

Hey, Jo, Where You Goin with that Gospel of Mine?

“Prophets are Friends, Not Food”

Jonah 1:17 - 2:10

Probably the majority of you have the New King James Version of the Bible. There are many other, good, popular translations.

None of you, I'm sure, has the Jefferson Bible.

Founding Father Thomas Jefferson denied all things supernatural, so he edited his own New Testament. It was completed in 1820 by cutting and pasting with a razor and glue numerous sections from the New Testament.

Jefferson's condensed composition is especially notable for its exclusion of all miracles by Jesus and most mentions of the supernatural, including sections of the four Gospels that contain the resurrection and most other miracles.

The story of Jonah and the great fish would not have made the cut in a Jefferson Old Testament. Jesus, however, alluded to it as historical, and we believe the Lord.

Before we get to the great fish, let's set the scene. The Jews enjoyed wonderful spiritual privileges that the Gentile nations did not. In Romans 9:4-5, the apostle Paul lists some of those spiritual privileges:

Romans 9:4 ...to [Israel] *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises;

Romans 9:5 of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God...

As a privileged people, the Jews were commissioned to share the knowledge of God with the Gentiles. The Jews refused; but God, Who is full of pity, sent the message of salvation to the Gentiles despite the Jews and the Gentiles entered into the spiritual privileges of a relationship with God.

Jonah was sent to Gentile Nineveh. Jonah illustrates the Jews in their refusal to share with the Gentiles. God, Who was full of pity, got His message of salvation to Nineveh despite Jonah's refusal, and the people of that city entered into the spiritual privileges of a relationship with God.

We should take all of this to heart: The Church can repeat Israel's disobedience when **we** refuse to show God's pity to those who are perishing.

For a long time, Christians have struggled to minister to homosexuals - today broadly included in what they're calling LBGTQ. When AIDS was first being recognized, early rhetoric from pulpits made it sound like God didn't want homosexuals saved. I won't repeat some of the comments.

God is not willing ANY should perish. Same sex attraction is real for many individuals, including Christians. Acting upon it is sin; it is sexual sin, condemned by God's Word.

But so is fornication and adultery, and other sexual sins committed by people who are considered straight.

Heterosexual or homosexual, God has pity, and the solution is the Gospel.

Now, *to the fish!*

Jonah 1:17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

I'm not going to take any time to convince you that this really happened. There *are* "great fish" large enough to swallow a man whole. The Bible never says it was a whale; but if it was a whale, there are sperm whales large enough to swallow a man whole.

Most of you have heard of a particular historical account, that of James Bartlett who, in 1891, on the whale-ship *Star of the East*, was swallowed by a whale and lived. I want to tell you that there is now some dispute over whether or not that is a true account. It may be true; it may not be true.

The scientists over at *Answers in Genesis* have a good web article that cites a few of the fish it could have been. And they cite theories on how Jonah could have survived the digestive acids, and how he would have had oxygen to breathe.

It doesn't matter if we can repeat it or not. There is a word in verse seventeen that settles the matter: "prepared." The Lord supernaturally *prepared* a great fish to swallow Jonah.

And, as I alluded to earlier, Jesus spoke of it as a true account. Whether anyone else has ever been swallowed by a great fish or whale is irrelevant. *Jonah was swallowed.*

The rest of chapter two is regarded as Jonah's prayer. Interestingly, very little of it is him praying. You're told he prayed, and you're given snatches of his prayer. But most of the words are his description of what he experienced in the pit of the great fish. In each case what he experienced was a reminder of the spiritual privileges that belonged to him as a believer. These are your privileges, too.

There is, of course, the privilege of prayer:

Jonah 2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly.

Jonah 2:2 And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, *and* You heard my voice.

This isn't what he prayed; he's telling you that he did pray. You don't get to his prayer itself until verse four. What you're told here is that Jonah remembered his privilege of prayer. He knew he could "cry out to the Lord" and that the Lord would hear his prayer.

This is the first mention of Jonah praying. He didn't pray at all in chapter one. The storm raged and the nonbelievers "cried out to [their gods]." Jonah slept and didn't pray even when asked to pray by the captain.

The storm was severe – but not severe enough to remind Jonah to pray. So God prepared a pit from which Jonah would remember the privilege of prayer.

Next there is the privilege of God's promises:

Jonah 2:3 For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

Jonah 2:4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

When Jonah said "I will look again toward your holy temple," he was claiming a promise in God's Word. At the dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem, King Solomon prayed and said,

1 Kings 8:38 NASB whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house;

1 Kings 8:39 NASB then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men,

Jonah was claiming this promise. In the pit – in the "deep... in the heart of the seas..." while the "floods surrounded" him and "billows and... waves passed over..." him – he remembered his privilege of claiming God's promises.

Next there is the privilege of God's preservation:

Jonah 2:5 The waters surrounded me, *even* to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head.

Jonah 2:6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.

Jonah had described his pit as “Sheol,” the abode of the dead. The pit was indeed a simulation of Sheol, or Hades. It would have been utterly dark; the temperature would have exceeded 100°; seaweed would be wrapped around him, choking him; there was little in the way of breathable air; acids in the belly would be affecting his skin.

Still Jonah declared “You have brought up my life from the pit.” He meant that God preserves His people. You are indestructible until God has accomplished His will in and through your life. Even though he was in a simulated Hades, God had sent him to Nineveh and would see to it he got there. He remembered the privilege of preservation.

Finally, he remembered the privilege of God’s presence:

Jonah 2:7 “When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went *up* to You, into Your holy temple.”

Jonah had sought to flee from God’s presence. Now he spoke to God with the full awareness that wherever he was, God was present with him. God saw him from His holy Temple – this time a reference to the true Temple in Heaven. God’s omnipresence is a precious privilege.

The Jews were a specially privileged people. We read about some of their national privileges in Romans Nine; we recounted some of their personal privileges just now. Jonah took his privileges for granted, so God prepared a pit for him within which he would remember them.

Whenever you take your privileges for granted, a pit might be something God uses to bring you back to your spiritual senses. Whatever He does, it is worse than leaving you alone in your rebellion.

Jonah is almost ready to be barfed on the beach. First he gets his priorities in order.

Jonah 2:8 “Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy.

Jonah 2:9 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.”

The idols of these civilizations were representative of real supernatural powers. The apostle Paul confirms the association between idols and demons in his first letter to the Corinthian church, saying, "... what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons" (10:20).

No idol can provide the “mercy” that you need in order to have your sin forgiven and be saved. Idolaters especially need the Gospel since they are trusting in a false hope.

Jonah was now ready to “pay what [he had] vowed.” This could be a reference to his calling as a prophet. He was now ready to fulfill it – no matter the assignment.

Then he said, “Salvation is of the Lord.” If God wanted to save Assyrians in Nineveh, then it was His prerogative to do so. Salvation was never exclusive to the Jews.

Having returned to his spiritual priorities, you read in verse ten,

Jonah 2:10 So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry *land*.

The Hebrew word for “vomited” means *vomited*. *What a humiliation*.

In the pit, Jonah’s priorities came back into focus. I should point out that his heart was still hard. After he preached to Nineveh, and after they repented, he was angry and wanted to die.

You can serve the Lord with the wrong motives; that’s a shame. But for now at least Jonah had returned to his priorities, and that’s a start.

If I’m asked to list my priorities, it’s always God... Wife... Family... Church... Work... Trouble is, they all compete for the top spot.

It’s probably best to say that God is my priority, and that I need Him to be first in my marriage, my family, my church, and my work.

Is He? To what extent can I say, “for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain?”

It’s not a rebuke; just something we each ought to reflect upon.