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Dear precious and faithful friends,

Daddy is a bit under the weather, so I (Sally) am greeting you in his place. For this newsletter, we'll start by taking a look at Daddy's Introduction to the book of Jonah from his Bible Study Guide.

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The Prophets, Book 10 Jonah



Jonah by Pieter Lastman, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Of all the 66 books of the Bible, this book is probably the one most emphatically and universally rejected by the unbelieving, secular world, and by many critical theologians. It is a myth, they say, a fairy tale--it couldn't possibly be true. They cite the testimony of biologists who say that whales cannot swallow a man whole (I remember being convinced of this lie when told by a biology professor that the largest of whales [the Blue Whale] can choke to death on a tennis ball). But the Bible doesn't say that it was a whale--it says that it was a "great **fish**." Whales are not fish--they are mammals, complete with umbilical cords and

mammary glands. As fetuses they have hair on their heads but lose it before they are born. Some species of whales and dolphins have a few hairs as adults.

Most game fish swallow other animals whole; and this fish was a very large one. In addition, it was apparently a custom-made fish, created by God just for this project ("Now the Lord had **prepared** a great fish to swallow up Jonah"). Critics also say that Jonah could not possibly have lived for three days after being swallowed by a fish; but maybe he didn't live--as we shall see.

NOTES:

*a. One characteristic of the Hebrew language is that one word typically can have several different meanings. In this case, it appears that God, knowing that there would be this distortion of his Word concerning Jonah, fish and whale, wished to make the matter clear; for the Hebrew word rendered "fish" is "da'g" ("dawg"), and it has **only one meaning**: that one meaning is "**fish**."*

b. Actually, in Matt 12, where Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees about seeking a sign, "whale" is used in the passage; but we will deal with that when we come to it.

Some Examples of Huge Fish (and a Whale)

Some huge fish, and at least one whale, large enough to swallow a man whole, have been caught and examined. Finis Jennings Dake, in his *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*, cites examples, from which I quote: *A Mediterranean fish was caught and exhibited in Beirut [Lebanon] which had a head that weighed 6 tons. A man of average height, standing on the lower jaw, could not reach the upper jaw, the opening being about 8 feet high. The April 4th, 1896 issue of Literary Digest included the story of a Mediterranean whale that demolished a harpoon boat. Two men were lost. One, James Bartley, was found alive in the*

whale's belly a day and a half after it was killed. Bartley survived the amazing incident with no after effects, except that his skin was tanned by the gastric juices. A pure [sic] fish was caught off the Florida coast that weighed 30,000 pounds. It was 45 feet long and 8 feet thick. It had a 1,500 pound fish in its stomach, besides a large octopus. A man of average height could easily stand up in its stomach. It could have swallowed 10 Jonahs.

"It Ain't Necessarily So." In the classic 1935 Negro folk opera, "Porgy and Bess," composed by George and Ira Gershwin, there is a song which attacks the validity of the story of Jonah (and other miraculous events in the Bible). The song is, "It Ain't Necessarily So"; its theme, and repeated refrain, is "The things that you're liable, to read in the Bible, it ain't necessarily so." In the opera, the song is sung by a wicked character, defending a life of sin; but today it could be the theme song of a great many preachers and priests, and of most critical theologians and professors of religion. Today, many critical Bible scholars not only deny the miracle of the great fish, they even deny that such a person as Jonah ever existed.

Did Jonah Even Exist?

And yet his existence, and his ministry as a prophet, are recorded as Jewish **history** in II Kings 14:25. Both Jonah and his book have been accepted from the beginning as historical and canonical in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. And, of all the evidence for the validity of the book, the most compelling for Christians is the fact that Jesus accepted it as history and as Scripture. He referred to the miraculous repentance of the Assyrians at Nineveh that resulted from Jonah's preaching. He even said that the story of Jonah's experience was actually about Himself, referring to Jonah's three days and nights in the belly of the great fish as symbolic of his own coming death, burial and resurrection. Yes, Jonah was what is called a "type" (symbolic forerunner) of Christ. In fact, Jonah's statement that God had "brought up [his] life from corruption" (2:6) is at least a strong suggestion that Jonah died in the sea (or after being swallowed by the great fish), and that God had raised him from death when the fish spit him out on the beach. If so, he was an even more perfect type than he is usually thought to be, of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

