

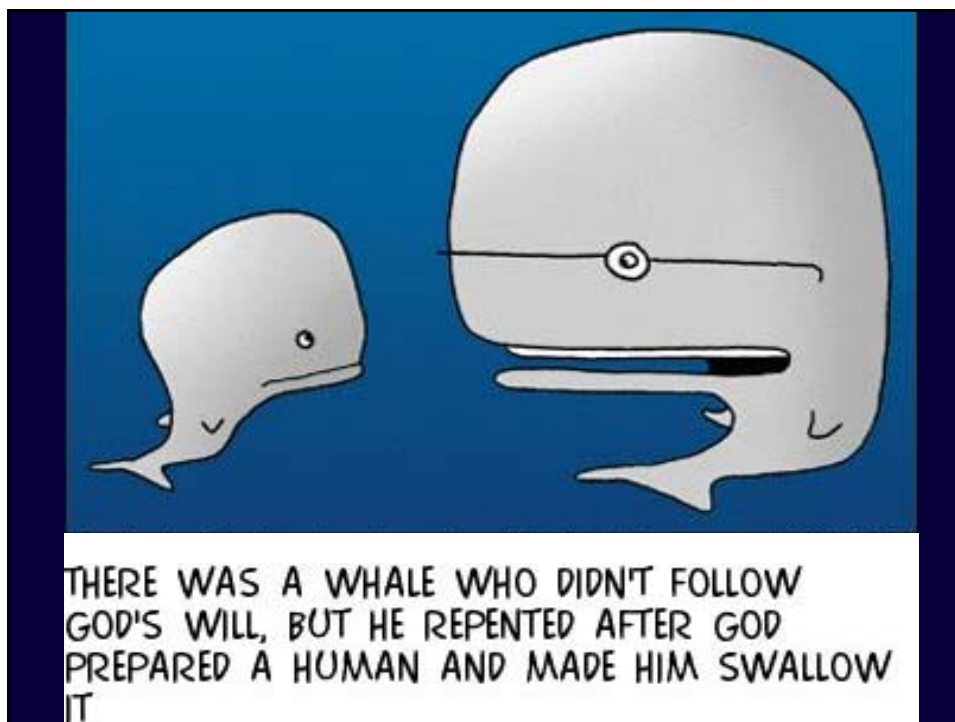


THE BOOK OF JONAH

The most denigrated book in the Bible

“The Achilles Heel of the Bible”

- The LXX translators questioned its reasonableness.
- Many scholars and clergy like to allegorise the book.
- Many view it as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver’s Travels*.
- Some theories of modern critics are even more farfetched than they think the book of Jonah is:
 - *Jonah fell asleep during the storm and had a dream.*
 - *Jonah is copied from the Phoenician myth of Hercules and the sea monster.*
 - *Jonah was rescued by a boat with a fish figurehead.*
 - *Jonah took refuge from the storm in a floating dead fish (a really, really big one).*
 - *Jonah was rescued by an intergalactic submarine operated by aliens who practice mind-control.*



Historicity

The bible does not question the historicity of Jonah (Jonas in Greek):

- Seven New Testament verses quote Jesus speaking of him as a real person: for example:
 - *For as Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. (Luke 11:30)*
 - *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet, Jonah; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, 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 Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:39-41)*

Historicity

- History wrote of Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash:
“He restored the border of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spoke by the hand of his servant, Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.” (2 Kings 14:25)
- Ninevah was one of the oldest and greatest cities in antiquity, settled as early as 6000 BC (Genesis 10:11).
- Ninevah was the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire from 883 to 612 BC. It’s heyday was between 800 and 750 BC, the probable time of Jonah’s ministry.
- Ninevah fell in 612 BC, and was in ruins by 606 BC.
- Its extensive ruins occupy the east bank of the Tigris River across from modern-day Mosul, Iraq.

