

# Roundabout Journey

Jonah Story II

Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Jonah 2:1-6

Jonah 2:7-10

## 1. Jonah and the Whale



This is a story that I put in the newsletter last Sunday.

There was a little girl who was talking to her teacher about whales.

The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though they were very large mammals their throat was very small.

The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale.

The teacher said again that a whale could not swallow a human; it was impossible.

Then, the little girl said, "Well! When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah."

The teacher asked, "But, what if Jonah went to hell?"

The little girl replied, "Then you ask him."

The little girl is pretty smart.

I believe that the Bible tells the truth, but I suspect that some biblical stories are fact.

"Truth" and "fact" are two different categories. Religion talks about 'truth', but science talks about 'fact'. Sometimes, 'fact' is true, but sometimes not. For example, the book of Job came before the book of "Psalms", because 'Job' is a novel and it is in the category of biblical literature with 'Psalms.'<sup>1</sup>

Jonah is one of my favorite stories, and it certainly has messages from God. But I questioned if it was possible to be swallowed by a whale but still survived.

One day, my son came to me and asked a riddle.

"Daddy, can you guess what it is? It is seven letters long. It is stronger than God. It is more evil than Satan. If you eat it, you will die. "

Can you guess what it is? The answer is 'nothing'.

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<sup>1</sup> Five books of the Literature: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

## 2. James Bartley and a whale

I know and I believe that nothing is impossible for God, but I was not sure if the 'swallowed by a fish' story was possible or not. Then, Andi Barnard told me last Sunday that she read a story of a man who had survived after being swallowed by a whale. I was excited because it was like Jonah's story. So, I googled it and found that the man's name is James Bartley.



This is what happened. In February, 1891, the whaling ship, "*Star of the East*", left from Liverpool, England and was hunting whales in the South Atlantic near the Falkland Islands. A whale was sighted and two boats were sent to kill it. The first boat successfully harpooned the whale, but the whale swam away, dragging the boat for about five miles. Later, the harpooner in the other boat also succeeded in harpooning the whale. Both boats were towed about three miles by the whale. When the whale went below the surface and came back, it capsized one of the whaling boats. All crew members were rescued by the other boat but two were missing at sea.

A few hours later, the dead whale was lashed to the side of the ship and the crew hoisted onto the deck. The crew began the task of cutting it up. When they came to the stomach, they were shocked to see something moving around inside. They quickly cut the stomach open and found that one of the missing sailors, 35 year old James Bartley, was inside alive, but unconscious. He was in the whale for 15 hours. He was soon revived, but for two weeks he was delirious.

Back in England, Bartley was taken to a London hospital for medical treatment. His skin had been bleached by the gastric juices and he became partially blind. He lived in health and died around 11 years later. His tombstone in Ireland says "James Bartley – a modern day Jonah."

It is an interesting story, isn't it? James Bartley, a Modern day Jonah. After reading this story, I believed that it is possible to survive after being swallowed by a big fish.

Then, I found another story.<sup>2</sup> Edward Davis, a professor at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, was curious if James Bartley's story is true. So he traced the origin of the story. He searched newspaper files, original documents and libraries. He even spent time in England tracking down some of the sources. Then he found that there was no credible evidence, but more questions.

He checked the London hospital where James Bartley might have been treated, but there was no record. He read through the documents about the particular voyage during the time, but James Bartley was not listed as a crew member. Moreover, a letter written by the wife of the captain of the whaling ship was published in 1907 in 'The Expository Times', and in the letter she said, "There is not one word of truth to the whale story. I was with my husband all the years he was in the 'Star of the East'. There was never a man lost overboard while my husband was with the ship. The sailor has told a great sea yarn."

Carl Chavez told me that when people said that they caught a 50 inch fish, it meant 25 inches. It is not lying, but people usually exaggerate. Even though James Bartley's story was interesting, there was no sufficient evidence to support it. It may be sailors' great sea yarn. Who know what happened?

