

# God's Love Preserved Jonah

Bible Background • [JONAH 2](#)  
Printed Text • [JONAH 2](#)  
Devotional Reading • [PSALM 116:1-14](#)

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCOVER with Jonah that God's love protects and preserves when we make decisions to do His will; FEEL grateful for times God rescued or protected us; and EXPLORE how God's love is expressed when we accept the mission He gives us.



Michelle had a chaotic job leading a team of more than fifty people. She was also heavily involved in church activities—volunteering in the youth ministry and singing with the praise team. Along with managing a family of five, Michelle's hectic schedule was taking its toll on her physically and mentally, but most of all spiritually. She knew she needed to spend time in her Bible and to seek God in prayer, but there never was enough time.

Then Michelle started having migraines. She tried to power through them and not let them stop her from all she felt she needed to do, but over time, that only made them worse. Eventually, the migraines got so bad that the only thing that made them subside was lying down in a dark room for a while. "Maybe God's trying to give you a message," Michelle's teen son joked with her one day. "Maybe He just had to make you slow down before you gave yourself a heart attack!" Michelle wondered at this and started to use these quiet times as opportunities to talk with God. She would rest, pray, and see where God had moved in her life that day. Michelle began to see the ways that God protected and provided for her each day, which helped calm her anxiety about taking care of everything herself. The migraines slowly went away, but she still spent time each day reading and praying in her room as her devotion time.

*Has there ever been a time when you experienced God's protection and deliverance?*

## Keep in Mind

"But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD" ([Jonah 2:9](#)).

## **KJV**

**Jonah 2:1** Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

**2** And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

**3** For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

**4** Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

**5** The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

**6** I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

**7** When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

**8** They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

**9** But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

**10** And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

## **NLT**

**Jonah 2:1** Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish.

**2** He said, "I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the land of the dead, and LORD, you heard me!"

**3** You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.

**4** Then I said, "O LORD, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple."

**5** "I sank beneath the waves, and the waters closed over me. Seaweed wrapped itself around my head.

**6** I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O LORD my God, snatched me from the jaws of death!

**7** As my life was slipping away, I remembered the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.

**8** Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies.

**9** But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone.”

**10** Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

## **The People, Places, and Times**

**The seas.** The seas were known in the ancient world as the realm of chaotic, powerful beings. The sea itself was considered a power in opposition to the gods. Many of the Psalms show that the sea far from being opposed to God, is under His rule. He is in control of it ([Psalm 104:7–9](#)) and it gives praise to Him ([Psalm 148:7](#)). This is because the Lord created the sea ([Genesis 1:9](#)) and declared that it was good.

**Vows.** Vows were promises and pledges to God to fulfill an obligation. This usually included offering a sacrifice at the end of a vow. Vows were not mandatory and were done on a volunteer basis. They were usually given in response to God as a form of gratitude ([Psalm 56:12](#)), a way to gain the Lord's favor ([1 Samuel 1:11, 27–28](#)), or to display total dedication to the Lord ([Numbers 6:1–8](#)). The Law provided regulations to making vows, reminding the Israelites that vows were to be taken seriously ([Deuteronomy 23:21–23](#)).

## **Background**

In the previous chapter, Jonah disobediently went in the opposite direction from where God had commanded him to go. He did not want to preach to the Assyrian people of Nineveh, so he decided to board a ship headed for Tarshish. The Assyrians were a conquering nation at the time and known for their cruel methods of subjugation. Jonah, instead of hearing and obeying God's voice, gave in to fear and prejudice. As a result, God sent a storm to stop Jonah's ship and a fish to swallow him.

There in the belly of the fish, Jonah discovers repentance for his actions. This seed of repentance is expressed in a prayer for deliverance from this predicament. This prayer is both a request for deliverance and a hymn of praise. Jonah is committed to obeying God and desperately wants to be released from this situation.

## **In Depth**

### **1. Jonah's Predicament ([Jonah 2:1](#))**

Jonah has gotten himself into a very terrible situation. His disobedience has caused him to be swallowed by a fish. This predicament prompts him to pray. Jonah faces death inside the belly of a fish and has no other option but to cry out to God.

He does not pray from the Temple or the comfort of his home. He prays to God in an impossible and very uncomfortable position. This situation calls for prayer. He is stuck inside a fish and imprisoned. Some would wait out their fate and resign themselves to die, but Jonah has hope in God. He believes that God can hear him no matter where he is and no matter what situation he is in.

## **2. Jonah's Prayer (vv. 2–8)**

Jonah's prayer is a mixture of recounting his immediate circumstances, the horror of what it means to be trapped inside a sea creature, and heartfelt repentance. It is a plea for mercy, but also much more than that—a poetic description of his circumstances. As you read the prayer, you can imagine the seaweed wrapped around his head. You can see the waters overwhelming him. Jonah is intimately familiar with his suffering.

