

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 10, Jonah, Part 3

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 10, Jonah, Part 3.

A Word of Prayer, please. Thank you for your guidance and help through this week, our Father. We all know you. You've given us various responsibilities today. Help us to be faithful in discharging them.

Thank you that we're never alone. Even where we don't see outwardly the hand of God, we do believe that the God of Jonah, indeed, is our God, guiding us, directing us, even behind the scenes, making a way for us, enabling us, keeping in mind the big picture that he's taking us somewhere with our lives. In the midst of the details that we seek to accomplish today, help us never forget that there is that bigger picture that is of great concern for you.

As you take us one step at a time, help us to have faith in you and your purposes for us. We rest in that assurance today with thanksgiving through Christ our Lord. Amen.

All right, my friends, I want to journey to Jonah. A few more things about the great fish. As I indicated, this sea monster, or simply large fish as it is described here, which God is said to have provided.

A number of things God provides in the story. They are attributed to Him. And verse 17 speaks of this fish which in God's timely provision, according to the story, rescues Jonah from drowning.

In both the swallowing, verse 17, and the vomiting, chapter 2, verse 10, are under the control of God. So again, one of the strong emphases in this book, God controls nature. Sub-theme, Baal was supposed in the Phoenician world, the Canaanite world, to control nature.

He was the weather God. He was the God who brought the rains and caused the crops to grow. And here, the God of Jonah is the one who does this.

Indeed, it is the stamp of the supernatural. The three days and three nights that are mentioned in terms of the last phrase in chapter 1, the time he spent entombed in the belly of the fish, seem to refer to simply a short period of time. If you take that expression, three days and three nights, you know in Jesus' case, it didn't mean 72 hours.

Three times 24, three days, and three nights. It's a conventional expression. In Jesus' case, maybe 39 hours of the 72.

Why? Let's take the Gospels. Jesus was crucified about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The sun turned to darkness from noon until the ninth hour.

Say he's taken off the cross late Friday afternoon and buried. So, there's three hours there on Friday afternoon, 24 hours on Saturday, say he rose 6 o'clock Sunday morning. There are 12 hours.

So, three hours plus 24 hours plus 12 hours from 6 o'clock Saturday evening when Sunday began, the first day of the week, until the dawn on Sunday, 6 in the morning. So, you're halfway into Sunday. So, that's 39 hours.

Another great example is the literary types of the Bible. And the comparison is the Son of Man is three days and three nights, and the heart of the earth, as Jonah, is three days and three nights. Again, the point here is not to suppress the specificity of the language.

It's simply used in general for a short period of time involving, at least in this case, would seem to be at least all of part of a period of three days. In either case, the typological application of the burial of Jesus, who, like Jonah, was in tomb for three days and three nights, is clearly taught, certainly in the New Testament. Chapter 2 sees Jonah, as it were, in his own watery grave.

I say, as it were because the word for a grave in the Hebrew Bible is part of Jonah's prayer from the fish's belly, which he reconstructs. You notice in 2.1, as we now move to the poetical from the narrative, the straightforward prose account, he says, As he was inside the fish, he prayed, and then he follows what he prayed. As here in the text, he recalls his prayer for deliverance.

He prays to God. In his distress, he called to the Lord, and he answered him from the depths of the grave. A footnote in your NIV, G-R-A-V-E, is Sheol. Everyone went to Sheol in Old Testament times. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Everyone.

The righteous and the unrighteous. Sheol was synonymous with the grave. It was simply the realm of the dead.

In some places, it's translated as the pit. You always went down to Sheol. The New Testament equivalent, typically for this word, is Hades, which the Septuagint, usually in Greek, rendered Sheol, for the grave.

It was the realm of the dead. He saw himself, as it were, as a goner. But in this prayer, after he is rescued, he recalls how God's mercy is abundant in his life.

And as he cried out to God, what sustained him in the hour of crisis is exactly the same thing that sustains Jesus in the hour of crisis. He knew the Psalms. The Psalms have always brought encouragement and existential spiritual identification to many of the great saints of Scripture.

