

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
THE BIG FISH STORY

Monday, June 29

Reading: Jonah 1:17

***Jonah 1:17** Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

Fishermen all have their “big fish” stories about the one that got away. The size of that fish continues to grow with each retelling. Many view Jonah and the Whale as just such a story. It is too incredible to believe! Thus conservative scholars spend a great deal of time proving it could happen, while critical scholars spend as much time arguing that it could not.

Before we go any further, I want to confidently state that I believe this is an historical account and this “big fish” story really happened to Jonah. First, notice that the text calls it a “huge fish” – not necessarily a whale. We will not spend time looking at the arguments or the accounts of people being swallowed by large water creatures and surviving. You can do your own internet search for these interesting debates. Second, notice that God had “provided” this fish to swallow Jonah. This Hebrew word means to appoint for a reason. This was not mere chance! God had specially prepared this fish and had it in the right place at the right time to save Jonah from drowning. This fish would be the prophet’s ride back to shore from wherever the ship was in the Mediterranean Sea.

In his commentary on Jonah, Lloyd J. Ogilvie makes a good point. “I think the debate about whether or not Jonah was swallowed by a whale has swallowed up biblical expositors at both ends of the spectrum. Unfortunately, God’s deliverance of Jonah becomes secondary to the debate.”¹ We spend so much time talking about the fish that we miss the point! This book is not about the great fish. It is about the power and mercy of God. Jonah was as good as dead, but God provided salvation. The storm and the fish were God’s means to show His power to control nature to do His will. It also showed God’s mercy as He used them to get Jonah’s attention and give Him a second chance to obey.

What should we learn from this “big fish story”? I believe a major theme we should remember is that God uses both natural and supernatural means to accomplish His purposes in our lives. Miracles do not simply occur to bring us comfort or to rescue us from sickness and danger. They are God’s call to get busy with the work He has called us to do. God’s rescue of Jonah from the sea was meant to get him to Nineveh so He could miraculously save these wicked people.

I would define a miracle as something you cannot explain – it is God stepping into your life to get your attention. When has God done a miracle in your life? What did He want you to learn from it?

God’s salvation and making us members of His family is the greatest miracle! What should be our response? Why did God call us? What mission does he want you to do?

¹ Lloyd J. Ogilvie. The Preacher’s Commentary: OT Vol. 22, Hosea-Jonah, p.429.