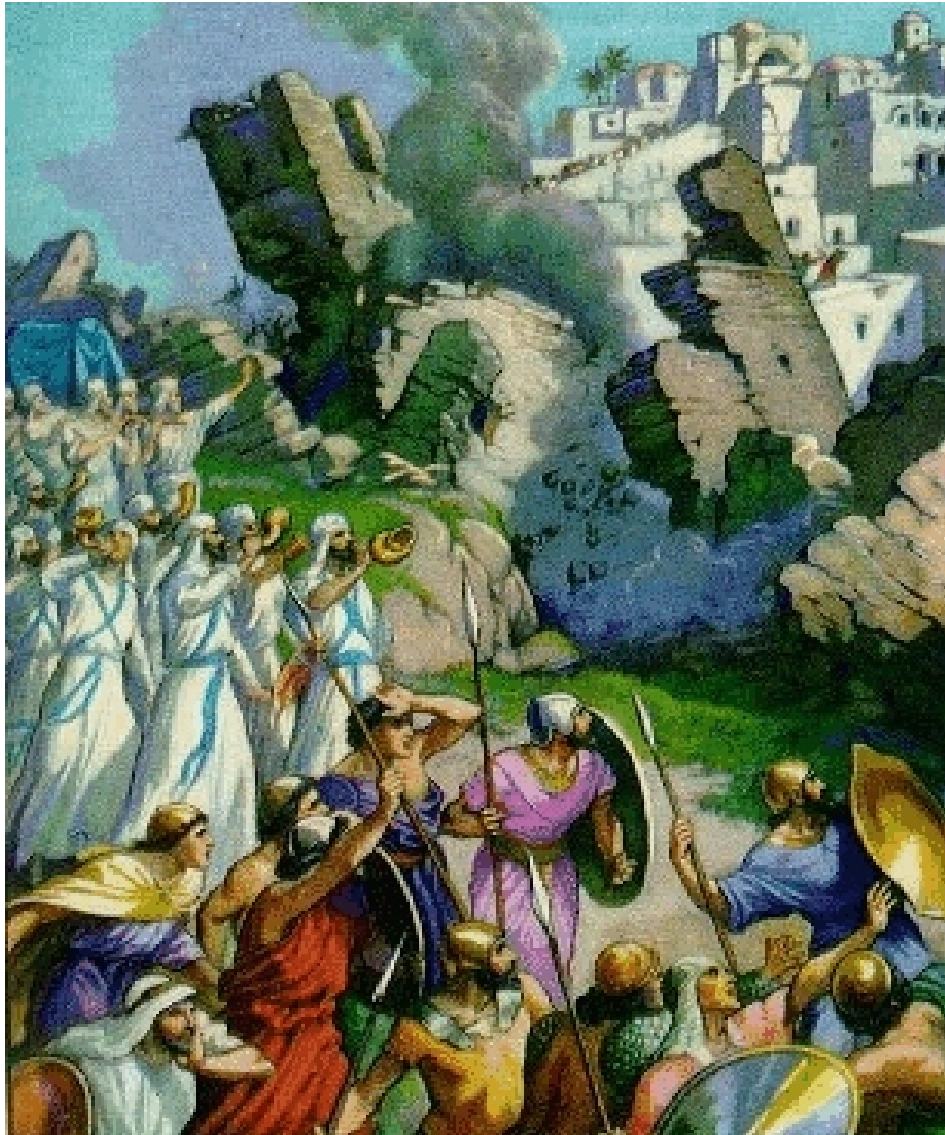

BIBLE GREATS



Volume I: A Series of Sermons on Great Bible Wonders

Gene Taylor

Preface

The theme for this series of lessons is *Great Bible Wonders*. The Bible contains many miracles that were performed in order that people would see God's awesome power and believe His word.

Although God doesn't demonstrate His power in the same way today, He has given us a permanent record of these miraculous events in His inspired word. By studying some of these fascinating stories in the Old and New Testaments we can strengthen our faith and better appreciate God's marvelous power. He is, indeed, Master over all things— nature, disease, life, death and sin. In these sermons we find that those who trust and obey are pleasing to Him.

These sermons may be presented as a series or independently for each lesson is complete in and of itself and does not build on previous lessons.

Gene Taylor

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Table of Contents	2
The Fall of Jericho	3
Naaman Is Healed	8
Jonah and the Great Fish	14
The Contest Between God and Baal	19
Christ Is Risen!	23

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The Fall of Jericho

Text: Joshua 1:1 - 6:27

I. The World's Oldest City

A. Location and climate.

1. Jericho is situated on the wide plain of the Jordan Valley (Deut. 34:1,3) at the foot of the Judean mountains about 8 miles northwest of the place where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea, some 5 miles west of the Jordan.
2. Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level so it has a climate that is tropical and, at times, very hot.
 - a. Only a few inches of rainfall are recorded there each year but it is a wonderful oasis known as "the city of palm trees" (Deut. 34:3) or "the city of palms" (Jud. 3:13).
 - b. It flourishes with date palms, banana trees, balsams, sycamores, and henna. (Song of Sol. 1:14; Luke 19:4)

B. History.

1. Old Testament.

- a. Moses saw "the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees." (Deut. 34:3)
- b. Two spies were sent by Joshua to Jericho who Rahab hid. (Joshua 2)
 - 1) She said, "Get to the mountain." (Josh. 2:16)
 - 2) There is a mountain only 2.5 miles to the west of Jericho.
- c. Joshua and the Israelites marched around the wall of Jericho and they fell. (Josh. 6; Heb. 11:30)
- d. A curse was placed on the one who would rebuild Jericho. (Josh. 2:26) Hiel of Bethel rebuilt the city in the days of Ahab but at the loss of two sons. (1 Kings 16:34)
- e. 50 strong men went from Jericho on a three day search for Elijah after his translation. (2 Kings 2:15-18)
- f. Elisha cast salt into the waters at Jericho and "healed" them. (2 Kings 2:19-20)

2. New Testament.

a. General information.

- 1) The city was built by Herod the Great as his winter capital. This city is located 1 mile south of Old Testament Jericho.
- 2) It was built on an Italian style and served as the winter "resort" of Jerusalem since Jerusalem was about 2500 to 2700 feet above sea level and Jericho only 800 feet above sea level.

