

Jonah's Grateful Prayer

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Jonah cries out to God from the belly of the great fish in thanksgiving and a renewed vow
2. aim – To cause us to hold a thankfulness whenever the Lord ordains difficulties in our lives
3. passage – Jonah 1:17-2:10

b. outline

1. Jonah Swallowed By the Great Fish (Jonah 1:17)
2. Jonah Prays From the Great Fish (Jonah 2:1-9)
3. Jonah Disgorged From the Great Fish (Jonah 2:10)

c. opening

1. the **location** of the pericope
 - a. **again:** the outline based on a *parallelism* twice-over repeated, followed by a *conclusion*
 - b. **previously:**
 1. **A¹** – Jonah is commissioned to go to Nineveh, but flees from the Lord aboard a ship
 2. **B¹** – Jonah is confronted with a storm, the sailors (eventually!) throwing him into the sea
 - a. God's sovereign action to return Jonah back to where he was supposed to go
 - b. **i.e.** God's *providence* overriding Jonah to accomplish *his* purpose *in Nineveh*
 - c. **today: C¹:** Jonah's Grateful Prayer (**1:17-2:10**)
 1. **again:** this structure will be repeated in the second half – **and it shows up in this prayer**
 2. **ITC:** Jonah's *recognition* that his choices and actions were *sinful*, for no one can thwart the plans and purposes of God – **i.e.** even if it means being swallowed by a fish ...

I. Jonah Swallowed By the Great Fish (Jonah 1:17)

Content

a. the *appointment* of the fish

1. **note: v. 17** is a *transition* between the story of Jonah and the sailors and his grateful prayer – it *finishes* the narrative of Jonah fleeing from the Lord and *begins* Jonah being returned by the Lord
 - a. **IOW:** I have included it in *both* **B¹** and **C¹**
2. "*appointed*" (*mnh*; *y^eman*) = to number; to count; to take a census of; to be counted among; to determine or assign; lit. to make a decision about a matter by virtue of completion and authority over; or, counting things and so knowing all about them, thus determining their purpose and intention
 - a. KJV: "*prepared*"; NIV: "*provided*"; **Job 7:3**: "*nights of misery are apportioned to me*"
 - b. **i.e.** in God's providence, he had counted out a *specific fish* to swallow up Jonah – the fish was *determined* and *used* by God as a **primary means** of accomplishing his *providential intentions*
 - c. **e.g.** the word appears three (**3**) other times in **Jonah: 4:6** (plant), **4:7** (worm), **4:8** (wind)
 - d. **IOW:** it is a word that *clearly* represents God's sovereignty over aspects of his Created Order to accomplish his will in and through and around Jonah – **i.e.** the fish was not an *accident* (like the storm was not a *coincidence*; **1:4**)
 - e. **principle: God will, at times, intervene directly in the affairs of human beings (individually, corporately, nationally) to accomplish his purposes – because he is God, he is utterly free to do so, and no human dares question his intentions (Job 42:2)**
 1. **e.g. (contra the synergist)** the regenerating work of the Spirit is a *direct intervention* in the life of the reprobate man, through an effectual call, to respond to the gospel – without it, no one can ever be saved from his own rebellion (**i.e.** the very **confession** of Jonah in the fish)
 2. **meaning:** sometimes God sends things into our lives that are designed *explicitly* for our good (**Romans 8:28**) even though they appear to be quite the opposite (**i.e.** painful, difficult, etc.)

b. the *nature* of the fish

1. "*great fish*" (*dāg gādōl*) = a *general* word used to describe any large creature that lives in water; a sea monster whose size implies that it a) could be controlled *only* by God, and b) was large enough to hold a man – **i.e.** no specific size or species, *per se*; just a *general* term for a large sea creature
 - a. **note:** although there *may* have been some distinction in ancient Hebrew for a fish vs. a mammal (**i.e.** a whale), the writer (here) uses a *generic term*, without specificity