Architect’s view of ancient Ninevah in Jonah’s era



One of 15 original gateways into Ninevah



The restored Adad Gate
(Destroyed by ISIS in April 2016)



The Mashqi Gate (Gate of God)

(Destroyed by ISIS in April 2016)



Some added “Nine-bites”

- In 722 BC the Assyrians battered down the walls of Samaria and took the people of Israel captive.
- Several events occurred prior to Jonah’s arrival that were considered signs of divine anger:
 - Ninevah suffered two plagues, in 765 and 759 BC
 - A total eclipse of the sun occurred on 15 June 763 BC
- Ninevah had an outer wall and an inner wall: the inner wall was 50 feet wide and 100 feet high; three chariots abreast could race on top. It had 1200 towers, each 200 ft high. 60 miles (100 km) in circumference, the population was supported by internally grown crops.
- Ninevah was known for brutal torture and atrocities. See book of Nahum for their crimes.
- Pagan Ninevah was also known for idolatry.

And something more

- The Book of Jonah is read in the synagogue on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, the **holiest day in the Jewish calendar**, the sacred Day of Atonement.
- Why this book of all books? It isn't even about Israel.



And something more

- The Book of Jonah is read in the synagogue on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, the **holiest day in the Jewish calendar**, the sacred Day of Atonement.
- Why this book of all books? It isn't even about Israel.
 1. The themes are sin and divine judgment, repentance and divine forgiveness, all singularly relevant to Yom Kippur.
 2. Its noble ideas constitute the fundamentals of Judaism:
 - a. Its universalistic outlook;
 - b. its definition of sin as predominantly moral sin;
 - c. its teaching of human responsibility and accountability;
 - d. its apprehension that true repentance is determined by deeds and established by transformation of character (Jonah 3:10), not by the recitation of formulas, however fervent;
 - e. its emphasis on the infinite preciousness of all living things in the sight of God (Jonah 4:10–11); and, finally,
 - f. its understanding of God as “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness” (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah, the Prophet

- Jonah the son of Ammitai was a real person.
- He was a Jewish prophet from Gath Hopher in Zebulun. Gad Hopher today is a small set of ruins five kilometres north of Nazareth and 1 km from Cana. His tomb was known to Jerome of Rome and medieval geographers, and is still pointed out.
- He ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC).
- His prophecy that Israel would regain lost territory from her enemies was fulfilled in his lifetime.
- Jonah was contemporary with Hosea and Amos, both of whom showed God's concern for other nations.
- Like Nahum (Ninevah) and Obadiah (Edom), Jonah prophesied to gentile nations.

Jonah's lament

*We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned;
There isn't any place for you,
We can't have heaven crammed.*

Courtesy of Jonathan Swift

2 Timothy 3:16-16

¹⁵ And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Outline

GOD'S PATIENCE WITH JONAH (1:1-17)

1. Jonah's disobedience—1:1-3
2. Jonah's indifference—1:4-10
3. Jonah's impenitence—1:11-17

GOD'S MERCY TOWARD JONAH (2:1-10)

1. He hears his prayer—2:1-2
2. He disciplines him—2:3
3. He honours his faith—2:4-7
4. He accepts his confession—2:8-9
5. He restores his ministry—2:10

GOD'S POWER THROUGH JONAH (3:1-10)

1. The gracious Lord—3:1-2
2. The obedient servant—3:3-4
3. The repentant people—3:5-9
4. The postponed judgment—3:10

GOD'S MINISTRY TO JONAH (4:1-11)

1. God hears him—4:1-4
2. God comforts him—4:5-8
3. God teaches him—4:9-11

Jonah 1 (KJV)

Man running *from* God

1. Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
2. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.
3. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.
4. But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

Jonah 1 (KJV)

5. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.
6. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.
7. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know *for whose cause this evil is upon us*. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.
8. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, *for whose cause this evil is upon us*; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

Jonah 1 (KJV)

9. And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.
10. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.
11. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.
12. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.
13. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

Jonah 1 (KJV)

14. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.
15. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.
16. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.
17. Now the LORD had prepared a great fish (דָּג גָּדוֹל) to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly (מִעֵדָה) of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2 (KJV)

Man running *to* God

1. Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,
2. And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.
3. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.
4. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.
5. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

Jonah 2 (KJV)

6. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.
7. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.
8. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.
9. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.
10. And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Jonah 3 (KJV)

Man running *with* God

1. And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,
2. Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.
3. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.
4. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.
5. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

Jonah 3 (KJV)

6. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
7. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:
8. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.
9. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?
10. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

The end.