- 3) "It would be no exaggeration to call the place divine—a place where the rarest and loveliest of things are found in such abundance...This is due, I think, to the warmth of the air and the fertilizing power of the water...The air too is so mild that the inhabitants dress in linen where the rest of Judea is under snow." (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, A New Translation by G.A. Williamson, p. 385)
- 4) The American Schools of Oriental Research, directed by J.L. Kelso and J.B. Pritchard, excavated NT Jericho in 1950-1951. They discovered Herod's winter palace with a facade 330 feet long.

b. New Testament references.

- 1) The story of the good Samaritan takes its setting as "a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho." (Luke 10:30ff.)
- 2) Jericho was the last city visited by Jesus before going up to Jerusalem to be crucified. It was at Jericho the episode with Zacchaeus took place. (Luke 19:1-10)

C. Archaeological excavations.

1. From 1907 until 1911, the German scholars Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger excavated this site.
2. British archaeologist John Garstang's excavations from 1930 to 1936 yielded significant information.
 - a. He believed he found evidence of Joshua's destruction of the city.
 - b. He discovered an inner wall about 12 feet thick and an outer wall about 6 feet thick.
3. Kathleen Kenyon directed excavations at Jericho from 1952 through 1958.
 - a. The walls which Garstang identified as belong to the city destroyed when the children of Israel marched around the city are said, by Kenyon, to belong to the 3rd millennium B.C.
 - b. She did find a wall dating back to 5859 B.C. (+ or - 100 years, determined by Carbon 14 testing).
 - c. In 1954, part of a wall about 21 feet high was found on the western edge of the tell at Jericho. The wall compassed the entire city which had a population of about 2400 to 2600. A large moat had been scooped out of rock at the foot of the wall.
 - d. A huge circular tower was found which has been dated to about 7000 B.C.

II. The Fall of the Walls of Jericho

- A. Upon the death of Moses, Joshua succeeded him as leader of the children of Israel.
1. His task was to lead them into the land of promise, conquer its peoples and divide the inheritance.
 2. God appeared to him and commanded him to lead the people over the Jordan River (Josh. 1:1-10).

3. He prepared the Israelites to travel on the third day and summoned the two and a half tribes who chose to settle east of the Jordan—Reuben, Gad, and half-tribe of Manasseh— to perform their promise of helping conquer the land. (Josh. 1:10-16)
- B. Joshua sent two spies to Jericho which was to be the first city attacked. (Josh. 2:1a)
1. Rahab, a harlot, received the spies into her home and hid them from the authorities because, having heard all that God had done for Israel and of His purpose to give them the land, she believed in God. (2:1b-11)
 - a. She hid the spies, misdirected the officers of the king who came in search of them, sending them out of the city in fruitless pursuit, and then let the spies down from a window of her house over the city wall after they had sworn to save her and her family in the destruction of the city. A scarlet thread placed in the window in which the spies had been let down would identify her house. (Josh. 2:12-21)
 - b. She told the spies to go to the mountain and hide there three days to avoid the pursuers who had gone out in search of them. They followed her advice. (Josh. 2:16, 22)
 2. The spies returned to Joshua with the report that God had delivered the land into their hands because all its inhabitants were fainting with fear because of Israel. (Josh. 2:23-24)
- C. The next morning Joshua broke up the camp at Shittim and moved to the edge of the Jordan River. (Josh. 3:1)
1. On the third day the officers instructed the people as to the order of their march and Joshua told the people to sanctify themselves because of what would take place the next day. (Josh. 3:2-5)
 2. In the morning, the priests who bore the ark advanced in front of the people and when they stepped into the Jordan, the waters divided—those which came from above building up as a wall and the lower portion flowing down toward the Dead Sea—leaving the channel bare. (Josh. 2:6-16)
 - a. The priests stood in the river’s bed with the ark until all the people had passed through. (Josh. 2:17)
 - b. Twelve chosen men, one from each tribe, took twelve stones from the spot where the priests stood and brought them out of the Jordan to Gilgal on the plains of Jericho where Joshua set them up as a memorial to the division of the waters of the Jordan by God. (Josh. 4)
- D. At Gilgal:
1. God commanded Joshua to circumcise the sons of Israel because none of the present generation had been circumcised. (Josh. 5:2-9)
 2. The people kept the Passover the next day after the circumcision. (Josh. 5:10)
 3. After the Passover, the people ate unleavened bread and parched grain from the produce of the land. (Josh. 5:11)

4. The manna ceased the day after the people ate of the produce of the land. (Josh. 5:12)
5. The commander of the army of the Lord appeared to Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15) and God instructed Joshua to take the city of Jericho and gave him the plan of attack. (Josh. 6:1-5)

E. The conquering of Jericho.

1. God's instructions for defeating Jericho. (Josh. 6:1-5)
 - a. The people were to march around the city once per day for six days with the priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. (3-4a)
 - b. The seventh day they were to march around the city seven times and the priests shall blow the trumpets and, upon hearing the trumpets, the people were to shout with a great shout, the walls of the city would fall and each person would go to the place "straight before him." (4b-5)
2. Joshua related God's instructions to the people and they followed them each day for six days. (Josh. 6:6-14)
3. On the seventh day:
 - a. The people marched around the city seven times, the priests sounded the trumpets, the people shouted, the walls of the city "fell down flat," the people took the city, and they utterly destroyed everything in the city. (Josh. 6:15-16, 20-21)
 - b. Joshua warned the people not to take anything from Jericho for all the spoil was to belong to the Lord. (Josh. 6:18-19)
 - c. Rahab and her family were spared. (Josh. 6:17, 22-23, 25)
 - d. The city was burned. Only the silver and gold and the objects made of brass and iron were spared and put into the treasury house of the Lord. (Josh. 6:24)
 - e. Joshua placed a curse upon the person who should rebuild Jericho. (Josh. 6:26)
 - 1) This curse was literally fulfilled when Hiel, the Bethelite, rebuilt Jericho during the reign of Ahab (about 870 B.C.).
 - 2) Hiel's first-born son, Abiram, died as he was laying the foundation and his youngest son, Segub, while he was setting up the gates. (1 Kings 16:34)

4. **"Scholar: The walls did tumble down as Bible says."** (*Tallahassee Democrat*, February 22, 1990)

"NEW YORK — The walls of Jericho did come tumbling down as recounted in the Bible, according to an archaeological study.

"When we compare the archaeological evidence at Jericho with the biblical narrative describing the Israelite destruction of Jericho, we find remarkable agreement,' said archaeologist Byrant Wood of the University of Toronto.

“After studying data from recently published reports of British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, Wood wrote in the March-April issue of the scholarly journal, *Biblical Archaeology Review*:

“Here is impressive evidence that the walls of Jericho did indeed topple as the Bible records.’

