



*Christ, the LORD
in the Book of Jonah*

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St. Jacob of Serugh

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A Battlefield or a Joyful Paradise

No other event symbolizes the resurrection of Christ, the LORD, like the casting of Jonah alive out of the Whale's belly. When the scribes and the Pharisees asked Christ to show them a sign, He answered: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas; 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... and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" [Matthew 12:39-41].

Here, I feel that I'm indebted to St. Jerome and St. Jacob the Serogian, for their writings lifted up my heart, as with the wings of a dove (Jonah = dove), to rise with the person of Christ, the LORD, who raised from the dead to grant the power of His resurrection to those who believe in Him.

Fleeing from the Presence of God:

St. Jacob the Serogian recorded some of the internal feelings of Jonah's heart, for, as a prophet, it is impossible that he was so ignorant so as to flee from the presence of God, especially that he testified that He has made the sea and the dry land [1:9]. But, fleeing to the sea and by going through its waves and streams, he would behold his Master, with the eye of prophecy, holding all the streams and lifting up the sins of the entire world. [How could the son of the Hebrews, the teacher of the Law who was raised with the education of the house of God, and the bright man who was filled with wisdom flee from God?... I don't take it that he was ignorant, nor was he errant or filled with incomplete thoughts].

In his talk with the mariners, he wasn't asked about his God, but about his race and people; yet his answer focused on his God, the Creator of the sea and the land, as if while fleeing from the service of the nations (the people of Nineveh) he was testifying for God before the Gentiles (the mariners), who afterwards joined the house of God and offered sacrifices and made vows [1:16].

Jonah's Fleeing is a Good Prophecy of the Coming of Christ:

[He beheld him with the light of the sacraments; and with his secret the preacher hurried to dwell in the core of the earth for three days... It is good that road which the man has taken to flee from God, for through that road he served the sacrament of the Son of God... Jonah's fleeing was a good prophecy; thus he fled from God without blame...]

The Sea advised Prophet Jonah to be Wise:

The sea was shocked to find a believing prophet fleeing from God and advised him to return to God and to obey Him, for it is useless to think that the sea can protect him from God or hide him from Him.

[The great sea spoke to him with words as follows: Which road did you choose, Jonah, to walk this day? Where would you go to flee from God? The sea is the Lord's, so seek somewhere else to flee to... Where would you flee? You left Him on the land only to find Him in the sea; and even if you went somewhere else, He will find you there.]

The World's Waves discriminates our Savior:

The sea directed Prophet Jonah's attention to behold its waves that could kill the soul, which are more dangerous than the sea waves that could kill the body. As Jonah took the ship and the waves were strong against him, he was a symbol of Christ, the LORD, who –through His incarnation- came to the insides of St. Mary and dwelled in the world to save humanity, but the Jews agitated against Him and against His ship –i.e. St. Mary.

[Through Jonah the road of the Son (Jesus Christ) was illustrated, which is the sea of the world that persecuted our Savior. The Scribes were agitated against the Righteous even more than the anger of the sea waves against Jonah, and the Pharisees were more violent than the storms that came upon the son of Amittai. The envy of the crucifiers was like a great sea...

St. Mary became, for the Leader of the creation, a suffering ship that is driven out of the world and the sea. The ship of Jonah was crushed by the winds because of him, and the curses came unto the daughter of David for our Lord. St. Mary is called "the suffering ship that is filled with richness", for she carries the Safe, the cause of the Jews' envy. Our Lord preached –to all nations- more than Jonah and turned the entire inhabitation to repentance with His word.]

The Sea's Insisting on Swallowing Jonah:

The sailors thought they could satisfy the sea by throwing in all the supplies and goods they had on the ship, but the sea wouldn't take any substitute for Jonah. He is the symbol for Christ, the LORD, for He alone is able through His death to save all believers and to save the church –God's ship- from destruction!

[They cast in the richness instead of the Hebrew, but the sea didn't accept. The waves wouldn't take the entire ship's safe in the stead of one man. They offered a lot to the waves, but it didn't ask for anything but Jonah.]

