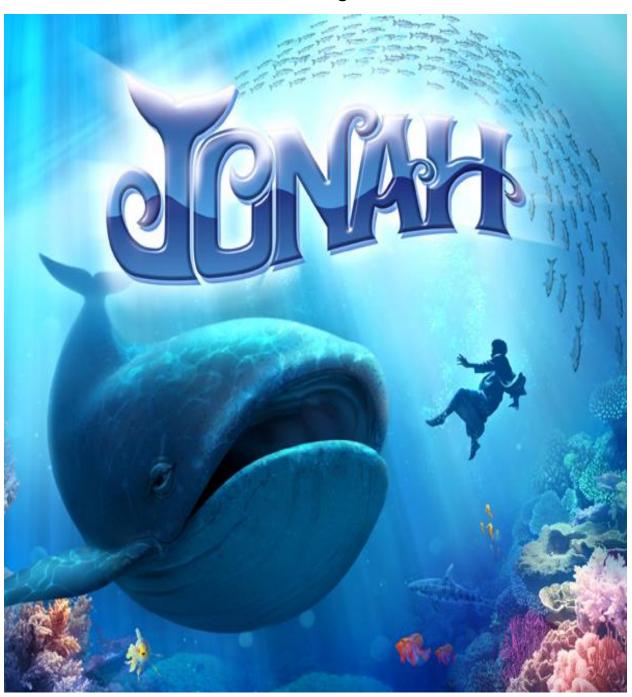
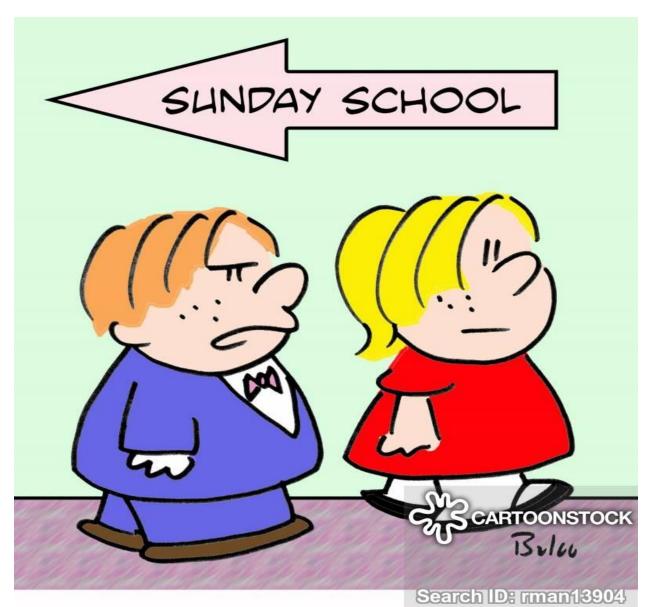
Was Jonah In The Belly of Beast Whale or Great Fish?

