
THREE DAYS & THREE NIGHTS

AS JONAH...SO THE SON OF MAN
AS JONAH...SO ISRAEL

By Arlen L. Chirwood

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly [*lit.*, ‘the huge fish’s belly’]; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

The Book of Jonah forms a dual type, foreshadowing, through Jonah’s experiences, different aspects of the experiences of both of God’s firstborn Sons — *Christ and Israel* (cf. Ex. 4:22; Heb. 1:6).

(*Ref.* the author’s pamphlet, “Jonah,” for information pertaining to the typological teachings of this book.)

The book is more particularly about *Israel*, though the time which both Sons would spend in the place of death, is seen in the time which Jonah spent in the place of death. Thus, the book, in a larger scope, is about both Sons.

This time spent in the place of death is expressed in Jonah and referenced in Matthew as “three days and three nights.” And a mistake, having major negative ramifications in Biblical interpretation, is often made through seeking to understand this expression in a Western mind-set rather than through comparing Scripture with Scripture.

The expression, “three days and three nights,”

from Jonah 1:17 and Matt. 12:40, is often understood as a period of time encompassing three twenty-four-hour periods — *i.e.*, seventy-two hours. And this is where mayhem in Biblical interpretation enters into the matter, not only in the expression itself but what this does to numerous passages of Scripture, including the overall scope of the manner in which the whole of Scripture is structured.

Thus, it is no small matter concerning whether this expression is interpreted and understood within man’s Western mind-set (within man’s finite understanding) or whether Scripture is allowed to interpret and explain the matter for us (through God’s infinite wisdom and knowledge, the Author of this expression).

Facts That One Must Face

Christ was raised from the dead *after two days, on the third day* (Luke 24:7); and He was also raised *after three days* (Mark 8:31). Both are true and must be reconciled, one with the other.

(Relative to the timing of Christ’s resurrection, the expression, “after three days,” is only used two times in the N.T. [KJV, Matt. 27:63; Mark 8:31].)

On the other hand, the expression, “the third day,” is used twelve times in the N.T. [KJV]. In five of the references there is some manuscript support for the rendering, “after three days” [Matt. 16:21; 17:23; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22]. However, for the remaining seven [Matt. 20:19; 27:64; Luke 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; I Cor. 15:4], no such support exists. All existing manuscripts read the same way — “the third day,” leaving no room to question how the text should read.

Also, note the expressions, “within three days” and “in three days” in Mark 14:58 and John 2:19, 20.)

Israel, seen in the place of death today (note both the sign of Jonah in the O.T. and the sign of Lazarus in John 11), will be raised *after two days, on the third day* (Hosea 5:13-6:3), *i.e.*, after 2,000 years, in the third 1,000-year period. And, as was

stated concerning Christ, it can also be said of Israel that the nation will be raised up *after three days* (after 3,000 years). And, as with Christ, these statements must be reconciled, one with the other.

Then there is the matter of *Jonah*. Exactly the same thing *must* be said of him (because of the way Scripture uses the expression, “three days and three nights”). That is to say, Jonah was raised from the dead *after two days, on the third day* (note that Jonah died in the belly of the fish; he is seen crying out from *Sheol* [Jonah 2:2], the place of the dead). As well, Jonah was raised *after three days*. And, exactly as in the two antitypes, these statements must be reconciled, one with the other.

And the preceding is perfectly in line with the septenary structure of Scripture, which must be the case with any part of Scripture. This septenary structure is set forth in the opening two chapters of Genesis, beginning the Old Testament; and it is set forth as well in the opening two chapters of John, beginning the New Testament.

(Note that John’s gospel should be the beginning book in the N.T., not Matthew’s gospel. See the author’s pamphlet, “Genesis and John,” where this is dealt with and explained.)

The whole of Scripture is built upon this septenary structure, which is seen through the manner in which each Testament opens. And this structure is dealt with after different fashions numerous places throughout Scripture (*e.g.*, the Sabbath given to Israel, pointing to that coming seventh day of rest, the millennial day; or, it can be seen in the subject at hand — the raising up of Jonah, Christ, and Israel).

Problems That Are Encountered, If...

If a person follows the approach numerous individuals have taken when dealing with the expression, “three days and three nights,” in relation to the timing of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, attempting to understand this period of time as a

full seventy-two hours, that person will encounter *insurmountable problems, along with committing mayhem in numerous facets of Biblical interpretation.*

(These individuals usually attempt to see a Wednesday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection in order to allow what they see as a full three days and three nights — seventy-two hours — between His crucifixion and resurrection. Any other day would not allow the full time that they believe is needed.)

