

# In the Belly of the Whale (Jonah 1-2)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Jonah

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## I. Why This Lesson Matters

- a. Paul summarizes the foundation of the Christian faith, which he received and delivered to the Christians in Corinth, in **1 Corinthians 15**. There he makes the following statement:
  - i. “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...” (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**, NKJV)
    1. When Paul says he died for our sins and rose on the third day *according to the Scriptures*, he means *in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies*.
- b. Jesus had made a similar statement to the apostles prior to His crucifixion.
  - i. “Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and *all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished*. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. *And the third day He will rise again.*’ But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.” (**Luke 18:31-34**, NKJV)
    1. At the time he spoke those words, the apostles did not understand what Jesus was referring to. They did not understand the prophecies and how He would be fulfilling them.
- c. However, after He rose from the dead, Jesus explained this to the apostles.
  - i. “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, *that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*’ 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....*’” (**Luke 24:44-46**, NKJV)
- d. In view of what Paul and Jesus said, I have two questions.

- i. **Question No. 1:** Where in the Old Testament (including the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms) does it say that Christ “*died for our sins*”? Where does it say that He would *suffer*? Where does it say He would *be mocked, insulted, spit upon and scourged*?
  1. **Answer to Question No 1:** See **Isaiah 50:6-7, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Psalm 2, Psalm 22, Psalm 69**, etc.
  2. Also, the Passover Lamb story of **Exodus 12** is an allegorical style prophecy about the suffering, death and life-saving blood of Christ.
- ii. **Question No. 2 (a more challenging question):** Where in the Old Testament Scriptures does it say that the Christ would *rise from the dead on the third day*?
  1. **Partial Answer:** In recent prior lessons, we have discussed several Old Testament prophecies regarding the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. For example:
    - a. **Psalm 16** (as we discussed recently in the lesson on **Acts 2**, in our expository series on **Acts**)
    - b. **2 Samuel 7 & 1 Chronicles 17** (covered in **Acts 2**)
    - c. **Deuteronomy 18** (covered in **Acts 3**)
    - d. **Amos 9** (covered in **Acts 15**)
    - e. **Psalm 3**
    - f. **Genesis 22** (story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, an allegorical-style prophecy)
    - g. **Genesis 49** (prophecy given to Judah)
    - h. See also: ‘*Prophecies About the Resurrection of Jesus (Harvard S2T)*’, linked provided through our teaching website [www.walking-by-faith.org](http://www.walking-by-faith.org).
    - i. Also, on the *Historic Faith* website, we have posted a teaching series dedicated to prophecies about the resurrection of Jesus.
  2. **Problem:** However, while all of the prophecies referenced above are about the resurrection of Christ, NONE of them mention His being raised on the third day.

- a. I have even heard some Christian teacher-types express doubt that there really are any Old Testament prophecy that states that the Christ would be raised on the third day.
- b. However, Jesus and Paul clearly state that it was prophesied that the Christ would be raised on the third day! What prophecy did they have in mind?
- c. Some early Christian writers did point to **Hosea 6:2** as a prophecy about the resurrection on the third day. However, to some of us might view that statement as unclear regarding being a prophecy about the resurrection of Jesus.
  - i. "After two days, He will heal us. In the third day we shall rise, and live before him." (**Hosea 6:2**, OSB, LXX)
  - ii. "After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight." (**Hosea 6:2**, NKJV)
- e. Two types of prophecies.
  - i. In the Old Testament, we find two major categories of prophecies about Jesus. I was first introduced to this concept in the book *Common Sense* by David Bercot (available through Scroll Publishing).
    1. 'Western' style prophecy: a straightforward statement that such-and-such will happen in the future.
      - a. For example, the **Isaiah 53** prophecy about the Suffering Servant.
    2. 'Eastern' style prophecy: conveyed in the form of an allegory, or pattern, where multiple facets of the story correspond to aspects of what will be revealed later. This is similar to the parables.
      - a. For example, the Passover Lamb story of **Exodus 12**.
        - i. The male lamb sacrificed at twilight on the eve of the Passover = Christ's sacrifice on the cross, on the evening before the Passover.
        - ii. The chosen lamb being "without defect" = Christ being without sin (**1 Peter 1:19**).

