



Sine Die—Session is Over

Jonah 2:10

TO: NEBRASKA STATE SENATORS

FROM: REV. PERRY M. GAUTHIER

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“Sine Die.” The literal Latin phrase means “without a day.” Adjournalment sine die means, “without assigning a day for a further meeting or hearing.” To adjourn an assembly sine die is to adjourn it for an indefinite period. A legislative body adjourns sine die when it adjourns without appointing a day on which to appear or assemble again. In England they say, “Parliament was dismissed sine die.”

United States usage is similar. According to the United States Senate Glossary: “Adjournment sine die is an adjournment until the next session of Congress, there being two sessions to each numbered Congress - e.g., the 110th Congress met in 2007 (first session) and in 2008 (second session). Sine die adjournments in the Congress typically do not have a date certain, but rather are determined by the Speaker of the House and Majority Leader of the Senate at a later time.”¹

Thankfully, we are privileged to come to the close of the 101st Nebraska Legislature’s Second Session. One of our many spiritual privileges this session has been to study together the small but mighty Old Testament book of Jonah. It is fitting that our in-session study closes with the final verse of Jonah 2. This closing verse closes an unsavory session that Jonah had spent on the floor of the whale’s viscera and in the large chamber of the fish’s monstrously mucous innards.

Jonah 2:10 *“Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.”²*

I. SESSION IS OVER—THE SPEAKER HAS SPOKEN

The verse opens up with the Lord’s voice. Here we hear the Lord’s command. Are you surprised that the Lord spoke to a fish? Every week I see a man in our capital city who speaks to himself for hours—out loud. In sadness and compassion, I often pray, “Lord, why does he do that?” It is not normal to speak to oneself aloud for hours. For those unfamiliar with God’s lordship over His created universe, it may seem odd that he “talks to the animals.”

Jonah 2:10a *“Then the LORD commanded the fish...”*

In Genesis 3:14, God talks to another animal, the serpent that tempted Eve who then tempted Adam. Unfortunately, because of the silence of Adam and his spiritual and relational passivity on that day, paradise was lost. In Genesis, God questioningly rebuked the satanically strengthened serpent. However, in Jonah, Jehovah commanded the titanic, famous fish to obey His will exactly as spoken. God is the great Speaker of the Bible.

By His spoken word, the galaxies leapt into being (*ex nihilo*). He had spoken. At Lazarus’ tomb, a dead man came forth because He had spoken. God is indeed the authoritative speaker of His house. His house includes every atom in every molecule in every thing in every galaxy in the entire universe.

That certainly includes our little planet, as it is referred to in the TV show by the same name as the “3rd Rock from the Sun.” 1 Corinthians 10:26 insists:

“FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS.”

God’s house is the world that He created with His words—the words He had spoken. He speaks to all on “3rd Rock.” He is “the” Speaker.

God spoke to the winds and the waves and they obediently blew and submissively soaked Jonah. God spoke to the fish and it engorged and entombed Jonah. Why? Because God is speaker of His house and He had spoken to a mortal man who would not listen. God’s speech was with full authority. Jonah’s idolatrous, willful disobedience was world famous.

But, the Lord, the Speaker said, “Session Over.” Why? Because Jonah had learned his lesson. The Speaker would not set any certain day to bring Jonah into hearing or to the judgment floor...for now. Session Over...*Sine Die*.

II. SESSION IS OVER—THE CHAMBER IS EMPTY

Jonah 2:10b *“...and [the fish] vomited Jonah...”*

We do not know if the larger, less intelligent whale said to the smaller, more stubborn prophet, “Your disobedience makes me sick!” However, we do know that God’s monologue command told this monster to vomit Jonah. Jonah was not regurgitated; he was disgorged from that great gut. Hurlled.

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

SENATORS WEDNESDAY STUDY: 7:30, ROOM 1022

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Heaved. Vomited. No longer will wriggling fish in the belly of the whale see Jonah trapped in chastisement. On that famous day, that great fish emptied its belly of its irritatingly unsavory passenger. The Hebrew verb here,³ *wayyachi*, is onomatopoeic, which means the word's name (*Greek: onoma*) has been formed (*poetic*) from the sounds it made. It is a guttural verb, correctly pronounced deep within the throat with a slightly forced gravelly gurgle. The prophet has learned his lesson. Now he can evacuate the chambers. Disciplinary session over, ending with a gooey, gurgling gush.

