



INSPIRED BY
JONAH'S FAST

A Temple at Sea!

By St. Jacob of Serugh
And Commentary From the Church Fathers

PREPARATION AND COMMENTARY
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**A Matchless Castle? A New Monastery?
Or A Hidden Heaven?**

**By St. Jacob of Serugh
And Commentary of the Church Fathers**

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Translation

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The Prophet Jonah and the Risen Christ¹

Jonah as a symbol the Lord Jesus Christ

Every symbol has some resemblance to what it symbolizes, and at the same time it is *not* the exact same thing! If both were exactly the same, there would no longer be an original and a symbol (or a type), because each of them would be a separate truth. This is what we see in the character of Jonah and his story and in other characters and events, like how the bronze serpent is a symbol of the cross, and the character of Joshua is a symbol of Jesus Christ who enters to the heavenly Canaan with us, and others.

The church fathers often pointed to the relationship between Jonah the prophet and the person of the Lord Christ as a connection between the symbol and the symbolized. As **Saint Cyril of Jerusalem** says: [The one was cast into a whale's belly: but the other 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.]² As Saint Ambrose says: [Moreover, the sign of Jonah, if it shows the passion of the Lord, also testifies to the seriousness of the sins committed by the Jews. We can remark at once and the oracle of majesty and the mark of goodness: for the example of the Ninevites announces the torture and at the same time shows the remedy; so that even the Jews must not despair of forgiveness, provided they consent to do penance.]³

- + Look into the (Holy) Scriptures, and you will find His great image drawn there clearly in the visions. He is pictured in the prophets, and

¹ Homily references: Jacob of Serugh, Homily 122 on "Jonah the Prophet" in: *Behnam Sony, Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Jacob of Serugh, *Jonah the Prophet and the Call to Nineveh*, translated by Fr. Emil Abi Habab Al-Antony, Manshurat Al-Gami'a Al-Antuniyya, Lebanon, 2008; *Mimro* 12 on Jonah the Prophet and the Repentance of the People of Nineveh (Coptic).

² The Catechetical Lectures

³ Ambrose on Luke 11; Luke, XI, 29-32. The sign of Jonah.

His beauty shines in their visions; and He is present in the books, and the secret is revealed from their commentaries. Of Him spoke all the seers and explained His mystery all who preached of the unseen. The Son portrayed Jonah in the way of His preaching and drew the symbol in the path of His passions, because He resembled him. The chosen laborer carries the pains in front of the son of the king, to prepare the way for his Lord to walk in it. Thus, I speak of the son of Amittai and am amazed at the beauty of the mysteries that followed him and walked with him.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Jonah and the Mystery of the Third Day

Saint Cyril the Great says: [The request originated in malice, and therefore was not granted them, according to the text, "The wicked shall seek Me, and shall not find Me." (See Hosea 5:6) ... He said, however, *the sign only of Jonah shall be given them, by which is meant the passion upon the cross, and the resurrection from the dead.* "For as Jonah," He says, "was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so shall also the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." ...this sign have been given to the Jews: but inasmuch as the passion, wrought for the salvation of the world, was indispensable, it was given these...For also in speaking to the Jews, He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (John 2:19)"⁴]

In more than one homily, when St. Jacob of Serugh points to Jonah the prophet, he perceives the mystery of the three days which is the mystery of our salvation through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus:

- + The Son of God was among the dead three days, and He went on His way and restored His bow, to come with power.

Jonah the prophet preached in Nineveh for three days, to become a sign to the Son of God in the way He will tread.

⁴ On Luke 11:29-36. Sermon LXXXII.

Our Lord walked tread Hades for three days, as Jonah had walked in Nineveh when he preached in it.

Jonah called for the destruction of Nineveh and it was not destroyed, but our Lord entered and destroyed Hades when He walked in it.

On the third day the Son's mystery shone by the resurrection and He saved the people of Nineveh.

The Lord also continued His preaching in Hades and demonstrated His Resurrection with great power on the third (day).

He measured the Hades with His footsteps and established it the signs of the great peace in it.⁵

- + Jonah was purified with inner Love until in his beauty he became a sign to the Son of God.

St. Jacob of Serugh

⁵ *Mimro* 53 (8); the Coptic Text *Mimro* 52 the night of the Sunday of the Holy Resurrection.

On Jonah the Prophet and the Repentance of Nineveh

In his exceptional spiritual genius and eloquent irreproducible Syriac poetry, St. Jacob of Serugh writes a wonderful poem on Jonah's flight and the repentance of the people of Nineveh. It was first published in Syriac by Fr. Paul Bedjan and translated to Arabic by Fr. Dr. Behnam Sony, and by Fr. Fr. Emil Abi Habab Al-Antony in a critical edition. It also appears in the book *Mwa'ez Al-Serougy (The Sermons of Serugh)* which was published by Misr Al-Fagalla Publishing House in 1905.

St. Jacob records the feelings hidden in Jonah's heart. He was a prophet and so it is inconceivable that it was lack of knowledge that led him to hide from the Lord's face in the middle of the sea. After all, he himself witnesses for his Lord as the Maker of the sea and the dry land (Jonah 1:9)! But as he flees to the sea to have the waves and the tides of the sea pass over him, with prophetic eyes He sees his Master carrying the tides laid on Him in order to lift the sin of the entire world, as Isaiah the prophet had foreseen (Isaiah 53: 6).

In Jonah's conversation with the mariners, they did not ask him about his God but about his country and people, and his answer revolved on his God the Maker of heaven and dry land. As if while he fled from the service of the gentiles (the people of Nineveh), he witnessed to God in front of the gentiles (the mariners), and because of him they joined the people of the house of God and offered sacrifices and took vows to God (Jonah 1:16).

St. Jacob portrays the raging sea, heaving waves, tumultuous depths, and howling winds as they chase him who fled from the face of God, and would not calm down until they had captured him according to the Creator's command! His poetical commentary captivates readers' and chanters' hearts and draws them to rejoice in the Lord's salvific work with great joy.

Divine Wrath sought to destroy the city and Divine Mercy preceded and locked the Gates!

St. Jacob of Serugh illustrates the exceeding love of God. If the wicked drink bitterness and destruction out of the cup of their wickedness, then God in His love allows His wrath over their sins to be revealed, not for revenge or to destroy them, *but rather to reveal to them the fruit of their wickedness*. This way He calls them to repent and enjoy His compassion, so the gates of wrath would be shut, and the gates of Heaven would open to welcome them! The “wrath of God” is actually completely in harmony with His love and compassion because it prevents the wicked from continuing to pursue evil and getting destroyed! And so St. Jacob likens the sinner to a girl in deep sleep, whom God awakens with His warnings lest she fall in destruction!

- Divine inspiration fell on the prophet, to go and restore the pagan nations to repentance.

He sent him to Nineveh, to tell the fortified city of its destruction, *so that by threats he might redirect it away from evil*.

He told him: Arise, go, and preach there to the people of Nineveh, and speak to their ears the destruction that I tell you.

The great city in which the great iniquity has been committed, great compassion was boiling to revive it through its repentance.

This Compassionate One, full of goodness, is rich in mercy, and when he becomes angry to smite the wicked, it seems like He has no knowledge.

He is slow to torture. And very quick to have compassion, He threatens, but He does not destroy according to His threats.

If He meant to strike Nineveh because of the multitude of her iniquities, He would not have sent her a warning.

If He truly planned to harm her, He would have sent wrath suddenly and struck her.

He filled His bow and when He saw her naked, He pointed to her to put on the weapons that she wielded through supplication,

He raised His bow to her head, and as she did not feel it, He sent her a warning to recognize it, and ask for mercy to be saved.

He raised His arm to strike her with destruction, and as she was sleeping, he called her and woke her up, so that she does not get hit in her sleep.

The jealousy of justice reached the wretched one, and He sent her grace so that she runs to repentance.

His wrath went out to the city to destroy it, yet compassion hastened to close the doors before wrath lest He enters through them.

If this compassion did not exist there, what would have been the use of a preacher?

He sent him there to restore them from evil, and through repentance he might receive rest, and destruction does not reign.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

What great ignorance, that a man runs away from God!

Saint Jerome says that Jonah could not bear going to Nineveh because he knew that, on the day when the gentiles accept the faith, Israel would deny it, as if the gentiles are saved at the price of his own people Israel. This is why he disobeyed the Lord, not because of hatred but jealousy for his people, as if he imitated the jealous prophet Moses 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 might have seemed to be opposing the Lord, but he obtained the mercies of God for his people, and God did not blot out his name from His book. In the same spirit, Saint Paul the apostle 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 desired to be accursed so his brethren could live in Christ and counted his death as gain. Through this love he did not die, but was found worthy of the life which he desired. Likewise, Jonah feared the destruction of Israel through him preaching to the Assyrians, the enemies of Israel, so he fled to Tarshish 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] ⁶

On the feast of Nativity in 361 A.D., **Saint Gregory of Nazianzus** was ordained a priest to help his father who had turned 80 years old. He greatly feared the priesthood and was actually ordained against his will, the next day so he fled to his close friend St. Basil the Great in Pontus. Yet, as the time for Easter came (i.e. after approximately 4 months), he went back and accepted his pastoral work. He wrote in his epistle "In Defense of his Flight to Pontus" that the story of Jonah suggests to many of those who resist the work of priesthood to go back and accept the yoke of service.⁷

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus says that Jonah fled from the face of the Lord but was terrified because of the sea and the storm and the lot that the sailors cast. The belly of the fish and his burial in it for 3 days bore a great mystery, as he knew that the city was going to be delivered through repentance, and thus they regarded him as a false prophet before the people of Nineveh. He thought it was shameful to be regarded as a false tool. Thus, Jonah was zealous for the integrity of his prophetic work.⁸

As for **Saint Jacob of Serugh**, he perceived the fleeing prophet in awe and wondered: Is not fleeing from the face of the Lord utter ignorance? How can a great prophet like him act out of ignorance? Surely greater cause motivated his behaviour! He fled not out of ignorance, but to present a prophecy of the suffering of Christ, His burial, and His resurrection! By fleeing, he served the mystery of the resurrection of Christ!

- The word of God came to Jonah the son of Amittai, but the man was terrified and was not ready to go.

He started to flee from God, so he thought, and he hastened to the sea

⁶ Jerome's Commentary on Jonah

⁷ Oration 2 in Defense of his Flight to Pontus and his Return, 109-112.

⁸ Oration 2 in Defense of his Flight to Pontus and his Return, 106.

to flee.

By what terror did Jonah flee from God? What would he do if he got caught on the way?

He cared to become fortified away from God in a place, where he would go and disappear so as not to perish.

What an exceedingly terrifying thing, that a man flee from God. What can I say? Jonah thought to flee! *What naivety! Fleeing from his master! ...*

It is great ignorance for a man to think that he can escape the Feared One, the Pantocrator.

It is indeed great stupidity to think to flee from God to another place.

What shall I say of this magnificent (Jonah) full of visions, for none of these things can be said of his magnificence!

He is a shrewd prophet, full of understanding, with an enlightened mind and vast thoughts, with an intelligence that is aware of mysteries.

He has a wise heart and he is intelligent, he is vigilant in God, a man of the Spirit, the mouth that speaks prophecy.

The son of Hebrews, who lives according to the Law, and was brought up according to the teachings of the house of God.

How can this glorious one, full of wisdom, ask to flee from God in the way that he trod?

It cannot be that he was stupid, or that he was astray or had mistaken thoughts.

Why would he do such a unsatisfactory act as fleeing from God?!

Saint Jacob of Serugh

The fleeing of Jonah is a good prophecy, and not fleeing from God

Mostly Jonah is criticized for his attempt to flee to Tarshish from the face of God, but Saint Jacob of Serugh says in this work a good prophecy.

