



## eLesson 016

**Text: Jonah 2:1-10**

**Subject: Running back to God**

### Jonah – Part 2

**Jonah tried to run away from God.** Then he ran back to Him in repentant prayer. Jonah's prayer tells us something about him. His prayer was a combination of paraphrases of the Psalms. They must have been very familiar to him. The Word, treasured in his heart, came out of his mouth as he prayed. Jonah had the Word with him ... even in the darkness of the whale's stomach. Have you treasured God's Word in your heart? Do your prayers demonstrate your familiarity with the Word?

**Jonah was awake.** *"Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish" 2:1.* He had slept and not prayed in the ship ... but he was awake and praying in the whale. The storm at sea and the captain's exhortation were not enough to cause him to pray. God increased Jonah's distress ... then he prayed. Some Christians do not pray very much. They should ... but they do not. What would it take to wake them? What would God have to do to get them to pray as they should? Many American Christians have been very concerned about getting prayer back into public schools. When I attended public school, I also attended the weekly prayer meeting at church. It was not a big church ... but many of us gathered there to pray on Wednesday nights. The older people and the high school students met in separate rooms so that all could have time to pray. Does your church have a prayer meeting? Do more people go to the prayer meeting or to the church dinner? Maybe Christians should be more concerned about getting prayer back into the church than getting it back into the schoolhouse. Is your church praying? Are you praying? If not, what will God have to do to get you to pray? Is there a whale following your ship?

**Loving discipline.** *"I called out of my distress to the Lord" 2:2.* Distress can certainly change our prayer life. God sent affliction to Jonah to discipline him to repentance. His affliction was not punishment ... it was discipline. Punishment and discipline are different. God does not punish His children. However, we should expect our loving Father to discipline us. It would be unjust if He punished Jesus and us for the same sins. In addition, it would be unloving if He did not discipline us when we need it. Jonah described his discipline as being in the depth of Sheol ... in the deep sea ... in the heart of the sea ... surrounded by sea currents ... and covered by waves and sea swells. He was inside the dark, wet, slimy, smelly, undulating stomach of the whale. He did not know if he would live or die. He was humanly helpless, hopeless, and powerless. He prayed to God, *"For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas" 2:3.* He knew that he was there because of God.

**Turning back to God.** Jonah boarded the ship to try to run away from God. He told the sailors that, *"he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord" 1:10.* What he desired (being away from God) became his discipline. He told the Lord, *"I have been expelled from Thy sight" 2:4.* He felt that God had withdrawn His presence. His physical distress in the whale's stomach was nothing compared to his feeling separation from God. However, even in his exile, God was there. God was ready to give him a second chance. Are you running away from God into some sin? Are you

being disciplined? Do you feel separation from the presence of God? Discipline is only one of the possible reasons for feeling that way ... but it was Jonah's reason. Immersed in the depths of the ocean, he was brought to the edge of death. Seaweed, ingested by the whale, was wrapped around his head. The whale carried him to the bottom of the sea ... to the roots of the mountains. Jonah's physical circumstances seemed like a permanent, earthly prison. His disobedience had brought him to the pit. At that point, he had only one place to turn ... and that was back to God.

**From forgetfulness to praise.** The price of disobedience is much greater than the price of obedience. Jonah was a difficult case requiring much discipline to bring him to repentance. We see that in his own words, *"While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord"* 2:7. He did not repent until he was at the point of slipping into unconsciousness and probable death. Then, and only then, Jonah remembered the Lord. Much of Jonah's prayer is easy to understand. However, verse 8, *"Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness"*, can be confusing. The phrase *"vain idols"* has variant translations in different versions of the Bible. When that happens, I prefer a simple, non-interpretive translation that fits the context. The word *"vain"* could be translated as *worthless*. The second word, *"idols"* could be translated as *vanities* ... meaning *empty plans* or *empty pursuits*. Think about the context. Why would Jonah refer to worthless idols in his prayer? What worthless idols? In verse 9, he added, *"But I will sacrifice to Thee ... that which I have vowed I will pay."* Would a repentant Jonah declare that he had greater righteousness than idol worshippers did? I do not think so. In the context of Jonah, I prefer the simple paraphrase of verse 8, *"People who follow their own worthless, empty plans forget to be faithful to God"*. That was Jonah in chapter one as he followed his own worthless plans and forgot to be faithful to God. Jonah turned away from his worthless plans. He turned back to God. He prayed, *"I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving"* 2:9. The word translated as *"thanksgiving"* also means *praise*. Jonah did not promise to sacrifice animals or birds. He promised a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Do you know how to offer such a sacrifice? You should. *"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."* Hebrews 13:15. Jonah added, *"That which I have vowed I will pay"* 2:9. It is very serious to make a vow to God, Deuteronomy 23:21-23, Ecclesiastes 5:4-5.

