

# God's Protective Love

Jonah 2:1-10

SS Lesson for 05/14/2017

**Devotional Scripture:** Ps 116:1-14

## OUTLINE

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OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

*Key Verse: Jonah 2:9*

*Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

*Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

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Prayer that comes from a righteous heart (James 5:15-16)

Prayer for those captivated by sin (1 John 5:16)

Prayer that is in the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:18)

Prayer that asks for an open door for those who proclaim the gospel (Col 4:3)

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Salvation for those baptized in Jesus (Gal 3:26-29)

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God delivers through prayer (Phil 1:19)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

## Introduction

### Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson helps us understand that **God's Protective Love** protects both physically and spiritually. The **study's aim** is to recognize that God's love leads Him to protect us while He disciplines us. The **study's application** is to utilize God's means of protection from spiritual dangers.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

### Key Verse: Jonah 2:9

*9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."*

### Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

This prayer by Jonah was not a plea for deliverance for there were no petitions in it. The prayer is a psalm of thanksgiving (v. 9) to God for using the fish to save him from drowning. The prayer was made while Jonah was in the fish's stomach (v. 1) but it was written of course after he was expelled from the fish's stomach. Sensing that the great fish was God's means of delivering him, Jonah worshiped God for His unfathomable mercies. Jonah praised God for delivering him from death (cf. Ps. 30:3) in a watery grave (cf. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974, pp. 84-6). The contents of Jonah 2 correspond in several ways to the contents in chapter 1:

**2:1-2.** After noting the place (**inside the fish**) where he voiced this prayer, **Jonah** poetically recounted the story of his deliverance. Though the sailors had sacrificed to **the LORD** (1:16), He was in a special sense Jonah's God. When the sailors cast him overboard, **in... distress** he prayed and **the LORD... answered** with a miraculous provision (the fish). The phrase **from the depths of the grave** refers to the fear of death that gripped the prophet. It does not mean he actually died. God **listened to his cry** for help and went to his rescue.

Here the prophet recorded his watery horror and God's gracious deliverance.

**2:3.** Though the sailors had thrown him into the sea (1:15), actually God had **hurled him into the deep**, that is, He was behind their action. As **the currents** of the Mediterranean **swirled about** Jonah, he knew that God controls the **waves and breakers** (Jonah called them **Your**; cf. Ps. 88:7).

**2:4.** **Banished** by God because of his sin of disobedience, the prophet evidenced repentance and renewed faith, for he expressed confidence in approaching God (**I will look again toward Your holy temple**). The "holy temple" may be the Jerusalem temple or, perhaps more likely, God's heavenly abode (cf. Ps. 11:4), for the prophet said (Jonah 2:7) his prayer "rose" to God in His temple. Or verse 4 could refer to the Jerusalem temple and verse 7 to the heavenly temple.

**2:5-6a.** In his peril the **waters threatened** to take his life and the sea **surrounded** him. Ocean vegetation was bound about his **head** as if to imprison him. In the sea he **sank** to the bottoms **of the mountains**, and **the earth** was about to entrap him permanently. This is the prophet's description of his plunge into what appeared to be a watery grave.

**2:6b-7.** At the point of Jonah's hopelessness and utter despair, God used the fish to lift the prophet **up from the pit** ("pit" is a synonym for grave). Because God had saved his life, the repentant prophet confessed that the **LORD** was his **God** (cf. v. 1). Sensing that he was about to die by drowning and that his **life was ebbing away**, he turned to God, praying to Him (cf. v. 2) for deliverance (on the **holy temple**; cf. comments on v. 4). In the gravest of perils the prophet prayed and his petitions **rose** to heaven to be answered most uniquely.

**2:8-9.** The statement concerning the folly of trusting **worthless idols** provides a dark background against which God's brilliant grace is evident. No lifeless idol could effect so great a deliverance as the God of

heaven, who made the sea and the land (cf. 1:9). In contrast with those who trusted weak idols for deliverance (cf. 1:5) Jonah offered a **sacrifice** (cf. 1:16) of praise to the true God who effected such a wondrous provision. Also he **vowed** to obey the Lord because **salvation** (i.e., deliverance) **comes from the LORD**. Deliverance from perilous situations is a provision from a gracious God.

**2:10.** After the deliverance of **Jonah** from the watery grave, **the LORD commanded the fish** to deposit the prophet safely on **dry land**, presumably on the coast of Palestine after the three-day return journey (cf. 1:17). Seven miracles have taken place already in this short narrative: God caused a violent storm (1:4), had the lot fall on Jonah (1:7), calmed the sea when Jonah was thrown overboard (1:15), commanded the fish to swallow Jonah (1:17), had the fish transport him safely, had the fish throw Jonah up on dry land, and perhaps greatest of all, melted the disobedient prophet's heart (evidenced by his thanksgiving prayer in chap. 2).

