



Oceanography

By Michael Lane, September 2021



Ponce De Leon



Benjamin Franklin



Matthew Fontaine Maury

Some of the greatest scientific discoveries have actually been made through Bible studies by knowledgeable people. That seems difficult for some today to believe, but it is fact.

In this lesson on our series Science and the Bible, we will examine the field of Oceanography and Marine Biology and see how accurately the Bible is and how wrong science was in the past.

The Bible was mostly written in the Middle east, and in areas one normally does not consider much when thinking of oceans. Yet, the Bible does contain a few passages that deal specifically with marine science.

Currents in the Seas

For much of human history, the academia taught that the oceans were just vast pools of water without organized currents. Currents were known to land-dwellers because of numerous rivers, with an earthen bank on either side, but as to the oceans, where no banks could be seen and just water appeared all around, it was taught that there were no ocean currents.

Wind and waves would push the waters around at random, but there was no organized circuits or paths of ocean currents anywhere in the oceans.

In 1513 a Spanish explorer named Ponce de Leon noticed that there seemed to be a river of water moving through the ocean along the Florida Keys and the eastern coast of Florida. He noted his discovery, but it went mostly unnoticed by academia of the day.

In 1769 Benjamin Franklin published a paper about a standard and predictable ocean current along the east coast of the United States. He gathered his information not by personal experience, but from a cousin of his named Timothy Folger who was a sea captain and frequently sailed these waters. Today we know this ocean current as the Gulf Stream.

Little did people know that ocean currents were located all over the world's oceans and at various depths as well. This was all changed about 70 years later by a U.S. Navy Captain who was a Christian and an astute student of the Bible.

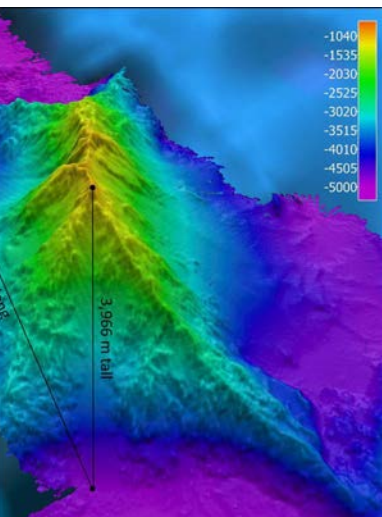
Captain Matthew Maury went to sea at 19 and was schooled mostly on-board ship. He was extremely bright and intelligent individual who was deeply devoted to Jesus Christ. During his Bible studies, he discovered a passage in Psalms that helped him to discover ocean currents.

Psalm 8:3-8 (ESV)

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings

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Kaukana Seamount
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*and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

Paths of the seas seemed to him a river in the ocean – or ocean currents. He then began a scientific study of currents. He indeed did find that the oceans did contain organized currents at various depths. He charted these and published a famous book called *Wind and Current Charts*. It would be used by many navies. He is today called the “Pathfinder of the Seas” and the “Father of Oceanography.” Later in 1855 he wrote another book called *The Physical Geography* in which he stated the following: *“There is a river in the ocean. In the severest droughts it never fails, and in the mightiest floods it never overflows. Its banks and its bottom are of cold water, while its current is of warm. The Gulf of Mexico is its fountain, and its mouth is in the Arctic Seas. It is the Gulf Stream. There is in the world no other such majestic flow of waters. Its current is more rapid than the Mississippi or the Amazon.”* — *The Physical Geography*, 1855

Maury wrote more scientific papers and books in his career and became a well-known scientist of his day. He was a scientist who believed strongly in the Bible. He reasoned that if a science concept was found in the Bible, it was true, no matter what other scientists said.

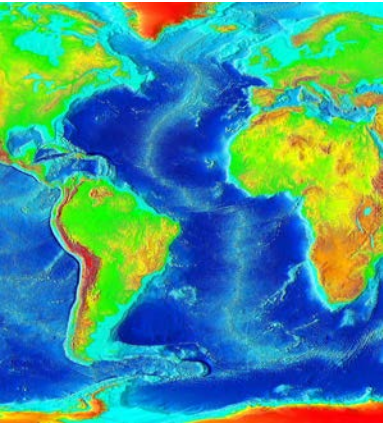
Mountains Under the Sea

For centuries, scientists thought and taught that the ocean floor was a flat plain. They taught that between the eastern and western hemispheres, the ocean floor was uniformed, and a smooth plain they called the Abyssal Plain. Why not? In most bodies of water that could be explored before submarine and sonar, it seemed that the floor of lakes, ponds, and small seas were flat. So they expanded that thinking into the oceans as well, having science declare them a flat abyssal plain. But in the 19th Century that was about to change, and by none other than the man we just spoke of – Captain Matthew Maury.

As Maury studied his Bible, he came across passages such as these:

Psalm 104:5-9 (ESV)

*He set the earth on its foundations,
so that it should never be moved.
You covered it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they fled;
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.
The mountains rose, the valleys sank down
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.*



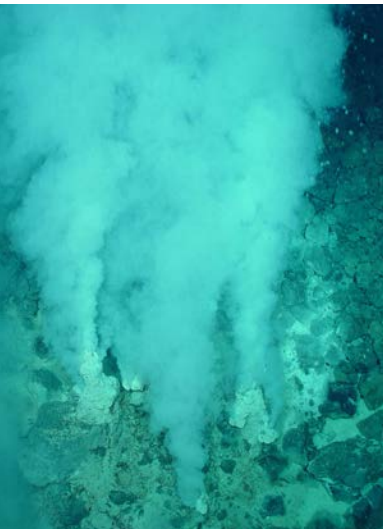
This paragraph in Psalm 104 deals with the earth's foundation under the seas.

Notice it says that waters stood above the mountains. This mentions that mountains were under the oceans.

It also states that the mountains rose, the valleys sank. Many mountainous places on earth have rifts and deep valleys between mountains. This could mean that the sea floor is not an abyssal flat plain from continent to continent.

Jonah 2:5-6 (ESV)

*The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head
at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever.*



This passage is in a paragraph where the prophet Jonah has been swallowed by a great fish. Under the Holy Spirit's influence, he is writing about the roots of mountains under the seas. Maury read this and reasoned that what science had been teaching for centuries was wrong, that the ocean floor is not a flat abyssal plain, but that mountains are under the surface.

Maury began by getting ocean soundings from the US Navy and the British Navy and began a detailed study and experiment. The data he discovered showed that there were indeed mountains under the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1854, Maury published his work in a book called Bathymetrical Map of the North Atlantic Basin. It contained the first detailed mapping of the North Atlantic Ocean floor. The next year he wrote: *"Could the waters of the Atlantic be drawn off so as to expose to view this great sea-gash which separates continents, and extends from the Arctic to the Antarctic, it would present a scene the most rugged, grand and imposing. The very ribs of the solid earth, with the foundations of the sea, would be brought to light."* — The Physical Geography, 1855.

This mountain range was later named the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. More oceanographers continued Maury's quest for over a hundred years until in the 1950's it was finally mapped and published. Today it is a well-known scientific fact and is included in all oceanography textbooks.

Deep Sea Vents

During the winter of 1977, Dr. Ballard and a team of geologists had stumbled upon something never seen before, deep sea vents of extremely hot water coming out of the ocean floor. The water was 750° F (400° C). That is hot enough to melt lead!



Photos by NOAA

These underwater natural springs, sometimes called "black smokers" due to the chimney structures formed around them, come from water that has seeped into the earth's crust which is very thin there almost reaching the mantle. Because of the heat of the molten rock of the mantle, the water is heated so high and contains



high levels of minerals from the rocks that it appears like smoke. Because of the high pressure at this depth, the water cannot reach a temperature to boil, and comes spewing forth as a blackish plumb of spring water.

This discovery shocked the world, because just a few decades before this the ocean floors were mapped. But since that day, over 240 deep sea thermal vents have been discovered all over the world in very deep water of all the oceans and some in very deep lakes.

This should not surprise Christians who believe the Bible is the true Word of God. Because in the oldest book of the Bible, Job, these are described.

Job 38:16 (ESV)

*“Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?”*

In this obscure passage, God is telling us of springs in the sea in the thesis sentence of this paragraph describing the oceans.

The Great Fish of Jonah

One Bible verse often used by atheists as one of the strongest reasons not to believe in the Bible is Jonah 1:17.

Jonah 1:17 (ESV)

And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

We will never know exactly what swallowed Jonah. This story has confused many people, but we are not given specific details from God on this. Obviously in God’s perspective, the species of the animal is not as important as what Jonah is experiencing. It is symbolizing his death in a way that the tomb engulfed Jesus. Jesus even makes this point in Matthew:

Matthew 12:40 (ESV)

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

But is this contrary to science and an error in the Bible? Let’s examine this.

First, in Jonah, the animal is called a great fish. The ancient Hebrew word here for fish is the word דָּג dag which is the literal word for a fish. It is not the Hebrew word for whale, which would be לִיְיָטָן liviyatan from which we get the word leviathan.

Even if it were a whale, today there is only one species that is capable of swallowing a man whole and containing him for a period of time. Sperm whale rarely have but can swallow objects that large. But the word in Jonah is the word for fish, even though the King James Version has the Matthew account referring to a whale.

Matthew 12:40 (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.



Photos by Gatis Marcinke
David Clode, & Rian Shin
on Unsplash

But the Greek word used here in Matthew is the word κῆτος kētos meaning sea monster or whale. (The ancient Greek does have a specific word for fish called ἰχθύς ichthus, but it is not used here in the N.T.) The New American Standard Bible, which is a very accurate translation, has the animal being more correctly identified as a sea monster.

Matthew 12:40 (NASB)

For just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

If the creature was a sea monster it could well be something like a mosasaur, an extinct dinosaur-like creature, some other aquatic dinosaur, or even something special God created for the moment.

If the creature was a fish as Jonah does state, what kind of fish could swallow a man and hold him for a length of time in a living stasis?

Scientists have identified a few fish that can do this.

- Great White Shark *Carcharodon carcharias*.
- It is commonly called Megalodon, *Carcharodon megalodon* or *Otodus megalodon*.

Megalodons are thought to be very similar to great whites since their teeth are basically the same, only much larger. (Sharks can be identified by their teeth.)

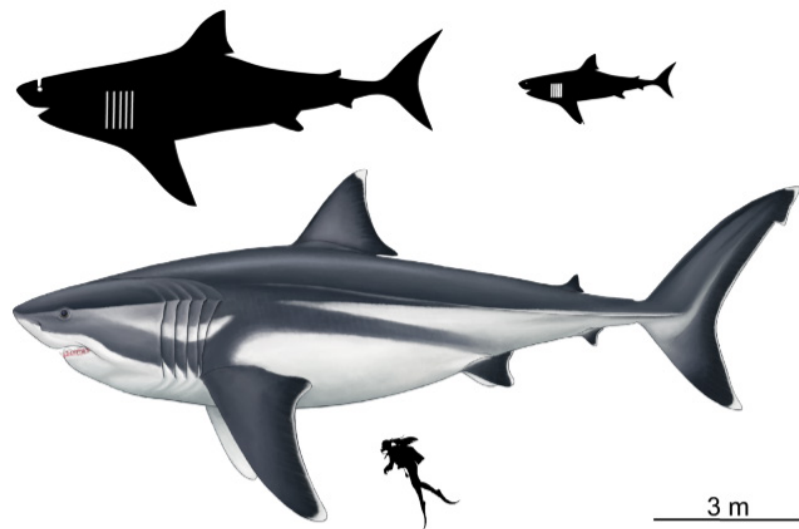
These hopefully extinct creatures might have reached lengths of over 50 feet long, though some scientists believe that they might have reached up to 90 feet on rare occasions.

Pictured are Proportions of megalodon at lengths of 3 m (9.8 ft), 8 m (26 ft), and 16 m (52 ft), extrapolated from extant relatives, with a 1.65 m (5 ft 5 in) diver.

Megalodons are sharks that fall into the category of cartilaginous fish.

Thus, the Bible states that there were fish that were large enough to swallow a grown man.

We have examined the Oceanography contained in the Bible and again have found that science and the Bible have been disagreeing. But as we have seen in this series, science just needs time to finally see that it was wrong and that the Bible was correct all the time. Science is constantly changing, making corrections as to what it declares as truth. The Bible is constantly standing firm in truth.



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Discussion Questions

1. What impressed you the most in this lesson and why?
2. Download the paper Springs of the Oceans by Dr. Stephen A. Austin at <https://www.icr.org/article/180> and discuss what it contains.
3. If the Bible is this accurate, why do you believe that more scientists do not consult it on areas of science?
4. Why do you think that the Bible has so little to say on Oceanography or Marine Biology?
5. In the case of Jonah being inside the creature for 3 days, what effects do you think that would have had on him physically?
6. The Book of Job is the oldest book and the passage we discussed dealt with the deep-sea vents. These were not discovered until 1977! What do you think the people thought about this passage for thousands of years?