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The Waves of the Sea Seek Jonah!



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The Church Fathers often spoke about the relationship between Jonah and Christ, as Jonah is seen as a type of Christ as **Saint Cyril of Jerusalem** says: [Jonah was cast into a whale's belly: but Christ of His own accord went down, where the invisible whale of death is. And He went down of His own accord, that death might cast up those whom he had devoured, according to that which is written, I will ransom them from the power of the grave, and from the hand of death I will redeem them.]¹

The Divine Wrath Decided to Destroy the City and the Divine Mercy Preceded and Shut the Doors!

God sent Jonah to Nineveh to proclaim to the fortified city of its destruction so that through these threats, he might redirect it away from evilness. He told him: Arise, go, and preach there to the people of Nineveh, and speak in their ears of their destruction that is about to happen because of their wickedness.

Saint Jacob of Serugh captures for us the exceeding Love of God. If the wicked drink bitterness and destruction out of the cup of their wickedness, God in His love reveals His wrath over their sins, not to take revenge or destroy them, but rather to reveal to them the fruit of their wickedness. Thus, He calls them to repent that they may enjoy His compassion, and the gates of wrath may be shut while the gates of Heaven may be opened to welcome them. The “wrath of God” in reality is in harmony with His love and compassion because it prevents the wicked from continuing to sin recklessly on the way of their destruction!

Saint Jacob also compares God's loving heart to the great city of Nineveh. While the city was full of sin and iniquity, God's heart was “boiling” with great compassion to revive it through its repentance. The Compassionate One who is full of goodness, for He is slow to anger but very quick to love. If His intention was to strike Nineveh because of the multitude of her iniquities, He would not have warned her. If He truly planned to harm her, He would have sent His wrath suddenly and struck her! He raised His bow to her head, and when she did not feel it, He sent her a warning to recognize it and ask for mercy to be saved.

❖ His wrath set out to the city to destroy it, yet compassion hastened to shut the doors before wrath that it may not enter.

¹ The Catechetical Lectures



If this compassion was not there, what would have been the purpose of a preacher?

He sent him there to restore them from their wickedness, and through repentance He may rest as corruption shall no longer reign.

St. Jacob of Serugh

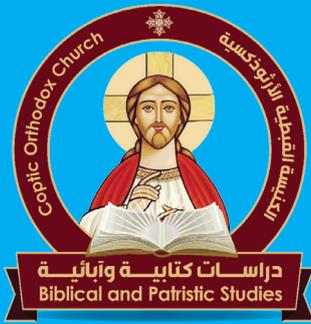
How great is this ignorance that a man runs away from God!

Saint Jerome thinks that Jonah did not bear going to Nineveh, because he knew that the day when the gentiles will accept the faith, Israel would deny it as though the gentiles would be saved on account of his people Israel. This is why he disobeyed the Lord, not because of hatred, but out of jealousy for his people as if he is resembling Moses the zealot when he said: “Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (Exodus 32:31-32). Moses seemed to be opposing the Lord, but he received the mercies of God for his people and God did not blot out his name from His book. In the same spirit, Saint Paul says: “For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites” (Romans 9:3). He wished to be accursed so that his brethren may live in Christ, counting his death as gain. Through this love he did not die but was found worthy of the life which he desired. Likewise, Jonah feared that the destruction of Israel could be looming if he preaches to the Assyrians, the enemies of Israel, so he fled to Tarshish which is in the opposite direction.

Saint Jerome says: [The fleeing of Jonah refers to the condition of humanity in general, which despising the precepts of God withdraws from His face and delivers itself over to the world, where afterwards by the tempest, the whole world violently shipwrecked against it so that humanity is compelled to notice God and to turn back to Him from whom it had fled...The ship was in danger...The seas were stirred up by the wind for nothing is secure when God is the opposing one]²

On the feast of Nativity in 361 A.D., Saint Gregory of Nazianzus was ordained a priest to help his dad who had turned 80 years old. He greatly feared priesthood and was ordained against his will, so he fled the next day to his close friend Saint Basil the Great in Pontus. Yet, as Easter approached (i.e. after approximately 4 months), he returned back to receive His pastoral work. He wrote in his letter “In Defense of his Flight to Pontus” that the story of Jonah suggests to many of those who resist their call

² Jerome's Commentary on Jonah



for priesthood to go back and accept the yoke of service.