### **Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

Jonah was in an awkward situation! He was trapped in the belly of a fish, not knowing how long he would be in it or what would happen if he got out. He did not know where the fish was going. He did know that he was somewhere deep within the sea. He also knew that he had brought this on himself. When he ran from his mission, he chose to rebel against God's revealed will. Ending up in a fish was the result of a disobedient decision that set him on a crash course toward disaster. At this point, most people would have been tempted to throw up their hands in despair. After all, Jonah was trapped in the sea. He was too far away from shore to swim back. Besides, he did not know where he would land if he made it to shore. It would have been easy to get angry and just give up. At first glance, it looked as though God had completely abandoned the hapless prophet. However, nothing was further from the truth. The reality is that God, despite what happens, never stops protecting His people. There were so many things that could have occurred. Jonah could have drowned, or the sailors could have chosen to take a knife and kill him on the spot. Instead, God brought a fish to swallow Jonah. Inside, Jonah was kept safe. He was not floundering in the middle of a storm-tossed ocean. God gave Jonah a free ride back to shore! God continually did this with His chosen ones in Scripture. Whether He was shutting a lion's mouth (Dan. 6:22), parting a sea (Exod. 14:21-22), or even letting someone hitch a ride in a fish, God protected His children. In Psalm 34 we read, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (vs. 7). Isaiah praised God for being a shelter in the storm (Isa. 25:4). Even Jonah recognized God's protective hand (Jonah 2:6). God is still demonstrating that protective love toward us today. When trouble is stalking us and we are feeling battered, it is easy to forget that He is there. The temptation is to give in to despair and let the tides of circumstance carry us wherever they will. However, we do not have to give in to that impulse. We have a holy God who is in control of all things. The same God who calmed the storm (Luke 8:22-25) is the One who watches over all who love Him (Ps. 145:20). He has each of our names written on the palms of His hands (Isa. 49:16). Though trouble may press hard on us, God will not allow His children to be destroyed (2 Cor. 4:8-9). This means that we need not fear when we face trouble. We know that we will face it in this life (John 16:33). Christ Himself faced it. However, believers have an assurance that the rest of the world lacks. We have an all-powerful God who helps us through hard times and provides a way of rescue for His own. Are you facing a crisis in your life today? Whether physical, financial, relational, or whatever, give it to God. If you belong to Him by His grace, you will be protected. Although it may look doubtful, His plan for your rescue is already in place. Take heart, hold on, and trust in Him to provide the protection you need.

### **Lesson Introduction and Background**

#### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

In 1884, the American Christian Review related a prayer experience between Jacob Creath Jr. and L. B. Wilkes that took place in 1854, as recounted by Wilkes. The location was Lagrange, Missouri, where Wilkes had come to preach. After breakfast, Creath invited Wilkes to take a walk into a nearby wooded area. Stopping by a fallen tree, Creath said, "Let us pray." According to Wilkes, *My soul trembled with excitement. Brother Creath talked so to God that I voluntarily felt for the moment that if I should open my eyes I should certainly see Him upon whom no one can look and live. I never heard such a prayer before, and now thirty years have passed since that remarkable experience, and yet I have heard no such prayer since.* In today's world it is very difficult to have a quiet nook in the woods in which to pray. The important thing is to pray regardless. Busy schedules tend to squeeze prayer out of daily life. There is only one way to pray daily: take time to pray, for there is no such thing

as “finding time.” Don’t be like Jonah, saving your most earnest prayer until a crisis forces it from you. Instead, “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

