

BIBLICAL STUDIES

EXEGETICAL PAPER:

Jonah 2:1-10

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Jonah 2:1-10

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Rough/Wooden Translation

Jonah Chapter 2

V.1: And he the Lord appointed a great fish// to swallow Jonah/and it was so that Jonah in the belly of the belly of the fish//three days and three nights/

V.2: And he prayed Jonah to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish/

V.3: And he said///I cried from my distress to the Lord and he answered me/from the belly of Sheol I cried you heard my voice/

V.4: You cast me into the deep of the sea//and deep currents surround me all your waves and billows passed over me/

V.5: And I say I am banished from before your eyes/nevertheless I will continue to look to your Holy Temple/

V.6: Enclosed over me the water as far as self deeps surrounded me reeds stuck to my head/

V.7: To the ends of the mountains I descended the land the bars of Sheol closed behind me/nut you go up from pit my life the Lord my God/

V.8: When fainting over me my life//the Lord I remembered/ and I went to you my prayer in your Holy Temple/

V.9: Those who worship empty idols have no covenant loyalty/

V.10: But I/in a thankful voice/will sacrifice to you/that which I vowed I will pay/Salvation belongs to the Lord/

Smooth Translation

Jonah Chapter 2

V.1: And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

V.2: Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

V.3: He said: "I cried to the Lord from my distress, and He answered me. From the belly of Sheol I cried and you heard my voice.

V.4: You cast me into the deep of the sea and deep currents surrounded me all your waves and your billows pass over me.

V.5: And I say: I am banished before your eyes. Nevertheless, I will continue to look to your Holy Temple.

V.6: The waters enclosed over me. The deeps surround me. Reeds are stuck to my head.

V.7: To the ends of the mountains I descended; the bars of Sheol closed behind me. But you brought me up from the pit. O Lord my God.

V.8: When my life was fainting within me, I remembered the Lord and my prayer went to your Holy Temple.

V.9: Those who worship empty idols have no covenant loyalty.

V.10: But I, in a thankful voice, will sacrifice to you; that which I vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Background of the Book of Jonah

Regardless of age or religious exposure, one would be hard-pressed to find many who are not familiar with the story of Jonah and the Great Fish. Numerous depictions of this narrative have been made through artwork, cinema productions, and children's storybooks. However this brilliant pericope is not a mere bedtime story that should read half-heartedly. Jonah's account is one of the most relatable episodes of the Bible (save maybe Job). As the reader dissects the text and delves beyond the surface level reading, the deeper message quickly flows to the top. Embarking on the journey of better understanding the book of Jonah is well worth the investment.

As with many books of the Hebrew Bible, "the book contains no indication of author or date of composition."¹ What is certain, however, is that the author was "a scribe, someone with education, training in writing, and a sense of literary cleverness."² This can be easily deduced from the style of the writing. Most modern scholarship assumes an authorship somewhere between the sixth century and the third century BC.³ This would place the writing of the narrative in a post-exilic context, shedding light on its overall purpose and message.⁴ "Therefore,

¹ Tremper Longman, Raymond B. Dillard, and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

² Lowell K. Handy, *Jonah's World: Social Science and the Reading of Prophetic Story*, Bible World (London, England: Routledge, 2007).

³ Eckart Frahm, "Of Doves, Fish, and Goddesses: Reflections on the Literary, Religious, and Historical Background of the Book of Jonah," *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy* 175 (2006): 443, accessed October 14, 2017, doi:10.1163/9789004324749_025.

