

## Prayer

Glory, honour, power and praise be to You, Lord Jesus Christ. You know all things, yet You show understanding of the lives we lead, of our need of forgiveness and the means of grace. You can do all things, yet You choose to share with us Your work in the world. Lord Jesus, Your graciousness amazes us, and You are worthy of all praise; AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Who are your personal 'enemies'? Do what Jesus recommends, and pray for your enemies*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray this week** about witness. Pray about the attitude of all God's people towards others; ask the Lord to give them a heart of love.
- Ask God to help the world's nations deal with the problem of injustice
- Seek forgiveness for the sins of God's people in the world today

## Meditation

Do not stop the work of the Spirit ...  
it satisfies the soul, so the heart can breathe the fresh air of life.

Do not stop being kind ...  
it binds people together in a contract of love, which never fails.

Do not stop offering forgiveness ...  
it heals as many as will give it or receive it, and often, both.

Do not stop patient enduring ...  
it maintains hope and sustains the soul at times of great trial.

Do not stop expecting revelation ...  
it will come in a moment, and your life will be changed forever.

Do not stop praying for healing ...  
it opens you up to the power of God's Spirit to work in you anew.

Do not stop being faithful ...  
it is the proof of your faith in Christ Jesus before Almighty God.

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## Bible Study - Jonah 1:11-17

<sup>11</sup> The sea was becoming ever more turbulent, so they said to him, 'What shall we do with you to make the sea calm down for us?' <sup>12</sup> He replied, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; and then the sea will become calm for you; for I know that this wild storm has come on you because of me.' <sup>13</sup> Despite this, the sailors rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but were not able to do it for the sea became even more violent against them. <sup>14</sup> So they finally cried out to the LORD, 'Please, we pray O LORD, do not let us perish for taking this man's life, or make us guilty of innocent blood. You, O LORD, do whatever pleases You.' <sup>15</sup> Then they took Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the raging sea calmed down. <sup>16</sup> The men then greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

<sup>17</sup> Then the LORD summoned a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

## Review

In our passage today, the story of Jonah gathers pace. Jonah had awoken on board the ship to Tarshish during a storm, and discovered quickly that the others on board blamed the storm on him (1:7-10). He

confessed to the sailors, but even though they threw the cargo overboard, this did not abate the storm and everyone on board would have assumed that the 'gods' were still angry!

The story is dramatic; Jonah was the one person on board who had nothing to lose, because he had already confessed to running away from his God. He even told the sailors that he was the reason for their problems and volunteered to be thrown overboard with the cargo in order to save everyone from the wrath of God (1:12). It is easy to read on, because the pace of the narrative is rapid and the story is driven by a sense of impending doom, represented by the pounding of the wind and waves. However, if we pause for a moment to look at what we know of Jonah, we must note that we have just been told something significant. The story of Jonah is about someone who had rejected the call of God to be a prophet, and as a consequence he was severely depressed. He knew exactly what God wanted of him, he had done the opposite, and as a consequence he no longer cared for his life; it is a sorry picture, but to be expected of one who had rejected God's call.

Perhaps something of this forlorn and lost nature of Jonah may have appealed to the humanitarian side of the sailor's personality, for Jonah's desperate appeal (1:11,12) appears to have made the sailors even more determined to endure the storm. Very quickly, they changed from a state of panic (1:5) to hardy practical seamen who rowed bravely for the shore, seeking to save both the ship and the pathetic man who was the source of their problems (1:13). It was only after this last attempt to save everyone on board that the seamen finally gave in and threw Jonah overboard, with the result that the sea calmed down.

Why should God act in this way? It seems primitive to us now as we read the story. We must place ourselves alongside these ancient people however, if we are to understand how God dealt with them. By responding to the sailors efforts and the dispatch of Jonah, God was able to reveal something of Himself to the sailors. They saw what happened and accepted that 'the Lord, the God of heaven' (1:9) was indeed responsible for their own salvation from the storm. When scripture says 'they greatly feared the Lord and they offered a sacrifice ...' (1:16), it indicates that even pagans were capable of worshipping the Lord! Tragically, Jonah had by then been thrown into the sea, and was unable to see that even though he had rebelled against the call to be a prophet, his words and actions had caused the repentance of pagans! This, after all, was what the Lord wanted of him by sending him to Nineveh.

The popular version of the story of Jonah says that he was swallowed by a whale. The Hebrew text of Jonah says that he was swallowed by a 'large fish', but we are not in a position to say exactly what kind of large fish this was, and it is not worth arguing about. This is a story with a great deal of imagery, and we will miss the point of it if we become fixed on the nature of the fish; it is not important. It is worth saying that an ancient reader would have assumed that 'three days and nights' inside the fish meant that Jonah was well and truly dead.

At this point in Israel's history, few prophets had been called. Elijah and Elisha were before him, and beyond this we cannot tell. Certainly, no other prophet was told to work amongst the pagan enemies of Israel (Nineveh - see 1:2). Jonah is the awesome story of a prophet who had not yet come to terms with his calling, and yet the signs were there that his words were closely attached to the Lord's will, if he could but see it. Even though Jonah is as good as dead, the story is by no means over, and there is much more to come than Jonah's deliverance from the belly of the large fish / whale. This is not just a story about what happened to Jonah; it is a story about the calling of God's prophets, of all generations.

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group what state of mind Jonah may have been in during this episode.
2. In this story, what are the different things that cause the sailors to offer a sacrifice to God and make vows, and what do they mean?
3. Are you aware of any modern day experience like this in which someone has suffered through not doing what God has asked of them?

## Discipleship

### Discipleship issue in this text

- *Submission to God's will*
- *God's concern for all peoples*

### Personal comment:

*I have come across people who have judged my ministry on the basis of whether I believe that the story of Jonah is true or not, and whether the fish was in fact a whale. How sad that for some, their faith hangs by such a slim thread. I know that the principle people evoke is that of believing the Bible, but the words of the Bible are sometimes unclear, and it is tragic when some will not accept this. When reading the story of Jonah, we must cast aside all such prejudices and focus on God's story. This is one of the rare places within the Old Testament, where God shows a clear concern for the salvation of all people, beyond Israel, and this may be why Jesus speaks of the 'sign of the prophet Jonah'; Jonah is the one prophet he speaks of most, apart from Isaiah.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Write down a list of the different nations and peoples of the world, insofar as you know them. As you look at this list, reflect on the fact that God loves them all, whatever you or I think of them.*
- *Pray for people of different beliefs and religions around the world, and ask the Lord God to both bless them and also make Himself known through Jesus to all.*

## **Final Prayer**

This day, Lord God, is Your precious gift to each of us. Keep us from falling, and fulfil Your purposes in us today and throughout our lives. Bring us to the end of each day rejoicing, and as Your disciples, may we be glad to be Yours. We praise You through all we do and say. AMEN

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