

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Jonah 2**
"The Underwater Prayer"

Some people think that in order for God to respect their prayer, they have to stand a certain way, or kneel, or speak out loud; but did you know that God can hear your prayer wherever you are, and whether you speak out loud or in your heart? In this chapter, we will see that the most important part of prayer is the posture of your heart, not of your body. I believe this is the only recorded underwater prayer in the Bible. Whether you are in a church, at home, driving a car, alone in a hospital room, or in a whale's belly, you can pray to God. If you come to Him with the right heart, you can have hope that God will hear you in spite of three things.

1: Hope in spite of punishment (v1-4).

Jonah prayed **out of the fish's belly**, which was as good a place as any to pray! God can hear us wherever we are, whether we are in a palace or whether we are spending the night in, as McGee called it, the "fish motel" like Jonah. He prayed **unto the LORD his God**, not to idols or nature, or to the fish, or to the sun or moon or stars. He didn't try to remember his horoscope; he prayed to the God of heaven.

(v2) Oftentimes I don't pray enough, until it is **"by reason of mine affliction"** (cf. Psalm 119:67). Affliction can either draw us close to God or push us away from God, depending on our reaction. Jonah seems a little surprised that **"God heard him"**; even when we are disobedient, God is ready to take us back when we repent! I think Jonah expected the silent treatment from God (see Isaiah 1:15).

Also, how can Jonah be so sure that **God heart his voice** when he is still in the fish's belly? Maybe God allowed Jonah to find some air. But in any case, God showed Jonah He was still there. God is always with us if we are saved, and we can confidently say He has heard our prayer, even if we haven't yet been delivered.

(v3) Whales can go down **into the deep** quite low, thousands of feet below sea level. I'm not sure how low Jonah could have survived before his lungs collapsed, but I'm sure he felt a

lot of pressure. Jonah probably felt the **floods** of ocean currents pushing on the whale, as well as the small currents inside the whale's belly. I think the **billows** constantly made Jonah feel like he was drowning, crashing over his head time and time again.

(v4) As a prophet who probably knew his Bible and prophecies of others, Jonah may have worried that I Kings 9:7 applied here, and that he had been **cast out of God's sight** forever. Yet even the slightest glimmer of hope caused Jonah to pray anyway. How sad that many people today reject the gospel outright, in spite of being offered lots of hope from God's Word if they turn to Him. Jonah was willing to grasp at any hope possible of God hearing him.

God chastened Jonah because He loved him, not because He hated him or had abandoned him (Proverbs 3:11-12, Isaiah 54:7-9). God chastens all true Christians at some time or another (Hebrews 12:5-8). Because of that, we can have hope in spite of punishment.

2: Hope in spite of corruption (v5-7). Can you imagine the sloshing waves and intense heat inside the whale? The verse mentions plural **waters**, not singular; and similarly, in hell are multiple torments (Luke 16:23). I think this chastening **even to the soul** may indicate that Jonah experienced a taste of hell itself, possibly even dying (cf. Matthew 10:28). Imagine Jonah's hopeless feeling as the whale's mouth **"closed him round about"**, and the light went out, with no more escape.

Hell will also have unexpected torments, as Jonah experienced the **weeds wrapped about his head**, which may have started drowning him as he became tangled in them. Similarly, hell has specific difficulties people haven't considered, including worms (Isaiah 14:11).

(v6) Jonah **went down** (cf. 1:3), and hell is a place of descent, a bottomless pit (Revelation 17:8). Jonah felt a taste of the hopelessness of being locked in hell forever. Jonah experienced **corruption**, unlike Jesus (Psalm 16:10). And although Jonah previously told the sailors about the LORD (Luke 6:46), now he actually means it.

(v7) In hell, a person's **soul faints**, and he loses all hope (Proverbs 10:28; 11:7; ~Job 8:13). But Jonah's troubles led him to **remember the LORD**; do you remember Him? Do you thank Him for everything He has done for you? Or do you ignore him in your life? I like how Jonah's

prayer came in unto God, as though it came to His mail inbox. I'm afraid His "inbox" is not nearly as full as it ought to be; we ought to be praying much more (Luke 18:8).

And isn't it amazing that if we're right with Jesus Christ, our prayers also come **into His holy temple** (Rev 5:8)? We now have a direct connection to God through Jesus Christ. It's better than having the President on speed dial.

Jonah's difficulties were because he was disobedient. But very often, godly, obedient Christians have physical difficulties as well, having their flesh eaten away by disease and corruption (e.g., Job). But one day, all of us Christians will receive brand new, glorified bodies (Job 19:26), without even one hair missing (Luke 21:18)! Not even the chill of death or the ugliness of disease can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:38-39). Like Jonah, we can have hope in spite of corruption.

3: Hope in spite of the past (v8-10).

Sadly, many people **observe** wicked things, like the occult, horoscopes, superstitions, or false religions. But anything contradicting the Bible is a **lie**. Sin's price tag is always incorrect and always has a lot of fine print. Ask a drunkard on the street whether he thought he would end up that way; likely, he thought he would be cool and popular by drinking and having a good time. But the pleasures of sin are **vanity**, as they last for just a moment and then disappear like a puff of smoke (Hebrews 11:25, James 4:14).

Sinners who choose to follow their own way, instead of following Jesus Christ, are **forsaking** the only key out of hell; they are tearing up their signed pardon (cf. Hebrews 2:3). The salvation that God offers people is **their own**, prepared especially for them; Jesus died for each person in particular, not just for the world as a whole (Galatians 2:20). And anyone who thinks he or she can get to heaven on their own merits is sadly mistaken; they absolutely need God's **mercy** if they hope to enter heaven, just as a pardoned prisoner needs mercy, not justice, to enter the king's palace.

(v9) The world may reject Jesus Christ. But let us say, "**But I receive Him**" (cf. Joshua 24:15). It is better to go to heaven alone than to hell with a crowd. And let us serve Jesus Christ **with the voice of thanksgiving!** Let's not have sour faces and grumpy hearts when we serve Jesus. When the offering plate comes by at church, we

shouldn't give with a frown on our face. It's not always easy to have the right attitude, but we should strive for that. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7).

Jonah paid what he had vowed

(Deuteronomy 23:21; Jonah 1:16). If we made a loan at the bank, wouldn't we follow through? How much more should we take a vow to God seriously?

(v10) I'll bet this **fish** received a special reward for this gross assignment; maybe, after **vomiting out Jonah upon the dry land**, God gave him an extra burst of excitement as he swam away. Did he drop Jonah off at Joppa, where he left? If so, he took the scenic three-day route on the way back to shore. Did anyone see this? I think perhaps some people did; maybe Jonah just lay there, face down in the sand, so glad just to be on solid land again; and maybe others came and helped him get to a place where he could recover and regain his strength. He would need it for the long journey ahead.

In spite of Jonah's past of disobedience, he could have hope in God. You can have hope, too, in spite of your past. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 50:15, 19); Jephthah was born illegitimately (Judges 11:1); Saul had an extremely religious background (Philippians 3:4-6); and John Mark had a reputation for "jumping ship" (Acts 13:13, II Timothy 4:11). Cf. Isaiah 1:18. Yet each of them, and many others, were still used by God.

We can have hope in God in spite of punishment; God is merciful and forgiving. We can have hope in spite of corruption; though worms or disease destroy our body, yet our brand new body awaits, immune to the curse of sin. And we can have hope in spite of our past; God is willing to throw our sins into the depths of the sea, much further down than this whale that swallowed Jonah would ever be able to swim (Micah 7:19).