- iii. Blood of the lamb applied over the doorways to protect from death = blood of Christ, which now saves us.
  - iv. Memorial meal of the flesh of the lamb being celebrated regularly thereafter = Lord's supper
  - v. None of the lamb's bones were to be broken = Christ's bones were not broken (despite the fact that the other two crucified with him had their bones broken), in **John 19**.
  - vi. Getting yeast out of the homes and community right after the lamb is sacrificed = getting sin out of our lives and out of the church, now that Christ has died for our sins (**1 Corinthians 5:7**).
- f. What Jesus said about Jonah and the three days.
- i. Read **Matthew 12:38-42**.
    - 1. Jesus said: "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." (**Matthew 12:40**, NKJV)
    - 2. Note that where NKJV uses the term "great fish", it is rendered "whale" in the KJV, ASV, RSV, Douay-Rheims and some other versions.
  - ii. Many would consider this statement by Jesus regarding the three days as a *simile*.
    - 1. A *simile* is a comparison of two things that have a very few (for example one or two) points of resemblance. They typically contain the words "as" or "like" when making the comparison.
    - 2. Examples of similes found in Scripture include:
      - a. Peter (**2 Peter 3:10**) and Paul (**1 Thessalonians 5:2**) say that the day of the Lord will come "as a thief in the night". Jesus uses the same expression in **Revelation 3:3** and **16:15**.
        - i. The point of similarity: it will happen by surprise, catching people unaware and unprepared.
      - b. Jesus uses a simile to describe his desire to protect the people of Jerusalem:

- i. "...How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (**Matthew 23:37**, NKJV)
  - c. Jesus uses three similes in the following statement:
    - i. "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (**Matthew 10:16**, NKJV)
- iii. **Question:** When Jesus said: "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." (**Matthew 12:40**, NKJV):
  1. Was he using a *simile* (saying this is the one point of similarity, being three days)? OR...
  2. Does this suggest that the story of Jonah and the whale is a full-blown *allegorical prophecy*, a scale model of future events with multiple elements foreshadowed (as in the Passover Lamb example)?
- iv. **My Answer:** While most people assume Jesus was simply using a simile here, I will make the case that the story of Jonah was, indeed, a full-blown Eastern-style allegorical prophecy, mapping to correspond to details in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus hundreds of years later.
  1. I plan to demonstrate this in this lesson, so that you can see it for yourself.
  2. Let me make it clear that I believe the story of Jonah and the whale is an *historical event*. It really did take place, as recorded in Scripture.
  3. Note that Jesus Himself treated it as an historical fact when he said that just as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the great fish, so Jesus would spend three days and nights "in the heart of the earth".

## II. The Text of Jonah

- a. The Septuagint (LXX) was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made around 200-250 BC in Alexandria, Egypt. This is the version generally quoted by Jesus and the apostles when they are quoting from the Old

Testament, as opposed to the Masoretic Text (MT), which is used as the textual basis for most Bibles today.

- b. When Jesus said in **Matthew 12:40**, “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish [*or whale*]”, the Greek is a word-for-word quote from **Jonah 2:1** in the LXX (which corresponds to **Jonah 1:17** in the MT).
- c. It is apparent that early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr (in *Dialogue with Trypho*), who were discussing **Jonah**, were reading from the LXX as well.
- d. Therefore, I will defer to Jesus and the early Christians and follow a translation of Jonah based on the LXX. This will provide a clearer picture of what the first- and second-century Christians would have been following when they read this story.

### III. Introduction to Jonah, the Prophet (When Did He Live, Where Was He From?)

- a. Read **Jonah 1:1-2**.
  - i. From this book, the only things we learn about the background of the man Jonah was that he was a Jewish prophet and the son of a man named Amittai.
- b. There is only one other place in the Bible where we learn background information on the prophet, Jonah.
  - i. Read **2 Kings 14:23-25**.
  - ii. This brief statement tells us *when* he lived and *where* he was from.
- c. Note that early Jewish and Christian writers identify Jonah from the book of that name as the same man as the Jonah cited in **2 Kings 14**.
  - i. See Jerome, *Commentary on Jonah*; Theodoret, *Commentary on Jonah*; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Commentary on Jonah*.
  - ii. See also the discussion and citations of early Jewish commentators in Heisler, J.M., *Gnat or Apostolic Bee, a Translation and Commentary on Theodoret's Commentary on Jonah (2006)*, pp. 91-92.
  - iii. See also Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 9, chapter 10.
- d. From this passage in **2 Kings 14**, we learn that Jonah lived during the time of the Divided Kingdom, during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (Northern Kingdom). Israel was ultimately conquered and deported by Assyria in 722 BC. Jeroboam II was king roughly 30-70 years before that end

