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Jonah

Three years ago during one of my ministry trips, I happened to stumble upon a DVD produced by another faith that claimed that the Bible is corrupt and it is not the true word of God. Amongst others, this religion claims that Jonah *did not die* in the belly of the fish. In fact, even many Christians believe the same. Well, if that's the case with Jonah, then Jesus did not die for us either. Recollect that Jesus, during his time on this earth, spoke about the "sign of Jonah":

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 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. 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. Matthew 12:38-40 (NKJV)

If Jesus then did not die like Jonah, then where is our forgiveness? Is there forgiveness of sins without the shed blood of Jesus Christ? This provoked me to delve deeply into the scriptures and the result of which will be a series of studies for the past one week.

First let us look at the life of Jonah. The name "Jonah" is Hebrew-derived meaning "dove." No one has the name meaning Dove in the entire Old Testament.

Besides Jonah from the Old Testament, there are two other witnesses for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament: (a) Lazarus and (b) Mary anointing Jesus

Jonah was a prophet sent to preach the Word of God to the city of Nineveh but he disobeys God's word and tries to flee from the presence of God.

Jonah 1:3 (NKJV) (fleeing from God's presence mentioned twice in this verse)

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.
Jonah 1:10 (NKJV)

He rebels against God's instructions and attempts to sail to Tarshish disobeying God, sleeping on a lower deck of the ship (Jonah 1:5-6). Under the Old Covenant, the ultimate punishment for disobeying God's word was death. Read through 1 Kings 13 to know what happened to the prophet who disobeyed God's command (verses 11-34).

Now when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard it, he said, "It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the Lord. Therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to him." 1 Kings 13:26 (NKJV)

If you have read the chapter, you will realise that the donkey that the prophet had rode on was alive beside the lion. Also, the lion did not eat the body of the prophet; it's almost as if the lion was guarding the body until someone came to collect it.

Going back to Jonah's case, Jonah was killed for his sin of disobedience to God's call, whereas Jesus was crucified for the sins of the whole world.

Jonah confesses to the sailors that because he has been trying to flee from the presence of God, he is to be blamed for the storm (Jonah 1:12).

Terrified of the confession, the sailors toss him overboard, although reluctantly, at his request and after crying out to the Lord to not hold his death against them. They throw Jonah into the raging sea (Jonah 1:14–15) of depth of between 4 and 7 miles.

This is where you need to understand that verse 17 of Chapter 1 does not take place immediately. This account was given by Jonah after his resurrection, after preaching in Nineveh, and after the repentance of the whole city, hence not in sequential order. Please wait patiently as the crux of the message unfolds.

Jonah 2:3

*You threw me into ocean's depths, into a watery grave.
With ocean waves, ocean breakers crashing over me. (MSG)*

*You threw me into the sea, down, down into the deep sea.
The water was all around me, and your powerful waves
flowed over me. (NCV)*

*You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the
seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and
breakers swept over me. (NIV)*

From the above verse, we can be sure of the following:

- That it is either God or His angel who has pushed him into the deep of the ocean.
- That only a person who is dead due to drinking too much water could reach the very heart of the sea.
- That the water current or billows of waves overwhelmed him completely, as emphasized in Verse 5.

Jonah 2:5

Ocean gripped me by the throat. The ancient Abyss grabbed me and held tight. My head was all tangled in seaweed at the bottom of the sea where the mountains take root.
(MSG)

The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. Seaweeds surrounded me. (NKJV)

The waters surrounded even to his soul; it is very clear that the Abyss – the hell – held him tight in the deepest part of the ocean. Seaweeds surrounded his head. The parallel here is that when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, sweating drops of blood. And before being crucified, the Roman soldiers placed a crown of thorns on the head of Jesus.

“I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. Jonah 2:6 (NASB)

To point out, from the above verse, it is clear that Jonah has still not gone into the belly of the fish:

- The waters and currents engulfed him
- There are no mountains in the belly of the fish
- He was taken to the Abyss
- He was taken to the deep of the earth where the door was closed forever
- He was brought up from the pit

For You will not abandon me to Sheol (the place of the dead), neither will You suffer Your holy one [Holy One] to see corruption. Psalm 16:10 (AMP)

Now that Jonah was dead and he went to hell, God prepared a fish to swallow Jonah's body (Jonah 1:17)

The body of Jonah was inside the belly of the fish, like being entombed, but his soul, according to the Old Testament, went to the hades:

"In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry." Jonah 2:2 (NIV)

"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, And He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice." (NKJV)

From Sheol, Jonah prays for the first time. And the prayer was answered. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 12:38-40 saying just as how Jonah was kept inside the belly of the big fish, so will He also be in the belly of the earth.

A sacrifice of prayers was offered from the Sheol and the Lord heard that prayer and answered him (Jonah 2:7,9), sparing his life from corruption (2:6). When Jonah comes back alive and prays (2:1), the only prayer he offered to God in the future tense is mentioned in Jonah 2:9.

Following this, Jonah went into the city and preached for forty days:

Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Jonah 3:4 (NIV)

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3 (NKJV)

Here again, we see another similarity between Jonah and Jesus that both of them preached for 40 days!

Following Jonah's preaching, the people of Nineveh repented:

When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened. Jonah 3:10 (NLT)

What we learn from this study is that:

- Jonah was dead and went to Sheol
- He was kept inside the belly of the big fish
- He was raised to life again after 3 days
- He came and preached repentance to Nineveh and
- He brought people back to God

Jesus was dead and buried in the tomb for three days and three nights. He visited hell during this time and preached the Gospel to the first and the second world. After that, He was seen alive 40 days and He preached about the Kingdom of God to His apostles.

If Jesus had not died, then there is no forgiveness for our sins. He died and rose again and is seated at the right hand of God. Foreshadowing Jesus' death and resurrection was Jonah's life in the Old Testament. Just as Jesus was *dead* and his body entombed, so was Jonah *dead* and his body entombed in the belly of the fish.

Just as Jesus spent 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth, so was Jonah there 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish. Just as Jesus was resurrected after 3 days, Jonah was also raised to life, the fish then spewing him out on the shore.

Just as Jesus appeared and preached to his disciples and was seen alive for forty days, so did Jonah preach for 40 days after coming back alive. This is the sign that Jesus had spoken about in Matthew 16:1–4. If Jesus had not died, then neither did Jonah. "Dove," the meaning of Jonah's name, symbolizes the promised Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit – which first descended upon Jesus after He was baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan when the heaven parted and the voice from heaven spoke as thus, "This is the Son I love"

Now, does not Jonah's life mirror the better covenant that we enjoy through Christ Jesus? People of Nineveh had redemption through Jonah's message; we, the people of the world, have redemption through the blood of Jesus!