

Jonah: A Fish Story? Does It Matter?

Joe Slater

Few Bible accounts meet with greater skepticism than Jonah and the whale. Even people who say they believe the Bible have difficulty accepting certain parts of it. Some claim the book of Jonah is just a myth, or perhaps an allegory or parable teaching a moral lesson rather than an actual historical record.

What about this? Was there really a man named Jonah? Did sailors actually throw him overboard during a raging storm? Was he truly swallowed whole by a gigantic sea creature in whose belly he lived for three days before being vomited out? In an age of rapidly advancing scientific knowledge, can reasonable, rational people believe such a thing? And does it really matter whether we believe a short little book nestled back toward the end of the Old Testament?

Scripture presents the account of Jonah as historical fact. It contains none of the marks of allegory, legend, parable, or myth. The very first verse identifies Jonah as *“the son of Amittai.”* Similarly, the prophet Joel is *“the son of Pethuel”* (1:1), and Hosea is *“the son of Beeri”* (1:1). Only the most radical skeptics deny that Joel and Hosea were historical people. Jonah is also referred to as historical in 2 Kings 14:25 where king Jeroboam II *“restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hopher.”*

More on the historical Jonah next week!

The Bible And The Chinese Alphabet

Michael O’Brien grew up in a strong atheistic household. He was converted and then attended Bear Valley Bible Institute. He told us how he began reaching people in China through his scientific knowledge.

Before he went to China, he and I read a book which gave the background to the Chinese characters (alphabet). They are in picture form. Many of the Chinese characters come from the biblical accounts recorded in Genesis, chapters 1-11.

For example: (1) the character for family is a boat with eight people (Noah’s ark); (2) the character for “create” is a man coming from dust; (3) the word for murderer is a man with an X mark on his head (Cain).

Remember Genesis chapter 11 is the account of the tower of Babel and the people scattered because God gave the workers on the tower different languages. The people who became the Chinese formed their alphabet from the events their forefathers and they had lived through.

--Wayne Burger (Conifer, CO)

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Who Is Acting?

“People have an idea that the preacher is an actor on a stage, and they are the critics, blaming or praising him. What they don’t know is that they are the actors on the stage; he (the preacher) is merely the prompter standing in the wings, reminding them of their lost lines.”

— Søren Kierkegaard

LIFE EXPECTANCY

The life expectancy of an average American dropped by a full year during the first six months of 2020. Since the number of COVID deaths continued to increase throughout the remainder of the year, we can expect that an even greater decrease in life expectancy might be seen when the next life expectancy figures are released.

However, with the increasing availability of COVID vaccines and the recent drop in numbers of COVID cases, we can anticipate that perhaps by this time next year, the life expectancy figures will be back to near 2019 levels.

This illustrates the fallacy of trusting in statistics without considering why they yield the results they do. As the name suggests, life expectancy means how long the experts expect an average person to live. But they have no way of predicting the future with accuracy. In 2019, we didn’t expect to lose a half million American lives because of a disease we knew nothing about. Even in the best of circumstances, actuarial tables (what the life insurance companies call life expectancy rates) are an imperfect way to predict how long a specific individual will live.

All we can know with 100% certainty about death is that we’re going to die (unless Jesus returns while we’re still living). Hebrews 9:27 ESV says, *“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...”* We’re going to die and we’re going to face judgment. Instead of trusting that we’ll have 10, 20, or 30 more years to live, it makes more sense to live every day prepared to go through the veil of death and stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

--John Gaines (via Facebook)