

Introduction

When received literally, important Bible verses, often passed over in their contexts, can radically alter how we understand a passage. Every idea here comes from a literal reading of the Bible, in context of both the whole and the specific texts themselves. Nothing is merely proof-texted.

In this book:

- ♦ Jonah 4:2 is the key verse in describing Jonah and his life as God's prophet. Through this lens, we view Jonah as a great prophet with whom Jesus choose to compare himself. Some notable events in his story are obscured if we view him only through the dark lens of his rebellion and racism.
- ♦ In Job 3:25,26, Job expresses why horrific tragedies happened to him: he was afraid. Most have not considered this answer – Job himself did not realize what he said. Job's story describes how his relationship with God, went from faith to fear and back to faith. These verses help us see his story more clearly, and help us understand why God and Satan spoke and acted as they did.
- ♦ Romans 5:13 tells us that sin is not imputed when there is no law: God did not hold people guilty for sins for about 2500 years, until the gave His law to Israel (Romans 5:14a). Until then, God charged sin to no person, even though the world was so wicked at one point that He judged it with a global flood. (Question: How does God judge when He does not impute sin? This question and response, and more, are on the Book 1 site of www.literallenses.org)
With God not imputing sin for so long, we learn that the sins we commit are not our only sin problem. Part 3 examines the two universal sin problems, each of which required its own solution. Our sin problems and God's distinct solutions to them are the same in both the Old and New Testaments, but the complete and permanent solutions are found only in the cross of Jesus Christ.
- ♦ Chapters 5 and 11 describe God's declarations in Psalm 34 and elsewhere, that His people will be delivered from or out of all trouble. Psalm 91 repeats that no evil will touch God's believing people. The fact that God is a Refuge for us is repeated in Psalm 62 and others passages. Can we read these many passages literally? Is God a secure refuge? Do their contexts agree both with the plain reading of these verses and with the Bible as a whole? Can they really be true for human life and experience? Yes! to all of these questions, because our Creator is trustworthy.

Introduction

- ♦ In Genesis 1:3, God commands light into the universe for the first time. By examining Genesis 1:1,2 with no light in the universe, we see that the Bible describes scientific realities about origins that are described nowhere else.

These brief descriptions of some lenses should cause Bible believers to think. Bible students will greatly benefit from looking through Literal Lenses.

These and several other literal lenses in this book fit cleanly into a broad, Biblical framework. Other crucial verses, not dealt with in this book, build in further structure and shape. For example, God reveals in the Literal Bible, a completely satisfying solution to the Problem of Evil; it is described in Book 2. This solution includes God's explanation of how He is Sovereign and people are responsible. Our Creator God literally described the reality He created, in the Bible.

A Bible-believing friend of mine, reading these ideas as first written, needed to make too many adjustments to his commonly-taught understanding; just a few paragraphs could make his 'head spin'. Therefore, the decision was made to ease into them. Parts 1 and 2 of this book each have six chapters. Part 1 has six shorter chapters introducing subjects, each of which are expanded in Part 2, six chapters later.

An example of the pairing of chapters is the consideration of Jonah's story in chapters 2 and 8. Chapter 2 introduces the fact that Jonah knew God well and believed him, a fact that helps us understand his inexcusable flight from God's direction to preach against Nineveh. How often have we heard that Jonah boarded a ship going the opposite way because he knew and believed God? That in itself can be a struggle to process, but Chapter 8 expands to describe Jonah's very successful ministry in its historical context. It describes two stunning incidents when Jonah got God's attention by his ability to intercede according to God's word.

Jonah: the historically successful prophet? Jonah: the effective intercessor? Yes, and knowing these largely unheard teachings help us view Jonah's bigotry and rebellion, both unjustifiable, as a part of his larger story and in the light of his deep faith in God, knowledge of God, and experience with God. This does not lessen how badly Jonah reacted – we all know that his actions were very wrong – but the new perspective helps us see it more clearly.

The chapter pairs on Job, on protection, on science and more also offer new and helpful literal perspectives. These will be blessings for those who enjoy learning more about the Bible, seeking Holy Spirit taught truth, and meditating on it. By God's grace, we answer, "No way!" to the question: "Could I tell my Creator that He spoke wrongly about some parts of the reality He created?"