The end.

Well, it is as far as
Ninevah is concerned.

**They repented.
God relented.
Case closed.**

**They repented.
God relented.
Case closed.**

But the book really isn't about them, is it.

Jonah 4 (KJV)

Man running *ahead of* God

1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.
2. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.
3. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.
4. Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

Jonah 4 (KJV)

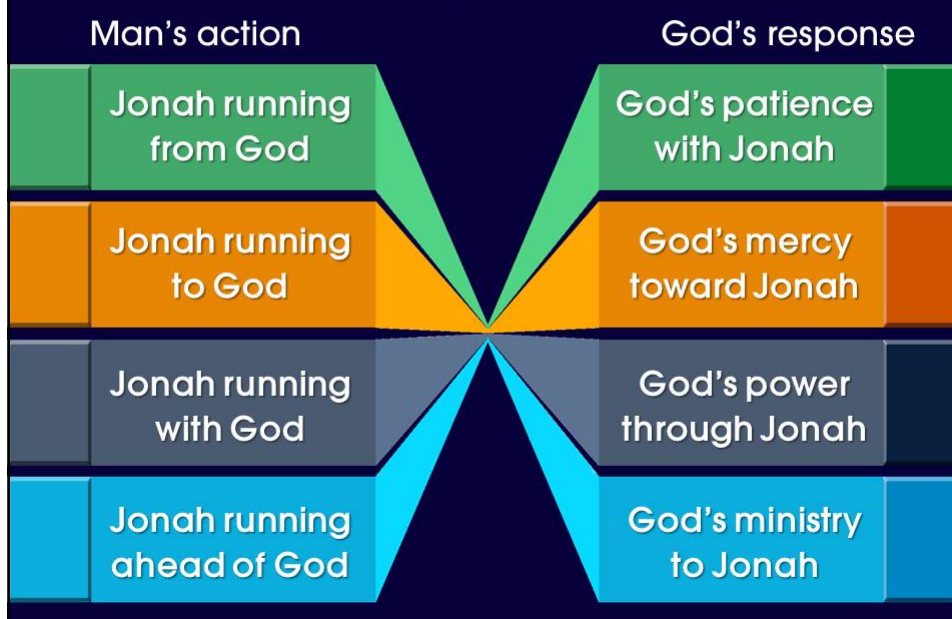
5. So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.
6. And the LORD God prepared a gourd (קִיקְיוֹן, *qiyqayown*), and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.
7. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

קִיקְיוֹן, *qiyqayown*, doesn't mean "gourd." It refers to the Palma Christi (castor, *Ricinus communis*), a tall, quick growing plant, a slight injury of which will cause the plant to die. In the Septuagint, the Hebrew word קִיקְיוֹן was transliterated into (*kolokynthi* (colocynth, *Citrullus colocynthis*)). Translated into Latin, this became the similar-sounding *cucurbita* (gourd), specifically the *Lagenaria siceraria* (bottle or calabash gourd), a fast-growing climber.

Jonah 4 (KJV)

8. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.
9. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.
10. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:
11. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

