

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 18, Jonah 1-4

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 18, The Book of Jonah 1-4.

Our last video in discussion of the book of Jonah laid out for us the structure of the book and the major themes of the book of Jonah. Remember, we're looking at a book that has a panel structure where chapters 1 and 2 mirror what we have in chapters 3 and 4, and then chapters 1 and 3 and 2 and 4 mirror each other.

What we have in chapters 1 and 3 is stories of Jonah interacting with a group of pagans, and then in chapters 2 and 4, Jonah interacting with God and praying to God, first of all celebrating his own deliverance, and then complaining to God about the deliverance of the Ninevites. I want us now to begin working through the book and the individual chapters. Beginning in chapter 1, we're going to see Jonah interacting with the sailors who are on the ship as he flees from God's presence.

The first thing I want to comment on is that as we look at chapter 1:1 to 3, where God says, arise and go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it. This is a serious thing when Jonah refuses to do what God has called him to do. In prophetic call narratives at other places in the Old Testament, whether it's with Moses or Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, they often protest the calling that God has made upon them.

There's some statement of personal unworthiness. Isaiah says woe is me, I'm undone, I'm unclean, I'm not worthy to speak. Jeremiah says, I'm but a child, I don't know how to speak, God.

The Lord says, don't worry about that. I'll put my words in your mouth. Moses is going to repeatedly protest that he's not an eloquent speaker. Actually, when God calls you a response of unworthiness is the right response because God is the one that is going to make them able.

If the prophet were to respond, God, you've made an excellent choice, I can't think of anyone better to do this job, that wouldn't have been the right response. But to refuse to do what God has commanded him to do, especially after there is already this relationship between God and Jonah where he has been a prophet to Israel, this is a serious thing. And the construction, Jonah, God says, arise and go up to Nineveh.

Then it repeats, and it says that Jonah arose, but he arose to flee. In 1 Kings chapter 17, verses 8 and 10, God commands Elijah to arise, and so he arises and goes up. That's what a prophet is supposed to do.

And so, Jonah's disobedience is ultimately going to lead to this interaction with the pagan sailors on the ship as he tries to flee away from the presence of God. And what we're going to see in this interaction is that I think there's this idea on Jonah's part that he is somehow superior to the pagans that he interacts with, whether it's the sailors in chapter one or the Ninevites in chapter three. But the irony of the book and the satire of the book is that the pagans, whether it's the sailors or the Ninevites, are much more spiritually attuned than the prophet is.

In many ways, they're much more open and responsive to God and what God is doing than the prophet. We see that in chapter one. Jonah is an Orthodox Israelite, and he gives a theological confession of that in verse nine, where he's talking to the sailors and finally relates to them who he is.

He says, I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. It's the first of three places in the book of Jonah where we see Jonah saying something that is theologically Orthodox. But as we look at his behavior and his conduct, he's not exactly acting in accordance with his beliefs.

I believe that God made the land, the dry land, and the sea. He's the creator. Then why does Jonah believe that fleeing from the land of Israel, getting on a ship and trying to go to Tarshish, why does he believe that that's going to enable him to flee the presence of God? And so, we have Jonah sort of feeling theologically superior, making these confessions where he acknowledges Orthodox things about God.

But in the comparison between Jonah and the sailors, Jonah sort of loses out. And what we end up seeing as we look at this is that I want us to imagine Jonah and the sailors, and I hate to use this pun, they are ships passing in the night. And the reason that's true is because they are going in exactly opposite directions.

Jonah is fleeing away from God, but ultimately, the sailors are coming to a recognition of the true God, and they are moving toward him. The first place where we see the spiritual sensitivity of the sailors in contrast to Jonah is that when the Lord hurls the storm on the sea, the sailors are immediately responsive to that. And what they begin to do is cry out to their various gods.

The contrast to that is that when the Lord hurls the wind on the sea, what's Jonah doing? Jonah is down in the inner recesses of the ship and he's asleep. So again, Jonah, he's the Orthodox Israelite. When God is acting, Jonah is asleep and the pagan sailors are praying and are sensitive to the fact that God is involved here.

The movement and the motion of Jonah in this book. There is a repeated word here and along with the concept, Jonah is fleeing away from the presence of God. That's mentioned twice, but there's another word that's used here to talk about the direction that Jonah is heading.

The word that's used here is the verb, to go down. The verb yarad. It's going to be repeated three times in chapter one.

Jonah is going to run away from God. What that ultimately means is that it's going to bring about a descent in his life. The descent that Jonah takes is not just going down to Joppa or not just going down aboard the ship.