These poems set to music take us to the heart of Jewish personal spirituality and personal questioning of God, feeling abandoned by God, complaints to God, as well as living on the matter horn of spiritual experience, as well as living in God's presence with a sense of tremendous understanding and comfort and direction from the Almighty. In this particular case, as he recalls this prayer he uttered from the fish's belly, he probably was recalling Psalm 118 in part. Why should you have a cross-reference Bible in your library? Well, for one reason, if you don't always have time to get out the commentaries, cross-reference Bibles will often show you the *remez*.

A *remez* is a word used in Hebrew biblical interpretation of how writers would often hint, that's what *remez* means. And they are hinting at previous passages echoing back the earlier language. And so, what Jonah sometimes partially quotes, other times hints at is the experience of the Psalmist.

In Psalm 18, where he says, The Lord is my deliverer. The same thing he says, deliverances of the Lord, is how he ends this Psalm. God is my rock in whom I take refuge, my salvation and stronghold.

I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise. I'm saved from my enemies. The cords of death entangled me.

He talks, doesn't he? In chapter 2, he talks about seaweed wrapped around him, entangled as it were in seaweed. It's an interesting expression. The cords of death entangled me, and torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

It reminds us of the watery grave he was in. The snares of death confronted me. In my distress, I called to the Lord; I cried to the Lord for help.

From his temple, he heard my voice. Twice in chapter 2, the word temple is used once, probably of the heavenly temple, and secondly, as he contemplated his own death.

Better word. He thought of that temple in Jerusalem and the prospect of being there sometime in the future to offer sacrifices. So, my cry came before him into his ears.

That's typical of how the experiences of the psalmist now are reflected on in this cry for help. He knew God was involved in all that was happening. I've made this statement a hundred times every semester in every class.

According to the Hebrew Bible, everything is theological. God has his fingers in the pie of everything that happens in your life, in Israel's life and on the earth. Doesn't mean he's directly responsible for everything that happens.

But he is the God of history. And providentially, that hidden finger of God, that hidden guiding hand of God, is there. And whether you put it in terms of the ultimate thing behind it, the theological meaning of it.

Chapter 2 says you hurled me into the deep. The immediate explanation of that, of course, is the sailors on board the ship were involved in hurling him into the deep. He asked them to throw him into the deep.

The sailors were just the instruments of the divine as he looks back and reflects on all of that. I mentioned being in the deep and being the deep here representing as it were the grave. Just come back to that one further time.

Sheol seemed to have two compartments based on the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Remember that account in the gospel? Some call it a parable. But there seemed to be two compartments.

A compartment for the righteous and a compartment for the wicked. Some scholars believe after the resurrection, the compartment for the dead in Sheol was removed to as it were a new location with a new description and called paradise above. But in any case, the Septuagint calls it Hades.

Not to be confused with Gehenna which comes from two Hebrew roots. Ge which means valley and Hinnom, the valley of Hinnom is really what that means. Which was a town garbage dump in Jerusalem where the fires were always burning, where dead carcasses of animals were taken, where always things were being destroyed as they were taken away and being consumed by fire.

Gordon's own property had Gehenna when it moved here. If you'd like to see the Gehenna, take the next exit going toward Gloucester, exit 18, take Pine Street, and head toward the Gordon woods. You will find the dump there, which continually burned when Gordon came here.

Now, it's a sealed landfill, but that was sort of the local Gehenna. Where animals killed on the road were taken and burned. Trees were burned.

People's trash was taken from the roadside or from contractors in those days that collected trash and it was dumped there. Now we know the lack of wisdom in all of that in terms of chemicals and other such things. But that's the modern valley of burning.

Sometimes, the one in Jerusalem was called Tophet. My mom used to say it's hot as Tophet in here. I never knew what she was talking about.

She was a very careful reader, and Tophet is the idea of a hearth or a fireplace. And it is a biblical word, sometimes used synonymously with Gehenna. Alright, so we're not talking about Gehenna, which is really the state of final punishment after the resurrection of the body.

Where Gehenna is particularly used in Revelation, it speaks about hell being prepared for Satan and the angels and the lake of fire and so forth. And that being for the wicked dead. We're talking about Sheol, the grave.

The other few things I want to point out in chapter 2. As we come to verse 9, you'll observe there that this word from which Jesus' name derives. The Hebrew root Yashah, Y-A-S-H-A-H. Yashah means to rescue, to deliver, to free.