- + The image of the Son brought him low, to the depths of pain, and sent him to flee to the heart of the sea,

He saw the mystery and quickly fled in its light and remained silent for three days in the heart of the Earth.

He was sent to preach repentance to the nations, and if he had not suffered, he would have been a stranger to the mystery of the Son.

If he had directed his path to Nineveh as he was sent to it, he would not have become a sign to our Lord as he became.

Great was the path of this runaway from God, because with it he served the mystery of the Son of God.

If he had not fled, he would not have gone down to the great sea or had portrayed the path of our Lord's coming to the world.

If he had not fled, he would not have dwelt at the bottom of the mountain, nor portrayed the death of the Son, with [the symbol of the] three days.

Jonah's flight is a good prophecy and is the glory of his prophecy, for without blame he fled from God.

If he had been to blame, so much would not have been revealed to him, and he would not have been honored with the prophecy after he dared (to flee)!

The mystery compelled him to find it difficult to go so that he would not, until he had prepared the painful path ahead of the Savior.

The path to Nineveh was opened to the Hebrew, and the mysteries led him to walk to the path of the Son.

The Savior prepared the path of pains in the tomb and thrust Jonah in the depth of the waters to tread it.⁹

Saint Jacob of Serugh

The sea urges Jonah to be wise!

The sea is shocked to find a faithful prophet fleeing God and departing from the path that God commanded him to take, and instead trying to escape by sea and oppose God's commands! The sea advises him to return to God and obey Him, for it is vain of him to think that the sea will protect him from God or hide him from Him. There is no place on dry land or in the sea that is void of God.

Tertullian says that the attempt of a human to run from God shows his weak plan, so he says: [In your attempt to run from God, the frailty of everyone who plans to run from God is shown. A stubborn prophet fled from God to pass over with the sea from Tarshish to Joppa, as one who is able to flee from God. But God found him, not on the dry land or in the sea, but in the belly of the beast who could not die for three days, or flee from the eyes of the God... so he said: it is the Lord, He is Might, everything belongs to Him, wherever I am, I am in His hands. Let Him do with me as He wills, I will not run! If He wills for me to die, so be it, as long as I serve him with faithfulness. For I prefer much more to obey Him and idea according to His will, over that I live according to my cowardice.]

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus confirms this. He had tried to escape priestly work but could not bear fleeing the yoke of service, considering it a failed and stupid attempt to run away from God Himself. He says: [Jonah knew more than everyone that the purpose of his missions toward the people of Nineveh was fulfilled by his flight; even though he changed his directions, but he did not flee from God. For no one can accomplish that by hiding in the bottom of the Earth, or in the depths of the sea, or by flying with wings,

⁹ *Memre* 122 on Jonah the Prophet; *Memre* 12 on Jonah the Prophet and the Repentance of the people of Nineveh read in Jonah's Fast (Coptic); *Jonah the Prophet and the call to Nineveh*, translated and edited by Fr. Emil Abo Habib ElAntony, pp. 37-39.

even if such methods are found. For it is impossible to flee from God or to ridicule Him. For if God wanted to hold one and put him under His hands, He overtakes all speed, and overcomes the wisdom of the wise, and overthrows the strong, puts down the mighty, subdues the reckless, and resists the powers.]

- The Lord hurled a mighty wind unto the sea, to catch the servant who escaped according to his thought.
A strong storm shook the ship and almost destroyed it, to wreak vengeance over the runaway lest he escape.
The Lord of the sea pointed at the sea to stir it, so it was stirred exceedingly to torture the son of the Hebrews.
The sign of the divine power stood over the waves, so it stirred them over the runaway who exchanged the destination.
The sea, the obedient servant, accepted the sign, so it went to reprieve for God his friend who ran away.
The winds raced after the runaway like maidservants, to kidnap him because he had fled in disguise from the house of his master.
The waves gushed and heaved speedily, and threatened the Hebrew to catch him quickly.
The seas were agitated because a man had fled away from God. They rebuked his ways so he would not walk in them as he had intended.
The great sea spoke to him: Where have you laid your path today Jonah? Where are you going, intending to flee from God?
The sea is the Lord's, so look for another place to run to.
Where did you throw your path, O Jonah, to walk today? Where do you go, as you want to flee from God?
The sea is the Lord's, so find another place to run to.
The Lord is here in the great sea, and it is His. Change your path if you want a place that will cover you from Him.
Where do you flee? With the palm of His hands He gathers the waters! Quicken your steps to escape Him, for you are in His hands.

He commands under the seas and in the depths. Do not flee, return to Him for He is close to you.

The sea's locks and gates are in God's hands. Who tempted you to come when you will be found out if you were a runaway?

The more you go into the depths of the great sea, you remain a runaway inside it. For there is not a place in the sea that escapes the Lord.

If you run 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.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

The sea chastises Jonah

- The sea punished Jonah who had lost his way, and it chastised him like a master chastising his student.

A silent master for this understanding student, he led him to confess that he had gone astray so he would cease his straying.

He tied him with waves and tortured him with storms, it was silent and threatening as it tortured him lest he goes astray again.

The waves tossed Jonah's ship, and it was guarded lest it get harmed by the storms.

The waves of the sea tossed it like a ball, this one tosses it to that one and it suffers no harm.

If it tilted, the sign would support it lest it perishes, and when the sea attacked it, the compassionate one support it lest it gets destroyed.

The waves raised their voices against Jonah to barricade the way lest he walks through it.

The might of the sea terrified the Hebrew, and the waters surrounded his soul and he almost perished.

A strong wind stirred the sea with a great sign, and the waves danced under the runaway to throw him (in them).

The waves caught him, they captured the man who wanted to flee,
and they stopped the way in which he started to walk.

The sign held him captive at the surface of the sea, and it was shut in
his face to strand him there because he had fled from God.

A storm arose in the depth of the water and stirred it, and the waves
reached up to the clouds in great fear.

The storms hit the sea and the son of Amittai trembled, and fear
overtook the far-away islands and confused them.

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 their cargo into the
sea. But the weight was not a result of the material objects, but of the sin
which Jonah the prophet had 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.¹⁰

St. John Chrysostom

With his incredible imagery, **St. Jacob of Serugh** explains that the sea
directed Jonah's gaze to the (real) deadly waves, which are the waves of sin
that can destroy the soul!

+ The homily of Jonah makes the news from God clear. I gaze upon the
world and the sea, and I say they have troubled Jonah and our Savior.

The world is more evil in its actions than the sea in its waves. The world is
troubled, revolting and full of curses for those who love it.

¹⁰ *Homilies on Repentance and Almsgiving* 5:8.

The world is filled with great envy and jealousy likened to the great depths. Its waves are humiliation and its winds are insults.

I do not say that it resembles the sea, but it is a sea, and maybe the sea resembles the world a little.

The sea calms down at some point, and the evil world worries those coming into it every day.

Being astray in the world is like a ship that makes the sea murky, and sin inside the world is as relentless as the sea's waves.

Sins within the temporal world are more turbulent than waves, and everyone fears its warfare.

Here I am living in two seas because of what I seek, my Lord, let your cross be an oar that grabs me.

Only through You can one overcome the world – the sea, and likewise only through You, those who survive the storms can ascend.

Through You Jonah the prophet survived after drowning, for Your symbol extended to him a hand, and he ascended from the depth.¹¹

Saint Jacob of Serugh

The waves of the world persecute our Saviour!

If Jonah fell asleep on the ship and the waves arose upon them, then he became a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ who through His incarnation, dwelt in the womb of the Virgin Mary, walked upon the world for the salvation of humankind, and then the Jews rose up against Him, and against the ship He was on, who is the virgin Mary.

Through Jonah the way of the Son (Christ) is symbolized to the beholder, and the sea is likened to the world that persecuted our Savior.

¹¹ *Mimro* 122 on Jonah the Prophet; *Mimro* 12 on Jonah the Prophet and the Repentance of the people of Nineveh read in Jonah's Fast (Coptic); *Jonah the Prophet and the call to Nineveh*, translated and edited by Fr. Emil Abo Habib ElAntony, pp. 49-51)

Envy of the crucifiers blew up like the great sea, and the sins of the priests was storming stronger than the sea.

Our Lord paved His way in the world to walk in it, and envy met him as the storm that met the Son of Hebrews.

For the Almighty, Mary became a ship of pain, persecuted within the world as in the depth of the sea.

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

We call Mary a ship of pain full of goodness, carrying the Treasure, who is envied (by the Jews).

Our Lord preached more than Jonah to all peoples, and all nations returned to repentance with His word.

His way is greater than those which the prophets contemplated, as the presence of the body is greater than its imagination.

He was met with envy by those who crucified Him, and (their envy) was greatly intensifying (mounting) like the storm over the son of Amittai [Jonah].

Jonah trod this path of pain, which is why the sea revolted upon him as he was trying to run from God.

The shadow of the Son of God went down to the sea, and there he portrayed the images of suffering between the waves.

Jonah was immersed in the mission of the Son of God, and so he was surrounded by sufferings and pains in his path.¹²

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹² *Mimro* 122 on Jonah the Prophet; *Mimro* 12 on Jonah the Prophet and the Repentance of the people of Nineveh read in Jonah's Fast (Coptic); *Jonah the Prophet and the call to Nineveh*, translated and edited by Fr. Emil Abo Habib ElAntony, pp. 49-51).

The sea insists on swallowing Jonah!

The sailors assumed that they could please the sea by throwing out all of their rations and merchandise from the ship, but the sea would not accept a replacement for Jonah. He is the symbol of Jesus Christ, who is the only One able, by His death, to save all believers and the Church – God’s ship – from destruction!

St. John Chrysostom presents a dialogue with Jonah when he escaped saying to him:

+ “(8) Tell me, are you running away from the Master? Then, wait a little bit and you will learn from the state of affairs themselves that you will be unable to escape even from the hands of His servant, the ocean.

For as soon as Jonah set foot on the ship, the ocean raised her waves up high and raised herself to a great height. And just as a considerate hand-maid, discovering that her fellow-slave has run away because he stole something of her master's, does not revolt as previously mentioned but submits the individuals who captured him to myriads of troubles until she seizes him and brings him back, likewise, the ocean found her fellow-slave and recognized him.¹³

St. John Chrysostom

In a poetic piece, **Bishop Paulinus of Nola** reveals to us the rebellious nature of the escaping soul from her master’s face:

- “He surely teaches us that sea and stars are moved by God’s control. By vainly seeking to flee from God the Controller of all things whom none can escape, he aroused the anger of both sky and sea. Nature, which belongs to the almighty Lord, realised that he was revolting and she was afraid to play conspirator by transporting the guilty man safely through her demesne; she chained the runaway with winds and waves.”¹⁴

Bishop Paulinus of Nola

¹³ *Homilies on Repentance and Almsgiving* 5:8.

¹⁴ *Poem* 22

The sailors saw the sea troubled and they trembled; they saw the storm rise strongly and were tormented.

They saw the sea water unusually disturbed, provoked by a strong wind until it was irritated.

They saw that the wind threatened them from all sides, and the waves angrily raging on their ships in revenge.

The sea is like a man who is angry and full of antagonism; it is pernicious, troubled and raging with strong malice,

The sailors saw the sign of anger at sea and feared; and began to call on their gods to help them.

They threw the cargo from the ship into the sea, and but to no avail, because the weight of Jonah was still aboard.

They saw that the war threatened their very souls, and swiftly let go of their belongings.

The cargo of the ship, collected over long periods, was discarded as worthless, for a higher purpose.

The soul is precious and they longed to save it, so the miserable men mercilessly threw their belongings into the sea.

They considered their naked and unharmed ascent from the sea as the greatest trade-off at a time of danger...

The sailors threw all the riches that were in their ship, because their lives are more precious than all the great riches...

They threw the luggage as the prey is thrown to the lion, and the sea, which was intensifying, did not calm down.