Jonah sleeping in the bottom of the Ship:

Jonah was deep asleep because of his grieve sorrow for his escape from the presence of God, and because he was a symbol of Jesus Christ in His death. The sea was crying unto him to lecture him, and

the waves were violent and insisted on not stopping until he awakes, but he didn't.

[The sea cried out to him and the waves got violent for him to rise up, but the man didn't wake up from his deep sleep...

Maybe the sacrament tied him up to a spiritual slumber in order to glorify the death of the Son.

In the sea, the tomb of the Son was symbolized when He descended to the depths, and it cast him in the ship into a deep sleep.]

Nobody called unto the True God in the midst of the Fake Ones:

When the chief mariner woke up Jonah, he was shocked to find that they lay their hands on him, for the sea, the waves and the winds were asking for him to lead him to Who he was escaping from! There was a great difference between the feelings of the sailors and those of Jonah. The former cried out to false gods without any response, while the latter woke up to behold God moving the entire nature to capture him.

The sailors were terrified to realize that the great sea was disturbed by the sins of one man, and wondered: Who might that man be to cause the sea to move like that; and how bad is his sin? How large is it? The sailors asked Jonah to act, for he alone knows how to satisfy this disturbed sea.

[They looked upon him with great anger and said: tell us for what reason this great evil was brought upon us because of you. Tell us what is your occupation? What is your country? And of what people are you? What did you do that you have become so evil? How long have you been so evil that the entire sea has moved because of you?]

The Lot Drawing cried out against Jonah:

Jonah became as if imprisoned inside a den, for the sea, the waves and the winds were against him, the sailors in the ship were demanding him to act, and the drawing declared that he is the reason for this disaster! Now, all what was left for him was to admit that he is guilty!

[The lot drawing cried out: He is the one that disturbed the entire sea; and his mates said unto him: Come, show us what you have done.]

The Sea that served my People is now moving against Me:

When Jonah was asked about his people, he remembered that he is a son of Israel, before whom the sea was split up for them to walk inside it in peace, and before whom the water of Jordan drew back so they can cross over to the Promised Land! But now, behold the sea has moved against him!

[I'm a son of the people of Moses who split up the great sea; I'm a son of Israel who crossed the great sea; I'm a son of the people of the mighty Joshua, son of Nun, who split up the river of Jordan and crossed it... My Master has made the great sea and the dry land, and I worship Him... but I escaped from Him, yet He caught me. He casts the wind on the sea and away from it. If He rebuked the sea, it would dry out as if it was never there... My God is Great and Mighty, and because I disobeyed His orders the waves of the sea have surrounded me.]

Preaching the Heathen Mariners:

The sailors asked him about his people and about his home, but what occupied him was his God. Although he was fallen, as though a prisoner, under the disturbed hands of nature and sailors, yet he revealed to them that his God is the Creator of the sea and the land. Although Jonah escaped from serving and preaching the people of Nineveh because they are heathen, he found himself testifying for God in the midst of the heathen mariners!

[The mariners paid great attention to the words of the prophet and were exceedingly terrified when they heard about the LORD. They were afraid of him when they knew who his Master is and gladly came to ask him: Tell us, what we shall do, O servant of God, and show us how we could calm the sea. Your people are chosen and your God is Almighty above all. You are wise... pray for us that we do not perish.]

Jonah requests his casting into the Sea:

With mutual love and frankness Jonah and the mariners exchanged advice, where each party was demanding what is good for the other one; but the disturbed sea for the disobedience of Jonah to the

Creator was censuring the mariners, because in vain were they demanding the salvation of Jonah.

[Jonah said: The waves have captured me and the sea imprisoned me for I wanted to flee...

The sea insisted: If I don't take him, I will not calm upon you... If you want to sail to the shore, you must leave me Jonah first and I would send you on your way. If you long for the port to rest from this distress, then let the servant that escaped from his Master stay behind that you might go on your way.]

