

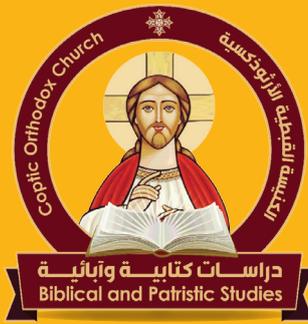
## Jonah's Passover

# A Bright Morning At Nineveh



Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

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# A Bright Morning At Nineveh

❖ Hoping for salvation by human resources 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 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.<sup>1</sup>

**Bishop Paulinus of Nola**

## Repentance: A battle or a feast?

❖ The communal repentance that Nineveh carried out was sweet, for the voices of pain were heard from all mouths.

The **celebration** that took place on their streets was loved, because they were shedding tears, and receiving mercy and salvation.

The **wedding feast** that they held by their broken hearts was magnificent, because their weeping was heard from it in place of flutes.

The **new feast** that took place there was magnificent and in place of sacrifices, prayers were offered instead.

Groanings sprung out of all mouths like fragrance, for the Lord to be pleased with this work that He loves.

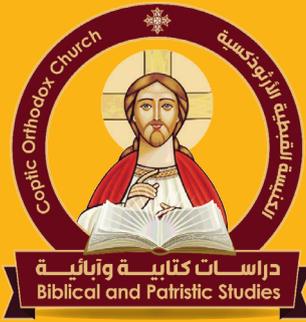
It was a supplication that caused any beholder to marvel, because the king became their instructor that he may gather them.

The groom came out of his chamber wearing sackcloth and the bride came out of her chamber while bowing her head in great sorrow.

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

Brides threw out their beautiful wedding dresses, and instead boasted in clothing themselves in sackcloth.

<sup>1</sup> Poem 26



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

At the voice of Jonah, the voices of joy ceased from the city, and  
the entire city was clothed with sackcloth.

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

## Nineveh Judges Jacob's Daughter!

❖ Jonah entered the city of Nineveh with no astounding victories, only warning of destruction. He proclaimed a simple word with no proof, and the wise men of Nineveh did not despise him. Thus it was written that the men of Nineveh will rise and judge the generation that slandered the Savior. Jonah entered Nineveh and did not perform any miracles or was known to be a wonder-worker like our Savior.

He did not turn water into wine, but rather offered pain and she accepted it from him because she was wise.

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

When he came to them with bad news, they lovingly listened, so what if he did good deeds there? What would they have done?

There, he announced that the city will be destroyed and was welcomed, so if he was able to raise the dead, how much more 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 rise, she might have crowned him as a king!

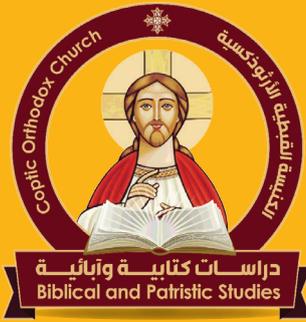
Zion did not accept the way of our beloved Lord, and when He performed good things in her He was insulted.

He healed the sick, cured pains, purified the lepers, exorcised demons and made the deaf hear ...

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

Jonah did not perform any of these deeds in the city of Nineveh, for he began with destruction yet they all loved him and pleaded to him ...

It befits her (Nineveh), this exalted name in the whole world, for she performed on earth a great deed. She will rise up on the last day with the daughter of Jacob and will judge her because she doubted the Savior.



Nineveh was saved by prayer and not gold. Tears bought the city, entered, and inhabited it.

A city that gained herself with her prayers to the Lord, teaching her children the mournful fast with which they gain salvation.

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

## A Bright Morning At Nineveh

❖ 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 energetic one from humiliation and rejoice with us.

O wise one take off your sackcloth, for wrath has ceased.

Rise from the ashes, for the Lord has been pleased with us getting close to Him. End your supplication, for the city has been covered with mercy.

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

## 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.]<sup>2</sup>

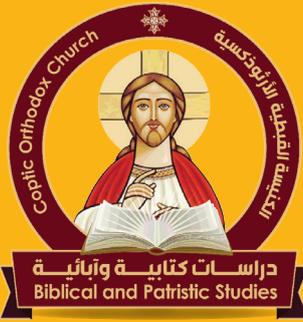
**Saint Jerome** believes that Jonah's grief and complaints were founded on his understanding of God's mercies and longsuffering. Since it was not possible to present Him to the people of Nineveh as a harsh God, he desired death so that he would not see the God's mercies being bestowed on the gentiles while Israel perishes, so he says on the mouth of 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]<sup>3</sup>.

❖ This Hebrew was grieved, was sorrowful and depressed, so he prayed in agony to God. Jealousy spread within him, to rebuke God because of His mercy, while feeling regretful. My Lord, I know that You are merciful and longsuffering, that is why I ran away when you sent me. I knew of Your long suffering long ago, that is why I was afraid to come to Nineveh which is full of transgression. My Lord, I knew that there is no limit to Your grace, and that it will never let You strike the wicked as they deserve.

I was confident that the rivers of mercy flow from You, and all Your threats fade as though they never existed,

<sup>2</sup> Conc. Stat 5:16

<sup>3</sup> Jerome Commentary on Jonah



My Lord, I knew that Your hands are full of compassion, and that You cannot hold the rod of fierce torture.

I was fearing this thing that happened now, so I fled away from You like a disobedient.

This was my conviction when I was in my country, for I know You are compassionate.

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

O wise men, behold what Jonah blames God: 'I knew that You are merciful and compassionate.' He reproached Him for His mercy, and blamed Him because He does not harm, and rebuked Him for His abundant grace.