The storm demanded vengeance on the son of Amittai and would not accept to replace him.

They threw their riches instead of the Hebrew and it did not accept. The waves were not satisfied with the ship's treasure instead of one man.

They presented to the waves numerous things, and it asked for nothing except Jonah.

They gave all their belongings and did not pay off their debt, for they were required to surrender Jonah.

They gave up all and remained in debt, because the sea asked for Jonah and would not give up on him.¹⁵

St. Jacob of Serugh

Jonah sleeps below deck!

St. Jerome presents two justifications for Jonah's slumber: [while the others were in danger, He was safe to sleep and wake up. At his request and in the mystery of His pain, He saved those who awakened him.¹⁶] As he says: [The sailors thought that the ship with its existing cargo was too heavy, and did not realize that the heaviness exists because of the fugitive prophet. The sailors feared, and each one shouted to his god, for they were ignorant of truth, but they did not know the divine providence. During their faulty religiousness, they knew something and realized some spiritual depth... For Israel, neither ease of life nor the pain could lead him to know God. Therefore, Joshua wept a lot on behalf of the people, but the eyes of the people were dry.]

St. Jacob of Serugh also presents two reasons for Jonah's deep slumber; either that he was escaping in sleep from his great grief at running away from God, or that he was a type (symbol) of Christ in His death, or both reasons together, grief and prophecy.

The sea cried aloud as it tried to preach to him, and the waves would not stop raging until he arises from sleep. But still, he did not wake up.

+ The sea raged, and the sailors were horrified, and the son of Hebrews [Jonah] was asleep calmly as if he were not there.

¹⁵ ¹⁵ *Mimro* 122 on Jonah the Prophet; *Mimro* 12 on Jonah the Prophet and the Repentance of the people of Nineveh read in Jonah's Fast (Coptic); *Jonah the Prophet and the call to Nineveh*, translated and edited by Fr. Emil Abo Habib ElAntony, pp. 49-51)

¹⁶ *PL. 26: 25 In Matt 1.*

The sea shouts to him with its towering waves: “get up from there!” and the man did not move from his heavy slumber.

Jonah’s sleep was not disturbed by the intense wind that worsened the whole sea, because it was the sleep of pain.

Each one of his companions cried to his god, and his slumber remained just as heavy.

Pain drowned him and imposed a heavy slumber on him; the sufferer lay down and could not arise again.

Despair devastated him, grief made his sleep heavy, and a great slumber fell upon him.

He was afraid because he had fled, and he trembled because the sea had caught him; from trouble he fell asleep, he who was filled with pain.

At the bottom of the ship he was overcome by great worry and anxiety; there drowning is, and in sleep he forgot his condition and did not move.

His ship is haunted by fearful disturbances surrounding it, and Jonah remained silent as though he didn't know.

Did he sleep thus because of grief? Or did a divine mystery associate him with sleep?

Did the Lord present a type (symbol) of his sleep in the sea, because Jonah was a symbol of the Son?

In the sea, he symbolized the Son’s burial when He descended to the depths, for it hurled him into the ship and he slept long ...

Perhaps this is why Jonah slumbered on the ship, like our Lord slept in the boat as the sea raged on the disciples.

This type was portrayed in Jonah’s sleep. His sleep mysteriously symbolized our Lord’s sleep, that in everything he prepares the way of suffering.

Among all those aboard the ship of the son of Amittai, it was not written that anyone else slept.

For the sake of this mystery he slept, and likewise he was awakened as the disciples awakened our Savior.

St. Jacob of Serugh

The true God was not called among the false gods

The shipmaster came to awaken Jonah and was astounded at (Jonah's) arrest! The sea, the waves, the wind, they all demanded Jonah in order to lead him to the One he had run away from!

Amid the violent currents, raging storm and impending danger, we would expect the sailors to lose their peace and calm, but they proved to be wise. They perceived that Jonah had a secret, and they asked him about all his life, asking to know the truth. Their questions were a gentle rebuke that God used to restore him. Their questions were appropriate for Jonah to reflect again on his actions.

As **Saint Jerome** says: [The purpose of the lots was that the sailors would force him to admit to the reason for such a great storm, or for what reason divine wrath had come upon them. Tell us, they say, where this wickedness comes from which has come upon us. Confess your disobedience to the Lord and your flight from the One who created the sea and land. He then admitted: "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and land."]¹⁷

Saint Jerome also says: [He did not say, 'I am a Jew', the name given to the people after the schism between the ten and two tribes, but 'I am a Hebrew', that is to say, passing by as Abraham who was able to say: "I am a foreigner and a visitor as were my fathers", and about whom it is written in another psalm: "When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people..." (Psalm 105:13). I fear the Lord God of the heavens, not the gods that you have invoked and who cannot

¹⁷ Jerome's Commentary on Jonah

save us, but the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. The sea that I flee to, the earth that I flee from.]¹⁸

Saint Jacob of Serugh says the great difference between the sailors' and Jonah's feelings. The former cried to the false gods and received no answer. The latter woke up to see that God had moved all of nature to capture him and realized that he had sinned by escaping. He had thought little of dying in the sea and refused the mission God had entrusted to him.

- It was written that they cried each of them to his god, and those who they called were not there to help them.
The one whose god is the true God was asleep and silent, and the sailors prayed so the truth would be manifested.
If Jonah had called upon his God alongside them, who would have known which god had saved them?!
In Jonah's sleep, God's economy accomplished its purposes, so that only the one God who speaks may be known.
Jonah lay down, and they called upon their gods. They were crushed and he slept unawares.
[God] made [Jonah] sleep, so he would not call [for his God] when they prayed, and when they were exposed, they rushed to awaken him.
It would have been a great insult to the one God if Jonah had called Him as the [other] gods were being called upon.
That is why he was asleep while they were screaming, so the One God is not mentioned with the gods.
And if he were awake, he would not have been able to call or use the name of truth (God) with falsity [other gods].
Jonah is asleep and they call their gods, and there is no one to answer or save them from the storms.
So the captain came to Jonah and said: "Why are you sleeping amid the horror surrounding us?
Wake up, look, the sea is endangering us! Pray to your God fervently to help us!
Let go of your sleep because death haunts us, we are being asked, not to sleep, but to die.

¹⁸ Jerome's Commentary on Jonah

Death came, let go of slumber for it is nothing; evil is inevitable, let your God save us!

The sound of the waves owns our souls. The seas are troubled, and you don't get out of your sleep!

You are no stranger to the pain that puts pressure on us: death is universal! Wake up with us, for we suffer.

Let your God respond and help us, resolve anger! Pray until we are saved.

Jonah woke up and looked around him at the surrounding sailors, as the waves stirred and heaved, and the ship was helplessly tossed about.

He saw the waves revolting against him and claiming him. The man was astounded and knew not what to do.

The runaway was captured and could not get away. Nature surrounded him, and he did not know where to turn.

He was raided by nature, by the intensity of the high waves and the powerful sea storms raged on ...

His soul diminished in his own eyes. Who can escape the Controller of such seas?!

His initial intention [to escape from God] abandoned him, and he greatly despised it. How could he escape the Maker of the sea?!

He was strongly enlightened by the power of creation and learned much about the creativity of the Maker.

St. Jacob of Serugh

The Sailors' Terror

St. Jerome envisions the sailors speaking to Jonah saying, "It is because of you, you say, that the winds, the waves, the sea and swells have been unleashed. You have revealed the cause of this wickedness, now tell us how to stop it. The sea swells against us, and we know that a God is angry because we took you on board. If we have sinned by taking you in, then what can we do so that the Lord does not become angrier? "What should we do with you?" that is to say: "shall we kill you?" but you are faithful to the Lord. Are we to protect you? But you flee from Him. All we have to do is carry out whatever you command, all you have to do is give the

command that the sea be calm, for now its wildness attests the wrath of the creator. We cannot wait any longer in face of the creator's revenge."¹⁹

Saint Jacob of Serugh is of the view that the sailors were horrified to realize that the sea, with its power of greatness, was disturbed for the sin of one man. Who is this man for whom the sea rages? How dangerous is his sin? How big is it? They asked him to take action because only he knew how to appease the rebellious waters.

- They saw that it seemed obvious that the sea had been disturbed for him, and as if it had a mouth; the sea screamed, announcing who he was looking for.
They all stared at Jonah as a vessel filled with evil; they came and roughly asked him.
They looked at him in terror as if he were a lair of snakes; and gazed at him with great anger:
Reveal to us why these great evils have occurred and come upon us because of you.
Come on, tell us what you do! What is your land, what people are you from, what have you done to be so evil?
How long have you been wicked that the whole sea is troubled for you?
Your sin seems greater than the sea, for it moved forcefully to escape from you.
Your sin is like the entire sea, and the waves and winds now surround us.
Are your people evil, or is your land filled with evil, or are you even more wicked than them because of your actions?
If your evils weren't great, the sea would not rage thus for you! If your work had not been greater than all the evils around, all this storm wouldn't have happened!
And why is the sea threatening to drown us? Rise and appease the revolting sea if you can, or if you need to, evacuate the ship lest it be destroyed.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹⁹ Jerome's Commentary on Jonah

The lots cry out against Jonah

Jonah became as though he was imprisoned in a den, for the sea, waves, and winds testify against him; and the sailors in the ship are demanding that he take action, and the lots revealed that he was the reason for the catastrophe! And now he has no option except to confess that he was guilty!

- Jonah stood in front of the waves of the great sea, while the storms raged and the sailors rebuked him.

An accusation was declared against the prophet from every side, and he renounced his way as he was being denounced.

The sea threatens, the winds are relentless, the waves are rising, the storm is powerful, the depths are troubled, and anger is raging, The ship is being chased, fear has dawned on the sailors, while the prophet is in the middle of the wreck! What can he do...?

The lots cried out: this is the man who has angered the sea greatly. His companions said to him: arise and tell us what you have done.

The dangers surrounded him inside and outside of the ship, the sailors from inside, and the surrounding waves from outside...

The symbol leaned against the prophet and imprisoned him as if in a den, in a difficult place.

Hardships fell upon him from every side, so he started telling the sailors what he did.

He was interrogated as if he was found guilty inside a court of law, and he exposed himself as one fleeing God's face.

St. Jacob of Serugh

The sea which served my nation now arrests me!

St. John Chrysostom says: "Jonah expected to escape by the ship, and the ship became his chain.²⁰" He thought that he would be able to escape from the God of the sea using a ship, and was caught inside it amid the raging waters. it captured him in his distress and opened a path of repentance for

²⁰ Conc. Stat. 6: 14

him. God used the same way Jonah thought was his escape route from Him and transformed it to be his path back to God.

How beautiful is the expression which **St. John the Chrysostom** says: “Many days he needed not, nor continued counsel; but speaking these simple words only, he brought all to repentance! On this account God did not lead him directly from the ship into the city; but the sailors committed him to the sea; the sea to the whale; the whale to God; God to the Ninevites; and by this long circuit He brought back the fugitive, that He might instruct all, that it is impossible to flee from the hands of God.²¹”

St. Jacob of Serugh says that when Jonah is asked about his people, he remembered that he was from the descendants of the Israelites for whom the sea was split in half so that they could tread it safely. Before them the Jordan’s waters had retreated so they could cross to the promised land! And now the sea was raging against him!

- The prophet started to speak with great pain, revealing to which people he belonged, and from what place.
I am a Hebrew from the sons of Abraham, I am a slave, born in the house of the true God, Adonai.
I am the son of Moses who split the great sea, and from the descendants of Israel who crossed the great sea in awe.
I am the son of Joshua son of Nun, the mighty one who split the waters of the Jordan and crossed it.
I am a Hebrew from the people who walked amid the waves and crossed the sea and not a single drop of water touched them.
It is my tribe who conquered the sea in the old days, and stepped on it as if it were land, and walked in a path amid the water.
It is my people who came out of Egypt, and the water of the sea stood for them, and made way for them to cross.
It is my Master who made Earth and the great sea, and I serve Him...
From Him I escaped, and for that, He has caught me. He makes the winds strong and if he rebukes the sea, He can make all of it dry like it does not exist ...