Ultimately, Jonah, as he runs from God, is heading toward the underworld, toward death, and Sheol, as he runs away from God. That's ultimately where his journey has taken him. So, in verse two, instead of getting up and going to Nineveh, he went down, yarad, to Joppa and he found a ship going to Tarshish.

So, he paid the fare and he went down in the ship. So yarad is mentioned there twice. Verse five, then the mariners were afraid and each cried out to his God and they hurled the cargo that was in the ship to lighten it.

But Jonah had gone down, another use of the word yarad, into the inner part of the ship and had laid down. So as Jonah runs away from God and he's fleeing the presence of God, don't just think about the geography of Joppa and Tarshish. Think about the fact that he is going on a descent.

And then later in the chapter, the word yarad is not mentioned there, but there is a descent in Jonah's life. As he is thrown overboard from the ship, he goes down into the waters. Now he's at the point where the descent that he's going to take him is a lot further than Tarshish.

He is going to descend to the bottom of the sea and ultimately to death and in the Old Testament thought world, into the underworld itself. And so, in the prayer in Jonah chapter two, where Jonah is talking about the fact that I was about to drown and God rescued me, he pictures himself as going down to the bottoms of the mountains of the sea and about to be locked in, in the bars of Sheol, which is the place of no return. He says in verse six, or in verse five, the deep surrounded me, the seaweed wrapped around my head at the root of the mountains.

And I went down, yarad, to the land. And so, Jonah illustrates for us, this is what happens when a person flees from God. And in our lives, even as believers, when we run away from the direction that God wants us to go or we resist that, the wages of sin is death.

And running away from God, people who resist God's presence in their lives, who want nothing to do with God, are ultimately on a path that leads them to death and destruction. And that happens in Jonah's life. We see that illustrated very clearly.

So that's the direction that Jonah is going, away from the presence of God and going down. Well, there is a word repetition, again, another word that is repeated in chapter one very effectively in the narrative that shows the opposite direction that the sailors are headed. And the word that I'd like us to focus on as we think about the sailors is the word yarad, the verb to fear.

Fear is a big part of this story. The Lord hurls a gadol, a great storm on the sea, and there is a mighty tempest. And the sailors, these experienced veteran sailors that have been on the Mediterranean many times, they're afraid.

This is a serious storm. In fact, in chapter four, it says that the ship itself thought, this is what it literally says in the Hebrew, the ship itself thought that it was going to break up. So, the narrator personifies the ship itself.

And the ship is looking at the size of the storm, and it's like, wow, I'm about to break up. If the ship itself is afraid, then imagine what the sailors are like. And imagine just the dullness and the insensitivity of Jonah as all of this is going on.

He's asleep down in the recesses of it. So fear is introduced into the story. The ship is afraid that it's going to break up.

And then it says the sailors were afraid. And in Hebrew, they feared a fear is the way that this is going to be expressed. And they're going to cry out to their gods.

At this point, the object of the fear is the storm and the possibility of their death. And it leads them to do what the only thing that they know to do is to cry out to the gods that they worshipped. We have the second use of the word fear in chapter one, verse 10.

After Jonah acknowledges that he's a follower of the Lord, he's a Hebrew, he serves and he fears the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. It tells us that then the sailors were exceedingly afraid. They feared a great fear.

But now they're beginning to have a change in the object. They're still afraid for their lives. They're still afraid about what is going to happen.

But now they have been introduced to the one true God who is different from all the gods that they have been crying out to. And they are specifically afraid of him. And they say, what is this that you've done to us? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them.

So, what's happening now is that they're not just afraid of the storm. They're afraid of the Lord. But the fear that we're talking about here is, it's a terror. And they're afraid of what God is going to do to them.

Finally, when it comes to the time that they have to pick up Jonah and hurl him into the sea, it says that the sea ceased from the raging. And when they see the automatic cessation of the winds and the storm and realize and recognize that God has done this, then it says, then the men feared the Lord exceedingly. They feared a great fear.

And the object of that fear is God. But now, instead of simply being terrified of him, they believe in him. They trust in him.

And they do the things that genuine and true worshippers of God do. They offer a sacrifice to the Lord, and they make vows. And so, I think what we have going on here is that they are moved from a fear of the storm to a fear of God as a terror to a fear of God where it becomes reverence and genuine worship.

It is exactly the opposite of what is going on in the life of Jonah. He knows the true God but is running away from him. And so the narrative in chapter 1, as Jonah interacts with these sailors, they are the ones moving in the right direction.

He is the one going in the wrong direction. Now, Jonah's role and Jonah's mission is that he is a prophet of God. We have already seen in verses 1-3 that he is resistant to that calling.

