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## LESSON NOTES (EXPLORE THE BIBLE)

### THE SIGN OF JONAH

(Jonah 1; Matthew 12; Acts 2) Lord's Day, February 21, 2017

### OVERVIEW

"Session 12" for this week in the *Explore the Bible Series*

There is no more primordial need of humanity than the need to atone for sin. It is sin that separates us from each other. It is sin which separates from the Lord God. Sin separates; sin in fact is best defined as separation from the Lord God. Sin defines humanity—God does not sin.

Animals do not sin. Tornadoes do not sin. Even recalcitrant computers do not sin (even though their recalcitrance often stimulates a variety of ungodly thought and behavior.)<sup>1</sup> Because of this ancient need, the sin solution has many manifestations—some vile, some holy, others sheer nonsense.

But, sin must be atoned. If it is not, then the greatest need of humanity—to feel worthwhile—is abrogated. We want to feel atoned. We need to feel atoned. Deep within the recesses of any sentient human is the recognition that we are often despicable. We abuse children. We kill our brother. We drink to dullness. We eat to satiate our heads, not our stomachs. We rape to dominate. We lie. And when caught in the lie, we pretend there is no truth beyond our own. We curse the holy. We deny the virtuous. We steal. We are greedy for that which is not ours. We need atonement.

Previously we learned the role, both metaphorically, and literally that blood fulfills in the atoning act of the Lord God. We learned blood is more than a symbol, more than a sign, but an icon representing the very act of God Himself, reconciling Himself to us by providing the ultimate sacrifice, Himself. Deity which does not exact justice for sin is not a deity worthy of worship. Deity which does not provide atonement is a mere figment of human fantasy. The Lord God Jehovah is *the* Deity Who seeks holiness at all costs, even if it costs that which is most precious--Himself.

**A QUESTION TO GET YOU THINKING:  
WHY DO WE KEEP FLOUNDERING AROUND IN  
THE GUTS OF LIFE, REFUSING TO BE SPIT UP  
ON THE BEACH?**

<sup>1</sup>As I write this, Microsoft wants to update my operating system. I've got work to do here! Incidentally, if Bill Gates is ever found murdered, you may find me on the lamb, in the woods somewhere, ranting about the evils of unstable operating systems which don't allow you to work, but assume their anomalies are more important than you completing your Bible study. Jesus said pray for your enemies—I haven't prayed for Bill Gates in quite awhile.

Atonement engages a reconciliation of the Lord God to Himself. Sacrifice is the key idea, an idea which will span the entire love letter we call the Holy Scriptures. Sacrifice in the atoning act of God must be understood.

We so easily reject the comfort and care of the Lord God. We love to grumble and wish we were, at times, back in our old days of sin slavery. It was so much “easier” then. If we pay attention, however, we can learn the Lord God always has, and always will, provide everlasting redemption to satiate our thirst by everlasting water.

Last week we considered the reality of judgment and rest. There are too many pearls and too many swine. This week we consider the instance of Jonah—his reluctance to be God’s servant, according to GOD’s rules, and how the Lord God used Jonah time with the fish as a portent, a sign as it were, of His own sojourn on earth. It is indeed the time of the sign of Jonah...

## SCRIPTURE REVIEW

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- JONAH 1:1-17 (CONTEXT);
  - MATTHEW 12:38-42 (TEXT);
  - ACTS 2:24-28 (APPLICATION)
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### CONTEXT

Jonah 1:1-5, Jonah was instructed by the Lord God Yahweh to go to Ninevah, the current capital of Assyria. There you will preach against the evil there—it has risen up to Me.

Jonah, not being the sharpest knife in the drawer, headed the other way, defying the Lord God by heading for Tarshish. He boarded a ship at Joppa and sought to run away from the Lord God Yahweh.

So, Yahweh sent a huge storm which threatened the sea-worthiness of the ship. The sailors were scared, each screaming out to his own deity. Trying to lighten the ship, they threw the cargo into the water.

Our hero? Jonah was fast asleep, below deck.

Q Why did Jonah, a man with a direct message from God Himself, think he could “flee from the Lord God Yahweh?”

Q What storm has God created, or used, to get your attention? How so? Were you asleep below deck? If so, why?

Q Where was Jesus when the storm was threatening their boat on the Galilee?