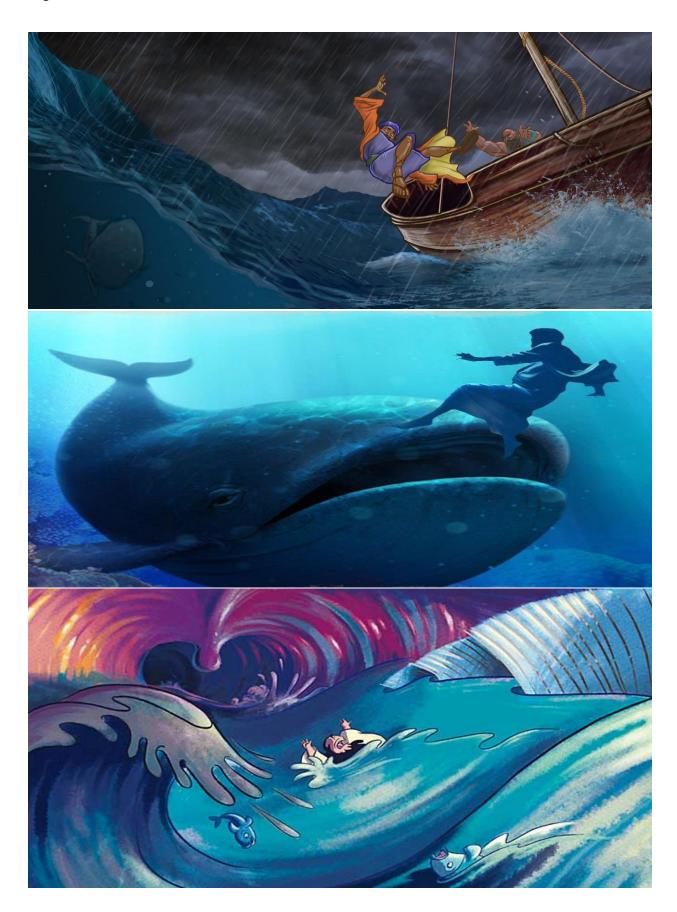
By David Lee Burris

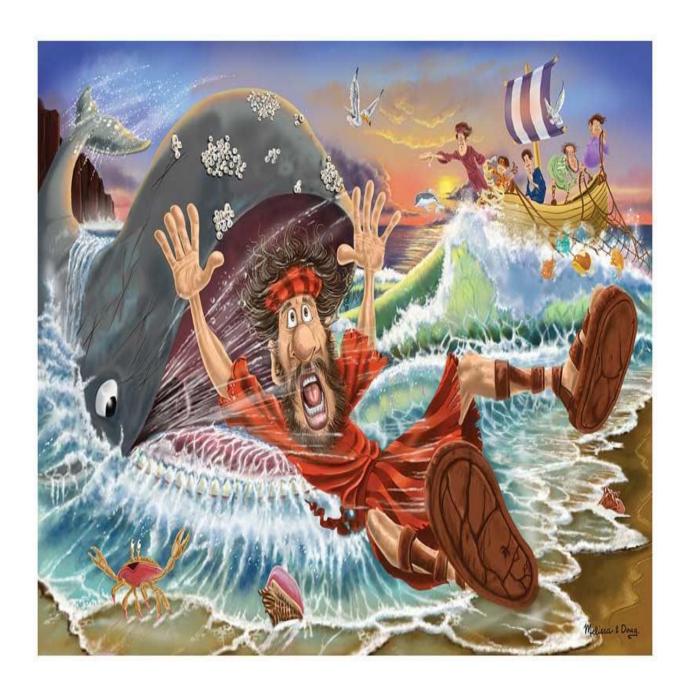




"That 'Jonah' story sounded *fishy* to me!"



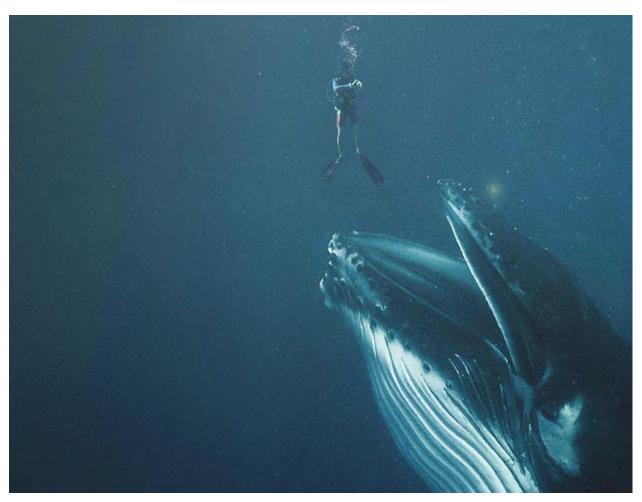




WHAT IF YOU WERE SWALLOWED BY A WHALE?

Biggest threat: being swallowed by a sperm whale **Our best hope**: the whale spitting you out right away

Worst consequence: being digested by a whale's stomach acids



FAST FACTS

Sperm whales are the largest toothed whales in the world. They also have the largest brains on earth, weighing in at 17 pounds, over five times as large as a human brain.

Bowhead whales have the largest mouths of any whale.

There are zero confirmed instances of a whale eating a human in history.

Background Information from If Magazine:

Close calls with whales happen more often than you might expect.

