



*On a mountaineering trip in the Sierra Nevadas with Capitol Ministries six years ago, I got stranded on a smooth, huge slab of granite sloping 15 degrees down to a 400-foot drop onto jagged boulders. I really needed to be rescued. Have you ever been in a life-threatening situation where you were in great need of a radical, miraculous rescue?*

## INTRODUCTION

*Last week we left a band of storm-punished, wailing, wet-bearded seamen navigating a Mediterranean boat fighting for their lives in a massive shrieking sea squall. They were in very deep trouble and in great need of a miraculously radical rescue.*

## 1. RADICAL RESCUE & RESPONSIBILITY

Those sailors were fighting against becoming the executioners of our story's prodigal son. A funeral at sea is solemn, but hurling a prophet of God into a watery grave terrified those manly seadogs. They valued his life. No longer able to resist his looming salt-water punishment, they took real responsibility for *his* sin and *their* safety.

**Jonah 1:15a** *"So the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea...."*

Someone asked, *"Why didn't Jonah jump?"* We will see in Jonah 4 that his narcissism was nearing masochism. If he had repentantly seen himself as the problem, he could have jumped over the rail, bounding into those black billows. Instead he put the burden of his death onto them. Nice guy! The sailors' slippery galley was brine-filled and gushing. Foaming liquid drowned that dirty deck. The soaked sailors took responsibility in the slanted, punishing rain. God required them to take action. He had hurled hurricane winds onto the sea, steadily increasing the squall's intensity.

Desperate times called for desperate measures, and those desperate salts needed a miracle. They cried out to Jonah's Jehovah-God. He, the Sovereign of all seas, said, *"Then give up your passenger. Hurl that man overboard!"* God's providence pressed them to radical responsibility.

## 2. RADICAL RESCUE—IT IS A REALITY

**Jonah 1:15b** *"They threw Jonah into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging."*

The literal Hebrew says the sea *"stood still from her anger."* The grammar communicates that the sea became calm like glass. The text does not say the *storm* stopped, and yet the *sea* became calm. To settle so many million gallons would take hours.

## IF GOD RADICALLY RESCUES, TIME IS NOT AN ISSUE.

In Joshua 10:13 God caused the sun to stand still and the moon to halt for nearly a full day. There, God radically rescued His people by His "timeless" miracle power to give His people a needed military victory. Note too in Jesus' day:

**Matthew 8:24-26** *"There arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, 'Save us, Lord; we are perishing!' He said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?' Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm."*

From Jesus, Joshua, and Jonah, we see, Biblically, that all of nature obeys Creator God, except ironically the very crown of His creation—man!

All in the Capitol Community Are Welcome to be a Part of Regular Bible Study and Fellowship

SENATORS' WEDNESDAY STUDY: 7:00-8:05 AM, ROOM 1422

CAPITOL MINISTRIES, NEBRASKA [WWW.CAPMIN.ORG](http://WWW.CAPMIN.ORG)

STAFF WEDNESDAY STUDY: 12:00-1:00, ROOM 1306

PHONE: 402-327-0011 REV. PERRY M. GAUTHIER, V.D.M.

ALL STUDIES AVAILABLE AT [WWW.NECAPMIN.ORG](http://WWW.NECAPMIN.ORG)

E-MAIL: [PERRY@NECAPMIN.ORG](mailto:PERRY@NECAPMIN.ORG) [FAITH@NECAPMIN.ORG](mailto:FAITH@NECAPMIN.ORG)





➤ Note that it is man who cries out for God's miracles. Contrastingly, it is also man alone who denies God's miracles. Next we will see Jonah's big fish stomach him for three days. Many deny God's miraculous power to orchestrate such an event, but let us remember Jesus' words about a tomb that swallowed Him up. With 46 days until Easter, consider that Jesus made this prophesy:

**Matthew 12:40** *"As Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights so the Son of Man shall be in the belly of the earth and come out alive!"*

All of nature obeys God. *Will we?* All of nature heeds the Creator's beck and call. The sailors finally did. *Will we?* Daily life can grind like a crucible. *Will we* seek God for miracle relief?

### 3. RADICAL RESCUE'S RIGHT RESPONSE —REAL REVERENCE

The boisterous sea was now balmy. The howling sky had hushed. Jonah held his breath as he sank into the sea, but the sailors breathed a sigh of relief. If he had turned his eyes upward before the sea closed over his Hebrew head, Jonah would have seen the ship's draining deck holding pagan sailors, now praising God for their rescue.

**Jonah 1:16** *"The men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows."*

God loves to be praised. Man exists to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Radical rescue will produce right responses of worship to Him.

