

HUH?

UNDERSTANDING JONAH 2

THE PIOUS PRAYER OF AN IMPERFECT PROPHET: THE PSALM OF JONAH IN ITS NARRATIVE CONTEXT

IAN J. VAILLANCOURT

Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

The question of whether the psalm of Jonah 2 is integrative or disruptive in its narrative context greatly effects one's interpretation of the book of Jonah as a whole. While the older historical-critical scholars have almost universally concluded that the psalm of Jonah was a disruptive addition to an otherwise coherent narrative, more recent canonical interpreters have tended to argue for its integrative nature. Utilizing the canonical method of interpretation, this article freshly evaluates the issues and argues for the integrative nature of the psalm of Jonah in its narrative context by exploring: 1) comparative vocabulary between psalm and narrative in Jonah; 2) the phenomenon of Hebrew poetry inserted into narrative; 3) the psalm's contribution to the theme of irony in Jonah; 4) the psalm of Jonah in the broader context of the Book of the Twelve; and 5) a rethinking of the problem of Jonah's conflicted character between psalm and narrative.

JONAH'S PRAYER

AND THE PSALMS

Jonah 2	The Psalms
² saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.	120:1 In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me. 65:2 O You who hear prayer, To You all men come. [See further Ps. 130:1, 2; 2 Sam. 22:7]
³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.	88:6 You have put me in the lowest pit, In dark places, in the depths. 42:7 Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me. [See further 69:1, 2, 14]
⁴ Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'	31:22 As for me, I said in my alarm, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications When I cried to You. [See further Ps. 77:1-7]
⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head	69:1 Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life. [See further Ps. 40:2]
⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.	16:10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. [See further Ps. 30:3]
⁷ When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.	18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears. 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds. [See further Pss. 27:13; 42:5; 43:5]
⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.	31:6 I hate those who regard vain idols, But I trust in the LORD.
⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"	3:8 Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah. [See further Ps. 37:39; 50:14; 66:13-15]

THANKSGIVING PSALMS AND THE PRAYER OF JONAH 2

SUMMARY OF THE TESTIMONY OF THE PSALMIST	
Recalls plea for help	2 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, ² saying, “I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.
Recounts God’s intervention	
NARRATION OF THE PSALMIST’S EXPERIENCE	
The original problem	³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ ⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. ⁷ When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. ⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.
The cry for help	
God’s deliverance	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF GOD’S AID IN PRAISE/THANKS	
Worship, with the word Todah : Praise, Sacrifice, Blessings	⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay.
Cry of praise	Salvation belongs to the LORD!

Thanksgiving (Todah) Psalms

Community 65*, 67*, 75, 107, 124, 136*

Individual 18, 21, 30, 32*, 34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 108*, 116, 118, 138

Specialized Thanksgiving (Todah) Psalms

Salvation History 8*, 105-106, 135, 136

Songs of Trust 11, 16, 23, 27*, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131

*These Psalms are difficult to classify because they could fit into more than one group or are mixed types.

Songs of Thanksgiving: Although containing elements of hymns and laments, the songs of individual thanksgiving are characterized by their retrospective character: they look back to the time when a suppliant, in a situation of lament, cried out to Yahweh for help. The former situation, however, no longer exists. The interim of the eclipse of God has ended. In response to a cry out of the depths, Yahweh has heard and has acted with liberating grace, with the result that the suppliant now sings a "new song." <http://legacy.owensboro.kctcs.edu/crunyon/e261c/03-Hebrew/04-Psalms/PSALSTRU.html>

JONAH

ACT 2 - THE SCENE IN THE FISH

OVERVIEW

- Act 1 - The Scene on the Ship (1)
- Act 2 - The Scene in the Fish (2)
- Act 3 - The Scene in the City (3)
- Act 4 - The Scene on the Hill (4)

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been so busy for a prolonged period of time that you craved a reprieve even if it were a “small” emergency where you had to go to the hospital to recover? Or perhaps you would break a leg and have to be house bound for say a week or two?

I know we laugh at this, but I’ve been there where a short stay in the hospital looks attractive. Well, none of us would want to perhaps admit this, but it is probably true on one level. We need a break if for no other reason than to wrap our minds around God.

We have gone from Act 1 – the scene on the ship and moved into Act 2 – the scene in the fish. It would seem Jonah has moved from the proverbial frying pan and into the fire.