1. **remember:** the *modern* classification system that put whales, dolphins, and orcas into the category of mammal did not come about until the mid-1800s
 2. **thus:** there really is *no way to know* what kind of sea creature is being mentioned here (**i.e.** there can be no *dogmatism* on this point – and no reason for any *disunity* over it)
 - b. **IMO:** since there is no breathable air within a fish, and since whales *do* breath and hold air within themselves, it seems *more likely* that this is actually a whale, but it certainly could be anything
 2. **note:** there have been stories of fishermen being swallowed alive by whales and surviving, but that *does not* have be proven (as *empirical evidence*) in order for this story to be believable
 - a. specifically, this event is “*appointed*” by God, implying that he *might* have done this by miracle
- c. the symbolism of the fish**
1. Jesus references Jonah in the fish as an *analogy* re: his own resurrection (**read Matthew 12:38-40**)
 - a. the Pharisees demand a “*sign*” from Jesus (**i.e.** *proof* that Jesus is the Christ)
 - b. but, Jesus replies that the only sign they will receive will be the sign of Jonah:
 1. just as Jonah was three days and three nights “*in the belly of the great fish*” (**1:17**)
 2. so he (the Son of Man) will be three days and three nights “*in the heart of the earth*” (**buried**)
 - c. **i.e.** the “*sign*” they request will be the sign of his *resurrection* – just as Jonah “*languished*” in the belly of a great fish for three days, so Jesus will do so (as well!) *in a tomb*
 1. **implying:** the *sign* will be **his resurrection** – three days after being buried, he will come forth
 2. or ... if you *really want to know if I am the Christ*, wait and see if I rise from the dead ...
 2. Jesus *also* references Jonah as an analogy re: the day of judgment (**read Matthew 12:41**)
 - a. Jonah preached repentance in *pagan* Nineveh, and the pagans *repented*
 1. unlike *this generation* (**i.e.** the *supposed* people of God) who have *not* repented at *his* preaching
 2. even though Jesus *is far greater* than Jonah (who was an *obstinate* and *reluctant* prophet)
 - b. **i.e.** the pagans of Nineveh would be *utterly justified* in condemning the Jews of Jesus’ day at the Judgment, for *they* repented at the preaching of a *significantly lesser prophet*
 3. **IOW:** the symbolism of Jonah that Jesus develops is of a *singular point*: someone *far greater than Jonah* is here, and the *proof* of that greatness will be seen in his resurrection

II. Jonah Prays From the Great Fish (Jonah 2:1-9)

Content

a. the prayer from the water

1. **again:** the structure of this prayer *mimics* the structure of the whole book (a parallelism, a conclusion)
2. **parallelism:** **vv. 2-3** cf. **vv. 4-6** – Jonah cries out to the Lord, then describes his peril
 - a. **note:** all of **vv. 2-6** is Jonah recounting his time *in the sea* – he *rehearses* (in this prayer) what happened to him while bobbing around in the water while the storm raged over him
 - b. in each parallel, he *first* cries out to the Lord for help (**vv. 2, 4**), *then* describes the peril of the sea (**vv. 3, 5-6**) – **i.e.** he *emphasizes* his cry to the Lord *in the midst* of his danger
 - c. **now:** in the fish, Jonah *admits* that God answered his prayer to save his life
 1. **direct confession:** I *deserved* to die for my rebellion against you, O God, but you “*answered me*” (**v. 2**) and “*brought up my life from the pit*” (**v. 6c**)
 2. **implied confession:** “*I shall again look upon your holy temple*” (**v. 4**) = I confess that I ran from your holy habitation; I *rejected* your sovereign rule; I failed to bow down to you in obedience

b. the question regarding the prayer

1. **question (posed by some):** did Jonah (in fact) **die** (either before being swallowed up, or in the fish) and was then **raised to life** by God and sent on to Nineveh?
 - a. **i.e.** is Jesus (**in Matthew 12**) *equating* himself being *dead* “*in the heart of the earth*” to Jonah being *dead* “*in the belly of the fish*”?
 1. is Jesus actually *teaching* (**i.e.** revealing) here that Jonah was dead in the fish?
 - b. and ... can this idea *also* be gleaned from “*evidences*” within Jonah’s prayer?:
 1. **e.g.** Jonah spoke of being in “*the belly of Sheol*” (**2:2**; **i.e.** the place of the *dead*)
 2. **e.g.** Jonah “*went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever*” (**2:6b**)
 3. **e.g.** Jonah sees God bring his life up “*from the pit*” (**2:6c**; **i.e.** raised from the *dead*)
 - c. **IOW:** is Jesus actually *revealing* here what *should have been clear* from the story: that Jonah died in the water and was resurrected by God?
2. **answer (based on a consistent exegesis): no!**
 - a. the text says that he “*prayed ... from the belly of the fish*” (**v. 1**) – he is making this prayer *alive* from within the fish itself, and ... there is *no mention* of Jonah dying *before this prayer*

