



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Jonah 2:1-10

New Revised Standard Version

May 14, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 14, 2017**, is from **Jonah 2:1-10**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Jonah 2:1) Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,

In dire emergencies, especially when people have time to pray, they will pray without ceasing as long as possible. Jonah lived in the fish long enough to pray lengthy and repetitive prayers, and also examine his relationship with God. He knew he was responsible for his situation, and he was alive only because of God's grace and mercy. God still had plans for him. Perhaps he hoped that the fact he was alive meant God would forgive him. In this chapter we only have brief quotes from his praying.

(Jonah 2:2) saying, "I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

Jonah could only dictate or write a few of the high points of his praying to God. Only God could continue to save him, and God answered Jonah's prayer by saving him from drowning and giving him a second opportunity to obey Him. Jesus descended into the realm of the dead and preached to the spirits in prison. Jonah descended into the depths of the sea and would have died if God had not answered his prayers. Both Jesus and Jonah rose again, and both saved people as the result of their continued ministry.

(Jonah 2:3) You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

Jonah described the situation of a drowning man before and after the LORD sent a fish to save him. Inside the fish, the LORD gave Jonah time for prayer, reflection, self-examination, and repentance. One can imagine Jonah gasping for breath as the waves swept over him. At the same time, he would be praying, “O LORD, save me” repeatedly.

(Jonah 2:4) Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?’

After he was swallowed and saved from immediate death, Jonah considered his guilt and punishment. Having resigned his calling and fled from God in willful disobedience, and now near death inside a fish, Jonah felt banished from the presence of the LORD. God could have sent an angel to carry Jonah to a mountaintop experience with Him, but Jonah needed to experience the redeeming discipline of the LORD for the time God knew he needed; only then would Jonah return to faithful obedience to God. His experience would be valuable to him when he went to Nineveh and preached about the necessity of repentance and obedience. Having felt banished from God’s sight, Jonah resolved to mentally and spiritually turn his thoughts and prayers toward the holy temple in Jerusalem where God had dwelt since the time of King Solomon.

(Jonah 2:5) The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head

We can understand the magnitude of the miracle that God performed to save Jonah; perhaps only second to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Living inside the fish was not a relaxing vacation by the seashore that perhaps Jonah had anticipated when he began his trip to Tarshish. The waters threatened to drown him. The fish dived so deep that he felt he would never rise to the surface and see daylight again. If the waters did not drown him, the seaweed threatened to suffocate him. Every second, he knew his only hope of salvation was the LORD God Almighty, Creator of land and sea.

(Jonah 2:6) at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O LORD my God.

The pit (Sheol, Hades, hell) is the abode of the dead with bars so the prisoners (departed spirits) cannot escape. Jonah declared that he sank down so far into the sea that he was close to dying and entering this prison from which he knew he could not escape. By this time, he probably realized that his rebellion against God deserved God’s just judgment

and eternal condemnation. As he prayed to the LORD, he only escaped the pit because the LORD brought up his life from the pit. After Jesus died on the cross and was buried He preached to the departed spirits in this same prison: “For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:17-20).

(Jonah 2:7) As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

Even as he felt he was near death, Jonah kept praying to the LORD as the One who could save him. His spirit of rebellion against God had been replaced with a spirit of submission. He learned that no one could disobey God and continue running down a path of disobedience without serious, eternal consequences. From floating in the darkness, perhaps being slowly digested with all the other food in the belly of the fish, his skin would show the effects of three days in the fish and be a public demonstration of God’s punishment for his rebellion. Because he did not know what direction he faced as the fish swam and dived (probably making him seasick), Jonah continued to look spiritually toward the holy temple in Jerusalem and prayed to the LORD (not toward the idol-filled temple in the Kingdom of Israel).

(Jonah 2:8) Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.

As his life passed before him, Jonah remembered his fellow idolatrous Israelites (whose kingdom would be destroyed in 722 BC by the Assyrians because of their idolatry), and the Assyrian Ninevites to whom God had sent him to preach a message of judgment because of their idolatry, and the pagan sailors on the ship who prayed helplessly to their idols that had no power to save them. All these people had turned to and trusted in worthless idols, and Jonah had run away from the only true God, the God of compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and redeeming power. Together, these various translation differences teach some of the consequences of turning from God and clinging to idols: KJV= “forsake their own mercy;” NASB= “forsake their faithfulness;” ESV= “forsake their hope of steadfast love;” NRSV= “forsake their true loyalty;” NIV= “turn away from God’s love for them.”

(Jonah 2:9) But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!”

Jonah concluded his prayer with a proclamation of praise because God had assured him of salvation. Jonah proclaimed his faith in God, that God would save him and he would live to make sacrifices to God once again. Just as the sailors who turned to the LORD made vows, so did Jonah. He probably vowed to obey God in the future and do whatever God commanded. He would tell everyone he saw, and he would preach in Nineveh the truth that he now knew personally with absolute certainty: “Salvation comes from the LORD.”

(Jonah 2:10) Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

After Jonah had prayed for three days and three nights in the fish, God determined that Jonah was truly ready to set foot on dry land again as His obedient servant. The word “vomited” may have been used to show how disgusted the fish must have felt to have such a disgusting, rebellious person as Jonah within it. Jesus used Jonah’s experience in the fish as a prophecy or sign that He would fulfill after He was buried and three days later rose from the dead. Even as Jonah led thousands to repent in Nineveh, with the salvation of many Gentiles, so Jesus’ preaching after his death and resurrection resulted in His disciples becoming apostles. In turn, they and their followers preached the gospel throughout the world with untold millions of people eventually being saved – even some as wicked as the Ninevites. See Matthew 12:39-41 – “Jesus answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.’”

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. If you had been Jonah, when would you have started praying to the LORD and when would you have stopped praying about your experiences inside the fish?
2. If you had been Jonah, what vows to the LORD would you have made?
3. How might Jonah’s three days and three nights in the belly of the fish have expanded his knowledge of the true God?
4. Remembering what you have learned about Jonah’s experiences so far, when did Jonah have opportunities to repent for running away from doing God’s will? When do you think he should have repented?

5. In what verses did Jonah say he prayed toward the LORD's holy temple? From those verses, what might have prompted Jonah to pray toward the LORD's holy temple? Why do you think he mentioned these prayers with the added fact that he had prayed toward the LORD's holy temple?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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