

Chapter Seven

JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH

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. Then Jonah prayed to the LORD, his God from the fish's belly. And he said: "I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, And He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me. Then I said, I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple. The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple. Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

The last chapter closed with Jonah being cast into the sea by the sailors, and the storm immediately subsiding from its fury. We looked at the conduct of a backslidden believer, and we saw from Proverbs 14:14 that while **"the backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways,"** that also another Proverb says, **"the way of the unfaithful is hard."** (Proverbs 13:15). Jonah learned that seeking his own way was a hard way, and he ended up in the depths of the sea.

The scene shifts from the ship on the surface of the water to a terrifying and incredible event taking place below the surface of the waters. In Chapter 1, verse 17, we find Jonah being swallowed by a giant fish designed by God's appointed providence. He will spend the next three days and nights inside the stomach of this great fish. Chapter 2, verses 1 through 9 contain the recollection of Jonah of his state of mind during this time span. It is a vivid description of the conflict that went on in Jonah's mind between what his natural senses were conveying to him and what his faith in God was telling him.

In verses 8 and 9 Jonah is brought to confess the deception which his disobedience had brought upon him, and he renews his vow to obey his God. In a spirit of humble thanksgiving, he acknowledges that his miraculous preservation and deliverance is of the Lord. Whereupon when Jonah confesses that, God causes the fish to vomit Jonah out onto the dry land as is recorded in verse 10. We look today at the ministry of the Lord and the great fish.

In verse 17 we read, **"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah."** In the book of Jonah there are four prepared things that are designed and arranged by God.

In Chapter 1:17, there is a prepared fish; in Chapter 4:6, there is a prepared gourd; in Chapter 4:7, there is a prepared worm, and in Chapter 4:8, there is a prepared vehement east wind. In verse 17 it is brought to our attention who is the fish's Ruler or Master. The text declares that the LORD prepared this great fish. That is, this fish was not independent of its own, but it was one of God's creatures. Some believe that this fish was a special creation of God designed for the distinct purpose of swallowing Jonah, and after it had accomplished its mission, it ceased to exist. That is, it was a special fish distinct from all other species that God created just for this particular incident. It is not necessary to believe that, because the meaning of the word "prepared" in this context does not mean to create. It means to determine or to appoint, and the thought conveyed here is that Jehovah ordained a great fish that would swallow up Jonah. (paraphrased from C.F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, p. 398). Just as the worm, the gourd, and the vehement east wind were not special creative acts of God, neither is the great fish a special creative act of God, but it was an appointed and a providential act of God to fulfill its mission to swallow up Jonah. This tells us that among other teachings of the Bible, God has absolute control over all of His creatures and can make them serve His purposes at all times. The fish was prepared by God and was appointed to be close to the ship so that when Jonah was cast into the depths of the sea, he would be swallowed up before he could drown.

We also see in this text the fish's nature. It is described as a great fish. It may, or may not, have been a whale. Genesis 1:21 tells us that **"God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind."** In Matthew 12:40, our Lord describes the comparison between His ministry and that of Jonah when He says, **"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."** The same Greek word for "great fish" was also translated "whale" in the KJV, and can be translated "sea monster" as it is done in some of the other versions. So this may have been a whale or may not have been a whale.

The sole purpose and function of the fish was to swallow up Jonah. Let's consider, humanly speaking, the possibility of this happening. Is it possible that a fish could swallow a human being? Some critics have maintained that the size of a whale's throat would not allow a man to pass through it. But, as we have already pointed out, the word translated "whale" in the KJV of the New Testament can mean a "sea monster." Therefore, it does not require that this fish be a whale, so this objection is unfounded. Furthermore, this objection is not based on scientific evidence. While most whales have small throats, the sperm whale

can swallow lumps of food eight feet in diameter and the skeleton of a shark sixteen feet in length has been found in the stomach of a sperm whale. So it is not true to maintain that all whales' throats are so small they could not swallow a human being. A most striking incident is related by Sir Francis Fox, (a well known British engineer, published this story in his autobiography in 1924) and he maintains this story was very carefully investigated to determine its accuracy. One of the scientists appointed to investigate the incident was M. De Parville, the scientific editor of the journal, *des Debats of Paris, France*. The incident was related upon this scientist's examination as follows.