In chapter one, Jonah sleeps during a storm. Here, he probably continues the refrain of wishing himself dead.

THE TEXT

When we consider this text, let us also hear the voice of Psalm 139.

¹⁷ And **the LORD appointed** a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2	Psalm 139
<p>2 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, ² saying, “I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. ³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me;</p>	<p>139 O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.</p>

<p>all your waves and your billows passed over me.</p> <p>⁴Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'</p> <p>⁵The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶ at the roots of the mountains.</p> <p>I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.</p> <p>⁷When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.</p> <p>⁸Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.</p> <p>⁹But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"</p>	<p>⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.</p> <p>⁷Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?</p> <p>⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!</p> <p>⁹If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.</p> <p>¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹²even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.</p> <p>¹³For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.</p> <p>¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.</p> <p>¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.</p> <p>¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.</p> <p>¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!</p> <p>¹⁸If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.</p> <p>¹⁹Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!</p> <p>²⁰They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.</p> <p>²¹Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?</p> <p>²²I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.</p> <p>²³Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!</p> <p>²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!</p>
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¹⁰And **the LORD spoke to the fish**, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

God does what He wants with what is His and when He does it, it is always right. God orders all of life to carry out His will. His design / vision will be fulfilled and the means to that end will achieve it. It is impossible not to see how God is controlling this moment. He appoints and He speaks.

IN A NUTSHELL

God graciously [a fish] and mercifully [life] provides Jonah a place / sanctuary from his depression and enables him to block out all unnecessary “noise” so that he could be freed from all outside distractions and hear only God. The situation is horrible. There is no downplaying its horribleness. But life often has this in store for us. We do not wish natural calamity on anyone, yet it is often in those moments we begin to see life with a clear head and unblemished sight. Whether or not Jonah actually repented in a manner that we are accustomed to is up for debate. Regardless, the prophet cries out of God.

I would encourage us to read Jonah from the vantage point of a very depressed prophet. His depression led him to the point of physical collapse and spiritual apathy. I do not believe this is God “chastening” or “disciplining” the prophet. This moment is pastoral.

AUTHOR’S EMPHASIS:

God is always overriding our emotional/spiritual indifference. He understands our frailty.

Like chapter one, this chapter is not easily outlined. We have to look at what are considered its primary emphases.

OUTLINE

I. Jonah's Location – In a Fish.

There has never been nor ever be another situation just like this. Jesus uses this as a shadow/type of His own death, burial, resurrection, but He is in the ground and not “in a fish.” (1:17)

“The LORD appointed”

Only Jonah of the Minor Prophets uses “appoint” [manah].

- Jon 1:17 Now **the LORD had prepared a great fish** to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.
- Jon 4:6 And **the LORD God prepared a gourd**, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.
- Jon 4:7 But **God prepared a worm** when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.
- Jon 4:8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that **God prepared a vehement east wind**; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

Is the language of Jonah hyperbole or are we to take this as accurate? Are we to believe that God is actually behind these activities or is this simply theological bias?

Because I believe in the absolute sovereignty of God, I believe where we are is where God would have us to be. We will often say that Jonah is in the fish because of his disobedience. I agree, but **it is a disobedience birthed by significant depression. His depression drove his apathy and it was his apathy that drove his response to God's Vision.** I do not dismiss his will in choosing, but his choice and consequence is somehow a part of God's sovereign plan. I do not understand this, but I cannot deny it.

In his biography, the prophet wrote, "the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah"

There is much discussion about the nature of this fish. Was it a whale, a large shark, or a large fish? Like many Bible facts, we will have to get the precise answer in heaven. But the type of fish isn't as important as the role of the fish. Some see this fish simply as God's judgment on Jonah. Yet, neither the storm nor the fish are parts of God's "chastising." Both are to be seen as God's means of drawing Jonah closer. The location Jonah finds himself represents three thoughts. The fish was:

A. A protective haven from the sea –1:17

"Jonah was in the fish." And the fish represents God's provision for his protection. God intended to use Jonah. While the three days and nights in the fish's belly were extremely difficult and painful, God had no intention of killing Jonah. If God wanted Jonah dead, He could have left him in the ocean and sent a shark!

In the fish, God was bringing Jonah back from his depression. Although Jonah found himself running from God as a consequence of his emotional/spiritual fatigue and depression, God desired to bring him back from the darkness of soul. God wasn't finished with Jonah yet.