The fleeing Servant obeys and is silent:

Jonah accepted the verdict upon him and gave himself to death. All the sailors could do was to cry out to God to ask Him not to lay the blood of Jonah upon them! It is a great picture of the heathen Gentiles that are coming to know God for the first time and are asking for His advice and mercy. The heathens were able to enter the house of God while still in the ship and in the midst of the sea. They offered praising and thanking sacrifices that were accepted by God. They enjoyed God's fear that many of the people of God deprived themselves from.

[They entered to the people of the house of God and turned to Him, and started to offer complete sacrifices there.]

Jonah symbolizing the Son of God:

As Jonah willingly obeyed the death verdict that came upon him so that the heathen sailors would not perish, he beheld the Saving Messiah who came to the world to willingly die for the entire mankind. The distress turned to a divine prophecy and an ultimate symbol that brought joy to Jonah's soul. He didn't care for his own death, because he became a symbol of the Granter of life who died to raise all people.

[The sacrament cried unto him: Descend to the depths and become a symbol of the Son of the Living, for He will descend to the hell of the dead like a diver.

Come, dwell in the sea like an abnormal living dead, for the Bringer of life will also die to raise all people!

Dive, descend, and study the way to the core of the earth, for your Master is coming to descend to below the earth. Let the sea cover

you and stay buried without putrefaction, because that is what will happen in the tomb of your Master when He descends...

When Jonah descended to the sea, the waves calmed down, just like the crucifiers who have rested after the death of the Son of God.

The sailors cried out to God not to let them perish for Jonah's innocent blood, just like the ruler has washed his hands from the pure blood of our LORD.

The sailors requested to bring the ship to the land, but they couldn't save the Hebrew from drowning. Also, the ruler has argued much for our Savior, but he couldn't help that Righteous.]

A Trust (Deposit) in the Whale's Belly:

He is a safely kept trust in the whale's belly. Where there was no hope, the hope and trust in God appeared before him; and where death dwelled, he was able to get in touch with the new raised life!

[A great whale shockingly took him in and kept him as a trust so that the surrounding waves would not strike against him... in a place where there was no cover or savior, the Gracious covered and kept him to get his life back after death.]

The Whale and the Work of Christ:

St. Jacob the Serogian sees in the whale a great picture of the delivering work of Christ:

1. The wale became a new amazing ship for Jonah, which the God steers and protects as if under His wings. The winds do not move it, but the Spirit of God which grants all mankind the new birth through the water of the baptism.

2. The whale became a unique house of God that moves through the waves, but is never empty from its Dweller.

3. He saw it as a new tomb that embraces a live and dead person at the same time, and which is guarded by the Granter of the resurrection Himself.

4. He saw it as hell, to which the Savior has descended to grant life to the dead.

5. He saw it as a moving wedding carriage that embraces inside it Christ, the Groom, enjoying the secret feast of pain.

6. He saw it as the womb of the Virgin St. Mary that got pregnant with Him without a man's seeding. He entered it through the mouth of the wale.

7. He saw it taking a new path and moving in the depths of the sea, for Jonah has taken a path nobody has ever taken before or even heard of before. Christ, the LORD, is the path.
8. The whale became a royal palace, in which the Groom King dwells and which He has prepared for His bride church.
9. The whale became a joyful prison that imprisons without hurting, and embraces the prisoner along with life as his companion.
10. The whale became a sacred temple in the sea that is not man-made, and upon which praising sacrifices are offered. It is a new monastery that practices the life of worshipping. It is a secret heaven and participation with the heavenlies!
11. Finally, St. Jacob presented a comparison between the two entombed: the prophet Jonah and his Savior Jesus Christ, for both of them entered the tomb, but they didn't die, rather they gave life to others.

The Answering of the Prayer:

[The prisoner came out of the darkness and saw the light. A new man was unusually born from the water. He was born from a whale like a child coming from the darkness, and the dry land received him like a newborn from a nursing women. He came up just like he went down... He didn't rot inside hell's belly, but came out of death and was filled with life without any harm coming to him... The sea gave him back to the dry land as a trust. The resurrection shined down on the prophet sending life into him. He opened his eyes and saw the Light and longed to meet with Him.]