### JONAH 1:1-5

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The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

<sup>3</sup>But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

Jonah 1:6-17. The ship's captain was not happy. How can you sleep—you need to come up on deck and call on your god like the rest of us. Maybe he'll take notice and save us from this crisis.

Being superstitious, the crew decided to use the tried and true method for figuring out the guilty—throw dice. Sure enough, it worked. The result pointed toward Jonah.

Fess up, dude—what did you do? Where are you from? What's your country? Who are your people?

Jonah told the truth, sort of. I am a Hebrew, and I worship Yahweh, the God of heaven, who *made* the sea and the land.

This answer freaked them out—what have you done!? They knew he was running away from Yahweh because he had already told them so.

In the meantime the storm got rougher and tougher—What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?

Again, not the sharpest knife in the drawer, Jonah said throw me overboard—I know it's my fault.

Being somewhat humane, they declined and tried to row to land—the sea got even wilder. They began to cry out to Jonah's god, Yahweh. Save us! Don't punish us for killing an innocent man—You've done as you please, O Yahweh!

As soon as they threw Jonah overboard, the sea grew calm. Immediately they worshipped Yahweh, offering vows and sacrifices to Him.

And Jonah? Yahweh provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Yuck. And, Jonah was inside the fish for three days, and three nights.

Q Was Jonah penitent in verse 12? Was this not suicide? Was this a morally justified action?

Q Who did the pagan sailors eventually worship and revere? Why?

Q Why did God provide a large fish to swallow Jonah?

Q Which large fish has God used to swallow you until you got your act together?

## JONAH 1:6-17

The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish."

<sup>7</sup>Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

<sup>8</sup>So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

<sup>9</sup>He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

<sup>10</sup>This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

<sup>11</sup>The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

<sup>12</sup>"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

<sup>13</sup>Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. <sup>14</sup>Then they cried to the LORD, "O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased." <sup>15</sup>Then they took Jonah and threw him

overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup>At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

<sup>17</sup>But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

## TEXT

Matthew 12:38-42. Jesus was always being challenged by those who either were jealous of His standing (“they were amazed at His teaching”) or His popularity (“multitudes followed”). In this instance, they thought they could put the Creator of the universe on the spot by challenging Him to show a sign of His legitimacy. Jesus was not happy...

You’re a wicked and unfaithful generation—you ask for “miraculous signs.” There will none be given—except one: the sign of Jonah.

Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand in judgment of you—they repented at Jonah’s preaching. Now? One even greater than Jonah is among you. Even the Queen of Sheba will rise at judgment and condemn you—she came from the ends of the earth (modern day Yemen) to listen to the wisdom of Solomon. Now? One greater than Solomon is here among you.

- Q Why do we always want to see a “miraculous sign” to prove God’s legitimacy and authority in our lives? [Hint: consider two concepts, spiritual blindness, and what constitutes a “miracle.”]
- Q And, when we do see a “miraculous sign,” we have propensity to detract it.<sup>2</sup> What’s up with that? Soft-peddled atheism? Beige agnosticism? How do we get Jesus to become our “advance man?”
- Q Why was the repentance and subsequent elevation of Nineveh and the humble obedience of the Queen of Sheba such a devastating blow to the listeners of Jesus?
- Q Who are the Ninevites and Sheba’s in our life? That is, who do we think we’re better than who in reality will stand in judgment of us?

## MATTHEW 12:38-42

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

<sup>39</sup> He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. <sup>42</sup> The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

<sup>2</sup>Consider people’s reaction to the great movement within Islam as people are attracted to Isa. See Appendix A—JESUS AS THE ADVANCE MAN IN ISLAM.

## APPLICATION

Acts 2:22-28. Peter's sermon with the eleven (apparently Matthias was not included in this group sermon) on the day of Pentecost reminded all of us who had come to Jerusalem to worship that we had killed Messiah, the very One for which we were waiting. Here's how it was explained to us...

Listen! Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by the Lord God—there were miracles, wonders, and signs. Father God did all these things among you through Him. You know that—I'm not telling you anything new.

This man was given over to you by Father God's specific purpose; He knew what was going to happen, before it happened. Then? You, along with help from non-believers, killed Him. You actually nailed Him to a cross.

