

JONAH 1:17
Jonah's Predicament

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The story of "Jonah and the Whale" has been the object of ridicule by the unbelieving-- world for centuries. This story more than any other has caused liberals to state that the Bible is filled with myth and legend.
- B. Natural man finds it impossible to believe this story. Yet it is part of inspired scripture and must be true. Martin Luther said,

This narrative seems almost unbelievable, yea, sounds like a greater falsehood and folly than any fable of the poets. If it were not recorded in Scripture, I would regard it as ridiculous lie . . . I myself would not believe it, were it not written in Holy Scripture.

- C. This story, however, is part of scripture and is historical. Upon further examination of all the facts, this story will not seem too far fetched and will be put into the category of a sensible miracle.

II. JONAH IN THE HANDS OF GOD (1:17a): "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish."

- A. The word "prepared" does not mean to create, but to determine, to appoint or to ordain. The thought is that Jehovah ordained a great fish to swallow Jonah. NOTE: God providentially had this great fish near or under the ship to swallow Jonah when he was cast overboard, for Jonah would be swallowed before reaching the bottom, keeping him alive.
- B. All of God's creatures, even this great fish, obey the Creator and serve His designs of mercy. The fish was more obedient than Jonah.

III. JONAH SWALLOWED BY A FISH (1:17b): "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah."

- A. What Kind of Fish? The Bible says only that this was a great fish and does not identify it. In Matt. 12:40, Christ said it was a whale but the Greek simply says a "huge fish." So this may have been a whale or one of the many species of the shark family, or any other sea monster. NOTE: Many scholars think that it was probably not a whale but a large shark or sea-dog (canis carcharias, or squalus carcharias) which is very common in the Mediterranean, and has so large a throat that it can swallow a living man whole.
- B. Unbeliever's Explanations of This Event. Various approaches to this story have been taken by the scoffers. Critics, unable to credit the account as actual fact, have dreamed up explanations even -more fantastic. Some say Jonah had a wild dream in the ship while he was asleep during the storm, and that later he recorded the extravagant fairy tale. Some relate the book to the Phoenician myth of Hercules and a sea monster. Others claim that Jonah was picked up after the storm by a boat which had a fish for a figure-head and that this gave him the idea for a "good story." And some would even resort to the ridiculous claim that a dead fish was floating around and that Jonah took refuge in it during the storm.
- C. Fact for the Historicity of This Event. The greatest proof for the historicity of Jonah and the fish is the fact that Jesus Christ unequivocally spoke of Jonah as being in the great fish's belly three days and three nights (Matt. 12: 40). And

since Christ is God and cannot lie or be deceived, His opinion is infinitely more trustworthy than that of the destructive critics.

D. Can A Fish Swallow A Man? Yes, and there is historical evidence to prove it. The following quotes were taken from the book Jonah – Dead or Alive? By J. Vernon McGee, who took his quotes from the book The Bible Today by Grace W. Kellogg.

There are at least two known monsters of the deep who could easily have swallowed Jonah. They are the Balaenoptera Musculus or sulphur-bottom whale, and the Shinodon Typicus or whale shark. Neither of these monsters of the deep have any teeth. They feed in an interesting way by opening their enormous mouths, submerging their lower jaw, and rushing through the water at terrific speed. After straining out the water, they swallow whatever is left. A sulphur-bottom whale, one hundred feet long, was captured off Cape Cod in 1933. His mouth was ten or twelve feet wide—so big he could easily have swallowed a horse. These whales have four to six compartments in their stomachs, in any one of which a colony of men could find free lodging. They might even have a choice of rooms, for in the head of this whale is a wonderful air storage chamber, an enlargement of the nasal sinus, often measuring seven feet high, seven feet wide, by fourteen feet long. If he has an unwelcome guest on board who gives him a headache, the whale swims to the nearest land and gets rid of the offender as he did Jonah.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer recently quoted an article by Dr. Ransome Harvey who said that a dog was lost overboard from a ship. It was found in the head of a whale six days later, alive and barking.

Frank Bullen, F.R.G.S., who wrote, "The Cruise of the Cathalot," tells of a shark fifteen feet in length which was found in the stomach of a whale. He says that when dying the whale ejects the contents of its stomach.

The late Dr. Dixon stated that in a museum at Beirut, Syria, there was a head of a whale shark big enough to swallow the largest man that history records! He also tells of a white shark of the Mediterranean which swallowed a whole horse; another swallowed a reindeer minus only its horns. In still another Mediterranean white shark was found a whole sea cow, about the size of an ox.

The famous French scientist, M. De Parville, writes of James Bartley, who in the region of the Falkland Islands near South America, was supposed to have been drowned at sea. Two days after his disappearance, the sailors made a catch of a whale. When it was cut up, much to their surprise they found their missing friend alive but unconscious inside the whale. He revived and has been enjoying the best of health ever since his adventure.

Dr. Harry Rimmer, President of the Research Science Bureau of Los Angeles, writes of another case. "In the Literary Digest we noticed an account of an English sailor who was swallowed by a gigantic Rhinodon in the English Channel. Briefly, the account stated that in the attempt to harpoon one of these monstrous sharks, this sailor fell overboard, and before he could be picked up again, the shark turned and engulfed him. Forty-eight hours after the accident occurred, the fish was sighted and slain. When the shark was opened by the sailors, they were amazed to find the man unconscious but alive! He was rushed to the hospital where he was found to be suffering from shock alone, and a few hours later was discharged as being physically fit. The account concluded by saying that the man was on exhibit in a London Museum at a shilling admittance fee; being advertised as 'The Jonah of the Twentieth Century.'"

In 1926, Dr. Rimmer met this man, and writes that his physical appearance was odd; his body was devoid of hair and patches of yellowish-brown color covered his entire skin.

For further corroboration that a fish can swallow a man the Research Service of Encyclopedia Britannica released a positive statement:

Further, the Research Service goes on to cite two instances of men in modern times being swallowed alive and living to tell the story. One of these cases was subjected to careful scientific investigation by a British and two French scientists. A whaler disappeared after his small boat was upset by a harpooned whale; two days later he was found in the dissected whale's stomach. Except for a two-week period of shock and a permanent bleaching of his skin from the gastric juices, the man lived a normal life thereafter. (Teacher's Manual — Campus Crusade for Christ's Ten Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity.)

IV. JONAH'S THREE DAY ORDEAL (1:17c): "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." — The three days and three nights are not necessarily to be thought of as a total of 72 hours, but are to be interpreted according to Hebrew usage. According to the Jews, any portion of a day was considered a whole day; therefore, we conclude it was probably less than 72 hours.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. After examining the facts, the historical account of "Jonah and the Fish" seems more than just a possibility. The evidence is overwhelming that Jonah was swallowed by a fish and after three days was vomited up alive.
- B. However, we must be careful not to give a natural explanation to what God designed to be a supernatural event, for God was supernaturally controlling both Jonah and the fish.