

Running to God Jonah 1:17 - 2:10 or: Jonah has a 'whale of a time'

Introduction

The big fish or whale brings the picture of Moby Dick but such creatures are not to be found in the Med, where we left Jonah last week. The cold Arctic Ocean and the warm Med are two totally different environments.

But there is one contender for this role: the Sperm Whale which has been found to grow up to 63 feet in length. It feeds on fish, squid, octopus and cuttlefish. Sometimes it scoops up its food from the bottom of the sea like a marine JCB and with it can come some quite large rocks. Between its throat and its belly is a large pouch where such excavations are initially placed and sorted. Then the food goes through the narrow gullet to be fully digested - and the rubbish spewed out. Another name for this creature is The Cachalot. A man could get swallowed, and could enter his pouch - tout could not go any further. In addition as this whale is mammal in needs to breathe and it's through this pouch that it gets its air intake. It is possible in theory - has it ever happened?

1758 Man swallowed by cachalot but poor records

1891 Feb. The 'Star of the East' a whaling ship working off the Falkland Islands lost seaman James Hartley when a bull cachalot was hit. It was subsequently caught and killed. Bartley was found alive but unconscious in the pouch. Emotionally disturbed for a time he recovered from his ordeal & none the worse for wear except the exposed parts of his body had been bleached by the gastric juices

1915 Discovered that if a man could get to the air supply tract of a cachalot (ie the pouch) he could be saved from drowning.

1927 A boat overturned near the Falkland Islands & a sailor got swallowed. Three days later this whale was caught by a whaling ship, when cut open he was found alive inside the

pouch. He was bleached for life by the gastric juices and experienced poor health the rest of his days - but he was alive. 1973 Dec 2, an Arab swallowed by a cachalot in the Gulf of Akaba was interviewed having escaped by cutting his way out with a knife. He described the pouch as 14 feet long, 8 feet,, wide and 12 feet high.

SO: The story of Jonah is physically plausible. It is not so much a miracle that it could happen BUT that God made it happen at just the right moment. Left to chance it is statistically impossible - God prepared the great fish.

JONAH DIED

I suggest to you that Jonah was not saved by the great sea creature. He was dead. Look at the text carefully, and put it into context.

1. Generally, Jews hated the sea. Sailors couldn't swim and it is almost certain that Jonah, from inland Gath hepler could not.
2. As he bobs up and down in the waves (3c) he loses his strength and the waters close over him (5). He begins to sink and drown.
3. He is stuck at the bottom of the sea. He is there long enough for the seaweed to get entangled in his hair - to tie him to the ocean depths (5)
4. He is right down at the bottom among the rocks - the 'roots of the mountain' (5c)
5. He recalls those final moments (4) I'm going to die, I'm never going to see the Temple again
6. It is from Sheol he prays (the grave v2) – the place of the dead, the realm of the departed (2b) It is the only time that the prayer of a dead person is recorded as being answered in the bible. As Ps139 says , even Sheol is not beyond God. In answer to the prayer of this dead man God sends along this cachalot to pick up the body of Jonah. The creature swallows up Jonah -

almost certainly from the sea bed like a marine JCB, and at some time during the three days God re-unites the body & soul of Jonah

Tabitha, Euticus, others in OT & NT

Jonah's Prayer

Jonah had chosen to be thrown overboard - he'd handed God his resignation as a prophet. He thought he had ended the game of life - but God refused to accept resignation and out manoeuvred Jonah. Oh how like GOD!!

Without Jonah knowing, God had a return ticket even if it wasn't on a Cunard !

1. Jonah turns to God in the worst time of his life (7)- and his death.
2. He accepts Gods justice (v3) He does not blame the sailors or the sea or his bad luck - but accepts it all as what he deserves.
- 3." At last" says God - v9 - Repentance. Jonah had broken a vow to be a preacher where God wanted him, if given a chance he will do it (reluctantly) I'll go where you want and speak to who you want.
4. And so Jonah "wakes up" (inside the whale, cold, lonely, afraid. In a dark submerged dungeon, echoing with strange, frightening sounds. Imagine if whale burped! And even if he had a box of matches would he have been any happier to know where he was? Even if he had managed to prize open the bars of the whale's teeth, would he not have drowned before reaching the surface. In this cold sea water tomb would he not retch till he had nothing more to bring up. No firm ground on which to stand, washed over with the cachalot's intake of food, water, rocks , debris etc. the chilling blast of the air it takes in from time to time. Reality was bad enough - but what was his imagination doing for three days?

5. And with repentance came praise (9a) His circumstances had not changed - well not for the better certainly. But for the believer our worship should not be dependant on our circumstances - so like Paul in the Philippian jail, Jonah begins to praise God. He recognises that his 'salvation' or 'deliverance' comes from The Lord (9) and Jonah uses God's personal name here – Jehovah

God's response

God , the patient was prepared to have Jonah back. He is patient with us too. He could have called another preacher, but ne didn't. He could have rejected the run away, the betrayer, the, one who had let him down - but God is not reasonable. Think back to prayers of dedication you made as young Christians. Prayers you would never pray today because we nave settled for middle age Christianity. To us too, God says, I want you to come back to me. The next miracle is where and when the whale disgorges the contents of his pouch. Not in the middle of the sea, but on the beach I Almost back to square one for Jonah.

Did God let Jonah go home to re-cooperate before he gets his marching orders again (3:1) or was it on the beach?

Conclusion

Jonah bore the marks of death on his body for the rest of his life - his bleached body, the effects of the whales gastric juices. When Jesus came from his tomb after three days he also had the marks of death, the marks on his hands and in his side - he will have them for eternity ! No wonder Jesus used Jonah to illustrate his forthcoming death and resurrection.

Both deaths were because of the justice of God

Both were judicial murders or executions

Both were raised from the dead

on both occasions the events led to the good news of Gods

love & mercy being taken to Gentiles - like us.

The whole experience of Jonah speaks of the resurrection of Jesus.

In 1815 Wellington took on the might of Napoleon.

When the signal ship returned all that was seen before the mist finally came down was "Wellington defeated" and the sad message went to London. When the fog lifted the whole message was read :

"Wellington defeated the French"

On Good Friday the message seems to be "Jesus defeated" but on Easter Sunday it's "Jesus defeated the grave" Hence Matthew 12:40

Jonah was a man going to great lengths to yet away from God only to find that God would go to even greater lengths to yet him back !

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