BUT, Father God raised Him from death—freeing Him from the agony of death. Why? It was impossible for death to hold Him. Here's what King David had to say about Jesus:

The Lord is always with me, at my right hand; I won't be freaked out. My heart is happy and my words rejoice—I live in hope. You will not abandon me in the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. YOU have made known the paths of life—YOU will fill me with the joy of your presence!

- Q Why were the signs, miracles and wonders of Jesus ignored by this audience? Today's audience?
- Q Who gave Jesus of Nazareth over to be killed? By whom? For what purpose [in this context]?
- Q What was particularly significant about Messiah being raised from the dead for the believers in Jerusalem at Pentecost?

### ACTS 2:22-28

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup>This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of non-believers [*wicked men who know not the Law*, sometimes a euphemism for "Gentiles"] put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup>But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. <sup>25</sup>David said about him:

" I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

<sup>26</sup>Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope,

<sup>27</sup>because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

<sup>28</sup>You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

[Psalm 110:1]

## APPENDIX A—JESUS AS THE ADVANCE MAN IN ISLAM

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*Note: We<sup>3</sup> watched a 2 day webcast last month, entitled, "Understanding and Answering Islam."*

The speakers were all former Sunni & Shia Muslims, and all now Christian pastors, evangelists and seminary professors. (One speaker bore a scar from having his throat cut when attacked after speaking at London's famous "Speakers Corner" in Hyde Park, after sharing the Gospel.)

One of the most remarkable facts from the meeting was that all mentioned "*...there have been more Muslims coming to Christ in the past 20 years than in all centuries up to this point...*" Another astounding fact was the *list of "fastest growing evangelical countries"*. *The first two were.... Iran and Afghanistan!*

(Annual Growth rates: (1) Iran 19.6%, (2) Afghanistan 16.7%. Somalia is 7th, at 8%, and in spite of Al-Shebab terrorism. Kuwait is 9th at 7.3%, and even the United Arab Emirates 25th at 5.5%) <http://www.operationworld.org/hidden/evangelical-growth>

In fact, so many Muslims are having dreams about "Isa" (Jesus) and then seeking out missionaries to learn more about Christ that it's literally a daily occurrence for many evangelists stations in those parts of the world.

Saw this story today [February 17, 2016], and it made us smile. (and I wonder how the missionary "Daniel" felt when he heard...)

<http://www.charismanews.com/world/55173-muslim-family-says-jesus-appeared-to-them-with-a-specific-message>

"...Tyler Connell with the Ekballo [Greek for out "throw/reach out"] Project has been touring college campuses around the U.S., sharing stories and video from his most recent trip to Middle East, where he documented a dramatic move of God among Muslims, particularly with refugees.

College students are amazed to learn what God is doing in Iraq and the surrounding region. "Jesus is moving in these Middle East nations," he says. "Many there are disillusioned and broken and just want to know the truth. Now more than ever there is a harvest among Muslims that has not been seen in history."

His first film chronicles a young missionary named Daniel (whose name has been changed for security reasons), 24, originally from Vermont. Two years ago Daniel moved to the Middle East to work with Syrian refugees.

"They go house to house and visit these Muslim families and sit with them and talk with them and find out their names, their stories, and love them. As trust is built, they begin to open up about the Gospel."

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<sup>3</sup>"We" = Pete & Lori Fair. Thanks to my good friend and Christian, Pete Fair, for providing this summary and review.



One afternoon Daniel walked into a white tent with a family of eight people inside. "Hi I'm Daniel and I'm here to tell you about Jesus," he announced.

He wasn't quite prepared for their reaction. "The family freaked out, they looked at each other, almost turned white. The father was excited, yelling."

What's going on? Daniel wondered.

The interpreter explained that the night before Daniel's visit the whole family was sitting in their tent having tea together and a man in white opened the door to their tent and stood at the entrance. The man was glowing.

"Hello, My name is Jesus and I am sending a man tomorrow named Daniel to tell you more about me." Then he disappeared.

So when Daniel arrived at their doorway and told them his name, they were completely undone. "They asked him to tell them more about Jesus and he gave them the Gospel and the whole family gave their lives to Jesus," Connell reports.

The father had been a part of the Free Syrian Army. "He had known bloodshed. He was a devout Muslim. This man and his family are now planting underground churches and are seeing a harvest among Muslims."