An action summary of the book of Jonah



Jonah's errors

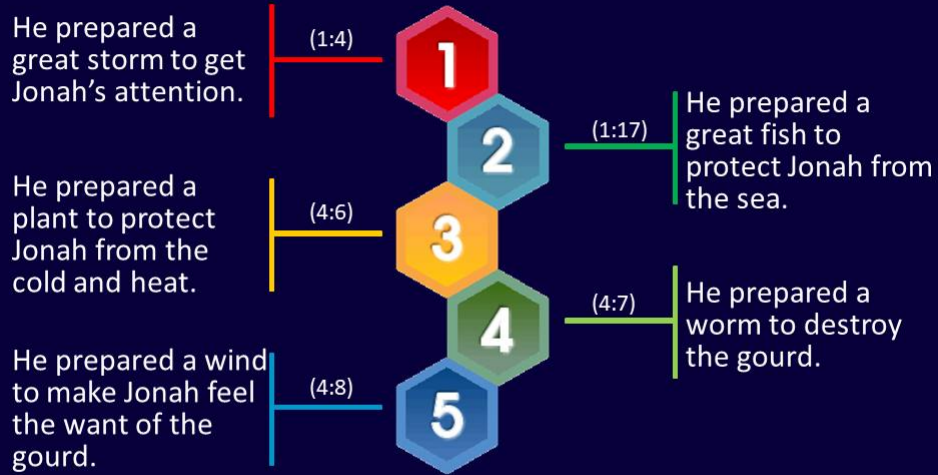
- 1
Jonah Quit!
- 2
Jonah separated himself from others.
- 3
Jonah became a spectator.
- 4
Jonah's happiness was just as tenuous as his anger. Both were all about *self*.

At various times, Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah felt like packing it in, too, but God wouldn't let them either.

God showed His mercy through *preparation*.

- 1
He prepared a great storm to get Jonah's attention. (1:4)
- 2
He prepared a great fish to protect Jonah from the sea. (1:17)
- 3
He prepared a plant to protect Jonah from the cold and heat. (4:6)
- 4
He prepared a worm to destroy the gourd. (4:7)
- 5
He prepared a wind to make Jonah feel the want of the gourd. (4:8)

God showed His mercy through *preparation*.



But the real preparation happened in Jonah – as a person and as a prophet.



Lessons from Jonah

- My relationship with God is not about me!
- He is God is a Saving God, the God of the second chance
- God is compassionate and gracious
- Repentance must precede forgiveness
- God is righteous. Israel, like Jonah, refused to obey God so Israel, like Jonah, was disciplined.
- God is concerned for all nations
- Don't be too quick to write the Bible off



**KEEP
CALM
AND
FOCUS ON
UNIMPORTANT
STUFF**

**SOMETIMES MIRACLES
AREN'T IMPORTANT STUFF,
ALTHOUGH THEY
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What miracles are in the book of Jonah?

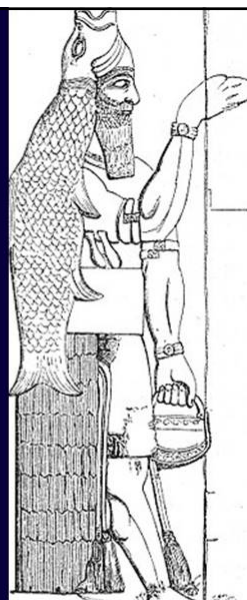
Miracles in the book of Jonah

1. 'The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest' (1:4),
2. '... and the sea ceased from her raging' (1: 11),
3. 'The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah' (1:17),
4. Jonah lived (or died and was resurrected) in the fish,
5. 'The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land' (2:10),
6. Repentance of the entire population of Ninevah (3:),
7. 'The Lord God prepared a gourd [*vine*, NIV], and made it to come up over Jonah' (4:6),
8. 'God prepared a worm...and it smote the gourd [*chewed the vine*, NIV] that it withered' (4:7),
9. 'God prepared a vehement east wind...' (4:8).