However, the resistance to that calling continues in the rest of this chapter. We do not see a place where Jonah offers to intercede and pray for these people the way that maybe a Moses or a Samuel or a Jeremiah does. He doesn't pray for God to cease the storm.

He doesn't immediately offer up to them an explanation of what is going on or call them to believe or call them to pray to the Lord. Jonah resists his prophetic calling even after he is on the ship and even after the storm has happened. In verse 6, the captain of the ship is the one who is going to have to call out to Jonah and say, hey look, Jonah, arise, get up, and call to your God.

God had already called him to arise and get up and go to Nineveh. Jonah resisted his prophetic commission then, and Jonah doesn't arise and get up and pray even when the captain does this himself. The only time when Jonah finally is going to talk about the Lord or finally explain to these pagan sailors who are in the dark, who don't know what's going on, who need to know how can we appease God that is angry with us,

the only time that Jonah speaks is when it is finally indicated by Lot that he is the one who is responsible for the storm.

The pagans carry out their pagan ritual of casting lots, trying to figure out the will of God. God speaks through that, and then finally, Jonah is going to speak as a result of this. He is, without a doubt, a very reluctant prophet in this book.

We spoke about this in the last video. I think we see a satire going on here where Jonah can be envisioned throughout this book as the anti-prophet. A true prophet, when God says, get up and go. They do what Elijah did.

They arise, and they go. A true prophet, when there is a disaster and when there is a calamity, is going to warn the people, instruct the people, this is what you have done. This is how you need to respond to God to avert or avoid or to avert the disaster that is going to come upon you.

Jonah is resistant to that. Jonah did not want to preach to the pagan Ninevites and he is not terribly resistant to preaching to the pagan sailors as well. Further evidence of his resistance of the prophetic mission that God has given to him.

The sailors say, what should we do with you? We do not have too much experience here. How are we going to appease this God that you serve? Jonah says, pick me up and throw me into the sea. And when that happens, the tempest will no longer be over you.

The sea will then quiet down for you. I think the question that we have to ask here is, how does Jonah know that is going to happen? How does Jonah know that the sea will be quiet simply if the sailors pick Jonah up and throw him into the sea? It may be an acknowledgment that he is the one who is ultimately responsible for this, but in some ways he makes God seem more like the volcano God that needs to be propitiated in some way than what we know about the true God of Israel. Rather than offering them simply a solution to their problem, I believe that Jonah would rather commit suicide, assisted by the sailors themselves than he would carry out his prophetic commission.

Either to pray for these people, intercede for them, and further instruct them about the true God, or ultimately to go to Nineveh and do what God has called him to do. From the very beginning of this book, Jonah is portrayed as the anti-prophet. All right.

Looking at the book of Jonah in light of the book of the 12, remember that one of the issues here is that the book is trying to highlight for us and the book of the 12 is trying to highlight for us, how people respond to the word of the Lord. Again, we have another rebuke of the unbelief of Israel and the refusal to repent and turn to

the Lord that I think we see reflected throughout the book of the 12. These sailors are responsive to God in a way that Jonah was not responsive to God. But more importantly, in the book of the 12, the sailors are open and responsive to God in ways that the people of Israel as a whole were not.

All right. A further contrast between not just the sailors in Jonah, but maybe even thinking about the contrast between the sailors in Israel and how they interact with the prophet and respond to the prophet. The sailors respond to God and believe in the one true God, even though they have the worst possible prophetic witness in front of them.

I mean, they have got the antiprophet who simply doesn't want to even preach the message to them. The sailors respond and fear God in spite of this. The contrast is Israel has had prophets for hundreds of years that have faithfully fulfilled their commission throughout the history of the book of the 12.

They are going to have prophets that warn them about the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian crisis, and the need to repent in the post-exilic period, and they are not going to respond. All right. It is also, as we are continuing to develop this idea of Jonah as an antiprophet, I think there's the possibility that there are some specific connections between the book of Jonah and the book of Jeremiah, where we have narratives that are talking about how these prophets carry out their commission.

What these intertextual connections seem to indicate for us is that we have an example of a Jeremiah who did exactly what God had called him to do. He was a faithful prophet and experiences all kinds of opposition. On the other hand, we have here our antiprophet.

We have Jonah who doesn't want to fill his commission, who doesn't tell these sailors what they need to know in order to rightly respond to God in this situation. The irony is the sailors believe and Israel does not. The sailors believe, even though in a sense they really have to do the work of the prophet himself in this particular narrative and story.