“In the 1950s, Kenyon had concluded the city was destroyed about 150 years before the Israelite invasion after 1400 b.c.

“As a result, for about 30 years, ‘scholars by and large have written off the biblical record as so much folklore and religious rhetoric’ he said.

“Among the results of his study, Wood reports:

- A carbon-14 sample and extensive ceramic remnants contradicted Kenyon’s earlier dating, and supported the biblical account.
- Evidence of large amounts of scorched grain indicate the city fell quickly and after spring harvest, as related in the Bible. ‘The city did not fall as a result of starvation siege, as was common in ancient times,’ Wood wrote. ‘Instead, the Bible tells us Jericho was destroyed after but seven days.’”

III. The Lesson from Jericho - Faith and the Nature of Salvation by Faith

- A. The victory over Jericho by the children of Israel is included as an example of saving faith in Hebrews 11:30. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.”
 1. Since the walls fell “by faith,” did Israel not have to keep the command to march around the city? Of course not.
 2. To be exact, the text actually says the walls fell “by faith” after the marching.
- B. If one can understand:
 1. How the walls of Jericho fell “by faith” after the marching, he should have no difficulty understanding and accepting the concept that saving faith includes obedience to that which God has commanded one must do to be saved.
 2. That the marching was essential and that the walls would not and could not fall without it and that at the same time the fall of the walls was “by faith,” it should be easy for him to see the necessity of obedience to the commands of God for salvation—including baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)—and at the same time see that the sinner is saved by faith. (Romans 5:1)
- C. The marching was faith.
 1. It was faith in action, faith expressed, faith embodied.
 2. The marching was not the embodiment or expression of human wisdom and reason.
 - a. In human terms, the marching was utter foolishness.
 - b. No one would ever take a city in such a manner.
- D. It is equally correct to say that one’s obedience today to such commands as being baptized for the remission of sins is faith.
 1. Baptism is an act of faith. Baptism is faith in action, faith expressed.
 2. That is why the Bible can say, at the same time, that baptism is essential to salvation (1 Pet. 3:21) and that the sinner is saved by faith. (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9)

Naaman Is Healed

Text: 2 Kings 5:1-15a

I. Background Information

A. The Syrians (or Aramaeans).

1. Syria was a major nation northeast of Palestine that served as a political threat to the nations of Judah and Israel during much of their history.
 - a. Syria is the Greek term used to designate this country (2 Sam. 8:5; 1 Kings 20:20; Amos 1:5), while Aram is the Hebrew name for this country. (Num. 23:7)
 - b. It was situated widely from the Lebanon Mountains to the east side of the Euphrates River, and from the Taurus Range to Damascus and northern Palestine.
2. The Syrians were descendants of Shem. (Gen. 10:22-23; 1 Chron. 1:17)
3. The Syrians (Aramaean) were grouped into various centers of power.
 - a. Aram-Niharim (Aram of the two rivers)—Mesopotamia, around Haran. (Gen. 11:31; 24:10; 31:47)
 - b. Aram-Damascus. (1 Kings 11:23-24)
 - 1) This was the constant enemy of the northern kingdom of Israel.
 - 2) It was destroyed by Assyria in 732 B.C.
 - c. Aram-Zobah, north of Damascus.
 - 1) Hadadezer was its most powerful ruler. (2 Sam. 8:3-9)
 - 2) Hadadezer also ruled Maacah, Geshur and Tob.
 - d. Aram-Maacah, east of Jordan, near Mt. Hermon.
 - e. Geshur, east of Jordan, in Manasseh's territory. Absalom's mother was from this area. (2 Sam. 3:3; 13:37)
 - f. Tob, east of Jordan.
4. The Syrians, religiously, were idolators. (2 Kings 5:18)
5. David conquered the Syrian states and Solomon extended the kingdom far into these areas.
6. "Rezon, the son of Eliadah" of Damascus was raised up to chasten Solomon (1 Kings 11:23-25) and captured Damascus preparing the way for the rise of the Aramaean kingdom.
7. Kings of Syria (at Damascus).
 - a. Hezion (Same as Rezon?). (1 Kings 15:18).
 - b. Tabrimmon.

- c. Benhadad I (Approximately 890-843 B.C.). Note: Benhadad I, hired by Asa (2 Chronicles 16:2) about 875 B.C., seems to have been the same person as the Benhadad (formerly called Benhadad II) who fought Ahab about 856 B.C. (1 Kings 20:1)
 - d. Hazael. (2 Kings 8:15; 843-801 B.C.)
 - e. Benhadad II. (2 Kings 13:24-25; duration of reign uncertain)
 - f. Rezin. (2 Kings 15:37; approximately 750-732 B.C.)
8. After the division of the kingdom of Israel, the Aramaeans of Damascus gained strength and became the foremost Syrian kingdom and Israel's chief enemy.
 9. Asa, king of Judah (911-870 B.C.), by sending gifts to Benhadad, formed an alliance with him, and he, in turn, invaded the Northern kingdom of Israel under Baasha (909-886 B.C.). (1 Kings 15:20-22)
 10. Benhadad was kept at abeyance during the reign of Omri in Israel (c. 885 B.C.), who greatly strengthened his position by alliances with various foreign neighbors.
 11. During Ahab's reign (874-853 B.C.), the Northern kingdom became stronger (1 Kings 16:34; 22:39; 2 Kings 8:18,26) and Benhadad, leading a coalition of 32 other kings, was soundly defeated around 856 B.C. at the Battle of Samaria (1 Kings 20:1) and again in 855 B.C. (1 Kings 20:26-43) During this time, the rise of the Assyrian power checked Syrian advancement also.
 12. Ahab was killed by the Aramaeans, under Benhadad, in the battle of Ramoth-gilead. (1 Kings 22:1-40)
 13. Hazael became king of Damascus about 840 B.C. and, because of the failure of Jehu, king of Israel (841-814 B.C.), to aid in war against Assyria, he began to fight constantly against Israel. (2 Kings 10:32-33)
 14. During Jehoahaz's reign in Israel (814-798 B.C.), Hazael reduced Israel's territory to a very small area. (2 Kings 13:1-9, 22, 25) As Hazael advanced further south, he was kept out of Jerusalem only by the payment of a large amount of money obtained by using temple furnishings, etc. (2 Kings 12:17-18)
 15. The Aramaeans were weakened substantially by the Assyrians around 800 B.C. Jehoash (798-782 B.C.) reclaimed much of the territory taken by Hazael, and during the days of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.), Damascus was taken by Israel and the northern boundaries were restored as they had been in the days of Solomon. (2 Sam. 8:5-11)
 16. When Jeroboam II died in 753 B.C., Rezin, king of the Aramaeans, regained independence, but in 732 B.C., in the days of king Ahaz of Judah (732-716 B.C.), Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria (744-727 B.C.), captured Damascus, executed Rezin, and ended Aramaean power for good.