➤ Our prodigal prophet just sank to fish-food status. Nonetheless, he had become a missionary to these pagans in spite of himself. A continuing theme in the Minor Prophets is that God will be God in His justice and in His mercy. This is stated succinctly in Obadiah 1:21 which we said was Velcro-strapped to Jonah 1:1. It says "...and the kingdom will be the LORD's." Jehovah God *will* be King of all the earth, not just King of Israel. He will be worshipped by all peoples, not just the

Jews. He received the worship of wide-eyed seamen westbound on a calm Mediterranean as readily as dry Jews far to their east in Jerusalem.

The sailors' passenger gone, the sea having closed over him, the ship sailed on, "*unconscious of her matchless story.*"<sup>a</sup> The shuddering shipmates and calming captain were very aware they had been radically rescued. The result? Reverence. This small group of heathens had turned to the LORD. They had three right responses to this eerily and instantaneously stilled sea. Their Real Reverence contained these three elements:

➤ 1. **RIGHT MOTIVES:** Jonah 1:16a says they "*feared the LORD.*" Literally, "*they feared a fear (a big one) and they feared the LORD.*" The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The fear mentioned here *yirah* (יִרָא) in Hebrew means a reverential respect. Until we really respect the Lord, we cannot worship Him. Worship starts with right motives; it starts in the heart. Jonah should have known this. The Sacred Text has shown us that his heart and motives were bad.

➤ 2. **RIGHT ACTIONS:** After Jonah took his seaward plunge, the sailors started to sacrifice. The Hebrew authors of Scripture are fond of using cognate accusatives. We saw this in "*they feared a fear.*" We will see it twice more. Here they "*sacrificed a sacrifice.*" Sharpening their knives, they prepared an animal sacrifice to Jehovah, since real reverence involves *sacrificial sacrifices*. Researching volumes about ancient seafaring, one finds portable altars to be common on such ships as well as animals on board to provide fresh meat for sailors. Relieved, they *sacrificed a sacrifice* on orange fires and calmly sailed away happily under blue Mediterranean skies.

➤ 3. **RIGHT WORDS:** Finally the sailors "*vowed vows.*" They pledged fidelity to the Lord who had become their radical Rescuer. Note: these are not foxhole prayers. These were words of real verbal commitment AFTER leaving the foxhole's dangers. What a difference!



## A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF DEEP PAIN

On Saturday, May 27, 1995, actor Christopher Reeve (of *Superman: The Movie*) fell off his thoroughbred, Eastern Express. He broke three vertebrae in his C-spine. Two months earlier, I also broke three vertebrae in my C-spine in a full-speed car wreck at 40<sup>th</sup> and South Streets in Lincoln. If Reeve were still alive, I believe he would agree with me that our near fatal accidents 20 years ago are *among the best things* that ever happened in our lives.

I have often said through the years—“*I am actually glad that happened to me, so much so that I would almost ask God for something like that again. Almost.*” Reeve, “The Man of Steel,” suffered quadriplegia, being confined to a metal wheelchair. I became a home-bound invalid imprisoned in a metal neck brace, eventually dependent on an aluminum cage walker. Our stories differ, but I believe Reeve and I shared something most valuable in common.

We both learned intense lessons about the value of life and each made major progress in our lives as we learned how pain makes us better. Pain forced us to grow.

What can we learn about Jonah and His God and deep pain in the last verse of Jonah 1? Did Jonah learn deep lessons while in the deep dark sea?

## 4. THE LOVING LORD—APPOINTING PAIN

**Jonah 1:17a** “*And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah....*”

Let us first note that it was the LORD Himself who appointed the pain for our passage’s prophet. The Lord *never harms* His children, but He *will hurt*—so He *can help* us. There are two kinds of pain in the lives of God’s children. First, the pain of chastisement (brought on as correction for sin). However, there is also the pain of testing and trial (brought on to test faith and character, with a goal of proven success).

➤ There are many instances in the Bible where people suffer the pain of testing that is NOT related to chastisement. Famous examples are Joseph, Job, Jeremiah and Jesus. Often pain comes into the life of the believer not because he has *done something wrong* but because he has *done everything right*. Job and Jesus are the classic examples. A believer can be tested and tried by God, and feel great pain—not as a punishment but to prove his faith and improve his character.

