

## **Jesus and Jonah**

Often I get calls from people who want to argue a point or "straighten out" my theology. I consider each of these calls a challenge because having to answer tough questions sends me to the Word to search out scripture in order to reaffirm in my mind what the Bible says on a subject.

Several years ago I had a call about an often-asked question, "Did Jesus go to hell?" This particular caller told me that he didn't believe that a holy person like Jesus could go to hell. He went on to say that when the Word talked about Jesus being "under the earth", it referred only to His soul, not to His spirit. However, when I asked him how you divide and separate the spirit and the soul, he said that in this case it "just happened".

In my answer to him, I brought out two facts. The first is that a man is spiritually dead until he accepts Jesus Christ. Secondly, since Jesus was man's substitute, He had to become like man. In other words, He had to become spiritually dead and He did this on the cross. Since those who are spiritually dead go to hell when they die, there is no way around the fact that because of His spiritual death, Jesus too had to go to hell.

## **Did Jesus Go to Hell?**

As to the separating of the soul and the spirit, according to the Bible the only way to separate them is with the Word of God. However, the Word does not literally, physically separate the soul from the spirit; instead, the Word makes clear what is a thought coming from the soul and what is an intent coming from the spirit.

Each of us has had the experience of something welling up in us or coming into our minds and we question, "Is that me, or is that the Lord?" For the answer, go to the Word.

I gave the caller these answers, and although I knew in my spirit they were right, I couldn't back up my statements with enough concrete examples from the scriptures to satisfy him or me. In fact, after studying the subject, I found that there are

not any New Testament verses that explicitly say Jesus went to hell. There are however scriptures which imply this such as Colossians 2:15, which refers to Jesus as *...having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.* This indicates that Jesus went to hell, but there are those who argue against this and other scriptures as being definite proof. On the other hand, I also recalled having heard many sermons describing everything Jesus went through in hell. Obviously preachers were divided on the subject.

As I meditated on this dilemma- knowing something was true, but not being able to thoroughly prove it, the Lord told me that He had already provided the answer but I had never looked it up! He sent me to the story of Jonah. When the Word tells us what happened to Jonah, it is also giving us a description of what happened to Jesus while He was in hell, and this can be proven with scripture.

Before we actually get into the proof, I want to give you some background information, and as I do this, I'm going to get off the subject a little and answer another often-asked question-"What is the unpardonable sin?"

Matthew 12: 1-2, tell us that the Pharisees saw Jesus and His disciples pick and eat some ears of corn on the Sabbath day. And so, they confronted Him about the lawfulness of this. In verse three, Jesus addresses them with His answer. It is important here to establish the fact that Jesus is talking to religious leaders who had fought Him during His entire ministry. You see, legalism hates grace and when Jesus taught grace, these legalistic, religious men could not accept Him or His teaching.

As we go on in Matthew 12:31- 32, Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto me: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

In these verses Jesus is telling the Pharisees about the unpardonable sin - the one sin that cannot be forgiven. We all have heard various sermons on this and each had its own variety of sin considered to be THE SIN. However, these verses make it clear that

the one's in which cannot be forgiven is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. In order to understand just what this means, we have to look at the sixteenth chapter of John which tells us that the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict people of the sin of rejecting Jesus. Therefore, the only way to blaspheme the Holy Spirit and commit the unpardonable sin is to reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior!

Why was Jesus telling this to the Pharisees? Because they needed it. Believers don't need it. They have already accepted Jesus and so could not be guilty of this sin.

Even though the Son of the Living God, the Lord Jesus Christ, preached to these men and told them truths from the Word of God, they did not believe. In fact, Matthew 12:38 tells us, *...then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.* The irony of their request is that if they could not believe the Son of God, they certainly would not believe a mere sign.

This brings us back to our main topic of Jesus, Jonah, and spiritual death. When Jesus answers the Pharisees, He tells them that the only sign they will get is the sign of the Prophet Jonah. Although Jesus' entire answer includes Matthew 39-45, we are going to cover only the references to Jonah which are found in verses 39-41.

But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Because Jesus makes a comparison between Jonah and Himself in these verses when He refers to Himself as "one greater than Jonah," we must look at what happened to Jonah in the belly of the whale in order to realize the significance of what happened to "one greater than Jonah" in the belly of the earth.

Often the story of Jonah is interpreted to mean this: you shouldn't run from the call of God, because if you do, He has a big whale waiting for you. However, this is not

the essence of the story at all. In fact, Jonah wasn't running from God. He was running from having to tell the Gentiles about God! You see, he was very much like the religious people of Jesus' day in that he was jealous and possessive of God's message. In Jonah's mind salvation belonged to the Jews and he didn't want to take the Jewish message to the Gentiles of Ninevah.