NOTE: For a more thorough examination of Jonah as a type of Christ, see "Jonah As a 'Type' of Christ" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

Jonah's ministry took place in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, during the reign of King Jeroboam II. This 41-year period was a time of unequalled prosperity and military success in the Northern Kingdom, during which territory, previously lost to the Assyrians and other pagan invaders, was regained. This military success was probably made possible by the repentance in Nineveh, led by the king himself, as a result of Jonah's reluctant preaching there. This reformation in Assyria seems to have lasted for one generation; about 40 years later Assyria, under different leaders, would conquer Israel and carry the survivors into cruel captivity.

Jonah's Tomb in Mosul, Iraq

Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, is the modern successor to ancient Nineveh, whose ruins lie beneath it, on the bank of the Tigris River. Ancient Mosul is on the west bank of the Tigris River, built over the ruins of Nineveh; but today the city has expanded to both sides of the river, connected by bridges over the Tigris. Mosul has been famous for the muslin material made there (and named for the city in which it was made).

Until July of 2014, there was a population of 30,000-40,000 Iraqi Christians in Mosul; it was the only significant population of Christians in Iraq. There is, at the site of ancient Nineveh, a mound which the local people call the "Yunas (Jonah) mound." It is within a stone's throw of the site of the ancient wall of Nineveh. It is 100 feet high, covers 40 acres, and is revered by the local people. Jonah's tomb was there, revered by Christians, Jews and Muslims, suggesting that, after his reluctant prophesying brought the great reformation there, he stayed and ministered in Nineveh for the rest of his life. In July 2014 there was a mass exodus of Christians from Mosul to escape slaughter by the unimaginably barbaric Islamist army calling itself "ISIS" (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). The Christians fled northward to Kurdistan and, behind them, the ISIS invaders occupied Mosul. One of the first things the barbarians did was to destroy the tomb of Jonah, although he is supposedly venerated by Muslims as a prophet, and then they insanely destroyed with explosives the mosque containing the tomb.

The Small Book Is Rich in Revelation

Although the Book of Jonah is small, it is extremely rich in revelation, and must be read carefully. Attention will be called to such places in the study guide, with explanations.

A. Author. The human author of the book is Jonah, the son of Amittai, and the prophet with the bad attitude. He was a native of Gath-hepher in Galilee, and his ministry was to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was a contemporary of Hosea, Isaiah and Amos.

NOTES:

a. This town, Gath-hepher, is not the Gath of Philistia, Goliath's home town.

b. Jonah's birthplace gives the lie to the arrogant pronouncement of the Pharisees concerning Jesus that, "out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (Jn 7:52). Nahum (the only other prophet sent to Nineveh, after its return to paganism, to predict its doom) was also probably a native of Capernaum in Galilee. One would expect better scholarship of those arrogant, religious snobs.

B. Place and Date. Jonah probably wrote his book between 800 and 750 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II. Some scholars believe it to be the first of all the prophetic books to be written. The place of writing is unknown. Since it appears that he spent the rest of his life in Nineveh and died there, his book was probably written there.

C. Theme. The theme of Jonah is (at least) two-fold:

1. That we cannot run far enough away to escape from God and his calling on our lives;

2. That God is not willing that any should perish; He wants to forgive and save even the most vicious and cruel among us (for that is what the Assyrians were in the era of their geopolitical dominance).

D. The Uniqueness of Jonah. Among the prophets of God, Jonah seems to be unique in at least two ways: first, he is the only one who rejected God's calling and actively rebelled against it; and, second, he was sent, as a missionary to a pagan nation, to call it to repentance. In this second way, he was not only a type of Christ, but his ministry was a type of the New Covenant to come, in which the message of repentance and salvation will be taken "into all the world." (Matt 28:19; Mk 16:15)

* * * *

More from Tom:

What Is Predestination?