(793-753 BC). So Jonah's ministry would have been somewhere around 780 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

- e. It says in **2 Kings 14** that Jonah was from Gath Hepher.
- i. **Question:** Where is that?
  - ii. In **Joshua 19:13**, when the land is divided by lot, Gath Hepher is mentioned as being within the borders of the land of Zebulun.
  - iii. **Question:** Is there any special significance regarding "*the land of Zebulun*"?
    1. **Matthew 4:15-16:** "*The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali by way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, Light has dawned.*"
      - a. Here **Matthew** is quoting the prophecy of **Isaiah 9:1-2**.
    2. In **Matthew 4**, it says that Jesus went from Nazareth (his hometown, in Zebulun) to Capernaum (in the region of Naphtali, on the Sea of Galilee) in fulfillment of that prophecy. The region Isaiah describes in his prophecy, the dark land where a great Light would shine, is the land in the north (Galilee) where Jesus' ministry would be focused.
    3. Galilee was an old Gentile term. It appears to have predated the time of the Jews entering Canaan. The term 'Galilee' is mentioned in **Joshua 20:4-7** and **21:32** in connection with the location of the cities of refuge and cities for Levites (in this case, associated with the hill country of Naphtali).
    4. **Question:** Is there any significance to the fact that both Jonah and Jesus were from the region of Galilee?
      - a. Possibly.
      - b. Jonah was from Gath Hepher, from the region of Zebulun. He was from Galilee. I can think of one other notable Jewish prophet who came from Galilee!
  - iv. Gath Hepher and Nazareth were both in Galilee, both in Zebulun. **Question:** How far apart were these two villages?
    1. **Answer:** They were only about 3-5 miles (5-8 km) apart!

2. Is this just an interesting coincidence? Or might there be something more going on here?
- v. Further significance of Galilee. The fact that Jesus grew up in Galilee and did the bulk of his preaching and miracles there (not in the south / Judea) was a stumbling block to many who were looking for the Messiah. Read **John 7:37-53**.
1. The Christ, the Messiah, was supposed to be from Bethlehem (in the south).
  2. However, Isaiah prophesied that light would come to Galilee, (**Matthew 4**), which is in the north.
  3. Side note: There is no indefinite article (a/an) in ancient Greek. Therefore, while **John 7:52** is rendered in some translations “a prophet does not arise from Galilee”, there is no such indefinite article “a” in the Greek text. Consequently, the passage also could be translated as “the Prophet does not arise from...”, which would point back to **John 7:40**, with ‘the Prophet’ referring to the one Moses spoke about in **Deuteronomy 18:15**, which we know applies to Jesus based on what Peter said in **Acts 3:22-23** and what Stephen said in **Acts 7:37**.
    - a. Since everyone there would have known that Jonah came from Galilee, rendering the passage: “the Prophet does not come from Galilee” seems (to me) to make the most sense.

#### IV. Jonah Chapter 1

- a. Read all of **Jonah chapter 1** (from a translation based on the LXX text).
- b. Summary of main elements of the story
  - i. Jonah is given a mission to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire (located in what is now northern Iraq).
  - ii. He does not want to go; and tries to run away in a different direction.
  - iii. A great storm comes upon the sea.
  - iv. Jonah is sleeping in the bottom of the boat. The sailors are afraid the ship will be lost, and all on board will die. They wake Jonah up and question him.
  - v. The sailors draw lots, which indicates that Jonah is the cause of the catastrophe.



