

JONAH 2:1-10
Jonah — Dead or Alive?

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The real issue in Jonah 2 is whether Jonah was swallowed by the fish and lived three days or whether he died in the fish and was resurrected.
- B. This issue is very important in order to silence the attacks of the critics who think the whole story of Jonah and the Fish is a myth or legend. God does not ask the Christian to throw away his intellect, for there are reasons behind and for every miracle of the Bible.
- C. It should be noted that the entire chapter, except the first and last verses, is Jonah's prayer while he was in the belly of the fish.

II. VIEW #1: JONAH ALIVE

- A. The standard interpretation of Jonah 2 is that Jonah was alive for three days and three nights in the fish's belly. He made the prayer of deliverance on the second or third day. Much of the prayer is recollection upon his miraculous preservation from drowning. The miracle is that Jonah was kept alive for three days and nights within the fish and was vomited up on dry land. This view is held by most commentators.
- B. The arguments for this interpretation are:
 1. The sequence of events in the narrative: (1) God prepared a fish - 1:17; (2) Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish - 1:17; (3) Jonah prayed - 2:1; and (4) Jehovah spoke to the fish and Jonah was delivered - 2:10. NOTE: The prayer seems to be prayed on the second or third day. OBJECTION: Jonah 1:17 is just a general statement and the context nowhere tells when the prayer was offered.
 2. The word "hell" (sheol, grave) does not speak of actual death but it is figurative language meaning it were as though Jonah were dead (2:2). Having been cast into the sea, Jonah was on the verge of death through drowning (2:3); therefore the fear and anguish of death gripped him. The deep waters were as a grave, and he was counted among the dead. NOTE: The word "belly" could be translated "womb" and probably does not refer to the fish's belly at all but to the "womb of the grave."
 3. Jonah felt as though he had been "cast out of the sight" of God (2:4) in that he had been put out of God's presence and forsaken by Him, but he still had a confidence that God would keep him alive to see the Holy Temple again. He was a drowning man (2:5). As he sunk, he went to the "bottom of the mountain" (hidden rocks protruding from the mountains that extend along the coastline in many parts of the Mediterranean), and to "the earth with her bars" (long sub-marine reefs) (2:6). Just when it looked as though Jonah would die through drowning God spared his life by sending the fish to swallow him, so he was saved from the "corruption" of death (2:6).
 4. Having been in the fish's stomach for three days, as he contemplates God's miraculous preservation, Jonah cried out to God for deliverance (2:7). He realized that "salvation is of the Lord." If he was to be delivered, then God would have to supernaturally intervene.
 5. The language of Christ in Matt. 12:39-40 does not require death and resurrection, the emphasis being upon the

time element of three days and three nights.

III. VIEW #2: JONAH DEAD

- A. Another possible interpretation is that a short while after Jonah was swallowed by the fish he died. The prayer of deliverance was made when he first was swallowed by the fish, and most of the rest of Jonah 2 is a description of his death within the fish. The miracle is that God resurrected Jonah from the dead and vomited him out on dry land. The arguments for this interpretation are:
1. Jonah prayed when he was first swallowed by the fish. It seems only natural that Jonah would pray this prayer when he found himself in difficult circumstances. He could have easily prayed this prayer within a matter of minutes after being swallowed and before death overtook him.
 2. He cried out of the "belly of hell" (sheol), a term that has as its primary meaning "grave" (Gen. 42:34; Ps. 88:3). Thus he considered the fish his grave. The grave is not for the living but for the dead.
 3. Verse 3 describes a drowning man, not a living one. He was; drowning within the stomach of the fish.
 4. The saying "cast out of *thy* sight" refers to death, and his conviction that he would see the Holy Temple again shows he believed that God would resurrect him from the dead.
 5. The phrases "the waters compassed me about even to the soul" and "the weeds were wrapped around my head" is the picture of a man who died through drowning within the belly of the fish.
 6. The word "corruption" refers to death (2:6) and perfectly describes the state of death (Ps. 16:10).
 7. Christ used Jonah as a sign of death and resurrection (Matt. 12:39-40). The resurrection of Jonah was a sign Christ gave to His day of the resurrection of Himself from the dead.
- C. The miracle in the story of Jonah and the Fish does not pertain to a man living three days in a fish, for there is evidence that this sort of phenomenon has happened in history and there is nothing really miraculous *about* it (cf. Lesson #3). The miracle is that God raised Jonah from the dead. Dr. J. Vernon McGee says,

The mighty miracle before us in this book is one of resurrection. This is the sign given by our Lord to the wicked and adulterous generation of His day. He prepared a gainsaying world for the mightiest miracle of all. They asked for a sign, and they were to receive the greatest. The reason that He chided them for looking for a sign to give substance to belief was expressed by Him in the parable concerning the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar, ". . . if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).