

5 JONAH – O.T. & N.T. THEOLOGY & HISTORY – MAY 1997

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These notes, composed from 2013 on, are based on taped lectures given between 1977 and 1997 by Dr. Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., formerly the Head of Theology for the Worldwide Church of God; he resigned in January 1974 because of his unresolved doctrinal issues with the administration. Sadly Dr. Martin died in January 2002, a great loss to the world and to those who seek Biblical truth.

Jonah is the 5th minor prophet, which was written around 862 B.C. This lecture is about its Old Testament historical context, but it has important links and meaning for New Testament times as it really is the “Gospel according to Jonah.” It is also a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Jonah is not about a “whale” like most people were taught in Sunday School! God prepared a special “fish”. It has much more profound meaning for us than that story. It actually represents what was going to happen to Christ dying to save the world.

Jonah was an Israelite, and the only prophet who was from Galilee. It says in 2 Kings 14:25 He (King Jereboam) restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher, (West of the Sea of Galilee, and near Nazareth.)

Jonah means ‘Dove’ or signifies ‘Peace’. But he knew that war was on the horizon for his nation. He had been prophesying for decades, among the Israelites who were seriously into paganism and all forms of idolatry. Jonah thought that God was going to punish Israel, and he did not want that, and in fact he was willing to give his life to prevent Israel from being punished if he could.

We need to understand its O.T relevance in relation to the fact that at this time the Assyrians were in power, and indeed ascendancy as the greatest force in the world, and the ten tribes of Israel were in the land of Canaan in the North of Palestine, and the Jews were centred in Jerusalem.

Jonah was given a commission by God to go North to the Assyrians, who lived in Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, to the capital city which was Nineveh, which today would be in the area of Northern Iraq. The city was sixty miles long along the banks of the River Tigris, with a population of 120,000 people.

The Assyrians were from Asshur a son of Shem, but also many of them were also of Abrahamic stock, a truly wonderful nation of uncircumcised Gentiles.

So when God told him to go to the Gentiles and tell them to repent, Jonah did not want to go, as he knew in his heart that they would indeed repent.

Jonah was actually a reluctant and indeed a rebellious prophet! But God still honoured him in a particular way as he was in a high position as a prophet of Israel. He did not want to preach repentance to this powerful nation of Gentiles. He wanted God to destroy them so that they would not be able to attack and subjugate Israel.

Jonah 1:1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 Arise, go (North) to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

The Assyrians were not particularly wicked people, it says they did not know their left hand from their right, or were ignorant as far as God was concerned. However, everyone knows it is wrong to steal, sleep with your neighbour's wife, and kill people, but in some ways the Assyrians had overstepped the mark of normal social life, and God was aware of their sins.

Notice, verse 3 begins **BUT...**

³ But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish (the opposite direction from that he had been told by God to go) from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; (the Mediterranean port for Jerusalem) and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah went to Joppa, turned his back on God so to speak, and bought a ticket on a ship (West) to Tarshish, (Spain) to go FROM the presence of the Lord. He knew what he was doing! Joppa is going to feature importantly in the New Testament in relation to the spread of the Gospel. (Peter stayed in Joppa and went to the Gentiles!)

⁴ But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

(Somewhat the same as when Paul was sailing to Rome!)

⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

The sailors were crying out to their own personal gods, they were in the deep seas around Greece, but Jonah was asleep!

⁶ So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

⁷ And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

God made sure it did!

⁸ Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

⁹ And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; (or an Israelite) and I fear the LORD, (Jahweh) the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

¹⁰ Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

They knew about Yahweh and the escaping of the Israelites through the Red Sea, they knew of the history.

¹¹ Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

¹² And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

Jonah was very calm about it. He did not try to wriggle out of it, he knew that he deserved to die for disobeying God, but where was his heart? He was prepared and willing to allow that to happen, he thought, for the sake of Israel.

¹³ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

The sailors did not want to send him to his death. As far as they were concerned he appeared innocent, as Christ did to Pilate.

¹⁴ Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. (Pilate said of Christ, "This man is innocent...")

¹⁵ So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

The sailors offered sacrifices, this shows they were Gentiles, actually Phoenicians with little knowledge of God's laws, as any Jew or Israelite would know that you could only sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem.

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.

Jonah was a type of Christ. Jesus says in Matthew 12:40 as Jonas was three days and three nights in the fishes belly, so shall the Son of Man so shall the Son of man be.

Side B

Jonah knew full well the penalty of disobedience was death. He made no appeal for clemency, and nor did Christ! God was motivating Jonah's actions just as he motivates all of us. He wanted to avoid his responsibility for going to the Assyrians. He was thinking about his own people. God would use this for our admonition today.

Philippians 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Jonah 2:2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell (sheol a grave) cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

So just before Jonah died, he cried out to God, just as Jesus did, “Why hath thou forsaken me?” So Jonah died in the belly of the fish, of that there is no doubt.

Jonah 2:6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruptions, O LORD my God.

So Jonah was resurrected back to human life, but not to glory like Christ was.

Jesus said in Acts 2:27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Jonah 2:10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it **vomited** out Jonah upon the dry land.

Where was Jonah spewed out? Josephus says that it was in the shores of the Black Sea, right opposite where Nineveh was. This means that Jonah was carried in the fish’s belly across the Mediterranean, through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, a distance of over a thousand miles at about 30-40 miles an hour in the three days and nights.

When the Assyrians saw him, probably bleached white in the juices in the stomach of the fish, they thought he was Ionnis (Jonah!) the fish god. Ministers, bishops, etc., in some religions wear hats like a fish’s head to this day! So the Assyrians listened to Jonah, they fasted, and wore sackcloth and ashes, and repented, just as Jonah knew they would.

Incidentally, the Romans who killed Paul were descendants of the Assyrians.

Important doctrinal note! God accepts anyone’s repentance which can only be based on that person’s understanding and knowledge of God at that time.

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

²And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

He knew that they were going to repent! He did not want that as if the Assyrians had not repented then God would have punished them, and they would not have been able to punish Israel.

Paul was in Tarshish when he received the inspired information of the "mystery"!

³Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

⁴Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

God is saying, you shouldn't be angry.

⁵So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

Here Jonah was the fourth day, again with NT significance, going up to the mountain to see what was going to happen.

⁶And 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.

⁷But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

⁸And 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.

⁹And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

Jonah was very cross at their repentance. It was very hot, so in one day. God prepared a Gourd, a Castor Oil plant, to shade Jonah, although he wanted to die.

¹⁰Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

¹¹And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

God was actually comparing the ignorant Assyrians to cattle!

And in just one day, God prepared a worm to smite the Castor Oil plant so it withered and died. So God prepared protection for Jonah and brought evil on him in one day.

God allowed Jonah whose motives were in a way good, as he was happy to die for three days, and as he was willing to sacrifice himself for Israel. God had Christ killed as a blasphemer, although He was innocent of any such thing, but He was willing to die for the sins of the world.

Before they crucified him, the Sanhedrin stripped Christ of all His dignity or any honour He might have had, and put Him to public shame.