- b. the various phrases above can *actually be* references to the fact that Jonah *was in grave danger* in the water, to the point of *nearly* drowning before being rescued
 - 1. **e.g.** the “belly of Sheol” is simply a way of saying “the place where dead men go” (**i.e.** that is where I was *headed* while trying to survive in the water; I *nearly* died)
 - c. Jesus’ *comparison* does not have to imply *equality* – Jonah *does not have to be dead* for Jesus to use the story *as a comparison* – he is making a point *using* Jonah as an *example*
 - 1. **i.e.** the *point* is the *length of time* and the fact that *something happened after the time was over*
 - 2. **i.e.** it is *improper* to “read back” into **Jonah** an *inference* from Jesus’ words *to which the narrative itself never even hints*
 - d. the story makes *better sense* if Jonah *survives* being cast overboard – the ship continues on, but Jonah is sent *in the opposite direction* – *alive* to do what God called him to do
 - e. the prayer of Jonah from within the fish is *clearly* one of **gratitude** combined with a strong *recommitment* to doing what is right – **i.e.** I am grateful *to still be alive* and able to serve the Lord
 - 1. **as above:** Jonah *confesses* that God has intervened *for his good purposes*
- c. the prayer of gratitude from within the fish**
- 1. **conclusion:** **vv. 7-9** – Jonah *gratefully* promises to return to the “*holy temple*” and keep his vows
 - a. **note:** **v. 7** is a *summary of vv. 2-6* – when “*fainting away*” (**i.e.** about to die), he prayed “*into*” ...
 - b. “*your holy temple*” (**vv. 4, 7**) = *not* the literal temple (in Jerusalem, of which Jonah *probably* had never visited); *rather*, God’s holy habitation, the place of God’s holy residence, his presence
 - 1. **e.g.** his prayer went up to the Lord *from the sea* into “*your holy temple*” (**v. 7**)
 - 2. **i.e.** Jonah called to out God from the sea, and the Lord heard him *from on high*
 - c. “*pay regard to vain idols*” (**v. 8**) = probably a reference to his own *self-assurance*; the sense within himself *that he was right*, and that *nothing* could move him – the *idol* of **self-determination**
 - 1. **e.g.** sleeping soundly in the bottom of the ship during the storm
 - 2. **i.e.** a *confession* that he had made *himself* an idol, and that he had forsaken God’s “*steadfast love*” – instead of obeying God and being blessed, he found himself nearly drowning
 - d. “*I will sacrifice to you*”, “*what I have vowed I will pay*” (**v. 9b**) = not a *literal sacrifice* (nor a vow he had made; for he had *not* actually made a vow); *rather*, a promise to do what is right
 - 1. **i.e.** a statement of *commitment* – instead of running away, I will go where you tell me to ...
 - e. “*with a voice of thanksgiving*” (**v. 9a**) = I will obey you with **an attitude of gratitude**
 - 1. because ... it’s all in the **attitude** – **forced obedience (technically) is not true obedience**
 - 2. for Jonah to go to Nineveh with an attitude of “all right, I’ll go, even though I don’t want to” is certainly not in his best interests, *nor in the interests of the Ninevites* (**see below**)
 - f. “*salvation belongs to the Lord*” (**v. 9b**) = God *alone* is the author of salvation
 - 1. thank you for saving me from the sea ...

III. Jonah Disgorged From the Great Fish (Jonah 2:10)

Content

a. Jonah vomited out on dry land

- 1. **again:** God *commands* the fish (**i.e.** “*spoke*” has the force of an *order*) – the *direct intervention* by God over the circumstances to produce the result he desires
- 2. the fish disgorges (vomits, regurgitates, expels) Jonah, *alive*, onto the shore
 - a. probably somewhere just N of Joppa, where he had originally boarded the ship to flee (**1:3**)
 - b. **IOW:** Jonah, with all of his planning to run from God, finds himself *right back where he started*
- 3. **what attitude dominates your life?** do you serve Christ, both in your everyday activities and in your explicitly Christian ministry, with an attitude of gratitude? or do you find yourself gritting your teeth and going through the motions of what you’re “supposed” to be doing?
 - a. **IOW:** do those around you see you do your job, teach your children, mow your lawn, finish your homework, serve in the nursery, or preach a sermon with a **visible sense of great thankfulness?**
 - b. Paul made virtually *everything* in the Christian life a matter of thankfulness – a deep sense of gratitude for the fact that God has rescued **us** “from the sea” (**Colossians 3:16f**)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”