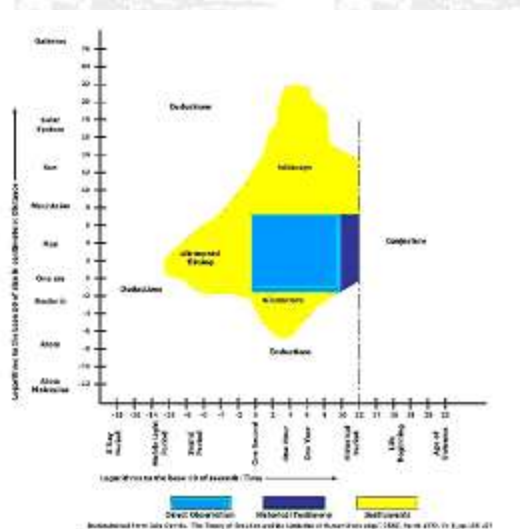


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C0819 – May 21, 2008 – Jonah 1:17 – The Day Of Crucifixion

If you'll open your Bible to Jonah. We've been developing the first chapter and we want to close that out tonight with a look at the most controversial verse, 1:17, perhaps in the Hebrew Bible. Did Jonah really spend "three days and three nights" in the belly of a great fish. In the pagan analysis of such a story this record is excluded as historical on the basis of the **Pagan Strategy** of suppression. The pagan strategy that has dominated the west since the 6th century Greeks is philosophic materialism, the idea that all that exists is material and all events can be explained by the uniform processes of natural law extended through space and time eternally. This is the philosophy Peter was addressing in his Flood commentary of 2 Pet 3 when he said in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." In other words, there are no major disturbances in the natural order of things, no divine interferences, there's a stability to nature, a uniformity to natural processes. Therefore no Jonah's in whales, no Jesus' walking on water (without water ski's), no water into wine (without kool-aid packets), no Mt Sinai experiences (without drugs), no empty tombs (without tomb robbers) and so forth. The problem with this approach is that past events occur outside of their present experience. Human experience is simply far too limited. But in man's quest to know all things, to claim god-like omniscience, what they must do, once they've rejected the Bible as a historical record of genuine history, is extrapolate their experience into the past and treat such extrapolations as just as much fact as their direct experience. To see this we've gone over and over this chart. I don't know about you but I have to go over and over and over things. Repetition is the mother of all knowledge.



Now, this is very simple to understand but I've read a lot of the secular academics on this point and they never deal with this issue. It's just assumed that our present experience, erosion rates, earth's magnetic decay rate, the speed of light, etc... are constant. And when I use that word constant, I'm using it just like the math textbooks. When you hear that word constant you want to make a mental note of that. That word is commonly tossed around by people who haven't really thought through what their saying. What does that word mean? Unvarying, something that never changes, okay, something immutable, aha, now where have we heard immutable before? When we talk about our God, His character. We say our God is constant, His character never changes. So when we say natural law never changes what have we done? We've held onto a religious concept but we've slapped a new terminology on it to cloak the religious baggage. It's not that these people are irreligious at all, they just select a secular terminology, they haven't got rid of the attribute of God, they've just re-located it in the creation. They've universalized their personal experience, made themselves the center. Excuse me, but on what basis can you universalize your experience and make it the standard for all time? Do you see how profoundly arrogant that is? You don't really know outside of your direct experience what went on, you can make a guess, you may have a good guess, you may make an educated guess but in the final analysis all you're doing is making a guess, a speculation, you don't know that in the same sense that you know something inside your direct experience. So you may be fulfilling the dominion mandate, doing what man was designed to do but it's how you're doing it that's where the problem is. The Bible says, "Yes, go out and name but name under My direction, under My ultimate classification system, name knowing that you are not the ultimate namer of things, you're just discovering what I've already classified."