²¹ Conc. Stat. 5: 19

My God is great, and because I opposed his commandment, these dangers of the sea surrounded me.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Preaching to the gentile mariners!

St. Jerome comments Jonah's words to the mariners, saying: [This storm is searching for me. It threatens you with drowning so that you may hold onto me and live through my death! I know the truth that I am the cause of this great storm ... Behold, the waves urge you to throw me into the sea for them to calm down ... Notice here how noble this fugitive is! He does not balk or conceal the matter, or deny that he has escaped from God, but accepts the punishment with an expansive heart. He is willing to die rather than allow others to be destroyed because of him.] ²²

St. Jerome also says these words as a prophecy of the work of the Lord Christ - our true Jonah who accepted death to redeem everyone - when he says: [Our Jonah says: I really know that this great storm hovers over you because of me, so when the wind perceives me sailing with you to Tarshish (which means 'joyful contemplation'), I shall lead you to glory, so that where I am, there you will also be with the Father. This is why there is wrath! The world is crying and nature is disturbed! Death wants to swallow me up so it can kill you too, and it does not realize that I am a bait, because by my death it will die! Take me now, and throw me into the sea!]

Saint Jacob of Serugh highlights Jonah's spiritual wisdom. The mariners asked him about his people and his land, but his mind was preoccupied by God. Therefore, even as a captive falling into the hands of rebellious nature and the mariners, he revealed to them that his God is the Creator of the sea and land.

In humility and submission, the mariners did not rebuke Jonah. They realized who his God was and asked him how they could calm down the sea. Jonah escaped from serving and teaching the gentile people of

²² Jerome's Commentary on Jonah

Nineveh and now he found himself testifying to God among gentile mariners!

- He sent me to preach to a city and I rebelled against Him; when I did not fulfill his request, the waters tightly surrounded me.
As I would not take the road to Nineveh, the sea captured me; it roared at me and the waves dashed me with their raging turmoil. And when I did not want to call sinners to repentance, the waves of the sea rebuked me ...
Jonah's path in the sea became profitable, for the mariners gained wisdom by his teaching.
When the prophet was asked he answered wisely, and with discernment and understanding they heard him.
They asked him: Where are your people? Where is your land? They did not ask him: Who is your god?
But he rejoined: I worship God! He chose to answer about the Lord. He boasted that his Master created the sea and earth, and exalted his teaching with his reply.
The mariners heard the word of the Prophet with discernment, and they feared his words about the Lord.
They were terrified of him knowing who his Master was, and gently they approached him with the question.
Teach us what to do, servant of God, and reveal to us how the sea can calm down.
Your people are chosen, and your God is greater than all, you are wise. Find a way for us to be saved!
You know that no one can disobey your God, so tell us, how could we be saved while you are with us?
O wise one, see what we should do now.

Ask and teach us what to do, for we are humbled, and the sea torments us.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Jonah asks to be thrown into the prison of the sea!

Saint John Chrysostom believes that the love and mercy of the mariners rebuked the fugitive prophet, and that these pagans did not want to condemn a person who admitted that he was a sinner and was condemned by the sea, winds, and lots, even though he had been indifferent to the destruction of the entire city of Nineveh.

The captain of the ship realized with his experience that the storm was unnatural, that it was sent by God, that the surrounding ocean revolt was greater than human experience, and that the hands of the helmsman were useless. In this case, what is required is the Supreme Leader, the one who runs the whole world, and help from above is extremely important. This is why they left the oars, the sails, the ropes, etc. they stopped trying, and raised their hands towards heaven, pleading to God.

St. John Chrysostom

Saint Jerome comments on the marvelous position of the mariners, for they did not ask what Jonah did, nor did they ask God for an explanation of the situation, but rather trusted in God's justice in His judgments.

Saint Jerome highlighted in his writings the pagan mariners positive attributes, including that the Book of Jonah did not mention that the mariners carried Jonah and threw him overboard, but rather, the Septuagint says that they carried him and laid him in the sea according to his judgment upon himself. And that the sea calmed down because it was looking for this fugitive as if it was chasing him to arrest him. And when it caught him, it calmed down and rejoiced that it caught him.

[They wanted to use all their force and conquer nature so as not to offend the prophet of God. If the sailors rowed to regain the land, it was because they believed they could deliver the ship from danger without realizing what Jonah, who ought to have suffered, had said.]²³

²³ Jerome's Commentary on Jonah

[The sailors' faith is strong: they are all in danger of losing their lives, and yet pray for the lives of another. They know well that spiritual death is worse than natural death of the body. Do not lay innocent blood upon us, they say. They take the Lord as witness not to visit them for what they are about to do and say something like this: 'we do not want to kill your prophet, but he himself has proclaimed your wrath, and the storm shows us that you have done what you wished, O Lord. Your wish is accomplished by our doing]²⁴

Saint Jacob of Serugh believes that Jonah and the mariners conferred together in mutual love and frankness, and each was concerned for the others' benefit.

- Jonah said: Take me and throw me in the sea, and it will calm down, because it threatens to drown you.
Because of me the waves are upon you today, and you stand no chance if the sea does not take me from among you.
If you do not throw me in the waves it will not be silent. Cast me off now, enough! for you have been disturbed enough on my account.
I, who transgressed the command of my Lord, will fall into the sea, and sorrow will be removed from you ...
I am the sinner, the sea will calm down when it swallows me up, but you men will sail to port in great safety.
I will be an example for the whole world and future generations. The waves caught me, and the sea locked me up, because I tried to escape ...
The mariners heard Jonah's words that were full of pain; they mourned him, and wanted to save him if they could.
They thought in bitterness to return to the shore, but were unable to because waves surrounded them.
They struggled against the great waves, but the raging sea did not leave them nor did it calm down ...
By all means they tried to make Jonah live, but the sea threatened (saying): Unless I take him, I will not calm down.
Leave the fugitive and leave, go where you want and throw this man, the cause of the storm, overboard!
The ship is wrecked and sinking into the depths. If you do not throw

²⁴ Ibid

Jonah out of it, there will be no calm.

As long as he is there, the waves will not cease to rage. If I don't take him, I won't let the ship sail.

If you think of sailing to the port, leave me Jonah, and I will let you go on your way.

If you long for the port to rest from distress, let this Hebrew, who left his Master remain, and you shall sail.

You have known what is the cause of your distress, so why do you yet struggle? There is no way to save him.

St. Jacob of Serugh

The fugitive servant bows down and remains silent!

Jonah accepted his judgment, and surrendered himself to death, and there was nothing for the mariners except to cry out to God, so that Jonah's blood would not be asked of them! Such a wonderful picture of gentile pagans as they come to know God and seek His counsel and mercy right away.

- Amid the seas Jonah spoke, in order to help, and the word of the Lord gathered fruit even from the sea.
In a terrible hour, he stood between the waves and the mariners cried out to God in great pain.
They invoked a sad prayer at the hour of grief with great fear (saying): 'do not let us perish in return for this man's life.'
The storm rises, the head of the son of Hebrews is bowed; the sea roars and Jonah remained silent like a guilty man.
They prayed but he remained silent with shame; the waves chased him and terror seized him.
Prayer is swift and Jonah awaits retribution, the fugitive is caught and the hour of retribution dangerously approaches.
The servant who escaped stands with his head bowed, full of terror, and he was tormented by the waves like a rebel.
The mariners approached and submitted the matter to the Lord; they led Jonah among them like a prisoner.
They took him from the ship with great fear, and accompanied him in great gloom and pain.
O servant of God, this matter is not up to us, your Lord has

authority over the sea and the land, as we have learned from you ...
Our lost cargo does not matter to us like leaving you, but if your
fearful and powerful Lord has willed it, who can disobey him?
We are not sorrowful for our ship's ruin at your hands, but we
sorrow that we are deprived of your fellowship.
You have become a good example for all of us, because we learned
from you that there is an invisible Lord who controls the sea.
May your Word be to us a good seed and delight to us, and may we
confirm the taste of life that we have acquired.
Go, O Hebrew, may peace accompany you among the waves, and by
your innocent blood, may we not drown if we cast you overboard.
Let your soul be in the hands of your Lord, if He desires, it is easy
for Him to save your life from the waves. '

St. Jacob of Serugh

The persecuted ship rested from the waves!

Saint John Chrysostom sees throwing the disobedient Jonah overboard as an indication of the expulsion of sin from the ship of our life, so that our true peace returns to us , as he says: [The city was shaken because of the sins of the Ninevites; and the ship was shaken because of the disobedience of the prophet. The sailors therefore threw Jonah in the deep, and the ship was preserved. Let us then drown our sins and our city will assuredly be safe!]²⁵

St. Jerome says that casting Jonah into the sea was a symbol our Lord's suffering, which took away our raging sea and rescued the ship and all those in it from danger. During the passion of Christ the world was filled with surpassing inner peace!

Saint Jacob of Serugh says that when the fugitive was arrested, the nature revolting against him calmed down, because it had fulfilled its mission. It has delivered him into the hand of his Creator, to do with him according to His divine command. As for the ship, it rested from nature's oppression, for Jonah was thrown out of the ship into the sea like a newborn child

²⁵ Conc. Stat. 5: 18

emerging from his mother's womb, and the mother rested from her pains of labor.

- They took Jonah after these words, and threw him into the sea, and its raging ceased.

Immediately the angry waves calmed down, because the servant they had been chasing was caught.

The wind that troubled the great sea rested, as it seized the one it was commanded to catch.

The storm subsided like a merchant whose trip has ended, and the hidden mystery engulfed the sea in great safety.

The sound of the gales and storms quietened, and aboard the ship and her mariners serenity reigned.

The ship rested from the storms wrecking it, like a mother giving birth to her child, and her pain subsided.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly!

St. Jerome says: [Jonah – the shipwrecked fugitive – died and the ship was saved from the waves, as where they pagans.] He also says: [Faced with the Lord's wrath, the sailors fearfully implored their gods (Jonah 1:10); but after the pains they feared Him, meaning that they revered and worshipped Him ... They do not worship Him in the usual way, as we have seen in the beginning, but with "a great fear", according to that which is said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37). And they sacrificed victims that indeed, to take this literally, they were not able to have out at sea. But this is because sacrifice to God is a troubled spirit. And it is said in another place: "Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High." (Psalm 50:14)]

And as Jonah suffered this for the sake of those who were endangered by the storm, so Christ suffered for the sake of those who are tossed on the waves of this world. And as the command was given at first that the word of God should be preached to the Ninevites by Jonah, but the preaching of Jonah did not come to them until after the whale had

vomited him forth, so prophetic teaching was addressed early to the Gentiles, but did not actually come to the Gentiles until after the resurrection of Christ from the grave.

St. Augustine

Saint Jacob of Serugh believes that the gentiles entered the house of God while in the ship in the middle of the sea, and they offered sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving acceptable to God, and delighted in the fear of the Lord that many of God's people deprived themselves of.

- The mariners beheld the sea and it was calm, and they feared God exceedingly.
They saw how the symbol of the Lord frightened the waves, because His mighty power was manifested by His hidden symbol.
They witnessed the miracle, that the storms are chasing Jonah.
They realized the work of the Lord who commands the waves of the sea, and they obeyed him like servants.
They recognized the Lord of the seas by faith, so they offered sacrifices and made vows of great love.
They entered the house of Adonai (God) and took refuge in Him and began to offer sacrifices there.
They were kindled by the love of God, to whom they were disciples, and by their vows they approached Him with love.
The waves calmed down, and the sailors were quiet, fear disappeared, and there were many sacrifices and vows.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Jonah is a Type of the Son of God!

