

# **THE PROBLEM OF JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH**

## **Jonah 1:17**

And Jehovah prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Most of the criticisms against the book of Jonah are based on an anti-supernatural bias. The miracles in Jonah are no more difficult to perform, or to believe in, than the miracles in the Gospels or Acts. However, critics focus on Jonah and the great fish because it is unique and they can be more effective in charging and convincing others that this is a ridiculous situation. Because of the love and respect of most people for Christ, the critics dare not ridicule the miracles of Christ, but generally, they can get away with ridiculing Jonah. There is no more reason to reject the miracle of the great fish, than there is to reject the miracle of Peter getting coins from a fish's mouth to pay taxes (Matthew 17:27). The difference is in the psychological response the critics receive.

Is supernaturalism so incredible? Certainly, it should not be (Acts 26:8). If there is a God at all, then supernaturalism is possible. If Christ is the son of God, then supernaturalism is possible. If there was a creation by God, then supernaturalism is possible, for God certainly could enter into his creation, and intervene at any time he chose. If Christ was raised from the dead, then supernaturalism is possible. The rejection of supernaturalism is the rejection of Christ, the Bible, and all religion, morals, and ethics.

Specific Observations On The Great Fish. First, critics allege a contradiction in the Bible between Jonah 1:17 and Matthew 12:40. Because the New Testament is translated whale instead of fish, critics contend that a whale is a mammal and not a fish. This charge only indicates the ignorance of the critics who make it. (1) The original Hebrew word and the original Greek word, both mean a creature of the sea. Neither the Greek word nor the Hebrew word has a specific type of fish inherent in its meaning. The English translations that use wale are erroneous by being far more specific than they should be.

(2) Classifying a whale as a mammal is merely a human classification and very late in date. The present biological classification system began about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and has gradually developed to the present sophisticated system. Even among biologists, there are many conflicts as to classification and no one claims infallibility for their system. Such a classification system was totally unknown in the Old Testament and the New Testament world. For general purposes, most people still consider an animal that lives in the sea to be in the category of fish. It is indeed ridiculous for critics to demand that the Bible conform to some recent

classification system devised by men.

Considerable evidence is in existence to indicate that it is possible for some varieties of whales and sharks to swallow a man. While it is still disputed whether a clear case exists of a man surviving such a swallowing, it is agreed that such swallowings have taken place. Victor B. Scheffer, in his book, the Year Of The Whale, published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1969, discusses a number of reported instances of humans being swallowed by sperm whales on pages 82 through 87. Other studies can be found.

Whether there have been any modern parallels to Jonah, or not, the fact is that the scripture says God prepared a great fish. The best way to deal with this biblical account is simply to regard it as a miracle and not attempt to explain it by some naturalistic process. The gourd and the worm would also appear to be miraculous. We have no reason to apologize for miracles for our universe and life itself is a miracle, and apart from God, it cannot be explained. Rather than expending our time and effort in finding naturalistic explanations, we should simply spend more effort in demonstrating the existence and power of God and increasing our faith in him and his word.