- vi. Reluctantly, in fear of the storm, the sailors cast Jonah overboard.
- vii. Swallowed by a huge sea creature (whale/huge fish/sea monster).
  1. Most modern references say the word used here just means “huge sea creature”, not specifically a whale.
  2. Jerome, the famous translator of the *Vulgate* version of the Bible, who lived in the late 4<sup>th</sup> / early 5<sup>th</sup> century, said that the Hebrew word was indistinct (any large sea creature or fish or whale). However, he said the Greek word (κῆτος / ketos) used by Jesus in **Matthew 12** (following the LXX) meant “whale”.
    - a. (Source: Jerome, *Commentary on Jonah*, chapter 2; translated by Timothy M. Hegedus, MA thesis, Wilfred Laurier University, 1991; p. 28)
  3. KJV translators agreed with Jerome and translated the Hebrew word ‘great fish’ in **Jonah chapter 2** (from the Masoretic Text), but as ‘whale’ when Jesus quotes the passage in **Matthew 12** (the Greek word used there, “whale”, matches the LXX).
  4. Therefore, I am comfortable using the traditionally accepted term “whale” here.
- viii. Upon Jonah being cast into the sea, the storm stops and the pagan sailors fear God.
- ix. Jonah in the “belly” (an indistinct term, including more than just the stomach) of the whale for *three days and three nights*.
- c. Moral lesson: Don’t attempt to run away from God.
  - i. God had an important mission for Jonah to do. However, Jonah did not want to do it!
  - ii. Read **Psalm 139:7-12** (designated **Psalm 138** in the LXX).
  - iii. God is everywhere and sees everything. It is impossible to flee from the gaze of God. There is nowhere to hide!
    1. This is both extremely comforting (when we are being righteous and facing difficult times) and frightening (if we are involved in evil and hope to escape God’s notice).
    2. Jonah figured this out at sea in the midst of the great storm. Hopefully, we can learn from his example and not make the same kind of mistake!

- iv. **Question:** Is any specific assignment that you know that the Lord has prepared for you to do, which He expects you to do for Him?
- d. However, there may be allegorical (prophetic) significance in this passage, also.
  - i. **Question:** If (based on what Jesus said in **Matthew 12**) we see Jonah is a type of Jesus, and the time in the whale (**Jonah chapter 2**) represents the time “in the heart of the earth,” what do the events of chapter 1 (before he is in the whale) correspond to?
    - 1. Jesus said he would be three days and nights “in the heart of the earth”. According to Peter in **Acts 2**, we know that between the time Jesus was crucified and he rose from the dead, his spirit was in Hades.
      - a. See **Acts 2:27**, “You will not leave my soul in Hades”, where Peter quotes from **Psalm 16** (designated **Psalm 15** in the LXX)
      - b. **Answer:** Therefore, we might expect to see that the time right before Jonah was cast into the whale foreshadowed the time right before Jesus was killed (and went to Hades for three days).
    - 2. Let’s take a look at the gospels regarding the things that happened leading up to the crucifixion and see if we find any parallels to this story.
- e. Possible parallels between the stories of Jonah (before his time in the whale) and Jesus (right before He was crucified), based on what we find in **Jonah 1**:
  - i. The main character is a *famous prophet from Galilee*.
  - ii. He is set apart and *called by God* to go on a dangerous, daring, far-reaching *mission*. At stake was the repentance and salvation of thousands of Gentiles.
  - iii. The prophet *does NOT want to go* on this mission and tries his hardest to get out of it.
    - 1. You may object that Jesus went to the cross voluntarily, “for the joy set before him...” (**Hebrews 12:2**).
    - 2. However, let’s go back to the Garden of Gethsemane. His first response to the Father was *NOT* that of **Isaiah 6**, where Isaiah responded eagerly to the invitation: “Here am I! Send me.” (**Isaiah 6:8**)

3. In **Luke 22** and **Matthew 26:39**, Jesus is kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane and praying intensely, “O My Father, if it is possible, *let this cup pass from Me*; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”
  4. Jesus agonizes and prays intensely for hours, that He be spared from His mission to go to the cross. He did not want to undergo this suffering.
- iv. After the ‘wake-up call’ (Jesus’ disciples asleep in the garden; Jonah asleep in the boat), events progress rapidly toward a conclusion.
1. Jonah is asked the questions:
    - a. “What is your occupation?”
    - b. “Where do you come from? From what country and from what people are you?”
    - c. And finally: “What did you do?”
  2. Jesus is questioned before his death:
    - a. Are you a king? (**John 18:37**)
    - b. Where are you from? From what region and people?
      - i. Pilate asks Jesus, “Πόθεν εἶ σὺ; / Where are you from?” (**John 19:9**). Compare that to the question that the mariners ask Jonah, “Πόθεν ἔρχῃ; / Where do you come from?” (**Jonah 1:8, LXX**).
      - ii. Pilate asked if Jesus was a Galilean (**Luke 23:6**). Compare that to the mariners who asked Jonah, “From which country and from which people are you?” (**Jonah 1:8, LXX**)
    - c. What did you do?
      - i. Pilate asked Jesus, “τί ἐποίησας; / What did you do?” (**John 18:35**). Compare that to the mariners who asked Jonah, “τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; / What is this that you did?” (**Jonah 1:10, LXX**)
        1. Note that since the Greek interrogative pronoun τί can mean either ‘what’ or ‘why’, translations can vary. However, in Greek, the very same word is used when

Jesus was questioned (in **John 18**) as when Jonah was questioned (in **Jonah 1**, from the LXX).

