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A Biographical Study of Jonah

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

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Jonah

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. The refusal: Jonah's protest—A demonstration of God's patience (chapter 1)
 - A. The prophet's order—God commanded him to go to Nineveh and warn that city that divine judgment would fall unless it repented.
 - B. The prophet's objection—Jonah disobeyed and set sail at Joppa for Tarshish.
 - C. The prophet's ordeal
 1. God created a great storm, which threatened to sink the ship Jonah was in.
 2. After praying to their gods and throwing the cargo overboard, the terrified sailors awakened Jonah and asked him what they should do.
 3. He instructed them to cast him into the sea, explaining that his act of disobedience had brought about the storm in the first place.
 4. He was thrown overboard, causing the raging sea to become calm immediately.
 5. Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, prepared by God, whose huge stomach would house the prophet for three days and three nights.
- II. The resolution: Jonah's prayer—A demonstration of God's power (chapter 2)
 - A. The prophet's despair—Inside the fish, he acknowledged his disobedience and cried out for help.
 - B. The prophet's dedication—Jonah promised to make good his former vows to God.
 - C. The prophet's deliverance—At God's command, Jonah was vomited up by the fish onto dry ground.
- III. The revival: Jonah's proclamation—A demonstration of God's pardon (chapter 3)
 - A. The warning—He told the people of Nineveh their city would be destroyed by God at the end of 40 days unless they repented.
 - B. The mourning—One of the greatest revivals in all human history then took place as a result of Jonah's preaching.
 1. A citywide fast was declared which included both people and animals.
 2. The king of Nineveh led the way, taking off his royal robes, covering himself with sackcloth, and sitting down in the dust.
 3. The entire city turned from its wicked ways.
 - C. The transforming—View all this from heaven, the compassionate God saved the people both physically and spiritually.
- IV. The resentment: Jonah's pout—A demonstration of God's pity (chapter 4)
 - A. The twofold complaint of Jonah—In great bitterness he prayed for death.
 1. First occasion—Concerning the sparing of the city. This carnal prophet apparently preferred death to life if it meant seeing God's salvation extended to the pagan Ninevites.
 2. Second occasion—Concerning the glaring sun
 - a. God had allowed a vine to grow quickly and spread its broad leaves over Jonah's head to shade him.

- b. The Lord then prepared a worm that ate through the plant's stem, causing it to die.
 - c. Finally, God ordered a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah, which only intensified the power of the fierce sun already beating down upon his head.
- B. The manifold compassion of God—God contrasted his great heart with the grubby one displayed by the prophet.
 - 1. The selfish heart—Jonah felt pity only for himself and the vine which the worm destroyed.
 - 2. The sovereign heart—God's compassion embraced:
 - a. The adults of Nineveh
 - b. Their 120,000 children (This may be a reference to 120,000 people in Nineveh who were spiritually ignorant.)
 - c. The cattle of Nineveh

THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. Jonah was probably the only Old Testament prophet who enjoyed some degree of popularity, for he predicted a "bull market" time of prosperity for Northern Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25).
- II. He became the most famous "foreign missionary" in the Old Testament.
- III. He was from the city of Gath-hepher in Zebulun of Galilee, which in fact contradicted the claim of the Pharisees (2 Kings 14:25): "Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:50-52).
- IV. Some believe Jonah actually died in the fish's belly and was raised again (compare Jon. 2:2, 6 with Matt. 12:40).
- V. Jonah may be compared to John Mark and Simon Peter in the New Testament.
 - A. Jonah and John Mark
 - 1. Jonah failed God the first time but was given a second chance and succeeded (compare Jon. 1:2-3 with 3:1-3).
 - 2. John Mark failed God the first time but was given a second chance and succeeded (compare Acts 13:13; 15:36-40 with 2 Tim. 4:11).
 - B. Jonah and Simon Peter
 - 1. In Joppa, God called Jonah, a Hebrew prophet, to minister to some Gentiles (Jonah 1).
 - 2. In Joppa, God called Peter, a Hebrew apostle, to minister to some Gentiles (Acts 10).
- VI. According to Jewish tradition, Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath, whom Elijah raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:8-24).
- VII. Jesus referred to the life of Jonah on two occasions when he was confronted by the Pharisees.

- A. Concerning their demands (Matt. 1:38-40; 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-30)—“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but 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” (Matt. 12:38-40).
- B. Concerning their disbelief (Matt. 12:40; Luke 11:32)—“The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Luke 11:32).

STATISTICS

Father: Amittai (2 Kings 14:25)

First mention: 2 Kings 14:25

Final mention: Luke 11:32

Meaning of his name: “Dove”

Frequency of his name: Referred to 27 times

Biblical books mentioning him: Four books (2 Kings, Jonah, Matthew, Luke)

Occupation: Prophet (2 Kings 14:25)

Place of birth: Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25)

Important fact about his life: He survived being swallowed by a fish, and he preached a great revival in Nineveh (Jonah 2:10—3:5)