Recently the father was dismayed by a large cell phone bill and he asked his 15-year-old daughter about it.

"It's because I'm telling all our relatives in Saudi Arabia about Jesus," she said..."

"We felt God told us to go to these places, the dark places, and capture what He is doing thru the lives of missionaries that have given their lives, left everything they had here to live overseas. We follow them with our camera and capture what God does and show it on college campuses to ignite students to live for something bigger than themselves."

In May 2015 his team spent eight days in the Middle East, going house to house among the refugees. "They were all Muslims but they all said they were disillusioned with Islam and they didn't know what they believed anymore," he observes.

"They asked, 'What is the truth?' There was a perfect cocktail of circumstances that caused them to be open to the preaching of the Gospel."

Going to the Middle East his team had to confront their fears. "We realized that intimidation and fear was only a smokescreen. On the other side of that fear was our greatest breakthrough of joy and laying down our lives and seeing Jesus move like we never imagined."

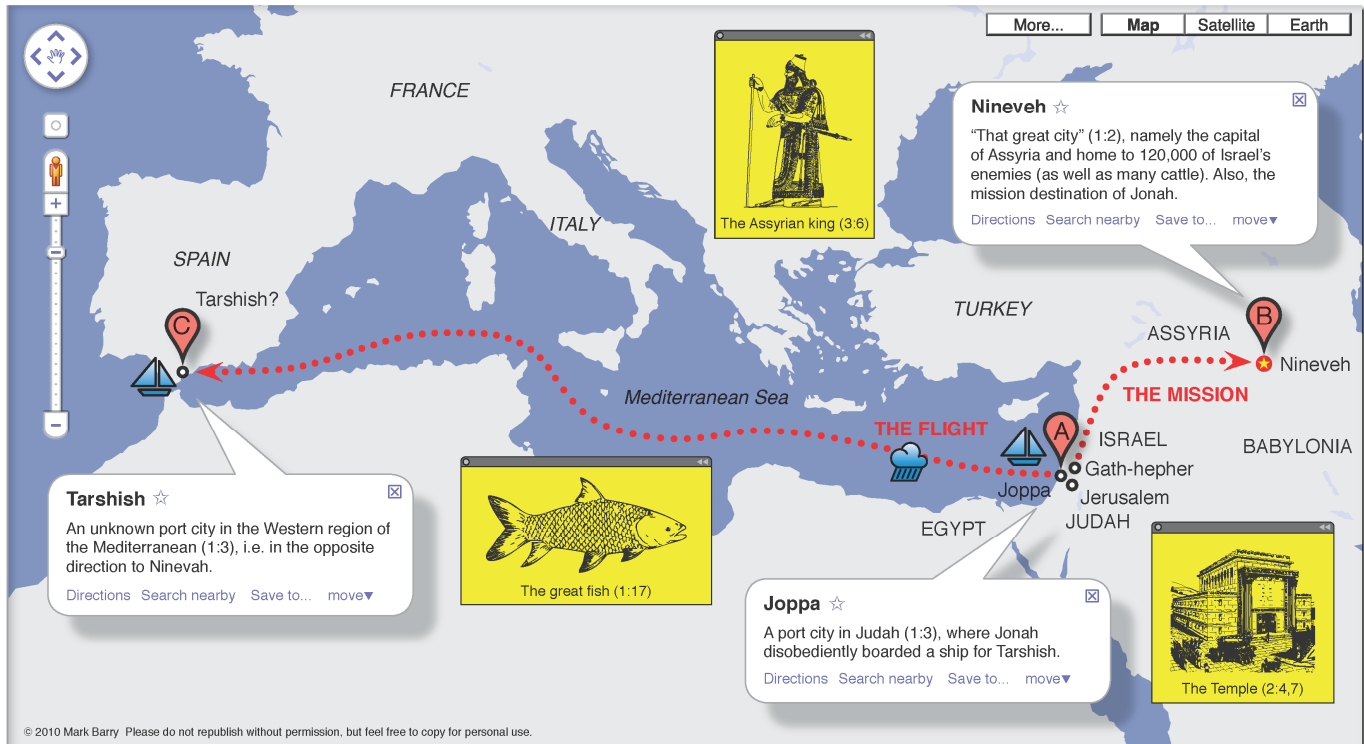
In another Syrian refugee family, Connell felt God's presence break through in a powerful way. "The joy that broke out among these people was incredible," he notes. "Jesus' presence was stronger than I have ever felt, in that little dirty room, with cat pee everywhere."