There's a humble submission in that operation but what the pagan is doing is coming in with all of his ego, placing himself at the center, making himself out to be ultimate so that he can go out and name things, classify things and create categories without any reference to God whatsoever and assume that his categories are final. Paste the term "natural law" on it and thoughtlessly move on. There's a particular term we use to sum that up. Autonomy, rejection of God's revelation and replacement of Him with self so that the self is the law, self is the final namer. So of course, if natural law is true then "Jonah is just a fantasy, c'mon" we're told, "you don't really believe a guy got swallowed by a whale, give me a break." This is totally at odds with what we know to be the way the universe operates. Oh really? And then you just work this diagram with them, try to bring them back down to size, get them back in the box, see how far you can work with someone like that. It's an eye opening experience. What we're saying is that when we get outside that box we are dependent on someone who is not limited by that box, we can go back into the annals of history but ultimately we're trusting the One who has seen and known all things, God Himself and His testimony in His word. That's an approach contrary to many evangelicals we might add. Okay, this is not the uniform consensus among Bible scholars. You're liberals of course who have already accepted the pagan premise reject everything supernatural so they toss out the virgin birth, Jesus walking on water, Daniel in the lions den, the whole nine yards, we call that the **Capitulation Strategy** of interpretation. They've given up on the Bible as anything more than a compilation of cute religious stories; they've capitulated to the world system. Put another way, rather than letting the word of God interpret the world they have let the world interpret the word of God. That's actually become a very popular approach to Jonah in modern churches where they use the religious lingo but they've flushed it's reliability. Then we have the **Accommodation Strategy** where you try to hang on to the Bible as the word of God but you endlessly re-interpret the Bible to fit modern evolutionary thought. For example, Richard Loesch, an Episcopal rector, he says, "If the Jonah story is history, then we have to deal with a number of problems: a cowardly, petulant, and disobedient prophet, whom God forces into service, and who is angry with God for being merciful; a fish large enough to swallow a man, yet mild enough that three days in its belly do not harm him..."¹ So he trashes the historicity of the entire book, then to save the day he says it's a parable, Jesus liked parables and this is a powerful allegory, but Jonah really wasn't swallowed by a fish, the Ninevites didn't really repent, they won't really be in

heaven. One wonders what miracles, if any, in the Bible are true. Okay, that's what most people are being taught in their churches. And we wonder why our children raised in evangelical churches grow up, go off to college and lose their faith. Obviously they can see that if these things aren't true then modern science is true. So if we have to wait until scientific interpretations come in before we can accommodate the Bible to modern science it just undermines the whole thing. Be honest and just Capitulate but stop trying to hit a moving target. Then we have the third approach to the Bible, it's the approach that has been accepted for several millennia, the traditional Jews accepted this, it's the **Counterattack Strategy**, really that's just a modern term to describe what began in the 1960's when it was realized that the Accommodation Strategy was bankrupt. What we're coming to grips with in the 20th and 21st century is the issue of authority. If there's one central issue the church has had to deal with it's the source of authority. Is it man? Is it evidence? Is it God? It's the fundamental issue in our time. We're taking the approach that when God speaks, He speaks with absolute authority, His word carries implicit authority. And what we mean by that is that His speech, because it is Creator speech, carries intrinsic authority. You remember when Jesus gave the sermon on the mount in Matt 5-7, do you remember the people's response to that discourse? It's the very last two verses of chapter 7. The people were amazed at his teaching..." why? for he taught as one having authority and not as their scribes. Not as the scribes? How did the scribes teach? Well they'd quote rabbi so and so and rabbi so and so says this and so forth. Jesus didn't do that, what He taught didn't need rabbi so and so to verify, His word was final, it carried implicit authority. So that's the approach we're taking, it's a humble, submissive, mindful approach, God was there and through eyewitness report of Jonah we're getting a historical account. Jonah lived through this, the sailors lived through this, the Ninevites lived through this and when we get to heaven these people are going to be there and you will be able to walk up to the captain of that ship and say, "Now give me the lowdown, what happened on that ship, did you really toss this guy Jonah overboard, what really happened?" And he's going to report that it happened just as we have written here. Why are we taking this approach? Is it just because we're leaping out there into the mystical nothingness, hoping this is true, we like to believe fairy tales or something? Not at all. We believe God providentially runs the universe. There's no natural law, there's God who upholds all things *by His*

word, and here in v 1 we have *the word of the Lord* coming to Jonah to go to Nineveh.