⁴ Joel Edmond Anderson, "Jonah's Peculiar Re-creation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 4, no. 41 (2011): , accessed October 14, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lutherrice.edu:2048/10.1177/0146107911423079> http://libnet.ac.il/~libnet/pqd/opac_uls.pl?0606013.

whatever the theological message of Jonah is, it must have been attempting to address certain issues unique to the post-exilic community.”⁵

Robert B. Salters asserts, in his book *Jonah and Lamentations*, “The purpose of the story is to set forth a moral problem and suggest a solution.”⁶ He goes on to quote Kaufman in an analysis of the Old Testament that concludes reference to "repentance of sin" before the Jonah narrative is sparse, if in existence at all - “Sin was simply punished.”⁷ In the post-exilic context, a foundation for the repentance of sin is laid. In many ways, this narrative serves as a precursor for the New Covenant that would soon come. No longer would mankind exclusively fear the wrath of God, but would be led to repentance by His love and kindness. Quite possibly, this is a partial reason behind Jesus' reference to Jonah about the fulfillment of his own mission.⁸

Literary Analysis

The book of Jonah is an exhilarating tale of a disobedient prophet who comes to realize the awesome sovereignty of an Almighty God. Throughout this story, Jonah shows consistent belligerence and unwillingness to carry out the will of God. He is ungrateful and irreverent to his position as a prophet. Interestingly enough, sandwiched between the records of his infamous exploits, the reader finds a small glimmer of hope for Jonah. Unlike the surrounding genre, *Jonah's Prayer*, as it has come to be known, resembles a piece of poetry that one may find in the

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Robert B. Salters, *Jonah, and Lamentations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ When asked for a sign in Matthew chapter twelve, Jesus says that the only sign to be given would be the *Sign of Jonah*.

Psalter (ex. Psalm 18:6, 120:1). Usage of this type of literature serves as ironic reversal; the mood of the narrative at this point calls for a lament or a statement of repentance. Rather, what stands in chapter two is a prayer of thanksgiving that describes a former threat rather than a future liberation. As Amanda W. Benckhuysen explains, “The strength of this reading is that it accounts for and explains many of the incongruities experienced by the reader with respect to the placement and content of the psalm.”⁹

Form and Structure

The very form of the story seems to offer a sense of mystery. Some have gone as far as to say that the fantastic elements of the literature make it impossible for it to be considered a historical account.¹⁰ Many have said that the entire narrative should be read as prose or poetry. Others would argue against this point, but the very nature of this debate makes reading the Psalm of Jonah much more simplistic. Either the entire book is poetry, and then the Prayer is just another element to the overall poetic structure, or it is the prayer of a real person in the midst of an actual event – either way, the raw human emotion captured in these ten verses contains a deep cistern of significance and applicable content. That is to say, “Jonah is not a flat, but complex person. In his spiritual ups and downs, he acts like a real person.”¹¹

⁹ Amanda W. Benckhuysen, "Revisiting the Psalm of Jonah," *Calvin Theological Journal* 1, no. 47 (April 1, 2012): , accessed October 14, 2017, <http://calvinseminary.edu/>.

¹⁰ George Adam. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets: Commonly Called the Minor* , vol. II (London: Hodder and Stoughton.).

¹¹ Tremper Longman, Raymond B. Dillard, and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, , MI: Zondervan, 2007).

Style

The Psalm of chapter two is “a psalm of thanksgiving for help received in great danger, not a prayer for help in the midst of danger.” It is unique to the rest of the narrative and has therefore been speculated as being a poem memorized by the prophet and here recited in a time in which he deemed appropriate. Herman Gunkle, in his book *Introduction to the Psalms*, characterizes the elements of a thanksgiving psalm. James Nogalski applies Gunkle’s work by analyzing the finer aspects of Jonah’s prayer and comparing it to the structure of the thirtieth Psalm.¹² From his work, one can easily see that the prayer of Jonah and the thirtieth Psalm share several significant commonalities: a recounting of the danger and deliverance profession of the Lord as deliverer from distress, and hymnic or didactic elements.¹³ It has been said that “[the book of Jonah] is sensational literature. That is, the book is clearly composed with a high concentration of elements designed to arouse the imagination and emotion of the audience.¹⁴

Didactic Elements

While the traditional Psalmic elements can be readily identified within verses two through seven, the didactic portion (which Gunkel identifies as essential to the Psalter) stands outside of this structure in verses eight through ten.¹⁵ Mention is made here to idol worship and the folly

¹² James Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (Macon,, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2011).

