

## Declaring praise in the belly of a fish?! (K. Barker)

1. The focus of our study is Jonah 2; however, study Jonah 1 to gain a historical setting. What has happened?

In his attempt to flee God, Jonah went by sea. Amidst the ensuing storms and discovery that God was after Jonah, the crew submitted to Jonah's request to be tossed overboard. And instead of perishing, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish appointed by God.

2. Examine Jonah 2:2. What do you see?

Jonah is sharing his "distress" of drowning, and the "grave" (Sheol) is a hyperbole for his brink-of-death experience (as in Psalms 18:5; 30:3). God has already "answered" him. In this introduction, Jonah is sharing a summary of his testimony.

3. Examine the portrayal of his affliction in Jonah 2:3-6. What do you see?

Jonah is looking *back* to his time of need. "Deep," "seas," "currents," "waves," "breakers," "engulfing waters," and "seaweed" all depict drowning in the sea. Jonah is portraying his affliction.

4. Study Jonah 2:6-7. These verses reveal his petition for help and deliverance. What do you see?

Jonah voices a petition when he was about to drown (back then). He also gives thanks for deliverance from drowning.

5. Examine the conclusion found in Jonah 2:8-10.

Jonah utters his declarative praise from "inside the fish," and he thanks God for delivering him from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea by rescuing him with the fish. That is why the verb tenses are *past* (except in v.9). The fish, then, is an instrument of grace and deliverance, not of punishment and judgment. Jonah acknowledges God's Gracious Act and promises (vows) to present a Thank Offering.

As exemplified by Jonah 2, psalms of declarative praise can exist *outside* of Psalms. By observing and identifying the structure of a psalm, you can improve your interpretation. Jonah 2 is often understood incorrectly as a prayer for deliverance from the great fish. The very structure and contents show that this is a song of thanksgiving or psalm of declarative praise for deliverance already experienced.

Declarative praises focuses on specific acts of God. There are three main parts to this type of Psalm:

1. Introduction

The worshipper announces his intention to give thanks to God, or he simply announces what God has done.

2. Main Section

A narration of the individual's experience.

- a. Portrayal of the distress he was in.
- b. His cry to God for help.
- c. The deliverance.

3. Conclusion

The worshipper again testifies to the Lord's gracious act. A prayer for future help, or a confession that the Lord is gracious, or some other formulation may be added.

Do you have something to praise God for? Consider using this structure as a model for your prayer!

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