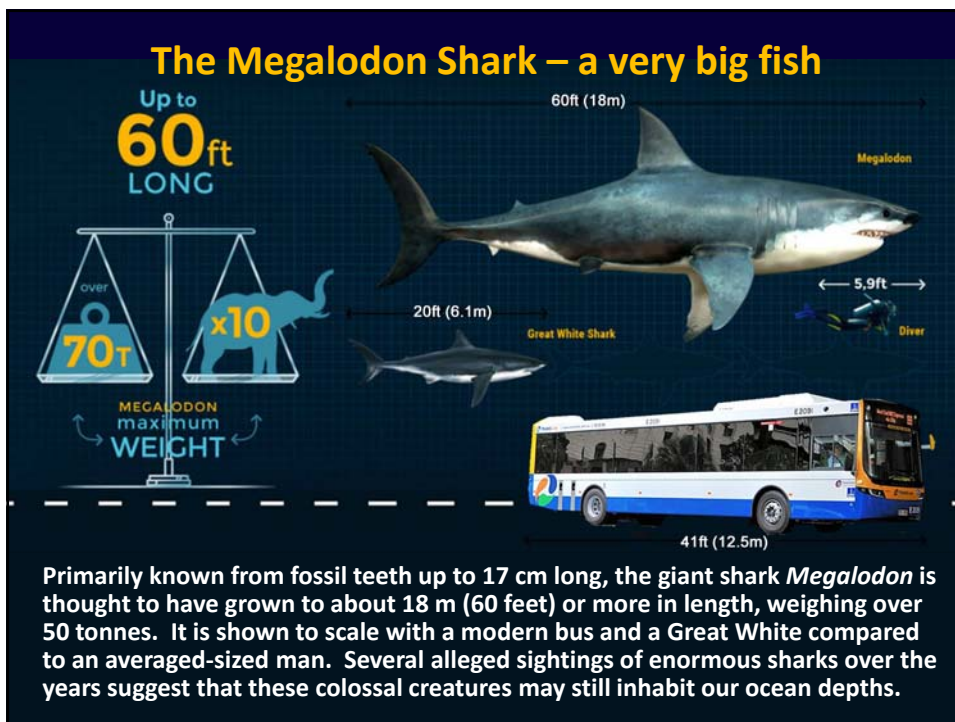
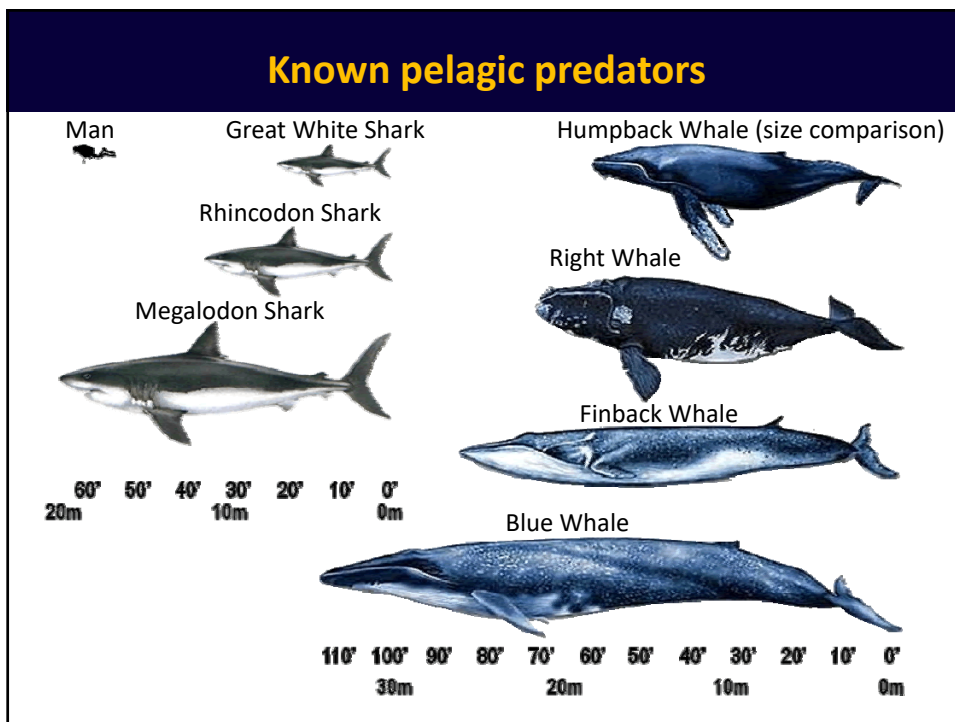
The "great fish"

'The Lord had prepared a **great fish** to swallow up Jonah.' (1:17)