"Although many people have gotten away relatively unscathed, there's no denying that some were just yards away from becoming a whale's lunch. If you've never seen a whale up close, it's hard to comprehend just how monstrous they can really be. To put it in perspective, the blue whale is the largest animal on the planet. Its tongue alone weighs as much as an elephant, and it can fit anywhere between 400 and 500 people in its mouth. We wouldn't have to worry about a blue whale swallowing, because their anatomy makes it nearly impossible. Instead, we should be more concerned with their smaller cousins, sperm whales.

In 1891, reports emerged that a man had been swallowed by one of these whales, and although he lived to tell the tale, he would never be the same again. According to the story, James Bartley was swallowed when a whale attacked his ship, and he wasn't retrieved until the following day. When the crew found and killed the whale, they quickly brought it on board their ship and cut it open, revealing an unconscious but very alive James Bartley. His face and arms were bleached white, and he was blind, all thanks to the stomach acids of the whale.

However, as the years went by, people started poking holes in this story & questioned whether James had really been swallowed by that whale. Wouldn't the stomach acids do more damage than just bleaching his skin? Well, with the power of science, we took a closer look, and we quickly discovered that if you get swallowed by a whale, coming back out with shiny white skin would be the least of your worries. The first thing you would have to worry about, once you were swallowed, would be getting shredded to pieces by the sperm whale's impressive set of teeth. Each tooth is approximately eight inches long; that's about the length of an average chef knife, and whales have anywhere from forty to fifty of these. Let's say you're lucky enough to make it past all of them. Next, you'd begin your descent down the throat. Not only would it be dark and slimy down there, but you'd also find it hard to breathe due to the lack of oxygen and an increase in methane gas. As the whale's throat muscles constrict in and out to help force you down, you'd also start to feel hydrochloric acid beginning to eat away at your skin.

Next, you'd be dropped into the first, and largest, of the whale's four stomachs. You'd probably be in there for a while, but the bright side is that you might have some light in the form of a bioluminescent squid or two being noshed on after your arrival, since sperm whales love neon flying squid.

You'd better enjoy this brief light show, because after this you'd just be tossed from one stomach to the next, with the acids breaking down almost all of your body until you're just a bunch of bones being unceremoniously ejected from the whale's anus. It's pretty safe to say that there's no way you could be swallowed whole by a whale and live to tell the tale. Sorry, James. You may have been able to fool people in the 1890s, but we're on to you now.

For as vast as they are and as monstrous as they might seem to us, whales actually have no interest in eating humans. And if they could talk, they would probably make a point of telling us that." -IF

JONAH, JESUS, AND ANTI-SUPERNATURALISM Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

Among critics of the Bible, there are few stories discussed more often than that of Jonah and the great fish (Jonah 1:17). This account has been ridiculed perhaps as frequently as any in the Bible. It is too difficult, critics allege, to believe that a man could be swallowed by such a fish, and then emerge alive and well three days later. In reality, however, the problem with this account is not the fact that a fish could swallow a man. While in the past it was suggested that no fish had a gullet large enough to allow it to swallow a man, today scientists acknowledge the sperm whale, which inhabits the Mediterranean Sea, is capable of swallowing an object as large as, or larger than, a man (see Scheffer, 1969, pp. 82-87). The whale shark and other great marine animals can do likewise. Nor is the problem related to a dispute over whether a man could live for approximately 72 hours inside such an animal. Accounts of that actually happening have been documented (see Rimmer, 1936, pp. 188-189).

Even though fish exist with a gullet large enough to swallow a man, and even though it has been documented that a man can live three days inside such a fish, these matters actually are beside the point. Why so? They are irrelevant because the text acknowledges that God's miraculous powers were at work in Jonah's life. Jonah 1:17 specifically states that God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah 2:10 notes that God spake unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. The critics ridicule is directed at the account of Jonah because it is miraculous, not because of the size of a fish's gullet or the life span of a man inside a fish.

What we are dealing with here is a clear-cut case of anti-supernatural bias. The real question is this: Is supernaturalism credible? If God exists, then miracles are possible. If there was a creation by God, then supernaturalism is credible because God could choose to intervene in His creation at any time. If Christ was raised from the dead, then super-naturalism not only is possible, but proven. Ultimately, then, the rejection of supernaturalism is the rejection of Christ. This may mean little to the hardened atheist, or to the religious modernist who attacks the account in Jonah as nothing more than a myth and who long ago gave up any real belief in the deity of Christ.

