

Chapter 2

ANCHORED IN THE DEEP

Throughout the years some have questioned the validity of this story. The idea of a man spending three days in the belly of a whale and living to talk about it is a little far-fetched for some people to swallow. But is it really? Or could it be that they're underestimating the miraculous power of God?

We have several reasons to believe this story is true, the first being that Jesus Himself makes mention of it in Matthew 12:40, where He draws a parallel between Jonah's three-day ordeal and His own resurrection. Jesus says, "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." Now, if we take Jesus at His word, which we absolutely do, then this reference affirms the reality of Jonah's experience.

Furthermore, Jonah's story isn't a standalone narrative. In 2 Kings 14:25, we see Jonah's prophecy against Nineveh mentioned in a historical context, which unfolds exactly as he prophesied.

He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.

If you're still wrestling with the biblical perspective, let me share a modern-day miracle that just might change your mind. Let's talk about Harrison Okene. Harrison was a Nigerian sailor who, in 2013, found himself in an extraordinary circumstance that echoed the story of Jonah.

Harrison's ship capsized and sank to the bottom of the sea, with him trapped inside. In what can only be described as divine intervention, Okene managed to find an air pocket within the sunken ship where he survived for three full days, alone, in complete darkness. The video capturing Okene's rescue is both eerie and awe-inspiring, a stark testament to human survival and the power of hope against all odds. The moment he's found, his eyes reflect a mix of fear, relief, and disbelief at being discovered after such a long, lonely ordeal.

Just like Jonah, Harrison discovered that odds are defied when God intercedes. Some might say it was pure luck that saved him, but Harrison credits the grace of God. "I prayed about a hundred times," he said. "When I was tired, I started calling on the name of God." In another interview, he said, "I was crying and calling on Jesus to rescue me."

Now, if we can believe in that story, then surely, we should have all the more faith in the truth of God's Word.

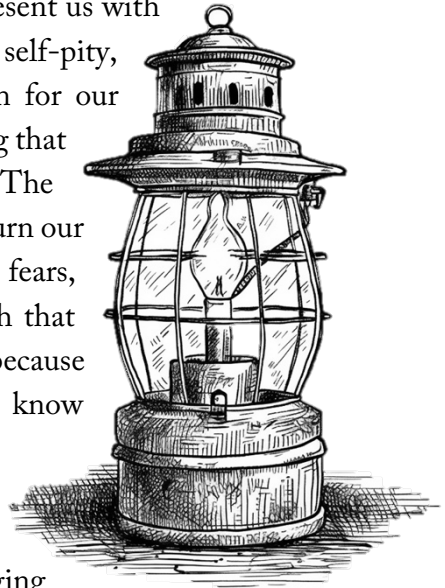
JONAH'S CRY FROM THE BELLY OF THE FISH (JONAH 2:1-7):

I can't imagine finding myself in the belly of a whale. I don't even like the smell of fish, let alone the idea of being inside one. A place of complete darkness, isolation, and fear. A place where every human comfort and familiar sight is stripped away. You see, this is exactly where Jonah found himself, and it's a space many of us can relate to in our own ways. Sometimes life tosses us into the deep

end, and we find ourselves feeling lost and overwhelmed, much like Jonah.

Trials, as difficult as they are, often present us with a fork in the road. One path is to wallow in self-pity, question God's plan, or even blame Him for our troubles. "Why me?" we may ask, forgetting that He is with us, even in the deepest depths. The other path, a more illuminating one, is to turn our hearts toward God, surrendering our fears, doubts, and ego. It's in choosing this path that we find the true essence of faith, not because everything is going right, but because we know that God is right and good.

Jonah, in his desperation, offers us an extraordinary example of this second path. In his prayer, he starts by acknowledging his dire situation with raw honesty. He's reached a point that seems like the lowest imaginable—"To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever." Yet in this moment of extreme vulnerability, Jonah experiences a transformative realization that many of us can learn from.



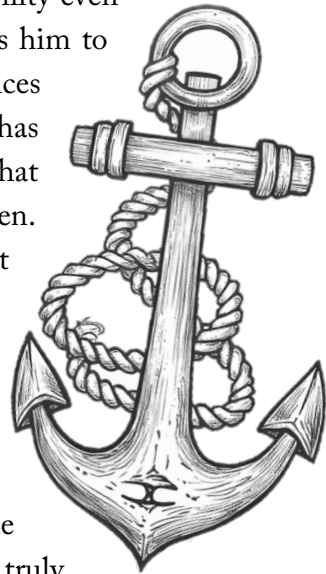
Did you know?

Jonah's prayer in Chapter 2 is often compared to a psalm of thanksgiving. It includes elements common to the Psalms, like calling out to God in distress and vowing to offer sacrifices and to "make good" on his vows.

"But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit" (v. 6). Here, Jonah's tone shifts dramatically from despair to hope, from self-pity to profound gratitude. He recognizes the power of God's grace in his life even at his lowest point. This shift isn't a change in his physical circumstances; he's still in the belly of the fish. Rather, it's a change in his perspective, his attitude, and his spiritual posture.

