

Jonah 2:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/jonah/jonah-2/jonah-21/>

Jonah prays to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish.

In chapter one we learned that Jonah disobeyed the LORD's command to go to Nineveh and took a ship to Tarshish, which went a long distance in the opposite direction. When the LORD frustrated Jonah's plan by sending a great storm on the sea, Jonah told the sailors to throw him overboard. Jonah may have thought he could escape his mission through death, but the LORD's plan was for him to stay alive to preach to the wicked city of Nineveh. Thus, the LORD commissioned a great fish to swallow Jonah to spare his life from drowning. The prophet remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, which creates an image of Jesus's time in the belly of the tomb (Jonah 1:17).

While *Jonah* was in the belly of the fish, he came to his senses and *prayed*. This is the first instance in which the text explicitly tells us that the prophet *prayed*. It seems Jonah was resigned to die while on the boat. But now that Jonah is in the belly of the fish it seems he has a change of heart.

When the sea was raging, the pagan sailors *prayed* to their gods and urged *Jonah* to pray to his god so that the sea might become calm (Jonah 1:6). However, there is no indication that Jonah did so. Instead of repenting and praying *to the LORD* for forgiveness, Jonah preferred to die in the sea. It seems he thought that in his death, Israel's enemy, Assyria, would be judged rather than spared through Jonah's message of repentance. So, he asked the sailors to throw him overboard (Jonah 1:12). Here, at last, he *prayed to the LORD*.

That *Jonah* finally *prayed* is crucial in the development of the narrative. In the previous chapter, *Jonah* told the sailors that he feared "the LORD, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). Jonah's statement prompted the sailors to recognize the LORD's power. So, they *prayed* to Him before throwing *Jonah* into the sea (Jonah 1:14). They even sacrificed to *the LORD* and made vows when He delivered them from their calamity by causing the storm to stop (Jonah 1:16). Here too, *Jonah* *prayed*. He addressed his prayer *to the LORD his God*. Now, both the sailors and *Jonah* acknowledged God's power.

The phrase *the LORD his God* is significant. It makes clear that *Jonah* had a relationship with *the LORD*. Jonah was a prophet of God. Unlike the sailors who worshiped and served pagan gods before experiencing the storm, *Jonah* knew *the LORD* and was used to worshipping Him because he was a prophet (1 Kings 14:25). Ironically, *Jonah* rebelled against *the LORD his God* by trying to escape his prophetic mission. But when *the LORD* spared *Jonah's* life from drowning, he finally acknowledged his dependence on *the LORD*. So, he cried out to *the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish*.

It is interesting to consider that Jonah's preference at this point was to die, seemingly. So God sparing his life might initially have been met by Jonah with annoyance. But Jonah's life inside

the fish apparently caused him sufficient discomfort and anxiety to alter his perspective. We can only imagine a man living inside a *fish* for an extended period. Such an experience would have been painful and fearful for *Jonah*. But through it all, *Jonah* learned the lesson God wanted to teach him. He learned to depend on God alone. The prophet humbled himself before *the LORD*, thanking Him for providing such a great *fish* to deliver him from drowning.

Although *Jonah* prayed inside *the fish*, he recorded the prayer after the *fish* spit him out. The prophet was thankful that God miraculously intervened on his behalf. So, he recounted the story of his deliverance. In doing so, he articulated his gratitude to *the LORD* for preserving his life from the inevitable death by drowning through a great *fish*. In this case, the *fish* became a source of salvation for the prophet.

Biblical Text

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish.