Jonah, the "Whale," and Dr. Seuss: Asking Historical Questions without Alienating Conservative Students[1]

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Many undergraduate students enrolled at Christian colleges and universities come into the requisite introductory Bible course with the belief that everything in the Bible, or almost everything, happened more or less as the Bible says it did. They are convinced there really was a worldwide flood, Egypt actually did suffer ten devastating plagues at the hands of God, and the walls of Jericho quite literally came crashing down after the Israelites circled the city seven times. In fact, virtually all the well-known Old Testament stories are regarded as "true" stories about real people and historical events. While they might allow for the possibility of some embellishment, and may even regard a few stories as more parabolic than historical, by and large they believe the OT contains an accurate rendering of Israel's past.

Many factors contribute to this view of the OT. The notion that these stories are historical accounts of what actually happened is often implied by sermons, Sunday school curriculum, and a wide assortment of books, videos, and DVDs that give this impression. Our modern expectations and assumptions about history writing also contribute to this view. Today, we put a premium on historical reliability and expect a wide range of materials – history books, biographies, and newspapers – to include reasonably accurate stories about real people, places, and events. Many people expect no less of the Bible, assuming that similar standards for writing history existed then as do now.[2] Expectations about the historical nature of the Bible are also reinforced by claims scholars make. When OT scholar Tremper Longman declares that "the events of the Bible are as real as what happened to you today," many readers instinctively agree.[3]

Additionally, this confidence in the Bible's historical reliability is supported by the belief that the Bible is divinely inspired. Since many conservative students believe God is the source of the Bible, and thus its ultimate "author," they see no reason to question its trustworthiness. If God

stands behind the writing of these stories, why question whether they report "what actually happened"? Certainly, they reason, God would not allow people to write things that were not "true."

The cumulative effect of all these factors has a profound impact upon the way students view the Bible and makes it easy to understand why so many confidently believe the OT is a reliable record of the past. They are convinced the Bible is historically accurate because that is what they have been taught to believe or – at the very least – have always assumed. This results in a deeply held conviction at the core of their beliefs. Many theologically conservative students have never seriously questioned the validity of this belief or been introduced to alternate ways of understanding the biblical text. Understandably, they hesitate to relinquish this core conviction and often feel threatened when alternate perspectives are proposed.

For many students, the first real challenge to this view comes in the college classroom. Many professors who teach biblical studies do not share their students' views about the historicity of various portions of the Bible. On the contrary, they regard such views as ill-informed and even potentially dangerous.

The Dangers of Demanding the Historicity of the Bible

Those who assume everything in the Bible actually happened are often unaware of the potential dangers of maintaining this view. For example, insisting all the stories are historically reliable jeopardizes the Bible's credibility. Some of the most embarrassing moments in the history of the church have been those in which Christians have publicly attempted to "defend" the Bible's accuracy. One need only recall the humiliating performance of William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes Monkey Trial as case in point.[4]

Another significant problem resulting from assumptions about the Bible's essential historicity is the view of God it fosters. These assumptions create severe difficulties for those wishing to use the Bible theologically, as a resource for understanding who God is and how God acts in the world. When certain texts are read as an account of what actually happened, the picture of God that emerges is deeply disturbing. Take, for instance, the divine command to exterminate the Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15:2-3. Here, the

prophet Samuel reportedly relays a divine message to King Saul:

> Thus says the Lord of hosts, "I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."[5]

For those who take this divine directive as historical fact, it follows that the annihilation of the Amalekites was the will of God. As such, it reveals at least four highly troubling propositions about God: 1) God sometimes commissions and sanctions genocide, 2) God sometimes punishes people by commanding other people to kill them, 3) God sometimes punishes one group of people for the sins of another group, and 4) God sometimes demands the death of people who apparently have little or no opportunity to repent.

These "truths" necessarily follow when reading the divine command as historical fact. But does this picture accurately represent the true nature and character of God? If so, it is certainly not the God many Christians today worship. Insisting that this narrative portrays what actually happened creates serious theological problems that are difficult to overcome.[6]

Five Effective Pedagogical Strategies

What are we as educators to do? How can we help students think more critically about the nature of the Bible? How can we raise the historical question without unnecessarily raising their defenses? I would like to offer five pedagogical strategies – suggestions, really – designed to enable educators to help theologically conservative students wrestle with this issue more constructively. Although my comments are especially geared toward how to raise this issue when discussing OT narratives, the approach applies to the entire Bible. In what follows, I will use the book of Jonah to illustrate how the suggested strategies might be deployed.

1. Differentiate between a Story's Truthfulness and its Historicity

When discussing the historical question, one of the most important things we can do is help students realize that a story's truthfulness does not depend upon its historicity. Doing so requires making careful distinctions between

"truth" and "history." Unfortunately, the common way the word "true" is used renders this task far more difficult. For example, suppose you and a friend have just finished watching a movie. As you are leaving the theater, your friend asks, "Do you think that movie was based on a true story?" By putting the question this way, your friend is asking whether you think the story really happened, whether it is rooted in historical events. Even granting considerable artistic license, your friend wants to know if you think the movie portrayed real people and real events. By asking if it was based on a true story, your friend essentially equates the words "true" and "historical," using them as virtual synonyms.

Although the practice of using "true" and "historical" synonymously is understandable, it is unfortunate because of how it conditions us to think about the Bible. Since we are taught to believe the Bible is true, we instinctively conclude it must be historical, given the way these two terms function in modern usage. Admitting that the Bible is not historical would seem tantamount to admitting it is not true. But is this necessarily the case? I think not. Determining whether something is historical and determining whether something is true are two fundamentally different kinds of questions. Something can be undeniably true even if it is not historical.

I routinely try to make this point in the introductory Bible course I teach. Late in the semester, I show the class a Dr. Seuss video titled "The Butter Battle Book."[7] The video has a very simple plot. It describes a conflict between two groups of "people" (cartoon characters), the Yooks and the Zooks. As the story begins, we see a very small Yook and his grandfather walking toward a high stone wall. The grandson says:

> On the last day of summer, ten hours before fall, my grandfather took me out to the Wall. For a while we stood silent, and finally he said with a very sad shake of his very old head: "As you know, on this side of the Wall, we are Yooks. On the far other side of this Wall live the Zooks. And the things that you've heard about Zooks are all true, that terribly horrible thing that they do. And at every Zook house, and in every Zook town, every Zook eats his bread (shudder) with the butter side down!"

The Yooks hate the Zooks and the Zooks return the favor for one simple reason: they disagree over which side of the bread to butter. The

Yooks butter their bread up on top – "the true honest way" – while the Zooks butter theirs "down below." This causes great tension between the two groups, who seem to know virtually nothing else about each other. In order to keep an eye on the Zooks "in their land of bad butter," the elder Yook tells his grandson about taking a job on "the Zook-Watching Border Patrol." Walking along the wall, he watched the Zooks closely. If they gave him any trouble, he just threatened them with a shake of his "tough-tufted prickly Snick-Berry Switch." For a time, that was all that was needed to maintain order.

At this point, the story sours for the Yooks. "Then one terrible day," says grandfather Yook, "a very rude Zook by the name of Van Itch, snuck up and slingshotted my Snick-Berry Switch." An arms race ensues as each side builds bigger or comparable weapons. As the story draws to a close, the grandfather (Yook) and Van Itch (Zook) stand face-to-face on the wall, each armed with a "Big-Boy Boomeroo" (a nuclear weapon). Only then do we again hear from the grandson, who by this point in the story has been all but forgotten. "Grandpa, be careful," he says. "Hey, easy. Oh gee. Who's going to drop it? Will you or will he?" His grandfather replies, "Why, be patient. We'll see. We will see." A screen then appears with the words "The End," followed momentarily with the word "Maybe" underneath.

After watching this video, I ask the students three questions. First, I ask them whether what they just saw actually happened. Of course, the answer is "No." It did not actually happen because there are no such beings as "Yooks" and "Zooks." There are no such weapons as a "Snick-Berry Switch" or a "Big-Boy Boomeroo." And besides, cartoons typically do not portray stories that actually happened.

Next, I ask them if the story is true. They say "Yes," because they easily recognize this story as symbolic of the Cold War and think that something is true if it is historical. Moreover, many "truths" can be found in this story. It demonstrates how prejudice gets passed down from one generation to another by family members and educational systems. That is unquestionably, albeit tragically, true. Another "truth" in the story is that large conflicts often erupt over seemingly insignificant matters. After reflecting on the "truth" of the story, I then summarize what I am hearing: "So far we have said that even though this story didn't actually happen, it is

still true in certain respects."

Then I ask my final question. "Might we apply this same line of thinking to the biblical text? Is it possible that there might be things in the Bible that never actually happened but which are still profoundly true?" Some students are obviously uncomfortable with this move, though it is not too difficult to recognize that certain biblical stories are true even though they never happened. Students typically mention Jesus' parables in this regard. Take, for instance, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). If you had been in the crowd that day and asked Jesus the Samaritan's name or the town where he took the victim for lodging, the crowd would have had a good laugh at your expense! Jesus was telling a story to make a point, not to report a specific historical incident. To be sure, Jerusalem and Jericho were real cities, and there actually was a road between the two as the story claims. Moreover, we know that robbers and bandits frequently did assault people on that dangerous stretch of road in the first century. That notwithstanding, the story Jesus told about the good Samaritan did not actually take place. It was "only" a parable.

So, is the parable true? Not according to the way many people normally classify a story as being true. If a story must be historical to be true, then this parable is most certainly false. But that conclusion immediately exposes the inadequacy of our language and our common notions of what constitutes a "true" story. To say this parable is not true is ridiculous! Of course it's true. It's true because it reveals something about God's will for how human beings are to relate to one another. Specifically, it teaches us who our neighbors are and how we should respond to someone in need, even when that person is our enemy.

A story's truthfulness is not dependent upon whether or not it actually happened. Truth can be delivered through many different genres: parables, historiographical writings, gospels – even fiction. As Hebrew Bible scholar Ronald Hendel puts it in a brief article dealing with the flood narrative in Genesis, "The best stories, of course, are a vehicle for profound insights into our relationship to the world, each other, and God. . . . The biblical story of Noah's Flood is an exemplary and immortal narrative in this respect. Even if it didn't happen, it's a true story."[8] Differentiating between questions of historicity and questions of truth is crucial to helping theological conservative students entertain new ideas about the nature of the Bible.

2. Explain Why Scholars Question the Historicity of Certain Stories

It is important to take time to explore the kind of evidence that leads biblical scholars to question the historical veracity of certain stories in the Bible. In my introductory Bible course, I used to assign a small book by John Barton titled *How the Bible Came to Be*. While I think it was helpful to students in many ways, some brief comments Barton makes about the books of Ruth and Jonah were not. As something of an aside, he writes that "The books of Ruth and Jonah, short stories about imaginary characters, have few signs of being compilations. They seem to be conscious works of fiction."[9] Inevitably, students would either ask me about this in class or write about it in their assigned journals. Barton's statement catches many of them off guard and challenges some of their most basic beliefs about the Bible. Regrettably, Barton never explains why he thinks as he does about these two OT books. He simply declares them "fictional" without supplying any rationale for that conclusion. This kind of casual proclamation is not very persuasive to people who have believed in the Bible's historical reliability all their lives. In fact, unexplained declarations like these tend to do more harm than good, raising readers' defenses rather than inviting them to seriously consider an alternative way of viewing things.

In order to avoid this pitfall, I try to be explicit about the kind of evidence prompting some interpreters to conclude that the OT does not always report exactly what happened. When discussing the book of Jonah, for example, I highlight several items that seem to cast doubt on its historicity.[10] I start with Jonah's physiologically implausible fish ride, undoubtedly the best known part of the story. There are numerous difficulties with the prophet's three-day, three-night underwater adventure. The gullet of a whale[11] is too narrow to swallow an adult. Even if it were wide enough, the chances of a person surviving for three days and nights inside such a creature seem highly unlikely. The gastric juices – not to mention the lack of oxygen – would not be very conducive for sustaining human life. Additionally, it seems rather improbable that Jonah would have been in any state, physically or mentally, to pray the prayer that he reportedly uttered while inside the fish's belly (Jon. 2:2-9).

From a historical point of view, another problematic feature of the story is the enormous size of Nineveh. Traveling through Nineveh required

"a three days' walk across" (Jon. 3:3). For a city to be a three days' walk across, it would have to be approximately fifty miles in diameter. Yet archaeological excavations at the ancient city of Nineveh have determined the city was never that large. Instead, it was no greater than seven and a half miles in circumference, and only about three miles in diameter at the oblong axis. Although this is still very large by ancient standards, walking from one end of the city to the other could easily have been done in less than half a day.[12]

The presence of numerous supernatural events in this very short prophetic book has also led scholars to question its historicity. As Leslie Allen writes:

> This little book is a series of surprises; it is crammed with an accumulation of hair-raising and eye-popping phenomena, one after the other. The violent seastorm, the submarine-like fish in which Jonah survives as he composes a song, the mass conversion in Nineveh, the magic plant – these are not commonplace features of OT prophetic narratives. While one or two exciting events would raise no question, the bombardment of the reader with surprise after surprise in a provocative manner suggests that the author's intention is other than simply to describe historical facts.[13]

While I do not question God's ability to perform miracles, the fact that this prophetic book contains so many, while other Latter Prophets contain none at all, raises serious questions about the kind of story we are reading. The writer seems to be sending the reader important signals that suggest this book is not to be read as straightforward historical reporting.

Finally, a close reading of the book reveals a highly sophisticated literary structure that makes it seem more like a carefully written piece of literature than a record of past events. For example, there are intriguing parallels between chapters 1 and 3. Both chapters describe an unnamed "pagan" acting decisively in a time of crisis – the captain in chapter 1 and the king in chapter 3 – and both chapters begin with a nearly identical word from God to Jonah. Interesting parallels also occur between chapters 2 and 4. Jonah speaks to God in both chapters, though in the former Jonah thanks God for saving his life and in the latter he asks God to take it. The

conversation that takes place between Jonah and God in chapter 4 is an especially striking piece of literary artistry. According to the Hebrew text, both individuals speak exactly the same number of words in the following order: Jonah thirty-nine, God three, Jonah three, God five, Jonah five, God thirty-nine.[14] This level of linguistic coordination is difficult to explain if someone was simply recording what actually happened.

When raising the historical question, I think it is important to share this kind of information with students so they can evaluate the evidence for themselves. This allows them to actively engage the issue in a more informed manner, and opens them to the possibility that the story represents something other than an unvarnished record of the past.

3. Present Multiple Perspectives, Especially Theologically Conservative Ones. It is also helpful to present multiple perspectives. Particularly, it seems important to give some attention to the way those who maintain the Bible's historicity respond to those who raise questions about it. One way to do this in regard to the book of Jonah is to present counter-arguments to some of the challenges mentioned above by demonstrating how conservative scholars – and others – might respond.

Take, for example, the claim that the story could not have happened because it is impossible for a person to survive inside the belly of a "great fish" for three days and nights. When I deal with this in class, I indicate that one way to counter the argument is to claim that what happened to Jonah was simply a miracle. While humanly speaking such an event would be impossible, God made it happen because God can do anything. Another approach some have taken is to offer supporting evidence that something like this actually could have happened by appealing to modern stories about people who have been swallowed by a whale and survived. The most popular story is about a man named James Bartley, who reportedly survived in the belly of a whale for thirty-six hours.[15] Although this particular story is unfounded, it illustrates an attempt to counter the charge of Jonah's physiologically implausible fish ride.[16]

Similarly, those who defend the historicity of the book of Jonah have found ways to respond to the problematic notion of Nineveh being a three-day's walk across. Some have suggested what is meant in Jon. 3:3 is a three-

day preaching mission. Others have argued that the three days' walk refers to "Greater Nineveh," a more extensive area that included both the city and the surrounding region. This would explain why it took a number of days to traverse.[17]

Regardless of how we might feel about the merit of such arguments, it is important to introduce students to alternative explanations. Offering more than one perspective provides them with a more balanced presentation. Failing to provide multiple perspectives on sensitive issues may cause them to think we are trying to force them to think like we do. Students are less likely to feel we have an agenda or an axe to grind if more than one option is presented in class.

It may also be helpful to give students a select bibliography that includes various perspectives on the historical question. This provides them with resources they can use to explore this issue further as they weigh and evaluate the merits of different perspectives. Encouraging this kind of open inquiry is especially important when dealing with controversial issues. Otherwise, it may appear we are interested only in promoting our own ideas without engaging other voices and perspectives. Students are more likely to consider new thoughts about the nature of the Bible if they sense we are willing to discuss contested issues in an even-handed way.

4. Create a Safe Space for Class Discussion

Teachers who hope to ask the historical question without alienating conservative students need to create a safe environment for class discussion. Ample time should be set aside to dialogue about this issue, and students should be encouraged to share their questions and concerns. Due to the controversial nature of this issue, it is probably best not to discuss the historical question until later in the semester if at all possible.[18] That allows time for trust and good rapport to develop, and this relational capital is essential for facilitating a constructive conversation.

Before I enter into a conversation about the historicity of the book of Jonah, I have students complete a brief in-class writing assignment in which they respond to two questions: 1) Do you think the story of Jonah actually happened? and 2) Do you think it matters if the story of Jonah actually happened? The second question gives them an opportunity to voice their

concerns about questioning the historicity of this – or any other – biblical story. Students commonly worry that questioning the historicity of Jonah will lead them down a slippery slope. If we concede that the story of Jonah didn't really happen, they say, what is to stop us from saying the story of Abraham didn't happen? Or the story of the Exodus? Or the story of David? Or the story of Jesus (gulp!)? Doesn't admitting that one of these stories or events is non-historical put all the rest at risk? Where do we draw the line? These are very reasonable questions, and I think it is important to give students the space to voice them.

Ideally, there will be others in the class who do not think of this as an all-or-nothing proposition and who can provide other ways of framing the issue. But even if these voices are not forthcoming, allowing students to raise such concerns honors their own voice and paves the way for discussing their concern at some point in the conversation. It is important to let them know that just because we believe some parts of the Bible did not actually happen does not imply we believe none of it is historical. Such a conclusion is reductionist and unwarranted. The OT contains a great deal of extremely valuable historical information, and we should help students realize they must weigh all the evidence – textual, archaeological, social scientific – when trying to determine what most likely did or did not occur in Israel.

Whenever we respond to student concerns, we must do so graciously and hospitably if we hope to be persuasive. We should never ridicule or belittle a student for views we regard as naïve or uninformed. Such behavior will not encourage other students to share openly and honestly for fear that they too might be shamed. They need to know that the classroom is a safe place where sensitive questions can be asked and where alternative perspectives can be raised. They need to know that their ideas and opinions will be respected. Only then will they be able to wrestle with the issues in a way that can help them make significant movement on this critical journey.

5. Communicate a Deep Appreciation for the Bible and Christianity

Finally, if we hope to persuade theologically conservative students to rethink some of their deeply held convictions about the Bible's historicity, we must be sure to communicate our deep appreciation for the Bible and the Christian faith. If our students do not trust us, if they suspect that we care little about

the authority of Scripture or the Christian faith, there is little chance they will listen to what we have to say about such a controversial issue. Therefore, as educators, we must find ways to help them know how much we value and respect the Bible and how eager we are to help Christians strengthen their faith. Ideally, these commitments should be evident to students in various ways throughout the course.

In his article "Easing the Pain: Biblical Criticism and Undergraduate Students," Terry Brensinger argues that teachers who introduce critical issues to undergraduates should be characterized by sensitivity, humility, accountability, and malleability.[19] While all these characteristics are valuable, "malleability" is especially relevant here. Brensinger describes malleability as "the attitude and devotion which the teacher brings to the Bible in particular and the Christian life in general."[20] He writes, "So often, students shun critical ideas and difficult questions because they fear that a loss of faith inevitably lies somewhere around the corner. When they are invited to see first-hand that true faith and critical thinking can live nicely together, their defenses begin to fall."[21] Therein lies the key. When students begin to realize that asking critical questions is a help rather than a hindrance to Christian faith and faithfulness, they become much more willing to engage in such conversations.

When I do a unit on the book of Jonah in my introductory Bible class, discussing the book's historicity is just one part of a much larger discussion. For example, I also discuss some of the important themes and applications that grow out of it. I suggest that the book is useful for reflecting on such matters as the futility of running from God and the notion that grace freely received ought to be grace freely given. It can also be used to emphasize the extent of God's grace and to reveal God's concern for our attitudes as well as our actions. In this way, I try to demonstrate that even though I do not think the story of Jonah actually happened, I believe it is true and has much to say about how we should live our lives.

Communicating our deep appreciation of the Bible by emphasizing its truthfulness, and by demonstrating its applicability, should help conservative students be more receptive to alternative perspectives about its historicity. Such an approach demonstrates that a critical reading does not rob the Bible of its power to speak to us today. The ability to handle the Bible in this

way, to read both critically and applicationally, will help students be more receptive to what we have to say about the historical question.