### 3. From Inside the fish

Jonah's story happened 2700 years ago. It is impossible to find reliable evidence to support if Jonah survived from a big fish or not. It does not mean it is impossible. We do not know if it is a historical fact or not, but we know that nothing is impossible for God.

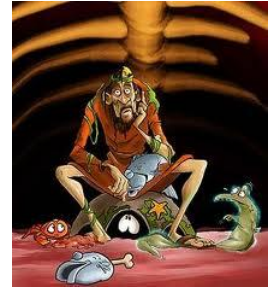


Jonah chapter 2 is about Jonah's prayer while he was inside of the big fish. I used to think when I was a child that Jonah was inside of the big fish like this picture. It seems like Jonah was camping inside of the big fish for three nights and three days. He might have been lonely, but it must have been exciting.

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<sup>2</sup> From <http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/n/newjonah.htm>

Then, when I saw this picture, I had little pity on Jonah. Jonah looked pretty serious, and he must be in trouble. But still he could eat and move.



The verse 2 says, "from the depths of the grave I called for help." 'Grave' is where people are buried when they die. The Hebrew word for 'grave' is 'sheol', and it is a place where people go when they died. In the belly of the big fish, Jonah felt that he was dying. He could not move, could not eat and could not see anything. He felt like a person who was buried underground alive. He was desperate, scared and hopeless. He felt that he was at the end of his life. It is said that when people are born, they fold their hands, but when they die, they open their hands. When people die, they forgive others, give away what they have, and clear others' debts. At the end of a life, people change and prepare for a new life.

Jonah was a stubborn prophet who valued his patriotism and his sense of justice. He did not want to obey God's mission but wanted to run away. Then, he came to a dead end. At the end of his life, he gave up his will but confessed in verse 9 that "With a song of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you, Lord." When people have a near-death experience, they confess that "Lord! I am dead. From now on, my life is yours. I will do whatever you ask me to do." Near-death experience is a beginning of a new life. Jonah surrendered himself to God, and it became a turning point in his life. He was born again as a real prophet.



This is a picture painted by Jason Ingram in 2005. Its title is "Jonah". He said, "I really felt like Jonah that year. I went the wrong way in life, and God ended up using my wanderings to accomplish the next phase in my life and ministry. Notice the cross near the bottom. There is a lot about death and resurrection in this story... Jonah was truly one of the most potent revivalists in Old Testament."

In our lives, sometimes we meet a dead-end. It is a place or a situation of fear, desperation, hopelessness and we do not know what to do. It seems we are dead. But for Christians, it is not a place of death, but it is a place for 'resurrection'. Therefore, even in the belly of the big fish, Jonah prayed to God with thanksgiving.

#### 4. Roundabout Journey

Don Williams, American Novelist and poet, said "The road of life twists and turns and no two directions are ever the same. Yet our lessons come from the journey, not the destination." Most of the roads that we meet in our lives are not usually straight but twisted.



One day, a few years ago, I went to Yosemite national park and began to hike to the top of 'Half Dome'. It took me 13 hours for the round trip. Half Dome was visible from the Yosemite village, but the trail was not straight toward Half Dome, but it was around. In order to get to Half Dome, I had to walk away from it.

When I arrived at the top, I was excited, not only because I was on the top but because I made the long journey. I was proud of myself. If it was a short and easy hiking trail, I might not have been excited that much.

God allowed Jonah to run away, but turned him around at the dead end. What Jonah experienced inside of the fish was like the city of Nineveh that God wanted to save. The people who lived in the city of Nineveh were dying by their sins. They were at the dead end, desperate and hopeless. As God saved Jonah from the belly of the big fish, God wanted to save Nineveh. Therefore, God wanted Jonah to see what God saw and to do what God wanted.

A Christian's life is not about choosing a 'straight road' in our lives, but it is about 'knowing God and trusting him' in the twisted road, and even at the dead end. As Jonah confessed in verse 9, "Salvation comes from the Lord". Therefore we are thankful to God always.