In February of 1891 the whale ship, *Star of the East*, was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands and the lookout sighted a large sperm whale three miles away. Two boats were then lowered and in a short time one of the harpooners was enabled to spear the fish. The second boat then proceeded to attack the whale but was upset by the lash of its tail and the men thrown into the sea. One of the men was drowned and another named James Bartley? having disappeared could not be found. The whale was killed and in a few hours the great body was lying by the ship's side and the crew busy with the axes and spades removing the blubber. They worked all day and part of the night. The next day they attached some tackle to the stomach which was then hoisted on deck. The sailors were startled by spasmodic signs of life and inside was found the missing sailor doubled up and unconscious. He was laid on the deck and treated to a bath of sea water which soon revived him but his mind was not clear. He was placed in the captain's quarters where he remained for two weeks, a raving lunatic. He was kindly and carefully treated by the captain and by the officers of the ship and gradually regained possession of his senses. At the end of the third week he had entirely recovered the shock and resumed his duties on board. During his sojourn in the whale's stomach, Bartley's skin where exposed to the action of the gastric juice underwent a striking change. His face, neck and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness and took on the appearance of parchment.

Whether this incident is actually true or not, there are numerous other incidents similar to this to show the possibility of something like this occurring. Now that we see that it was possible, let's focus on why God purposed to prepare the big fish and send it to swallow up Jonah? I take the position that it was to preserve his life from death. It has been the predominant view of both Jewish and Christian teachers that from the time Jonah was swallowed in Chapter 1:17 until the time he was vomited out in Chapter 2:10, Jonah was preserved alive and remained in a conscience state, communicating with his God throughout the entire ordeal.

The early Jewish writer, Josephus, who was a contemporary of Christ, gives the

traditional understanding of the Jews of the book of Jonah. He said,

It is also related that Jonah was swallowed down by a whale, and that when he had been there three days, and as many nights, he was vomited out upon the Euxine Sea, and this alive, and without any hurt upon his body. (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 9, Chapter 10, Section 3).

This view that Jonah was preserved alive was also the unanimous view of the early church Fathers, who lived and wrote after the death of the apostles. I could have given numerous quotes here, but I have chosen one by the name of St. Chrysostom, and he states,

After, however, being thrown out into the deep, and having put away his sin by means of the punishment, he had been conveyed into that unstable vessel, I mean, the whale's belly, he enjoyed great security. This was for the purpose of teaching thee, that as no ship can be of any use to him who is living in sin, so him who has put away sin, the sea cannot drown nor monsters destroy. Of a truth, the waves received, but they did not suffocate him. The whale received him, but did not destroy him; but both the animal and the element gave back to God unhurt that with which they were entrusted. (*Works of St. Chrysostom*, Vol. 5; Section 18, p. 378, *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers*).

Again, if you study through all of the Nicene fathers, you will find that to a man, this is the general understanding of the Jewish writers and the early church Fathers that Jonah was preserved alive during the three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. This was also the view of the Reformers, that is, those who came on the scene and reformed the Roman church in the 15th and 16th centuries. John Calvin states,

We know that it was not according to the course of nature that the fish swallowed Jonah, and also, that he was preserved uninjured in his inside for three days and three nights. . . . for he was received into the inside of the fish as though it were into a hospital; and though he had no rest there, yet he was as safe as to his body, as though he were walking on the land. (Calvin, *Commentary on Jonah*, Lect. 76).

Matthew Henry, in following the school of writers known as the Puritans, expresses the same view when he writes,

This fish was prepared, lay ready under water close by the ship,

that he might keep Jonah from sinking to the bottom, and save him alive, though he deserved to die. . . . The fish swallowed up Jonah, not to devour him, but to protect him. (Matthew Henry, *Commentary on Jonah*)

So from the time of Christ, and up to the present time, it has been the understanding of the Jewish writers, the early church fathers, the Protestant reformers and the Puritans that the miracle in Jonah's case was the preservation of his life in the belly of the great fish. In fact, out of all thirty-one writers which I have researched, not only did they all believe that Jonah's life was spared, but not one of them ever made mention of another view. From the time of Josephus through the church fathers, to the Reformers, to the Puritans, I could not find any writer who makes mention of any other view other than the fact that Jonah was preserved alive.