"At what point did the fish swallow Jonah?" Did it happen immediately or did some time pass before the fish appeared? Jonah seems to answer that question in his description of those events.

Notice the progression in his testimony:

1. The sailors throw him into the sea [1:15]. He, however, confessed that God was behind that action [see 2:3].
2. The waves swept over him [2:3b]. Since the sea was not calm, Jonah should have been able to tread water for only a little while. Apparently, Jonah was not a good swimmer.
3. He thought God had "banished" him [2:4]. He thought he was all by himself.
4. The water swirls around his neck as he struggles to stay afloat [2:5].
5. The water overcame him and he began to sink [2:5b-6].
6. He was about to die ["raised my life from the Pit" – 2:6-7].
7. Just before he dies [2:7] God rescued him. How did God rescue him? The great fish!

God sent the fish to rescue him from dying. God did not want Jonah dead at this point. In fact, God chooses not to answer Jonah's prayer for death.

B. A personal transport to the coast – 1:17, 2:10

After "three days and three nights" [1:17], "God commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah on dry land" [2:10]. The three days and nights probably has nothing to do with the speed of the fish, but with the time Jonah needed to empty his soul to God. God prepared a way to move him from the middle of the ocean back to where he started.

C. A private sanctuary with the Lord – 2:1

We read, "Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish."

What is a "sanctuary?" What makes a church auditorium, a prayer closet, or even a fish's belly a sanctuary? It is the place where you encounter God. And you can know that you have encountered God when He has your attention. In that moment everything, except God, diminishes in your sight. Everything else is just a distraction. All of us crave some kind of emotional/spiritual "high" in our relationship with God. Life with God on the horizontal, however, isn't structured for this. Yet, each of us have our "moments." When we have those moments, we are changed.

How many times have we heard people want a closer encounter with God? I doubt they are thinking "I would like to be swallowed whole and kept alive in the belly of a great fish!"

Jonah got alone with God and the "white noise" ceased. But the voice of God became loud and clear. If you have become emotionally and spiritually distracted, then take some time to pull away from everything else and get alone with Him. Find a private place to meet with God. You don't need a dramatic event [i.e. "fish"], you just need to be alone with God. Where does this occur for you? When does this occur for you?

II. Jonah's Action – Prayer

- His condition – one of despairing
- His content – one of remembering
- His conclusion – one of thanksgiving

While offering this prayer, Jonah often quoted from the Psalms. When you lay Jonah's prayer against the backdrop of the Psalms, you realize just how saturated Jonah was with the biblical text. Although he did not acknowledge the chapter or verse, he allows the Word of God to permeate his thoughts.

Some would suggest that Jonah's Psalm/Prayer is self-serving. I am not sure how I can judge such a thing. Regardless, Jonah's communion is with God.

- “We may be deceived by the terminology employed by Jonah, much of which is borrowed from the Book of Psalms. But when we compare the theology of Jonah’s “psalm” with that of the psalms, the shallowness and inferiority of Jonah’s praise is quickly evident.”¹
- “As we go through this prayer, we will see a lot about Jonah’s perspective by the specific verbs and verb placements that he utilizes. Many study Bibles and commentaries argue that Jonah’s prayer is a beautiful expression of his repentance. But we are going to try to show how something much darker lurks behind these beautiful words.”²

I will continue to argue throughout Jonah that the prophet is not in a good place emotionally/spiritually. If the prayer of Jonah is self-serving, it comes from weariness. Jonah knows what is true, but emotionally he isn’t tracking.

Notice at least seven specific references to the Psalms. This isn’t readily seen except for a thorough understanding of the Psalms [See further the Handout – Jonah’s Prayer and the Psalms]

- "Your billows swept over me" [2:3] Compare with Psalm 42:7.
- "I have been banished" [2:4]. Compare with Psalm 31:22.
- "engulfed me up the neck" [2:5]. Compare with Psalm 69:1.
- "my life was fading away" [2:7]. Compare to Psalm 147:3.
- "To Your holy temple" [2:7]. Compare to Psalm 18:6.
- "to worthless idols" [2:8]. Compare to Psalm 31:6 ["Worthless idols" in Jonah 2: 8 literally means "empty nothings"]
- "Salvation is from the Lord" [2:9]. Compare to Psalm 3:8.

