

Jonah, the Manipulative Prophet

Jonah Chapter Two

The Jonah 2 commentary offers my translation of Jonah 2:1-10 with Hebrew keywords and phrases in bold letters.

Jonah 1:17

The LORD APPOINTED a GREAT fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the intestines of the fish three days and three nights.

- In the Hebrew Scriptures, this is the first verse of Jonah 2. In English translations it is Jonah 1:17.
- The Bible doesn't clarify what type of **fish** swallowed Jonah. The **LORD APPOINTED** the **GREAT fish** as an act of His judgment. Soaking in the stomach acid of a **fish** shouldn't be interpreted as an act of deliverance.
- He judged Jonah previously with the **GREAT** wind (Jonah 1:4) and the **GREAT** storm (Jonah 1:4, 12).
- The **LORD** will judge Jonah later with an **APPOINTED** worm (Jonah 4:7) and an **APPOINTED** wind (Jonah 4:8).
- Even though the **LORD APPOINTED** a **plant** to deliver Jonah (Jonah 4:6), the Hebrew verb for **APPOINTED** is more often than not associated with a vehicle of judgment in the book of Jonah.
- Jesus references **the three days and three nights** in the New Testament (Matthew 12:40).

Jonah 2:1

Jonah prayed to his God from the intestines of the fish.

- Why not just state that Jonah finally **CRIED OUT** to God?
- The Hebrew verb **prayed** differs from **CRY OUT** used elsewhere to describe the pagans in prayer.
- Jonah didn't **CRY OUT** to his God aboard the ship per the Captain's request (Jonah 1:6).
- None the pronoun **his**. Why does the narrator insert this possessive pronoun? Jonah didn't want to share **his** God with the pagans.
- The **intestines** of the **fish** compare to the **guts** of the ship (Jonah 1:5).

Jonah 2:2

He said, "I CRIED OUT to the LORD in my distress. He answered me. I cried for help from the belly of the grave. YOU heard MY voice."

- Jonah writes this prayer after the **fish** vomits him up. He personalizes parts of Psalms 118:5 and 120:1 in prayer.
- In my literal translations below, notice the phrases that begin the verse. The words that begin the verse are fronted for emphasis.
- Psalm 120:1, "To the **LORD** in my distress I **CRIED OUT**; he answered me." Surrounded by enemies, this Psalmist places the **LORD** at the front of his prayer.
- Psalm 118:5, "From my distress I **CRIED OUT** to the **LORD**; he answered me." This Psalmist emphasizes his distress.
- Jonah 2:2, "I **CRIED OUT** in my distress to the **LORD**." Inside the fish, Jonah places himself "I" at the front of his prayer.
- Even though Jonah finally "**CRIED OUT**", the narrator restructured the Psalm putting "I" at the beginning of the personalized text.
- Pay attention to all the first person pronouns (I, me, my, mine) referring to Jonah in this chapter, because this indicates Jonah's self-centeredness.

Jonah 2:3

For YOU cast ME into the deep into the heart of the sea. The current surrounded me. All YOUR breakers and waves passed over ME.

- Jonah confesses that God led the Sailors to throw him into the stormy **sea** (Jonah 1:15).
- Even with the absence of the verb **WENT DOWN**, Jonah descends downward into the **sea**, where the waves crash over him.
- Notice the possessive pronoun **YOUR**. These **breakers** and **waves** belong to the **LORD**.
- Psalm 42:7, "Deep calls to deep at the sound of **YOUR** waterfalls all YOUR **breakers** and **waves** passed over **ME**." Jonah recollects this Psalm in prayer.

Jonah 2:4

But I thought, "I have been driven out of YOUR sight. Yet once again, I will look to YOUR holy temple."

- Jonah's hope in this verse contrasts with the utter despair of Jonah 1:3.
- He alludes to Psalm 31:22, "In my alarm I am cut off from your sight, yet you heard the voice of my supplication when I cried to you."
- Who has driven the prophet Jonah out of God's sight? Only the LORD has that kind of power.

- Here Jonah confesses loyalty to Yahweh even though the **LORD** has driven the rebellious prophet out of His sight.
- Pagans weren't allowed in God's **holy temple**, especially **EVIL** Ninevites. Perhaps, Jonah tries to remind Yahweh of this in his prayer.

Jonah 2:5

The waters encompassed ME, up to MY neck. The deep surrounded ME. The seaweeds wrapped around MY head.

- Jonah reflects upon his experience on top of the stormy waters.
- Inside the **fish**, he had sunk into deep waters with seaweed covering his head.
- Psalm 18:4, "The cords of death **encompassed ME**."
- Psalm 69:1, "Save me, O' God. For the waters have come **up to MY neck**."
- Once again the prophet Jonah personalizes the Psalms in prayer.

Jonah 2:6

I WENT DOWN to the base of the mountain. The earth, its bars were around ME forever. But YOU have brought MY life up from the pit, O' LORD MY God.