However, there is one other view of modern origin which is extremely rare that deserves mentioning. It is the belief that Jonah actually died inside the fish and was resurrected from the dead when he was vomited out onto the land. Those holding to this view believe it is necessary to fulfill the role of Jonah as a type of our Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The words of Jesus are appealed to in Matthew 12:40, "**For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**" From this, it is then reasoned that since Jesus actually died while in the heart of the earth, even so must Jonah have actually died in the whale's belly so as to be a true type of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, in this view, Jonah's miracle was that of resurrection, not preservation. I have only known of four Bible teachers who have held to this position. Two were personal acquaintances of mine and two are contemporary writers, Dr. M. R. DeHaan and Dr. J. Vernon McGee, both now deceased. Dr. McGee in his booklet, *Commentary on Jonah*, p. 37, acknowledges,

I realize there are those who will not accept my viewpoint concerning this. When I wrote my first booklet on it, I felt very much alone. However, when the late Dr. M. R. DeHaan also took this viewpoint, many folk accepted it because of their confidence in him.

Dr. McGee is with the Lord now, a great Bible teacher and a very influential radio minister. He was a very widely read teacher, and he acknowledged that he could find but one other person who held to this view. This confirms my position that this is a very rare view indeed. If Dr. McGee could have found anybody in the Puritans, the Reformers, the church

fathers or the Jewish historians who held to this view, knowing Dr. McGee's ministry, he would have pointed it out. Dr. McGee believed that Jonah probably died within five minutes after being swallowed by the fish, and the entire collection of thoughts contained in Jonah's prayer in Chapter 2, occurred prior to his death. In commenting on the words in verse 7, "**my soul fainted within me,**" Dr. McGee says,

It must have been at least five minutes before Jonah lapsed into unconsciousness, but before he did, he said "**I remembered the Lord.**" This is when he prayed his prayer . . . Before he lapsed in to unconsciousness and before death came to him, this man had already prayed his prayers so that everything we read in the Chapter 2 of Jonah took place within the first five minutes of Jonah's being swallowed by the great fish.
(McGee, *Commentary on Jonah*, p. 44).

Dr. McGee goes on to state that Jonah believed that he was not only going to die, but that God was going to resurrect him from the dead and send him to Nineveh. Dr. McGee does not explain from the text how Jonah was given this revelation, particularly within the first five minutes that he was in the fish's belly. My reply to Dr. McGee is that it is very difficult to believe from the evidence in the text, that Jonah was going to die, that God was going to raise him again from the dead, and that all of these prayers recorded in the second chapter, were uttered in that first five minutes while Jonah was suffocating to death in the fish's belly. Also, if Jonah doesn't die until verse 9 in Chapter 2 where he rededicates his life to God and expresses thanksgiving for God's deliverance, there is a gap of three days and nights between verse 9 and verse 10. You have to read it like this. Look in verse 9 of Chapter 2: "**But I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord**" Then Jonah dies. Then verse 10: "**And the LORD spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.**"

The Hebrew word "**and**" at the beginning of verse 10 is also the same word that begins the chapter with the word "**then**" in verse 1 and in verse 17 as "now." So it can be understood that when Jonah was brought to submission, and brought to renew his vow of obedience to God to go to Nineveh, "**then the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.**" The words "**and**" and "**then**" as I have stated, seem to reveal that God did not release Jonah from his prison until he was totally subdued to the will of God. If God had intended to only take five minutes to bring Jonah to submission, He could have done that in the sea waters without the fish ever being involved. If God was going to kill Jonah in the waters and then raise him from the dead, He did not need a fish to do that. Why did

He not just let Jonah drown and then raise him from the dead and send him on his way. Why bring this great fish into the picture, if it was not for the purpose of preserving his life and bringing Jonah to a place where he cried out in total submission, "I have no hope but in You. I renew my vow, deliverance is of the LORD. I will go and obey and fulfill my vows that I have made unto you."

