem to draw on concepts and phrases found in the Jewish Psalter– but it relates directly to his personal conditions.

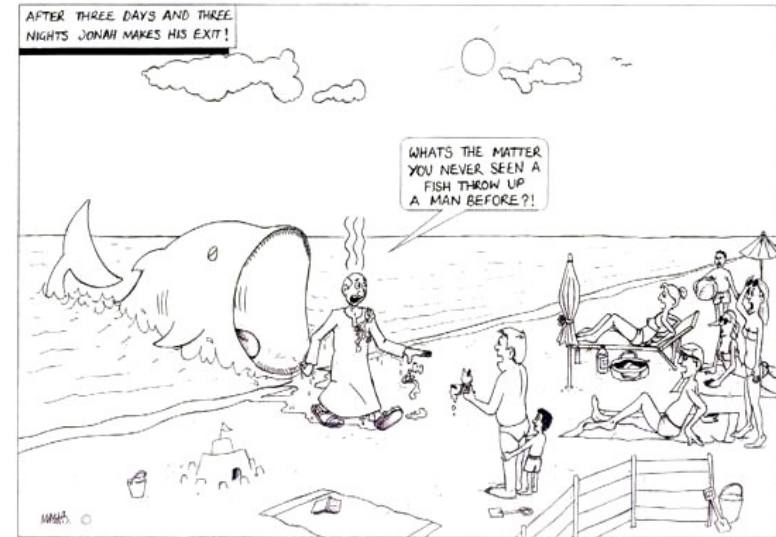
It seems God is incredibly patient with Jonah. God is patient with all his people. There is hope even for the most undeserving among us.



Notice that throughout ch.1 Jonah failed to pray, even when the pagans did. Now after offering himself to death, and when his situation seems impossible, finally he offers a polished and pious prayer/song.

Many words and motifs link the psalm in verses 2 - 10 to the rest of the story.

Q. What words and motifs can you find in chapter 2 that are common to the whole story? (see page 11 for a list after you've had a go at identifying some.)



Going Further

1. Read Nehemiah chapter 9:7-35 and note in the space following the characteristics of God in response the failures of his people down the ages:

2:2 Jonah is glad to be in the "belly of the fish" (2:1)

Jonah prays: "out of the belly of Sheol" (2:2) his cry to God has been heard! Here is another element of irony in that one who has been called to offer a warning and a message of salvation to others now has a testimony to share of God's redemption.

Q. What other biblical characters can you think of that have a testimony of God's saving work that dramatically changes the course of their life?

2:9 "Deliverance belongs to Adonai!" - the pious cry with which Jonah closes his contrast between idol worshipers and himself - like all the references to God's saving action in his psalm refers to past salvation. The psalm gives thanks for salvation already experienced. At this point in the story only Jonah and the sailors have experienced deliverance.

Q. What's your story? Are you able to pray such a self-centred prayer as Jonah's about God's work in your life?

2:10 "spewed"

Various English translations of the Bible try to clean up the Hebrew word here which is in every sense the negative word for "vomit". As with the fish being "provided" or appointed in 1:17, so here it is God who "commands" the fish to expel Jonah onto the dry land. The fish just didn't happen to be passing by; nor did it get a stomach upset! The text wants us to consider the greatness of the God who "sent" the storm and later the vine and the worm.

Q. Israel must learn that God is not the Lord of only one nation or a confined group of people. Instead God is Lord of creation and the God of history. Today the challenge to God's sovereignty is more likely to be those around us who believe that the world's history is a matter of random events and coincidences. How would you respond to someone at work or school who stated this to you?

2:3 "You cast me into the deep"

Doesn't this seem a bit steep? After all, Jonah asked the sailors to throw him over board, God asked Jonah to head (overland) to Nineveh not to sea! Note that throughout the story Jonah will exhibit a fine ability to express how the world feels if one is Jonah.

Q. In what ways are people around you today a bit like Jonah in this regard?

2:4 "'I am driven away from your sight"

Is this a fair statement from Jonah? See 1:3 for a quick reminder of the story.

Q. Looking at 1:10, what do you imagine Jonah may have told the sailors?

"how shall I again look upon thy holy temple?" Perhaps Jonah finally recognized that his running away has potentially severed his connection with the centre of his religion?

2:7 "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Adonai; and my prayer came to thee, into thy holy temple."

Thinking back over the story and the psalm as so often in the book Jonah we may see him as conventionally "religious", he knows all the right words and phrases, sounds pious, but acts his own reluctant way.

Q. "God on our side" is a common idea in human societies, but it is not so very different from "God in my pocket", the notion of a deity we can control. In what ways do you think religion promotes a desire to control God or "the gods"?

Q. In what sense does human religion seek to control God? What aspects of the human religion that you know best (the life of your local church?) seem to try to do this, or expect God to do what "we" want?

2:8 "Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty."

Above on the ship the sailors are doing the opposite, sacrificing to the one true God, the Ninevites will soon show a similar change! Jonah is the only one here to forsake true hesed "loyalty/mercy".

Q. In what sense is Jonah a "type" of Israel's long history of rejection of God's love?

In the recent feature film, *Evan Almighty* Morgan Freeman is back again (having played God in *Bruce Almighty*) as the omnipotent almighty with a sense of humor. Bringing the story of Noah into the 21st Century, Steve Carell plays Evan who receives the charge from God to build an ark and fill it with animals for a great flood is coming. In making the film more tension filled, Evan seems to be more like Jonah than Noah in terms of Bible's point of view. Evan is the quintessential reluctant subject. Just as

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