You may wonder why was Jonah so determined to disobey God by not going to Nineveh, a major city in Assyria? One definite reason is given in Jonah 4:2. Some students offer the further possibility that Jonah, as a prophet, did not want to associate with idol worshippers. Furthermore, there had been military conflicts between Israel and Assyria (of which Nineveh was the capital); this may have caused Jonah to dislike the Assyrians. That is speculation, but a review of the former campaigns between the two nations provides probable cause. During the years of Jonah’s ministry in the eighth century BC, Assyria was having internal problems and was not a threat to Israel. The actions of the past, however, were remembered. Some of the people involved in those wars could have been alive during Jonah’s lifetime. The prophet’s hometown of Gath Hopher was in northern Israel (2 Kings 14:25), a region more likely to have experienced conflict with the Assyrians. Jonah may have had relatives who fought against them. In 853 BC, about 75 years before Jonah began his prophetic ministry, King Shalmaneser III (not mentioned in the Old Testament) had attacked a coalition of 11 or 12 kings that included King Ahab of Israel. Assyrian records proclaim Shalmaneser to have won the resulting Battle of Qarqar; the losses he claims to have inflicted on the coalition include 2,000 chariots and 10,000 men of Israel. Actually, it appears that the battle was indecisive, with the Assyrians advancing no farther that year. It is very possible that some of Jonah’s relatives of a previous generation fought the brutal Assyrians in that battle. In 841 BC, Shalmaneser III again flexed Assyrian power against Israel. His famous black obelisk shows Jehu of Israel bowing before him (although some think it is a representative who is bowing). Another king of Assyria reigned from 811 to 783 BC. He received tribute from Jehoash (Joash), father of Jeroboam II. Jonah prophesied about events in the reign of the latter (2 Kings 14:25). Considering all these factors, it is quite plausible that Jonah and his fellow Israelites had a great disdain, even hatred, for Assyria. Jonah would rather go anywhere than to those despised people!

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Protection During The Situation (Jonah 2:1-4)**

- 1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly.
- 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.
- 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.
- 4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

### **Allows prayer (1-2)**

*Prayer that "strives" with others (Rom 15:30)*

30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

*Prayer that comes from a righteous heart (James 5:15-16)*

15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

*Prayer for those captivated by sin (1 John 5:16)*

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.

*Prayer that is in the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:18)*

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

*Prayer that asks for an open door for those who proclaim the gospel (Col 4:3)*

3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

### **Time to realize consequences (3)**

*Consequences of God's pronouncement of punishment (Num 16:28-33)*

28 Then Moses said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: 29 If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the Lord has not sent me. 30 But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt." 31 As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. 33 They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community.

*Consequences of man's pronouncement of punishment (Dan 6:24)*

24 At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

*Consequences of sharing the punishment of sin (Josh 7:20-24)*

20 Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: 21 When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath." 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. 23 They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord. 24 Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor.

*Consequences of not partaking of the good things of God (Jer 29:32)*

32 this is what the Lord says: I will surely punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He will have no one left among this people, nor will he see the good things I will do for my people, declares the Lord, because he has preached rebellion against me."

### **Seeking a better future (4)**

*Future blessing of rewards (Matt 10:40-42)*

40 "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

*Future blessing of receiving many times as much as given (Luke 18:28-30)*

28 Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" 29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

*Future blessing in this life and the life to come (1 Tim 4:6-8)*

6 If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

*Future blessing of the right to sit with Jesus on His throne (Rev 3:21)*

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

### **Protection Allows A Thinking Change (Jonah 2:5-7)**

5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. 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. 7 "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple.

### **Aware of trials and tribulations (5-6)**

*Trials and tribulations as an example to others (Jude 7)*

7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

*Trials and tribulations as a test (James 1:12)*

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

*Trials and tribulations to show God's love (Rev 3:19)*

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

*Trials and tribulations that are part the discipline of being a child of God (Heb 12:7-8)*

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

*Trials and tribulations that produces holiness and righteousness (Heb 12:10-11)*

10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

### **Remembering God (7)**

*Remembering so it can be taught to future generations (Exodus 12:26-27)*

26 And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' 27 then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'" Then the people bowed down and worshiped.

*Remembering so that we don't forget what God has done for us (Ps 105:3-5)*

3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. 4 Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. 5 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

*Remembering so that we will understand God better (Mark 8:17-18)*

17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?"

*Remembering to ensure we are always thankful for God's blessings (Luke 17:12-19)*

12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him — and he was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

*Remembering to be thankful because of where we came from (Eph 2:11-13)*

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

### **Protection Knowing God's Love (Jonah 2:8-10)**

8 "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy.

9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

10 So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

### **Love that provided salvation (8-9)**

*Salvation among all nations (Ps 67:2)*

2 that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

*Salvation that comes from the sanctification through faith (Acts 26:16-18)*

16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

*Salvation for everyone who believes (Rom 1:16)*

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

*Salvation for those baptized in Jesus (Gal 3:26-29)*

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

*Salvation through the gospel (Eph 3:6)*

6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

## Love that delivers (10)

*God delivers from the evil one (Matt 6:13)*

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

*God delivered from the dominion of darkness (Col 1:12-14)*

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

*God delivers from deadly peril (2 Cor 1:10)*

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

*God delivers through prayer (Phil 1:19)*

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### *Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh*

#### **The Lessons of This Chapter**

Despite the discomfiting reality of Jonah's continued rebellion in this chapter—indeed, because of it there are several important lessons to be learned from this chapter. As we close, let me draw your attention to the lessons for Israel, and for the church.