JONAH

**1:1** *The word of the LORD came.* See 3:1; a common phrase used to indicate the divine source of the prophet's revelation (see, e.g., 1Ki 17:8; Jer 1:2,4; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Hag 1:1,3; Zec 1:1,7).

**1:2** *great city.* See 3:2; 4:11. According to Ge 10:11-12, Nineveh was first built by Nimrod (perhaps along with Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen) and was traditionally known as the "great city." About 700 B.C. Sennacherib made it the capital of Assyria, which it remained until its fall in 612.

Nineveh is over 500 miles from Gath Hopher, Jonah's hometown.



*its wickedness has come up.* Cf. Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 18:20-21). Except for the violence (3:8) of Nineveh, her "evil ways" (3:8,10) are not described in Jonah. Nahum later states that Nineveh's sins included plotting evil against the Lord (Na 1:11), cruelty and plundering in war (Na 2:12-13; 3:1,19), prostitution and witchcraft (Na 3:4) and commercial exploitation (Na 3:16).

**1:3** *ran away.* The reason is found in 4:2. The futility of trying to run away from the Lord is acknowledged in Ps 139:7,9-10.

*Tarshish.* Perhaps the city of Tartessus in southwest Spain, a Phoenician mining colony near Gibraltar. By heading in the opposite direction from Nineveh, to what seemed like the end of the world, Jonah intended to escape his divinely appointed task.

Nineveh and Tarshish represent opposite ends of the Levantine commercial sphere in ancient times. The story of Jonah extends to the boundaries of ancient geographic knowledge and provides a rare glimpse of seafaring life in the Iron Age. Inscriptions and pottery from Spain demonstrate that Phoenician trade linked the far distant ends of the Mediterranean, perhaps as early as the 12th century B.C.

<sup>4</sup>Adapted and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

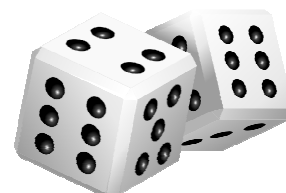


**1:4-5** Although Jonah's mission was to bring God's warning of impending judgment to the pagan world, his refusal to go to Nineveh brings these pagan sailors into peril. **1:4** *the LORD sent a great wind.* God's sovereign working in Jonah's mission is evident at several other points also: the fish (v. 17), the release of Jonah (2:10), the vine (4:6), the worm (4:7) and the wind (4:8).

**1:5** *his own god.* Apparently the sailors, who may have come from various ports, worshiped several pagan gods.

**1:6** *The captain went to him.* The pagan captain's concern for everyone on board contrasts with the believing prophet's refusal to carry God's warning to Nineveh.

**1:7** *let us cast lots.* The casting of lots was a custom widely practiced in the ancient Near East. The precise method is unclear, though it appears that, for the most part, sticks or marked pebbles were drawn from a receptacle into which they had been "cast."



*lot fell on Jonah.* By the lot of judgment the Lord exposed the guilty one (cf. Jos 7:14-26; 1Sa 14:38-44; Pr 16:33).

**1:9** *God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.* The sailors would have understood Jonah's words as being descriptive of the highest divinity. Their present experiences confirmed this truth, since, in the religions of the ancient Near East generally, the supreme god was master of the seas (see Joshua 3:10). This is Jonah's first confessional statement, and, like those that follow (2:9d; 4:2), it is thoroughly orthodox. Though orthodox in his beliefs, Jonah refuses to fulfill his divine mission to Nineveh.

**1:12** *throw me into the sea.* Jonah's readiness to die to save the terrified sailors contrasts with his later callous departure from Nineveh to watch from a safe distance while the city perishes—at least he still hoped it would perish (see 4:5).

**1:13** *did their best to row.* The Hebrew uses the picturesque word meaning "to dig" (with oars) to indicate strenuous effort. The ship could be driven by sails, oars, or both. The reluctance of the sailors to throw Jonah into the sea stands in sharp contrast to Jonah's reluctance to warn Nineveh of impending judgment.