Jonah Stoning Nineveh with the Voice of His Preaching:

Jonah's words were like arrows pointed at the people of Nineveh, for he didn't open the door of hope before them, neither did he show them God's mercies that embrace the repentant, but instead he casted upon them terrifying woes. Yet they didn't doubt his words, instead they moved to work.

[Jonah casted upon the daughter of the people some terrifying voices that she got horrified and petrified and started to shake and feel bitter from his threats. He threw the news at her like arrows, and she fell before him. He stoned her with his voices. He screamed at her in anger and she escaped from his threats. He warned her with getting overthrown and she believed him and put on the pain.]

The City with the Fortified Walls is in Terror of One Man:

Jonah's encounter with the people of Nineveh was like a battle, where Jonah was on the one side and the people and the leaders of Nineveh on the other. He came to them with no weapon, yet they were terrified of him as if they saw in him a great army.

[The city with the fortified walls was in terror of one man, who – without a weapon- suppressed it with the sound of his threats. He screamed at her and she gave in to his threats. She was terrified from his expressions... She feared him as if fearing a great army of soldiers.]

O, Servant of God, Speak Unto Us with Joy:

In meekness, the people of Nineveh asked Jonah to have mercy on them and to speak to them with the words of hope. They were ready to learn, for they fasted, put on sackcloth, and gathered around with a unified spirit to learn how to please God.

[O, servant of God, speak unto us with joy that we can learn from you if there was any way for us to heal from our pains. What would please your angry Master? If it was possible, pray with us that He might turn away from His anger. Teach us how we could put out His anger towards us?]

The Battle was not like the Usual Battles:

The king put on the royal garment that heaven glorifies and became –along with his people- a symbol of the church, for he turned Nineveh to a battlefield against God's wrath, or rather to a heaven that is watered by rivers of tears.

In humbleness, he didn't take lightly a poor, unarmed man that appears to look humble. He left the earthly royal throne and offered true repentance in contrition as a way to royalty. He gathered his people so that everyone would participate in the battle, even the small children, for heaven rejoices the spirit of participation. He realized that the weapon of the infants and the children is greater and more powerful than any other weapon, for only with these can they win the battle and attain God's exceeding mercies.

[Jonah said: there is no possible way to annul God's wrath, for the sins have gathered and the overthrowing will be cast upon you to destroy you... God –the Almighty and the Bearer of the creation- has sent me to call for fear and overthrowing to be cast upon your walls...

These voices slapped the king of Nineveh in the face and he was terrified to hear this horrifying news. He feared Jonah more than he could fear the ranks of mighty soldiers... He arose from his shiny throne, and the fearful king cringed before a humble man... he put on sackcloth and prepared himself for repentance... He realized that this battle is not like the usual battles; and thus he gathered his people and urged them to fight. He gathered his soldiers and lined them up to entreat, supplying their ranks with prayers.

He compelled the men, women and children to fast, everyone according to his ability, and to line up for battle against the wrath. The king spoke unto his soldiers with words as these: Gather around to entreat, for we are upon a new and unusual fight... No one-day-old ceases to fight... and the infants shall also participate with us and support us before evil is cast upon us. In this battle the youngsters are more powerful than the men, and the children can fight more easily than the mighty soldiers. The children, who have not trespassed, shall come to battle and participate with us, for through them the fight is better.]

With Repentance, the King challenged the Prophet's Threats:

The king has wisely realized that his life and the life of his people is in the hands of God, the God of this prophet. Although Jonah has closed the doors of his heart before them, yet their repentance was able to open the doors of God's mercies.

[Behold, the Hebrew is assuring and threatening us with destruction... Let us act that he will not rejoice our defeat. He did not rest to call for the wrath to be cast upon our impurity; and we will not rest to call for the mercies to save us. The man has asked for his words to be fixed, for he is a prophet; let him preach and let us beseech his Master... If it were in his (the prophet's) hands, the city would have been overthrown by now. We shall not bore, for destruction is in the hands of God. It is not in the hands of the prophet to build or destroy as he is threatening... but let the voices of our repentance stand against his

voice. Let us pray with tears that we might silence this man and appease him. Let us not ask him, for he will not listen to us nor will he stop his talk. Let us send the voices of our pain to the High, for He will save us.]