The pain in Jonah 1 was not “testing pain.” It was “chastising pain.” God had been chasing Jonah, and the hounds of heaven were nipping at his Hebrew heels. Jonah was a prodigal son, and God perfectly played the part of a pure parent Who perfected and corrected His son. We have already seen this classic verse on God’s fathering and disciplinary role as the great Chastiser:

**“WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE  
DISCIPLINES, AND HE  
SCOURGES EVERY SON.”<sup>b</sup>**

**Does pain make us better?** It does when a wise Father appoints it for our painful chastisements.

## 5. THE FAMOUS FISH—SWIMMING AND SWALLOWING IN OBEDIENCE

**Jonah 1:17b** “*And Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.*”

Animals in the Bible are often instruments of God’s service and wholly submissive to God (unlike us). A world full of animals marched two-by-two up dry gangplanks into Noah’s ark. God also told a donkey to speak with the voice of a man to rebuke Balaam the prophet. In Jonah 4, the larva of an insect opened wide to chew at the roots of Jonah’s shade tree. God told it to. Here in Jonah 1:17 the famous fish modeled a mouthful of obedience. Heeding God’s voice, this animal displayed a readiness to do His will.

➤ This is unlike the world of sin-soaked humans whom God destroyed outside Noah’s ark. Jonah’s obedient fish was unlike the man in its belly. The great fish would obey the Lord again in Jonah 2:10, emitting the bleached prophet onto a beachhead of obedience. That famous fish teaches us that God might chase and chastise *us* with pain. The prophet’s mouth was clenched shut, refusing God’s assignment, and that fish’s maw opened wide to fulfill God’s will for itself as a dutiful animal.



**Does pain make us better?** Yes. It does when it shows us our willful disobedience more clearly.

## 6. THE PUNISHABLE PROPHET—SUNKEN, SWALLOWED, AND SAVED

Jonah disappeared, dumped down into the deep. The monster's jaws had snapped shut, as Father Mapple preached at The Whaleman's Chapel in *Moby Dick*, "like so many white bolts upon his prison."<sup>c</sup> Jonah was jailed in a mucousy, smothering, cavernous cell. He now had time to think.

**Jonah 1:17b** "Jonah was in the stomach...."

A critical truth to be gleaned from this verse is the two-fold nature of God's chastisement.

### GOD'S CHASTISEMENT HURTS & HELPS, BRINGING SUFFERING & SALVATION.

#### ➤ JONAH—SWALLOWED FOR SUFFERING

Can you imagine being inside a sea monster for three nights? A world renowned *Jonah* scholar said, "there are no days in the belly of a fish." He also taught that the compound Hebrew word *bime'y* (= בִּמְעֵי), translated here "in the belly,"<sup>d</sup> can mean being inside any internal organ of that leviathan.

That gargantuan beast of God's chastisement intruded *into* Jonah's world and actually *became* Jonah's world. It *saved* but also *imprisoned* him. Swallowed, straight-jacketed, cramped, cold, and claustrophobic Jonah smelled fish guts, saw only inky blackness, and felt jailed within that palpitating prison. He had nowhere to flee. He was alone, very alone. God's chastisement is always painful. One child asked his disciplining father before a spanking, "Daddy, will it hurt?" The wise father answered, "My dear son, if it did not hurt, it would not be a spanking." A favorite seminary professor spoke of his dad's firm discipline which included spankings:

### MY FATHER APPLIED THE 'BOARD OF EDUCATION' TO MY 'SEAT OF KNOWLEDGE'!

Hot salty tears often fill the eyes of God's chastised children. Those same tears are designed to cleanse our souls and clear our eyesight.

**Does pain make us better?** Yes. It does when it forces us to see the seriousness of our sins.

#### ➤ JONAH—SWALLOWED FOR SALVATION

In April, we will study *Jonah 2:9*—"Salvation is from the LORD!" Jonah found his famous fish to be a source of salvation. A judicious Jehovah used the fish in two ways: to *punish* and *save* him. Oh, the mercy and severity of God. God saved Jonah from drowning in Mediterranean salty sea water and God also saved Jonah from "himself." Thank God that He saved us *from our sins*, and that He continues to save us even *from ourselves!*

**How does pain make us better?** When God uses it to rescue us from sin and selfishness.

### RESCUED BY PAIN

Most Honorable Senator:

Know that God deeply loves His children even when He has to chase and chastise them for sin. God will hurt but never harm you because He loves you and is conforming you into the image of His own dear Son. Pain can make you better.

Serving so Christ may be formed in you,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier V.D.M. (cell/text: 402-770-6270)

<sup>a</sup> *Jonah*, Ellen Gunderson Traylor, Tyndale House Publishers, © 1989.

<sup>b</sup> Hebrews 12:6; and see v.5—"MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM." ALL CAPS indicate Old Testament quotations.

<sup>c</sup> *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville, from Father Mapple's sermon in that classic.

<sup>d</sup> *Jonah*, Jack M. Sasson, © 1990, Doubleday.

Printing compliments of [www.stardigitalprint.com](http://www.stardigitalprint.com) and Mr. Larry Moon.