Now in v 2 what is the word of the Lord? Is it the gospel message? Do you see any good news in that verse? No gospel in the text? Don't read into the text. What you have is a message of doom for wickedness, the wrath of God. This is a message of judgment. With that in mind let's try to stimulate some thinking. A message of doom goes out; does God want to judge the Ninevites? Think about the story and ask yourself that question. Does God want to judge them? What does Jonah think? "No, God doesn't want to judge them." How do we know that? For one if He wanted to judge them He'd judge them. But He doesn't do that. Instead He wants to send them a message. In fact, how can we tell from vv 2-3 that Jonah knew this very well? Does Jonah go to Ninevah? Here's a guy going 2,500 miles the opposite direction. That's a pretty clear signal that this guy doesn't have the slightest interest in going to Nineveh. He gets on a ship, that's a bold move for a Hebrew, they were not seafaring people, they were afraid of the seas, remember Noah's Flood, then he goes down in the hold and takes a nap, some people think he took some kind of anesthesia there, something that knocked him out because here's a guy who'd probably rarely been on a ship and yet he's sleeping right through the fiercest storm these Phoenician sailors have ever seen. How do you do that without an anesthetic? This is one of the pagan coping strategies? He's out of it, he's in rebellion and so he's coping with it not by going to the Lord but by taking some drugs. So here's a guy who does not want to give the Ninevites the Lord's message. Why doesn't he want to give them the message? Isn't it because he knows who God is? Isn't it because he's very familiar with God's essence? What does he know about God? That God is merciful, that He is gracious. That if they repent then God will relent and Jonah does not like this attribute of God. He does not like that God is gracious and longsuffering and compassionate. This gets back to one of the five points in our **doctrine of judgment/salvation**, grace before judgment. So let's review our doctrine of judgment/salvation. Anytime you get wrapped around the axel on some point of salvation you want to go back to a picture like the Flood or the Exodus because these are visuals to keep you orthodox. Let those stories cycle through your mind, bathe in them, let your imagination be filled with them, that's why the Holy Spirit put them there, they are powerful reminders of doctrine. The first point is **perfect discrimination**, God always judges perfectly between those who are saved

and those who are judged, He's very precise, put in military terms God uses laser guided smart bombs, He's got perfect telemetry. No one gets caught up in the wake of judgment that's not targeted. Where was the dividing line in Noah's Flood? Those inside the ark and those outside the ark, very clear line of demarcation, that's what we mean by perfect discrimination. Second point to the doctrine of judgment/salvation, **substitutionary blood atonement**, salvation is always based on blood atonement, it doesn't have anything to do with what I do or you do, my works or your works, salvation in the Bible is always on the basis of a substitutionary sacrifice. What's the picture of this in the Exodus? Blood on the door posts. So God determines the basis, he reveals that to man and that is the only thing that will satisfy Him. So there's a provision made for all but third point, it has to be **appropriated by faith**. Salvation must be appropriated. The atonement does not apply itself, it has to be appropriated by man, we have to trust God's provision is sufficient by actually going out and applying blood to that doorpost. Fourth point, when **God judges and saves** He judges and saves **both man and nature**. Who was on the ark? Men, eight people but what else? Animals, two of each kind. God saves both man and nature, this is always true and this is actually highlighted in the book of Jonah, 4:11, last verse, God says, "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" Animals? Who cares about animals? God does, He has compassion on animals. He made them. Their forms are revelatory of Him. These verses are pertinent reminders that salvation is much more than just something that happens in your heart, it's also related to everything outside your heart. Don't ever retreat to a heart-centered religion, that's not Christianity. Your hearts important but salvation is much grander than that, redemption involves the entire heavens and earth. Lastly, and the main point we're looking at in Jonah is **grace before judgment**. That's why Jonah doesn't want to go to the Ninevites in v 3. He knows that God is gracious and if he goes they may repent and then God won't judge. That's explicitly stated in 4:2. God, I knew if I went they might turn from their calamity and you would relent. So he reasons, if I don't go then they won't get the message and they'll roast. So here's a man, he's been a popular prophet all his life. He's brought all kinds of prosperity to the northern kingdom. What action could he do for his people, what final act of goodness could he do for them? Leave and let their enemies get wiped out. In a sense he's willing to give up his life for that of his nation. So, I just take flight?