Chapter 8:

Jonah: More of the Story

In his ministry as God's prophet, Jonah focused on some of God's unchangeable purposes for Israel and great blessing followed. But in the book of Jonah, he struggled against some of God's good ways for accomplishing His purposes. Again, great blessing followed, but Jonah did not like it. Knowing God like he did, Jonah should have acted better.

Jonah's most important quality was that he knew Israel's God – the Creator of the universe. Jonah acted on this knowledge to become the extremely effective prophet to whom Jesus chose to compare himself. Of course, Jesus said that he was greater than Jonah; he could have said that about any other prophet, like Daniel who appears almost perfect in the Bible.

As I see it, Jesus chose Jonah, in part, because two great, almost unbelievable events, occurred in history as a direct result of Jonah's prophecy. Most know the negatives about Jonah, and those cannot be ignored, but they too occurred because he knew God and His ways, yet sometimes hated how God expressed Himself. Possibly, Jesus wanted us to search and to learn more about Jonah, since little more than the negatives about him seem to be well-known.

This chapter examines the historical context of Jonah's story from the Bible. It zooms in to see details about him, and zooms out to show a wide view of his life. The Bible's portrait of Jonah can be organized under three headings:

- 1. Jonah: a Successful Prophet**
- 2. Jonah: a Nationalistic Prophet**
- 3. Jonah: an Interceding Prophet**

The Bible introduces Jonah in one brief historical passage. It says more than expected about the prophet generally familiar from the events following God's sending him to Nineveh. The verses below, and Jesus' testimony, establish the historical context for this prophet sent to Nineveh; they establish Jonah to be a real person. Nothing of Jonah or his story is discounted as fable or myth.

The one Old Testament passage where Jonah appears outside the book of Jonah is hidden in Second Kings. Here is that passage: II Kings 14:23-27:

In the 15th year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, the king of Israel, Jeroboam, the son of Joash, began to reign in Samaria. He reigned 41 years and

did evil in the eyes of Yahweh. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. He [Jeroboam of Joash] restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain, according to the word of Yahweh, God of Israel, which he spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet of Gathhepher. As Yahweh saw Israel's affliction being very bitter, and no longer being held back, and no longer being loosed, and not one helping Israel. And Yahweh did not speak to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. (Underlines added.)

It is important to distinguish between the **two kings named Jeroboam:**

Jeroboam, the son of **Neb**at, was the first king of Northern Israel.

Jeroboam, the son of **Joash**, reigned as king of Northern Israel much later, when Jonah prophesied.

Summarizing the above verses: the reign of **Jeroboam of Joash** was notable for the expansion, relief, and deliverance received in the nation of Northern Israel. These blessings happened even though, during his reign, the nation still followed the evil religious ways begun by its first king: **Jeroboam of Nebat**. God acted when His servant Jonah believed and prayed and prophesied according to God's word and His repeated promises for the nation of Israel. God saw their desperate needs, and He blessed Northern Israel when they apparently deserved their bitter affliction, and deserved to be blotted out.

1. Jonah was a Successful Prophet

Jonah grew up in one of the two nations of God's chosen people. The nation of Israel was divided when **Jeroboam of Nebat** led a successful workers revolt against Solomon's son, King Rehoboam, who acted oppressively. After the revolt, Jeroboam ruled 10 northern tribes of Israel, and Rehoboam continued as king over the two southern tribes: Judah and Benjamin.

This split of the nation of Israel occurred shortly after Solomon's 40-year reign of peace and prosperity. Solomon's honorable father, King David, had also reigned 40 years. At God's direction and with God's blessing, King David conquered nations and expanded Israel's borders north to the Euphrates River, and to the south and east as well. Rehoboam did not continue this 80-year legacy.

