

Jonah 1:7-17

Jonah 1:7-17 And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. (8) Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” (9) So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” (10) Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, “Why have you done this?” For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. (11) Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?”; for the sea was growing more tempestuous. (12) And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.” (13) Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. (14) Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, “We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.” (15) So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. (16) Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows. (17) Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Questions On The Text

What course of action did the crew decide on?

Verses 7-9: Thinking that a storm of that severity must be supernatural in origin, the crew decided to draw lots to discover who was to be held responsible. This was not an unusual practice in settling God's will in important matters, (see Joshua 7:16-18; 1 Samuel 10:20-21; Esther 3:7; Acts 1:24-26) and God's Word validates this method in Proverbs 16:33.

As it turns out, the lot fell to Jonah which prompted the crew's barrage of questions centring on his identity. Jonah's reply told the everything they needed to know. He was a Hebrew and he feared Yahweh, the God of heaven who created the land and the sea. Identifying Yahweh in this manner recognised Him as being far more than just one of their local gods. However, running away from Yahweh was hardly the action of one who laid claim to the fear of God.

What was the response of the crew when Jonah revealed his circumstances?

Verses 10-11: The crew was exceedingly afraid, which in Hebrew is literally “they feared with fear,” a way of expressing the intensity of fear. They understood the supernatural origin of the storm, and now, to discover that its source was Yahweh the God of heaven and Creator, terrified them. It is now that we learn that Jonah has revealed that he is running from God. The crew is stunned that he should be attempting to do so, and demand to know why. Next, they ask what must be done to him so that the sea will be calmed.

What was Jonah's advice?

Verse 12: Jonah understood that the storm was on account of him and that if they hurled (same word as in verses 4 and 15) him into the sea the storm would cease. So he advised them to do just that, evidently resigned to the fact that he would die for his lack of obedience.

What was the response of the mariners?

Verses 13-16: The crew was reluctant to take an innocent man's life unnecessarily, even though he put all their lives at risk, and they try to row to shore. No doubt, their purpose was to deposit the disobedient prophet on

dry land so that the storm will abate. Unfortunately, the storm worsened and it was impossible to row to shore.

So while Jonah remained prayerless, the crew cried out to Yahweh requesting that He not hold them responsible for Jonah's death. They then hurled him into the sea and immediately the raging sea calmed. The crew immediately feared Yahweh exceedingly (literally "feared with fear"). They have had an encounter with the only true God.

What happened in the sea?

Verse 17: Jonah was immediately swallowed by a great fish. The type of fish is not identified in the text. Attempts to link this story to modern day stories of people being swallowed by whales and surviving are irrelevant. Such stories have often been subject to debate as to whether or not they are true. But it doesn't matter either way. The point here is that Yahweh Himself was involved and the entire occurrence was a miracle.

The word translated "prepared" means "appointed, designated" and emphasises Yahweh's involvement. The purpose of the fish was not to eat Jonah, but merely to swallow him for his own protection from the sea and to convey him to dry land, as without the fish he would surely have drowned.

The three days and three nights he was in the fish could be literal since God is well able to perform such a miracle. However, it could also be a figurative way of expressing the idea of being back from the dead. In Matthew 12:39-40, Jesus relates His own impending death and resurrection in terms of "the sign of the prophet Jonah" and that He would be in the earth for three days and three nights. Nevertheless, Jesus could not have been dead for much more than 36 hours.

Further Questions For Discussion:

Do you think that it is contradictory to claim to fear God while at the same time walking in disobedience?

Do you think that casting lots is a good way for Christians to discover God's will for their lives?

What do you think unbelievers think when they find Christians who are running from God's will?

Was Jonah's advice to throw him overboard an act of courage or a further attempt to avoid God?

How does the fish that swallowed Jonah demonstrate God's care and kindness?