- v. The prophet is the reason for the great tumult (Jonah is responsible for the storm; Jesus for the angry crowd that surrounds Pilate)
- vi. The only way to calm the increasingly tumultuous situation:
  - 1. Jonah says those in charge need to do two things (**Jonah 1:12**):
    - a. Lift me up / take me up, and
    - b. Cast me into the sea (essentially handing him over to death).
  - 2. Jesus said that for us to be saved, he would have to be *lifted up* by men.
    - a. **John 3:14** “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the Wilderness, so the Son of Man *must be lifted up*.”
    - b. **John 12:32-33** “*If I am lifted up* from the earth I will draw all people to myself...signifying by what death he would die.”
    - c. In **Acts 8:33**, when the Ethiopian eunuch is reading from **Isaiah 53:7-8**, the passage he is reading follows the LXX. This is a famous prophecy about the crucifixion of Christ; it says, “His life is taken [= *lifted up*] from the earth”.
      - i. The same Greek word for ‘lifted up’ is used here, as when Jonah told the sailors to ‘lift him up’ in the LXX.
- vii. Those in charge (Pilate in the case of Jesus; the mariners in the case of Jonah) do not want to kill the prophet from Galilee, and try to find a way out. (The mariners strain to return to land in **Jonah 1:13**; Pilate tries to find a way out in **John 19:6-12**.)
  - 1. However, things only get worse. Desperate, they feel that they have no choice but to hand him over to death.
- viii. Those who hand the prophet over to death do not want the blood of a righteous man on their consciences.
  - 1. Compare what the mariners say in **Jonah 1:14** versus what Pilate (and the mob) say in **Matthew 27:19-26**.

- a. “When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.’” (**Matthew 27:24**, NKJV)
  - 2. Jerome, in his commentary on Jonah, remarks, “Great is the faith of sailors... ‘And do not hold over us’, they say, ‘the blood of an innocent man’...Does not the voice of the seamen seem to us to be the confession of Pilate, who washes his hands and says, ‘I am clean from the blood of this man?’”
    - a. (Source: Jerome, *Commentary on Jonah*, chapter 1; translated by Timothy M. Hegeudus, MA thesis, Wilfred Laurier University, 1991; p. 24)
- ix. One man must be sacrificed to save many.
  - 1. A parallel (also noted by Jerome) with Caiaphas unknowingly prophesying that it was better for one man to die for the people, than that the whole nation should perish.
    - a. “And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us *that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.*’ Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation....” (**John 11:49–51**, NKJV)
- x. Upon the prophet’s being handed over to death, there is a dramatic change in nature. When the Gentiles see what happens, they fear and turn to God. Compare **Jonah 1:15-16** with **Matthew 27:50-54**.
  - 1. “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”” (**Matthew 27:50–54**, NKJV)

2. Similarly, in **Jonah 1:16** after the prophet is cast into the ocean, the sea becomes calm and the pagan sailors fear God, offer sacrifices and make vows to the Lord.

## V. Jonah Chapter 2 – In the Belly of the Whale

a. Read all of **Jonah chapter 2**

b. **Question:** *Where is Jonah?*

i. Re-read **Jonah 2:1-3**

1. In my opinion, this passage may be the strangest, and most critical, part of the entire story! **Jonah 2:3** is a verse that no one (before Jesus) would have taken literally. Everything turns on this verse.
2. The prophet is clearly praying from *in the belly of the whale*. Yet Jonah says that the Lord hears his cry, “*out of the belly of Hades*”.

a. The most incredible thing to me about this story is not that a whale can swallow Jonah, and he can come out alive. That is simply a miracle by God. I get that. But I find this line in the story is a mind-bender, as if we are suddenly switching into another dimension.

b. **Questions I Have:** Jonah, *where* are you? *Who* are you?

3. As we previously discussed, Hades = Sheol = the place where spirits of the dead go awaiting final judgment. In **Psalms 16**, as explained by Peter in **Acts 2**, that is the place where Christ went immediately after he died, and where He remained until His resurrection. Jesus referred to that place as “in the heart of the earth” in **Matthew 12**, when He spoke about His own resurrection.

ii. The prayer of Jonah from inside the belly of the whale has a familiar feel to it. It reminds me of similar lines in a few of the psalms, including **Psalms 18** and **Psalms 69**.