In the Islamic holy book, the Koran, Muslims read about Jonah. In Koran, surah (chapter) 37, verses 143-144, we read, “*If Jonah had not praised God, he would have stayed in the fish’s belly until Resurrection Day.*”⁴ Christians and Muslims can agree that since Jonah learned a lesson and praised his Lord, he was expelled from God’s judgment chamber. Session over...*Sine Die*.

III. SESSION IS OVER—“THE GOOD LIFE” AWAITS

“*Nebraska—The Good Life.*” I remember flying through the clear Nebraska airways years ago. I was coming back to Nebraska after three smoggy weeks among 12 million bustling bodies in a hot Los Angeles summer. Gazing out the plane’s window that sun-splashed afternoon into the blue Nebraska skies, I thought about the state slogan created for Governor J. James Exon in the 70’s--“*Nebraska—The Good Life.*” It was fun to be gone, but it was good to be home. Jonah had been enchambered for chastisement in a session of discipline. Jonah was glad it was “session over.”

It is as if the Lord tickled the tender tissues at the back of the whale’s throat. I smile as I think of the soft, fleshy, tickled and gigantic uvula hanging down from the soft palate of the whale that swallowed father Gepetto in the Disney classic *Pinochio*. In our Bible passage, God activates the powerful ejection seat of the throat of the muscular sea monster. It sends Jonah flying through the ancient Asian air. This visceral volcano sent a stream of gushing vomit rushing out. Where did Jonah land? Did he plop into a puddle near the land, or was he spewed into the salty sea with seashells by the seashore? No. He arrived safely on the shore. Jonah and any remaining clothing not eaten away by the stomach acids from the fish’s gut were all wet. They were soaked with fishy films of mucous and sagging strings of vomit.

Nevertheless, the Scripture points out that his landing spot was dry.

Jonah 2:10c “...vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.”

Jonah was on dry land because of the goodness of God. Jonah was on dry land by the grace of God who is the “God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10). We see here the grace of God and His government of grace. Paul also exults in the New Testament about the Christian’s standing in grace of God.

Romans 5:2 “[through Christ we have] our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”

I think of the hymn “The Solid Rock”, and its lyrics “*On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.*” The faithful Baptist pastor in Sussex England, Edward Mote, wrote that hymn. Mote was not modeling after Jonah’s unfaithfulness as a preacher. Mote stood true in his ministerial vows. Mote wrote that song in 1834, and he never missed a single Sunday in the 21 years of his preaching ministry. Why did he stand so firm, never missing a single Sunday? Why so faithful? God’s grace.

I think Mote had landed securely on the safe, solid, dry ground of grace. That grace was God’s. That grace *was* God. Mote had been introduced, by faith in Christ, to God’s government of grace. He had known for 21 years what Jonah learned after three wet days and three smelly nights. The grace of God is good; the grace of God is ground, dry ground—solid ground.

We stand on the dry ground of faith, by grace. Jonah stood on the dry ground of some ancient Mediterranean shoreline because of a God whose name is “Grace.” Jonah stood on the dry land by God’s power as well. Do you remember where the muscley mariners tried to transport Jonah? “The dry ground...” (Jonah 1: 13). What big backs and bulging biceps could not do, God did—with a whisper of His word. Why? He is the Speaker of His universal house. With a word, He commands waves and winds and whales and they all obey. The God of all power is the God of all grace. He gives a second chance to Jonah, and He gives us a second chance too. Thank God.

IV. SESSION IS OVER—“SINE DIE”

When Speaker Flood calls for the next session, or Governor Heineman calls for a special session, we will move forward in our senatorial studies into the more exciting half of the book of Jonah and see more of God’s great grace.

As you move out from the Capitol onto our good Nebraska soil amidst the 35,000 Nebraskans you represent, may you walk by faith and walk in grace. We are not better than Jonah, but praise God, as we know because of this true Biblical story of His prophet, we learn that we are certainly not worse.

Session is over...*Sine Die*.

May God richly bless you, your family and those you lead...by grace.

¹ *US Senate Glossary Web Page*, retrieved July 18, 2009;

http://www.senate.gov/reference/glossary_term/adjournment_sine_die.htm

² All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

³ The Hebrew “and it vomited” is *wayyachi* (in unpointed Hebrew, left to right—וַיַּאֲחִי).

⁴ *The Qur’an (Arabic Text and English Translation)*, Published 1999, Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an Inc. (Elmhurst, NY).