Because of this, Jonah cries out for relief. He wants God's deliverance. He is confident that God will hear his prayer. Although he is trapped in the fish's belly, he believes his prayer has reached God's "holy temple." His hope for deliverance is also contrasted with those who worship idols. They forsake their own hope of salvation from God.

## **3. Jonah's Praise and Preservation (vv. 9–10)**

Jonah is so expectant of God's deliverance that he is already praising Him. His voice of thanksgiving will be his sacrifice to the Lord. He has made a vow to God and will fulfill that vow. This is the attitude of someone fully committed to God no matter what the future holds. Jonah exclaims, "Salvation belongs to the Lord," meaning he will not turn to anyone or anything else for salvation.

The Lord hears Jonah's prayer and speaks to the fish. Jonah was correct to place his complete trust in God. He is sovereign, and even the creatures of the deep obey His voice. The fish obeyed God and vomited Jonah out onto dry land. Jonah's life was preserved because he cried out to God in repentance. Now, he was free to serve the God who saved him.

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. What is the significance of where Jonah chose to look after realizing his distance from God ([Jonah 2:4](#))?
2. What does it mean to forsake your own mercy (v. 8)?

## **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Jonah turned to God in an impossible situation. What popular things do people turn to when they hit rock bottom or their backs are against the wall?
2. Jonah made a vow to God. These were common in the Old Testament. Are we as New Testament believers allowed or expected to make vows?

## Lesson in Our Society

Jonah knew where his help came from. So many today do not know where or to whom to turn when things do not turn out well. Many refuse to go to God in hard times, even if their trouble was caused by their disobedience. The Lord is always willing to show us mercy. There is no sin He will not forgive. As long as we have breath in our lungs, we have the opportunity to pray to Him and seek Him out. There are no impossible cases with God.

## Make It Happen

List three ways God has come to your aid in an impossible situation, and thank Him. If there is an impossible situation in your life, pray the prayer of Jonah and apply it to your situation, knowing that God will hear your prayer. Tell three people about how God has delivered you after you repented of your sins.

## More Light on the Text

### Jonah 2:1-10

#### **1 Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly,**

Some argue that Jonah was not miraculously kept alive in the belly of the fish, but rather that he died and was resurrected after three days as a copy of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection ([Matthew 12:40](#)). Christ's reference to Jonah here does not indicate that Jonah died or was dead for three days, but that he was in the fish's belly for three days. It signifies that Jonah was alive while in the fish's belly. The reference here therefore should be regarded as a metaphor or analogy of Christ's death, or as a simile used for comparison in the same sense as when Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (from [John 2:19](#)). The Matthew passage is clear enough to understand that the emphasis is on "three days and three nights" rather than on death. In the Bible, three days represents a relatively short, divinely-ordained period of time in which something significant and transformative happened ([Joshua 3:2](#); [Esther 4:16](#)). God preserved Jonah alive in the belly of the fish, and Jonah was conscious of where he was; thus, he spent three days praying (2:1) and obviously fasting, too. This was also part of God's design to prepare him for the task ahead.

#### **2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.**

Jonah says that he cried "by reason of mine affliction." The word for affliction is taken from a root word meaning enemy or adversary. In other words, Jonah cried to the Lord because of the opposition against him. We do not know whether Jonah referred to the waves while he struggled to survive in the open sea or the wetness and stench in the belly of the fish.

The word translated "hell" (Heb. *she'ol*, **sheh-OLE**) is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead. This is how Jonah describes his brush with death. Sheol was thought to be under the seas,

so to be in danger in the sea would be akin to being trapped in the “belly” (Heb. *beten*, **beh-TEN**) or the “depths” of hell.

**3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.**

The language here is similar to language in the Psalms (e.g., 18:4, 42:7, 88:17). Some speculate that this prayer is not really from Jonah but someone else. This might be the case, but Jonah might also be utilizing the language of the hymns and prayers that he knows. Whether using his own words or the words of a familiar prayer/psalm, Jonah’s grief is so great that he equates God with the sea itself. God has thrown Jonah into the heart of the sea, and now all of God’s breaking and heaping waves are passing over Jonah. The Hebrew for billows (*mishbar*, **mish-BAR**) is from the verb that means to break or even shatter, referring specifically to the moment when waves are most powerful because they are breaking. Likewise, the word for waves (Heb. *gal*, **GALL**) is from the verb meaning to roll over and over, indicating the constant motion of the waves, even as they are breaking all around Jonah. Only the power of God can equate with the power of the sea in this moment.

**4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.**

Jonah describes his situation. As he is in the belly of the fish, he is cast away from God’s sight. The word for “cast out” is *garash* (Heb. **gahr-OSH**), which is often seen in the Scriptures for banishing God’s enemies from the Promised Land, as well as divorce in the sense of a husband driving out his divorced wife from his home. This is not a slight to God’s omniscience, but a description of Jonah’s spiritual state. At this moment, he is out of God’s favor and separated from His presence. Contrasted to this, Jonah states that he will “look again toward thy holy temple,” confident that he would one day be able to pray in the Temple.