Now a different explanation of Jonah's supposed death is given by a fellow minister friend of mine who is now deceased. He uses two expressions from chapter 2, verses 2 and 6 to argue his position. The expression states, "**Out of the belly of Sheol I cried.**" Verse 6 states, "**Thou brought up my life from corruption.**" He points out that the Hebrew word "Sheol" can mean, among other things, the place of departed spirits that have left the body. Also the word "corruption" in verse 6 refers to the body. In order to prove his point, he states that Jonah's spirit was in Sheol while his body was corrupting in the fish's belly. Thus, his body died, and his soul went into the place of departed spirits. My friend believes that since this language is used in the text, it necessitates a physical departure of Jonah in death from the body. While attempting to establish what he believes is a Biblical truth, my friend makes an unbiblical blunder. If Jonah died in verse 2 and his spirit departed into Sheol, that would make him crying out to God for relief from his affliction while in a disembodied state. Read the text. "**Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD, his God, from the fish's belly. And he said: 'I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me.'**" If Jonah had died like my friend is maintaining, then he would have been praying in a disembodied state. Unless we are ready to accept the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, this line of interpretation must be entirely rejected as unbiblical. The reason being, a believer who has left the body in death is not in a state of pain and affliction. As Jonah was crying, "**Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, I am afflicted.**" If Jonah was dead at this time, he is praying in an intermediate state. As I have stated before, I do not believe Jonah died, but that this is figurative, symbolic, metaphorical language that is descriptive of the fear of facing death as he thought that he was. As we will see in the next chapter, language from the Psalms will bear this out. This is further substantiated by the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ did not suffer pain and affliction during the three days and nights He spent in the heart of the earth, unless you believe as some congregations do, that our Lord's meritorious atoning sacrifice took place, not just upon the cross, but that He also suffered for our sins three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Reformed and Calvinistic theology comes foremost here in teaching that the atoning work of Christ was finished at His death on the cross, and was not continued on after His death while He was in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. We certainly cannot maintain that our Lord was in some state of pain, be it mental or emotional

affliction in that intermediate state. The dying thief asked our Lord to remember him when He came into His kingdom. What did our Lord tell him? **"Today, you will be with me in Paradise."** What comfort would it be to the thief that paradise would be filled with mental anguish and affliction? The Bible throughout emphasizes that when a believer leaves this body, affliction and pain cease, whether it be physical or mental. You cannot have Jonah dying, and in a disembodied state, praying to God to relieve him from a state of affliction. He said, **"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried."** If that be an actual, literal disembodied state then we definitely have the doctrine of suffering for the believer when his soul is disembodied from his body.

The attempt to prove that Jonah died in the belly of the fish, is an attempt by over zealous Bible teachers to push teaching of typology beyond which the Biblical data will allow. Those of you who are interested in typology, I urge you to exercise great caution in this area. The Bible uses types, but all types break down when you push them beyond their limits. All that is necessary to uphold the type between Jonah and Jesus is to say that like as Jonah was delivered by God from the belly of the fish, so Jesus Christ was delivered by God from the heart of the earth. The deliverance of each proved to each generation of hearers the authenticity of the messenger as a true spokesman of God. More will be said on this subject when we examine in detail the prayer of Jonah in the fish's belly. But when Jonah went to Nineveh to preach, he could go there with the mark that he was an authenticated representative of God because God had delivered him from the belly of the fish. Why do you think that heathen city repented so readily? What would there be about some little Hebrew prophet appearing on the scene and calling upon millions of people to repent, and the whole city does so, even to the king on the throne, if they were not convinced he was a true spokesman from God. And how did God vindicate that His Son, Jesus, was a true spokesman from God? By raising Him again for our justification and seating Him at His right hand.

Now let us look at the fish's allotted time for his ministry. We read that Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights before the LORD caused the fish to vomit out Jonah upon the dry land, (Chapter 1:17, 2:10).