And when it's used as a noun, the word is Yeshua, with the emphasis on the last syllable. Yeshua is the word which is used here. The reason I mention Jesus' name is because even in the New Testament, the narrator in the New Testament wants you to know there's a connection between Yeshua, which is Jesus' birth name, which came into Greek as Jesus, and came in via Latin as Jesus.

There's a connection between that name and what Jesus was all about in terms of His ministry. You should call His name Yeshua because He will save His people from their sins. Redemption from sin was the primary work of Jesus, but not the only exclusive work.

Yeshua is a much broader concept, which means liberation, freedom from anything that oppresses. So, when you read Jesus' agenda, which He announces not in the First Baptist of Dallas but in this hometown synagogue of Nazareth, in Luke chapter 4, He talks about recovering sight to the blind. He talks about setting captives free.

He talks about things that deal with Yeshua in this life. Issues of social justice and concern. As Christians, personal redemption, personal salvation is obviously very important.

But we have to set what that word means according to the Old Testament context. And just as Israel comes out of Egypt after 400 years, and this is the Yeshua of God, the liberation, the freedom in the Exodus for an enslaved people. So this is the rescue, the salvation, the freedom of Jonah from the clutches of the whale's or the fish's belly.

And so here we see the expression, the triumph of divine grace, His liberation, which comes from the Lord. So, in other words, even physical things in this world that involve human rescue are attributed to the Lord. Salvation, again, is more than personal salvation from the cords of sin that bind the human heart.

There is a greater sense in which we have to understand liberation. And there are many of these wonderful passages that remind us of what Yeshua is about. In the third chapter, we have the second commissioning of Jonah.

As 3:1 says, the Lord comes to him a second time, and he is called to go to Nineveh. One of the deities worshipped in Nineveh was a fish. And if you ever study the Hebrew language, you don't have to study the Hebrew language to do this.

Just go to a Bible like the NIV and turn to the middle of Psalm 119. Because the letter Nun, which is related to the word Nineveh, Nun is the picture of a fish. And Nun sort of looks basically like a straight line with a little head on the top of it.

And so, the fish was used as an icon as one of the images at Nineveh. We know this from archaeological excavation. And represents in the Hebrew language the N letter.

The M letter is right smack in the middle of the alphabet. That's why the coat of arms in one of the Ivy League schools shows this wonderful word, which the rabbis recognized from the Bible, made up of the first letter, middle letter, and last letter of the Hebrew alphabet--Aleph, Mem, Tav.

The first, the middle, and the last. A boy's name Emmet comes from that name. And Emmet means truth.

All right. Nun is the letter right next to the M in the word Emmet in the Hebrew Bible. Now, he's to proclaim the message that God is to give him to this very large city of Nineveh.

There's an article I've written on Nineveh for a book on important cities of the biblical world that I've put on reserve. It's upstairs and you can get some appreciation of the vastness of this. So, I'm not going to articulate or simply repeat some of the things that I have said there.

But I do in particular want to refer to an interesting expression or a couple interesting expressions. One of the things we meet in these last two chapters is the fact that this city of Nineveh was an exceedingly great city as the RSV puts it. NIV is a very important city.

Traditionally, the King James emphasis, a very large or great city. People have wondered about that particular expression. Now, we do know there is a walled city

of Nineveh prophet where one Roman historian talked about how chariots could drive abreast on the top of the wall.

The city of Nineveh was eight miles around. It would have been a very compacted, walled city, which would have allowed close to 200 people to be tightly, say, compacted into that city. They could have lived there.

Which would be in keeping if one takes it that way. Namely, the walled city of Nineveh is what he has in mind, with 120 people referred to in chapter 4. What 120? Well, that number, as you know in the last verse of Jonah, says Nineveh has more than 120,000 people. We'll talk about that expression in a moment.

There is, however, another way of understanding Nineveh namely to take it as greater Nineveh. If you are in some little canton of Switzerland and somebody says to you, where do you live? Well, you are not going to say, I went to Massachusetts. You are going to say, I am from Boston.

