

The Resurrection of Jesus in Prophecy: Did the resurrection fulfill the Prophecy of Jonah?

by Dr. David Reagan



The most significant prophecy in the Bible concerning the resurrection of Jesus is known as "the prophecy of Jonah."

It is a symbolic prophecy represented by the three days and three nights that Jonah spent in the stomach of a great fish (Jonah 1:17).

Jesus explained the prophetic symbolism of this unique event on an occasion when He rebuked the Pharisees for seeking a "sign" from Him. By a "sign," they meant a miracle that would validate Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.

The Prophecy's Meaning

Jesus took their word and played with it by telling them that the only "sign" they would be given would be "the sign of Jonah." Jesus then proceeded to explain what He was talking about: "for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:38-40)

Jesus clearly and distinctly prophesies here, using the example of Jonah, that He will spend three days and three nights in the tomb before His resurrection will occur.

This prophecy, like all Messianic prophecies, had to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus if He truly was the Messiah of God. Jesus emphasized this point Himself after His resurrection when He told His disciples, "All things which are written about Me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44)

The Prophecy vs. Tradition

But was the prophecy of Jonah really fulfilled in the burial experience of Jesus? According to the traditionally accepted chronology of events, it was not!

The traditional chronology places the crucifixion on Friday morning and the burial on late Friday afternoon. It fixes the resurrection on Sunday morning. Thus, according to the traditional view, the body of Jesus was in the tomb only one full day (Saturday) and two full nights (Friday and Saturday). Jesus said His body would be in the tomb three days and three nights.

There have been many attempts to reconcile the problem that is raised here by the divergence between the prophecy and the traditional view of its fulfillment, but all the attempts I have read have always fallen short of producing a true fulfillment of the prophecy. Jesus said all Messianic prophecy had to be fulfilled in Him, and I believe He meant every detail of every Messianic prophecy. Otherwise, it could be argued that He was not the Messiah.

The Source of the Problem

Let's consider the events in the last week of Jesus' life to see if we can find some clues that will solve the problem. Perhaps the best place to begin is with the problem itself...



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