Jonah realizes that while he might be physically confined, his spirit is not. His life has value and purpose because it's in the hands of God. Just like an anchor steadies a ship amidst turbulent waters, his faith grounds him, offering a sense of stability even in chaos. This profound understanding allows him to see his life as better, not because his circumstances have changed, but because his perspective has shifted. It's a wellspring of faith and gratitude that gushes forth, even when he seems most forsaken.

The beauty of this prayer is that Jonah is not asking for salvation; he's thanking God for the salvation he already has. He acknowledges that he is already saved, not by his circumstances, but by his relationship with God. What a tremendous lesson for all of us! Our physical or emotional states do not define us; it's our spiritual relationship with God that truly matters.



So, what can we take away from Jonah's transformative prayer? Perhaps it's the simple but profound truth that God's power and love are always accessible, turning even our darkest moments into opportunities for spiritual growth and a deeper connection with Him.

As you journey through the highs and lows of life, take a moment to reflect on Jonah's prayer and the grace that lifted him "up from the pit." Remember that God has a plan for you, one that is meant for your growth and His glory.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LORD (JONAH 2:8-9):

I was thinking about my dad today, and how his story intertwines beautifully with the message we find in Jonah's prayer. Dad was a small man, barely five-feet tall, whose unshakeable faith was his towering strength. Day in and day out, he immersed himself in the Word of God, reading from Genesis to Revelation, from Revelation back to Genesis, and then he'd start again.

With joyful hope and incomparable peace, he walked through the last years of his life. Weighing barely 86 pounds with hands lifted to heaven, Dad showed us what it means to stand firm in your faith. His unwavering strength was a constant reminder to hold tightly to God in the midst of a storm.

So, how do we do that? How is it possible to find joy and peace when our lives are turned upside down? We do it the same way that Jonah did, which is holding fast to our hope of salvation. In verses 8 and 9, he prays,

"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'" (Jonah 2:8-9)

Isn't it an incredible blessing when God intercepts our misguided path and brings us to our knees? In the belly of the whale—an unusual and frightening place, Jonah's eyes were opened. In his darkest moment, a new man was forged, a man who recognized the emptiness in clinging to anything but God. In the depths, he awoke to a new reality, where he committed to a life of praise and sacrifice, ready to fulfill his vows to God. And most importantly, he boldly

declared that salvation—our true and only hope—comes directly from the Lord.

Do you know who Jonah reminds me of? The Prodigal Son. Just like Jonah initially ran from God's call, the Prodigal Son turned his back on his father and ventured off into a life of reckless living. In his quest for life on his own terms, the Prodigal Son reached a point where he "longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:16, NIV). This mirrors Jonah's experience in a powerful way. In his disobedience and pursuit of worldly desires, the Prodigal Son, like Jonah, lost sight of the blessings and love readily available to him.

Sometimes, it takes standing knee-deep in our mess to realize that the ground beneath us is holy—a sacred space of awakening where we finally see God's love as the only true anchor for our souls.

Both Jonah and the Prodigal Son had created "vain idols" that kept them from God's love. For Jonah, it was his will and sense of justice; for the Prodigal Son, it was the illusion of freedom. They put God in a box, limiting His transformative power.

In today's world, it's easy for any of us, especially as women striving to make a difference, to unintentionally create our own "vain idols." Maybe it's the quest for the perfect family, the pressure to always be strong and self-sufficient, or even the pull of social media approval. Whatever form they take, these idols subtly edge God out, limiting how deeply we experience His love and how freely we share it with others. We put God in a box, just as Jonah and the Prodigal Son did—limiting His transformative power in our lives.

Yet in their lowest moments, both Jonah and the Prodigal Son came to their senses, and turned back to the source of true love and mercy. They both realized that these "idols" they had created were keeping them from experiencing God's boundless love and grace.



It's a beautiful lesson for all of us. Regardless of where we've been or what we've done, it's never too late to turn back to God. Just like the father in the parable who saw his son "while he was still a long way off" and "was filled with compassion for him," God is always ready to welcome us back, not as servants, but as His beloved children (Luke 15:18-20, NIV).

This narrative, whether it's Jonah's struggle in the belly of the whale or the Prodigal Son's return to his father, underscores the transformative power of repentance and God's boundless forgiveness. Friends, it's a profound reminder that we must strip away our "vain idols" to truly grasp the depth of God's steadfast love and mercy.

Did you know?

The "third day" holds a special significance in the Bible, symbolizing hope, and new beginnings. On the third day of creation, life first sprang forth, laying the foundation for all living things (Genesis 1:11-13). Jonah was released from the belly of the whale after three days, ready for a second chance (Jonah 1:17). Esther fasted for three days before courageously approaching the king to save her people (Esther 4:16). Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, offering eternal hope (Matthew 28:1-10). And in Hosea, the prophecy states that Israel would be restored "on the third day" (Hosea 6:2). This recurring theme encourages us that after periods of struggle, God often brings renewal or deliverance just when we need it most.