But what should be the Christian's response? First, let us note that the account in Jonah is presented as authentic history, detailing the conversion of multitudes of people in a real city the great Assyrian city of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5). Jonah is discussed as a real prophet in 2 Kings 14:25. The entire record of Jonah was accepted by ancient Jewish historians and commentators all of whom were much closer geographically and chronologically than modern day atheists or liberals. Second, the most compelling reason for accepting the record of Jonah is that it was accepted by Christ Himself. Notice that in Luke 11:32 Christ commented on the fact that the men of Nineveh... repented at the preaching of Jonah. With respect to the miracle of the great fish, Jesus said: For as Jonah was three days in the belly of the fish, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40). Thus, the Lord Himself appropriated Jonah's miraculous preservation and restoration as a type and prophecy of His own death, burial, and resurrection. This leaves the Christian with three options. (1) Jesus was mistaken, and simply was unaware of His error in regard to Jonah. Jonah really did not spend three days in the belly of a great fish, even though Jesus said that he did. (2) Christ lied about the matter. He realized that the events recorded never took place, but He still employed the account as if it actually had taken place, in order to effect a comparison with His own situation. (3) Jesus actually told the truth regarding the matter; the events recorded in the book of Jonah really did occur, and as such, were used appropriately by the Lord in reference to His own impending death and the circumstances surrounding it. Jonah and Jesus stand or fall together.

One may not repudiate the account of Jonah, as if it were some kind of unimportant fairy tale, and then advocate the truthfulness of the deity of Christ at the same time. Jesus' testimony was that the events surrounding Jonah in his day and time were as literal, and as historical, as the events of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection would be in His. The evidence that attends the latter attests to the fact of the former. Were it not for the antagonism of atheism and the compromise of religious modernism, the story of Jonah would be accepted at face value, just as Jesus accepted it. Those of us who respect Christ and His testimony will acknowledge, and defend, what Christ acknowledged and defended. To do anything less impugns the deity of our Lord, and that is something we never must take lightly.

Jonah: A plausibility study

- 1. Are there "great fish" large enough to swallow a man whole?
 - of course! Keep in mind that modern animal classification systems weren't exactly in use at the time of Jonah. Any aquatic creature could be referred to as a "fish." And we know that there are whales (blue and sperm) and even sharks (great white and whale sharks) that can swallow a man whole. The sperm whale grows to a length of up to 70 feet. Its esophagus is approximately 50 cm (20") wide and "sperm whales don't have to chew their food so Jonah could have been swallowed whole." 2 Two marine scientists from Sea World in San Diego hypothesize that it was a great white shark that probably swallowed Jonah.3
- 2. Could someone survive three days and three nights in a whale's belly?
 - This is the difficult part of the question. There are fish species that surface from the sea and gulp down air into their lungs, like the lungfish for example. But there is no explanation for how air might have been transferred to the stomach.
- 3. What about the digestive juices?

The *Encarta Encyclopedia* reports, "When whales swallow food, it travels through the esophagus to a multichambered stomach that resembles the stomachs of ruminant hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep and deer. In the first stomach chamber, a saclike extension of the esophagus, food is crushed. In the second chamber, digestive juices further break down food." 4 If Jonah remained in this first chamber, he only needed to be worried about being crushed rather than digested! Sharks, however, have a much slower metabolism and a human body could last three days without deterioration.5

4. What about other stories?

There are a number of stories that have been around for over 100 years about whales swallowing men whole.
 Perhaps the most famous is the story of James Bartley, a whaler on the vessel *Star of the East*, who reportedly was swallowed by a whale and survived.

The bottom line:

- 1. God needed to discipline a runaway prophet.
- 2. God did prepare a "great fish" aquatic creature.
- 3. God brought the runaway prophet and the "great fish" together for His glory & the salvation of a large city. Answers

Jonah: A "Fish Story" or History?

By Wayne Jackson



Several years ago, Edwin Settle wrote a syndicated news article titled "Jonah's big fish story teaches important lesson." Mr. Settle was a former college professor (COE College) and minister with a doctorate from Yale Divinity School.