- The biblical Hebrew is "דָּג גְּדוֹל" (*dag gadowl*), or "great fish."
- Whales aren't fish, that was just the biggest "fish" that medieval bible translators could think of.
- The Ninevites worshipped Dagon the fish-god (sketch at right). No wonder they "believed Jonah"!
(3:5)

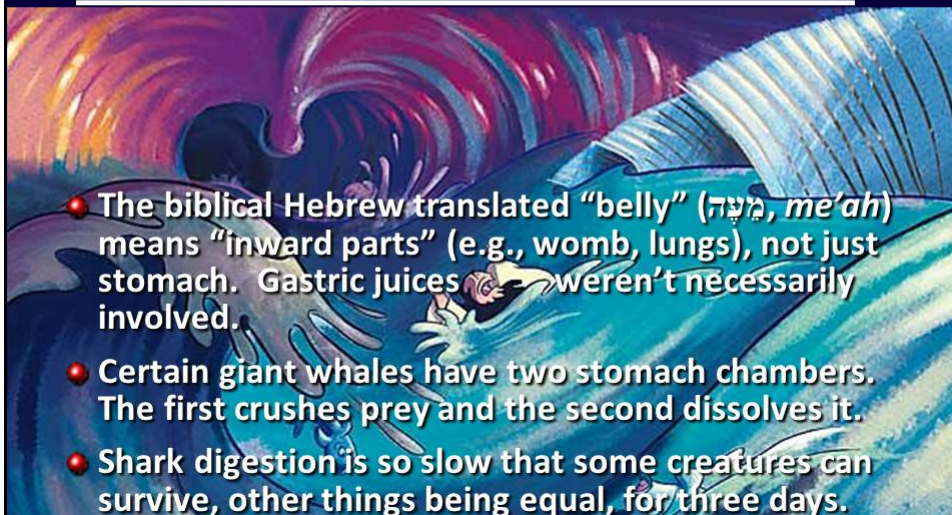


Bas-relief of "Dagon, the fish-god" from Nimrud found in 1845/7.



The belly of the beast

"Jonah was in the **belly** of the fish three days and three nights." (1:17)



- The biblical Hebrew translated "belly" (מֵעָה, *me'ah*) means "inward parts" (e.g., womb, lungs), not just stomach. Gastric juices weren't necessarily involved.
- Certain giant whales have two stomach chambers. The first crushes prey and the second dissolves it.
- Shark digestion is so slow that some creatures can survive, other things being equal, for three days.

The "gourd"

'The Lord God prepared a **gourd**, and made it to come up over Jonah.' (4:6)



Hebrew קיקיון
Palma Christi

(castor, *Ricinus communis*)
Quickly grows 8-10 feet high.
For the record, this plant
contains the highly potent
poison ricin in its seeds.



Greek *kolokynti*
Colocynth

(*Citrullus colocynthis*)
Painting from AD 512
Codex Vindobonensis.
This is the wild cucumber
(פִּקְעָה) of 2 Kings 4:39.

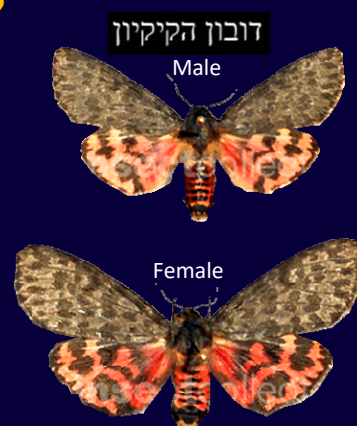


Latin *cucurbita*
Calabash Gourd

(*Lagenaria siceraria*)
4th century AD mosaic at
Aquileia, Italy.
There is no biblical
Hebrew equivalent.

The “worm”

- The worm is probably the larva of *Olepa schleini*, a moth of the family Erebidae, found only in the coastal regions of Israel.
- Its larvae feed exclusively on castor oil plant leaves, which is curious since castor oil plant leaves produce the natural insecticide ricin.



- The usual feeding causes massive damage and withering.
- *Olepa schleini* was only discovered in 2005.