Note several *insurmountable problems* one encounters with the preceding view. Then it will be shown, as well, how this causes a person to *commit mayhem in numerous facets of Biblical interpretation.*

1) *Insurmountable Problems*

If Christ was crucified on Wednesday, nothing fits, not even the seventy-two-hour period.

Note that Christ died in the middle of the afternoon. This is when He descended into *Sheol/Hades*. His body was then taken down from the cross, prepared for burial, and placed in the tomb shortly before the beginning of the next day. Then He was raised sometime after the beginning of the day following the Sabbath.

If crucified on Wednesday, nothing short of time extending to at least slightly over seventy-five hours could possibly exist. Then, if one attempts to begin the seventy-two hours at the time His body was placed in the tomb (which most do), that won't work either. Raising Christ exactly seventy-two hours from that point would put the resurrection on the Sabbath, on Saturday.

Then there is the matter of Christ being raised on the third day. Sunday is the fifth day from Wednesday, not the third day. "After three days," as used in Matt. 27:63 and Mark 8:31 would seemingly fit, but not so. This expression must be harmonized with "on the third day," and has reference to this day (as will become evident in the third and last major section in this pamphlet).

Then there is the matter of the day following

the crucifixion being "a high day," *i.e., a high Sabbath* (John 19:31). Though the day following the Passover was the beginning day of the feast of Unleavened Bread (a Sabbath day), the only way one could have *a high Sabbath* in the camp of Israel was for one of the feast days in Leviticus twenty-three to fall on the regular weekly Sabbath (Alfred Edersheim would be one well-known authority calling attention to this fact). Thus, a Wednesday crucifixion fails on this point as well.

2) *Mayhem in Biblical Interpretation*

Contending for a seventy-two-hour period between Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, invariably dealt with through a supposed Wednesday crucifixion, throws the complete latter part of the septenary structure of Scripture into disarray.

As *Christ* was raised after two days, on the third day, He will, as well, be raised up after 2,000 years, in the third 1,000-year period (the Messianic Era).

And *Israel*, in like manner, after two days, after 2,000 years, will be raised up to live in God's sight on the third day, on the third 1,000-year period.

Note what attempting to see a full seventy-two-hour period in the expression "three days and three nights" does to the preceding, to the last three days in God's septenary structure of Scripture. *It destroys how God has structured His Word in this respect, destroying numerous teachings which God has placed in His Word through this septenary structure.*

No Problems Are Encountered, If...

On the other hand, if a person interprets Scripture in the light of Scripture when dealing with the expression, "three days and three nights," not a single one of these problems will exist; and everything, in turn, will fit into its proper place.

And no one is then left attempting to explain the unexplainable, for Scripture will have been allowed to explain the whole of the matter itself, through its own built-in interpretation.

There are two other places in the Old Testament where the same or a similar expression to that seen in Jonah 1:17 is used (I Sam. 30:1, 12, 13; Esther 4:16-5:1). And in both of these places, along with several other companion places, Scripture relates exactly how Jonah 1:17 and Matt. 12:40 are to be understood (Gen. 40:12-20; 42:17-20; II Chron. 10:5, 12; Matt. 27:62-64), leaving no room for questions in anyone's mind about how the expression is to be understood when Scripture is allowed to interpret itself.

In this respect, *the Old Testament views any part of a day as covering the whole of that day, with the day's corresponding night period as well* (cf. Matt. 4:2; Mark 1:13). A twenty-four-hour period is not involved at all. Thus, *viewed solely from a Scriptural standpoint*, any part of Friday, all of Saturday, and any part of Sunday would be "three days and three nights."

As well, the expression, "after three days" in Matt. 27:63 and Mark 8:31 is not referring to events occurring on a fourth day (a day following three days), but is referring to events occurring on the third of the three days in view. Note how this expression in Matt. 27:63 is understood in Matt. 27:64. Or, note the sequence of days in Acts 10:3, 7-9, 17, 23, 24, 30.

Then there is the matter of *a high Sabbath* occurring the day following the crucifixion, which can be fulfilled *only by a Friday crucifixion.*

As well, Friday is the *only day* which will allow the resurrection on Sunday to have occurred on *the third day* (on the feast of First Fruits [cf. Mark 16:9; I Cor. 15:20, 23]). In reality, all one has to do to ascertain the day of the crucifixion is to count back three days from Sunday, which takes one to Friday.

And, as well, remaining completely within the way Scripture handles the matter, this likewise allows one *to remain completely in line with the septenary structure of Scripture.*