

Study of the Book of Jonah

It's not about the fish!

Introduction

For many people the story of Jonah is nothing more than fiction, fables, legend, myth comparable to the Greek stories of fantastic gods like the *Iliad and the Odyssey*, or silly make-believe stories as *Aesop's Fables*, or *Grimm's Fairytales*. No other book of the Bible is more maligned, mocked and ridiculed by the world as Jonah. Even so called theologians of our modern era wrestle with making this book palatable to secular humanists. Our main purpose here is not to prove that this really happened, (though we will attempt to do so) but to glean from Jonah the truths that will strengthen our faith and resolve.

Doubters & Skeptics

"Now that I'm older and wiser, I know that a whale's stomach isn't filled with oxygen; it's filled with things like saltwater, dead fish, methane, and digestive enzymes. A man can no more survive in the belly of a fish for three days than he can hold his breath for three days!" – There will always be Doubting Thomas's who will not believe unless they see for themselves, but to question the Jonah story is to question all the miracles of the Bible. None are logical or probable.

Stories of Great Fish Survivors

* See document – "Stories of Whale Survivors"

Archeological Evidences of Jonah

* See document – "Archeological Evidence"

Diagnostic Questions:

Who, what, where, when, how, why?

Outline

The four chapters are four stage scenes.

1. "Run, Jonah, run!"
2. "Out of the depths I cried."
3. "Land ho!" Gilligan's Island
4. "A Pouting Prophet"

Why Study Jonah?

- Romans 10:17 – Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God
- 1 Corinthians 10:5-11 – these are written as examples for us
- John 20:29-31 – Many other miracles...but these are written that you might believe
- Luke 16:28 – Rich man & Lazarus – though one rise from the dead they will not believe.

Every Bible Miracle is a Miracle!

The Bible is filled with miracles of God's intervention in space and time. Consider all the mighty miracles of the Bible. Which are do you think are hardest to believe? Why? Do we need to prove miracles as being rational, scientific, and possible?

- Study the Old Testament Miracles – creation, Noah's ark, sun stand still, fiery furnace
- Study the New Testament Miracles – virgin birth, walk on water, water to wine

Archeological Evidence from Nineveh

Berosus, a Babylonian historian, writing in the fourth century B.C., recorded the early traditions concerning the origin of the worship of this fish-man.

According to the earliest tradition, the very beginning of civilization in Chaldea and Babylonia was under the direction of a person, part man and part fish, who came up out of the sea.

During Jonah's time, the people of Nineveh believed in a divinity who sent messages to them by a person who rose out of the sea, as part fish and part man, and they would undoubtedly have been very receptive to Jonah's ministry if he had been vomited out of a fish.

Miracles

This is not *Ripley's Believe it or Not*, *Mythbusters*, or the *Syfy Channel*. Miracles are not natural phenomenon explainable through science but God stepping into time and nature to suspend the laws of physics and probabilities for His purposes. The Bible is filled with miracles!

Could God have...? -- Which to you are the hardest to believe?

- Created earth in 6 days
- Made a snake talk
- Send Flood and rainbow Noah's Ark
- Give Abraham's son at 99
- Save Isaac on the Altar
- Destroy Sodom and Gomorrah
- Turn Lot's wife into pillar of salt
- Make a Burning Bush
- Send Plagues of Egypt
- Cross the Red Sea on dry ground
- Provide Manna 40 years
- Do 40 years of Miracles in wilderness
- Make a donkey talk
- Make Walls of Jericho fall down
- Make Sun stands still
- Give Strength of Samson
- Elijah Widow's Son raised
- Elijah Pot of meal and oil multiply
- Elijah River Jordan crossed
- Elijah fire from heaven
- Elijah fed by ravens
- Elijah translated to heaven
- Elisha's many miracles
- Elisha Widow's oil multiplied
- Elisha Shunammite son raised
- Elisha 20 loaves feed 200
- Elisha Naaman's leprosy healed
- Elisha Ax-head floats
- Elisha's bones revive dead
- Sun goes back 10 degrees
- Daniel in lion's den
- Three boys in fiery furnace

Jonah's story is just another miracle. That's the point. It is a miracle that science cannot explain away as possible, probable or repeatable. Miracles don't need to be explained away—otherwise they would not be miraculous.

Stories of Fish Swallowing Man

Dr Harry Rimmer, D.D., Sc.D., tells of personally meeting a sailor who fell overboard from a trawler in the **English Channel** and was swallowed by a gigantic *Rhincodon whale shark*. The entire trawler fleet set out to hunt the shark down and, 48 hours after the accident, the shark was sighted and slain with a one-pound deck gun. The carcass was too heavy for the ship's winches to handle, so the crew towed it to shore, intending to give their friend a Christian burial.

When the shark was opened, the man was found unconscious but alive. He was rushed to hospital, where he was found to be suffering from shock alone, and was later discharged. He was on exhibit in a London museum at a shilling admission, and was advertised as 'The Jonah of the Twentieth Century'.