Jonah was thoroughly saturated with the biblical text. It is in the text that he verbalizes his experienced and petition. Why was the Word of God so critical to Jonah's spiritual communion?

- A. God speaks through His Word to the heart [our inner most being]

This reminds us of the value of hiding God's Word in our hearts [Ps. 119:9ff].

- B. God guides our thoughts by His thoughts

We know who God is and what He wants as we read His word. The Word of God guided Jonah to understand and acknowledge God's thoughts about him.

- C. God's Word has a revitalizing effect on us

Notice that Jonah's emotionally drained heart began to fill. God's Word will always guide us back to Him if we will follow it. It is His *Story* that enables us to see and understand our story. Maybe we should look at God's Word, like a man lost in the woods would look for those markers that will lead him back to “home.” The trail is clearly marked.

III. Jonah's Outcome – Deliverance / Salvation Is of the Lord

Jonah came to the place where he acknowledged, “He can’t, but God can, and Jesus did.”

Notice four responses that Jonah made concerning God's care for him.

A. I recognize Your hand at work here – 2:3, 4

He said, "You threw me into the depths" and "I have been banished from Your sight." Notice the words "You" and "Your." Jonah makes the connection between his depression driven disobedience and God's compassionate care. Furthermore, he holds God blameless and himself guilty.

B. I turn my eyes back to You – 2:4

Jonah added, "Yet I will look once more toward your holy temple." Here is a good definition of emotional and spiritual fatigue: Taking your eyes off God’s grand narrative. Likewise, a good definition of emotional and spiritual well-being is turning your eyes back to God and remembering how your story is a part of His *Story*.

C. I thank You for Your compassion – 2:6

"But You raised my life from the Pit, Lord my God," he confessed. In case you missed it, Jonah offers his thanks in faith for he had not experienced deliverance yet. He believes that God has left him alive for a purpose.

D. I renew my commitment to You – 2:9

He promised, "I will fulfill my vows." Jonah returned to the “gospel.” It is only at the cross that we find our justification and our sanctification. Repentance without obedience results in failure. Faith works. The JESUS SEED is always producing GOSPEL FRUIT. True repentance requires change.

CONCLUSION

What might we do when we find ourselves emotionally and spiritually drained?

First, the best defense is a solid offense. The “ounce of prevention is always better than the pound of cure.” Learn to live inside of His *Story*. **Although we all seek the sensational, God is often moving in the mundane.** None of us wish to be swallowed by the “whale.” Do not neglect the regular responsibilities you have inside of existing relationships as part of God’s presence and power. Do not downplay or overlook the regular and routine.

In addition, we should work to consciously [i.e. volition] keep ourselves inside of God’s greater *Story* by . . .

1. Gathering for corporate worship on a weekly basis
2. Seeking opportunity for continued instruction in the Word of God
3. Desiring transparent fellowship with other believers whom we can trust and “feel” unjudged and
4. Finally, learn to live gospel rich lives that communicate Jesus to those around us.

Shepherding the Sheep: (What's NEXT?)

What is God telling me through this text?

- First, God is master of the sensational and the mundane.

Although we seek to know God and crave some kind of visual and/or verbal intervention, God is present and appointing our moments.

- Second, learn to accept where you are as part of God's program for you.

Stop kicking against the goads.

- Third, your peace of mind only happens as you see your story inside of His.

You cannot undo what is true. Trying to live in the fantasy world of the fictional leads to a deeper and darker depression.

- Fourth, God is never pushed off center by our emotional and spiritual frailty.
- Finally, God's victory does not always look like what you want. Trust him and continue to believe that His ways are not your ways.

¹ <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-psalm-prodigal-prophet-jonah-21-10>

² <http://www.theartoftaleh.com/bad-prayer-jonah/>

TYOLOGY IN JONAH

JONAH	JESUS
From Galilee	From Galilee
Sent first to Israelites, then Gentiles	Sent first to Israelites, then Gentiles
Preached and Jews refused; Gentiles accepted	Preached and Jews refused; Gentiles accepted
Willing to die for his people	Willing to die for his people
Both through their actions calmed a storm	Both through their actions calmed a storm
Slept in a boat while in a storm	Slept in a boat while in a storm
1:6 “What do you mean, sleeper? Call your God so we may not perish.”	Mark 4:38 “Don’t you care that we perish.”
1:14 “O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you.”	Matt 27:4 Judas, “I’ve sinned by betraying innocent blood.”
1:17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.	Ac 2:23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.
Jonah preached that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days if the people did not repent [Jonah 3:4].	After His resurrection, Jesus taught the Church for 40 days before His Ascension [Acts 1:3].