B. The disease of leprosy.

1. "A slowly progressing and intractable disease characterized by subcutaneous nodules, scabs or cuticular crusts and white shining spots appearing to be deeper than the skin. Other signs are (1) that the hairs of the affected part turn white and (2) that later there is a growth of 'quick raw flesh.' This disease in an especial manner rendered its victims unclean; even contact with a leper defiled whoever touched him, so while the cure of other diseases is called healing, that of leprosy is called cleansing....The disease is a zymotic affection produced by a microbe discovered by Hansen in 1871. It is contagious, although not very readily communicated by casual contact; in one form it is attended with anaesthesia of the parts affected, and this, which is the commonest variety now met with in the East, is slower in its course than those forms in which nodular growths are the most prominent features, in which parts of the limbs often drop off." (*I.S.B.E.*, Vol. III, p. 1867)
2. "A slowly progressing and incurable skin disease. In the Bible the word 'leprosy' refers to a variety of symptoms...Biblical leprosy was most likely a severe type of psoriasis, a form of the disease relatively rare in modern times.
"Leprosy is a chronic, infectious disease characterized by sores, scabs, and white shining spots beneath the skin." (*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 759)
3. Leprosy was incurable by the power of man.
4. Leprosy was a very loathsome disease.
 - a. "As our traveling party passed out of the western gate of Nablus, the site of ancient Shechem, 'a city of Samaria'; a group of repulsive lepers greeted us with calls for help. They showed various forms of that terrible disease: the nose or the lips, a hand or a foot eaten away; the limbs distorted, and in one case at least there was a 'leper white as snow.'" (Dr. Trumbull, traveling a few years ago in Palestine)
 - b. "I was startled out of my reverie by the sudden apparition of a crowd of beggars, without eyes, nose, hair. They held up to me their handless arms, unearthly sounds gurgled through their throats without palates; in a word I was horrified." (Dr. Thomson, another traveler)
5. The disease was regarded as contagious and it imposed isolation. (Lev. 13:45-46)
 - a. Lepers lived in camps or colonies separated from clean people.
 - b. Lepers were required to keep a considerable distance from others.
 - c. When they went into a city, lepers had to use the back streets.
 - d. If someone approached them, lepers had to hold up their hands in warning and cry, "Unclean!"

II. The Cleansing of Naaman

A. Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Syria (2 Kings 5:1).

1. His master considered him a great and honorable man because, being a mighty man of valor, through him God had granted great victories to Syria.
2. He suffered from leprosy.

- B. A young Israelite girl who had been taken captive in one of the Syrian raids on Israel, while waiting upon Naaman’s wife, said that if he were to see the “prophet who is in Samaria,” he would be cleansed of his leprosy. (2 Kings 5:2-3)
- C. Naaman relates the girl’s information to the king of Syria (Benhadad I, 890-843 B.C.) who, following protocol, gave him an introductory letter to the king of Israel, Joram (Jehoram, 848-841 B.C.). (2 Kings 5:4-5a)
- D. Naaman, taking the letter and 10 talents of silver, 6000 shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing, traveled to the king of Israel. (2 Kings 5:5b-8)
 - 1. The king of Israel, thinking the king of Syria was seeking a quarrel, rent his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy?” (7)
 - 2. The prophet Elisha, hearing of the king’s reaction, sent word for Naaman to come to him. (8)
- E. When Naaman, along with his entourage, arrives at Elisha’s, Elisha did not come out to him but sent a servant with instructions for him to follow to be cleansed of his leprosy. (2 Kings 5:9-13)
 - 1. The instructions: “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.” (10)
 - 2. Naaman reacted furiously.
 - a. He had thought Elisha would come out to him and with great ceremony heal him. (11)
 - b. He preferred to wash in the rivers of Damascus. (12a)
 - c. He went away in a rage. (12b)
 - 3. Naaman’s servants persuaded him to obey Elisha’s instructions. (13)
- F. When Naaman dipped seven times in the Jordan, “his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” (2 Kings 5:14)
- G. Naaman’s conclusion following his cleansing: “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.” (2 Kings 5:15a)

III. The Lesson: To Be Cleansed from Sin, One Must Seek God and Follow His Instructions

- A. Leprosy as a type of sin. There are several interesting analogies that can be made between the two when comparing leprosy to sin.
 - 1. Like leprosy, sin is incurable by man’s power.
 - a. No one has that power. (Jer. 10:23; Isa. 64:6)
 - b. Sin is not cured by the merits of any work one might do or by any gift he might make.
 - c. Not even the shedding of one’s own blood would erase one’s iniquities.
 - d. Sin can only be healed by the Great Physician. (Rom. 5:6-11; 1 John 1:7)

2. As leprosy was loathsome and defiling, so is sin. (Mark 7:21-23)
 - a. "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness." (Proverbs 30:11)
 - b. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way." (Psalm 119:1)
 3. As leprosy was contagious, so is sin.
 - a. The guilt of sin is not contagious but the practice of it and its consequences are.
 - b. Biblical warnings against evil companions testify to this fact. (1 Cor. 15:33; Prov. 4:14-16)
 4. As leprosy resulted in final isolation, so will sin if it is not forsaken and cleansing for it sought. (Matt. 25:30-41; 13:41-42)
- B. Naaman's mistakes in seeking to be cleansed from his leprosy.
1. He went to the wrong place.
 - a. The Israelite girl suggested that he go to the prophet but he went to the king.
 - b. Somehow the prophet heard of his need and sent word to the king to send Naaman to him.
 2. He went with preconceived ideas.
 - a. He thought the prophet would do something great—come out to him, wave his hand over him and call upon God.
 - b. When Elisha did not proceed as Naaman expected, he angrily departed and almost missed being healed.
 3. He became angry. He went away in a rage, displeased with the prophet's command.
 4. He thought of substituting something else for God's plan. He said the rivers of Damascus were better than the Jordan and that Elisha should have sent him to one of them.
- C. Millions today make the same mistakes in seeking cleansing from sin as Naaman did in seeking cleansing from his leprosy.
1. Many often go to the wrong place.
 - a. They go to the churches and creeds of men and teachers of such false doctrines as salvation by "faith only" and "one church is as good as another."
 - b. One must come to Christ, the only hope, on His terms. (Acts 4:12; John 6:68)
 2. Many have preconceived ideas.
 - a. Blinded by prejudice and/or tradition, instead of hearing what the Bible says, they want to make the Bible fit what they "think."
 - b. To many the gospel seems too simple or foolish—they expect something fashionable and ornate. (I Cor. 1:18-25)
 3. When the truth of God is pressed upon some, they, many times, become angry and even scoff at it.
 - a. Their own will and feelings are more important to them than God's truth.
 - b. Consider the teachings of Proverbs 14:16 and James 1:19-21.

