

Jonah 2 – Jonah Prayed 11-12-17 PM

At the end of Jonah 1, we see God preparing a great fish and Jonah being swallowed by it. Chapter 2 begins with Jonah in the fish, and his offering of a prayer. It finishes with his being vomited out by the fish. It is not entirely clear whether he died in the belly and was resurrected, or was miraculously preserved. Either way, the hand of God delivered him.

One important aspect of this is that Jonah's experience is used to describe Jesus' experience. In Matthew 12:39-40 Jesus says "as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth". This reference describes the time Jesus was dead.

Jonah 2 is primarily a lesson about Prayer. We learn much about prayer when we examine the prayers of men in the Bible. Jesus prayer often; we have examples of this in John 17. David wrote many of the psalms as prayers. Hezekiah's prayer caused God to change His mind and have mercy on him. James 5 cites the prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 17 as an example of the prayer of a righteous man availing much.

What can we learn from Jonah's prayer? First we need to consider the context. If Jonah is not dead, he is as good as dead. His is locked in his own Hades, in utter darkness and filth. Among Muslims, the tradition is that while in this condition he was being burned by the stomach acid of the fish, not an unrealistic observation. So it is that this is a man in torment, as was the rich man in Luke 16. His prayer is of a man at the worst.

But what is interesting about the prayer is that it is not a complaint or a plea. It observes that there is a reason he is here, and that there is a hope for him because he regards God. Jonah's prayer is unusual in giving thanks; he is giving thanks for deliverance even before it has happened. This is an important characteristic of prayer. When we pray, we need to pray as though it has happened. This is the message of Jesus on prayer in Mark 11:22-26.

Another important point is that Jonah reminds us that we must keep what we have vowed before God. There are repeated warnings in Scriptures that God is angry when we do not keep what we have vowed to Him (Numbers 30:2, Ecclesiastes 5:4-6). Christians ought to consider that we make a vow to Him when we become Christians. We make a vow to God when we are joined in marriage. We must honor the vows we make to God lest He become angry.

At the end of the prayer, Jonah is returned to "life" by being vomited on the beach. Thus God has heard Him through a successful prayer.