1. Consider **Psalms 18:1-7** and **18:14-21** (equivalent to **Psalms 17** in the LXX).
  - a. David is fleeing Saul, on the run in the desert. Yet he prays as if he is being held prisoner somewhere at the bottom of the sea!

- b. God hears his prayer, comes down and pulls him out from 'Hades', from the bottom of the sea, and sets his feet on solid ground, because he was righteous.
  - c. Obviously, the language Jonah borrows from David also points to the resurrection of Christ from Hades.
- 2. Consider **Psalm 69** (designated **Psalm 68** in the LXX), which contains famous prophecies regarding the crucifixion of Christ.
  - a. It begins: "Save me, O God, for the waters flood my soul. I am stuck in the mire of the sea". (**v. 1**)
  - b. It also says: "Let not a storm of water drown me; neither let the deep swallow me up". (**v. 16**)
  - c. Jonah is delivered from the belly of the whale, "the belly of Hades", after being there three days and three nights!

## VI. Three Days and Three Nights?

- a. What about the reference to "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth (= Hades)? Wasn't Jesus crucified on Friday afternoon and rose Sunday morning? That is less than 48 hours! First, let's review the timetable.
  - i. **John 19:31** says that the Jews wanted to make sure that Jesus was dead before the start of the Sabbath (which would be sundown Friday).
  - ii. **Luke 23:44-46** says that darkness came over the land from noon to 3 pm (the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> hour).
    - 1. Note that the hours of the day were determined based on starting at sunrise, corresponding to about 6am 'our time'.
  - iii. **John 20:1** says that He rose on the morning of the first day of the week.
    - 1. Early Christian writer Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD, explained to the Romans why Christians gather on Sundays. Justin wrote that Jesus "was crucified on the day before that of Saturn. On the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the sun [= *Sun-day*] he appeared to his apostles and disciples".
      - a. (Source: Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 67; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 186)
      - b. Note that the '*day of Saturn*' or '*Saturn-day*' was the day of the week that we now call '*Saturday*'.

- i. Therefore, if Jesus had been crucified on the day before that of Saturn, he would have been crucified on Friday.
  - c. The '*day of the Sun*' refers to '*Sunday*'.
    - 1. So don't let anyone try to tell you that Jesus somehow died on Thursday night. The Scriptures clearly teach, and the church held from the beginning, that Jesus died on Friday afternoon and was raised Sunday morning.
- b. Note that the expressions "on the third day" and "three days and three nights" appear to be used interchangeably by Jesus in the New Testament (similar to 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven').
  - i. There is only one place in the New Testament (**Matthew 12:40**) where Jesus uses the expression "*three days and three nights*" to describe the period of time between His death and resurrection.
  - ii. There are a few places where Jesus says, "*in three days*". For example, in **John 2:19**, He says, "Destroy this temple, and *in three days* I will raise it up".
  - iii. However, the predominant way Jesus expresses this (ten places in the gospels) is by using the expression "*the third day*", or "*on the third day*". That is also used by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:4**, and by Peter in **Acts 10:40**.
    - 1. We can see from examples how the expression "on the third day" was understood in the Scriptures.
      - a. In **Luke 13:32**, Jesus says to tell Herod, "I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and *the third day* I shall be perfected".
      - b. **Exodus 19:10-11** the Lord tells Moses to have the people wash their clothes and sanctify themselves "today and tomorrow", to be ready for when the Lord descends upon Mt. Sinai "*on the third day*".
    - 2. Therefore, the expression "on the third day" in Scripture means the day after tomorrow, with 'today' being counted as the first day. If Jesus died on Friday evening and was raised Sunday morning, this would align well with His statements that He would be raised on the third day.
      - a. Likewise, that would match what Peter said in **Acts 10:40** and what Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:4**, where



they stated that Jesus had risen from the dead “*on the third day*”.

