Bible Synthesis IV

OVERVIEW OF JONAH

Jonah is one of the battle grounds of modern destructive criticism. Some consider it but an allegory with no historical basis whatsoever. But II Kings 14:25 presents him as an historical character. Then the Lord Jesus Christ vouches for Jonah in Matt. 12:39–41. We do not hesitate, then, to present him as an historical figure, and his account here as being fact rather than fiction, history rather than fable.

Jonah, the son of Ammitai, lived in Gath-hepher (II Kings 14:25). Gath-hepher was near Nazareth, thus he was another prophet of Galilee (contr. John 7:52). He was sent to Nineveh, capitol of the ancient kingdom and empire of Assyria (1:2). But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish, a city on the southern coast of Spain, some 2750 miles, more or less, from Nineveh. Jonah went down to Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. Joppa ("beautiful") was a great port. It was about 60 miles from Gath-hepher and 2300 miles from Tarshish. Nineveh was much closer — about 500 miles away!

It says, "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD …" (1:3). But he learned from experience that it is impossible to flee from the presence of the LORD.

Why did Jonah run away? It was not because he was cowardly. The answer is given in Jonah 4:1–3. He knew that God was merciful and would extend mercy to a repentant Assyria. Israel was threatened by this great and brutal nation of Assyria. Jonah wished them to perish, and Israel would be rid of this ancient and dangerous foe. His preaching might lead them to repentance and to salvation. Jonah did not want that to happen, so he ran away. However, they did repent, and God did preserve them. The book of Nahum, written about 150 years later, was addressed to Nineveh, but that time they did not repent. [See Introduction to Jonah.]

OUTLINE OF JONAH

• *Jonah 1:*

1. Jonah's First Commission and His Flight —Jonah 1

-1. Jonah's Commission —1:1–2

- Jonah means "dove" — This is the story of "the dove that flew the coop."
- Nineveh — "That great city"
  - It was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, enclosed by walls almost 8 miles around.

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"Salting the Oats"

Jonah 1:1–2 — What did God want Jonah to do?

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Jonah 1:3 — How did Jonah respond to God's command?

Jonah 1:4–11 — How did Jonah's disobedience effect himself and others?

- A wicked city: "… their wickedness is come up before me." [And see Nah. 3:1–7 concerning later wickedness]
- Jonah evidently hated the Assyrians — they were brutally cruel.
- The reason for Jonah's flight is given in 4:1–3. He did not want them to repent and be forgiven.

-2. Jonah's Flight —1:3–17

- Jonah deliberately disobeyed —1:3
- He "paid the fare thereof" — But that was not all, he had much more to pay later. We always "pay the fare" when we disobey God —1:3
- He went "unto Tarshish *from the presence of the* LORD," so he thought (See Ps. 139:7–12; Jer. 23:23–24) —1:3
  - Tarshish was the most distant point to which the disobedient prophet could travel — on the southern coast of Spain, near Gibraltar. It was a city founded by the Phoenicians as a jumping off point on the west.
  - *Jonah's downward progress:* (1) *Down to Joppa (1:3);* (2) *Down into the ship (1:3);* (3) *Down into the sides of the ship (1:5);* (4) *Down to the bottoms of the mountains (2:6). He could go deeper than that when* (5) *he went down into the depths of despair (4:1-3, 4, 8).*

(1. Result: On the seamen, a dangerous tempest —1:4–11

- A great wind and tempest —sent by the LORD —1:4
  - A supernatural storm!
- The troubled mariners —1:5
  - No doubt seasoned sailors who could detect that this was no natural storm, so they cried out to their idols
  - For they were idolaters, but not for long!
- A sleeping prophet —1:5b–6
  - How could he sleep through this? Isn't his conscience bothering him?
  - Call upon thy God (Elohim) —
- The fleeing prophet identified —1:7–11
  - Lots cast, Jonah identified —1:7
    - Is God in the casting of lots? Hardly! No more than he was in the Witch of Endor bringing back Samuel. She had no power to bring back Samuel. Even Satan himself could not do it. God intervened, just as He did here with the casting of these lots. See Prov. 16:33.
  - Why, why, why? —1:8
  - Jonah's confession —1:9
    - Notice, Jonah fears the LORD God of heaven, "which hath made the sea and the dry land." This is the sea which was in turmoil right at that time.
  - The sailors fear —1:10
    - They feared because Jonah had displeased the LORD by fleeing. It was affecting them!
  - Their question to the prophet, "What shall we do unto thee?" —1:11

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(2. Result: Salvation through substitution —1:12—17

- Jonah is the problem, so he tells them to cast him out of the ship —1:12
- Of course, they are reluctant to do that —1:13
- They turned to the LORD —1:14–16
  - Prayer to Him for pardon —1:14
  - They cast Jonah out —1:15
  - They turned to the LORD —1:16
- THE GREAT FISH —1:17
  - Prepared of the LORD …
  - It was a great fish …
  - He was in its belly 3 days and 3 nights [Cf. Matt. 12:40]. This is a type of Christ's 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth.

- Jonah 1 saw him leave his home in Israel and end up in the belly of the fish. His destination: Still Nineveh, not Tarshish. *Here is a man running from God*.

• *Jonah 2:*

2. Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance —Jonah 2

- The Scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign from the Lord. He responded that "an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." Then he told them that there would be only one sign, "the sign of the prophet Jonas." "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." It would be the sign of Christ's resurrection. (Matt. 12:39–40; cf. John 2:18–22)
- Then, Christ added, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matt. 12:41).