Tarshish

‘But Jonah rose up to flee unto **Tarshish** from the presence of the LORD...’ (1:3)

- Tarshish was a distant port from which silver, iron, tin, lead, ivory, monkeys and peacocks were brought to Israel (1 Kgs 10:22; Jer 10:9; Ezek 27:12)
- Tarshish had ships capable of long voyages (Isa 60:9).
- “Beyond the Pillars of Hercules” (Herodotus 4:152).
- No one knows where Tarshish was beyond speculation.
- “Ships of Tarshish” was an idiom for all ocean-going vessels (2 Chr 20:36; Isa 23:1-14; 1 Kgs 10:22; 22:49).
- Tarshish was a source of tin; “Britannia metal” was an alloy of 93% Sn, 5% Sb and 2% Cu. Cornwall exported tin to Europe during the Roman period (and from 1500 BC).

“Three days and three nights”

“Jonah was in the belly of the fish **three days and three nights.**” (1:17)

- Jesus referred to this reality as a prophecy of His own endurance (Matthew 12:39-40).

³⁹But he 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: ⁴⁰For 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.

“Hell” is not a Hebrew word

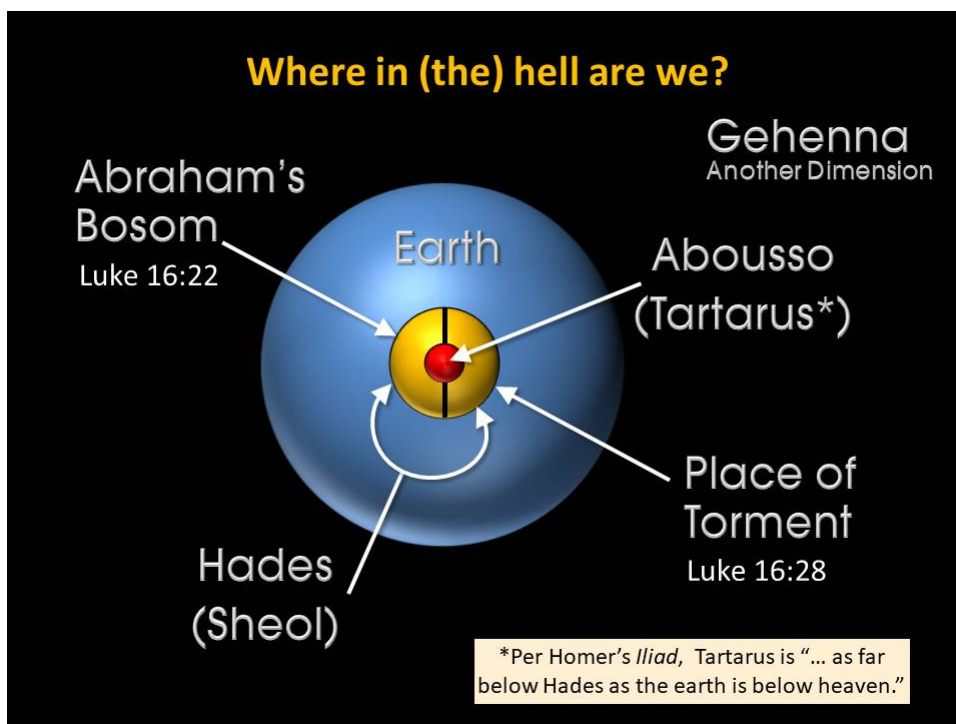
“... out of the belly of **hell** cried I, and thou heardest my voice.” (2:2)

- Biblical words translated “hell” come from one of five source words:
 - Verse 2:2 uses the Hebrew שְׁאוֹל (*shē'owl*), Sheol, the location of departed souls; the abode of the dead (both good and bad); the pit. (Used 65x)
 - The Greek equivalent is ᾗδης (*hadēs*), the nether world; the realm of the dead; the place (or state) of departed souls; the grave, death, hell. (11x)
 - Γέεννα (*geenna, gehenna*) is a figurative name for the place (or state) of eternal punishment. This was originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals were cast out and burned. (Used 11 times by Jesus and once in James 3:6)
 - Τάρταρος (*tartaroō, tartarus*) is the abode of the wicked dead where they suffer punishment for their evil deeds. (2 Peter 2:4)
 - ἄβυσσος (*abyssos*) is a bottomless pit, the abode of demons. (Luke 8:31; Romans 10:7)