Jonah offered us his wonderful prayers, and indeed his unique prophetic praise, not in moments of comfort, not inside the temple as a teacher, but in the midst of suffering, as in the tomb of the crucified Christ. And as **Saint John Chrysostom** says: [If only we did not care about the place, but rather the Lord of the place, for Jonah was in the belly of the whale, and the Lord listened to his prayer. And you, if you're even in the washrooms, pray. Wherever you are, pray; Do not ask for a place to pray, for you yourself are a temple.]

Saint Jacob of Serugh believes that Jonah willingly submitted to his death sentence, so that the gentile mariners would not perish, and for this reason the Messiah, the Savior – who will come to the world to die for humanity’s sake by his own will – appeared to him,

The tribulation turned into a divine prophecy and a supreme symbol, which poured out on Jonah's soul exultation. He did not care about his death, because he became a symbol of the Giver of life who dies to raise all things.

He heard the prophetic voice in his depths, granting him reassurance and peace, for as he was a type of Christ, the Grantor of life, he would die with him and rise again. Corruption would have no power over him. He saw himself being thrown into the middle of the waters, a symbol of Christ who went to preach to those who were in Hades.

- Jonah descended to symbolize the Son of God, and to be a sign of the His death amid tribulation.

The mystery cried out to him: Go down and feel the depths, because your Lord will come; He will descend and shake the depths of hades and empty them.

Be a symbol of the Son of the living God, because He will descend to Hades like a diver.

Come, and be both dead and alive in the sea, contrary to custom, for the Giver of life will also die and rise again!

Dive and come down, prepare the path in the depths of the earth, for your master is coming down to the depths of the earth.

Let the sea flood you and bury you without corruption, for this shall happen in your master’s tomb when He descends to it.

Die, even though you are alive, and you will not be corrupted, for your Master will not be corrupted when he also dies.

Explore the depths of the great sea and search it, for your master will search the lake of the dead when he descends to it.

Portray for us the example of the living dead who does not become corrupted because this sign shall not appear in anyone but your master.

Go down to the valley and prepare the path before the king’s son for by his salvific death He will come down and search the depths.

Dive, O Hebrew, into the depths of the sea, and be a sign for the Son

of God for He shall dive into Hades and empty it.

Jonah's descent into the sea resembled the Son of God's descent into the land of the dead.

Jonah's descent into the sea calmed the waves, just like the Son of God's death pacified His executioners.

The sailors cried out to God because of Jonah, lest they be destroyed for this righteous man's blood.

And the righteous ruler washed his hands of our Lord, so he would not be stained by His pure blood.

The sailors begged to return to shore and were unable to rescue the Hebrew from drowning.

And the governor [Pilate] also pressed for our Savior [to be released] but could not rescue the righteous One!

St. Jacob of Serugh

A charge entrusted to the whale's belly!

The stories of Jonah, Enoch, and Elijah were written for our benefit (1Corinthians 6:10), and as **Tertullian** states, "They were written so that we would have faith that God's power is greater than all human laws associated with the flesh." **Saint Jacob of Serugh** sees an entrusted charge in the belly of the whale. Where he found only despair, the hope of the Lord was manifested to him, and where he found death, he encountered the new life of the resurrection!

- Then the Lord prepared a whale that swallowed Jonah and roamed the sea with him.
A great whale he witnessed in utter amazement; it enfolded him, and the swirling waves could not touch him.
He encountered hope in the place of despair, and from within death life sprang in mystery.
Where there is no shelter or savior, compassion sheltered him and plucked his life from ruin.

St Jacob of Serugh

A new, unique, and amazing ship!

St Jacob sees in the unique whale that carries Jonah in its belly, a marvelous image that depicts the wonderous mercies of God.

The whale became *a new and amazing ship* for Jonah. God surrounded it and protected it. Its passenger, Jonah, did not get hurt, and it was not the winds that moved it but the spirit of the Lord, who grants humankind a new birth in the waters of baptism.

The whale became an *exceptional house*. Its foundation was not the earth; it floated on the waters and did not bother its resident.

He saw it as a *new tomb* that connected a person who is both dead and alive, protected by the power of the resurrecting God.

He saw it as *an abyss that carries a dead man to give him life*.

He saw it as a *wedding carriage* carrying a husband who rejoices in the feast of hidden pains.

He saw it as a *virgin woman's womb* which became pregnant without a man's seed (as Jonah entered through the whale's mouth).

He saw it as *a new untrodden path* in the depths, in which Jonah walked.

The whale was like a royal palace, which gave shelter to the king.

The whale became like a *prison* in which he is locked and unharmed, and where he is rejoined with life.

At the end, St. Jacob *compares the buried ones*: both Jonah and his Savior, Jesus Christ, entered the tomb and introduced life to others.

- Jonah trod the fearsome path without a companion, and mercy followed and accompanied him in the place of despondency. The gracious One joined him to protect his life from corruption, and he began to tread a previously untrodden path. Mercy surrounded him in the sea's depths; he continued on the fearful without being terror. Where there were no guards or saviors, the son of the Hebrews maintained the symbol without corruption. The lots told him to descend to the depths of the earth, and the hidden myseries protected him from affliction. Jonah resided in *a new vessel* that was not shipwrecked, and moved swiftly within the waters. A *troubled ship* sank in the depths of the sea, and all that it carried

remained unharmed.

A *ship that moved*, not by the winds of the sea, but the *flow of the water* without sailors.

In wonder *he dwelt in a house that resided amid the waves* and from which nothing is lost in movement. Indeed it is a wondrous house!

St. Jacob of Serugh

A tomb that the living rest in!

Porphyry scoffed at the story of Jonah and implied that it was an amusing tale, at which **St. Augustine** wrote that if Christians paid attention to the mockeries of the pagans then they would not accept Christ's resurrection in three days.²⁶

❖ *A new tomb* carries a great power; he was dead inside and yet alive, and in him resides a hidden power.

An abyss carries one dead and sails upon the seas, and from him springs life, amazingly and powerfully.

He was dead, destroyed but not corrupted. He is alive and has not died, and they buried him!

A new groom he was, for whom the whale became a bedchamber, in which he vanished to rejoice in his wedding of sufferings.

A new child entered into his mom's womb through the mouth, and he became like one conceived without a man's seed.

The path of Jonah is full of wonders for those who meditate on it, and this lengthy homily is short and insufficient to recount its beauties.

Words fail the son of the Hebrews because his path is wondrous, and it can only be explained through the mind.

If his homily is described then it resembles the sea, and is even wider than the sea.

Here is a man not suffocated by the sea in which he was thrown, and his homily is deep, for he overcame the depths he fell into.

This is he who swam in all the seas and did not get wet, and the waters surrounded him without hurting him.

He is a wondrous and unique prophet, for no one has walked under

²⁶ Letter 170:6

the sea except him.

He opened a new pathway in the heart of the earth, and he descended into the depths, far away from the sailors.

He trod places no one ever saw from the beginning of time except him.

He descended to the depths and visited the unvisited and dwelt down there. Indeed, who does he resemble? ...

He is the old man who became a new child in the whale's body, and he found life without breathing in a narrow space.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Whale or Royal Palace?

- ❖ I speak of him with distinction and amazement, for the narrow space that he dwelt in remained wide!

The whale became to him as *a royal palace*, and he happily dwelt in it.

The great symbol of creation placed him there and gave him the ability to breathe so the narrow space would not harm him.

The wise one protected the Hebrew in the whale's belly, and though survival sounds impossible, He made him able to live.

He gave him the ability to breathe as one in a massive house, and as fetuses in (their mothers' wombs) without constriction.

He placed him unharmed in the whale's belly, and compassionately situated and locked life within him.

Jonah was buried in the whale's belly for three days to explain our Lord's path to the tomb.

The prophet was in the whale, and the God of the prophets chose, by death, to revive all.

The buried ones were not corrupted ...

Two dead men brought life by their actions: Jonah for Nineveh and the Son of God for all humankind.

They became divers who brought loot from the depths, and new life sprang from two who were dead!

Jonah dove and rescued Nineveh from the depths, and our Lord also dove and rescued Adam from the abyss.

Jonah was buried in a tomb that typified (symbolized) the tomb of

Christ; this is the mystery that sent the son of the Hebrews into the sea.

A wonderous saying and an astonishing silence for those who are buried: Jonah is alive, and the Lord of Jonah gives life to all!

Have you ever seen a buried man pray except Jonah? Or one who was murdered giving life to the dead except our Lord?!

Jonah trod this mystery-filled path, and thus our words can never do him justice.

St. Jacob of Serugh

A holy temple, a new monastery, and a hidden heaven!

Jonah was in a truly astonishing place that no human feet had ever trod before. He had left the temple in Jerusalem and now he perceived the whale *as a holy temple* where he could offer the sacrifice of praise. He had left his people to dwell alone, *as though he were in a monastery*, and lead an ascetic life of worship to God, his Beloved. He now rises *as though he were in heaven*, praising with the seraphim and the cherubim!

❖ The prayers ascended from the depths like a first fruit. He offered the prayer in the prison that he was inside.

And his prayers ascended to the high place of the Almighty Judge, saying, "I called the Lord in my grief and He answered me.

I lay down and He heard me from the depths which I fell into.

Death put me in the midst of hell, but You protected me.

The seas surrounded me, and you preserved me without oars. You locked me in the depths and threw me into the sea.

I descended to the sea, and you would not let me die. Death swallowed me, but you kept me alive inside its mouth.

You did not leave to me to suffocate though the waters covered me.

The waves covered my wretchedness and the fearful depths ...

Yet I am amazed! In the place of death, life picked me up! When my hope was utterly dead, You restored me.

From the depths of the sea, my tongue richly praises you, and at the bottom of the sea I sing to You with joy.

I left you, O Lord, in Jerusalem at the ark, and I found you under the ground preparing a way for me.

You are above the waters and under it, inside it, and beyond it. All the heights, depths, and directions praise you!

You made me reside in a new monastery underground. I sing to you with the sounds of praises because of your glory.

I praise you, O good Lord, from within death, and my mouth praises you during my tribulations.

The fish and the animals that swim in the sea praise you with amazing song because of me.

The seas tremble with praises of your great power because of me, O You who gives life to all with his wisdom.

Here, there are not sheep or bulls to sacrifice, so I offer my voice as a sacrifice to please you...

Like a man in a temple, he prayed to our Lord in the whale's belly, and like one standing amid the cherubim, his prayers were heard.

St. Jacob of Serugh

A Priest from Land and an Altar in the Sea!

St Jerome says that, "The Lord assumed your position (being expelled) ... to raise mankind to be with Him where He is (John 17:2)." He performs His duty as a High-Priest. He enters his heavenly altar while lifting his church to the heavens. As the apostle states, "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). So, He carried us within while He was expelled in order for us to be a source of pleasure to the Father. Jonah was not a priest to enter the holy place, and he was not the high priest that can see the holy of holies once a year, but he was in the depth of the sea. He was expelled and he became a symbol of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when he was expelled and entered His holy heaven. Moreover, **St Jerome** states, "In the depth of the sea he sees the altar of God, and by the spirit of prophecies he found himself meditating on something else," and writes, "He is like a priest who seeks to free people through his flesh."

St. Ambrose also states, “Like Jonah in the whale’s belly, I prayed to you for the sake of the people.”²⁷

What did St. Jacob of Serugh see in Jonah?

Sometimes he sees him as *the captain of an amazing ship*, or *one dead in a tomb* and accompanied by new life, or *a groom* in a traveling bedchamber who enjoys a unique and delightful feast, or a *fetus* in a virgin’s womb, or a *king* that in a wondrous palace, or a *captive* held in a harmless prison. Here he perceives him as *a priest* coming from land to pray in the sea at an *temple* not made by humans.