In his article, he attacked the book of Jonah by stating: "The book of Jonah cannot be accepted as history" (Settle, B-4).

Professor Settle listed several alleged inaccuracies contained in the book.

- It is incredible that one could be alive for three days in a fish's belly.
- It is unlikely that a city would so unanimously respond to the preaching of someone of a different language and religion.
- Jonah speaks of "weeds wrapped about [his] head," which does not fit the description of being inside a fish.
- While there was a king of Assyria, there was no "king of Nineveh," as suggested in the book.
- The descriptive that Nineveh was a city of "three days journey" is erroneous; the metropolis was not nearly so large.

In spite of these supposed blunders, Dr. Settle contends that there are valuable **spiritual truths** in the book of Jonah (e.g., nations ought to live peaceably with one another, etc.). He suggests we should learn important lessons of this ancient document and allow them to motivate us toward a higher level of ethical existence.

Prior to giving some consideration to the accusations contained in Settle's misguided diatribe, a couple of preliminary observations are in order.

First, it is certainly a curious twist of logic that contends one can be motivated toward a more mature level of spiritual responsibility by reflecting on a narrative filled with **lies**.

How does error support truth? That makes no sense whatsoever.

Second, if the book of Jonah is actually a fictitious story account with **no historical basis**, what does this do to the credibility of Jesus of Nazareth? The Lord plainly declared that Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish (Matthew 12:40). He even argued this event was a typological preview of his confinement in the tomb for the same period of time.

If the episode regarding Jonah never happened, Christ reasoned falsely, and his divine status is clearly impeached.

But let us consider the professor's charges. Is the book of Jonah filled with historical fiction as charged?

Incredible survival

Is it incredible that Jonah could have survived for three days in the fish's belly? Only if divine intervention is incredible. The fact is, the record clearly states that "**God prepared a great fish** to swallow up Jonah" (Jon. 1:17). The objection thus actually smacks of an atheistic mentality.

That aside, even from a strictly naturalistic viewpoint, survival after being swallowed by huge fish is not impossible. In the late 1920s, a seaman was swallowed by a large sperm whale in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands.

After three days, he was recovered unconscious but alive, though he had some damage to his skin (Harrison, 907).

Unlikely mass conversion

Is it unlikely that such a mass conversion could have taken place? Perhaps, but unlikely isn't impossible. The question is: are we dealing with a credible historical document?

If there is no logical reason to doubt the historicity of the book of Jonah, then its testimony about the moral reformation on the part of the Ninevites stands. There is no evidence against such a concept. We should also remind ourselves that Jesus Christ affirmed that the people of Nineveh did, in fact, repent (Matthew 12:41).

No see no seaweed?

Is Jonah's description of weeds about his head inconsistent with his sojourn in the fish's belly?

It apparently never occurred to Dr. Settle that the prophet's declaration regarding the weeds could have been descriptive of his descent into the murky waters prior to actually being swallowed by the sea creature. Or is it possible that Jonah could have been consumed along with a quantity of sea-weed?

This quibble is truly one of desperation.

No king of Ninevah

But what of the objection that there was no "king of Nineveh."

First, it overlooks a common biblical usage by which a capital city sometimes stands for the nation itself. Hence the "king of Samaria" (1 Kgs. 21:1) is the equivalent of the king of Israel and the "king of Damascus" (2 Chron. 24:23) is the same as the king of Syria.

Moreover, Assyria sometimes wielded significant dominion. "[A]t this stage the Assyrian king exercised absolute control over a very limited region centered on Nineveh — hence the designation 'king of Nineveh'" (Alexander, 60). This objection is not valid.

Three-day walk?

Was Nineveh a city "of three days' journey" (Jon 3:3)? Since archaeological excavations have shown Nineveh was about eight miles in circumference, it is argued that it would not have taken "three days" to walk through, or around, the city.

The thing our critical friend fails to realize, however, is that the term "city" actually encompassed a larger region than the territory within the walls. In Genesis 10:10-11, we note:

Out of that land he went forth into Assyria, and builded Nineveh, and Rehoboth-Ir, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (the same is the great city).