And we have in scripture, particularly going way back to Genesis 10.11-12 it indicates that Nineveh was considered to be part of a complex of several cities, actually four cities that are mentioned with Nineveh. Rehoboth, Erechala, and Rezin. These names are not important to remember.

But some scholars take those cities which are more like a parallelogram and the reference then could refer to greater Nineveh with that basically 60 miles of circumference rather than 8 miles. Part of the interest in that by some scholars is they don't know what to do with that expression. It's a city of three days journey.

According to the Revised Standard Version, Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in breadth. Well, a city that has only 8-mile circumference isn't going to take you three days if you are cutting right through that city only if you are considerably immobilized.

The solution to this would seem to be the way in which we try in the third chapter of Jonah in the NIV to hint at this. I remember the reason it's translated this way because I remember the discussion we had and the man who was a professor at London College and he had published an article at the time we were translating the NIV and his name was Donald Wiseman, and he was a highly respected scholar in the British Museum. And he was not just good at Hebrew as one of the translators of the NIV but he was also an Assyriologist.

He worked in Akkadian sources. And his interest was how are we going to render that expression? Do we take it literally? It takes three days to journey through the city. He came up with the idea as the NIV renders it.

Here is a little bit of leaning toward interpretation. Bible translations should not be Bible interpretations. You leave interpretation for the commentaries the responsibility of a good Bible translation is to tell you what the text says.

If you get too much into what the text means or what you think it means now, you're getting into a slightly different area. And that gets highly politically charged when you take a word like in English, baptism, and if you want to turn that into the mode of baptism, the amount of water which is used and how you understand the word baptism or whether you just want to keep it general and let the audience decide whether it's immersion, sprinkling and how that's to be understood. Let the commentators talk about the Jewish ritual mikveot and how the person themselves submerged themselves.

It's reflexive in Hebrew. They put themselves under the water. It's certainly wrong to any artistic depictions that we have when we go through museums of Jesus being put under the water by John, much like in a modern-day baptismal tank. This was to immerse yourself.

Submerge yourself. Jewish ritual immersion was being practiced for centuries even before the New Testament was involved. But to refrain from translating that a different way allows each tradition to look at that and explain it as fairly and as openly as possible.

Baptizo has to be understood in its original context. Not in its modern context. And there are a variety of ways in which that word can be understood.

So, when you go to dictionaries, you can get a single meaning for words, but how they apply in a specific context is another thing. Alright, we take this idiom then, and Wiseman said okay, a visit requires three days. And what does he mean by that? Wiseman found it in ancient texts, and he published this in the Tyndale Bulletin.

Three days can refer to the first day of arrival in a city. The second day is for visiting and doing the business you plan to conduct in the city. And then the third day is for departure and return.

So, because Wiseman has identified this as an idiom in ancient Semitic literature and something that, indeed, in the world of Assyria where Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, to understand this as the first day to travel and to arrive the second day to get settled in, do your business visit with the appropriate people and the last day for departure and return. If we take it that way, it does not require. Therefore we have to have an expansive definition of the city of Nineveh, namely greater Nineveh, where he's running from Manchester to Essex to Hamilton to Wenham, and then he finishes up in Beverly, and he's got the sixty square miles all covered because there

are so many people he has to preach to on every street corner. Alright, so you know now, then there are a couple of different ways of understanding that.

Either the walled city or the greater Nineveh of the so-called sixty miles in circumference. A couple other things I want to comment on in this chapter. The announcement was forty days forty becomes a round number used many, many times in the Bible.

The first three kings of Israel had reigns of forty years. Saul reigned forty, David reigned forty, and Solomon reigned forty years. Jesus was forty days in the wilderness, being tempted.

Israel spent forty years in the wilderness. Etcetera, etcetera. It is a round number.

Sometimes, it is used for simply a generation. Other times, very specifically down to the exact period of time. The Ninevites, while they had this warning that the city was to be overturned in forty days, that word overturned in verse four.

If you go to modern Israel and like your coffee haphuch is coffee overturned. It's what they call coffee and milk mixed together. But they take it and throw it on its head.

It's the same word used here. In modern Israel it means to flip something over. And so, this announcement of the city being overturned.

