

A PRAYER FROM HELL

The Book of Jonah is located between Obadiah and Micah in the Minor Prophets section of the Bible. There are only 48 verses in the entire book. Chapter two has only 10 verses, yet the short story of Jonah and the sea monster is one of the best known stories of the Bible.

When I was a young boy, I heard people refer to something that seemed impossible as “not having a prayer in hell from happening.”

I remembered this phrase when I read chapter two of Jonah:

(Jonah 2:2b) “I cried for help from the depth (out of belly) of Sheol (Hades or Hell); Thou didst hear my voice.”

Today’s lesson teaches that no matter how desperate the circumstances of our lives are, many of which we have created ourselves, we are just one prayer away from the all sufficiency Grace of God!

(Matt.12:40) “For just as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth.”

Jonah wasn’t literally in Hell or Hades, just figuratively. He went from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea with sea weed wrapped around his neck to inside the belly of a sea monster! (Jonah 2:5-7, 10; 1:17)

Today’s lesson will study five aspects of a Prayer from Hell that was heard and answered.
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(Jonah 1:17) “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish.”

(Jonah 2:1) “And he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the Lord, and he answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice.” (Jonah 2:2)

1. We are introduced to the life of Jonah with the word of God coming to him in the form of the directive will (Jonah 1:1-3).

Three categories of the will of God are taught in the Book of Jonah:

- The **Directive Will** of God (Jonah 1:1-2; 3:1-2)
- The **Permissive Will** of God (Jonah 1:3-15)
- The **Over-ruling Will** of God (Jonah 1:17; 2:10)

Jonah chose to go against the directive will of God (Jonah 1:1-17). We call this reversionism or backsliding of a spiritually mature believer.

(Prov.14:14a) “The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways.”

This doctrinal principle is taught in the Book of Jonah in chapters 1 and 4 (Rom.12:2).

2. Divine discipline is the way God deals with reversionism in the life of believers (Heb.12:5-11).

- God permitted Jonah to choose against His Directive Will (Human Volition and the Permissive Will of God).

- God allowed Jonah to choose to remain in reversionism while being disciplined. (Jonah 1:3-4, 10-12, 15; 2:3-7). This was before the great fish swallow him (Jonah 1:17). “Thou hadst cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea.” (Jonah 2:3a)
- God disciplined Jonah to the point of the Sin Unto Death (Jonah 2:5; 1 John 5:16; 1 Cor.11:30-32)

(Jonah 2:2) “I cried for help from the depth of Sheol.”

(Jonah 2:4) “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Thy sight.’”

(Jonah 2:7a) “While I was fainting away.”

(Jonah 2:6b) “But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.” (Ps.18:4-6)

3. Chapter one closes and chapter two opens with Jonah inside the belly of the sea monster

As bad as it sounds, it was still better for Jonah than the seaweed wrapped around his neck (Jonah 2:3-6).

Chapter two also opens with Jonah’s confessional prayer “from inside the stomach of the fish.” (Jonah 2:1)

(Jonah 2:2, 4) “I called out of my distress to the Lord, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice.”

Jonah’s confessional prayer was important to his recovery from reversionism. It teaches us that no matter how deep in reversionism or desperate our circumstances, we are just one prayer away from the sufficiency of God’s grace.

(2 Cor.12:9) “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

4. Jonah’s confessional prayer was necessary for recovery from reversionism.

(Jonah 2:10) “Then the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah up onto dry land.”

(Jonah 2:7) “While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to Thee, into Thy holy temple.” (Luke 15:17)

(1 John 1:9) “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (Ps.51:1, 4-7) How do we know it worked for Jonah? (Jonah 2:10)

5. What changed in the life of Jonah from chapters 1 (running from God) and 2 (running to God) and then in chapter 3 to (running with God)? “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” (Prov.23:7)

- **In chapter 1**, Jonah spoke twice (Jonah 1:9, 12)
- **In chapter 2**, he spoke all the time.
- **In chapter 3**, he spoke most of the time. What changed?

What changed was Jonah’s volition towards the Directive Will of God - “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” (Matt.26:39)

Jonah’s confession of sin resulted in a change in his volition, attitude and voice - “voice of thanksgiving” (Jonah 2:9a). “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness. But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord” (Jonah 2:8-9)

If we have created desperate circumstances in our lives because of bad decisions, Jonah teaches us that we are just one confessional prayer away from recovery - by the Grace of God.