C. F. Keil notes that these four places composed a large composite city consisting of "a range of towns, to which the name of the (well-known) great city of Nineveh was applied" (Keil, 167).

When those who are consumed with modernistic presumptions assert there are mistakes in the sacred volume, they reveal that the problem is with their own limited knowledge. The Bible is accurate.

Jonah and the "Whale"?

by Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Skeptics frequently have railed against the allusion to a "whale" in Matthew 12:40 in the King James Version. They have insisted the very idea that a person actually could be swallowed by such a creature and survive is preposterous. Yet this charge has been shown to be impotent for two reasons: (1) historical precedent exists for the possibility of just such an occurrence; and (2) the text of Jonah insists that the sea creature in question was orchestrated supernaturally by God for the purpose intended (see Thompson, 1996, 16:86). God specifically "prepared" (mahnah—appointed, constituted, made ready) a great fish (Gesenius, p. 486). The same term is employed in the same book to refer to additional direct manipulations initiated by God. He also prepared a plant (4:6), a worm (4:7), and a vehement wind (4:8) [see Wigram, 1890, p. 733]. George Cansdale was correct in concluding: "[T]here's no point in speculating about full physical explanation of an incident that primarily is metaphysical, i.e., miraculous" (1975, 5:925). McClintock and Strong agree: "[T]he transaction is plainly miraculous, and no longer within the sphere of zoological discussion" (1881, 10:972). Jonah's survival after being inside a sea creature is no more remarkable than Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego surviving the "burning fiery furnace" (Daniel 3:27).

In addition to the evidence that may be deduced for (1) credibility of a **whale** swallowing Jonah and (2) the miraculous preparation of the creature by God, a third clarification is in order that pertains to **translation**. The actual text of the book of Jonah states that "the Lord had prepared a great **fish** to swallow Jonah" (Jonah 1:17). The Hebrew term (*dahg*) that underlies the English translation "fish" (1:17; 2:1,10) is a **broad** term that "always has the collective meaning 'fish'" (Botterweck, 1978, 3:135). William Gesenius, whose lexicographical labors in the Hebrew language were without peer, defined *dahg* merely as "fish" (p. 189). Eminent Hebrew scholar, C.F. Keil, insisted strongly that "[t]he great fish, **which is not more precisely defined**, was not a whale" (Keil and Delitzsch, 1977, 10:398, emp. added). We conclude, therefore, that the word used in the book of Jonah to refer to the sea creature that swallowed Jonah, refers indiscriminately to **any type of fish**—without regard for technical taxonomic, classification schemes developed by the scientific community in the last few centuries. It has the same generic latitude that inheres in the English word "fish" has, which can refer to any number of cold-blooded aquatic vertebrates—from a trout, bass, or crappie to sharks, rays, jellyfish, and crayfish (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 2000, p. 665).

However, a point of clarification needs to be sounded even here. According to the present zoological nomenclature, a "whale" is not a "fish"—it is classified as a **mammal**. Hebrew linguistic experts note no such distinction in the terms used in the Old Testament. The ordinary term for "fish" (*dahg*) would not necessarily **exclude** the whale in its application.

The Hebrew uses three additional terms that are germane to this discussion. Two of the words are closely interrelated: *tan-neem* and *tan-neen*. The first term generally is translated (though erroneously) as "dragon" in the KJV. Newer translations typically use "jackal," except in Ezekiel 29:3 and 32:2, where the creature's habitat is obviously aquatic, so "monster" generally is employed (Day, 1939, 2:873). The second term is treated more loosely in the KJV, and variously translated as "whales" (Genesis 1:21; Job 7:12), "serpent," archaic for "snake" (Exodus 7:9,10), "dragon" (Jeremiah 51:34), and "sea monsters" (Lamentations 4:3).

The third relevant term is "leviathan"—a transliteration of the Hebrew term *liv-yah-thahn* (Job 41:1; 104:26; Isaiah 27:1). This "very large aquatic creature" (Gesenius, p. 433) was unquestionably a now-extinct, dinosaur-like reptile that once inhabited the oceans (Lyons, 2001). Whereas the term "leviathan" undoubtedly refers to a specific type of animal, the previous two terms (*tan-neem* & *tan-neen*) are generic & nonspecific like *dahg*. [Interestingly, Isaiah 27:1 refers to leviathan as both a "snake" (*nah-ghahsh*) and a "monster," or "reptile" (NKJV) (*tah-neen*)].