The Lord had ordained a specific time period for the fish to bring Jonah into a state of submission and rededication of his vow of obedience to God. It is the whole purpose of this fish story, to bring Jonah to repentance of his sin and to renew his vow to go to Nineveh. That period of time for the fish to minister is said to be three days and three nights. Upon the completion of its mission, the Lord is said to command the fish to set the victim free. This

again reminds us that God is able to control whatever He creates. That includes the devil and every wicked sinner of Adam's race. We are all creatures of God, and we must never forget that God is able to control whatever He creates, be it the elements, the plants, the animals, and even the moral creatures of angels and men. God upholds the movement of all things and our times are in His hand. This fish was specially prepared for a ministry of time of three days and three nights to deal with a wayward prophet.

Now, how are we to understand the three day and three night time period? Are these complete days of 24 hours, or are they partial representative days? Much divisive understanding of this line of interpretation has existed down through the centuries, and we will give both views here for our understanding.

First I will explain the twenty-four hour day view. Those who hold to this view argue that it is essential to uphold the literal interpretation of the Bible and in our western way of thinking when the text would say three days and three nights, in our minds, that adds up to 72 hours of a time period. Those who hold to this view insist that Christ was crucified on a Wednesday, stayed in the tomb 72 hours and rose sometime after six o'clock on Saturday night. They reject the traditional Good Friday day of His crucifixion. I held to that position for a number of years in my understanding of the Bible. The Biblical data does reveal that Jesus died in the afternoon before it was dark on the day before the Sabbath. Read Mark 15:42, **"Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,"** Then in the following text, Joseph of Arimathaea comes and claims the body of Jesus so that Jesus might be buried before the Sabbath begins. Now the Sabbath would begin at six o'clock in the evening by the Jewish calendar. All are agreed that the Jewish Sabbath was a Saturday which began at six o'clock Friday night. The traditional view of the time that Jesus spent in death, (or referred to as the heart of the earth), is that Jesus died on Friday, remained dead on Saturday, rose again on the third day which is Sunday. Those who reject this view, do so by pointing out that it does not allow for a full time period of 72 hours or three days and three nights. This view argues that the traditional day of crucifixion on Friday overlooks the information given in John 19:31 concerning the identity of the Sabbath day. They claim that this text says that it was not the Jewish Saturday Sabbath, but another Sabbath day.

Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

A high day means a feast day. Not only was there a seventh day Sabbath that the Jews observed weekly, but there would be various feast times or days or weeks that would show up on the Jewish calendar, and that these were put in connection with Sabbath regulations. That is, no work could be performed within this particular high day or feast day. In our culture, we have special days that are observed such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and New Years Day which all rotate on different days from one year to the next. That is, if Christmas falls on Wednesday one year, it will probably fall on Thursday the next year, and Friday the next year. The Jews had these high days which were Sabbath days in addition to the Jewish Sabbath, and they would fall on different days of the week each rotation of the calendar year. It is held by this view that this special feast or Sabbath day fell on a Thursday in the year in which our Lord was crucified. Therefore, Jesus would have died on Wednesday afternoon, been placed in the tomb before six o'clock p.m. which would start the Jewish day of Thursday. So counting from six o'clock Wednesday our time to six o'clock Thursday would be twenty-four hours or one day. From six o'clock Thursday to six o'clock Friday to six o'clock Saturday would be 72 hours or three days and three nights. Now note that in this view, that Saturday would be the third day of Jesus' interment in the heart of the earth. At the end of the three days and three nights Jesus comes forth on the first day of the week which is the fourth day involved. So then sometime after six o'clock Saturday night, Jesus rose from the dead, and when the women came to the tomb the following morning He was gone from the tomb. Thus Sunday the first day of the week would be the fourth day. That is the view held by those who maintain that you must have a complete 72 hour time period.

I could give many quotes from Jewish writers to prove this is the way of their thinking, however, I will confine myself to strictly Biblical usage. There are numerous passages we could quote from the Jewish writers which maintain that when they spoke of the time frame of three days and three nights, they were not talking about complete days but partial days or representative days, but I will not go that length. I will try to stay within the Bible usage itself to show that this is the correct understanding. First, let us give some examples from the Old Testament.

Let's look at Esther 4:16. Queen Esther is going to proclaim a fast to last three days and nights. Watch and see how this is understood, not from our American western mind, but the Hebrew way of thinking.

Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so

I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!

(there is your time span. Fast for three days, night and day. What does it mean to fast? To refrain from eating.)

