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Dear Associates and Friends,

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“[The Book of Jonah](#)” by Dr. Ernest L. Martin is this month’s article. This 5th book of the Twelve Minor Prophets shows a highly intricate composition. It has many themes running through it which, when recognized, will open your understanding to the message in this book. Dr. Martin’s explanation will “open” the Book of Jonah to you.

I was meeting with a professor at Fuller Seminary in his office when he said, “You know, this would be a wonderful place to work if it wasn’t for the students.” I think we all feel that way at times.

The Book of Jonah is about God and His actions toward His creation of all human beings. Jonah came from a chosen people, Israel, who were God’s special people: **“For YHWH’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance”** (Deuteronomy 32:9).¹ Yet they were not His exclusive people alone. All people belong to YHWH. Although this simple fact seems obvious to us, Jonah did not want his people Israel to be punished so harshly by pagan Assyria. And Jonah did not want the Ninevites to escape the punishment God had prophesied for them. He wanted them to be punished before Jonah’s own people Israel were.

Desiring Death

The prophet Jonah is the leading character, the protagonist, of the Book of Jonah. Through his experiences God gives us very sophisticated teaching presented in a humorous way. One desire Jonah has is he wishes to die so he can avoid fulfilling God’s will. Others in the Bible have had this same desire, but for different reasons. Jonah’s wish to die is expressed in his prayer to YHWH (4:1–3). Other Old Testament characters have wanted to die as well, and for better reasons than Jonah.

- Job desired to die because of his great personal loss of wealth and status, the deaths of beloved family members, and great physical agony of illness. He also felt that unless God would answer his questions as to the cause of his calamities, living has no purpose. He wanted to die if he could not get an answer from YHWH (Job 6:9–14).
- Moses desired for God to kill him because he was inadequate to the responsibility of leadership of God’s people. The burden was too great for him (Numbers 11:14–15).
- The judge Samson asked God for strength so he might have renewed power to kill the Philistine leaders and help Israel, even at the cost of his own life (Judges 16:28–31).
- The exhausted prophet Elijah said to God it was time for him to die. He asked God, **“take away my life”** (1 Kings 19:4).
- The prophet Jeremiah (who came after Jonah) wished he had never been born. This is another way of saying he wished he was dead (Jeremiah 20:14–18).
- While the apostle Paul was content to live to continue to teach the *ekklesia*, nevertheless he was ready to die. For him death meant personal gain (Philippians 1:21–25). This is qualitatively different

¹ See Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 26:18–19, and many other verses. God’s special relationship was conditional, based on Israel’s obedience to their Covenant with YHWH. Obedience to the covenant — blessing. Disobedience — punishment.

from Jonah's complaint that YHWH does not do what he, Jonah, wishes.

Compared to those instances, why did Jonah want to die? He wanted to die because the people of Nineveh repented, the bush God gave him for shade died as suddenly as it had grown, and he was suffering from the heat and hot wind. He knew YHWH was "messing with him." So Jonah prayed and made a petulant request to die. As you will learn from Dr. Martin's article, Jonah did die in the fish and God had resurrected him once already so he could complete the mission God required him to perform. Jonah's complaint was trivial. In the end Jonah did obey God, he preached to the Ninevites, and they repented. Yet Jonah held on to his anger and worse, he was angry with God:

"Yet it was displeasing to Jonah, a great evil, and it was hot with him [meaning both Jonah's anger as well as the temperature]. **He prayed to YHWH and said, 'Oh YHWH, was not this my word while still I came to be on my own ground** [in Israel]?"

Therefore I forestalled by running away to Tarshish, for I know that You are [1] **a gracious El, and** [2] **compassionate, [3] slow to anger and** [4] **of much benignity, and** [5] **regretting of the evil. And now, O YHWH, take, I pray, my soul from me, for better is my death than my life."**

• *Jonah 4:1–3, Concordant Literal Version*

God responded: **"Then YHWH said, 'Is it good for you to be hot** [angry]?" (Job 4:4, CLV). The term "hot" here is used for anger, but it has a double meaning. It also refers to the heat of the sun. The next part of Jonah's experience was for him to suffer from heat. A gourd plant grew in one day giving Jonah the comfort of cool shade. Yet the plant died and withered the next day. Jonah is "hot" again. God then sends a scorching wind. Again Jonah asks to die:

"And it became as the sun arose, that Elohim assigned a sultry [hot] **east wind, and the sun smote on the head of Jonah, and he swooned. And he asked for his soul to die and said** [again, as in verse 3], **'Better is my death than my life.'**

Then Elohim said to Jonah, 'Is it good for you to be hot [angry] **over the gourd?'**

Yet he [Jonah] **said, 'It is good for me to be hot** [angry] **unto death.'**"

• *Jonah 4:8–9, Concordant Literal Version*

YHWH has the last word in verses 4:10–11. Throughout the Book there are four things God prepared special for Jonah: a great fish (1:17), a gourd plant to shade him (4:6), a worm to kill the plant (4:7), and a hot east wind (4:8). Truly, YHWH is in control, He takes notice of Jonah, and He has a sense of humor.

Like Jonah, it is difficult for us to realize that God greatly desires to save every human being, as well as you. Like Jonah, our sense of justice is different from God's. We are flesh and constantly influenced by fleshly impulses (Romans 7:7–25). This is how we are made. God's thoughts are not ours (Isaiah 55:7–9).

Thank You

Jesus approached His impending death with emotional and even physical agony (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Unlike Jonah, Jesus was always obedient, **"... he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the stake"** (Philippians 2:8). Surely Jesus was unique, but as the captain of our salvation He is the example we are to follow. Paul encourages us to be like Christ: **"Look ... every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 2:5).

Thank you for studying mature biblical teachings which plumb the depths of the mind of Christ and our Father. Through God's Holy Spirit their very thoughts are put into your mind. This is how education works. The ideas of one generation are transferred to the next. As the children of God, our Father's and our elder brother's thoughts are given to us. God's Spirit which communes with our spirit (Romans 8:16).

Thank you for your financial support. We need your continued help. God bless you all.

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