



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

Sean Patrick's book title captured my imagination — *Alexander the Great: The Macedonian Who Conquered the World*. Truly, Alexander was a remarkable figure in world history. By his untimely death at age 32, Alexander "had led his army 22,000 miles, was undefeated in battle, and founded some 70 cities in the lands he conquered, 22 of which he named after himself" (p. 123). But, Patrick's title seems a bit misleading for in his own words (p. 125), "After he was gone . . . his generals carved up the conquered territories for themselves and went to war with each other." This sad ending caused me to consider Jesus' question in Matt. 16:26, "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" When we breathe our final breath, what will we have gained? May our eternal treasure be Him alone.



Manlun "Lalpi" Khamlianla Zou (*MBS*, 2013) grew up in a small village of Manipur, India. (*Lalpi is pictured below in a house like his boyhood home.*) In the providence of God, Lalpi attended and graduated from Appalachian Bible College. He then enrolled at VBTS as an online student while serving in Manipur. Lalpi and Esther were married in October 2010, and the Lord has since blessed them with Timothy, Abigail, and Ezra. Lalpi has the joy of ministering with his brother, Pao, in the very area where he was born and raised. Together they have started and now pastor four churches, and God is prospering their faithful ministry. In January, they had a special evangelistic emphasis at one of their churches located in a village of 50 people, five of whom came to Christ!

Lalpi says, "My heart passion is to rightly divide the Word of Truth and stand for it so that my people can behold God's powerful word, and be transformed by it!" God bless the Zou family! Our hearts are greatly encouraged by their love for Christ.





Truth for the Agora: “Simon son of Jonah” (Matt. 16:17)

In his Gospel, Matthew records a perplexing statement, in which Jesus identifies Peter as “the son of Jonah” (16:17). What does Jesus mean by this title? Many today follow one well-known commentator who uncharacteristically passes over this phrase by surmising that Jesus probably called Peter’s father by his Hebrew equivalent Johanan (*Iōanan*) and then Matthew contracted it to Jonah (*Iōna*). Such a comment faces significant challenges, and here are three examples: (a) there is no other instance of such a contraction in either the NT or in the writings of the early Church fathers; (b) it would be peculiar for Jesus to call Peter’s father Johanan (*Iōanan*) when in all other cases Jesus identified Peter’s father by the name John (*Iōannēs*; cf. Jn. 1:42; 21:15); and (c) without exception the other NT references to the name Jonah refer to the OT prophet (cf. Matt. 12:39). Therefore, it seems best to view the phrase “son of Jonah” as from the lips of Jesus, and referring to the prophet Jonah. But why would Jesus address Peter in this way? Here are a few thoughts that may help us as we reflect on Jesus’ intention.

First, the context of Matthew 16:17 reveals that Jesus asked Peter a pointed question: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then pronounced a blessing on him that included addressing Peter as a “son of Jonah” and declaring “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” By combining these two statements, Jesus is honoring Peter for being used by the Father to pronounce divine revelation, and as such, is placing him in the same prophetic heritage as an OT prophet like Jonah. This must have been a startling statement to Peter at this time in his life, but it is borne out as true in Peter’s thirty-year ministry as an apostle of Jesus.

Second, the broader context in vv. 18-19 reveals that Jesus bestowed high privileges upon Peter: “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” However, like Jonah, Peter quickly revealed his depravity by his intense disagreement with Jesus’ teaching about his suffering and resurrection (vv. 21-23). As Jonah strongly disagreed with God (Jonah 4:1-2), so Peter acted like “his father” when he objected to Jesus’ words. Jesus, therefore, called out his prophet in v. 23 and said to him, “Get behind me, Satan!” Like Jonah, Peter acted with a defiant attitude, and had to be divinely reprimanded.

Third, the larger context of Matthew 16-28 astonishingly unveils a number of Peter’s flaws (17:4; 18:21; 19:27; 20:24; 26:40, 51, 69-75; 28:10); however, God determined to use Peter just as he did with Jonah. Both men were openly defiant and at times seemed clueless to truth, yet both men were graciously pursued by God. Significantly, both men were recommissioned to ministry by God (Jonah 3; John 21), and each was used to reach lost Gentile souls.

Peter is linked to Jonah by Jesus in Matthew as both a prophet and an insubordinate servant of God. However, with both men God’s plan was not thwarted; Peter, like Jonah, became an organic example of how our sovereign God overrules mistakes and rebellion for his own glory. Amazingly, neither Peter nor Jonah were discarded by God. Therefore, be encouraged today, by how Jesus addressed Peter. The God who calls also pursues, and he uses men and women “prone to wander” to bring highest praise to his holy name.