4. Some want to substitute other things for God's plan.
 - a. Some substitute prayer for obedience. Others substitute "faith only" for Christ's way.
 - b. Suppose Naaman had substituted or changed Elisha's command? Do you think he would have been healed?
 - c. One must not substitute anything else for the gospel of Christ. One must simply obey it. (Rom. 1:16; Hebrews 5:8-9; Matt. 7:21; Rom. 6:17-18; 2 John 9)

Jonah and the Great Fish

Text: Jonah 1:1 - 4:11

I. Jonah the Man

- A. His name means “dove.”
- B. His personal life.
 - 1. He was the son of Amittai. (1:1)
 - 2. He was from Gath-hepher. (2 Kings 14:25)
 - a. It was a city of the tribe of Zebulun. (Joshua 19:13)
 - b. It was located four miles northeast of the city of Nazareth.
- C. His prophetic ministry.
 - 1. He was a prophet in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). (2 Kings 14:23-25)
 - 2. His work which is chronicled in his book is exclusively to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. (1:1-2)
 - 3. He was not, to say the least, God’s most faithful prophet.
 - a. He was a narrow-minded, fiercely zealous patriot.
 - b. He was exceedingly jealous of Israel’s relationship to God wanting no other people to have a similar relationship.
 - c. He became upset when the people of Nineveh repented at his preaching.
 - 4. As a prophet, he and his book are unique in a number of ways.
 - a. His is the only book of the minor prophets that is a book about the prophet instead of being a collection of the oracles of the prophet.
 - b. He is the only minor prophet:
 - 1) Whose major activity is on foreign soil.
 - 2) In whose career the miraculous plays a prominent role.
 - 3) Who preaches exclusively to a foreign people.
 - 4) Who is mentioned by Jesus.
 - c. He is the only Old Testament character who:
 - 1) Is represented as taking a trip on the Mediterranean Sea.
 - 2) Is likened by the Lord to Himself.

II. The Date of the Book of Jonah

- A. The book was written some time around the general period of 780 B.C.
- B. Since Jonah was a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II which was from 793 B.C. to 753 B.C., it is likely the events recorded in his book took place during that time.

III. The Setting of the Book of Jonah

A. Geographically.

1. Tarshish was a city in Spain which the people of Jonah's day believed to be "the end of the world."
2. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria.
 - a. At that time it had a population somewhere between six hundred thousand and one million.
 - b. Located on the Tigris River, it was some 80 miles in circumference with a wall around it that was 100 feet high with some 1500 towers each of which was 200 feet in height. It is said that four chariots could be driven abreast upon the walls.

B. Politically.

1. Israel during the time of Jeroboam II:
 - a. Had her borders extended farther than at any time after Solomon. (See 2 Kings 14:25)
 - b. Enjoyed a time of ease and prosperity. "Times were prosperous, money plentiful, and the spirit of nationalism or patriotism was running high. The kingdom of Israel had been expanded and the people were proud and confident." (H.I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*, p. 280)
 - c. Was already feeling the influence of Assyria to whom it would ultimately fall in 721 B.C.
2. Assyria.
 - a. She was Israel's enemy during this period. She would eventually destroy Israel in 721 B.C.
 - b. The Assyrians were hideously and brutally cruel to the people they conquered.
 - 1) They had a seemingly unquenchable thirst for blood and vengeance.
 - 2) Their atrocities would have been well-known in Israel.
 - c. "...from shortly before 800 until 745 B.C., the time of Tiglath-pileser's accession to the throne, Assyria was torn with internal strife and by wars with revolting provinces...not only were there revolts from within the empire but also the nation was at war with a powerful country (Urartu) near the Caspian Sea. No doubt this depressed state of Assyria contributed much to the readiness of the people to hear Jonah as he began to preach to them." (Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, p. 63)

IV. The Message

A. A summary of the book.

1. God commissioned Jonah to go and preach repentance to Nineveh. (1:1-2)
 - a. Jonah, knowing God's mercy and lovingkindness, knew if they repented God would not destroy them.

- b. Jonah wanted no part in saving them. (4:1-2)
 - 2. Jonah began to flee to Tarshish. (1:3)
 - a. God caused a severe storm at sea. (1:4)
 - b. The sailors on board the ship on which he traveled were persuaded by Jonah, against their will, to throw him overboard in order to appease God's wrath. (1:4-16)
 - 3. Jonah was swallowed by a great fish prepared by God. (1:17)
 - a. He spent three days and nights in it during which time he penitently prayed. (1:17 - 2:9)
 - b. The fish vomited him on dry land at the command of the Lord. (2:10)
 - 4. Jonah journeyed to Nineveh to preach his message: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." (3:1-4)
 - a. All the people, from the king on down, repented. (3:5-9)
 - b. God spared Nineveh. (3:10)
 - 5. Jonah was enraged at God's decision to spare Nineveh. (4:1-2)
 - a. He wanted to die. (4:3)
 - b. God taught him a lesson about love and compassion by causing a plant to grow over Jonah. (4:4-6)
 - 1) Jonah was grateful for the plant.
 - 2) God prepared a worm to damage the plant and cause it to wither. (4:7)
 - 3) Jonah, having lost the cover of the plant and feeling the heat of the sun, again wanted to die. (4:8)
 - 4) God used the plant for which Jonah had pity to tell him how he should have pity on the Ninevites. (4:9-11)
- B. The book of Jonah has been variously interpreted. Some suggested interpretations include:
- 1. Mythical. The story is a myth that grew around some incident in the history of Israel.
 - 2. Allegorical. The story is an allegory of Israel's captivity, repentance and restoration to its land.
 - 3. Historical. This interpretation literally views the accounts in the book as happening in the historical context.
 - a. Is the fish historical? If God created all fish found in the seas, could He not create one specifically for the purpose of swallowing and preserving Jonah?
 - b. "**James Bartley & the Whale.**" (Bob Dickey, *The Pointer*, Vol. 14, No. 20, November 1982)
 - "The book of Jonah tells the story of the prophet Jonah's disobedience as he attempted to escape from the preaching task that the Lord had enjoined upon him. Having taken his flight in a ship sailing to Tarshish, Jonah was cast overboard and swallowed by a whale prepared by God. Tormented

alive in the whale's belly, the prophet repented and promised to do the Lord's bidding; whereupon, he was deposited safely on dry ground.