**Spiritual more than physical.** The final written words of Jonah's prayer are, *"Salvation is from the Lord"* 2:9. That is not simply the salvation of the Gospel ... it is a general word for deliverance. He was saying, *"Deliverance comes from the Lord."* Jonah's commission came from the Lord. The storm came from the Lord. His being thrown overboard came from the Lord. The whale came from the Lord. All of his discipline came from God. Finally, Jonah acknowledged these things as coming from Him. Deliverance is from the Lord. What deliverance did he mean? He was still inside the whale. Was he confidently stating in faith that God would deliver him from the whale? Or was he praising God as the source of all deliverance? Quite possibly Jonah was acknowledging his own deliverance from the spiritual, rather than physical, consequences of his recent disobedience. He had felt banished from God's sight. Finally, he repented. After that, he knew that God had lifted him up from the pit, 2:6. He knew that his prayers had reached God, 2:7. The vitality of his relationship with God had been restored. His spiritual deliverance happened inside the whale. It was much more important than his physical need to be delivered from the stomach of the whale. Jonah's physical circumstances were the consequence of his spiritual condition. His physical circumstances were not changed until his spiritual condition changed. Some Christians are confused. They are more concerned about their physical life circumstances than they are about their spiritual condition. That is wrong. Is this a needed lesson for you? Do you need to change your focus from the physical to the spiritual? Do you need to change your spiritual condition? Do you need to repent?

**The vomited prophet.** *"Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land"* 2:10. That is an amusing verse. Jonah had been thrown overboard ... then he was thrown up out of the belly of the whale. God commanded the whale to vomit. Were people on the beach playing with their children when the whale swam close to shore? Was anyone fishing nearby? What would they have thought if they saw the whale approaching the beach? What did Jonah think when he felt the whale's stomach convulse? What noise does a vomiting whale make? How

far was he spewed through the air? Was Jonah surprised to land on dry ground instead of in water? How did his eyes react to seeing light for the first time in three days? How water-wrinkled, discolored, or bleached was Jonah's skin? What did he smell like? Did he sit up ... pull seaweed off his head ... look up at a surprised fisherman ... and ask, "Where is the road to Nineveh?" Had he learned his lesson? Would Jonah be obedient this second time?

**God disciplines.** A young boy was asked what he thought was the main lesson of the book of Jonah. He answered that people make fish sick. The lesson of Jonah chapter two is that God disciplines His children to repentance ... it is not that disobedient prophets make fish ill. Jonah tried to flee from God. He got what he sought ... separation from the Lord. The Lord disciplined him back to repentance. Has some sin clouded your relationship with the Lord so that you feel as if He has withdrawn His presence? Do you feel that your life is in the pit? Turn back to God. *"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion"* Proverbs 28:13. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:9. Your spiritual condition is more important than your physical life and circumstances. Seek spiritual deliverance ... then, if God so wills, physical deliverance will follow. He loves us. Therefore, He disciplines us when we need it. *"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."* Hebrews 12:11.

**Turn back to Him.** Jonah's suffering was because of his own sin. However, there are many other reasons for suffering. Be careful ... do not look at all great sufferers as great sinners. Sometimes they are. Sometimes they are not. The remedy for Jonah's sin-caused suffering was repentance. However, God does not always take suffering away after repentance. Most of all, be careful to seriously and prayerfully examine your own life. Does your sin explain your suffering? Is God disciplining you? If you have run away from God, that may explain your whale. Do you need to repent? Call out to God in your distress. Turn back to Him.



## Study Questions Answers at end of lesson.

1. In what two ways did Jonah change from the ship to the whale?
2. What did God use to discipline Jonah?
3. What did distress cause Jonah to do?
4. Jonah was cast (thrown) in what three ways?
5. When did Jonah remember God?
6. What did Jonah vow to God?

7. What did he say about his vow?
8. Who is the source of deliverance?
9. Why did the whale vomit?
10. Where did the vomited prophet land?
11. What do you find when you confess and forsake your transgressions?
12. What is gained by the one trained by discipline?



### Personal Reflection No answers provided for these questions.

1. Is your prayer life more like Jonah in the ship or Jonah in the whale?
2. How much God-sent distress will it take to get you to turn back to Him?
3. How much should it take?
4. Have you been running away from God?
5. In what ways is He disciplining you to turn back?
6. Who has thrown you overboard? What whale has swallowed you? In what deep sea do you find yourself?

7. Do you feel expelled from God's sight?
8. When will you remember God and turn back to him?
9. Has your whale vomited you up on dry land ... surprisingly putting you on the safe shore after a harrowing experience?
10. Will you pay what you vowed in the deeps of your distress?

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## Answers to Study Questions

1. In what two ways did Jonah change from the ship to the whale? **He was asleep and not praying in the ship ... but awake and praying in the whale.**
2. What did God use to discipline Jonah? **A ship, sailors to throw him overboard, and a deep-diving whale.**
3. What did distress cause Jonah to do? **Turn back to God in repentant prayer.**
4. Jonah was cast (thrown) in what three ways? **Overboard, into the deep, and onto shore.**
5. When did Jonah remember God? **When he was fainting away.**
6. What did Jonah vow to God? **A sacrifice of thanksgiving/praise with his voice.**
7. What did he say about his vow? **That he would pay it.**
8. Who is the source of deliverance? **God is.**
9. Why did the whale vomit? **God commanded it to vomit.**
10. Where did the vomited prophet land? **On dry land.**
11. What do you find when you confess and forsake your transgressions? **Compassion, forgiveness, and cleansing.**
12. What is gained by the one trained by discipline? **The peaceful fruit of righteousness.**

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