



Jonah 1:15-17

Something Greater than Jonah is Here

What comes to your mind when you think of the Hebrew prophet Jonah?

Fish, a big fish, a whale, a run away prophet are some of the typical answers I get.

What came to Jesus' mind when He thought of Jonah?

The prophet Jonah tells us that he is the son of Amittai (1:1). His name means Dove and he belonged to the Ten Tribes of Israel, and grew up near Nazareth at Gath Hopher. He was a prophet who was given a second chance. His religion was controlled by his emotions rather than his will.

Jonah was confronted with the reality that the God of the Hebrews loves the Gentiles. He would rather forgive the repentant sinner than punish.

HISTORY OR FABLE

Either this is true or the greatest fish story ever told! Did God have the creative power to prepare a great fish to swallow up Jonah? Could God speak to a fish and cause it to vomit out Jonah upon the dry land? Jesus accepted the account of Jonah as historical (Matt. 12:39-41; 16:4; Lk. 11:29-30). How big is your God? The sovereign God of creation can handle the miraculous in the book of Jonah. God can take care of the great monster fish; let's make sure our hearts are right with Him.

Until recently Bible scholars never interpreted the book of Jonah as a parable or fiction. Jonah is a simple historical narrative. It is not an involved allegory as some modern writers suggest. No allegory in the Old Testament has as its hero a historical person. If the book is an allegory it does grave injustice to the real Hebrew prophet Jonah.

If you are willing to accept the fact that Yahweh is the great God of creation and salvation you will not have any problems with Jonah. For Yahweh to "appoint a great fish to swallow Jonah" and Jonah to be in the stomach of the great fish is no greater event than Jesus, the Son of the living God being raised from the dead. I suspect that is the real problem people have with Jonah and other miracles in the Bible. If we can get rid of miracles we can get rid of all moral responsibility to God, or so we think.

JONAH'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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Jonah was a Hebrew prophet who lived about 800 B.C. or a little after during the reign of Jeroboam II. His message is to "present with compelling persuasiveness the responsibility of the saved to save others." It presents the missionary imperative of Israel. Yahweh is a God of grace who also loves non-Jewish people.

The LORD commissioned Jonah to go to the great pagan gentile city of Nineveh the enemy of Israel and preach a message of warning of coming judgment.

"But Jonah . . ." arrests our attention. He is the fleeing prophet running from God and from his vocational demands. Yahweh is anxious to share evidences of His grace, forgiveness, mercy and compassion for a lost world even though it maybe the enemy of His chosen people (4:11). "And should I not have compassion on Nineveh . . . ?"

Jonah resisted breaking out of his nationalistic religion. He was regional in his thinking. He was foolish enough to think that he could flee from the presence of Yahweh. You are not going to flee from Yahweh by going to Tarshish or any other pagan city. Jonah "paid the fare" went down into the ship to go "from the presence of the LORD" (v. 3).

Somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea "the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up" (v. 4). Did God get Jonah's attention? No, but He sure got the pagan supposititious sailor's attention (v. 5).

Jonah was sound asleep and when the sailors cast lots the "lot fell on Jonah" (vv. 5-9). He confessed up and when the sailors heard which God Jonah was trying to flee from they became "extremely frightened" (vv. 10-14). After prayer and sacrifice they took matters in their own hands.

"So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights" (vv. 15-17).

In the Hebrew way of reckoning time Jonah was in there one whole day and the parts of the other two days, the day before and the day after, and, therefore three days. The Jewish people, even in Jesus' day, did not reckon time as we do. They counted the day on which any period began as the first day, and then they did the same thing on the day the period ended. Thus, Jonah was in the belly of the giant fish three days.

Jonah prayed (2:1-9), "Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry ground" (v. 11). God called Jonah a second time, "arise, go to Nineveh So Jonah arose and went . . . and they turned from their wicked way . . ." (vv. 2, 3, 10).

SOMETHING GREATER THAN JONAH IS HERE

Like the Jewish rabbis of His day, Jesus accepted the book of Jonah as historical (Matt. 12:38-41). Jesus called Jonah's experience in the "great fish" a "sign" of His own coming resurrection from the dead.

Jesus had been performing miracles as He ministered to people's needs. A group of Pharisees and scribes were pressuring Him for a sign from heaven, a miraculous sign. They wanted to have their sensations tantalized. It appears that they pressed him on various occasions for these attesting miracles and He steadfastly refused. He told them in their begging for signs that God had already given them a sign and it was before their eyes. They refused to believe the sign.

These people were not sincere and Jesus knew it. They were asking Him to accredit Himself by doing some striking miracle. They demanded proof that He was the Messiah and they wanted it now. They wanted something unmistakably from God right now. They wanted something produced on demand for instant gratification. Where is the evidence that God is at work in Your life? They wanted to impose their own rules on God.

Jesus responded saying, *An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and threenights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here "* (Matthew 12:39-41).

Jonah and his strange experience is a type of Christ and His resurrection. When Jesus said, a "greater than Jonah is here" He was not referring to a legendary character, but a real man and a real experience. Otherwise the comparison would not have made sense because Christ rose from the dead. It is clear that Jesus accepted this Old Testament account as the record of a historical fact. Just as the very big fish swallowed up Jonah, so the earth will swallow up Jesus; and as Jonah was delivered from his imprisonment, so will Jesus who is Jonah's great Antitype rise from the grave.

"Something great than Jonah is here." What is that something?

Jesus takes us back to Jonah 1:17. "Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster." It is no fairy tale He has in mind. It is the miracle God gave to Jonah. Jesus reminded the Pharisees and Sadducees again of the sign of Jonah in Matt. 16:4. There is a greater event than Jonah here. Then He openly told His disciples the meaning of the sign after Peter's great confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God (v. 16). After telling His disciples to tell no one that He was the messiah He opened His heart to them.

Don't miss these words in v. 21. "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."

What was the reaction of the disciples? It was astonishment, rejection and horror. Peter took Him aside as if to hold Him back from suicide and began to rebuke Him saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You" (v. 22).

Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (v. 22).

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This is the "something greater than Jonah." It is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God! That Jonah could live through his experience is nothing short of a miracle. It was a sign given by God. The pagans of Nineveh believed the message of Jonah and repented.

When Peter preached his greatest sermon he reminded his audience of something greater than Jonah. He said,

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know —this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power . . . This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33).

Dr. Luke gives an account of Jesus' conversation with the crowds of people who were looking for a miraculous sign from heaven (11:29-32). "As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here " (Luke 11:29-32, NASB95).

I am always intrigued by the words of Jesus. He does not say someone greater, but something greater. " Jesus does not compare Himself with Jonah but something. Jonah experienced a kind of death, burial and resurrection. However, Jesus experienced true death, true burial and true resurrection. Jesus' experience of the death, burial and resurrection was greater. The experience of Jonah foreshadowed the real experience of Jesus.

One of the amazing things about Jonah is that it was in the very city of Joppa where Jonah went to find the ship that centuries later the apostle Peter received from God the revelation that Gentiles were included in His chosen people on the same basis as Jewish people (Acts 10). Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Both Jewish people, non-Jewish and pagans can have a right standing with God by simple faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Is our response to Jesus any different? We can respond with arrogance that we know more in our modern age of understanding than Jesus knew, or with hostility like the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, or we can simply bow in humble repentance and submission like the Ninevehites.

How important is the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The apostle Paul responded, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

The all-sufficient work Jesus Christ includes God's free gift of eternal life. Have you received His free gift of eternal life by grace through faith in Christ alone? Here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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