

Jonah 1:17 (John Urquhart) 175053

Jottings About the Bible, Jottings About the Bible: Jonah and the Whale (1:17)

(Jonah 1:17; 2:1-10)

THE miraculous preservation of Jonah is a marvelous account, but in no sense absurd and incredible, as we are often told. It is quite fashionable, of course, to sneer at it, and treat it as a fable, a myth, too gross and monstrous to be for a moment believed. Even some professing Christians smile incredulously when "Jonah and the whale" are mentioned: they cannot well conceal their contempt for the story. The early Christians believed it, for they painted the prophet and the fish in the rough frescoes they made in the catacombs at Rome.

Our Lord Jesus Christ believed it, and has set the seal of His almighty approbation and confirmation on it once and again (Matt. 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29, 30, 32). Christ declares that Jonah was a type of His own death and resurrection. His words are precise and emphatic, "For 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," and that as the prophet was a "sign" to Nineveh, so was He a "sign" to the people of Israel. The Lord prepared or appointed (lxx.), a fish which swallowed down the recreant prophet.

It is not said He created it at the moment: He ordained that it should be in readiness to receive Jonah into its capacious maw. In Matthew the word is translated "whale": but more properly, it was a sea monster, as the revision has it in the margin, that is meant. In all likelihood, it was a species of shark (pesce-cane, the dog fish, Italian sailors call it), which is common in the Mediterranean, which has an enormous throat, and which sometimes attains a length of twenty-five feet or more, with space in its bulk ample enough to contain the prophet's body. The miraculous element lies, not in his being swallowed alive, but in his being kept alive in his moving grave for three days. Great, indeed, too great for mere nature, but not too great for Him who is above nature, the Almighty.

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