There are a number of interesting connections, particularly between Jonah chapter 1 and Jeremiah chapter 26. I want to just briefly develop this to show us this idea of as the antiprophet and the contrast between Jeremiah and Jonah. In Jeremiah chapter 26, verses 2 and 3, God commands Jeremiah to go and preach at the temple and warn the people about the judgment that is coming.

It may be that they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way. Jeremiah, I want you as a prophet to do what God has called you to do. I want you to go and speak to these people.

There is always the possibility that if they hear a prophetic word, they will repent and turn from their evil way. In the story of Jonah, it's the sailors themselves who have to raise the possibility that maybe God will relent from sending judgment against us. When Jonah is asleep in the hull of the ship, it's the captain who comes to him and says, hey Jonah, wake up and pray and call out to your God.

Perhaps God will give a thought to us that we may not perish. Jeremiah raises that possibility when he's preaching. The sailor has to come to Jonah and say, who knows, maybe God will respond to us.

Jeremiah confronts the people about the raah they have done. They have committed evil and if they turn from that evil, there is the possibility that God would relent. Again, it's the sailors in Jonah chapter 1 who have to do what we would expect a prophet to be involved in doing.

They said to one another, come let us cast lights that we may know on whose account this raah, this calamity has happened to us. Jeremiah raises the possibility because of the rash, the evil of the people; there is the possibility that God would bring calamity on them. In this particular instance, it's the prophet who is the source of the raah.

He's done the evil, he's brought the disaster, and it's the sailors who are trying to find the solution. This is exactly the opposite of what we have going on in chapter 26. So, when Jonah says to the sailors, okay, all you got to do is pick me up, throw me into the sea, the sea will be quiet for you.

Even though that might seem like an easy way for the sailors to get out of this, and if the prophet gives them this suggestion, we would expect the pagan sailors simply to pick him up and throw him overboard. The quicker, the better. However, the sailors are resistant to doing this.

They struggle and try to get back to dry land. They row hard to do that. They dig their oars into the sea.

They can't get back to dry land. They do not want to throw this prophet overboard. Finally, they say, O Lord, we understand we can't get away from this.

We're going to have to do what the prophet has told us to do, but Lord, do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not lay on us innocent blood. The sailors are resistant to killing the prophet, and they say, Lord, we don't want to bring innocent blood on ourselves. In chapter 26 of the book of Jeremiah, when Jeremiah goes to the temple and preaches to the people of Judah that the Lord is about to destroy their temple and bring judgment on them, do you know what the response of the leaders and the people are? This man needs to die.

Okay? The sailors and pagans, believing in these false gods, don't want to kill the prophet. Jeremiah chapter 26, people that are at the temple, Judahites who are supposed to know the Lord, want to put the Lord's spokesman to death. As they're about to do that, Jeremiah says, okay, that's fine.

You can do what you want to do, but as for me, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves. And so again, we've got this incredible contrast, a terrible prophet who doesn't do anything that God wants him to do and is supposed to do.

He tells these people as little as possible about God, and they repent, and they do the work of the prophet, and they find out the source of the evil, and they raise the possibility that God will relent, and they're the pagans, and they respond. They are resistant to putting the prophet to death, and they come to a point where they fear the Lord. The people of Judah do not fear the Lord.

They want to put the prophet to death, and ultimately, Jeremiah is only spared because the people finally do realize what they're about to do. I think we have an intertextual connection between Jeremiah 26 and Jonah chapter 1 to highlight the contrast between Jonah and Jeremiah, but even more the contrast between the response of the people of Nineveh and the response of the sailors who were on board the ship. Chapter 1, Jonah interacting with the sailors.

Remember the second element that's going to happen in this as we move to chapter 2, the B element in the second panel is that now we have Jonah's prayer, and we have Jonah's response to God. At the end of chapter 1, after Jonah is thrown overboard, after his life is essentially over, there is no way to be saved out of this. He is descending down.

He is getting the consequences of what he chose himself to do by fleeing away from the presence of God. God, in his mercy, appoints a fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah may think that he can run away from God and run away from God's presence, run away from God's commission. God is going to get him to do no matter what, but in the midst of this, God is also going to save him.

God provided a fish, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. So as a response to this merciful act of salvation, this miraculous act where God provides a fish to swallow him up and to save him and to spare him from death, we have the prayer of Jonah in Jonah chapter 2. My response to this prayer and my reaction to it, and I think this is the way that we should look at it as we read it is, wow, this is a model prayer. I mean, this is good stuff.

This is a thanksgiving psalm that could have made its way into the book of prayer. And in many ways, it is a thanksgiving psalm that looks very similar to these types of songs that are provided for us in the book of Psalms. A thanksgiving psalm was a specific type of worship where a person or maybe even the entire nation of Israel would come to God and they would offer thanksgiving because of a specific answer to prayer or a specific deliverance that God had provided for that individual or for the people.

