

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
HITTING ROCK BOTTOM

Wednesday, July 1
Reading: Jonah 2:5-7

Jonah 2:7 *"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You, LORD, and my prayer rose to You, to Your holy temple."*

Most commentaries view these images in the middle of Jonah's prayer as a repetition of his picture of drowning in the sea expressed at the beginning. But I often wonder if Jonah is now describing his condition of being swallowed by the fish. Jonah uses two Hebrew words in verse 5: the engulfing (*'āpāp*) waters and the deep surrounded (*sāḥab*) him. They both are different aspects of the idea of being surrounded. They mean to entangle, encompass, and close around. To me, this suggests the rushing water forcing Jonah into the fish's mouth. The seaweed and other gunk in the fish's belly wrapping itself around the prophet. In the fish's belly, Jonah sinks down to the bottom of the mountains and he seems to be barred forever from God's presence.

The author of Jonah has been describing Jonah's downward journey. He went down to Joppa, he went down into the ship, and now he has gone down to base of the mountains. Jonah has hit rock bottom! Only now does he realize his foolishness in trying to run from God. In the belly of the fish, Jonah finally recognizes that this punishment is what he deserves and only God can save him. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You, LORD, and my prayer rose to You, to Your holy temple." Notice once again, Jonah mentions the temple – the place where God's glory dwelt. God is holy while Jonah has been disobedient! Jonah's words remind us of David's words in Psalm 18:

The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.
The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.
In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help.
From His temple He heard my voice; my cry came before Him, into His ears.
(Psalm 18:4-6)

Sometimes it takes hitting rock bottom to get our attention. It causes us to look up! When Jonah had nowhere else to turn, he remembered God! He realizes his own selfishness and disobedience had brought him to death's door. It's only by a miracle that God preserved Jonah from being digested by the rescuing fish!

Our "rock bottoms" are often a result of our own foolish decisions as well. The only way out is to look up and realize we cannot save ourselves. We must admit our disobedience and failure and cry out to God for help. He stands ready to hear our cry and make us ready to follow and serve Him. As David wrote:

I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;
He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in Him.

What "new song" has God given you that you need to share with others?