What is particularly noteworthy is the fact that on the fifth day of Creation, God created sea life. He used two terms to specify these inhabitants of the "waters." The first was "souls" (Genesis 1:20,21b) — the ordinary term for living "things," or "creatures" (nephesh). The second was "sea-monsters" (Gen. 1:21a)—plural of tan-neen (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, 1967/77, p. 2). This latter term is important for understanding the **generic** nature of the Hebrew language in its reference to the animal occupants of the sea. The word is translated erroneously as "whales" in the KJV. The NKJV has "sea creatures," the ASV, NASB, RSV, and NEB have "sea monsters," while the NIV has "creatures of the sea." These latter three renderings are accurate representations of the Hebrew. They illustrate the in-built ambiguity that characterizes the Hebrew designations of animal species in the Old Testament. [NOTE: The term translated "birds" (Genesis 1:20,21, 22,26,28,30) doubtless possesses the same latitude and indiscriminate flexibility in meaning, thereby designating any creature that has the capability of flight, including mammals (e.g., bats), insects, and reptiles (pterodactyl).]

Moving to New Testament Greek, and the verse under discussion in this article (Matthew 12:40), did Christ refer to the great fish of Jonah as a "whale"? Matthew records that Jesus employed the Greek term ketos to refer to Jonah's sea creature. The Septuagint translators used the same term in their rendering of Jonah 1:17. Greek lexicographers are decisive on the meaning of this word. The highly respected Greek scholars Arndt and Gingrich offer only one definition for ketos—"sea-monster" (1957, p. 432). The dictionary that was designed for use with the United Bible Societies' prestigious Greek New Testament text (A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament) defined ketos as "large sea creature" (Newman, 1971, p. 100). Thayer listed three terms—"sea-monster, whale, huge fish" (1901, p. 346), with the reference to "whale" being merely one possibility among many others within the broader sense of the term. Renowned Bible commentator Albert Barnes insisted: "It is well known that the Greek word translated as whale, in the New Testament, does not of necessity mean a whale, but may denote a large fish or sea-monster of any kind" (1949, 1:134, italics in orig.). He speculated that the creature was a species of shark. McClintock and Strong elaborated further by noting that the term "is not restricted in its meaning to 'a whale,' or any cetacean; ...it may denote any sea-monster, either 'a whale,' or 'a shark,' or a 'seal,' or 'a tunny of enormous size' " (10:973). Respected Bible scholar J.W. McGarvey wrote: "The Greek word here translated whale is 'sea monster' " (n.d., p. 306). Lenski also preferred the rendering "sea monster," stating that "[t]he 'whale' of our versions is only an effort at translation" (1961, 1:493, emp. added).

The **versionary** evidence is surely confusing to the average English reader of the New Testament. The KJV, ASV, and RSV all render *ketos* in Matthew 12:40 as "whale." Their rationale behind this unjustifiable linguistic decision, which Lewis maintains has created "an unnecessary problem" (1976, 2:178-179), remains a mystery. Ironically, all three versions translate Jonah 1:17 as "fish." On the other hand, the NASB, NEB, and REB all have "sea monster" in Matthew 12:40. Three translations that handled the matter in a comparable fashion to each other include the GNB ("big fish"), the NIV ("huge fish"), and the NKJV ("great fish"). It also should be noted that, as a matter of fact, the generic word in Greek for "fish" is *ichthus*—not *ketos*. The latter term varies from the former in that *ketos* refers generically to a **sea monster**, or perhaps, a **huge fish** (cf. Vine, 1952, p. 209).

What conclusion is to be drawn from these linguistic data? Both the Hebrew and Greek languages lacked the precision to identify with specificity the identity of the creature that swallowed Jonah. As Earl S. Kalland affirmed, "[t]he identity or biological classification of this great water monster is unknown" (1980, 1:401). Both *dahg* & *ketos* "designate sea creatures of undefined species" (Lewis, 2:178).

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