What's the meaning of Jonah's name? Dove. What was the dove to the OT Hebrews? Did it represent peace? No, it doesn't do that here. Perhaps it represents the Holy Spirit like when Jesus was baptized by John and the dove came down. No, sorry, that's not it either. In the OT the dove was a silly, "flighty little bird." And Jonah is a silly, flighty little prophet. You can see that in the prophet Hosea, he was a contemporary of Jonah and in his book he says the tribe of Ephraim is a "silly dove, without sense." That's Jonah, he's a silly, senseless prophet. It's stupid what he's doing, running from God. That's one of the lessons of the book, don't be a dove, don't be a flighty, silly Christian. Don't run from God when you don't want to do the will of God. That's being a Jonah. Jonah takes flight in v 3 to Tarshish, 2,500 miles west to a coastal city in Spain. Then we have vv 4-16 where the Lord sends divine discipline for spiritual rebellion. There's a lot packed in there but we just want to sum up by saying these Phoenician sailors genuinely believed, they will be in heaven despite Jonah's rebellion. So Jonah actually ends up doing evangelism in spite of himself. The Lord is going to get His work done. God shows grace to the sailors and they toss Jonah in the water, the waters stand still, they go dead calm, exactly the reverse of the laws of thermodynamics.

So let's pick up in v 17, in the Hebrew Bible this is chapter 2:1. **And the Lord appointed**, we said that's a *piel* stem in the Hebrew, it's an intensive verb, He really appointed this **great fish to swallow Jonah, swallow** not eat, now there's something going on here, the Hebrews said God created this fish for this specific purpose and reserved him for this one task, Ron Allen says don't look for this fish because it doesn't exist today, it was one fish appointed for this task and you can't identify this fish as any kind on earth today. It's true that you can't gather from the Hebrew word alone any particular fish, this is the Hebrew *dag*, from which came the Philistine god *Dagon* who was a fertility god that had the face and hands of a man and the tail of a fish. Sounds something like a merman. In Nineveh, the name Nineveh is a form of Nina, the river goddess who's symbol in cuneiform was a fish in an enclosure. This is interesting in light of the fact that Jonah was swallowed by "a great fish." In the Greek, when Jesus quoted this verse, and we'll be looking at that later in Matt 12, he used the word *ketos*, which means "sea monster," it's only used once in the NT in Matt 12:40. It's also used in the LXX in Gen 1:21 of God's creation of the sea monsters on day 5, by Josephusⁱⁱ when he discusses the Jonah story and in 3 Mac 6:8ⁱⁱⁱ with respect to Jonah. You can't tell from any of this what kind of fish it was. All we can

tell is that God assigned this **great sea monster to swallow Jonah**, which conveys the thought that this happened by the providential plan of God. In fact, we said last week this was the only solution to the great storm. They couldn't row to shore, they couldn't weather the storm. They had to toss Jonah overboard because this would be a sign to the Ninevites that authenticated Jonah's message of doom. So the sailors tossed him overboard, the message went out to Nineveh about Jonah, that he drowned and was entombed in the sea, they knew that part of the story, so when Jonah came waltzing into town alive it was a sign that the Lord God of the sea and the dry land had saved Jonah, therefore He could save them too. So Jesus picks this up as a prophecy of his own burial and resurrection in the NT which was a sign to His generation. Continuing v 17, **and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish**, the **stomach** was known to the Jews as "the organ of nourishment" so this is the place of Jonah's salvation or nourishment from the Lord. We're going to find out in chapter 2 that the great fish is God's organ of salvation. Jonah was drowning, going down into the depths of the sea and then God's appointed fish saved him.