#### *Lessons for Israel*

As we have already shown, Jonah was not only a prophet by virtue of his declarations, but also by his deeds, specifically his disobedience. Jonah typified the stubborn rebellion of God's people, Israel. Just as Jonah disobeyed God's order, Israel disobeyed God's law. Just as Jonah refused to carry out his task of preaching to the Gentiles, so did the nation Israel. Just as Jonah called on God for deliverance, yet without genuine repentance, so did Israel. Just as Jonah had the outward trappings of righteousness, the right forms and the right terms, but lacked genuine righteousness, so did Israel.

The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day typify this same willfulness and rebellion. When He came, our Lord, as it were, swept away the three-fourth inch covering of snow from the accumulated garbage of Judaism. Jesus uncovered and condemned the smug self-righteousness and hypocrisy of the Israelite leaders, just as the Book of Jonah has done with the prodigal prophet.

The scribes and Pharisees were meticulous about the details of their religious forms and ceremonies (the gnats which they strained), but they overlooked the essence of true godliness—obedience (the “camels” they swallowed). Just as Jonah chaffed at the thought of the repentance and forgiveness of the Assyrians, so the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees bristled at the repentance of the “prodigal son,” as reflected by the older brother (Luke 15:11-32). They protested against the fact that Jesus spent his time with “**sinners**” and not with them (cf. Mark 2:16). And just as Jonah smugly saw himself as righteous, while the pagan was a sinner (Jonah 2:8-9), so the scribes and Pharisees looked down their spiritual noses at others:

“The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:11-14).

The rejection of Christ and of the gospel by the Jews proved to be the occasion for the salvation of the Gentiles, just as Jonah's disobedience was the means of God bringing the sailors and the Assyrians to salvation:



I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! (Rom. 11:11-12).

If not by their obedience, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all the nations through Israel.

### *Lessons for Contemporary Christians*

Before showing the similarities of Jonah's sins to those of saints in our own day, let me point out one significant difference between Jonah's thinking and ours today. Jonah, thinking with the mindset of the Old Testament Jew, rested and relied on his election as an Israelite, failing to see his relationship to God in terms of grace, but in terms of some kind of intrinsic worth, based upon his race and perhaps even on his calling as a prophet. Today we tend to presume upon God's grace. We use the grace of God as an excuse for our disobedience. Jonah tended not to see himself as sinful, as much so, or more than, the heathen; we, on the other hand, see ourselves as depraved, and admit this as part of our human condition, but we view God as somehow committed and thus obligated to forgive. The common element, then and now, is viewing God as obliged to bless "His people," regardless of their rebellion, and to view "heathen" sins as more reprehensible to God than "sacred sins," like disobedience.

*Jonah's "psalm" warns us of the very real danger of superficial spirituality.* The fact that Jonah's "psalm" has been taken so seriously by scholars and laymen alike warns us that we are not sensitive to superficiality in spiritual things. The church at Sardis, addressed by God in the third chapter of Revelation, was superficially spiritual: "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and you are dead" (Rev. 3:1b).

Superficial spirituality is very skilled in following the approved religious forms and in the use of pious platitudes. Because of this, it initially looks holy and good. But a little probing reveals its true character. I might say also that a little persecution or suffering also quickly exposes the spiritual reality.

I greatly fear that superficial spirituality is the norm in America, rather than the exception. I fear that there is much of this in my life and in our church. May God give us the grace to see it for what it is and to deal accordingly with it.

Superficial spirituality has several tell-tale symptoms. For one, it relies on the wrong things. It relies on one's background, one's ancestry, one's denominational heritage, one's position (an elder in the church, etc.), or one's knowledge. None of these constitute spirituality. Many of them are used to counterfeit it.

Superficial spirituality relies heavily on forms. It borrows much from others; it mimics piety rather than manifests it. Superficial spirituality prays only in dire circumstances; it is motivated by crises, and is manifested by foxhole prayers. It is selfward in orientation, rather than Godward or manward. It seems insensitive or oblivious to personal sin, yet it recognizes sin in others. It lacks a depth of intimacy with God and has little evangelistic fervor. It has a very narrow band of concern, and is usually very introverted in focus (e.g., "Lord, bless our missionaries."). It tends to distort doctrines and to accommodate or excuse one's sins (such as Jonah's use of God's sovereignty, veiling his own sin).