❖ How wondrous! A priest prays at lengths, and his altar swiftly speeds through the waves!

The altar is inside the whale, and his prayers thunder instead of offerings. No one enters the holiest of holies except for one, the high priest.

The priest came from dry land, entered, and sanctified a temple built by one born from water.

Aaron is in the tent, Elijah is on top of the mountain, Solomon is in the temple, and Jonah is inside the whale.

It is a celibate altar no priest has ever entered since for the glorious priest with his exceptional service.

St. Jacob of Serugh

The Prayer is Answered!

“So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (Jonah 2:10). **St. John Chrysostom** believes that God taught Jonah to be gentle with others because if the whale was able to swallow and vomit him without hurting him, shouldn’t he also be compassionate with his brothers even if they are from the gentiles? The waves received him but did not suffocate him, and the whale swallowed him without hurt. Hence, the prophet should have been merciful and compassionate, or else he would be

²⁷ The Prayer of Job and David 6:25

crueler than the aggressive beast, the ignorant sailors, and the raging waves.

Saint Jerome believes that the word “vomit” refers to the triumphant life that has emerged from the deepest and most impenetrable parts of death. It was impossible for hell to take hold of Jonah or for corruption to afflict him as the psalmist says, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Psalms 16:10). He rose as a first born from among those who had fallen asleep to raise us with him and as Saint Jerome states, “For those who were beforehand captives in death, He brought them to life again.”²⁸

- Wondrous are the Lord’s stratagems. Though plunged into the sea, he was tossed on the waves unharmed. Though devoured, he lived on, and the beast that had swallowed him remained unfed by the living food. He was the loot but not the whale’s food whose belly he used as a dwelling place. What a worthy prison for God’s saintly runaway! He was captured on the sea on which he had tried to flee. Translated to the deep belly of the massive beast, he was imprisoned in a living gaol. Thrown from the ship to destruction, he yet sailed upon the waters, an exile from land, a guest of the brine. He walked in the cavern of the whale’s body, a prisoner both captive and free. He was free upon the waves as he floated in that floating whale, both within the sea and outside it; and though physically incarcerated, the prophet emerged in spirit to fly to God. Body was constrained by body, but the bonds of earth did not constrain the flight of his mind. Though enclosed in that belly, he broke out of his prison by prayer, and reached God’s ears. Free for prayer but detained from flight, he proved himself by his faith. He had thought to escape God by sea, to hide from God in a ship, but now he believed that the Lord was with him even inside that whale submerged in the sea.²⁹

Bishop Paulinus of Nola

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Poem 24: 205.

- When Jonah prayed in the whale's belly, he saved his life from corruption.³⁰
- Did Jonah consider repentance unnecessary for the pagan Ninevites, when he sought to flee the duty of preaching? Or rather, foreseeing how God's mercy is given even to gentiles, fear that that mercy would, as it were, destroy (the credit of) his proclamation? And accordingly for the sake of a profane city, not yet possessed a knowledge of God, still sinning in ignorance, did the prophet nearly perish? So when he suffered as such, he became a typical symbol of the Lord's passion, which was to redeem heathens as well (as others) on their repentance.³¹

Tertullian

- Since the holy God has promised those who hope in him a means of escape from every affliction, we, even if we have been cut off in the midst of the seas of evils and are racked by the mighty waves stirred up against us by the spirits of wickedness, nevertheless endure in Christ who strengthens us. We have not slackened the intensity of our zeal for the churches, nor do we, as in a storm when the waves rise high, expect destruction. We still hold fast to our earnest endeavors as much as is possible, sensible of the fact that he who was swallowed by the whale was considered deserving of safety because he did not despair of his life but cried out to the Lord. So then, we ourselves, having reached the uttermost limit of evils, do not give up our hope in the Lord but watch and see his help on all sides.³²

St. Basil the Great

- How amazing! When he prayed in the whale's belly, his prayers arose without hindrance. They split the depths and ascended, and the storms did not hinder them. They flew to the heavens and were not affected by the depths. They entered amid the angels, and they were not denied. They passed by the fiery orders and they were not stopped. Their hands were clenched, and they cried out in pain in front of the

³⁰ Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 2: 3: 22.

³¹ On Modesty 10

³² Letter 242

Lord. They bent their head and prayed for mercy from the Divine Compassion.

Their voices thundered with their gentle harp, and their mouths begged for mercy.

The one You threw in the great whale like a prison, supplicates You to free him.

The one who has not lost hope is suffering. Guilty and tormented, he thirsts for your mercy.

The one buried like the dead beneath the land, looks to You to raise him if you will.

The one to whom the whale became a prison, and You threw him into it, and You chained him to it because he had run away.

My Lord, he has sinned: let him come and behold Your face. Open his prison so he may leave the darkness.

The fruit that Jonah sent from the whale's belly is beautiful: a prayer sent as a first fruit to the Lord of the most high.

It was a first fruit because it was new, and the angels received it with love because it was beloved.

It came from a place far away, and was beautiful because who has ever prayed from beneath the earth except Jonah?

It came from afar like a beautiful bride, and the angels marveled at its beauty.

It is a song that rises from the depths on its own, and there has never or will ever be anything like it.

It is a hymn sung by a Hebrew from the bowels of the earth, and it miraculously reached the highest place.

It is a cluster of glory, choicely picked from the belly of the whale and sent, and the angels were delighted with its sweet taste.

Jonah did not put incense on fire but on water, and the heavenly hosts marveled at its scent.

It was a pure prayer that had a scent more pleasing than perfume, and a fiery love that burns brighter than flames.

A mouth holier than the censer of pure gold, and a prophet of secrets who astonishes all who perceive him.

The prayer of Jonah was heard from the depths, and everyone was able to hear it.

The prophet cried out with great suffering from the whale's belly, and the merciful One heard his voice.
The prayer entered, and was accompanied by the great Compassion, to bring hope to the hopeless one.
The symbol of life sprinkled (like water) on the dead man, and he arose from the tomb after three days.
The Lord commanded this great whale with a hidden symbol, and sent the son of the Hebrews to dry land unharmed.
The one who raises the dead commanded the tomb and brought back the dead man, and the whale vomited him as it had swallowed him.
The captive came out of the darkness and saw the light, he became a new person born from the water.
The whale gave birth to him as a child who came from darkness, and the land received him as a newborn child.
He ascended as he descended, and he was not corrupted in hell. He came out of death and was full of life without being harmed.
The prophet walked in corruption for three days, but was not corrupted in this narrow space that ruins all.
The preacher exited the house of suffering unharmed, and the sea returned him to the dry land.
The resurrection shone upon the prophet and sprinkled him with life; he opened his eyes and saw the light, and he longed to encounter it.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Jonah stones Nineveh with the sounds of his preaching!

St. John Chrysostom says, "[The Ninevites when they heard the prophet vehemently declaring, and plainly threatening but even then, they did not lose heart but, although they had no confidence that they should be able to move the mind of God, or rather had reason to suspect the contrary from the divine message even then they manifested repentance saying: "Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" (Jonah 3:9) Now if barbarian and unreasoning men could perceive so much, how much more ought we do this who have

been trained in the divine doctrines and have seen such a crowd of examples of this kind both in history and actual experience.³³?

He also says, [In the days of Jonah, if God had not threatened with destruction then he would have not removed destruction... if he did not threaten us with hell then we would have all fallen into it.³⁴]

And again he says, [Threatening one with danger rescues him from it... threatening death creates life. He stopped the judgement after he announced it unlike what happens with the current judges, for if they make a judgement it must be done... but in terms of God, he does the opposite. He announces the judgement in order to stop it.³⁵]

St. John Chrysostom often referenced God's threats of death and corruption, clarifying that they do not lead to death but God uses them to lead his people to a life of repentance. Threatening with death generates life, and "that is why God threatened by hell, so no one would go to hell."

St. Jacob of Serugh saw the words of Jonah as pointed arrows, and he directed them at the people of Nineveh because he did not open for them the door of hope. He did not demonstrate the mercies of God which embrace those who repent, but he told them of the fearful events that would take place. They did not doubt his threats, but believed him and acted instantly.

- Jonah began walking in Nineveh, and he uttered sounds that inflicted sufferings on their listeners.
He told the city and warned it of what would happen, and he angrily threatened them.
He threatened with the destruction of the city, and they heard horrific sounds of ruin.
He threatened them with death, and called for God's wrath to wreak havoc on them.
The prophet began his warning that was filled with suffering and proclaimed that the city would be destroyed and not rise again.

³³ Letter to Theodore

³⁴ On 1Tim. Homily 15

³⁵ Conc. Stat. 5:16

Woe to you, woe to you, O arrogant city, for your terrible transgressions have risen against justice, and justice has drawn its sword to destroy your beauty.

Woe to you O Nineveh, for your transgressions have increased, and wrath has come from God to bring down your walls and destroy your palaces.

Woe to you for your sins have gone up like smoke, and the anger with its might will destroy you.

Woe to you O famous Nineveh, the time for your destruction has arrived because of your sins.

Woe to you O wonderful and strange city, they will destroy you, and you will appear as a shame.

He has given you forty days O daughter of the people, and his anger will descend upon you, and you will be destroyed.

In a little while, the spear will reach your arrogance, and all your beauty will be corrupted. The just judge has judged you because of your sins. He issued the judgement, and he shortened your life to destroy you.

After forty days, you and everyone inside of you will be dust.

After forty days, you will be a tomb for those inside of you.

After forty days, your beauty will be gone, and your glory will become darkness.

After forty days, no one will enter through your doors, and the roads that lead to you will be empty.

After forty days, those who pass by you will cry about you, and they will avoid you as if you were a cursed grave.

After forty days, fear will scare your beauty, and your high castles will fall on their residents.

After forty days, all your decorations will be destroyed, and your beautiful buildings will fall.

After forty days, your nobles will descend to hades alive, and the anger will squeeze them like a juicer.

After forty days, you will not be a city but dust, and they will call you hell rather than the beautiful Nineveh.

After forty days, the sword will be drawn to destroy your people, and your palace will be full of the dead.

In a little bit, he will meet you O sinner, and your judgement day will near O the lady of lust.

The scary sounds have come to disturb you, and the thunder of anger will carry your fall.

Jonah uttered fearsome words to the daughter of the people; she was terrified, and she quivered and trembled at his threats.

He shot at her the news like arrows, she fell in front of him, and he kept stoning her with his terrifying news.

He loudly shouted at her, and she was terrified. He threatened her with ruin and she believed him and put on her sufferings.

St. Jacob of Serugh

The fortified city of walls fears one man!

The saint depicts the meeting of Jonah with the people of Nineveh as a battle. Jonah is one warrior and the other are the Ninevites. He arrived at Nineveh without a weapon, but they feared of him and saw him as a mighty army.

- He aggressively warned them with threats, and they carefully listened to him. He uttered the words, so she woke up from her sinful sleep, and she swiftly and powerfully repented.

Jonah's words were ringing in the streets and markets, and every human listened to his warnings with love.

The city of walls was in fear at this one man, and he defeated it with his forbidding voice and without weapons. He yelled at her, she listened to his threats, and she feared his words.

She trembled at him more than a mighty army. He crushed her with his voice like a powerful host.

Though unarmed, his voice terrified them like the voices of fighters.

He appeared as a poor man, but the armies feared him.

He seemed poor and despised, and his voice scared the leaders of the earth.

He appeared despicable, and the city was terrified at his voice.

St. Jacob of Serugh

O Servant of God, speak gently to us!

In humility, the Ninevites asked Jonah to be gentle with them, so he opened his mouth with a word of hope. They were ready to learn, for they were fasting, and they put on the sackcloth, and they gathered together in the spirit of unity to learn how to please God.