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus sees that Jonah fled from the face of God, but was terrified because of the sea, the storm, and the lot that the sailors cast. The belly of the fish and his burial in it for three days bore a great mystery, as he knew that the city was going to be delivered through repentance and so the people of Nineveh might regard him as a false prophet. He thought it was shameful to be regarded as a false tool. Thus, Jonah was zealous for the integrity of his prophetic work.³

Jonah's Flee was a Good Prophecy and Not Fleeing From God

Jonah is most often criticized for his attempt to flee to Tarshish away from the face of God, but as for **Saint Jacob of Serugh**, he looked at this fleeing prophet in awe, wondering: Is not feeling from the face of the Lord ignorance? How can a great prophet like him act in ignorance? There must have been a greater cause stimulating his behavior! He fled not out of ignorance, but to offer a prophecy of the suffering of Christ, His burial, and His resurrection! By his fleeing, he served the mystery of the resurrection of Christ! For just as Christ suffered on the Cross, died and resurrected for us, so did Jonah have to suffer before he begins his ministry to the people of Nineveh guiding them to the mystery of resurrection and life.



The Sea Advises Jonah with Wisdom

The sea is shocked as it found a faithful prophet fleeing from God, forsaking the way that God commanded him to take. The prophet chose to tread in the sea, opposing what God commanded him. The sea advises him to return to God and to obey Him, for it is foolish of him to think that the sea will protect him or hide him from God. There is no place on dry land or in the sea that is void of God.

- ❖ The seas raged because a man fled away from God, they rebuked his ways so that he may no longer do as he had intended.

The great sea spoke to him:

Jonah, Where have you laid your path today? Where are you going intending to flee from God?

The sea is the Lord's, so look for another place to flee in.

The Lord is here in the great sea and He is its governor.

³ Oration 2 in Defense of his Flight to Pontus and his Return, 106.



Where do you flee, for with the palm of His hands,
He gathers the waters?

Do not flee, return to Him for He is close to you... You are in His
hands.

If you run away from Him on the dry land, you will find Him in the depths of the sea, and if you go
to another place, He will meet you there.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

The Waves of the Sea are More Merciful than the Waves of Sin

The sailors attempted to save the ship by throwing all of the cargo into the sea, however the weight
was not a result of the material objects, rather it was in the weight of the sin which Jonah the prophet
has committed by escaping from God.

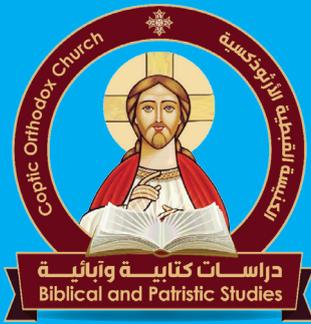
❖ "They threw overboard the wares that were in the ship into the sea; but the ship was not getting
any lighter" because the entire cargo still remained within it, the body of the prophet, the heavy
cargo, not according to the nature of the body, but from the weight of sin. For nothing is so heavy
and onerous to bear as sin and disobedience.

St. John Chrysostom

In incredible imagery, **St. Jacob of Serugh** explains that the sea points out to Jonah the inner waves
which are killing his soul which are more dangerous than the waves of the sea which destroy the body.
The world is more evil in its actions than the sea in its waves. The world is troubled, revolting, and full
of scourge for those who love it. The world is filled with great envy and jealousy likened to a great fog,
and its waves are humiliation and winds are insults. I am not saying that the world is like the sea, it is
a sea! The sea is actually somewhat similar to the world. The sea calms down at some point in time,
but the evil world burdens those coming into it every day and its wickedness is like the waves that
never rest. In this vain world, sin is more turbulent than waves and everyone is anxious from its
warfare. There is no salvation for us except through the Cross.

The Waves of the World Persecute our Saviour!

Saint Jacob beautifully compares the ship that carries Jonah and the Virgin Mary from whom the Son of
God took flesh from her virginal womb. Since Jonah slept on the ship and then the waves arose against



them, he became a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ who through His incarnation, dwelt in the womb of the Virgin Mary for the salvation of humankind, so that the Jews rose against Him, and against the ship which He was on, the Virgin Mary.

❖ Mary became a suffering ship, persecuted in the world as in the midst of the sea.

Jonah's ship was struck by the wind because of him, and insults fell on David's daughter for the sake of our Lord.

We call Mary a suffering ship full of goodness, carrying the Treasure (Christ) who was envied by the Jews.



St. Jacob of Serugh

The Sea Insists to Swallow Jonah!

The sailors assumed that they could please the sea by throwing out all of their luggage and merchandise from the ship, but the sea did not accept a replacement for Jonah. He is the symbol of Christ, for only through His death He is able to save all the faithful and rescue the Church – God's ship – from destruction!

❖ They threw the cargo from the ship into the sea, but that was of no use because the weight of Jonah was still weighing down the ship to sink.

They threw the luggage as the prey is thrown to a lion, but the raging sea did not calm down.

The waves were not satisfied with the ship's treasure instead of one man.

They offered the waves many things, but it demanded nothing but Jonah...

St. Jacob of Serugh

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