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ David E. Aune et al., *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco,, TX: Word Books, 1997), 437.

¹⁵ James Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (Macon,, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2011).

that such brings to the false worshiper. At first glance, this would appear to be out of place within the pericope. However, an association is made here that modern scholarship has identified as a crucial component of Psalmic application. Walter Brueggemann, in his essay, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function*, identifies the cyclical reality to the Psalms. He explains, “these Psalms are the voices of those who find their circumstances dangerously changed.”¹⁶ Brueggemann explains the necessary elements of one’s maneuvering from “disorientation” to “reorientation” by stating, “Thus the two works that must both be carried on are the criticism of idols and the heeding of the true God who will make all things new.”¹⁷

Hebrew Textual Issues

The second chapter of Jonah presents several challenges to the reader at the grammatical and syntactical level. As one begins to thoroughly study the implications of these "difficulties" it quickly becomes apparent that the challenges themselves have entirely plausible rectifications. As with any ancient text, authorial intent and assurance of uncompromising redaction cannot be guaranteed. However, a careful examination will inevitably bring about a reasonable deduction. A significant portion of the content in this chapter can certainly be understood in the context of its Psalmic attributes, while some verses require evaluation and scrutiny to make sense of their peculiarities.

¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives And Methods In Contemporary Scholarship.*, ed. Rolf Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 14.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

Jonah 2:1

The first half of this verse serves as a hook, of sorts, that links the rest of the chapter with the overarching narrative - albeit loosely. Verse one begins with a simple active piel verb that holds special significance in Hebrew narrative.¹⁸ Furthermore, the triconsonantal root (מנה) directly links the event to *appointment* by God. The use of this type of wordage can be seen in subsequent verses (ex. Jonah 1:4) where the purpose seems to be an indication that God is in complete control of the elements of nature for His purposes.

The second half of this verse (separated from the first by the use of ויהי) is considered an initial clause. Frederic Clarke Putnam explains, “When [the initial clause] precedes a *circumstantial* clause they are not primarily verbal, but function as discourse-level particles, signaling a change in the general time frame as past or present/future and the circumstantial clause explicitly relates the following events to what preceded them.”¹⁹ There is some dispute, however, over Putnam’s deduction. W. Dennis Tucker quotes Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze in refuting this idea, “When ויהי appears in the course of a scene, it ‘signals that a state of affairs needs to be treated on par with the mainstream of a narration.’”²⁰ Tucker expounds on this insight, “Thus the verse should not be understood as a type of discourse marker.”²¹

The implications that surround both views are deeply concerned with how one reads the narrative. In support of Tucker's assertion, this same discourse form can be seen in verse 1:1 and

¹⁸ Frederic C. Putnam, *Hebrew Bible insert: a students guide to the syntax of Biblical Hebrew* (Ridley Park, PA: Stylus Pub., 2002).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ W. Dennis Tucker, *Jonah: a handbook on the Hebrew text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006).

²¹ *Ibid.*

3:1 It should be acknowledged that a claim such as that which Putnam has made her¹, is not made for verses 1:1 or 3:1. The position that seems most probable is that of Tuckers. While there is much ado over the origin of this Psalm, acceptance of Tucker's proposition, therefore, leads one to accept that whoever placed the Psalm in the text did so with the full intention that the audience would read the pericope as if Jonah Himself was uttering these words. That is, the grammatical and syntactical elements surrounding the text in question have been intentionally hardwired into the very lifeblood of the narrative - with seamless inception.