- Jonah **WENT DOWN** to the base of the mountains. He sunk into the depths of the **sea**.
- This probably refers to where the downward slope of the mountains intersects with the deep part of the **sea**.
- The bars around Jonah point to the place of the dead in the underworld from which there is no escape.
- Psalm 30:3, "O' **LORD**, thou has **brought up MY soul** from the grave: thou has kept **ME** alive, that **I** should not go down to the **pit**" (KJV).
- The words of Jonah's prayer also echo Psalm 103:4, "who redeems **your life from the pit**."
- The prophet acknowledges Yahweh as his God, "**MY God**." He has no problem praying for himself to his God inside the **GREAT fish**.

Jonah 2:7

When MY life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD. MY prayer came to YOU in YOUR holy temple.

- Jonah finally decides to pray when he nearly loses his **life**.
- Psalm 142:3, "When **MY spirit faints** within **ME**, **YOU** know **MY way**."
- The prophet knows that he will die if he doesn't pray to the **LORD**.
- He describes his prayer reaching Yahweh in His **holy temple**.
- Some believe Jonah speaks of a heavenly **temple**, while others regard it as the physical **temple** in Jerusalem.

- Either way, the **temple** remains holy as opposed to the profane pagans.
- The "I" or "You" language excludes the Pagan Sailors and the Ninevites. Jonah doesn't **REPENT** for his unmerciful attitude towards them.
- Instead the prophet puts distance between himself and the **EVIL** Pagans by contrasting God's holiness with **idol worshippers**.

Jonah 2:8

Those who regard vain idols forsake their COVENANT LOYALTY.

- Jonah alludes to Psalm 31:7, "I hate **those who regard vain idols**; But I trust in the **LORD**." Here the Psalmist contrasts himself with **idol worshippers**.
- Jonah once again reminds the **LORD** that according to the Psalmist, He hates **idol worshippers**. He tries to manipulate God in aligning Himself with the Psalmist.
- The Hebrew keyword hesed which means **COVENANT LOYALTY** has great significance throughout the Old Testament. This word explains the depths of the **LORD's** commitment to Israel.
- Jonah wants to say that the Ninevites have forsaken their **COVENANT LOYALTY**. The Ninevites, however, didn't have a covenant relationship with God. That's why He sent Jonah to the **GREAT city**.

Jonah 2:9

With a voice of thanksgiving I will sacrifice to YOU. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.

- The language of sacrifice and **vows** reminds one of the Pagan Sailors at the end of Chapter One.
- Some differences include: The Pagan Sailors complete their **vows**, whereas Jonah promises a future **vow**.
- The prophet Jonah displays no **FEAR**; the Sailors, however, **FEARED** a **GREAT FEAR**.
- Similar to the Pagan Sailors, we don't know exactly what Jonah **vows** to the LORD or how he plans to fulfill his promise.
- Jonah alludes to Psalm 3:8, "**Salvation belongs to the LORD; YOUR** blessing is upon **YOUR** people" (NKJV).
- Notice again how Jonah keeps reminding the **LORD** of His chose people, Israel. In Psalm 3:7, the Psalmist meditates on Yahweh breaking the teeth of the wicked.
- Jonah thinks that he has quoted all the right Scriptures in order to appease God. Jonah is confident that he will return to **dry land**.

Jonah 2:10

Then the **LORD** spoke to the fish. It **VOMITED** Jonah out onto dry land.

- The narrator personifies the **fish** almost like its human. The **LORD** speaks and the **fish** obeys His command, unlike Jonah.
- The Hebrew verb for **VOMIT** used with the preposition "to" refers to projectile **VOMITING**.
- Leviticus 18:28, "So that the land may not **spew** you **out** [**VOMIT**], should you defile it, as it has **spewed out** [**VOMIT**] the nation which has been before you" (NAS).
- Leviticus 20:22, "You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not **spew** you **out**" (**VOMIT**).
- This verb never has a good connotation. It's not a neutral verb, rather it lets us know what God really thinks of Jonah's prayer.
- The Pagan Sailors couldn't get Jonah back to **dry land** but the **LORD's APPOINTED GREAT fish** accomplished the task.

Summary of Jonah 2

Since Jonah rebels against the **Word of the LORD**, the **LORD APPOINTED** a **GREAT fish** to swallow him. Just as the **LORD** spoke judgment upon the **GREAT city** (Jonah 1:2) and **HURLED** a **GREAT** wind (Jonah 1:4) and **GREAT** storm after Jonah, (Jonah 1:4, 12), now He **APPOINTS** a **GREAT fish** to judge the prophet's **EVIL** behavior (Jonah 1:17). While soaking in the stomach acid of the **fish**, Jonah reflects upon his experience in the **sea**. He takes several Psalms out of context, personalizes them, and then tries to manipulate the **LORD** into seeing life his way. The **LORD** is **his** God, not the pagans' god (Jonah 2:1). Jonah hopes to enter the **holy temple** again (Jonah 2:4, 7); the **EVIL** Ninevites don't have access to this **temple**. Even when Jonah **WENT DOWN** to the bottom of the **sea**, he still harps about the Ninevites' idolatry (Jonah 2:6-8). Unlike the Pagan Sailors when faced with death made **sacrifices and vows**, Jonah only promises to do the same sometime in the future (Jonah 2:9). The **LORD** gets fed up with Jonah's prayer. He speaks to the **GREAT fish**, and it **VOMITS** the lukewarm prophet out of its mouth onto **dry land** (Jonah 2:10).