I also, and my maidens, will fast likewise, and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish.

In other words, Esther was going to go before the king even though she did not have that right. She could die by violating the law, but she proclaimed a fast for three days before she went into the king. How long was the fast going to be? Three days, night and day. Now look in Chapter 5:1:

Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.

How long was the fast to last? -- Three days. What day did she go into the king? The third day of the fast. Therefore, the fast did not last a full 72 hour period because Esther was already in the presence of the king on the third day, not after the third day was over. Compare Hosea 6:1-2:

Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Come, and let us return unto the LORD; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

Note that the statement, "***the third day***" is synonymous with "***after two days.***" This is an example of Hebrew parallelism. Two days I will raise you up or I will revive you. The third day you will be raised up. This is an interesting passage of scripture. In his *Commentary on Hosea*, Adam Clark states on this verse: "*In so short a time can he give us such a complete deliverance?*" These words are supposed to refer to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is thought that the Apostle Paul refers to them in I Corinthians 15:4. "***Christ rose again the third day according to the scriptures.***" Dr. Clark says this is the only place in the Old Testament where his resurrection on the third day seems to be hinted at. But note that it is on the third day, not after the third day is over that he is to rise from the dead. There is another example of this in the book of Joshua.

Look at some of the examples from the New Testament. In I Corinthians 15:3-4, the Apostle Paul is declaring the gospel of which he preached, and in verse 3 he says:

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

Again, Dr. Clark points out that Hosea 6:1-2 is the only Old Testament scripture that hints that Christ was going to be resurrected on the third day. Notice it is the third day, not after it. Look in John 2:19. Our Lord makes the statement there which is very familiar to all Christians.

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'"

They said it took forty-six years to build this temple. Jesus said he could do it in three days. Now look in Luke 24:45-46. This occurred after the resurrection.

And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.

He is going to rise on the third day, not on the day after which would be the fourth day. Now look back in verse 21 of the same chapter. He was walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They did not understand who He was, and they were very downtrodden. His disciples stated:

But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.

Jesus was alive and well and talking with his disciples on the third day, just like the prophet, Hosea, in the Old Testament scriptures said he would be. ***"After two days he will revive us. The third day he will raise us up."*** Christ came forth from the grave, not after the third day was completed, but during the third day, and was alive and well and talking with his disciples. Now notice the expression, ***"today is the third day since these things happened."*** The third day was Sunday, the first day of the week. The previous day was Saturday and the day before that was Friday. Thus you have one complete day, Saturday, and two partial days during which Christ would accomplish His stay in the heart of the earth. Partial on Friday, partial on Sunday, and a full day on Saturday which is consistent with the

Hebrew way of understanding what three days and three nights represent. Thus, the two partial days, Friday and Sunday, are considered as complete days. Now this presents a major problem for the other view. In light of the Biblical fact that Jesus rose on the third day, now stay with me, he could not have stayed in the tomb for three complete days and yet the Wednesday theory says that the crucifixion took place on Wednesday and that the third day fell on Saturday. Sunday was the fourth day. Thus, the Bible contradicts the Wednesday theory of the crucifixion day of Christ and this is why the mainstream teachers throughout the history of the Christian church from the church fathers on down have held that the traditional day of Friday for the crucifixion of Christ still stands as the accepted or the majority view. Thus, John Gill, the most noted of all Christian Hebrew scholars says,

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, that is one whole natural day consisting of 24 hours and part of two others. The Jews having no way of expressing a natural day by day and night and to this antitype answers namely our Lord's being so long in the grave as appears from Matthew 12:40. (John Gill, *Commentary on Jonah*)

This has been the vast majority view of the understanding of the time period that our Lord spent in the grave and synonymous with the time period that Jonah spent in the heart of the earth.

In summary, what are some lessons that we ought to be able to grasp from the second chapter of Jonah?