"Modernists (those who reject the verbal inspiration of the scriptures and especially the miracles of the Bible) scoff at the story of Jonah and the whale. Many of them have said that it is scientifically impossible for a man to be swallowed whole by a whale, let alone live to escape and tell about it. Some of them propose the idea that Jonah is a symbolic, figurative book and we are not to take its meaning literally. Others say it is a product of an overactive imagination, or perhaps it is an ancient children's bedtime story like our modern-day "Three Little Pigs" or "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Many of the modernists just laugh and say, 'It's a whale of a fish story' or 'It's a fish story that's hard to swallow.' Jesus believed the story of Jonah and the whale. He likened it to His own burial in the earth and the promised resurrection from the dead (Matt. 12:38-40; 16:21).

"Those who think the story of Jonah and the whale impossible should be enlightened and made to reflect further by the account of James Bartley. His story was reported by H.P. Lee and printed in *The Literary Digest* of April 4, 1896:

'In February, 1891, an English vessel, Star of the East, was sailing in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands. The lookout sighted two large sperm whales three miles away. Two boats were launched. One whale escaped. The other was bombed and harpooned.

'The boat attached to the captured whale reduced to splinters when hit by the powerful lash of the monster's tail during its dying struggle. The men were thrown out of the boat and one of them, James Bartley, was mourned as drowned. It took the crew a day and a half with axes and spades to remove the blubber.

'At the end of that time they attached some tackle to the stomach and hoisted it to the deck. The sailors were startled to see something jumping in the stomach at irregular intervals. Upon cutting the stomach open James Bartley came rolling out, screaming like a lunatic. He remained in that mental condition for weeks. Within three weeks he recovered from the shock and resumed his duties.

'Writing of the experience later, Mr. Bartley said, 'I remembered from the moment that I jumped and felt my feet striking some soft substance. I looked up and saw a canopy of pink and white descending, and the next moment felt myself drawn downward, feet first and realized I was being swallowed by a whale. I was

drawn lower and lower; a wall of flesh hemmed me in, yet the pressure was not painful and the flesh gave way before the slightest movement. Suddenly I found myself in a sack much larger than my body, completely dark. Soon I felt a great pain in my head and my breathing became difficult. At the same time I felt a terrible heat; it seemed to consume me, and I believed I was going to be broiled alive. The thought that I was to perish in the belly of the whale tormented me beyond endurance, while the awful silence weighed me down. I tried to rise to cry out. All action was now impossible, but my brain seemed abnormally clear, and, with a full comprehension of my fate, I lost consciousness.’

“This dreadful account of a man swallowed by a whale is all the more remarkable because he lived to tell about it. But whether or not it can be demonstrated that a whale can truly swallow a man, we must remember that God ‘prepared’ Jonah’s fish for the task—and with God all things are possible. Those who believe the Bible should have no trouble with the story of Jonah or with any of the other Bible miracles. Your belief in miracles depends upon whether or not you spell your god with a capital ‘G’...”

- c. Jesus Christ confirms the historicity of the account of Jonah in Matthew 12:38-42 and Luke 11:29-32.
- C. Jonah’s message to Nineveh: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown.” (3:4)
- D. God’s message to Jonah.
 - 1. The love of God is for all mankind. (4:10-11)
 - 2. The will of God is to be done. (3:2-3)

V. The Lessons from Jonah

- A. National sin demands national repentance. (See Proverbs 14:34)
- B. The book of Jonah displays the universality of:
 - 1. God’s presence. A person can neither run nor hide from God. (Psa. 139:7-12; Amos 9:2-4)
 - 2. God’s concern for man. (Acts 10:34-35)
 - 3. God’s love for all mankind no matter how wicked. (4:10-11; cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 2 Pet. 3:9)
 - 4. God’s providence. He is able to use all incidents in the life of His servants for their good and His glory.
 - 5. A preacher’s responsibility. (3:2; cf. 2 Tim. 4:2)
- C. The conditional nature of prophecy. God’s wrath is conditioned on man’s repentance or lack of it. (3:9-10; Jer. 18:7-10; Acts 17:30-31)
- D. Opportunity begets challenge.
- E. God, in contrast to man, is more concerned with spiritual matters rather than with material things.

The Contest Between God and Baal

Text: 1 Kings 18:1-40

I. Elijah

A. Background information.

1. Name: "Jah is God," "my God is Jehovah."
2. He was a native of Tishbeh in the territory of Naphtali. (1 Kings 17:1)
3. His physical appearance was that of a hairy man dressed in a leather girdle. (2 Kings 1:8)
4. He prophesied mostly during the reign of Ahab, king of Israel. (876-854 B.C.)
5. His ruling passion was jealousy for Jehovah. (1 Kings 19:10,14)
6. He was the type of John the Baptist. (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:11-13; Mark 9:11-13)
7. He appeared with Jesus and Moses at the transfiguration. (Matt. 17:1-5)

B. A summary of Elijah's life.

1. He prophesied a drought (1 Kings 17:1). It lasted 3½ years. (1 Kings 18:1,41-46; Luke 4:25; Jas. 5:17)
2. He was fed by ravens at the brook Cherith. (1 Kings 17:2-7). The brook Cherith was east of the Jordan River.
3. He was sustained by the widow of Zarephath. (1 Kings 17:8-16)
 - a. Zarephath was on the seacoast of Phoenicia between Tyre and Sidon.
 - b. Her meal and oil did not run out.
4. He restored the life of the widow of Zarephath's son. (1 Kings 17:17-24). She thought his death was by a judgment on her sins because of the presence of the prophet.
5. He challenged and defeated the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. (1 Kings 18:1-40). There were 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah.
6. The drought he had prophesied ended in the third year. (1 Kings 18:1,41-46)
7. He fled from the wrath of Jezebel, wife of Ahab, queen of Israel. (1 Kings 19:1-14)
8. He was instructed by God to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, Jehu to be king over Israel (841-814 B.C.), and Elisha to be prophet (1 Kings 19:15-18).
9. He cast his mantle on Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21)
10. He prophesied against the house of Ahab for the death of Naboth. (1 Kings 21:17-19)
11. He prophesied the death of Ahaziah, king of Israel (853-852 B.C.), son of Ahab. (2 Kings 1:2-16)
12. He warned Jehoram, king of Judah (848-841 B.C.), of an impending plague upon his family and possessions and foretold of his death. (2 Chron. 21:12-15,18-19).
13. He ascended to heaven in a whirlwind, passing his mantle to Elisha. (2 Kings 2:1-18)