- When they knew that God had become angry, they ran away from him and protected themselves with repentance.
They strove against wrath by fasting, and they wore the sackcloth in great sorrow while entreating God.
They entered into repentance as a walled city, and they used fasting against the wrath as they entered the war raging against them.
With sackcloth they protected themselves from danger, and came closer to righteousness through their fasting.
All of them, old and young, felt the pain because of the horror of their situation because Jonah's voice terrified them with threats.
The word reached the King of Nineveh in great fear, and he feared the voice that proclaimed their fall.
They told the majestic king about Jonah (saying), "Who is this who threatens your majesty?
Who is this who mocks your crown, you, and threatens many with the fall of the city?
Look, your majesty, at the news that the one who mocked you brings, and explain his motive, with what power does he threaten you?" ...
They gave him gifts, and he did not accept them. They bowed to him, and he kept threatening them.
The king pleaded with him, and he did not listen. The king asked him to stop, and he kept on threatening them.
O servant of God, tell us if there is a way that can lift away the pain we feel.
What can please your wrathful master? If it is possible to please him, ask him to remove His anger and tell us how we angered Him.
Teach us how we can lift this wrath away from ourselves?

St. Jacob of Serugh

A Most Unusual Battle!

The king's wisdom was evident in how he handled the situation:

1. In humility, he did not underestimate this unarmed man, who appeared poor and despised.
 2. He instantly left his throne and sincerely repented.
 3. He gathered all the people, even the children, and had them participate in the battle.
 4. He realized that children and babies are stronger than any weapon, so with them, they could win the battle and earn the mercies of God.
- He therefore who does not fast is uncovered and naked and exposed to wounds. If Adam had clothed himself with fasting (Genesis 3:7), he would not have been found to be naked. Nineveh delivered itself from death by fasting. And the Lord Himself says, "this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21).³⁶

St. Ambrose

- Like a heavenly power overseeing Nineveh's charge, fasting snatched the city from these gates of death and restored it to life.³⁷

St. John Chrysostom

- How marvelous! He forgets that he is a king, fearing God the King of all. He does not bring to mind his own power but rather comes to possess the power of the Godhead. Marvelous! When he forgets that he is a king of men, he begins to be a king of righteousness. The prince, becoming religious, did not lose his empire but changed it. Before he held a principedom of military discipline. Now he obtained a principedom in heavenly disciplines.³⁸

St. Maximus of Turin

³⁶ Letter 4:4

³⁷ Homilies on Repentance and Almsgiving 5:4

³⁸ Commentary on Jonah

- Jonah said: there is no way to stave off this wrath, for your sins have proliferated and your city will fall.
Evil has been repeatedly done, and the inevitable end has arrived.
The time is near, and this city will fall.
The Lord has sent me, the one who is responsible for our creation, to let you know about your fall and the frightening sounds in your walls.
He is the Almighty that all living things fear, and the earth trembles because of him because he is its Lord.
He is the one who disciplined the earth with water and cleared it of all sinners, and they were not saved.
He is the one who scattered the people throughout the earth since Babylon, and if they sinned against him then he destroyed them.
These sounds devastated the king of Nineveh, and he trembled at the fearsome news.
He feared Jonah than thousands of soldiers, and he fell in front of the despised man.
He left his beautiful throne, took off his crown, put on sackcloth, and repented.
He realized that Jonah was not going to stop, so he decided to contradict him.
He realized that the prophet was threatening with power, so he tightened his loins to face danger with strength.
He knew what this battle required, so he prepared himself like a brave man.
He realized that this battle was unlike any other battle, so he gathered his people and urged them to strive.
He lined up his soldiers and made them fight with prayers.
He made the men, women, and children fast as much as they could, to line up and oppose the wrath.
The king told his soldiers, who were gathered to pray: the battle we are entering is no ordinary battle.
Let us awaken our souls to be victorious through righteousness. Put down your weapons, and put on sackcloth instead of raising your shields.
Let go of your arrows so that he may hear our prayers. May the children and elderly rise and line up in front of the wrath, and may

the men and women fight against corruption.

Everyone was involved in the battle, even newborns! It was an extremely difficult battle.

A boy who has not sinned can defeat thousands in this battle. They must join us as every battle they fight will be won.

The Hebrew threatens us with destruction, so we must confront him lest he rejoices when he defeats us.

The nursing babes will join us and support us until the evil leaves us. In this battle, boys are stronger than men, and the children strive easier than the mighty ones.

The children who do not sin can slay thousands in this battle, so let them join us because this struggle will be better with them.

St. Jacob of Serugh

Through repentance, the king challenges the prophet's threats!

The king wisely realized that his life and the lives of his people were in God's hands, the God of this prophet. Therefore, if Jonah locked the door of his heart, repentance can open the doors of God's mercy.

- Nineveh believed, but Israel kept resisting. The uncircumcised believed, but the circumcised remained in their unfaithful ways.
- Fasting and sackcloth are the weapons of repentance, and they aid the sinners. Fasting first then sackcloth. The former leads to what cannot be seen, and the latter to what is seen. One is always standing before the Lord, and the other stands before the people.
- Through repentance, the sackcloth can be linked with fasting because empty stomachs and clothes of sorrow plead greatly to the Lord in prayer.

St. Jerome

- The Ninevites fasted and won the favour of God. The Jews fasted too but profited nothing, and received blame (Isaiah 58:3,7; 1 Corinthians 9:26). Since then the danger in fasting is so great to those who do not know how they ought to fast, we should learn the laws of this exercise, in order that we may not run uncertainly, nor beat the air, nor while we are fighting contend with a shadow. Fasting is a

medicine; but a medicine, though it be never so profitable, becomes frequently useless owing to the if it used inappropriately due to the lack of experience of him who exercises it.³⁹

St. John Chrysostom

- Behold the Hebrew is asserting and threatening our annihilation, let us watch, lest he gloats at our defeat.
He did not stop calling for the wrath to destroy us, and we will not rest till we call for mercy to save us.
The man asked for his word to hold for he is a prophet, let him warn, and let us supplicate his Master.
He does not acquiesce for he does not have the right to refute his words, his Lord gave him the authority, let us return to Him lest He destroys us.
He is a messenger that speaks what he was told. He is given authority to preach, not to destroy, so we do not sorrow.
If it is in his hands (the prophet), he would have destroyed the city. It is in the Lord's hands, so we should not cease to supplicate to Him.
If it were in the prophet's hand to build and destroy as he threatens, it would have been difficult to plead with him for he does not have mercy.
The word has been delivered to him, let him preach it with all his might. He was permitted to warn, and if we could he would have eradicated us with his voice.
But we raise us the voices of repentance before his voice, and we pray in tears, so we quieten the man down.
We do not entreat him, for he won't concede or cease his words. Let us send the voices of our sorrow to the Most High, for He shall save us.

St Jacob of Serugh

³⁹ Conc. Stat. 3:8

Preaching repentance prevails over the voices of threats!

The king resorted to honest repentance and fasting, the Christian weapons that target the mercies of God. The Latin poet Paulinus of Nola says that Jonah, being a man of prayer and full of hope, prayed in the belly of the whale.

- Hoping for human salvation is no salvation, for mortal means will not rout death. So those who live in a time of anxiety should be anxious to pray to the Lord of heaven, who dispenses sadness or gladness and who alone by his transcendent sway can ensure that troubles are removed, and happy times restored...The power of prayers and the healing efficacy of tears in the presence of God our Father *is the lesson we must learn from Nineveh which was saved by its grief*. So the faith that relies on God should strengthen panicking hearts and its trust in God should in time of sorrow anticipate untroubled days. For fear of God ensures freedom from fear, whereas the one who does not fear God alone is right to fear everything. Those who have no confidence in Christ as bearer of salvation must put their trust in legions.⁴⁰

Bishop Paulinus of Nola

- The order issued from the king's house, calling the entire city to repent.
Many proclaimed the orders in the marketplace, one after the other, and the voice of Jonah faded between their voices.
The servants of the king cried out in the city, they filled the marketplaces with their painful warning.
The king's and nobles commanded all the people to fast in great pain. Not only people, but also beasts. The sheep and the oxen shall not eat or be shepherded in the houses of their master, or drink water. Only a great fast can stall the great wrath!
All the people put on sackcloth, alongside their cattle, and everyone repented from their old ways.

⁴⁰ Poem 26

Let transgression cease and deception no longer spread in the city, let no news of theft or robbery be heard at all.

Let the mouth of oppression and the love of money be shut, and let news of adultery and immorality cease.

Let the visible transgression and the inner deception stop: the everyday sin and the iniquities of all times.

Behold, wrath is coming, let every man wield a weapon to fight it.

Evil has been revealed, so let the people run to repentance.

The city was shaken because of the transgression that has been committed in it, let every man support his house with fasting lest it falls down.

If the supplication stops, destruction will arrive; and desolation approaches if fasting does not rebuke it.

Wrath is intense, unless prayer puts it out, let everyone bear fruits worthy of repentance.

Let everyone do as it befits faith, and let everyone carry their good deeds as fragrance.

Let every person pay off a great debt of coins, and let them swear according to their paying capacity.

He has tears, let him bring them and he will be accepted, and he who offers pain, through his pain his dues will be fulfilled.

If someone brings groanings, they are beloved, and a supplication pleases the debtor greatly,

Ash is wealth and kingly adornment, tears are gold, and through them the deed shall be torn.

Ash is a treasure befitting of the king. Tears are gold, through them all deeds shall be erased.

The days are short and the wrath is great and fearful; let everyone run and call for mercy to save us.

These voices were heard from the messengers of the king, and the people were gathered in fear to the voice of supplication.

The voice threw the brave king into struggle, and the entire city bore the weapon as one man.

He stood in front, and his armies behind his heel, and he urged them to repent as though it were to face danger.

Let us entreat my armies, so long as we can, lest evil strikes suddenly and wipe us .

I have faced many wars, but this is the only one that scared me, I looked upon the battle and trembled.

I never feared the troops of mighty men, but now my legs are shaking before the destitute Jonah.

The tribes of the earth did not scare me in war, but this man terrified me without fighting.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

Repentance: A battle or a feast?

- Nineveh's gathering for repentance was lovely, and the voices of pain were heard from all mouths.

Beloved was the celebration on their streets, for they shed tears and gained mercy and salvation.

Their feast of meekness was joyous, because weeping was heard in it instead of flutes.

The new feast that took place there was magnificent, and in place of sacrifices, prayer was offered in it.

It was the banquet that Nineveh prepared for its wrathful Master, for Him to enter and rest at its table and pass over its sins.

Her house she adorned with the garments of nobles, and the marketplaces she wet with her tears.

It decorated its doors with dark sackcloth, full of pain, and instead of incense it poured tears on its side.

Groaning sprung out of all mouths like fragrance, that the Lord would be appeared by that work He loves.

It was a supplication that filled all who beheld it with wonder, because the king became their instructor to them.

The groom came out of his tent wearing sackcloth, and the bride came out from her chamber and bowed her head in great sorrow.

They looked at the king as he took off his crown in great pain, and they dropped their crowns and wept with him.

The brides threw out the magnificent wedding clothes, and gloried in

covering their bodies with sackcloth.

Instead of luxury, they put on the garments of sorrow, and instead of fragrant oil, they put ashes on their heads.

Instead of the wine prepared for their wedding, they mixed tears for those who were gathered at their place.

At Jonah's voice, all voices of joy ceased from the city, and the entire city and its inhabitants were clothed with sackcloth.

The decorated jewelry of the betrothed ceased, for only sackcloth shone in their marketplaces.

The news of fear terrified the virgin women, and they cast away all the beauty of their decoration.

The young men despised the decorations of the prostitutes, and they took them off like the weeping hermits.

The king demonstrated mourning to the entire people, and all who came to see him wept with him.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

The voice of babes is mixed with their mothers!