**1:16** *greatly feared the LORD.* There is no evidence that the sailors renounced all other gods (contrast Naaman, 2Ki 5:15). Ancient pagans were ready to recognize the existence and power of many gods. At the least, however, the sailors acknowledged that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was in control of the present events, that he was the one who both stirred up and calmed the storm, and that at this moment he was the one to be recognized and worshiped.

**1:17** *the LORD provided.* This characteristic phrase occurs also in 4:6-8.

*great fish.* The Hebrew here and the Greek of Mt 12:40 are both general terms for a large fish. This great fish is carefully distinguished from the sinister "serpent" of the sea (Am 9:3)--otherwise called "Leviathan" (Isa 27:1)--and the "monster of the deep" (Job 7:12; see Ps 74:13; Eze 32:2).

*three days and three nights.* The phrase used here may, as in Mt 12:40, refer to a period of time including one full day and parts of two others (see notes on Mt 12:40; Lk 9:28; 1Co 15:4). In any case, Christ clearly uses Jonah's experience as a type (foreshadowing) of His burial and resurrection, who was indeed entombed for "three days and three nights" (Mt 12:40; see Mt 16:4; Lk 11:29-32).

## MATTHEW

- 12:1** *grainfields*. Of wheat or barley, the latter eaten by poorer people. *pick some heads of grain*. See note on Mk 2:23.
- 12:2** *what is unlawful on the Sabbath*. See Mk 2:24.
- 12:3** *what David did*. See Mk 2:25.
- 12:4** *consecrated bread*. Each Sabbath, 12 fresh loaves of bread were to be set on a table in the Holy Place (Ex 25:30; Lev 24:5-9). The old loaves were eaten by the priests.
- 12:5** *desecrate the day*. By doing work associated with the sacrifices.
- 12:8** *the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*. See Lk 6:5.
- 12:9** *synagogue*. See Mk 1:21.
- 12:10** *heal on the Sabbath*. The rabbis prohibited healing on the Sabbath, unless it was feared the victim would die before the next day. Obviously the man with the shriveled hand was in no danger of this.
- 12:13** *"Stretch out your hand."* *So he stretched it out*. The fact that the man stretched out his shriveled hand shows there is a connection between faith and Jesus' healing power.
- 12:16** *not to tell who he was*. See 8:4.
- 12:18-21** Another fulfillment passage (see 1:22). This one is from Isaiah's first servant song (Isa 42:1-4 and is the longest Scripture quotation in Matthew's Gospel. It summarizes the quiet ministry of the Lord's servant, who will bring justice and hope to the nations.
- 12:18** *my servant*. Jesus is called God's servant only here and in Ac 3:13 (see note there), Ac 3:26; 4:27,30. *the one I love, in whom I delight*. See note on 3:17.
- 12:20** Jesus mends broken lives (see v. 15; Jn 4:4- 42; 8:3-11).
- 12:23** *the Son of David*. See note on 9:27.
- 12:24** *Beelzebub*. Aramaic/Persian name for Satan, literally "Lord of the flies."
- 12:31** *blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven*. The context (vv. 24,28,32) suggests that the "unpardonable sin" was attributing to Satan Christ's authenticating miracles done in the power of Holy Spirit (see note on Mk 3:29).
- 12:38** *miraculous sign*. The Pharisees wanted to see a spectacular miracle, preferably in the sky (see Lk 11:16), as the sign that Jesus was the Messiah. Instead, he cites them a "sign" from history. See Lk 11:29.
- 12:39** *adulterous*. Referring to spiritual, not physical, adultery, in the sense that their generation had become unfaithful to its spiritual husband (God).
- 12:40** *three days and three nights*. Including at least part of the first day and part of the third day, a common Jewish reckoning of time. See note on Lk 24:46. *huge fish*. The Greek word does not mean "whale" but rather "sea creature," i.e., a huge fish (see note above on Jonah 1:17).
- 12:41-42** *one greater than Jonah . . . one greater than Solomon*. See Lk 11:31-32.
- 12:42** *Queen of the South*. In 1Ki 10:1 she is called the queen of Sheba, a country in southwest Arabia, now called Yemen.
- 12:46** *mother and brothers*. See Lk 8:19.
- 12:50** *whoever does the will of my Father*. See Mk 3:35.