II. The Worship of Baal

- A. Baal was the supreme male deity of the Phoenician and Canaanite nations while Ashtoreth was their supreme female deity.
- B. The prevalence of Baal worship.
 1. The worship of Baal prevailed in the time of Moses among the Moabites and Midianites. (Num. 22:41). It was through them that it first spread to the Israelites. (Num. 25:3-18)
 2. It was reintroduced to Israel during the reign of Ahab (874-853 B.C.) because of the influence of his wife, Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. (1 Kings 16:31)
 - a. It became the religion of the court and the people of the ten tribes (1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:19, 22) and appears never to have been permanently abolished from among them.
 - b. Temples were erected to him, even in Judah (1 Kings 16:32) and he was worshiped with much ceremony. (1 Kings 18:19,26-28; 2 Kings 10:22)
 3. The attractiveness of it to the Jews undoubtedly grew out of its licentious character.
- C. The nature of Baal worship.
 1. "The emphasis of Baalism was on psychophysical relatedness and subjective experience. The gulf between man and God was leveled out of existence by means of participatory rites. The terrifying majesty of God, His 'otherness' was assimilated to the religious passions of the worshiper. The god of the bull image, the god of wine, the god of the fertility figurine, was the god of relevance, fulfilling personal needs with convincing immediacy. The desires that inflame the soul were fulfilled in the cultic act of worship. The transcendence of the deity was overcome in the ecstasy of feeling." (E.H. Peterson, *Theology Today*, Vol. XXIX, July 1972)
 2. The prophets accused the people of harlotry. (Judges 8:33; 1 Chron. 5:25; 2 Chron. 21:13; etc.).
 - a. Such had a literal reference to the "sacred prostitution" of the worship of Baal.
 - b. It had an application to the entire rationale of their worship.
 - 1) Harlotry: worship that sought fulfillment through self-satisfaction, worship which was shaped and formed by the personal needs, desires and passions of the worshiper.
 - 2) It is worship which says, "I will satisfy you...you want a religious 'experience?' I will give it to you...Do you desire you needs to be fulfilled? I will do it and in the most alluring fashion possible."
- D. The will of God sets itself firmly in opposition to the tastes, preoccupations and idiosyncrasies of men and is conveniently discarded by Baalistic worship.
 1. In Baalism:
 - a. Worship is stripped to the personal desires of the worshiper.
 - b. Its rule is that worship must be interesting, exciting and "relevant."

2. In the worship of God:
 - a. Nothing is ever done simply for the sake of the “religious experience” involved.
 - b. No act of worship was ever authorized simply to allow someone to “feel good” about it alone.
3. “The distinction between the worship of Baal and the worship of Yahweh (Jehovah) is a distinction between approaching the will of the covenant God which could be understood and known and obeyed, and the blind life-force in nature which could only be felt, absorbed, and imitated.” (Peterson, 141)

III. The Contest on Mt. Carmel Between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:1-40)

- A. It was occasioned by Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel.
 1. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians.
 2. She instituted the persecution of Jehovah-worship and introduced the worship of Baal. (1 Kings 18:4, 13)
- B. Elijah was raised up by God.
 1. “Coming forth suddenly from the wilds of Gilead, he announced himself to Ahab. Austere and ascetic, he brought with him the strong monotheistic spirit of the desert...He came to save his country from a mixture of Baal and Jehovah-worship.” (George L. Robinson, *Leaders of Israel*, p. 161)
 2. His message to Ahab: Jehovah is a jealous God who demands the worship of His people.
 3. He prophesied three years of drought and famine.
- C. He demanded a contest between Jehovah and Baal.
 1. The contest at Mt. Carmel was the result. (1 Kings 18:1-40)
 2. It was an apparent victory for the people shouted, “Jehovah, he is God.” (1 Kings 18:39)

IV. An Application for Today

- A. We might suppose that we are far removed from idolatrous worship but we would be mistaken.
 1. Baalism did not die with the demise of the Canaanite civilization.
 2. Baalism resurfaces every time a new “Ahab” seeks to rectify the “emotionless, irrelevant and liturgical service” of “stale congregations” with new “relevant and meaningful innovations.”
- B. There appears to be a certain subjectivism creeping in among brethren which elevates selfish “needs” and prideful “entertainment” above the response of a thankful heart to God.
- C. Our worship can become, rather than a meaningful response to the true God, a show or performance which derives its motivation from will-worship. (Col. 2:18)
 1. Worship of this sort is a thinly disguised cover for self-seeking.

2. The participants in such worship may be entertained by, excited about or ecstatic over such worship but there is considerable doubt that such can be edifying to the whole church or pleasing to God.
- D. We must examine our motivation and objective in worship. We must be sure that we are worshiping God and not self.
 - E. Elijah's challenge in 1 Kings 18:21 remains relevant today.

Christ Is Risen!

Text: Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10

I. The Importance of the Resurrection of Jesus

- A. Nothing is more crucial in establishing the divinity of Jesus than His resurrection from the dead.
 - 1. If He was raised from the dead, there can be no question of His divinity. (Rom. 1:4)
 - 2. If He was not raised from the dead, He is nothing more than a martyr to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:12-19)
- B. For the Bible to be what it claims to be, the word of God, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead must have taken place for many Scriptures prophesy of it in both the Old and New Testaments.
 - 1. Psalm 16:10 is an Old Testament prophecy which foretold the resurrection. Compare it to the teachings of the apostle Peter in Acts 2:29-32.
 - 2. New Testament Scriptures which foretell of the resurrection are the frequent references Jesus made to it during His earthly ministry.
 - a. John 2:19-22. In three days after His death His body would be raised.
 - b. Luke 9:22. He would be killed and then raised the third day.
 - c. Matthew 12:40. The sign of the prophet Jonah—as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and nights, the Son of Man was to be three days and nights in the heart of the earth.
 - d. Matthew 16:21. He would be killed and then raised the third day.
 - e. Matthew 20:18-19. He would rise again on the third day.