Jonah 2:2

Special consideration seems to be made of the time frame in which Jonah was in the belly of the Great fish. של-שה ימים שלו-הש לילות is traditionally translated as “three days and three nights.” Douglas Stuart states, “The mention of both days and nights are description of duration may well have a double force. Idiomatically it would seem to stress the duration of the time ‘three full days’ as ‘forty days and forty nights’ does in Gen 7:4”²² In the Ancient Near East, it was a familiar mythological concept that it took three full days to travel from the Earth to the underworld (Sheol). This context is further developed in verses two and seven of the Psalm when Jonah prays, "in the belly of Sheol" and “The underworld, its bars, closed behind me.”²³ The point that seems to be conveyed here is that Jonah was on his way to death, but was brought back from that fate by the very hand of God. Because of this, he served as a living testimony of God’s salvific Grace. This powerful image can be further understood by the reference that Jesus makes

²² *ibid*, 474.

²³ *ibid*.

to this event when He compares His own mission to that of Jonah's.²⁴ There is a particular textual discrepancy in the phrase של-שה מימ'. That is, not all manuscripts provide this same reading. Careful study, however, indicates that the form provided in the BHS reading to be the most plausible. The heart of the controversy centers around, what would appear to be, a missing *yod* attached to the word מימ' in the manuscript MurXII of the Dead Sea scrolls from Wadi Murabaat.²⁵ This variation makes the reading of this particular manuscript *water* instead of *days* – adding confusion to the text. According to Dr. Paul W. Ferris of Bethel Seminary's Center for Biblical and Theological Foundations, "The reading which best explains the variant is preferred."²⁶ In this case, it would be more plausible to assume that the scribes of the aforementioned manuscripts simply passed over this particular letter as they were transmitted the word for *days*.

Jonah 2:5

Deliverance for the psalmist is closely related to the temple, and this "goal" continually resurfaces.²⁷ Two noteworthy handlings are applied to the temple, which serves to emphasize this point. First, reference to the "Holy Temple" can be found sandwiched between the two mentions of chaotic waters (vv. 3-5). This would appear to characterize the psalmist's feeling of surroundedness by said waters. Secondly, reference to the "Holy Temple" appears in every other

²⁴ Niv Life Application Study Bible (Zondervan, 2011), (Matthew 12:38-45).

²⁵ Ken M. Penner and Nick Meyer, *Lexham Dead Sea Scrolls Hebrew-English Interlinear Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

²⁶ Paul W. Ferris, Jr., PhD., "A Guide to the Use of the BHS Critical Apparatus," Ph.D. diss., Bethel Seminary, abstract in Center for Biblical and Theological Foundations:.

²⁷ James Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2011).

verse from verses two through seven, with the final verse ending with such a reference. The subsequent verses allude to some level of distress. This would appear to be an indication that the message to be understood is that the goal of the Psalmist is to be restored before the Lord, but despair consistently intervenes. However, the Lord's deliverance will eventually come to pass and remain uninterrupted. It should not go without mention that certain manuscripts would provide a reading that might do some damage to the aforementioned theme. In verse five of the Masoretic text, the Temple themes reemerge from the ashes of anguish in the phrase *היכלך לא* (Nevertheless, I will continue to look To your holy Temple). In the LXX there is a variant that attaches the seqol "e" class vowel to the aleph, rather than the patach "a" class vowel (*How* will I again look to your Holy Temple?)²⁸ A change in the syntactical meaning of the clause would undoubtedly disrupt the thematic harmony of "assurance in eventually returning to the Holy Temple." However, according to the commonly accepted rules of textual criticism, "the more difficult reading is preferred over the smoother reading"²⁹ Therefore the Masoretic reading is the more plausible

Jonah 2:4 - 11

Throughout the discourse, the vast majority of verses begin with a *wawiygtol* verb form which serves to "advance the plotline."³⁰ However, several verses do not start with this verb form. "Any clause that does not begin with a *wawiygtol* should be considered background

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Paul W. Ferris, Jr., Ph.D., "A Guide to the Use of the BHS Critical Apparatus," PhD diss., Bethel Seminary, abstract in Center for Biblical and Theological Foundations:.