Alright, we want to spend the rest of the night on the phrase **three days and three nights. Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights**. Now that of course is laughed at by modern man but they're saying that man used to be a fish. That's part of the modern evolutionary mythology. When I ran this idea by my 4 year old daughter she laughed and said, "That's crazy." I didn't have to tell her that. I just presented the idea.

Now, this phrase **three days and three nights** is picked up by Jesus in the NT. Turn to Matt 12:40. This is one of the reasons we're taking the Counterattack Strategy, you always want to do a check as you study passages in the OT to see how the NT authors interpreted the OT. That gives you a control. We're not just making this up. We said that Jonah was a prophet but no prophetic oracle is given in the book, but here's one of the main reasons it's considered prophetic, it looked forward to the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah. So here we are in Matthew 12, this is the chapter where the national leadership of Israel rejected the Messiahship of Jesus. Jesus had been doing miracles, kingdom miracles authenticating that He was the prophesied Messiah and everything comes to a head right here. How am I doing these if not by God? And the national leaders opted that He

did this by the power of Beelzebub, that's the lord of the flies, that's a demon, Jesus, they argued was demon possessed. Now that's considered the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin isn't suicide or something. The unpardonable sin wasn't even an individual sin, it was a national sin committed by Israel at this point in Jesus' ministry. By v 38 Jesus has refuted them quite handily so in v 38 the Pharisees want to see a sign, show us your the Messiah, v 39, "But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and *yet* no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;" and then he quotes Jonah 1:17, "for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Alright, so Jesus says, "I've been among you people, I've healed lame men, I've given sight to the blind, I've done miracle after miracle and you want more, fine, I'll give you one more, the sign of Jonah, but that's all your getting." The sign of Jonah, that's the sign of resurrection. So if we follow Jesus' logic here, if Jonah wasn't in the belly of the sea monster then was Jesus really in the tomb? It loses all its force if you do that. Either Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites because of what actually happened and Jesus was a sign to the Israelites because of what actually happened or Jonah was not a sign to the Ninevites and Jesus was not a sign to the Israelites. And what the Accommodationists school of interpretation actually says is that the repentance of the Ninevites didn't happen at all, it's just a parable of God's forgiveness. Pardon me for asking but "How is it that God is forgiving if He didn't in fact forgive them?" This is tomfoolery and this is tragic because millions of Christians are being led to believe that Jonah is just an allegory. And what happens is once you've mythologized Jonah you easily slide into the notion that Jesus' resurrection is just a myth as well. So there's a one to one correspondence between these two events. we're approaching them both as historical events.

Now we want to work with this **three days and three nights**. This has become a source of contention in our own circles, among those who do believe in a literal Jonah and a literal resurrection and so forth. The problem has to do with the day of Jesus' crucifixion. If you take Jesus at face value and He says here in v 40, quoting from Jonah 1:17, "just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Now, if you take the traditional view, that Jesus was crucified on Friday (Good Friday) and

resurrected on Sunday then how many nights is that? Friday night, Saturday night, two nights. Oops, what happened to the third night? This has led expositors to suggest some alternate days. There's the Wednesday Crucifixion and the Thursday Crucifixion. Now, why go into this? Well, if Jesus were wrong about something do you think that might cause a tiny problem? So lets' investigate.

Now, if you take a **Wednesday crucifixion** and a Sunday resurrection, and we're not going into all the details and related texts here, but the Wednesday view keys in on Matt 12:40, every other passage hinges on this one so what these people are saying is that this expression **three days and three nights** means "three whole days and three whole nights." So you've got Wednesday night, Thursday Night, Friday night and then part of Sunday night, that covers your three full nights in the grave. What's the problem with this view? Count the number of days, part of Wednesday, we can toss that, all of Thursday, all of Friday, all of Saturday, there's three days, raised on Sunday, alright, three whole days and three whole nights, but what's the problem? What day was He raised on in this view? The fourth day. But what do the Scriptures say over and over and over. That He was raised on the third day, raised on the third day, raised on the third day (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor 15:4). The Jews suggested the Roman soldiers make the grave secure until the third day, not until the fourth day (Matt 27:64). So a Wednesday crucifixion means Christ was raised on the fourth day. There are other problems with this view.