**5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.**

Here Jonah describes his predicament. The waters surrounded him even to his soul (Heb. *nefesh*, **NEH-fesh**). The word for soul in its most basic meaning refers to the throat (where one’s very breath fills the lungs and where one accurate cut can kill), as well as to life itself. In other words, the waters were up to his throat and threatening his very life. Jonah was at the brink of death and needed a reversal of fortune.

The phrase “I went down to the bottom of the mountains” also describes Jonah’s life-threatening situation. The mountains were thought to be rooted in the depths of the earth. In other words, he was in the deepest parts of the ocean with no hope of help or rescue. As he describes the “earth with her bars,” the sense is that there is no turning back. He would drown in the depths of the sea and have no access to the earth.

**7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.**

Now, we see a turn in Jonah's prayer. Before, he describes the pain and agony of his predicament. He was in danger and distress. Now, we see a turning point where he knows his prayer has been heard, and can hope for salvation and deliverance. Before he hoped to be in the Temple praying, but now Jonah declares that his prayer reached the Temple where God's presence resided. Although he was far from God and cast out of His sight, his prayer reached His ears.

Being assured that his prayer was heard probably reinforces for Jonah what he recently learned from the storm at sea. He tried to run away from God, fleeing toward Tarshish. When God sent the storm, however, Jonah knew he could not outrun Him. Now in the depths of the sea, Jonah again thought he was beyond God's power, but again finds that he was wrong. God's power stretches across the farthest sea and to the bottom of the deepest ocean.

**8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.**

In these two verses, Jonah sets up a contrast. The Hebrew word here translated "observe" (*shamar*, **sha-MAR**) is also translated "keep" or "heed." Jonah contrasts himself with those who heed "vanities" (Heb. *hebel*, **HEH-vel**), a word often used to refer to idols and false gods. Those worshiping false gods will neglect their "mercy" (Heb. *khesed*, **KHE-sed**), which is a key theological idea in the Old Testament, referring to covenant love and faithfulness between God and His children, but also just kindness toward others (cf. [Genesis 24:49](#); [Zechariah 7:9](#)). Idolaters forget to be merciful to one another or faithful to their so-called gods. In contrast, Jonah proclaims his faithfulness in sacrifice, thanksgiving, and fulfilling his vows.

Jonah's prayer concludes with a simple yet profound statement: "Salvation is of the Lord." Nowhere does Jonah more directly attest to God's sovereignty. "Salvation" (Heb. *yeshu'ah*, **yeh-SHOO-ah**) can refer to saving one's soul, but more often in the Old Testament it refers to rescuing someone from physical harm. Both are wholly the domain of God. Try as we might to save ourselves, we must surrender to the fact that God is the only One who can save us perfectly from our trials. He can save our bodies from physical harm and our souls from Sheol, as Jonah finally learned.

**10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.**

After three days and three nights, the Lord speaks to the fish (again) and commands it to vomit Jonah onto shore—and it obeys. Once Jonah realizes where his help must come from, he receives it. Jonah does not specifically ask God to save him from the belly of the fish. Instead, he comes to realize that God is the only One who can save him, and that is all the acknowledgment God wants before setting His prophet free to fulfill His will again. It should not be missed that the word for dry land (Heb. *yabashah*, **yah-bah-SHAH**) is the same word Jonah utters in 1:9 when he tells the sailors he worships the Lord "who made the sea and the dry land." Jonah has now experienced both extremes with God, and it is his prayer of confession and salvation that prompts God to remove him from the depths of the sea to the dry land.

If one were to stop reading Jonah here, one would think that Jonah had learned his lesson and obeyed God from then on out. Such a traumatic experience and such a heartfelt prayer could only

mean that Jonah's perspective on life was forever changed. Sadly, the tale of Jonah continues and shows instead how so easily people can forget their mountaintop (or in Jonah's case ocean-depth) resolutions.

## Say It Correctly

Affliction. uh-**FLICK**-shun.

Corruption. ku-**RUP**-shun.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Thanks for Deliverance from Death  
([Psalm 116:1–14](#))

### TUESDAY

Who Can Be Safe with the Leviathan?  
([Job 41:1–11](#))

### WEDNESDAY

The Lord Will Strike, Then Heal  
([Isaiah 19:19–22](#))

### THURSDAY

Answer Me, O Lord  
([Psalm 69:13–18](#))

### FRIDAY

Something Greater Than Jonah Is Here  
([Luke 11:29–32](#))

### SATURDAY

Make Disciples of All Nations  
([Matthew 28:16–20](#))

### SUNDAY

Jonah's Song of Thanksgiving  
([Jonah 2](#))