³⁰ Joshua Stewart, Ph.D., "Word Order and Focus" (lecture, HE5202 - Hebrew Grammar II, Luther Rice Bible College, and Seminary, Lithonia, Georgia, April 3, 2017).

information.”³¹ Verse three pushes the diegesis forward by beginning the Psalm, which (at least in the final form understanding) capitulates Jonah’s words to God in the belly of the *Great Fish*. The clause in verse four does not begin with a *wawyigtol*. The reasonable assumption is that verse four is subordinate to verse three and serves to, in some way, enhance the content of the preceding verse. Upon reading the two verses together, one may sense a particular repetition of ideas. What appears to be happening here is that the Psalmist is first expressing his distress (v.3); he then reiterates his sorrow. However, he now explains the origin of his situation: God has put him there. At first glance, it would appear that the anguish described in verse three and that which is described in verse four are separate events. However, an acknowledgment of the *wawyigtol* irregularity will indicate to the reader something different entirely. Namely, that these two verses should be read as one concurrent event.

Interestingly enough, this same pattern can be seen from verse four onward to verse eleven. It would logically follow that the same process applied to verse four (as being subordinate to verse three) should likewise be carried out on verses five through eleven. That is to say: The idea that the Psalmist is referring to one isolated event (taking place in real time and real space) should be gathered from the details of the subsequent verses. When read in this way, the reader becomes incepted into the very life of the text. Time would appear to stop, and the very progression of reality would seem to come to a standstill. The engaged audience may even feel the cold aloneness that seems to grip the author. This style is not dissimilar from the way in

³¹ Ibid.

which some New Testament writers wrote in the present tense to provide the reader with a "real-time" account of the narrative events.³²

Jonah 2:6-7

Just as with the subordinate material in verses four through eleven, the verbal misplacement of verse seven is also relevant to the emphasis placed upon the clause. Any time that a verb is not the first word in a clause, the serious student of the Hebrew Bible must investigate the reason for the displacement.³³ In the case the prepositional phrase at the head of verse seven, it should be realized that the emphasis should be placed on the place where the subject "went down" (to the bottom of the mountains), rather than to the subject itself. When considering the contextual elements of verse seven, along with verse six, a vividness begins to submerge. Each line of verse six illustrates an inanimate object acting upon the Psalmist (i.e., the waters enclosed; the deeps began surrounding; reeds were bound). Grammatically speaking, the author is the literal object of the emotionless actions of the subject, which is symbolic of the distress within which the Psalmist finds himself. On to verse seven, the preceding actions of the elements have now resulted in the locative reference to "the bottom of the mountains." The reference here to mountains seems significant in relation to the reference of God's Holy Temple. It is entirely predictable of the Psalmic literature to arrange the temple on a mountaintop (Mount Zion). In connection with the grammatical structure the proceeding verse, the author has now been cast to the foot of the mountain. Just as the preverbal *beating* seems to have let up, the

³² William Wilson, Ph.D., "Heb 12.15-17, Esau's Tears and Grammatical Gender" (lecture, GR5201: Greek Grammar I, Luther Rice College and Seminary, Lithonia, Georgia, September 12, 2017).

³³ Joshua Stewart, Ph.D., "Word Order and Focus" (lecture, HE5202 - Hebrew Grammar II, Luther Rice Bible College and Seminary, Lithonia, Georgia, April 3, 2017).

Psalmist is once again acted upon by yet another agent of turmoil: the bars of Sheol closing behind him. This may, in fact, be a very close illustration to what Jonah felt as he was finally caught in the stillness of the ocean, only to be engulfed by the mouth of a great fish.

Interestingly, the discourse then presents a glimmer of hope as the Psalmist shares the statement: "You brought up my life from the pit." This would seem to be the moment that the author realized that his anguish was the vehicle by which God has brought about salvation.