- c. **Question (Again):** But what about the “three days and three nights” description used by Jesus in the **Matthew 12** account, connected to the story of Jonah?
- i. On many occasions, I have been asked this question. Based on my own research, it is apparent that this same question has been raised repeatedly by thoughtful Christians throughout the centuries.
    1. Note that Christians in the early 300s were asking some of the same questions we ask today. For example, Eusebius was asked: “If Jesus died on Friday and was raised on Sunday morning, how did he fulfill what He said about being in the heart of the earth *three days and three nights*?”
  - ii. In a work by Eusebius, *Gospel Problems and Solutions*, a questioner posed this very question to Eusebius, who provided two possible answers that struck me as plausible. Eusebius (born c. 260 AD, died c. 340 AD), bishop of Caesarea, is well known as a church historian and apologist for the faith.
    1. **Eusebius’ Explanation No. 1:** The explanation that Eusebius himself seemed to prefer was that since a day and its corresponding night belong to one another, *any part of either the day or the associated night represented the full pair (day + night)*.
      - a. By that reasoning, the “three days and nights” would be understood as follows:
        - i. Friday evening (and the day associated with it, Friday day);
        - ii. Saturday day and night; and
        - iii. Sunday morning (counting for Sunday day, along with the associated night that belonged to it, Sunday night).
      - b. Some other Christian writers from the 300s and 400s make similar arguments, applying the term ‘*synecdoche*’.
        - i. *Synecdoche* is a figure of speech or literary device in which one part is used to represent the whole, or the whole is used to represent a part.

Therefore, any part of a day or night would represent the entire thing.

- ii. Modern examples of *synecdoche* include expressions such as:
  1. “100 *head* of cattle” (referring to the *entire bodies* of 100 animals),
  2. “all *hands* on deck” (requesting that people show up with their entire person, not just their physical hands), and
  3. “nice wheels” or “nice threads” (referring to an entire automobile or an entire suit of clothes).
- iii. Some examples of *synecdoche* in Scripture include:
  1. Jesus tells Peter, “*flesh and blood* has not revealed this to you...” (**Matthew 16:17**, where the terms ‘flesh and blood’ are used to represent the entire human persons).
  2. Paul says, “You cannot partake of the Lord’s *table* and of the *table* of demons” (**1 Corinthians 10:21**, where the word *table* is used to represent an entire meal).
  3. In **Romans 16:3-4**, Paul says that Priscilla and Aquila “risked their *necks*” to save his life (where the term *neck* is used to refer to their *lives*).
- c. From Augustine, writing c. 400 AD in *On Christine Doctrine*:
  - i. “The figure *synecdoche* either puts the part for the whole, or the whole for the part...”
  - ii. “For unless to the latter part of the day on which He suffered we join the previous night, and count it as a whole day, and to the latter part of the night in which He arose we join the Lord’s day which was just dawning, and count it also a whole day, we cannot make out the three days

and three nights during which He foretold that He would be in the heart of the earth.”

1. (Source: Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, book 3, chapter 35, section 50; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 571)
2. **Eusebius’ Explanation No. 2:** There is a second possible way to explain the “three days and three nights” expression: God inserted an extra ‘day and night’ into the Passion story!
- a. Eusebius noted that while he personally believed that the concept of *synecdoche* was the best answer to this question, he also was aware of another explanation that other early Christians held to.
    - i. “...others make the Preparation-day (Friday) into two, because there had been night and then day again, then the whole Sabbath day and its night.”
      1. (Source: Eusebius, *Gospel Problems and Solutions*, To Marinus 4.5)
  - b. Jerome, writing around 397 AD in the chapter 2 section of his *Commentary on Jonah*, saw this similarly. He also believed that the “three days and nights” expression should be understood on the basis of *synecdoche*.
    - i. However, Jerome, like Eusebius, commented that he was aware that some other Christians understood it differently: counting the Day of Preparation (Friday) as two days, with the night following the day when the sun disappeared from the sixth hour to the ninth hour (noon until 3 pm).
    - ii. By that reckoning, the “three days and nights” would be as follows:
      1. A special inserted night (Friday afternoon when the sun was darkened until 3 pm, plus Friday later afternoon when the light returned (Night-and-day No. 1);
      2. Friday night and Saturday daytime (Night-and-day No. 2); and