Trying to make sense of hell

Hades/Sheol	The Abyss	Gehenna
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary • In the earth (geocentric) • The abode of the unsaved dead prior to the great white throne judgement (Rev. 20:11-15) • The righteous and wicked are separated (Luke 16:19-31) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary • Where fallen angels (Gen. 6) are incarcerated • Where Satan will be bound for 1000 years (Rev. 20:1,3) • What the Beast (Rev 11:7) comes out of • What the demon locusts (Rev. 9) emerge from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forever • The “lake of fire” that is the ultimate destiny of the unsaved. • Another dimension (can’t be of earth as it is permanent).

Where in (the) hell are we?

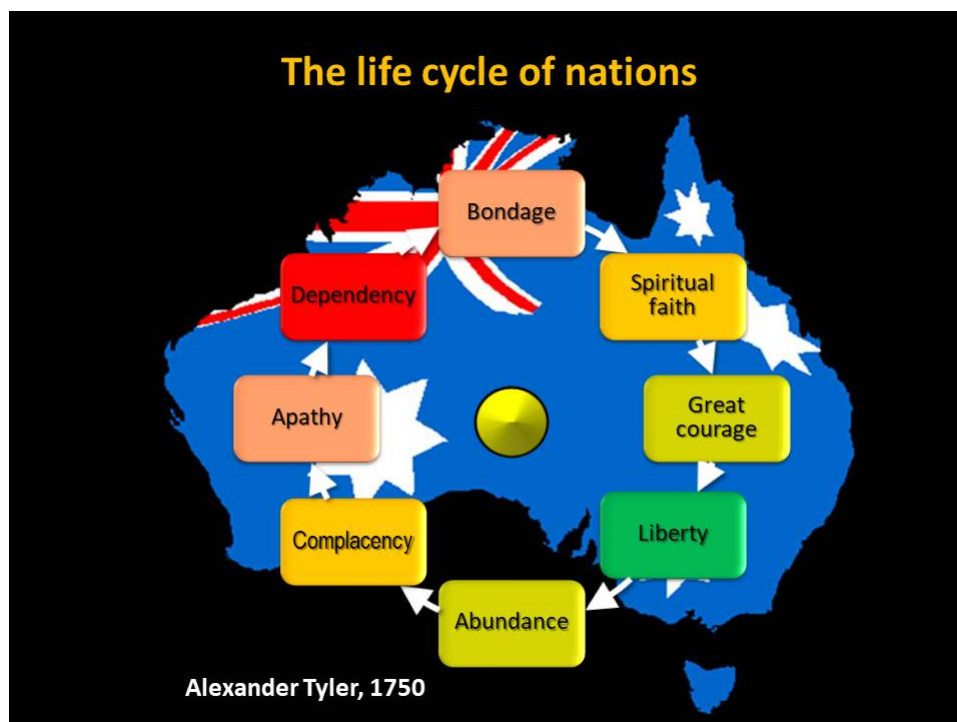


Much cattle

'And should not I spare Nineveh... wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; **and also much cattle?**' (4:11)

- How ridiculous that in his sulk Jonah appeared more concerned about the fate of a fragile plant than of a half million or more people and their livestock.
- God held up a mirror. It's not just the Ninevites that "cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand," Jonah!

Is this a good way to finish the book of Jonah?
Why or why not?



Something to keep in mind

'But Jesus beheld, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but **with God all things are possible.**'
(Matthew 19:26)

- However interesting, it's wrong to let "unimportant" things detract from God's Word.

In necessariis unitas, in dubiis
libertas, in omnibus caritas.

(in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity)

Roman Catholic theologian St. Augustine

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~~Catholic Protestant Catholic Heretic Marco de Dominis (d. 1624)~~