Thematic Analysis

The Prayer of Jonah is a unique Psalm that captures the raw emotions of humanity as one recounts the crux of their despair. As has been mentioned prior, there has been much debate over whether or not the prophet was the author of this poem, or if the prose exists as a redacted installment for emphasis. Given the form of the passage in question, practically the way in which it coincides with the rest of the Psalter, it stands on good evidence that these verses were in fact added after the event rather than penned during Jonah's escapade. Whether or not authorial credit should be given to Jonah remains to be answered, however entertaining the notion of another (whether before or after the fact) certainly frees the thematic consideration from the rigid restraints of this isolated event. That is to say when extracting the Psalm from the Jonah narrative (as is quite typical with the Psalter) the implications of the resounding subject matter takes on a particular breadth that encapsulates the human experience of desperation. As one explores the themes of Jonah's Prayer, sympathy of the human condition is inevitable.

Typologically speaking, Christ Himself draws certain reciprocations between the events of Jonah's assignment and the sign which would serve to indicate His own missional fulfillment. At risk being slightly Christocentric (although not enough to discourage the assertion) the

argument will be made for a thematic allusion of Christ Himself within the verses of 2:1-10. The three themes of mention (i.e., Present Despair: Chaotic Waters; Divine Deliverance: The Holy Temple of God; Vehicle of Salvation: Unorthodox Means) each correlate with the Passion of the Christ as can be seen in the Gospel accounts. Such an association would not be abnormal for a Psalm. Throughout the entirety of the Psalter Christ Himself is the focal point.

Present Despair: Chaotic Waters

At first glance, the “chaotic waters” described by Jonah would appear to be referring to the literal water that surrounded Jonah. However, a more thorough analysis of these references, in light of the overall structure of Psalmic literature, will reveal that “deep water” is regularly used to represent the depths of earthly despair.³⁴ This literary usage seems to articulate more than present distress. If it is true, that this Psalm was not written specifically for this isolated event, then it would logically follow that this reference is speaking to any situation in life where one was surrounded by “the waters of despair.” This seems to imply that Jonah is assessing something much more profound within himself.

Within the context of the Jonah narrative, this prayer comes forth at a point in time where the prophet has reached the brink of death. He has just been cast from the ship on route for Tarshish and left to the mercies of the Ocean. The nautical vocabulary unquestionably serves as a direct correlation to the ever-present danger that surrounded Jonah. The Psalmist speaks of “waves and billows” (v.3), which is undoubtedly the environment where the subject has found Himself. Line by line (with few exception) the Psalm vividly describes Jonah’s circumstance.

³⁴ Walter Brueggemann, “The Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function,” in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives And Methods In Contemporary Scholarship.*, ed. Rolf Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 16.

Thus proving that if the psalm was redacted, the editor could not have chosen a more appropriate Psalm.

Virtually seamless correlation between the details of the narrative and the verse of the prayer may compel some to stand contented that this Psalm's significance is exclusive to the context at hand. However, as Phillip Johnston explains, "The writers [of the Psalms] feel besieged, constricted, burdened, bogged down, submerged and drowning."³⁵ Such terminology is employed primarily to convey the depths of one's despair. This thematic element is used throughout the prayer to express not only the Psalmists anguish but is used in such a way as to convey the relentless ravaging nature of the situation. The psalmist finds himself in the pits of something with which he is unable to combat. As water consumed its helpless victim, so too our principle character has as his reality. This reality would undoubtedly imply a broader context than one bound to this narrative alone.

None have known greater despair than our Lord: Jesus Christ. As one reads each line with Him in mind, the vividness of His decent to death becomes apparent. At this juncture, the correlation may seem haphazard; however, the vocabulary describes great anguish-can any other be used to portray His suffering? Furthermore, in a lexical sense certain words serve as uncanny interconnection. The word סוף has been translated by many as "seaweed" (CSB, NIV, NLT) or simply "weeds" (KJV, RSV, ESV), but this seems to be an attempt to fit the term into the overarching narrative rather than allowing the authors intent to shine through. According to Brown, Driver, Briggs the best rendition of סוף would be "reeds" as is seen in מי-סוף: Sea of

³⁵ Philip Johnston and David G. Firth, *Interpreting the Psalms: issues and approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

Reeds (Red Sea).³⁶ The imagery connected to the rendered phrase, “Reeds were bound to my head,” present quite an intriguing reference.