Now let's look at the parallels between Jonah and Jesus. In Jonah 1:17 we learn that *...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.* Remember the time element referred to in Matthew twelve? Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, Jesus would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

We learn what took place in the whale in chapter two of Jonah. Versus 1-3 tell us, Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly. And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all the billows and thy waves passed over me.

In these verses Jonah is praying and crying to the Lord from what he calls "the belly of hell". Can you see the parallel being made? This becomes even more significant in verse four when Jonah says, *...I am cast out of thy sight, for Jesus too was cast out of God's sight.* Thus, when Jesus died on the cross, He couldn't have gone to Paradise because the Spirit of God was there. This means Jesus had to go somewhere else, out of God's sight, and the only other place to go was to hell - the heart of the earth!

There are verses in Matthew which further illustrate that this separation between Jesus and the Father must have occurred. In Matthew 5:25-26, Jesus is saying, Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

In the natural Jesus was talking about a civil case, but on a spiritual level. He

was referring to the time when He would be cast into the prison of the heart of the earth. Also, we can assume that Jesus' spiritual adversary is Satan. Although Jesus is saying to agree with your adversary in order to avoid the consequences, we know that He could never agree with Satan. Therefore, Jesus had to suffer the consequences described in these verses. He was "delivered to the judge" when He was placed on the cross where His Father stood in judgement over Him. At this time the Father had to turn His back on His Son and this caused Jesus to cry out, *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Then Jesus was "turned over to the officer". More exactly, He was legally turned over to the devil and was cast into the prison of hell. Remember, according to Matthew 5:26, He could not come out until He had paid the uttermost farthing, the entire debt. Then, and only then, would hell have to release Him.

Let's look once again at what happened to Jonah so that we can further compare this with Jesus' experience. Jonah 2:4-10 tells us, Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The water compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever: yet has thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remember the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord. And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Just as Jonah was vomited out upon dry land, Jesus was spit out from the heart of the earth. This can only mean He must have paid the entire debt for mankind!

The parallels of Jesus and Jonah do not end here, however. For example, after Jonah came out of the fish's belly, the Lord told him to arise (Jonah 3:2). Likewise, when Jesus came out of the heart of the earth, He "arose", or more explicitly, He "rose again" in that He was resurrected.

What happened to Jonah after he was released from the belly of the whale is found in the remainder of Chapter three. When the Lord spoke to Jonah this time, he obeyed and went to Ninevah. As Jonah walked through the great city of Ninevah,...he cried and said, *Yet forty days and Ninevah shall be overthrown.* (Jonah 3:46)

Why did God want him to warn the people of imminent destruction? It was God's desire to give them a chance to repent and He knew that their repentance would stave off destruction. The people heard Jonah and, *So the people of Ninevah believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.* (Jonah 3:5) The result of this was that *...God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.* (Jonah 3:10)

A parallel found in versus 3-5 is found in the forty days of grace which God was giving to Ninevah and the forty days Jesus walked the earth in His resurrected body before He ascended into heaven.

Jonah preached a simple message of repentance during these forty days. Also, because of the repentance of the people, the destruction of Ninevah was put off until a later time. The city was eventually destroyed, but these people were spared.

In the same manner, Jesus' message was the simple plan of redemption to turn from old ways and turn towards Him. Believe on Jesus. When we believe, we too are saved from destruction. You see we all should have been destroyed, but Jesus took our place. Our destruction has been stayed. Furthermore, when destruction does come-and it will-God will spare believers just as He spared the repentant people of Ninevah. Isn't that good news?

As we come back to Matthew 12:41, remember, Jesus is speaking to the unbelieving Pharisees who would not accept Him as Messiah even though He personally preached to them. He tells them, *The men of Ninevah shall rise in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

This is truly an indictment against religious people. Jesus tells them that their wickedness is greater than the wickedness of the people of Ninevah since Ninevah acknowledged their wickedness and repented on hearing Jonah's preaching. These Pharisees who seem outwardly moral and so inwardly wicked that even the preaching of "one greater than Jonah," the Lord Jesus Christ, will not bring them to repentance; therefore, they must be judged. These men had their chance to turn from spiritual death and they refused. Simply by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior they could have avoided this. Believers don't have to pay the wages of sin and spiritual death because Jesus went to the cross and suffered in hell for them. While in hell, He paid the price to the uttermost farthing.

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