- The babe became a stranger to his mother's breasts, crying before her and she cried back at them,
The voices of mothers were mixed up with the voices of their children, and sorrowful voices thundered and supplicated.
Milk was mixed with the mothers' tears as they watched their children cry out of torment.
The king, full of wisdom, enforced a great fast for the people and the animals.
They prohibited the babe to receive milk, for he is a human, lest the fast of the king be compromised in any way.
The elderly cry out before the young men like the elders (priests), and by his works, the king is likened to the high priest.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

Nineveh judges the daughter of Jacob!

- Now I tell its great news, and this is pleasing to me, and I do not bore of this story and all its benefits.

I declare how much it struggled in repentance, and through its supplication, its news spread to the whole world.

Let my tongue weave the crown of melodies, and offer it to the daughter of nations (saying) how well she has done.

In her story I become active, working with energy for this active one who struggled in her entreaty.

With her, I will disturb the daughter of Abraham (saying) how despicable she was for not accepting her Savior.

That one heard the prophet calling for destruction, and this one doubted her Lord who came to ask for her.

Jonah entered the city of Nineveh with no astounding victories, only warnings of destruction.

He said a simple word without proof, and the men of Nineveh, who were wise, did not belittle him.

Thus it was written that the men of Nineveh will rise and judge the generation that slandered the Savior.

The daughter of the Hebrews is now judged by the people of Nineveh, because they accepted the story and gave the fruits of repentance.

Jonah entered Nineveh with no wonder making or fame like our Savior.

He did not turn water into delicious wine for enjoyment but mixed it with pain, and it accepted it from him in wisdom.

He did not heal the sick to be loved, but threatened the mighty men with destruction and they did not complain.

When he came with bad news they listened to him in love, so if he had come good things there what would they have done?

There, he announced that the city will be destroyed and was accepted; if he had raised the dead how much would he have been exalted?

He told her that her inhabitants will die, so she bowed down and

venerated him, so if he told her that her dead will come to life, maybe she would have crowned him as (her) king!

Zion declined the way of our beloved Lord, and when He performed good things in her he was insulted.

He healed the sick and cured ailments and drove out devils and purified lepers and exorcised demons and made the deaf hear ...

Zion denied all these good things and after all these things repaid the Son of God with insults.

Jonah did not do any of these acts in the land of Nineveh, he started with destruction and they all loved him and begged him ...

She (Nineveh) truly deserves an exalted name in the world, for she performed goodness on this earth.

She who rises up in the last day with the daughter of Jacob and judge her, for she doubted the savior.

Nineveh was saved by supplication, not gold; the city paid tears for its price, and it entered and inhabited it.

A city that was obtained with prayers from the Lord, the village of might for which sackcloth and ashes became a wall.

The city of the uncircumcised will overcome the city of the circumcised on the day of judgement, teaching her sons the fasting of pain by which it is saved.

She gathered around the supplication in great pain for she did not doubt the messenger who spoke to her.

She heard Jonah and believed the words he spoke to her, and she straightened her way unto her Lord to beseech Him.

She wrote the supplication in tears, like a message that she sent to God in His high dwelling place:

“My Lord, I ask that You stop the destruction prepared for me, and drive out the wrath coming to demolish my walls and remove it.

My Lord, I ask You to return the sword which is pointed against me, and remove the wrath, elevated on my head, lest I get punished by it.

My Lord, I ask that You prevent the destroyers who threaten me, and without feat keep my walls that protect me.

My Lord, I ask You to protect my children from danger, and my gates

that protect me, let them stand with no destruction.
The morning came, visiting the sorrowful and uplifting them, and like those in prison, he opened the night and set them out.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

Morning shines on Nineveh

- The voices of weeping were turned to joy, and instead of tears they washed their face with rejoicing.
The freed men cried out with a loud voice: Let the new tidings make you rejoice O king, and that we may live with you.
Arise O active one from the supplication, and come rejoice with us.
O wise one, change your sackcloth, for the wrath has ceased.
Rise from the ashes, for the Lord has been pleased with us approaching Him. Conclude the litany, for the city has been covered with mercy.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

A Dispute full of wonder!

Saint John Chrysostom says: [The prophet was indeed ashamed, foreseeing when he saw that his prophecy was not fulfilled. God however is not ashamed, but is desirous of one thing only, the salvation of humankind, and the righteousness of His own servant.]⁴¹

Saint Jerome says that Jonah's grief and his complaints were based on his knowledge of God's mercy and longsuffering, as it was not possible to present Him as a harsh God to the people of Nineveh! That is why he desired death, so as not to witness the mercies of God getting bestowed on the gentiles while Israel perishes. So he says on the mouth of Jonah the prophet: [I have been the only one of the prophets chosen to announce my people's ruin to them through the safety of others.]⁴²

⁴¹ Conc. Stat 5:16

⁴² Jerome Commentary on Jonah

- This Hebrew was grieved, and he became sorrowful and depressed, and prayed in pain to God.

Jealousy spread within him, to rebuke God because of the mercy, and he apologized.

My Lord, I know You are merciful and longsuffering, that is why I ran away when You sent me.

I know your long suffering from long ago, and so I feared come to Nineveh which is full of transgression.

My Lord, I know there is no limit to Your grace, it does not let you strike the wicked as it is befitting!

I was sure that the river of mercy flows from You, and all Your threats fade as if they never were.

My Lord, I know Your compassionate hands that cannot hold the rod of fierce torture.

I feared this thing that happened now, so I fled away from you like a sinner.

This was my conviction when I was in my country, for I found You to be compassionate as I knew.

I did not relearn who You are, I knew You and thus I found it difficult to warn...

I knew and did not want to come to Nineveh, You forced me to come, so I came to call for destruction, which did not happen.

O wise people! Witness what Jonah blames God for! I knew that You are merciful and compassionate.

He reproached Him for mercy, and blamed Him because He does not harm, and rebuked Him for abundant grace.

It was a dispute full of wonder for the one who beholds it, and the prophet prepared it to quarrel with God.

He looked for arguments, according to his power, to discuss with Him, and found none but His mercy.

He reproached Him with this reproach because He has mercy, and Jonah started blaming Him.

Jonah was upset, and if he found more reasons, he would fo with them against his Lord because of the grief that befell him.

But as he found nothing to say, he said in short: I knew that You are merciful and compassionate.

He blamed God for his mercy and longsuffering, and started to ask for the death of his soul in bitterness.

He entreated the Lord:” Lord, take my soul, because death is better than life to me.

I wish to die, and do not make a liar! Now, my word of prophecy is spoiled, and death is better than shame to me.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

A leafy plant grows above his head!

Jonah looked to the plant’s shade for shelter and protection from the sun’s heat, so he rejoiced for it and his grief went away. But as the worm struck the plant, his soul became bitter within him and he was crushed, wishing for his own death. The leaves of the plant were full of holes because of the worm, so he felt like his shelter was full of holes. The leaves fell over his head and woke him up terrified. His shelter was no longer able to protect him from the heat of the sun.

- The Lord gave him something, so he would experience the pain of its loss when taken away.

He ordered a plant to grow over his head, so the shade multiplied under the shelter He made for him.

Jonah had no shelter to destroy, or children to be plucked out like flowers.

He was not tested with the love of the world to make him more patient, and to test him, God gave him a plant to rejoice in.

There is great wisdom concealed in the plant of Jonah, and a great mind was manifested in a small thing.

The Lord ordered, and the plant grew over Jonah; he saw it and rejoiced, and his great grief went away.

The weary one rested under its shade, and his heart rejoiced for the uplift of the hardship around him.

The man liked the new shelter that he gained suddenly, and loved so

much that he forgot all his pain.

His soul rejoiced with the leaves that he saw there, so his anger calmed down, and he ceased to ask for his own death.

The Lord prepared a delicious scene before him, and in wisdom He gave joy to his saddened soul. He saw the leaves and the fruits lined up over his head, so the man became arrogant like a rich man over his abundant gold.

He saw the flowers in that ceiling above him and rejoiced over them like the planets of the firmament.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

Jonah's Shelter is Full of Holes!

While Jonah was resting under the shade of the plant, a certain wind blew and his heart rejoiced, and he enjoyed the breeze, and his sorrow was removed. The weary one rested from the toil of his ministry, and all the things that made him complain ceased.

- Then the Lord ordered the plant so it withered, through a hot wind that was sent to it.

The flowers were scattered, and the leaves withered and the fruits dried up, and through a secret symbol their beauty was spoiled.

Holes were poked in every side of Jonah's shelter, and the sun entered, and it crushed the man in bitterness.

The wind carried that shade that gave him rest, and the heat intensified, and sorrow was multiplied on the weary one.

The breezy weather became hot, and the heat burned him during the exhaustion sleep that overtook him.

With the poisonous wind, the leaves fell over him, the man was worried, and he awoke from his sleep, terrified.

Maybe he thought this was the destruction that he awaited, it had attacked the city, and reached him to torment him.

He looked to see, did desolation befall Nineveh, and with it destroyed his wonderful shade?

Did the wrath overturn the city over its inhabitants, and reached the

plant and struck it so it fell?

He beheld and there the city stood, not destroyed; his soul was grieved, and he asked for death in deep pain.

He entreated God: My Lord, take my soul, give the death that I desire

...

The city of the uncircumcised, built with iniquity, was not destroyed, and the little tabernacle I was granted was struck by the winds!

The tabernacle that did not break your commandments was ruined, and Nineveh is rejoicing with music, and all its evils are not counted!

The walls of the city of the wicked are high and fortified, and the small plant that offered me rest was plucked out!

The towers of the gentiles, full of iniquity, escaped the wrath, and the simple leaves that I obtained withered and fell.

Now O Lord, set me free from this life that annoys me. I will find rest in death, for I find no rest here!

Through the plant that withered, the Lord showed him that though he is a prophet, he is also a man who experiences pain.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

Why do you blame my mercies?

- The Lord answered Jonah's inquiry with a question; He told him: did you sorrow exceedingly as you say?

He asked him about his grief to rebuke him for it.

Jonah said: I was grieved exceedingly to death, my sorrow is great, and for it I asked to die.

As he said that he grieved over nothing, then the Lord reprimanded him.

"Tell me, O prophet, why did you vilify my mercy? Why did you blame me for letting go of destruction?"

The plant which you did plant toil for or water, grew overnight and you did not know of it or feel it,

It then withered, and you had no hand in either event, you played no role in its growing and withering.

You have no hand in its growth and withering, and if it is so, you are

still as grieved as you say.

How shall I not grieve over destroying a great city with thousands of people?

Why do you have no mercy on the multitudes of children, all twelve who are in Nineveh, with as many beasts?

The plant that withered was not yours, and caused you great grief; the city is mine, why do you have no compassion on it if it is destroyed?

I fashioned those babes in their mothers' wombs, and gave life to rational people.

I poured light in those beautiful eyes, and granted hearing to the beloved ears ...

You did not create the plant, and were troubled because it was ruined; do not I, who created them, have compassion on my creation?

I became angry with the people of Nineveh so I sent you, and they asked me I had compassion on them, so why do you complain?

It is up to me to want, and it is up to me to do what I desire, why are you troubled because I had mercy on the repentant? ...

Everyone grieves their lost possessions, why do you hasten to destroy my city although it is mine?

As you were grieved now, likewise I grieve even more for Nineveh if it falls.

Through His compassion He opened a great gate for repentance, because He is full of mercies, and has pity on those who call unto Him.

Saint Jacob of Serugh

From the depths of the sea, my tongue richly praises you,
and at the bottom of the sea I sing to You with joy.
I left you, O Lord, in Jerusalem at the ark,
and I found you under the ground preparing a way for me.

You made me reside in a new monastery underground.
I sing to you with the sounds of praises because of your glory.
I praise you, O good Lord, from within death,
and my mouth praises you during my tribulations.

Like a man in a temple, he prayed to our Lord in the whale's belly,
and like one standing amid the Cherubim, his prayers were heard.

St. Jacob of Serugh