It was a dispute full of wonder for any beholder, and the prophet prepared it to quarrel with God. He looked for arguments, to the best of his ability to argue with Him and found no blame but His mercy. He reproached Him with this reproach because He is merciful, and that is why Jonah started blaming Him. Jonah was distressed, and even if he were to find more arguments, he would have brought them upfront against his Lord because of the grief that filled him.

He blamed God for His mercy and longsuffering, and in bitterness, he wished death for himself. He entreated God: "Lord, take my soul, for it is better for me to die than to live.

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

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

## A Plant Grows Over His Head!

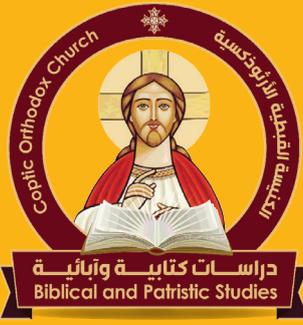
Jonah saw in the plant's shade a shelter for him that can protect him from the heat of the sun, so he was very grateful for it and his grief was taken away. The weary one finally rested from the toil of his ministry and he forgot all about these things that bothered him.

❖ The Lord gave him something, so that he feels pain for losing it once He takes it away. He ordered a plant to grow over his head, so that he may rest in the shade that He prepared for him. The Lord ordered, and a plant grew over Jonah, who saw it and rejoiced, and his grief was taken away.

The weary one rested in the shade, and his heart rejoiced that his hardship has gone away.

The man liked the new shelter that he gained suddenly and loved it so much that he forgot all about his pain.





His soul rejoiced with the leaves that he saw there, so his anger calmed down, and he stopped asking for death.

The Lord prepared a beautiful scenery before him, and in wisdom

He rejoiced his saddened soul.

He saw the leaves and the fruits lined up over his head, so the man became arrogant like a rich man with his abundant gold.

He saw the flowers in the ceiling above him and rejoiced over them as though they were planets in the firmament.

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

### Jonah's Shelter was Punctured!

In the early morning the next day, while Jonah was enjoying the plant's shade, a certain worm struck the plant. The plant's leaves were full of holes because of the worm, so he felt like his shelter was punctured, so he woke up from his sleep terrified. His shelter was no longer able to protect him from the heat of the sun, so he was bitter and wished death for himself.

❖ Then the Lord ordered the plant, so it withered, through vehement wind that He sent.

The flowers were scattered, the leaves withered, and its fruits dried up.

Holes filled every side of Jonah's shelter, and the sun heat penetrated, and crushed the man with bitterness.

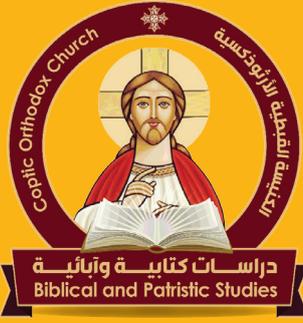
The wind took away that shade that gave him rest, heat intensified, and sorrow was multiplied on the weary one.

The breezy weather became hot, and heat burned him during the exhaustion sleep that overtook him. 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 attacked the city, and it reached him to torture him.

He looked to see, did desolation befall Nineveh and along with it destroyed his sweet tent? Did wrath overturn the city over its inhabitants, and reached the plant and struck it so it fell? He looked and there the city stood, not destroyed; his soul was grieved, and he wished for death in deep pain.

He entreated God: My Lord, take my life from me, grant the death that I desire



The city of the uncircumcised that was established on sin was not destroyed, and the little tent I was granted was struck by the winds!

The tent that did not break your commandments was ruined and Nineveh is rejoicing with music, and all its sins were not counted!

The walls of wicked city are high and fortified, and the small plant that offered me rest was plucked out! The towers of the gentiles that are full of iniquity, escaped the wrath and the simple leaves that I gained withered and fell.

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

Through the plant that withered, the Lord showed him that even though he is a prophet, he is also human who can suffer.

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

## Why Do You Blame My Mercies?

❖ The Lord answered Jonah question by question, as He told him: ‘were you exceedingly angry as you say?’

Jonah said: It is right for me to be angry, even to death! My sorrow is great, and because of it I wish to die.

When he said that he grieved over nothing, then the Lord reproached him.

‘Tell me, O prophet, why did you reproach my mercy? Why did you blame me for letting go of destruction?’

The plant which you have not labored nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night and you did not know of it or feel it,

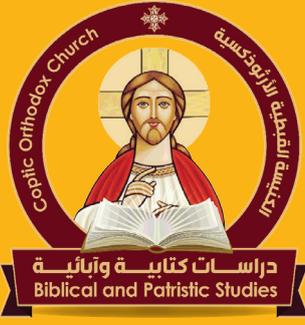
It withered, and you had no hand in either event, you played no role in its growing or withering.

You did not interfere in its growth or withering, and if that is case you are still so grieved as you say.

Should I not grieve over destroying a great city that houses thousands of people?

How did you not pity the thousands of children in Nineveh, and much livestock?

The plant that withered, which was not yours aggravated you but the city which is mine, why did you not have compassion on that city if it was destroyed?



I formed those children in their mothers' wombs, and gave life to those people.

You did not create the plant and was troubled because it withered, and I who created, should I not have compassion on my creation?

I was angry with the people of Nineveh, so I sent you and when they entreated me, I had pity on them, so why do you complain?

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

Does one grieve over his lost possession, why do you then hasten to destroy my city which is mine? Through His compassion He opened a great gate for repentance. Blessed is He because of His mercies, who has compassion on those who call unto Him!

**Saint Jacob of Serugh**

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Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty  
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**Translated by:**

Maria Ghobrial

Andre Ghobrial

Marianne Samuel

Markoryos Ibrahim

Christian Mourad

Monica Mitri

Micheal Stefanos