3. Saturday night and Sunday morning, at which time Jesus rose (Night-and-day No. 3).
- c. The disappearance of the sun at noon on the Friday of the crucifixion was seen by some early Christians as fulfillment of a prophecy in **Amos 8**.
    - i. “‘It shall come to pass in that day’, says the Lord, ‘That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning...I will make it like mourning for an only son....’” (**Amos 8:9-10**, NKJV)
  - d. The **Amos 8** prophecy about the darkness at noon (several also mention **Jeremiah 15:9** in connection with this) is mentioned by the following early Christian writers:
    - i. From Tertullian:
      1. “For that which happened at His passion, that mid-day grew dark, the prophet Amos announces, saying, ‘And it shall be,’ he says, ‘in that day, says the Lord, the sun shall set at mid-day, and the day of light shall grow dark over the land: and I will convert your festive days into grief, and all your canticles into lamentation; and I will lay upon your loins sackcloth, and upon every head baldness; and I will make the grief like that for a beloved (son), and them that are with him like a day of mourning.’” (**Amos 8:9-10**, see especially LXX)
      2. “...the day hastened to make an ‘eventide,’—that is, to cause darkness, which was made at mid-day; and thus ‘your festive days God converted into grief, and your canticles into lamentation.’”
        - a. (Source: Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 167)

## ii. From Cyprian:

1. “[*Subtitle*] That at mid-day in His passion there should be darkness.
2. “In **Amos**: ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, the sun shall set at noonday, and the day of light shall be darkened; and I will turn your feast-days into grief, and all your songs into lamentation.’ (**Amos 8:9-10**)
3. “Also in **Jeremiah**: ‘She is frightened who has borne children, and her soul has grown weary. Her sun has gone down while as yet it was mid-day; she has been confounded and accursed: I will give the rest of them to the sword in the sight of their enemies.’ (**Jeremiah 15:9**) Also in the Gospel: ‘Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the earth even to the ninth hour.’ (**Matthew 27:45**)”
  - a. (Source: *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise No. 12, Book 2, Testimonies 23*; found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 525*)

## iii. From Lactantius:

1. “Therefore, being lifted up and nailed to the cross, He cried to the Lord with a loud voice, and of His own accord gave up His spirit. And at the same hour there was an earthquake; and the veil of the temple, which separated the two tabernacles, was rent into two parts; and the sun suddenly withdrew its light, and there was darkness from the sixth even to the ninth hour. Of which event the prophet Amos testifies: ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, that the sun shall go down at noon, and the daylight shall be darkened; and I will turn your feasts into mourning, and your songs into lamentation.’ (**Amos 8:9-10**)

2. “Also Jeremiah: “She who brings forth is affrighted, and vexed in spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet mid-day; she has been ashamed and confounded; and the residue of them will I give to the sword in the sight of their enemies.’ **(Jeremiah 15:9)**”
  - a. (Source: Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, book 4, chapter 19; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 122)
  - b. See also a similar statement in Lactantius, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, chapter 46; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 241.
- d. **Bottom Line regarding “three days and three nights”:** Early Christians have (at least) two reasonable explanations of how the “three days and three nights” statement in **Matthew 12:40** could be correct with Jesus dying on Friday afternoon and being raised on Sunday morning.
  - i. You do not have to abandon the Friday crucifixion in order to accept what Jesus said regarding His resurrection. However, the statements in the New Testament that He was raised “on the third day” also are true!

## VII. Conclusions and Take-Aways

- a. Jesus did indeed suffer, die and was raised on the third day, in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.
- b. We need to pay attention to the Eastern-style allegorical prophecies that are throughout the Old Testament. These include some of the greatest prophecies in all of Scripture.
- c. Jonah and the whale is a true story, as well as an allegorical foreshadowing of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus from Hades on the third day. Like Jesus, Jonah was:
  - i. The prophet from Galilee;
  - ii. Called by God to a great life-saving mission that would save the lives of many Gentiles;
  - iii. The only man for the job. (There was no ‘Plan B’.);

- iv. Asked three questions after the 'wake up call'; and
  - v. The one who had to be handed over to death, in order for everyone else to be saved.
  - vi. Those involved in handing him over to death did not want the guilt of his blood on their hands.
  - vii. He had to be "lifted up" before being handed over to death.
  - viii. Miraculous signs in nature were observed by Gentile onlookers after he was handed over to death. The Gentiles who see those signs feared God.
  - ix. He spent three days in 'Hades' before coming out alive.
  - x. In the end, many Gentiles would be led to repentance and would be saved through his powerful message.
- d. In the next lesson, we plan to look at further parallels between Jesus and Jonah in the incident of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, when Jesus was asleep in the boat (**Matthew 8, Mark 4 and Luke 8**).
  - e. Jesus descended to Hades and rose on the third day. If we follow Him, the same will happen to us (death, time in Hades, followed by bodily resurrection).
    - i. However, in our case, it may take more time than the three days and nights for us to be detained in Hades, before we are released.
  - f. Don't even think of trying to run away from God. There is nowhere to hide!