In Psalm chapter 30, we have the prayer of an individual who has been healed of a life-threatening illness. He was at the point of death, and he came to God, and he said, what benefit is there in my death? If I go down to the grave, I'm not going to be able to praise and worship you. And God reaches down and heals him.

Psalm 30 reflects the psalm that that worshiper prayed back to God as a response to God saving him from death. Psalm 40, we have a thanksgiving song where the Lord lifts up the psalmist, saves him again from a life-threatening situation, and the psalmist praises God and offers him thanks. Part of what this thanksgiving celebration involved was the offering of sacrifices and the pain of vows.

When a person was in trouble, when they were lamenting to God, when they were in the midst of this life-threatening situation, like Jonah was when he was about to be swallowed up by the fish, they would often pray to God, and they would vow to offer him praise. Lord, if you save me, I promise to go to the sanctuary to pay my vows, to offer sacrifices, and to honor you in front of other people. When God saves the sailors in chapter 1, they do what a worshiper is supposed to do.

They offer sacrifice to the Lord, and they make vows to him. Part of what this thanksgiving celebration involved in ancient Israel, it seems like there would also be the presentation of the thanksgiving offering, the peace offering that reflected the relationship between God and the individual that's been saved. What would happen with that sacrifice is that part of it was offered to the Lord, part of it was given to the priest, and then part of it was given back to the worshiper.

That was one of the unique aspects of this sacrifice. In the midst of this thanksgiving celebration, the psalmist would bring his neighbors, his friends, people that had realized what was going on in his life, and he would share the story of God's answer to prayer. They would celebrate by eating this meal.

The psalmist would stand up. He would offer his thanksgiving song as an act of worship to God. That's what Jonah is doing here.

While he's in the belly of the fish, he promises that when he gets to the temple, he will pay his vows to God and do what a worshiper is supposed to do. We see this in

Psalms 66, where the psalmist is praying to God and making a vow of praise to him. I will come into your house with burnt offerings.

I will perform my vows unto you. That which my lips have uttered, and my mouth had promised when I was in trouble, I will offer you burnt offerings of fattened animals with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams. I will make an offering of bull and rams, of bull and goats.

And so the psalmist would offer these sacrifices, fulfill his vows, and share with others how God had rescued him. Jonah is doing that in chapter 2, and he's a model worshiper. He looks in many ways like King Hezekiah in Isaiah 38.

After God has told him to get ready, he's going to die. He prays for God to spare his life. Isaiah comes back to him and says, the Lord has added 15 years to your life.

In response to that, that God has healed him, that God has saved his life, Hezekiah prays a psalm of thanksgiving. And so, Jonah does the same thing. And Jonah is a very orthodox worshiper here.

Jonah does what we often see going on in these thanksgiving prayers. There is a vivid description of the life-threatening situation. And what Jonah is describing here, as he talks about the seaweed wrapping around his head, going down to the roots of the mountains, drowning here, has brought him within the realm of Sheol.

And if God does not intervene, Jonah is about to go down into the underworld. And it says I went down to the land. What he's talking about there is the land of the underworld, the land of Sheol, whose bars closed upon me forever.

And so in the visual representation of this, Jonah sees the sandbars at the bottom of the sea as becoming the bars that will shut him into Sheol forever. Now, what we have going on here is not the idea that Jonah died and was raised from the dead. I have heard sometimes teaching on Jonah chapter two that reflects that idea, but he is simply using the image of Sheol in the way that we often see the psalmist doing in the Psalms, where they are in the midst of a life-threatening situation.

The power of Sheol is beginning to surround them, and the vitality of life and what that was all about is about to disappear. And God reaches down and rescues Jonah from the midst of that. So as a result of that, we have a voice, an expression of thanksgiving at the end here.

And again, it's orthodox, it's exactly the right kind of response that you would expect to see. And Jonah says this, those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. Those that worship idols would never have the opportunity to experience God's hesed in the way that I have just experienced.

Or maybe he's saying they forsake their steadfast love in that they forsake the kind of devotion that they should give to the true God. But I, I'm not like those other people. I'm not like those pagans who regard vain idols and forsake their hope of steadfast love.

I'm a true Israelite. I'm a worshiper of the one true God. And I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. And so, just like in chapter 1, Jonah makes a very orthodox confession about God. Jonah 1, I believe that God is the creator, the maker of the sea and the dry land.

Here, Jonah says salvation belongs to the Lord, not to idols. I don't trust in idols. I trust in the one true God. But in the midst of all of this orthodoxy, it seems like there's something wrong with this prayer.