Divine Deliverance: The Holy Temple of God

Assuming that Jonah sincerely repented, which is plausible given the completion of his assignment, the prophet turned his eyes to the Lord and sought righteousness. In the psalter, righteousness takes on a different form than the western reader may readily understand. As Jerome Creach explains, “The term righteous in the Psalms refers to those who depend on God for protection, those who plead to God for forgiveness, and those who worship God in humility.”³⁷ Jonah’s cry to return to the “Holy Temple of God” embodies these characteristics of a “righteousness” in the context of the Psalms, according to Creach. Once again, the close association with the Psalm and the apparent events in Jonah’s narrative certainly reveal a divine editorship.

In keeping with our functionary theme, reference to the Temple is all too common in the Psalter: Psalm 27:4; Psalm 138:2; Psalm 150. Usage of this language positioned God’s Temple as the pinnacle of Righteousness and Justice. It is used in the second chapter of Jonah, as it is in many other places, to personify the completeness that is the Kingdom of God – embodying right standing and protection from one’s enemies. This goal presents itself as the ultimate mindset of

³⁶ Francis Brown et al., *A Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament: with an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

³⁷ Jerome Creach and Rolf Jacobson, "The Destiny of the Righteous and the Theology of the Psalms," in *Sounding in the Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011).

anyone traveling through the waters of despair. To fix one's eye on God's temple will allow for peace and contentment to see them through the trial.

This Kingdom to come, embodied in the concept of the Holy Temple, cannot be fully understood outside of the context of Christ Himself. This Mountain of Zion was the primary emphasis of our Lord's message while here on earth. Without a doubt, the pursuit of Kingdom establishment was the very goal that drove the Passion and carried our Savior through the most God-forsaken path that any man has ever walked. The words of Jonah chapter two verse cast the image of Jesus on the cross as the Father turned His back, "I have been driven away from your sight yet I shall again look upon your holy temple." This hope for reinstatement before the eyes of Almighty God seems to be the deepest yearning of a man at the crescendo of human suffering. As the final breath was leaving His lips, one could image the solemn utterance, "When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple."³⁸

Vehicle of Salvation: Unorthodox Means

Identification of the immediate danger and reconciliation of the ideal outcome are the two explicit themes in Jonah's Prayer. However, there exists an implicit idea that can only be seen once the top layer has been pulled back. This is the means by which God leads the psalmist from the despair toward the Kingdom that is righteousness. In Jonah's case, it was the Great Fish that *saved* the prophet from his inevitable doom. It may have been that Jonah was unaware of God's hand at work in his situation; perhaps he believed that the Fish was God's vehicle for judgment rather than his deliverance. Nevertheless, this unorthodox means fit into a greater framework of divine intervention, resulting in a great rescue.

³⁸ NIV Life Application Study Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jonah 2:1-10.

Beyond the immediate context of the psalm, the grammatical structure of the poem also reveals a plan for redemption that causes the psalmist to mistake his rescue as distress. The persistent clash of natural elements against the victim is belligerent until the time that he is cast before the very mountain that he seeks – the Mountain of God. This misunderstanding of the part of the sufferer is quite common in the Psalter – and quite common in everyday life. Often mankind mistakes an unconventional method of deliverance as a disparaging event. This prayer, and others like it, encourages the reader to embrace life's difficulties – trusting in God as the waves of reality crash around. There is also an underlying idea that capitulates one's understanding of past events as life unfolds before them.

When Christ took up His cross and walked to the place of His execution, even His closest followers accepted defeat. This man in whom they had believed to be the Lord's anointed now hung before them lifeless – consumed by death. Little did they know, this seemingly destitute image would serve as the very means by which they would receive restitution before God. These unorthodox methods of Salvation find their zenith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. None could have fully predicted the extent that Almighty God would go to bring about redemption. No more could one have foreseen the saving of a drowning man by being engulfed by a great fish.

