

# Jonah's Repentance

Douglas W. Cho, D.R.S.

*[Jonah 2: 1-9] 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.' 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. 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."*

Jonah was a prophet of God who served Him in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, as referenced in 2 Kings 14. God had told him to preach a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh in Assyria (today's Iraq), which was to attack Israel shortly. Jonah disliked the divine command and fled from God's presence by being on a ship heading to Tarshish. He was blamed for the great storm and was thrown into the sea by the sailors to appease the sea's tumult. Jonah was swallowed by a big fish prepared by God. Within the fish's belly, Jonah repented and pledged obedience to God. His prayer introduced above ascended to God and he was thrown out of the fish's belly.

As we finish the year 2021, I'd like to encourage you to look back to the past year and examine our spiritual life to see if we have been obedient to God's commands and instructions. Throughout the Old Testament era, the people of Israel were the chosen people of God. Accordingly, the priests and the prophets of God ministered to the people of Israel mostly. When God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, where very cruel, sinful people dwelt, he had no desire to obey the command. However, God was interested not only in His chosen people of Israel but also in the gentile peoples who lived in surrounding regions so that they might be led to repentance and to serve Him. God's heart of love and mercy toward all peoples of His creation was behind the coming of Jesus Christ as a human some 700 years later so that the gospel of grace could be preached to them. The missionaries who are taking the gospel to many parts of the world, particularly in the countries where Christianity is not welcome, are demonstrating the heart of God through their labor of love and sacrifice.

God wanted the people of Israel to be the channel of His blessings to all humanity. He showed the uncountable stars of the night sky to Abraham as a way of teaching him of this vision. Throughout the Old Testament era, God continued to encourage His people to become an example and model to the gentiles around them. However, the Jewish people, even today, fail to fully understand this unique mission from God. During the end times, however, they will experience a great awakening and many Jews will take the gospel of Christ to the ends of this world while being subject to persecution and tribulation [Rev. 7:3-8].

As Jonah fled from God's presence because he failed to understand God's heart of love and mercy, the ship he was on experienced a great storm, and the sailors cried out to their gods to save them. Jonah, however, was fast asleep in a corner of the ship. He lost the place of prayers because he lost obedience to God. He was all by himself. Upon casting a lot to determine who was the cause of the storm, Jonah was thrown into the sea. In verse 3, Jonah confessed that it was God Himself, not the sailors, who threw him into the deep. He confessed that the hard experience of discipline came to him by God and not by others. God disciplined him because He still loved Jonah.

While being trapped in the belly of the great fish, Jonah realized that he now was facing death, where the digestive fluids of the fish would decompose his body and he would soon lose his life. He cried out to God to save him from this dire situation [v. 6]. Just as his spirit would give up, his prayer reached the temple of God [v. 7]. All Jews trust in Solomon's prayer offered to God during the temple dedication ceremony in 1 Kings 8, and they pray

toward the temple in Israel even now when there is no temple standing there. However, the New Testament Christians do not place their trust in the non-existent temple because Lord Jesus promised that God would answer their prayers offered in the name of Jesus Christ.

*[John 14:13-14] And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.*

If, during 2021, you have lost the true peace within you, even in the place of prayer, find it difficult to have a genuine dialogue with your God, and have lost your testimony so that you were not able to testify the love, mercy and great power of the Almighty God of heaven and earth to those around you, I'd like you to cry out to God to help you and to save you from the situation where you are, so that your soul and salvation could be restored.

When you cry out to God of mercy and forgiveness, He will gladly restore the joy of salvation in you, so that you may begin the new year of 2022, just as Jonah did of wanting to "sacrifice with the voice of thanksgiving and paying your vows" in praise of our Lord Jesus. Amen.