Seeing and Preaching the Gospel of Jesus in Jonah

<https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/seeing-and-preaching-the-gospel-of-jesus-in-jonah>

I have occasionally written on the importance of seeing the Gospel of Jesus in the Old Testament—specifically seeing God’s plan of redemption woven throughout biblical history—all of which point ultimately to the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ. But in the past, I dealt with the argument of why this doctrine is important. This time, I want to show how we might approach this concept practically by looking at a familiar book in the Old Testament: Jonah.

Most people (even non-believers) know the story of Jonah. But many people either see it as an interesting tale about a man who was swallowed up by a fish or they see a story about why we should obey God, otherwise we might get swallowed up by a fish.

Several years ago I heard a sermon series through Jonah and the main point was a typical, principle-seeking approach, and its main focus was why we should not be like Jonah. The argument was that Jonah’s life would have been better if he had just obeyed. If Jonah only listened, the sailors would not

have been put in danger, and he would not have been swallowed up by a fish, and so on. This is a common way the Old Testament is preached and interpreted today, but let's pause here and not make the mistake to isolate this story from God's overall redemptive work, which Christ graciously tells us to do (Luke 24:44-47, John 5:39).

Morally and principally speaking, if God calls us to go somewhere, unlike Jonah, we should obey and go. Common sense alone leads us to that conclusion. Contrary to what many preachers and interpreters say, that is not the primary point of Jonah. The primary point of Jonah is not about how Jonah should have obeyed, it's about how God continued his redemptive plan despite Jonah's disobedience. To be clear, preachers often use the illustration of the fish who swallowed up Jonah as a threat to motivate the congregation into obedience. **However when God appointed a fish to swallow up Jonah, it was not so much punishment for disobedience (though God does discipline the disobedience of his people), but God's sovereign plan to put Jonah where he wanted Him in order to continue His own work.** Even Jonah saw his fate of being swallowed up by a fish as an act of salvation from God (2:1-9).

That interpretation is hard for many Christians to understand because we get stuck on our believer to-do list. Yet so much of the Bible is not centered on what we should do, but on what God is doing. And Jonah is a prime example. When we stop focusing on what Jonah should have done and rather see what God did, we see that the central, recurring theme throughout the whole story of Jonah is God's sovereignty over everything. Consider the following verses:

"And the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea..." (1:4)
"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah." (1:17)
"And He spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land." (2:10)
"And the LORD appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah..." (4:6)
"God appointed a worm that attacked the plant..." (4:7)
"God appointed a scorching east wind..." (4:8)

You get the point. **Clearly, the story of Jonah is not about Jonah, but about what God does through Jonah. It's no coincidence that the story begins with Jonah running away from God's plan, and ends with God fulfilling his plan anyway, despite Jonah's reluctance.** With that in mind, we must also see that the work God did through Jonah was, in fact, his plan of redemption, which is found ultimately in the person and work of Christ. We can see this by looking at the key events throughout the narrative. God orchestrates a storm so that Jonah is cast into the sea to save the lives of pagan sailors (1:12-16). God then appoints a fish to swallow up Jonah, who remains in the fish for three days (1:17). On the third day, God raises up Jonah out of the fish (2:10). Jonah then proclaims the good news of salvation to Nineveh, Nineveh repents, and God graciously saves them (3:4, 8-10). Jonah was in no way perfect like Jesus was (he was far from it), and we certainly should not desire to imitate Jonah. But as disobedient and self-centered as Jonah was, God still used him to not only continue his plan of redemption, but to paint a beautiful picture of the Gospel. Every chapter in this story points forward to the Gospel of Jesus. His sacrifice for pagan men, his resurrection on the third day, and the proclamation of God's message of salvation are fully realized in the person of Jesus. Jesus himself made these parallels in Matthew 12:40 and Luke 11:30.

So next time you read (or preach) Jonah, don't simply see some irrelevant story of a guy who disobeyed God, but see the story of God's relentless plan to redeem his people, found only in Jesus.