The Nuptial and Heaven of Repentance:

[Well did the nuptial go that was built on repentance. Instead of the sacrifices, the people of Nineveh offered prayers as a feast for their angry Master so that He would rest and accept them. They gathered their relatives and the free people and watered their streets with tears running from their gardens. They decorated their doorsteps with sad pain-bearing sackcloth. Instead of luxury, they surrounded their streets with crying and with bitter grief that came from every mouth, so that God would rest with the scents...

The groom came out of his sleep and put on the sackcloth, and the bride came out of her sleep with her head low in great sorrow.]

Nineveh Condemning the Daughter of Jacob:

[Because she made good deeds on earth, it is suitable for Nineveh – the great name in the whole world- to rise in the Last Day with the daughter of Jacob and to condemn her, for she deviated from the Savior. Nineveh was delivered with praying not with gold... The non-circumcised city beat the circumcised city in the judgment...

She listened to Jonah and believed the words that he spoke with unto her, and she rectified her way to God to ask Him. She wrote her prayers with tears as if in a letter that she sent to God in the high places... The free people cried out before the king in a loud voice: Let us make you happy, our king, with the new good news, and dwell with you. Get up, O active person, from your prayers and rejoice with us. Change your sackcloth, O wise man, for the wrath was annulled. Get up from the dust and the ashes, for God has accepted our prayers. Finish up your prayer, for the city got covered with mercies.]

A Dispute Filled with Astonishment:

[The Hebrew despaired and became in great distress and bitterness. He prayed to God and asked Him... I know that You are gracious, and merciful, and do not ask of evil; therefore I have fled before when You sent me... Behold, O wise men, with what Jonah is blaming God... He blames Him for His mercies and because He did not cause harm. He reprimands Him for His exceeding grace. It is a dispute filled with

astonishment for anyone who ponders in it... He started to bitterly ask for God to take his life.]

A Gourd growing up over His Head:

Jonah took the shadow of the gourd to be his own place and to protect him from the heat of the sun. He was exceedingly happy with the gourd and it delivered him from his grief. But, when the worm attacked the gourd, he became bitter, and wished in himself to die. The leaves of the gourd were filled with holes because of the worm that Jonah felt that his own home was filled with holes. The leaves started to fall on him and woke him up from his sleep in terror, for his house was not able to protect him from the heat of the sun anymore.

[God gave him something, so that when He takes it away from him, he would suffer its loss. He prepared the gourd to come over his head that he might find shelter in its shadows... The weary man rested from his distress under the shadow, and his heart rested from the grief surrounding him. He grabbed hold of his new home that he has suddenly acquired, and came to like it a lot that he started to forget his pain.]

Jonah's House got pierced:

[Then, God prepared a worm to smite the gourd that it withered... The house of Jonah got pierced from every side and the sun came in and struck the man bitterly... The moist weather turned hot... The leaves spread above him and the man moved and woke up from his sleep in amazement... The non-circumcised city that is built with sins was spared, while the small shelter that I acquired got hit by the winds!]

Why Do You Blame My Mercies?:

[Tell me, O prophet: Why do you blame my mercies? And why do you reprimand me that I have cut out the impurity? The gourd, which you have not labored nor made it grow, came up in a night, and you didn't feel or know how it became so. It has withered while you had nothing to do with both: neither the growing nor the withering... Yet you pitied it a lot as you say.

How can I not grieve over the great city that is filled with thousands of people?

How can I not pity more than twelve -the children of Nineveh- that cannot differentiate between their right hand and their left; and also the many cattle?

The gourd that withered was not yours, yet you grieved over it. Then, how can I not pity over the overthrowing of my city? I, who have figured out the children in their mother's wombs and who gave life to the talking people... Everyone grieves over the destruction of his belongings. Thus, why do you haste to destroy my city, which is mine?