II. The Certainty of the Death of Jesus

- A. The death of Jesus cannot be denied.
 - 1. The soldiers who crucified Him knew He was dead. (John 19:32-33)
 - 2. Pilate confirmed His death. (Mark 15:42-45)
- B. The character of Jesus' tomb.
 - 1. Jesus was buried in a new tomb. (Luke 23:53; John 19:41)
 - 2. The tomb was cut in solid rock. (Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:46) There was no other entrance to the tomb.
 - 3. The tomb was sealed with a great stone. (Mark 16:4; Matt. 27:62-66)
 - 4. A most careful survey was made of the contents of the tomb. (Luke 24:12; John 20:6-7)
- C. Remembering Christ's words, His enemies took special precaution to keep His body in the tomb. (Matt. 27:62-66)

III. Explanations for the Empty Tomb

A. The body of Jesus could have been stolen by His disciples.

1. The guards said they did but, remember, they were asleep and had been paid for their testimony. (Matt. 28:11-15)
2. Many proofs show His disciples did not remove His body from its tomb.
 - a. They were surprised and shocked to find the tomb empty. (Luke 24:4)
 - b. They did not have sufficient courage to do such a deed.
 - 1) They did not have enough courage to be with Him when He was still alive. (Matt. 26:56)
 - 2) Consider Peter's denial in Matthew 26:69-75.
 - c. It is inconceivable that an entire Roman guard would dare sleep on a watch.
 - 1) They were trained for vigilance.
 - 2) They knew that if they slept while on duty they would pay with their lives—the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:23-28) and the soldiers of Herod. (Acts 12:18-19)
 - d. If the guard had fallen asleep, the disciples would have awakened them by trying to move the stone covering the entrance to the tomb.
 - 1) It was described as a “great stone.” (Matt. 27:60)
 - 2) It was so large that the women who came to the tomb early Sunday morning wondered who could move it. (Mark 16:3)
 - 3) Dimensions of a typical stone: 9 inches thick, 60 inches in diameter. It took at least three men to move one because it could weigh up to a ton and rested at the bottom of an incline.
 - e. The folding of Christ's garments. (John 20:4-7) If His disciples had stolen the body, would they have taken the time to neatly fold His garments?
 - f. They had no motive.
 - 1) They could not give the body a better burial than it had already been given. It had been prepared for burial with a mixture of expensive myrrh and aloes brought by Nicodemus. (John 19:39) His body had been honored by being wrapped in linen and placed in a new tomb. (Luke 23:53)
 - 2) They did not expect it to be raised. (John 20:9)
 - g. Their earnest preaching of the resurrection show they believed it with all their heart.
 - 1) Had it been a farce, they could not have had the conviction to stand before a mob just a few days later and tell them they had crucified the Christ and that God had raised Him from the dead. (Acts 2:22-32)
 - 2) They preached His resurrection with great conviction everywhere they went.

- B. The soldiers who were guarding the tomb could have removed the body.
 - 1. They had no motive. The body was already in their care and if it were missing it would cast embarrassing reflections upon their honor as soldiers.
 - 2. They had no right to break the seal on the tomb. (Matt. 27:66)
 - 3. It would have defeated their very purpose for being there. (Matt. 27:62-66)
 - 4. They did not produce a body and deny the apostles' claim.
 - 5. They would be faced with the death penalty for allowing the body to be gone.
- C. The Jews would not have dared to steal it. (Matt. 27:62-64)
- D. Jesus did not really die. He escaped from the tomb Himself.
 - 1. This is known as the "swoon theory."
 - 2. It ought to be known as the "ridiculous theory" for how could someone in such a weakened state do all that was necessary to leave the tomb, including rolling away the great stone that covered its entrance, without disturbing the guards?
 - 3. The death of Jesus was certain. (John 19:32-33; Mark 15:42-45)
- E. God raised Jesus from the dead.
 - 1. Prophecy said He would. (Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:25,27-28)
 - 2. Jesus said He would. (Matt. 20:17-19)
 - 3. Jesus proved He did. (Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:3-8)
 - 4. The apostles preached He did. Their claim could not be denied, not even by their enemies.

IV. The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

- A. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus establish the resurrection as genuine.
 - 1. Jesus appeared on at least ten occasions to His disciples. (1 Cor. 15:5-8)
 - 2. Empirical evidence of His resurrection is presented in the gospels. For example, see John 20:19-29.
 - 3. Two objections are raised to His post-resurrection appearances. In reality they suggest those appearances were not what they seemed to be.
 - a. The vision hypothesis. Christ did not really appear to His disciples. He only appeared to them in a vision.
 - b. The television theory.
 - 1) The Lord ascended in His spirit, not in body.
 - 2) He televised pictures of Himself to the minds of the apostles in such a vivid way that they were led to believe they had seen the risen Lord.
- B. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.
 - 1. Mary Magdalene. (John 20:14-18; Mark 16:9)
 - 2. Other women who were returning from the tomb of Jesus after an angel had told them of the resurrection. (Matt. 28:9)
 - 3. Simon (Cephas). (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)
 - 4. Cleophas and one other man on the way to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13; Mark 16:12)

5. The apostles, except Thomas, and those who were with them. (Luke 24:33,36-49; Mark 16:14; John 20:19-23)
6. 500 brethren at once. (1 Cor. 15:7)
7. James. (1 Cor. 15:7)
8. All the apostles, including Thomas, 8 days after the previous appearance to them. (1 Cor. 15:7; John 20:26-29)
9. Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, and two others at the Sea of Tiberias. (John 21:1-14)
10. The eleven. (Matt. 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53)
11. Paul. (1 Cor. 15:8)

Conclusion: The Sign of the Prophet Jonah (Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:29-30)

1. The “sign of the prophet Jonah” affirmed the truthfulness of the account of Jonah, dealt a telling blow to those Jews who were the antagonists of Jesus, and had to do with Jesus’ resurrection.
2. The sign explained.
 - a. The “sign of the prophet Jonah” had reference to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.
 - b. As Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and nights, so was Jesus in the heart of the earth for three days and nights. The tomb could not hold Him. (Rom. 1:4)
3. As Jonah came forth from the fish to complete his God-given task, Jesus came forth from the grave to finish His mission and to ascend to heaven to the right hand of God where He now rules with all power.



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