Application to Modern Church

Once the theme of Jonah's psalm has been thoroughly studied and effectively extracted from its immediate context and can be adequately applied to the modern day setting of the Church. The *chaotic waters* can be understood as any and every trial that comes against an individual. Whether it be sickness, financial devastation, or relational conflict, the emotions

expressed in Jonah two are all too familiar for the oppressed. By finding commonality with the Psalmist, the reader sets into the current and allows the flow of the inspired text to carry him along the streams of healing. As the reader begins to sympathize with the writer of the text, he conversely begins to follow the same path as that which has been recorded. When the Psalmist realizes his subjugated state, he quickly directs his eyes to the only place where salvation can come: The Holy Temple. This action depicts an individual who has forsaken any attempt to save himself; he fully realizes that God and God alone can be his redeemer. Finally, the Psalmist comes to acknowledge that the trials he faced, was indeed the means and vehicle for his Salvation. As covenant people, the Church must come to realize that trial in this life is controlled and filtered by the very hand of God. When God's actions upon mankind are anything short of fire and brimstone, these events should be viewed as God's salvific actions, rather than His actions of wrath. Such unorthodox occurrences can be seen all throughout Scripture and serve as reminders of God's abounding Grace.

Sermon Outline: "In the Belly of Sheol"

Introduction

The content of Jonah chapter two is much more than just an account of Jonah's three-day stay in the belly of the fish. There is great reason to believe that Jonah didn't write this psalm and that he was either reciting a prayer that he had memorized, or whoever first wrote this story down added it in because it most accurately captured the emotions and the literary movement of Jonah's experience. Either way, the point here is that the meat of Jonah's prayer does not have to be bound up in the immediate context of Jonah's story. That means that we can quickly take what's being said here and directly apply it to our lives.

Jonah's Context

Before we can take the message from this psalm and apply it, we need to first see it within the context that it was used...

Read the first chapter of Jonah

Jonah's situation

It's crucial to notice Jonah found himself in an awful situation because he was disobedient to the will and purpose of God....

The Psalmic Context

Now, as I mentioned before, most meaningful scholarship believes that Jonah did not write this Psalm and that it was either written before or after this event took place. Assuming that to be the case, we must then find this particular piece of poetry in the broader context of the Psalter.

Psalms are one of the most important modes of divine revelation because they capture real human emotion and apply to virtually anybody. With that being said, let's take a moment to get inside of the text and place ourselves in the seat of the Psalter....

Read the Jonah 2:1-3

Applicable Point #1: Chaotic Waters

In the Psalter, water is used to symbolize any distress or discomfort in life. We all go through challenges in life, but one thing that we can rest assured in is that God will be our redeemer. I

heard a story once of a painter who was teaching a class for up and coming artists. One day he was teaching a class on artistic composition. He began to explain that if an artist were to paint a forest, he must include a pathway out of the trees. He explained that if the artist does not provide an "out" in his landscape, the dense foliage depresses and dismay the onlooker. God is no novice painter...

Read the Jonah 2:4-6

Applicable Point #2: The Holy Temple

In the book of Psalms, the *Holy Temple* is used quite often in reference to righteousness, justice, and most importantly, restitution before God. It is important to note that throughout the trial, the Psalmist continually places His focus on God's Holy Temple.

Read the Jonah 2:7-10

Applicable Point #2: The Belly of Sheol

As we read the psalm from the perspective of Jonah or the Psalmist, we can quickly relate to the distress that they are in. The Psalm says, 'From the Belly of Sheol.' In Near Eastern mythology, Sheol was the name for the place of the dead. What is actually being said here that the psalmist is face to face with death itself? But as we see from Jonah's story, the place where he found himself was not punishment or destruction, but rather it was the means of his very salvation.

Call to Action

We all go through distress, but like Jonah, we must keep our eyes fixed on God's Holy Temple.

We also acknowledge that the place where we find ourselves may be the means by which God intends to save us.

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