Some people trying to kind of break the book of Jonah down into sources or what it may have originally looked like will often argue that Jonah chapter 2 has been inserted into the story and may not have been an original part of it. Part of the struggle that they have with this is not just that we have a poetic piece inserted into a narrative piece, but it's the idea that we have a very orthodox Jonah who loves the Lord and is thankful to the Lord compared to the Jonah that we have in the rest of the book. However, in light of the fact that the contrast between chapter 2 and chapter 4 is really what the punchline of this book is all about, this is part of the original book.

And as we look at this, if we could just separate the prayer out by itself, this is something that we probably would want to suggest that somebody attach to the book of Psalms. But in light of what we know about Jonah before and after, there seem to be some things about this prayer that reflect that this may be orthodox in the way that it's worded, but there are still attitudes and problems in Jonah's life where, again, he is viewing himself as being superior to pagan idol worshipers. And what we have in chapter 1 is that these pagan idol worshipers are a lot more sensitive to the Lord than Jonah is.

And in chapter 3, when Jonah finally does get to Nineveh, those guys are going to be a lot more responsive to God than Jonah is as well. So, what's the problem with the prayer? Number one, the prayer seems like the wrong genre. It's a great confession or a great song of thanksgiving.

What seems to be appropriate here, however, is that we need a confession. We need Psalm 51 here. We need a recognition that he has rebelled against God and that God has saved him and a plea for God's mercy.

We don't have that. We don't have a Psalm 51. We don't have a Psalm 51.

There is no confession of sin. There is no acknowledgment of wrongdoing. It's a great prayer, but I think it's the wrong prayer for this particular situation.

I think the second thing that goes out of the second problem with this prayer is that it seems as if there is a false sense of confidence on the part of Jonah. Jonah says in Chapter 2, verse 4, "...then I said, I am driven away from your sight." And that's what Jonah had wanted, to be away from the presence of God. But yet, in the midst of the fish, Jonah says this, "...yet I shall look again upon your holy temple." If Jonah is still in the belly of the fish offering this prayer, again, maybe the appropriate response would be to pray for God to bring about an ultimate deliverance.

But Jonah seems to be presuming on God's grace. Maybe God had Jonah swallowed by the fish just to prolong the agony a little bit. So is Jonah being presumptuous upon God's grace when he believes that because he is this faithful worshiper of the Lord, the Lord is going to deliver him? Does his vow really ring true in light of the way that he's responded to God in the rest of the book? A third issue with the prayer of Jonah is that rather than taking personal responsibility for what's happened to him, Jonah seems to be blaming God for the circumstances that have come about in his life.

It's going to say this in chapter 2, verse 3, "...Lord, you responded to my prayer, you saved me. Here's why all of that was necessary. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me.

All of your waves and your billows passed over me." God did this to me. This does reflect, I think, the language of the Psalms and the fact that ultimately, God is acknowledged even as the source sometimes of the disastrous circumstances that have come into the psalmist's life. But again, it seems almost as if Jonah is making an accusation against God.

Look, you are the one that cast me into the deep. No, Jonah was the one who instructed the sailors to do that to him. Then he says in verse 4, "...I am driven away from your sight." Jonah hadn't been driven away from God's sight.

He had ran away from God's sight. I think it's just kind of a third issue with the prayer. Then, finally, in spite of the fact that everything that Jonah says in chapter 2, verses 8 and 9 is absolutely spot on theologically.

Vain idols are not going to save you. If you trust in them, you're forsaking your hope of steadfast love. Salvation is of the Lord.

Yet in light of the interaction that we see with Jonah and the pagans in the other parts of this book, there seems to be an arrogance and a pride that's behind all of this. That arrogance and pride is going to come out as we move from chapter 2 to chapter 4 where Jonah is angry that God has shown the same kind of grace to the Ninevites that he showed to Jonah here. But in chapter 2, the Lord has saved Jonah.

Jonah celebrates that, and that brings the first panel of the book to an end. Let's go to chapter 3, chapter 4, and the second half of the book. We have in Jonah chapter 3, the second of the A panels.

Remember, it's going to parallel what we have in Jonah chapter 1 as Jonah is interacting with a group of pagans. The sailors in chapter 1 and then the Ninevites in chapter 3. What's interesting is, again, we just keep boring down into deeper levels of this. There are a number of striking parallels between chapters 1 and chapter 3. Let me just reflect on a few of those.

In chapter 1, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah. Jonah rises up to flee. In chapter 3, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time, and now there's going to be a different response.