GOD'S RESPONSE AND JONAH'S RESTORATION (JONAH 2:10):

The last verse of this chapter is simple yet profound. It says,

And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. (Jonah 2:10)

There's an immense display of God's power and sovereignty in those words. Think about it: God spoke, and the fish obeyed. Just as the winds and the waves obeyed Jesus in the New Testament, the fish responded to God's command here in the Old Testament. This tells us something extraordinary about the nature of our God.

No matter how chaotic our circumstances may be, God is holding the reins. With one word things can change in an instant, and that gives me comfort. This verse is a beautiful reminder that nothing is beyond the reach of God's word – not even the belly of a whale.

Did you know?

Jonah's three days and nights in the belly of the fish are often seen as a type, or prefiguring, of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. In fact, Jesus himself makes this connection in Matthew 12:40, "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."

AS WE CLOSE THIS CHAPTER

As we close this chapter, let's embrace the reality of God's inescapable love. Jonah may have been in the depths, swallowed by a whale, but even there, he wasn't beyond the reach of God's love and grace. This chapter serves as a vivid reminder that God's love can find us in the most unexpected places, including the belly of a whale. It's a love that not only seeks us out when we're lost but also transforms and restores us when we surrender to it. So, no matter where you find yourself today, rest assured that God's inescapable love is there with you.

What do the following events point to or parallel in a believer's life? And, why?

Jonah's three days in the fish (Jonah 1:17)

The Israelites' crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14)

Noah in the Ark (Genesis 6-9, 1 Peter 3:20-21)

Christ's burial and resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10)

What does Romans 6:4 teach us about the symbolism of baptism?

In each of these stories a metaphorical "death" is left behind as part of a transformative journey. What does this "death" symbolize in each story (i.e. what are they leaving behind), and how might it correspond to the things you leave behind in the act of baptism?

Jonah in the Fish:

Israelites Crossing the Red Sea:

Noah and the Ark:

Christ's Burial and Resurrection:

Is there an area in your life where you need to rediscover hope? What words from Jonah's prayer might encourage you?

Can you recall a time when you cried out to God from a "deep" place in your life, much like Jonah? What was the outcome?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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What do the following events point to or parallel in a believer's life? And, why?

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The Israelites' crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14)

Noah in the Ark (Genesis 6-9, 1 Peter 3:20-21)

Christ's burial and resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10)

These four events can be seen as pointing to or paralleling the sacrament of baptism and the journey of faith in a believer's life. Each of these stories involves a form of death, burial, and resurrection or new life, echoing the key components of baptism.

What does Romans 6:4 teach us about the symbolism of baptism?

Romans 6:4 beautifully illuminates the symbolism captured in the act of baptism. It tells us that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too may live a new life. The act of being submerged in water symbolizes our old life being buried with Christ, and emerging from the water represents our resurrection to a fresh start, a new life in Him. It's a profound and tangible way to express the inner transformation that comes when we accept Christ into our hearts.

In each of these stories a metaphorical "death" is left behind as part of a transformative journey. What does this "death" symbolize in each story (i.e. what are they leaving behind), and how might it correspond to the things you leave behind in the act of baptism?

Jonah in the Fish:

Jonah leaves behind his disobedience and rebellion against God's call. This "metaphorical death" could represent turning away from sinful behaviors or disobedience when we choose to follow Christ through baptism.

Israelites Crossing the Red Sea:

The Israelites leave behind slavery in Egypt. This symbolizes our freedom in Christ and the slavery to sin that we leave behind.

Noah and the Ark:

Noah and his family leave behind a corrupt world that God decided to cleanse. This can be seen as leaving behind a life of worldly desires and sin.

Christ's Burial and Resurrection:

Jesus leaves behind the physical death as He is resurrected, defeating sin and death itself. For believers, this corresponds to the ultimate victory over sin and death that we share in through baptism.

We talked about the Parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke Chapter 15. What were some of the similarities between that story and Jonah's story?

In both cases, we see figures who stray from what they know is the right path, and who end up in dire circumstances because of their choices. Both Jonah and the Prodigal Son come to a realization of their need for repentance when they find themselves at their lowest point—Jonah in the belly of the fish and the Prodigal Son in a pigsty.

Additionally, both stories prominently feature the theme of “return.” The Prodigal Son returns to his father, who welcomes him with open arms, illustrating God's unconditional love and grace. Jonah, on the other hand, returns to the path of obedience after his prayer in the belly of the fish, and God gives him another chance to fulfill his mission to Nineveh.

Both narratives beautifully depict how God's love and mercy extend to us, no matter how far we've strayed. They show us that redemption is always possible, and they invite us into a deeper understanding of God's boundless grace.

Jonah found hope even inside the fish. Is there an area in your life where you need to rediscover hope? How can you turn to God in this?

This is a self-reflection question therefore the answer will be different for everyone.

Can you recall a time when you cried out to God from a “deep” place in your life, much like Jonah? What was the outcome?

This is a self-reflection question therefore the answer will be different for everyone.