Conclusion

Although the five pedagogical strategies described above are no guarantee that theologically conservative students will happily engage critical questions about the historicity of OT stories, implementing these strategies should help reduce obstacles standing in their way. In addition to enabling us to demonstrate our firm commitment to Scripture, they prevent us from unnecessarily raising defenses that may keep students from seriously entertaining these ideas. Utilizing these strategies should help us facilitate this conversation in ways that encourage openness to perspectives that many students initially find quite threatening.

Still, at the end of the day, some students will inevitably feel a sense of disappointment and loss upon hearing that stories they believed to be historically accurate may not have happened. Such feelings are probably unavoidable. But, we may hope, if they can talk about this in a supportive environment, one that encourages honest inquiry and dialogue and is not hostile to the Christian faith, they will be able to consider alternative possibilities.

As we teach, we should keep in mind that students are on an intellectual journey that does not proceed at any set pace. While some may be ready to make shifts in their thinking by the end of the semester, others will require much more time. Some may need to hear these ideas multiple times in different contexts before they are ready to entertain them seriously. We should not be discouraged by this. Rather, we should see our job as being one step in a much larger process. Our task is to equip students to grapple with this topic responsibly and to help them have a positive encounter with the issues at hand. If we are able to do that, we have succeeded in raising the historical question without alienating them. Regardless of where they come out on the question at the end of the term, we can rest assured that our time and effort have been well spent.

Notes

[1] Adapted from Eric Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009). Reproduced by special permission of Augsburg Fortress Publishers. This is a revised version of a paper I read at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society at Perrysville, OH, April 3, 2008.

[2] These same expectations would not have been shared by our pre-modern counterparts. They had quite different expectations when reading and writing texts that utilized the past. For a general orientation to ancient Israelite historiography, see the helpful collection of essays in V. Philips Long, ed., *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

[3] Tremper Longman III, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 101, emphasis in original.

[4] For an excellent treatment of this event, see Edward J. Larson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

[5] All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

[6] For an extensive discussion of this issue, see my *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

[7] Dr. Seuss, *The Butter Battle Book*, video, directed by Ralph Bakshi (1989; Atlanta: Turner Pictures, 1995). I am indebted to Dr. Terry L. Brensinger for introducing me to this delightful pedagogical tool, which he used similarly in some of his classes.

[8] Ronald S. Hendel, "The Search for Noah's Flood," *Bible Review* 19.3 (2003): 8.

[9] John Barton, *How the Bible Came to Be* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 32.

[10] For attempts to defend the historicity of Jonah, see, e.g., T. Desmond Alexander, "Jonah: An Introduction and Commentary," in T. Desmond Alexander, David W. Baker, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 69-77, and Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah, WBC 31* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 440-42. For a discussion of Jonah as something other than historical narrative, see Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah, NICOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 175-81, and Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretations* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 327-40.

[11] There are no Hebrew words in the OT referring to specific species of fish. In the book of Jonah, this creature is generically referred to as "a great fish."

[12] For details about the size of Nineveh discussed in this paragraph, see Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 221.

[13] Ibid., 176, emphasis mine.

[14] Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 224.

[15] The story is conveniently located in Edward B. Davis, "A Whale of a Tale: Fundamentalist Fish Stories," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 43 (1991): 225-26.

[16] Davis, "A Whale of a Tale," 224-37. Some of the evidence that mitigates against the authenticity of this account includes the following: the absence of James Bartley on the voyage in question (233); the facts that the Star of the East was not a whaling ship and that

British whalers didn't fish off the Falklands in 1891 (233), and the personal testimony of the captain's widow, who said, "There is not one word of truth in 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 in her" (232).

[17] Argued, for example, by Alexander, "Jonah," 57-58.

[18] Obviously, this is difficult to do if you are teaching a class on the Pentateuch. Such a discussion can hardly wait until the end of the term!

[19] Terry Brensinger, "Easing the Pain: Biblical Criticism and Undergraduate Students," CCCU New Faculty Workshop, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2004. http://65.221.16.189/resourcecenter/printerfriendly.asp?resID=888 (accessed 12/7/09)

[20] Ibid., under the heading "D: Malleability."

[21] Ibid.

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