St. Augustine, principal author of the doctrine, and his follower John Calvin—one of the most brilliant of the reformers-- are misunderstood. Many think it means that God arbitrarily chooses some of us for Heaven, and chooses others for Hell, and that neither group can do anything to change his plan. Nothing could be more wrong. The answer is that He knows in advance who will say "Yes" to his gracious offer of redemption, and who will reject it. The Bible is simple here; Romans 8:29-30 makes it clear: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate...." Yes, God, who knows everything--past, present and future--knows in advance who will accept his gracious offer, and who will reject it. Thus, one group is St. Augustine's (and Calvin's) "elect," predestined for Heaven; and the other is St. Augustine's (and Calvin's) "non-elect," predestined for destruction and hell, depending entirely on the choice we make. If you still need convincing, read I Peter 2.

AND...

Holy Habits--Powerful Weapons

If you are old enough to be reading these words, you know that a habit, once developed, is persistent and difficult to break. Yes, habit is a powerful force. So why not turn the problem around, do good things over and over and cultivate holy habits, creating powerful problems for Satan? Try it--it works!

* * * *

This is a reminder that our current email address is wordsforliving7@gmail.com (the letterhead still has the old email address in it). If anyone would like to be on our email list and receive the newsletter by email (as well as Food for Thought on the months when a newsletter isn't going out), contact us at wordsforliving7@gmail.com. You can also email Sally, at sumacsally@gmail.com (which I check more often).

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Food for Thought: The Importance of Grass



Photo by [Ochir-Erdene Oyunmedeg](#) on [Unsplash](#)

One day recently, while reading Michael Card's *Mark: the Gospel of Passion*, a certain phrase caught my attention. It was just part of a sentence, yet I knew it was true and important. It was this: "...Jesus, for whom all of life is a living parable..." It is easy to learn things from the world around us if we just stop for a moment and think about entirely common things. Grass is an example. What could be more common? Yet it plays crucial roles our world.

For one thing, grass roots hold soil in place, a critical job. Grass literally holds the world together. In times and places where drought or other conditions leave no living grass, such places are plagued with sandstorms, dust storms, and the loss of the land's fertility. People are like grass. In whatever setting—our churches, schools, workplaces, senior centers, hospitals, families, civic groups, enthusiast clubs, volunteer fire fighter units, etc.—the people hold things together. Without them, or with far too few of them, such entities couldn't exist. Without people—all of them playing a role, even though those roles might seem thoroughly unspectacular (sometimes just showing up can be important)—destruction or chaos (like dust storms) will fill the void.

Grasses also are a key to feeding us—both through grains like wheat, oats, corn, rice, etc. and through the meat, eggs, and dairy products we get from the animals who eat grass.

And while people tend to think only of trees as the key to providing us with oxygen and reducing the carbon dioxide in the air, all green plants perform this function. Grass also, like all green plants, also absorbs water and in the process regulates temperature (the shade under a tree is

always cooler than the shade under a manmade roof; likewise, a grassy lawn is about 30 degrees cooler than asphalt and 15 times cooler than dirt alone). Grasses play no small part, then, in providing us with air and an environment we can live in. They comprise 20% of the world's vegetation. Thus, as small and commonplace as it appears, grass plays a vital role in keeping us alive. In the same way, God uses common ordinary people to bring life and some amount of protection (through their actions and their words) to those around them.

Finally, grasses are diverse. There are 10,000 species, with some varieties able to survive in Siberia, some varieties able to survive in alpine conditions, and some able to survive in great heat. We too are diverse. And it is because we are varied that we are able to produce successful societies—both large scale and small-scale—from the most complex large cities to the small towns, from the folks who put on the local flea market to those who form a church, staff a soup kitchen, keep historical societies and libraries alive, and maintain friendships.

--Sally (McKenney) Mahoney

Milestones:

In this newsletter we note the passing of dear saints and friends. Please pray for their families.

Anna Merle Rouse Anderson 1 May 2023

Robert Starnes 15 May 2023

A FINAL WORD

Treasure and use each day as if it were your last, and never give up hope: God has a limitless supply of new beginnings, and He makes beautiful things out of broken pieces.



Photo by [Mr. Great Heart](#) on [Unsplash](#)