

Matthew 12:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

'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.' Jesus identifies Jonah's sign: as Jonah spent three days/night in great fish (Jonah 1:17), Jesus will spend three days/night 'in the heart of the earth' (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς/en tē kardia tēs gēs)—tomb, death, burial. This is prophecy of death and resurrection. The parallel: Jonah's entombment in fish followed by emergence prefigured Christ's burial followed by resurrection. Reformed theology sees Old Testament narratives as typological—historical events that also point forward to Christ. Jonah didn't merely provide moral lessons but prophetic type. The 'three days/night' is Jewish idiom meaning portions of three calendar days—Jesus died Friday afternoon, remained dead Saturday, rose Sunday morning (partial days counted as full). Critics claiming contradiction miss Hebrew idiom where any part of day counts as full day. The resurrection is ultimate sign validating Christ's claims, demonstrating His power over death, and proving His deity (Romans 1:4).

Historical Context

Jonah's three days in fish occurred after God sent storm to stop his flight from divine call (Jonah

1. . . Sailors threw him overboard; God prepared great fish to swallow him. Inside fish, Jonah prayed (Jonah

2. , was vomited onto land, proceeded to Nineveh.

Jesus uses this as type of His death/resurrection. Ancient Near Eastern cultures had various fish/monster swallowing stories, but Jonah's account is historical (Jesus treats it as such, not mere allegory). Jesus's prophecy that He'd be 'in heart of earth' three days/night refers to His burial in Joseph's tomb (Matthew 27:57-60). He died Friday (Preparation Day), remained dead Saturday (Sabbath), rose Sunday (First Day). Jewish reckoning counted partial days as full—Friday afternoon/evening (day one), Saturday (day two), Sunday morning (day three). Early church recognized resurrection as foundational: 'if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain' (1 Corinthians 15:14). All four Gospels climax with resurrection accounts. Church history centers on this: Christianity stands or falls with resurrection's historicity.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does understanding Old Testament narratives as types pointing to Christ enrich your Bible reading?
2. Why is resurrection the ultimate sign—what would Christianity be without it?
3. How do you respond to skeptics who claim the 'three days/night' is chronological contradiction rather than Hebrew idiom?

Interlinear Text

ἄσπερ	γὰρ	ἥν	Ἰωνᾶς	ἐν	τῇ	κοιλίᾳ	τοῦ	κήτους
as	For	was	Jonas	in	G3588	belly	G3588	the whale's
G5618	G1063	G2258	G2495	G1722		G2836		G2785
τρεῖς	ἡμέρας	καὶ	τρεῖς	νύκτας	οὕτως	ἔσται	ό	
three	days	and	three	nights	so	be		G3588
G5140	G2250	G2532	G5140	G3571	G3779	G2071		
υἱὸς	τοῦ	ἀνθρώπου	ἐν	τῇ	καρδίᾳ	τῇ	γῆς	
shall the Son	G3588	of man	in	G3588	the heart	G3588	of the earth	
G5207		G444	G1722		G2588		G1093	
τρεῖς	ἡμέρας	καὶ	τρεῖς	νύκτας				
three	days	and	three	nights				
G5140	G2250	G2532	G5140	G3571				

Additional Cross-References

Jonah 1:17 (Parallel theme): Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

John 2:19 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Matthew 17:23 (Parallel theme): And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

Matthew 27:40 (Parallel theme): And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Matthew 16:21 (Parallel theme): From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Psalms 63:9 (Parallel theme): But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth.

Matthew 8:20 (Parallel theme): And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

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