

29. Jesus in Obadiah and Jonah

December 22, 2016

This has never occurred to me as I prepared these two Books before, the Book of Obadiah and Jonah, previously in January, 2010 and February, 2007 respectively. Both Books have the same underlying elements that we often do not do by choice – forgiveness of the ones who offend us. In light of the Christmas season, this is a good reminder for all of us to forgive anyone who hurt us in the past as Christ our Lord forgave us from our sins.

A. JESUS IN THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

The Book of Obadiah is the shortest one in the Bible, even shorter than the Book of Jude and Philemon. Its prophecy was not directed to the Israelis, rather to the people of Edom who were living in a mountainous country southeast of Israel. They were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. As their ancestor Esau held a grudge against his younger brother Jacob, these people had been enemies of Israel for a long time. They were the ones who refused to provide a passage through their kingdom on the way to the Promised Land.

Prophecy is pre-written history. Obadiah knew that a foreign enemy was coming. As Esau cared more for the carnal and temporal things of the world than for his birthright that was mentioned in Genesis 25, his descendants have been just like him.

Obadiah's prophecy was final and clear cut – the kingdom of Edom would be destroyed completely because of their arrogance and their gloat over Israel's misery. To make the matter worse, when Israel asked for help from them in their crisis, the Edomites not only refused Israel's plea, but actively helped the enemy of Israel.

Obadiah 21 Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion To judge the mountains of Esau, And the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

V21 of the Book of Obadiah contains a foreshadow of Christ and His Church. As you noticed in this verse, the word "saviors" probably make you stop and wonder what it means in the plural, instead of being the singular tense. This verse prophesies about the time after the Millennium, not the time of Obadiah.

Some of the versions say, "deliverers," or "Those who have been rescued." The Bible is NOT contradicting itself by stating that there is more than one Savior. The proper translation should be "Those who have been rescued," since the Hebrew word "yasha" for "saviors" is actually a verb, not a noun. They are the ones who were rescued by the Lord Jesus and they are the ones who spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to others.

While Christ is the only Savior who alone came to purchase our salvation with His own life, and is the Author of it, these people who are rescued through the Gospel will be more and more in evidence as the end of the age draws near.

God will overcome all the difficulties on our behalf if we will stay true to Him. Unlike Edom, we must be willing to help others in times of need. Edom was destroyed because of its pride. We have nothing to be proud of except Jesus Christ and what He has done for us.

B. JESUS IN JONAH

Jonah 1:15-17 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows. 17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

All the unbelievers who think themselves scientific and intelligent cannot accept the fact that there was a great fish that could swallow up Jonah who survived in its belly for three days and three nights. They think that this Book is a little fishy. But I don't have one bit of a problem believing it, because I believe that Genesis 1:1 is true:

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Since our God created everything from nothing with a series of commands, He also could create this great big fish, not a whale, just for Jonah to be stuck inside for 72 hours. Why is it so difficult to believe? As I've mentioned many times before, if you can believe Genesis 1:1, you can believe and trust the rest of the Bible without any problem. The problem of trusting and not trusting starts at the first verse of the Book. That's why the Lord put that verse there. Simply genius!

Of course, the author of this book is none other than Jonah himself. Those who consider the Book of Jonah an allegory or a parable should note that 2 Kings 14:25 identifies Jonah as a real person, a Jewish prophet from Gath Hepher in Zebulun who ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.

2 Kings 14:25 He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher.

What we see in the Book of Jonah is God's sovereignty over nature, over a rebellious prophet and over the wicked nation. We can act any way we want against the Lord like bratty children, but He will accomplish His purposes, no matter what. We also see His love for the Gentiles. God doesn't want anyone to perish, but they may come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Our God also displays His grace to this rebel Jonah who is very much like anyone of us from time to time. God's compassion fails not, great is His faithfulness.

C. JESUS IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH

The moment any Bible critics question the historical record of the Book of Jonah, they question the credibility of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is very strange to hear the liberal say, "Jesus was the greatest teacher that ever lived," since one of the marks of a great teacher is that what he teaches is accurate and truthful. If Jesus is a great teacher, then His authentication of the Book of Jonah has to stand, because Jesus talked about Jonah's very existence in the belly of the fish in Matthew 12:

Matthew 12:38-41 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 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. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

People's minds haven't changed much since the first century. The people of that time period were fascinated by signs and wonders and the people in the 21st century are still fascinated by them. They'd prefer to see signs and wonders over knowing the truth. It is no wonder that Jesus called them, "An evil and adulterous generation."

Why did Jesus connect Himself with Jonah's deep sea diving? Think about it, folks. The first century audience who was standing in front of Jesus was very much a nationalistic people who wanted to be freed from the Roman's occupation, just like Jonah was against the people of Ninevah. The Jewish people could relate themselves with this wayward and disobedient prophet of God. Jesus was using Jonah's negative example toward the perfect Servant of God who impeccably fulfilled His mission.

Though there are many similarities between what Jonah went through and Jesus, there are many differences. Although Jonah described his experience in the fish like death, he actually didn't die. He just felt like it. I cannot even imagine what it was like in a very dark, humid, confined, and unpleasant location, inside of the fish's tummy. But our Savior actually died and was buried. Jonah ended up in there because of his sin of disobedience in the preaching mission from God, but the Lord Jesus preached the Gospel and died for our sins, not His.

Moreover, when Jonah told the pagan seamen to cast him into the sea, he'd rather die than obey God's order – one stubborn servant. But Jesus prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, "not My will, but Your will." Jonah thought that it would be the end of his confrontation with God when he died. His wish didn't come true, when he was swallowed up by a fish. Jesus willingly went through the 6 illegal trials, the torture, and crucifixion for something He didn't do.

John 10:17-18 Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.

It was obvious that Jonah didn't repent while he was in the fish. He simply said, "Uncle," so that he could get out and did his assignment reluctantly. He was hoping that the recipients of his preaching would refuse God's word so that they would be punished by Him. That's why he set up a shelter and sat to watch under it in the shade. In other words, he took the front row seat to see and enjoy the destruction of the people of Ninevah. No compassion, no shepherd's heart, no mercy toward his enemy. But what did Jesus do after He died on the cross and was buried in the grave?

*1 Peter 3:18-19 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison
Ephesians 4:8-11 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers*

So what is the sign of Jonah that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 12? He didn't leave room for us to guess. He made it clear in v41:

Matthew 12:41 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

The people of Ninevah, from the king to the commoners, they all repented and humbled themselves and the Lord allowed them to be spared from His wrath. But the people who have heard Jesus' story through preaching, teaching, and evangelism are still skeptical, some downright refusing to believe like the first century Jews. These are the people who will be condemned by the men of Ninevah who will rise up in the judgment with that generation as Jesus declared.