-1. Jonah's Prayer —2:1–9

(1. The unusual place of prayer —2:1

- When did he pray? How long was he in the fish? It is doubtful that he waited until day 3. It says, "Then."

(2. His penitence in chastisement —2:2

- Was Jonah alive? He cried "out of the belly of hell," that refers to the grave (*sheol*, translated "grave" in Ps. 30:3), that fish was Jonah's grave. He was dead!

(3. His experiences in the fish's belly —2:3–7

- <u>*God's*</u> billows and waves passed over him. He was totally submerged in water. It was of God! —2:3

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Jonah 1:12–17 — What was their only solution?

Jonah 2:1–9 — What do we learn about prayer from Jonah's prayer?

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Jonah 2:10 — How did God give Jonah deliverance?

Jonah 3:1–4 — What do we learn here about our merciful God?

- His expectation of deliverance —2:4
  - He would look toward the Temple (he would live).
- His discomfort —2:5
- His faith —2:6–7
  - Brought up from "corruption," that is *death* —2:6
  - Contrast Acts 2:25–31 (2:27).

(4. He confesses himself as one who forsakes his own mercy —2:8

- He is no longer observing vanities. He is dealing with reality now. He has experienced reality in the fish's belly. Now he will obey God!

(5. He will pay his vow (repentance completed) —2:9

- Salvation is of the LORD — Jonah will be delivered. But it will be by the LORD and none else.

-2. Jonah is delivered —2:10

- The LORD spoke to the fish, and then it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.
- Even the fish could not hold Jonah down. Not when God wanted Jonah alive and on his way to Nineveh.
- Thus, Jonah has passed from death unto resurrection. It will be this man who will go into Nineveh and proclaim God's message.
- Jonah 2 begins with Jonah in the fish, and ends with him alive on dry land. *Here in this chapter is a man running back to God*.

• *Jonah 3:*

3. Jonah's Second Commission and His Obedience —Jonah 3

-1. Jonah's Second Chance —3:1–3

- In what condition is Jonah following his time in the fish's belly? Would the fish's digestive juices leave him alone?
- The God of the second chance —3:1
  - Failure did not relieve Jonah of his responsibility to God's divine commission.
- Again — to Nineveh, "that great city" —3:2
- Did he even *think* of going to Joppa again to catch another ship? —3:3a
- The size of Nineveh — 3 days journey (through it) —3:3b
- Jonah obeyed without hesitation this time. Though, his mind has not been changed, as we shall see in chapter 4.
  - He may have repented of his *act* of fleeing.
    - The *attitude* which caused his flight has not changed.

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-2. Jonah's Obedience —3:4

- Notice Jonah's message to Nineveh.
- Imagine how Jonah looked — that would draw a crowd!
- How long did Nineveh have? 40 days!

-3. Nineveh Repents —3:5–10

- This was no doubt the greatest revival of all time. At Pentecost only 3,000 were saved, and Acts 4:4 records 5,000 men. But here is a city of thousands of wicked, idolatrous Gentiles.
- They "believed God" —That's faith! —3:5
  - Notice, they turn to "God," that is *Elohim*. It is not to the LORD. The names of God are used in Scripture with scrupulous exactness. LORD (Jehovah) is the covenant name which relates to God's people Israel. *Elohim* speaks of the Sovereign Creator (see Gen. 1:1).
- They were led by their king —3:6–9
- God extended His mercy to them —3:10

- In Jonah 3 we see him on his way from the place where the fish left him to Nineveh. *He is now a man running with God.*

- *Jonah 4:*

4. Jonah's Displeasure and God's Rebuke —Jonah 4
[The complaining, pouting Prophet]

-1. Jonah's Displeasure —4:1–3

- As stated earlier, this gives the reason why Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh in the first place. He can be compared with the elder brother of Luke 15:25–32.
- Jonah has gone to Nineveh and preached God's message, but he has not changed his mind.
- He, like Elijah (I Ki. 19:4), wishes he could die —4:3
  - He, like Elijah, has been through it. In the fish! Traveling, preaching!

-2. Jonah is Reproved —4:4–11

- The LORD's question: "Doest thou well to be angry?" —4:4
- Jonah's vigil —4:5
  - He is going to watch: Will Nineveh return to their sin? Will God judge them?
  - It will be a 40-day watch for him.
  - A "booth," made of branches.
- God's prepared gourd (shade) for Jonah —4:6
  - Remember, Jonah had spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish. His skin may have been quite tender and sensitive to the sun.

"Salting the Oats"

Jonah 3:5–10 — How do we see God's mercy here extended to the wicked gentile city of Nineveh?

Jonah 4:1–3 — How did Jonah's attitude here compare with God's mercy seen in chapter 3?

Jonah 4:4–8 — In this chapter, what did God prepare to reprove Jonah?

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Jonah 4:9–11 — What final appeal did God make to turn Jonah's heart from his selfish attitudes?

- This is Jonah's first and only note of joy in the entire prophecy.

• God's prepared worm —4:7
- To destroy the shade. The purpose of it all was not Jonah's comfort.

• God's prepared east wind (hot!) —4:8

• Notice the various things that God prepared in this chapter, and in the book as a whole.

• Consider Jonah's varying emotions and the cause of them in each case.

• What was the lesson of the gourd? —4:10–11
- Contrast Jonah and Jehovah in these verses.

• How large a city was Nineveh? —4:11
- Those "that cannot discern between their right and and their left hand" are the small children.
- It must have been a huge city.

• In Jonah 4 we see a pouting Jonah. *Here he is a man running against God*.

END OF JONAH

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