God instructs Jonah that the command hasn't changed; the directive is still the same: go to Nineveh. However, Jonah chapter 1 is going to say, Jonah got up to flee. In chapter 3, Jonah got up and went, does what a prophet is supposed to do.

There is a report in chapter 1 of impending disaster. God sends a storm that threatens to break up the ship. Chapter 3 verse 4, there is a warning of impending disaster because God warns that in 40 days he is about to destroy Nineveh.

We have the response of the sailors in chapter 1 verse 5 to the impending disaster. They fervently cry out to their gods and they plead for the gods to deliver them. In chapter 3 verse 5, we have the response of the people of Nineveh to the impending disaster.

The people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast. They put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them.

In chapter 1 verse 6, we have the captain of the ship who tells Jonah, get up, call out to your God, perhaps he will take notice and spare us from judgment. He's the one who raises the possibility of being spared and of God relenting from disaster. In chapter 3 verse 6, it's the king of Nineveh who raises that possibility.

Jonah doesn't say, 40 days, Nineveh will be overturned unless you repent or respond. Maybe there's a chance that God will relent. The king of Nineveh raises that.

He says, let us call urgently on God, just like the sailors did. Who knows? God may relent. The language of the king of Nineveh is exactly the language that was used previously in the book of the Twelve in Joel chapter 2. Turn to the Lord, rend your hearts, not just your garments, and get right with God.

Who knows? There's always the possibility that God may relent. Repentance does not obligate God to forgive, but God can respond to repentance and relent from sending even an unalterable message of judgment, which is what the message of Jonah looks like 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed or overturned. Just as the sailors turn to God and fear him and offer sacrifices in chapters 7 to 15, the people of Nineveh turn to God, and in the place of the sacrifices, they proclaim a fast, they put sackcloth and ashes on, and repentance that even includes the animals.

Even the animals put on sackcloth and ashes. It includes the king from the least of the people to the greatest of them. And so, this is an incredible response to God.

It demonstrates for us what we've already talked about in terms of Jeremiah chapter 18, verses 7 to 10, that there's always the possibility that God can relent from sending judgment if the people will listen and respond in the right way. Amazingly, the example of where that happens in the book of the 12, one of the four or five examples of where we see this is with the people of Nineveh. As a result of the people of Nineveh repenting of their evil, God relents, and God changes his mind and does not send the evil that he has planned for the city of Nineveh.

If God had just wanted to destroy these people, he could have destroyed them without Jonah announcing the message ahead of time. The very fact that he is sending a prophet in the first place indicates there's always the possibility of repentance. The prophet is telling them the shadow of things that are going to happen in the future, and I think Jonah understands that.

And that's why he says later on, I knew you were a compassionate God, and that's why I didn't want to go. The repentance of Nineveh is remarkable for several reasons. The brevity of the message.

In Hebrew, Jonah's sermon is five words. Now, I'm assuming that he said more, but considering the reluctance that Jonah had to carry out his mission, he may have kept it as brief as he possibly could have. The repentance is amazing because there's no previous history with either Jonah or Yahweh on the part of the Assyrian people.

The timing of the response is remarkable. It seems to be immediate. Jonah doesn't even complete his prophetic preaching mission in the city of Nineveh before the people begin to respond.

The nature and the extent of the repentance. It's fasting. It's wearing sackcloth.

Even the animals are included. These people don't fully know how to appease the wrath of God. They do everything that they possibly could.

And I think another thing that makes the repentance of Nineveh remarkable is that the response of God to their repentance is the most remarkable thing of all. We may not have here, as I've already suggested, a full and genuine conversion where these pagan people fully come to know the Lord and renounce their idolatry. They have simply heard a warning of judgment that is to come.

They are sensitive to that. They turn from their evil ways. They plead for God's mercy.

That is enough for God to show compassion and mercy to them. Daniel Timmer says there is striking moral reform in this chapter, but there is nothing in Jonah chapter 3 that requires us to say that it was more than that. And so the significance of that is that even when repentance is not a full conversion, even when the repentance is maybe in some sense, uh-oh, we got our hands caught in the cookie jar.

We're about to be punished. Even when people respond in that way, God ultimately shows mercy. What if Israel, in some sense, what if Israel had just responded to God? The Lord knows that the Assyrians are ultimately going to turn back to their pattern of imperial violence and hostility, and Nahum is going to announce their destruction less than 150 years after Jonah was there.

But in spite of that fact, God is willing to show mercy to the people of Assyria. The book of Jonah is going to highlight the wideness and the greatness of the mercy of God. And the prime example of that is going to be the Assyrian people themselves.