Remember when I gave my lecture on the conditional nature of prophecy? I said, often accompanying these pronouncements these burdens, these oracles that were given was that sometimes very unspoken but yet realized. P.S. Please disregard this notice if you repent.

Because Jonah of course wanted the enemy wiped out. This is the patriotic Jonah. This is the Jonah that didn't want the Assyrian juggernaut, the policeman, the enforcer of the ancient Near East of his day meddling in the affairs of his people and trying to control them there as they sat on the edge of the Mediterranean.

But this God of Jonah, as he puts it in 4:3 was wary of this God because he knew he was a compassionate God. He knew he had a long fuse, was slow to anger, and could back off or relent because of his gracious, abounding love. And that's exactly what God did in this particular situation.

Much to Jonah's dismay on one kind of personal level. The way the textbook puts it in 3:5, the Ninevites believed God. Now to what degree they genuinely turned to God? They certainly are said here to have responded to this message, and the

historical importance of this response is cited by Jesus in Matthew 12.38 and Luke 11:29 and following as a sign to the Jews of his day.

And that sign of Jonah was the fact that these people actually repented. Repented. And that's what you, my Jewish countrymen of the first century, need to do also, as Jesus' own prophetic voice called people to do what the Ninevites did.

They responded to God's call to turn around. Teshuvah. While we translate it repentance it means to do a 180.

And so visually, the language was a call to turn around, and so they believed the message of God, and outwardly, they responded as an entire community from the greatest to the least. Now this is what we call in literature Amerism. And if you open up an unabridged Oxford English dictionary you'll find Amerism is to use two opposites to indicate something which is entire.

Great and small came into the city. This doesn't mean kings and the poorest of the poor came into the city, or tall people and short people came into the city.

It means everybody came into the city. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil means the tree of the knowledge of everything. Not just good.

Not just evil. So, this was an entire city that responded, and they took the lead from the Malak or Malak. The king was the one who ruled, who was sovereign, and the people responded by taking the skins of goats. They placed this so-called sackcloth, which was goat skin on their bodies. It was very dark brown and blackish in appearance.

This is the origin of why people have worn black or dark colors at funerals or in times of disaster and calamity. You don't wear bright and cheerful colors. The sackcloth had that dark black color.

The New Testament has this expression: The sun will be turning as black as sackcloth. And so this was a symbol of the nations turning to God in repentance. It starts with the king, and the people sit in dust.

This is the origin of what happens on Ash Wednesday. We have on camera Father Juergen Lius who used to pastor in Hamilton at the Christ Church Episcopal who now is pastoring an Anglican church in the area. And on camera when we interviewed him on Ash Wednesday he talked about the origin of the ashes which are imposed upon the forehead typically of people on Ash Wednesday.

It really goes back to the Hebrew Bible he points out. And he cites this passage and several others as symbolic of repentance, contemplating your own mortality,

contemplating your own sin. And the sitting in dust, in sackcloth is a posture then of humility before an almighty God.

And the king of this city makes this pronouncement with his nobles. Notice how he includes the livestock. We typically don't do this but this is the part of the world Abraham came from.

Abraham had plenty of camels. Did you know when he went to get a bride for Isaac and went back to his old country Paddan Aram back up here from Canaan when he went to Aram Nahariam, Aram of the two rivers or Mesopotamia he took ten camels with him. But Abraham had 318 guys on his payroll, according to Genesis 14.

Therefore, patriarchs, people who roamed the fertile crescent, the nomads, the semi-nomads, the traders, their wealth was typically numbered in livestock. And that's what Abraham did as he came from Canaan, came back up into this broader area of Haran, took ten camels for Eliezer's chief servant to go get the bride for Isaac, namely Rivka, and brought Rivka back to the land of Canaan to marry Isaac.

They express repentance to the whole community, which these animals were so close to. People are part of that community, part of that. Fast look at verse 7, and it is also mentioned when God spares the community that little expression, God sparing 120,000 plus many cattle, something we would probably totally overlook. Did it ever occur to you that the Ten Commandments include instructions for the John Deere and the farm all of Bible times? Animals get one day off a week. Your ox, your donkey, you give them a Shabbat, you give them a rest. They are part of the community.