James Bartley – Star of the East

"A sailor swallowed by a whale," proclaimed the tract that fell out of *Winona Echoes*, (1891) an old volume on my shelf. The tract recounted the following remarkable story:

*The whaling ship **Star of the East** was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands, searching for whales, which were very scarce. One morning the lookout sighted a whale about three miles away on the starboard quarter. Two boats were manned. In a short time one of the boats was near enough to enable the harpooner to send a spear into the whale, which proved to be an exceedingly large one The whale ... beat about with its tail in the maddest fashion. The boats attempted to get beyond the reach of the animal, which was apparently in its death agonies, and one of them succeeded, but the other was less fortunate. The whale struck it with his nose and upset it. The men were thrown into the water, and before the crew of the other boat could pick them up, one man drowned and James Bartley had disappeared. When the whale became quiet from exhaustion the waters were searched for Bartley, but [he] could not be found; and, under the impression that he had been struck by the whale's tail and sunk to the bottom, the survivors rowed back to the ship. The whale was dead, and in a few hours the great body was lying by the ship's side, and the men were busy with axes and spades cutting through the flesh to secure the fat. They worked all day and part of the night. They resumed operations the next forenoon, and were soon down to the stomach The workmen were startled while laboring to clear it ... to discover something doubled up in it that gave spasmodic signs of life. The vast pouch was ... cut open, and inside was found the missing sailor, doubled up and unconscious. He was laid out on the deck and treated to a bath of sea water, which soon revived him*

During the brief sojourn in the whale's belly, Bartley's skin, where it was exposed to the action of the gastric juices, underwent a striking change. His face and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness, and the skin was wrinkled giving the man the appearance of having been parboiled

The whaling captains say that they never remember a parallel case to this before. They say that it frequently happens that men are swallowed by whales who become infuriated by pain of the harpoon and attack the boats, but they have never known a man to go through the ordeal that Bartley did and come out alive.

There are many other stories of men and animals surviving being swallowed by a whale or whale shark circulating in cyberspace. It is difficult to discern what is true and what is “fake news.” We can be sure of one thing: God does not lie. The Word of God is not some cleverly devised fable. His Word is true and altogether trustworthy.

Evidences of Jonah from Nineveh

There is a great deal of historical and archaeological evidence for the ministry of Jonah in Nineveh. Prominent among the divinities of ancient Assyria was **Dagan, a creature part man and part fish**. This was sometimes represented as an upright figure, with the head of a fish above the head of a man, the open mouth of the fish forming a miter as the man's sacred head-dress, and the feet of a man extending below the tail of the fish. In other cases, the body of a man was at right angles to the conjoined body of a fish. Images of this fish-god were found guarding the entrance to the palace and temple in the ruins of Nineveh, and they appear on ancient Babylonian seals, in a variety of forms.

Berosus, a Babylonian historian, writing in the fourth century B.C., recorded the early traditions concerning the origin of the worship of this fish-man. According to the earliest tradition, the very beginning of civilization in Chaldea and Babylonia was under the direction of a person, **part man and part fish, who came up out of the sea**. During Jonah's time, the people of Nineveh believed in a divinity who sent messages to them by a person who rose out of the sea, as part fish and part man, and they would undoubtedly have been very receptive to Jonah's ministry if he had been vomited out of a fish. H. Clay Trumbull wrote of this as follows:

What better heralding, as a divinely sent messenger to Nineveh, could Jonah have had, than to be thrown up out of the mouth of a great fish, in the presence of witnesses, say, on the coast of Phoenicia, where the fish-god was a favorite object of worship?

. . . The recorded sudden and profound alarm of the people of an entire city at his warning was most natural, as a result of the coincidence of this miracle with their religious beliefs and expectations.⁴

Berosis gives the name of the Assyrian fish-god as "Oannes," while he mentions the name "Odacon" as that of one of the avatars of Oannes. Since the name Dagan appears frequently in the Assyrian records from earlier dates, and no trace has been found in them of the name "Oannes," it is possible that this name is a reference to Jonah, as the supposed manifestation of the fish-god himself. **The name Oannes for Jonah appears in the Septuagint** and in the New Testament with the addition of I before it (Ioannes). However, according to Dr. Herman V. Hilprecht, the eminent Assyriologist, in the Assyrian inscriptions the J of foreign words becomes I, or disappears altogether. Hence Joannes, as the **Greek representation of Jonah would appear in Assyrian either as Ioannes or as Oannes. Therefore, in his opinion, Oannes would be a regular Greco-Babylonian writing for Jonah.⁵**

The preservation of the name "Yunas" or "Jonah" at the ruins of Nineveh also confirms the historicity of the Jonah story. As soon as modern discoverers unearthed the mound that had been known for centuries by the name of "Neby Yunas," they found beneath it the ruined palaces of the kings of Nineveh.⁶