So some people try a **Thursday crucifixion** with a Sunday resurrection. Again, Matt 12:40 is the key verse they are trying to satisfy, so they say he was crucified on Thursday, He's in the tomb Thursday night, Friday night and Saturday night, raised early Sunday morning, that gets you three whole nights. As for the days you only get part of Thursday, all of Friday, all of Saturday and part of Sunday, so you get three nights and two days. Okay, this doesn't exactly get you the three whole days so it doesn't really satisfy their view of Matt 12:40. This actually creates more problems than the first view.

Well, you might wonder, what other solutions are there, Matt 12:40 states pretty clearly **three nights and three days**. Is there any other option? Well, there is actually, and it's the Traditional **Friday Crucifixion**. This view

states that part of a day in the Jewish reckoning was equivalent to the whole day. As Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah stated circa AD100, "A day and a night are an Onah [‘a portion of time’] and the portion of an Onah is as the whole of it."^{iv} First passage we can look at is Esther 4:16, you remember the story of Esther how she risked her life for her Jewish people. Verse 16, she says, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day." there's you're three nights and three days, now notice 5:1, "Now it came about on the third day" not after the third day, but on the third day, so the expression three nights and three days signified until the third day not the fourth. Now turn to the best passage, 1 Sam 30:12, here's the story of an Egyptian servant who's master had left him behind three days ago. And "They gave him [the Egyptian servant] a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights." Alright, there's the same expression used by Jesus, and verse 13 goes on to equate that expression with three days ago, Thus "David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" And he said, "I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick three days ago." So the expression three days and three nights is the equivalent of three days ago. The picture that emerges is that this was an idiomatic expression among the Jews just as Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah stated in the Jerusalem Talmud, that a part of the day was as the whole of it. What this means is that a Friday Crucifixion satisfies all the texts. He was crucified on Friday at 9am, he died at 3pm, was removed and put in the tomb before the Sabbath began at 6pm, he lay in the tomb Friday night and all day Saturday, the women went to the tomb early on the first day of the week which was Sunday, it was empty. All that is required is that He be in the tomb part of Friday, all of Saturday and part of Sunday. This is exactly what the Bible states. What does this mean for Jonah's time spent in the great fish? That he too spent part of a day, a whole day and a part of a third day in the great fish and was then vomited out.

What have we seen, we've seen the pagan strategy of dealing with Jonah, the Capitulation, Accommodation strategies are bankrupt for the one who takes Scripture seriously. This is undoubtedly just as historical an event as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without these historical facts it is impossible to have biblical faith. Our faith rests on the facts of history not in a vacuum. The big thing to notice is that God gives grace before judgment, God showed

the sailors grace and saved them and God showed Jonah grace and saved him. We want to watch and see if Jonah returns the favor to the Ninevites. Is he willing to show grace to others. Is he thankful when God gives grace to others? Next time we'll get into chapter 2, this chapter is usually massacred and we want to avoid that.

ⁱ Richard Loesch, *The Uttermost Parts of the Earth*, 149.

ⁱⁱ "It is also related that Jonah was swallowed down by a whale, and that when he had been there three days, and as many nights, he was vomited out upon the Euxine Sea, and this alive, and without any hurt upon his body;" Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, Includes Index*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1987), Ant 9.213.

ⁱⁱⁱ 3 Macc 6:8 "And Jonah, wasting away in the belly of a huge, sea-born monster, you, Father, watched over and restored unharmed to all his family." - <http://www.hope.edu/bandstra/BIBLE/3MA/3MA6.HTM>

^{iv} Jerusalem Talmud: Shabbath ix. 3; cf. also Babylonian Talmud: Pesahim 4a.

[Back To The Top](#)

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