

Jonah's Preservation and Prayer

Lessons from the Depths of the Sea

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Introduction

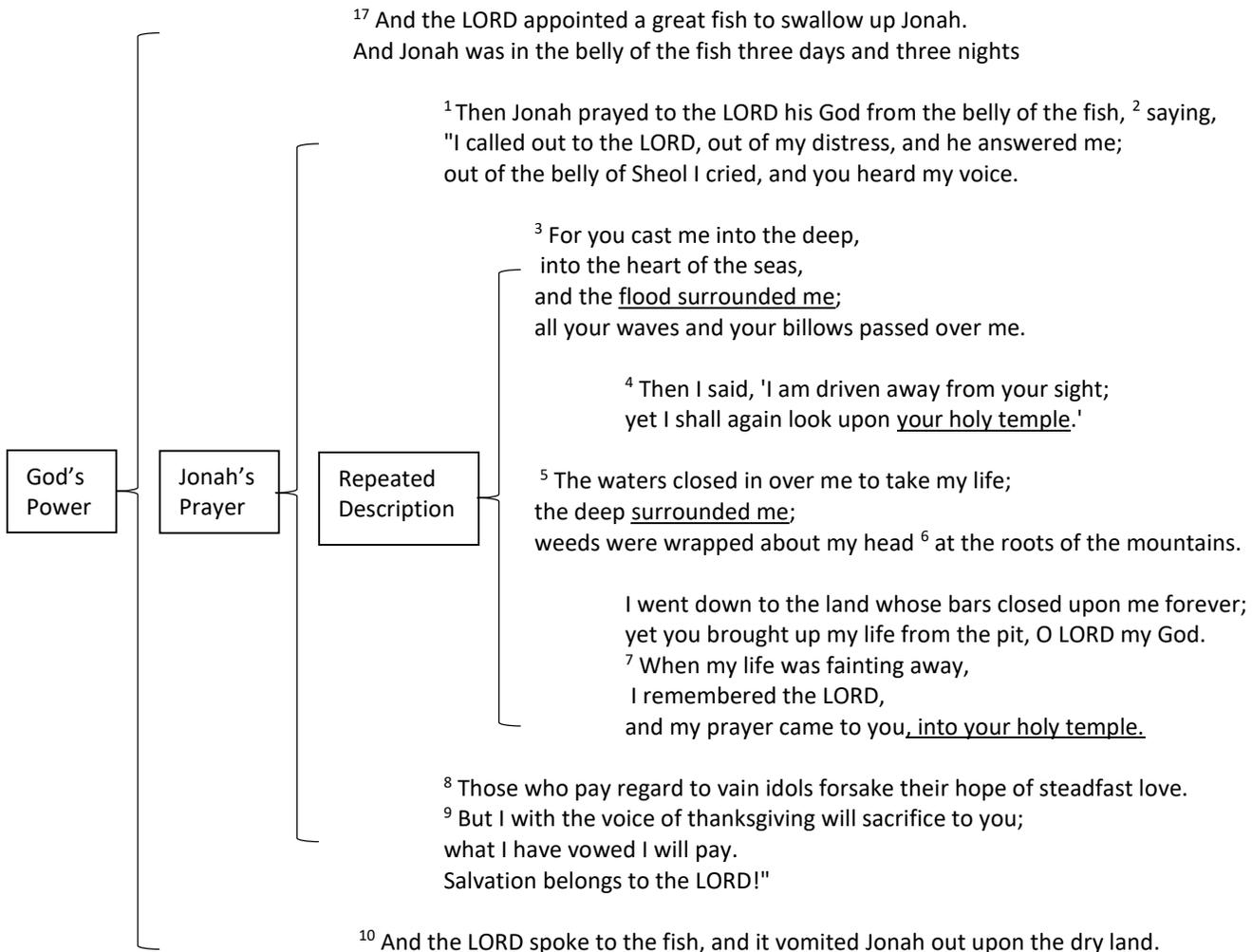
Jonah's miraculous preservation, and subsequent prayer, contain lessons about God, Jonah, Jesus, and ourselves.