And so, therefore, they are numbered along with how the community is living close identification. Now, God then relents, which means He backs off King James Version He repents, which is open to a lot of confusion because of that language. Now Jeremiah 18.5 and following a passage I mentioned which speaks of the conditional nature of prophecy, simply says if man changes his course of action, God in turn, responds to alter His.

Now, the fact that Scripture teaches that God is unchangeable does not imply some kind of passive immobility on God's part. The language here is anthropomorphic, which means we are trying to attribute to God a human-like form or emotion. This is really an anthropomorphism describing a human-like emotion to God.

That is from man's limited earthly perspective it appears that God is repenting or relenting a much better word. God has changed His mind. But you can't go that way because God isn't capricious or fickle.

But God does nonetheless out of mercy, of compassion, and relent of judgment when man's conduct is modified for the good. You have the same thing in the New Testament. When man makes the first move, God makes His move.

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. There is something that works cooperatively here. There is a mystery.

But Jonah's intense nationalism resulted in a flaming patriotic zeal against Israel's powerful and hated enemy. So here in the Bible, you see the human side of Jonah. God's response was to respond in pity.

Now, there are a few things about Jonah's anger. Just to wrap this up. You'll notice that even though he is upset by God's compassion and declaration that he was not going to destroy the city.

So, Jonah becomes angry. And God starts questioning him about his right to be angry. And he goes out on the edge of the city and he makes this little shelter under the hot sun.

He could very easily get heat stroke, get faint. God creates or provides same word as we saw before this vine that springs up overnight to give shade to him. But then God sends a tola.

It's an interesting word in the Bible. I'll come back and talk about the tola worm when we come to Isaiah. Tola is translated two ways in the Hebrew Bible.

One is the name of this little insect, this worm, which was highly prized for the dyeing industry.

D-Y-E-I-N-G It was taken, it was crushed. When it was placed in water it provided an indelible dye. Something that could not be eradicated. It was permanent.

The second meaning for the word translated worm here, the second meaning is crimson. It's a reddish-purple color.

That worm produced. You can turn to the book of Exodus and see how some of the beautiful coverings for the tabernacle were the color of tola. Scarlet, crimson color.

Here the worm comes, and of course choose the vine, maybe a castor oil plant, some scholars think. A shrub that could grow as high as 12 feet. That kind of environment is part of the world.

With large shady leaves. But it's it wilts fast. Then the sun comes up and a hamsin comes along.

And you notice that in verse 8. Hamsin is the hot dry wind that blows in off the eastern desert. You go to Egypt today, Saudi Arabia, for that matter anywhere in the Middle East. We're coming into hamsin season.

Hamsin is Arabic for 50. Hebrew for 50 is Hamsin. Very close.

They're both Semitic languages. Why is it called 50? Because during the 50-day period, approximately during March and April, the prevailing winds usually switch and become hot and dry, stirring up all kinds of dust particles. Most scholars believe that when the sun turned to darkness, its rays were obscured for three days in Egypt, and a solar eclipse occurred due to hamsin in the Nile Delta, with this hot, powdery black dust being stirred up in the air.

The sun was obliterated by that eastern wind. In any case, this scorching east wind, the word here, is a word which does not often occur in the ancient world, but the meaning here is doubtless an intense wind that comes in and causes Jonah to begin to feel faint. He says I want to die and wants a personal pity party right at this particular point.

And God nails him down, and the last thing I want to say here about this particular text is that he's all caught up in his own personal welfare. This is the self-pitying prophet. This is all pretty petty compared to a hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites that the gracious, merciful God has spared.

And when a prophet is only concerned with his own personal welfare and the comfort brought by a mere plant of fleeting temporal worth, here's a fortiori argument. How much more so, the prophet should be concerned with the gracious and merciful God who intervenes. In short, Jonah's sense of values radically needed revising.

How much more the pouting prophet should be unselfishly devoted to the needs of the thousands of Ninevites also created in the image of God. Objects of God's love and compassion. So, I think that's how he ends the book.

Calling Jonah out had been a disobedient prophet. Now he's too much caught up in himself. And again, the message of the Hebrew Bible is to be oriented toward community, not me, myself, and I. And it's a lesson of God's concern really for the wider society and indeed the message of the book, God's International Love.

And I will end there for today.

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