*The salvation of Jonah reminds us that God's means of saving us are not those we would have chosen.* God does not save us according to our preferences, but according to His provision. The great fish would not have been Jonah's choice of accommodations, but as unpleasant as the belly of the fish was, it did the job. Jonah would have much preferred a dramatic search effort, employing a Coast Guard cutter, helicopters, and skin divers. He would rather have been hoisted aboard a ship and given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation by a beautiful female sailor. God did not flatter Jonah in the means by which He saved him because pride was one of this prophet's principle problems.

So too, God's means of saving men has never been flattering either. Spending 400 years as slaves in Egypt was not flattering to the Israelites, nor entering into the Red Sea or the river Jordan, nor slaughtering an innocent animal and pouring out its lifeblood on God's altar, but these were the means which God provided. Looking up to a brazen serpent was not a flattering way to be healed from the bite of a serpent, but it was God's way. Trusting in the death, burial, and resurrection of a rejected king, the Lord Jesus Christ, is not man's preferred means of finding the forgiveness of sins and of entering into eternal life, either. Nevertheless, this is the means which God has provided for man's eternal salvation. This is the only means. If you have not experienced His salvation, you may have to be brought very low, as low as Jonah, so that any means of salvation is gladly received.

May God keep us from the superficial and synthetic spirituality of Jonah's "psalm", and bring us to the vibrant and genuine spirituality of the Book of Psalms.

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-prodigal-prophet-jonah-21-10>)*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

In the previous lesson, we began a series from the book of Jonah on the different aspects of God's love. Jonah was a prophet commissioned by God to go and preach a message of repentance to the city of Nineveh. He disobeyed the Lord and went in the opposite direction. The Lord brought a great storm at sea as discipline. After the crew of the ship determined that Jonah was the cause of their trouble, they tossed him into the sea and prayed. "We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee" (Jonah 1:14). The sea stopped its raging, and the sailors offered a sacrifice and made vows to the Lord. Through God's disciplinary love toward Jonah, these pagan sailors had come to know the true God. Jonah 1 ends with the Lord appointing a great fish to swallow Jonah and preserve him from the dangers of the sea. Jonah stayed in the fish's belly for three days and three nights. The lesson text for this week is Jonah 2:1-10. It describes Jonah's response while he was in the belly of the fish. While in the belly of the fish, Jonah had time to reflect on what had occurred, and he offered a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord. Because Israel's prophets were well-trained in the use of poetry and oral composition, it comes as no surprise that Jonah's prayer is offered in the form of a psalm. Jonah first thanked the Lord for responding to his cry of distress. When he was thrown from the ship into the raging sea, Jonah surely thought himself dead. Like any other believer in a similar situation likely would, he cried out to the only one who could help him. "He heard me" and "thou heardest my voice" (Jonah 2:2) are more than descriptions of God's auditory ability. These statements describe God's taking special notice of Jonah's peril and intervening to help. Although the Lord was the one who had cast Jonah into the sea and encompassed him with its billows (vs. 3), He was also the one who would deliver him. Jonah's inability to breathe and the vastness of the sea encompassing him gave him little hope of survival. The phrases used to describe his predicament have their background in ancient Near Eastern imagery for death. The "bars" (Jonah 2:6) of the underworld depict the inability of its occupants to escape, like the "gates of hell" in Matthew 16:18. "The bottoms of the mountains" (Jonah 2:6) describe the distance of the souls of the dead from the land of the living. It is from these depths that God rescued Jonah. Although Jonah seemed quite cavalier about his death when talking with the sailors on board the ship, his attitude changed when he approached its reality. The Lord sent a fish to deliver and protect him. Jonah responded with thanksgiving and a promise to fulfill his vow to God, recognizing that "salvation is of the Lord." The scene concludes with the Lord directing the fish to the coastline, where Jonah was vomited onto the shore. Even as Jonah was being disciplined by the Lord for his disobedience, God's protective love delivered him from death, preserved him in the sea, and brought him safely back to land. Having experienced both God's disciplinary love and His protective love, Jonah was now better prepared to obey and serve Him.

### **Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

1. God's grace is evident as He helps us through the consequences of disobedience (Jonah 2:1)
2. There is no place too distant and no trouble so severe that our prayers cannot reach the ears of God (vs. 2)
3. Believers benefit from God's discipline as they acknowledge their guilt and submit to God (vs. 3)
4. God's ultimate goal in discipline is to redeem us and bring our hearts back to Him (vss. 4-6)
5. Knowing God is committing to act based on what we believe about Him (vs. 7)
6. As you go through difficulties, remember that God has already prepared your deliverance (vss. 8-10)