

Explore the Bible: October 2

No Escape • Jonah 1:15-2:10

By Don Hicks



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If those who are recounting it have no Biblical roots or faith, they will probably dismiss it as an ancient fable. They would tell you it is a completely imaginary story. Many scholars with Christian backgrounds will not dismiss it, but do not accept it as an accurate historical account.

Let's see if we can find other Scriptures that will guide us in our search for truth when we look at Jonah's story. First, let's look to see if we can determine if there really was a historical man named Jonah.

2 Kings 14:24-25 identifies a prophet named Jonah who was the son of Amittai. The book of Jonah begins, "The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai" (Jonah 1:1 NIV). This is proof that a man named Jonah, a Hebrew prophet, did live about 800 BC.

I find even more convincing proof of Jonah and his mission in Jesus' teachings. "But he (Jesus) answered and said unto them,

An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas (Jonah): for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matthew 12:39-41 KJV).

Much of the skepticism about the historical accuracy of the Biblical account of Jonah revolves around the fish in the story. Many skeptics zero in on the King James New Testament account using the word whale. I still picture a whale when I remember this story from early childhood.

The scientific identification of the large fish is probably a distraction provided by Satan to cause us to miss the wonderful news that God's love provides in this story.

Not to chase this rabbit (or fish) too far, to try to understand ways we might be able to point skeptics to the truths about God's love being taught in this Biblical story. Some have said and written through the years that there are no fish large enough to swallow Jonah. I went my trusty iPhone and Googled "whales."

The Blue Whale is the largest animal in the world, growing up to 400,000 pounds – the equivalent of about 33 elephants – and 98 feet long. Whales and other large fish living in the seas and oceans are certainly large enough to swallow a man.

The God that I worship, if He chooses to, could prepare a guppy to swallow Jonah. Any discussion about God's power and ability related to choosing the fish misses the main point.

The Christian Standard Bible says "The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah" (Jonah 1:17a). The Message paraphrase explains the truth this way: "Then GOD assigned a huge fish to

swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the fish's belly three days and nights" (Jonah 1:17).

Let's look at one more version of this key phrase, the much loved and trusted King James Version: "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17).

The second chapter begins, "Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish" (Jonah 2:1 CSB). This was the biggest surprise Jonah got in the whole episode. He was very impressed that God could hear and then answer his prayer offered inside a big fish.

He learned God could hear our prayer from anywhere and answer it. He exclaimed that God could hear our prayers from "Sheol," the realm of the dead. He went on say God could hear and answer our prayers even in the depths, the heart of seas with the currents over coming him.

In ecstasy the prophet went on to say, "Salvation belongs to the LORD. Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land" (Jonah 1:9c-10 CSB).

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