I see a pattern working its way through the Old Testament that God is often willing to respond to the repentance of the worst of the worst. First Kings chapter 21, Ahab was the worst king in Israel. But when God announces that he's going to pour out the blood of Ahab's family because of the sin that he's committed with regard to Naboth, Ahab turns toward the wall.

He repents and he's sorry about his sin. It's not a full repentance. Ahab is going to go right back to his sinful ways.

But in spite of the fact that this is a fairly minimal response on the part of the worst king that Israel ever had, God is still willing to show mercy to him. The worst king that Judah ever had was Manasseh. 55 years of evil.

At a certain point in his reign, 2 Chronicles chapter 33 tells us that the Assyrians came and shackled him up and were getting ready to take him away. Amazingly, at this

moment, when there's a disaster and a crisis in his life, Manasseh finds religion. And Manasseh prays in 2 Chronicles chapter 33 verses 10 to 13, confesses his sin, acknowledges his sin.

Again, it's not a full or complete repentance. I'm not sure that we get the idea that Manasseh became a religious reformer after this, but God was willing to respond even to the minimal repentance of the worst of the worst. That doesn't highlight the fact that boy, God is sure gullible and stupid.

It highlights the fact we have not begun to fully understand the depths of the mercy and the grace and the compassion of God. The Bible means what it says when it tells us that God does not delight in the death of Ezekiel. God is not willing that any should perish in 2 Peter.

And so that's the heart of God. Then as we move to the final panel in Jonah chapter 4, the problem that we have now, we're back to a scene like in chapter 2 where Jonah is interacting with God. Remember the contrast.

In chapter 2, he prays to God and celebrates what God has done. He's thankful that God has delivered him. Now in chapter 4, he prays to God, same word that's used in chapter 2, and he's angry with God.

The wordplay continues in the sense that it says that Nineveh turned from its evil, its raah. God relented of the calamity raah that the Lord was going to bring against them. Then the final use of raah here, it was greatly evil to Jonah that God had done this.

Jonah is so evil. The sparing of Nineveh is such a serious problem for him that Jonah requests that he be put to death. And he says, I would rather die.

Now, we have a number of examples throughout the Old Testament of prophets who wished to die or to be put to death. But James Nogalski reminds us that compared to those passages, Jeremiah's request to die is trivial, petulant, and childish. Job, in the midst of his suffering, wishes that he could die in Job chapter 6, verses 9 to 14.

After the rebellion of the people of Israel in Numbers chapter 11, Moses says, God, I didn't give birth to all these people. Why do I have to take care of them? They've rebelled against me. Moses was displeased and asked to die.

In the book of Judges, Samson asked to die because he has been put in prison by the Philistines and his eyes have been taken out and he's been humiliated by all of this. Jeremiah, in chapter 20, the prophet Jeremiah curses the day of his birth and wishes to die because of all of the persecution that he's experienced. Now contrast that to Jonah.

Jonah wishes to die because people have actually listened to what he said and because God has extended mercy to them. I remember as a pastor, my typical response to preaching on Sunday was that I wanted to retire on Monday. Usually, the reason was, hey, nobody's listening to me.

Nobody was paying attention to what I had to say. I can never imagine a pastor who would be upset because the people actually listened to what he had said. Yet that's what we have going on in the life of Jonah.

At the end of the book, we have this object lesson with the plant that provides shade, with the worm then that comes along and eats the plant and Jonah's displeasure over his physical discomfort. As we're reading there in chapter four, it says that Jonah was exceedingly evil about the fact that God had shown mercy to the Ninevites. But then he is exceedingly glad when he has a shade over his head as he's sitting there watching and waiting to see what God will do with the Ninevites.

The selfishness and the petulance and the childishness of Jonah is there to contrast for us the heart of God and the heart of the prophet. Note the end of the book of Jonah. This is one of only two books in the Bible that will do this.

The book of Jonah is going to close with a rhetorical question. It's an open-ended question. God says to Jonah, should not I pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many cattle? Jonah, shouldn't I be concerned about the people of Nineveh? You're concerned about your comfort and a plant that grew up overnight.

What about the people of Nineveh? And that open-ended question is there for us, I think, ultimately as readers of this book, to ask ourselves the question, do I share the heart of God, or do I share what I see in the heart of Jonah? God has a redemptive concern for all people. Like Jonah, God is calling us to share that redemptive concern with him. If we have been the recipients of God's mercy and God's grace like Jonah was, then there needs to be a desire in our hearts to see others experience that and to share that mercy, grace, and compassion with them.

God does not just have a heart for Israel; God has a heart for the nations, and we're reminded of that in the story of the prophet Jonah.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 18, The Book of Jonah 1-4.