The Aim

To recognize that God is both Powerful and Personal, and that he hears our desperate prayers.

The Text

Read this section thoughtfully using the following structure:



Outline:

A. Lessons from Jonah's PRESERVATION

- a. **God is active in his world.** We can't read this story without noticing how active God is. Throughout chapter 1, we met a God who speaks, who is aware of evil in the world, who is affected by that evil, who throws wind onto the sea, who demands a sacrifice for sin, and who appoints a great fish to rescue Jonah, who even speaks to the fish to vomit him out. God is active. Two points to notice are:
 - i. **God is Powerful:** To describe God's Power, we sometimes use the words Sovereign, or Omnipotent, or we speak of God's Providence. All of these are on display in Jonah.
 1. These demonstrate, to quote Wayne Grudem, "that God is able to accomplish his will." (His definition of "sovereign" in *Systematic Theology*). God is able to accomplish his will, and nothing can get in the way.
 2. Proverbs 21:30 says, "No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD."
 3. God appointing a "great" fish should remind us how "great" God is—how powerful, omnipotent, and sovereign. The word "great" is repeated many times in chapter 1. He hurled a great wind. He created a great storm. He appointed a great fish.
 - ii. **God is Personal:** We need to take note of God's involvement in the actions of people. Jonah flees, so God responds with a storm. The men throw Jonah overboard, so God quiets the storm. Jonah's drowning, so God appoints a great fish. Jonah prays, and God answers. God speaks to the fish, and it throws Jonah up onto dry land. God is personally involved in the development of this story. To put in the words of the Apostle Paul, we might say that "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever" (Romans 11:36).
- b. **Application: Do we REALLY believe this?**
 - i. C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *Miracles* in which he defends the plausibility of miracles against a merely Naturalistic worldview. And he makes this observation at the end of the book:

"We all have Naturalism in our bones and even conversion does not at once work the infection out of our system." (Epilogue)

In other words, Lewis says that even as believers we must fight against unbelief. We must constantly resist falling back into our old way of thinking—the way our secular schools and unbelieving teachers have taught.
 - ii. If Jonah teaches anything, it's that God is both infinitely powerful and intimately personal. And He wants us to be in harmony with him. God wants us to be in a restored relationship with him.
 - iii. When Jesus was on the earth he referred to himself as "one greater than Jonah". And he said, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Jesus was referring here to his own death. Jonah was rescued and restored, but Jesus literally rose from the dead—Jesus was resurrected. Only Jesus could say, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live..." (John 11:25). The life and ministry of Jesus is the greatest reminder of God's powerful and personal activity in the world.

B. Lessons from Jonah's PRAYER

a. **Desperation is at the Heart of True Prayer**

- i. Notice Jonah's repeated description of his near-death experience in verses 3-7.
- ii. Paul Miller makes the following statements in his book *The Praying Life*:

"Learned desperation is at the heart of the praying life." (Chapter 13)

"We tell ourselves, "Strong Christians pray a lot. If I were a stronger Christian, then I'd pray more." Strong Christians do pray more, but they pray more because they realize how weak they are. They don't try to hide if from

themselves. Weakness is the channel that allows them to access grace.”
(Chapter 6)

b. God desires Contrition, not Perfection

- i. There are signs that Jonah has not changed deeply:
 1. He refers to himself nearly twice as much as to God. A note from the NET Bible says, “The eight verses of Jonah’s prayer in Hebrew contain twenty-seven first-person pronominal references to himself. There are fifteen second- or third-person references to the LORD.”
 2. He deliberately boasts against the pagans in verses 8 and 9.
- ii. Consider Isaiah 57:15, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Application

1. What resonates most with you, that God is Powerful or Personal? Why?
2. How have you experienced God’s Power and/or Personal presence?
3. What does it mean that “Desperation is the Heart of True Prayer”? Have you experienced this?
4. Describe a way that God has humbled you—that you were brought to contrition?