Far worse was Northern Israel's first king, **Jeroboam of Nebat**, who immediately erred by changing God's revealed and recorded ways. This king in the north acted to stop those under his rule from going to Jerusalem to worship their God, since the temple and altar for sacrifice were located there, and since the throne of King Rehoboam was there. To accomplish his desire, this Jeroboam changed

Chapter 10:

Job: Faith to Fear to Faith

Job also lived by faith in relationship with God very early in human history. As with Abel, Enoch, and Noah, the ancient book of Job features people having only a basic knowledge of God and His ways. Most notably, both Job and his friends believed that people got exactly what they deserved on the earth; good people were blessed and bad things happened to wicked people. Extensions of this were that only good things happened to good people and that only good people received good things ... likewise for the bad. They expected these 'truths' to be visible in life's experiences. We know that it is far more complex, but simple ideas such as this and the popular 'karma' are still used to explain some events.

The unrealized complexity caused conflict between Job and his friends who had come to comfort him in his very great trouble. Job knew that the tragedies which struck him did not reflect a wickedness in his life, but his friends 'knew' that Job deserved his trouble. They attempted to be gracious and gentle at first, but their entire message was that Job had fallen into wickedness and must repent in order for his circumstances to improve. Neither Job nor his friends knew of related causes from events outside their experience, like Satan, or from invisible spiritual laws and realities, like fear, that also affect visible events and complicate the simplistic separation of good actions and effects from bad actions and effects.

From Job's perspective, he did not deserve the trouble that happened to him, to his family, and to his property. Job seriously wondered about the truth of the ideas that only the good are blessed, and that evil only happens to those who have acted wickedly. His friends would not have been so certain about how and why these things happened to Job had they known that God Himself had twice testified to Satan that Job's behavior was "blameless".

The "Why?" question:

Everyone in every age has asked "Why?" We ask it about Job: "Why did tragedy come upon Job at all, much less so severely?" We usually do not attempt to answer these kinds of "Why" questions; we wonder how we can even guess at real answers, but we still ask, especially when experiencing or observing devastating events, unexpected or simply undesired. Believers ask it of their God, while many unbelievers use it as a reason to write God out of their lives.

In Job's case, we first eliminate the idea that Satan acted on his own. Satan had no authority over Job and saw no access to harm Job. Satan claimed that God had built a "hedge" around Job; since he was unable to harm anything in Job's life ... only Satan ever described protection as a God-built "hedge". Later we will consider that Satan may have attempted to assault Job, but stopped trying to harm him when perceiving that Job was protected.

In chapter 4 of this book, fear was identified to be the answer to the "Why?" of Job's trouble. The Bible's record of Job's story provides this key (Job 3:25-26) and it changes how we view the events and conversations detailed in the book of Job. This chapter explores that further.

It is often said that God gave Satan permission to assault an otherwise hedged or protected Job. Of course, God is unlimited – He can even limit His activity as He chooses – but did He allow Satan access to harm Job? Is that an accurate interpretation of God's words to Satan, "Behold, all he has is in your power."?

While serious and problematic questions are raised, they are not beyond our understanding. We can and should seek answers that initially appear to be hidden. God reveals more than we often expect, sending His Holy Spirit, in part to guide us, His children, into all truth.

Dueling Questions and Answers

Since Job appears to be a better servant of God than most or all of us, we question, "Why or how could God permit Satan to harm Job? We wonder: "If Job was not safe, can anyone be safe? If, for some reason, God authorized Satan to make a successful assault against His faithful and blameless servant, who had been securely protected, how can we count on God's protection?"

A firm response is that we humans cannot know the wise purposes of God. Watch how Job comes out of the tragedies better than before. He was an example of a servant of God being honed and refined in the crucible of suffering. Having these and other evidences, we can be certain that God, the judge of the whole earth, did right by Job. If we expect anything in this life, such as protection, we will be disappointed when God does something else.

Much of that is certainly true, but others assert that God has made clear promises, including many concerning the deliverance and protection of the believer. These too must be embraced by those who seek to know and relate to God. We do well to honor the many wise ways of God that remain hidden, but we should not doubt or explain away any promise He applies to us in relationship.

God means what He says in the Bible, and we must believe Him. If He declares Himself to be our refuge and fortress, He is. Even more, there seems to be no qualification to God's promises of safety and protection. Therefore we must ask,