



I Apologize for the Big Fish—A Miracle Monster? • Jonah 1:17

TO: NEBRASKA STATE SENATORS

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Cryptozoology is the search for legendary animals called cryptids. The Loch Ness Monster is perhaps the most famous cryptid of our modern times. Affectionately called Nessie, she is reputed to inhabit Loch Ness in the Scottish Highlands. The Irish monk Saint Columba first reported seeing the monster in 565 AD. Since 1933 interest rose in the creature's supposed existence but the evidence of such is minimal and much disputed.

Today we conclude our apologetics study of a real sea creature. Affectionately called "Jonah's Whale," it is the most famous animal in the Bible and perhaps one of the most famous Bible (true) stories of all time. This passage has been read and known and loved by untold millions--young and old alike. This real creature swallowed the Galilean Jonah, the historical prophet from Gath Hepher in northern Israel in 776 BC.

I. SEVEN SWALLOWING SEA MONSTERS

Jonah 1:17 *And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.*¹

By way of review let's just touch on a few details from our previous two apologetics studies about the big fish. We limited our thoughts to seven sizable sea creatures--all of which make our minor prophet Jonah look like a miniature man. We looked at three fish (cold-blooded gill-breathers) and four great whales (warm-blooded lung-breathers).

- 1) **THE WHALE SHARK**--The world's largest fish has a 6' wide toothless mouth. It is 67' long and propels itself with tail flukes that are 15' tall.
- 2) **THE JEWFISH GROUPER**--Renamed the "Goliath Grouper" in 2001, this hermaphroditic fish could have changed sexes while Jonah was inside.²
- 3) **THE GREAT WHITE SHARK**--Abundant in the Great Sea and able to swallow an entire horse without chewing, this fish has retractable teeth.
- 4) **THE KILLER WHALE**--The black & white "devil whale's" 6' dorsal fin is taller than Jonah & boasts of no recorded history of ever killing a man.
- 5) **THE SPERM WHALE**--This deep sea diver's head is filled with oil, wax &

air. It can hold its breath in a nasal passage 7' x 7' x 14' for 75 minutes.

- 6) **THE HUMPBACK WHALE** is actually humpless, but its 20" of blubber and 105°F body heat "...in the belly of hell (Jon. 2²)..." could have saved Jonah from drowning in the 37°F Mediterranean (or Great) Sea.

THE HUMPBACK WHALE HAS GROOVES IN ITS EXPANDABLE THROAT. WHILE FEEDING, IT CAN SWALLOW A MOUTHFUL OF OCEAN THAT COULD ENCLOSE A LINCOLN CITY BUS.

- 7) **THE BLUE WHALE**--World history's largest creature, whale and mammal, the great blue is as big as a 727 jet, has a heart the size of a Volkswagen³ and could hold a bull elephant on its 4.4 ton tongue.

We'll now conclude our apologetics study on the great fish by considering a third and final category of swallowing sea creature.

II. A MEDITERRANEAN MIRACLE MONSTER

Matthew 12:40 *for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS 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.*

There are pros and cons to the ideas of (smaller, cold-blooded) fish and (larger, warm-blooded) "great whales." Also, many believe the "great fish" (the NASU translation of Jonah 1:17) was literally a "sea monster" (the NASU translation of Matthew 12:40 above). Perhaps God miraculously created this sea monster for the unique task of swallowing Jonah whole.

In this line of thinking, I really like this translation: sea monster. Jesus spoke primarily Aramaic while He walked the earth and preached the Word of God. But the inspired words of Scripture, in their "original autographs" are written in a language we call New Testament Koine⁴ Greek.

The New Testament Greek word for whale (pronounced kay-toss) comes from the root word (pronounced kas-muh) from which we get "chasm." This great creature was so large and had such an immense space inside itself that its very name means "like a chasm." Monstrous. Sea monster--that's a

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good translation. So the third category of swallowing sea creature could have been God's own hybrid and unique creation of a Mediterranean Miracle Monster. Like the monster in Scotland's Loch Ness, this could have been a unique and mysterious monster.

Many rabbis pressed the word "appointed" in Jonah 1:17 towards a meaning of "predestined." They believe God created this monster and appointed it for its task in the primordial prehistoric oceans of Genesis 1:21.

Genesis 1:21 *God created the great sea monsters... swarming in the water... God saw that it was good.*

While the word "appointed" in Jonah 1:17 does not necessarily mean to appoint beforehand, it can be used in that way. Just as Jeremiah, Jesus and John the Baptist were all predestined even in their mother's wombs to become great prophets of God, this monster's DNA may have been knit together by God's miracle-working hand in the deep, dark oceans of a newly created earth thousands of years before Jonah sank into the Mediterranean. This brings us to a closing question.

III. WHAT ABOUT MIRACLES?

Studying diligently the 1,328 inspired and eternal words in the book of Jonah cannot be done without facing the facts of the miraculous. The miraculous is seen among the book's 48 verses at least once in each of its 4 chapters. The Bible affirms that all of creation is God's. What we call nature, or natural law, is nothing less than the handiwork of God Himself. The entire universe leapt into being at the sheer will and mere word of an amazing and powerful Creator. This explains why the everyday person on the street refers to many things as being miracles.

I have heard each of the following called a miracle. The birth of a baby, the beauty of a sunset, the immensity of the galaxies, the details of DNA, the complexity of the human eye and the boundless brain power the human (three pound) brain. These are wonders of God's naturally created world and truly wonderful displays of His creative power and eternal strength. However, these wonderful things are natural wonders, not *super*-natural wonders. A miracle, defined, is the *super*-natural working of God.

MIRACLES ARE SUPERNATURAL MANIFESTATIONS OF DIVINE POWER IN THE EXTERNAL WORLD--IN THEMSELVES SPECIAL REVELATIONS OF THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF GOD⁵

Miracles do not contradict the laws God has established in His natural creation, but they supersede those laws. God brought all things into being. John 1:3 says, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." The God who has displayed His power IN nature, as we observe it, is surely able to display power BEYOND nature. He does so repeatedly in the Bible; and when He does, it is what the Bible calls a miracle.

In weeks to come we'll talk more about the miracle-power of God. God does miracles and is able to exert miracle-power over the things He has created for His own revelatory purposes. At certain times, and for His own reasons, God displays power that is above nature and truly super-natural.

IN THE BEATING HEART OF OUR ARGUMENT IS AN AUDACIOUS, YET NONETHELESS VALID, THESIS, WHICH ASKS BUT ONE QUESTION: DOES THE GOD OF THE BIBLE HAVE THE POWER TO DO MIRACLES?

BEING DOERS OF THE WORD: Consider your own faith. Do you believe in God's miracle-power? If so, how might He display it in your life as an individual, or in your job as a state senator?

May you join the Psalmist who said:

Psalm 145:5-6 *On the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And I will tell of Your greatness."*

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

² See last week's notes for a discussion on the fish's gender switching from male to female to male again as clearly seen in the original Hebrew text.

³ "Had Jonah been injected intravenously, he could have swum the arterial vessels of this whale, boosted along by the slow, Godlike pulse." "*Still Blue*," Ken Brower, National Geographic Magazine March 2009, page 146.

⁴ *Koine* (κοινή) means "common" and refers to the everyday, casually non-technical Greek as spoken by the average person on the street.

⁵ From The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright 1988.