First, we ought to see how easy it is for God to have His way in the affairs of heaven and earth. God has no problems, and is not sitting up in the heavens wringing His hands for loss of instruments to carry out His plans and purposes. He can prepare a fish. He can prepare a gourd. He can prepare a worm. He can prepare east wind. God is not at loss for means to carry out His plans and purposes. The use of this text by Christ most plainly teaches that the prophet Jonah was literally swallowed by the fish, and by God's power alone, he was preserved alive for three days and three nights in the stomach of the fish. At the conclusion of this time, the same fish was led by the unseen power of God to the shore and there compelled to eject the prey that he could neither kill nor digest. How easy is all of this to believe the almighty power of God who is the author and sustainer of all life! Nothing is too hard or impossible for God to do. Jonah was brought to total submission and to say (paraphrased), "My deliverance is of the Lord. I have gone down through all of this. There is no hope that I have had. Everything was against me, but salvation is of the Lord. It is His

work and He has delivered me.” When Jonah confessed that, I believe, the fish had finished his ministry, and immediately regurgitated him on the shores of Palestine. From there, Jonah traveled right on to Nineveh to preach the message that God had told him to preach.

The Second lesson we need to learn is, after seeing how God’s providence is controlled by such accurate precision, should it not interest us to correctly interpret God’s Word with as much accuracy and precision as human ability will allow? If God is so precise in carrying out His providence, should we not seek to be as accurate and precise with the understanding of this book as our human gifts and abilities will allow us. Search the scriptures, and seek to understand them with absolute accuracy, for they give us the will and mind of God.

The Third lesson Proverbs 11:14 says: ***“Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.”*** Before you do something that is important, you should seek some other peoples’ views on the subject. We expose ourselves to making many mistakes when we think we know it all and believe that there is no one but God to teach us. If you would desire to know what the Bible teaches, you need to expose yourself not to one Bible teacher, but to a multitude of Bible teachers. ***“In a multitude of counselors there is safety.”*** If you are following only one teacher and he is wrong, you will fall into the ditch, but if you expose yourself to a number of teachers, particularly those who have labored through the centuries, for the most part, you will be on the safe track because you will see the totality of all the thinking of a given subject. Again I say, ***“In the multitude of counselors there is safety.”*** Remember the hundreds who followed the ministry of Jim Jones to the extent of committing suicide in Guyana. Why do you think they did that? It is evident that they did not expose themselves to a multitude of counselors, but they believed what only one man said. He led them into error and deception. You should never accept just what comes forth from one man. You must search the scriptures and expose what comes forth from the pulpits of your churches with multiple other sources. We should be cautious at arriving at rare interpretations of scripture which are not held by the majority of teachers. If you do, make sure you have all the Biblical ammunition that is at your disposal to support why the majority of Biblical scholars have not come up with that same viewpoint. I exhort my readers to expose your views to others to ascertain whether God is really teaching you or you are just chasing rabbits out in the woods somewhere. There is a statement that I have heard so often throughout my life which is the truth, and that is “iron sharpens iron.” Do not be afraid to expose your views of the Bible to other teachers of the Bible. If you have reservations about doing that, it is probably an indication that your views are in error. If God’s truth is truth, it is going to be the same throughout all the ages; it is not going to change.

If someone in the 20th Century comes up with an “off the cuff” view about something that has not been dealt with before, you had better be very cautious about embracing that view. The wise man, Solomon, said **“there is no new thing under the sun.”** (Ecclesiastes 1:9). I have attempted to show you how the vast majority of Bible teachers, Old Testament and New, held that Jonah was preserved alive. It is only a modern view that has originated with a rare number of Bible teachers that Jonah died and was resurrected. If this modern view is correct, why did all the Biblical scholars of the centuries miss it, and it take thousands of years for somebody to come up with that understanding? Red lights ought to be flashing all over our dashboard. The oil is gone. You are about to blow. You are on the wrong way. Shut it off.

God help us to interpret the Bible as accurately as our human ability will allow us to do it, and the only way we can do that is in the safety of a multitude of counselors. When people come into my library at home and say, “Why in the world do you have so many books?” My reply is, “These are my counselors.” In my study of the Scriptures, initially I leave all my counselors on the shelf and study the text first. After I arrive at an understanding of the text, then I start pulling out my counselors to see if they have arrived at the same understanding of the text. Whenever I find that my view is way off in left field, I back off and ask myself, “did God really show me this, or is my human ingenuity leading me astray?” Iron sharpens iron. Let us pray.