

Adam Clarke:

Introduction to the Book of the Prophet Jonah

Jonah, the son of Amittai, the fifth of the minor prophets, was a Galilean, a native of Gath-hepher, which is believed to be the same as Jotapata, celebrated for the siege which Josephus the historian there maintained against the Roman army, a little before the destruction of Jerusalem. Gath-hepher was situated in the land of Zebulun, where was the canton of Ophir or Hopher. St. Jerome places it two miles from Sepphoris, in the way towards Tiberias. Some rabbins are of opinion that Jonah was the widow of Sarepta's son, restored to life by Elijah.

What we know with certainty of Jonah is, that God having commanded him to go to Nineveh, and there proclaim that the cry of the inhabitants's sins was come up to heaven, and they were threatened with approaching ruin; instead of obeying these orders, he resolved to flee away, and go to Tarsus in Cilicia. For this purpose he embarked at Joppa; but the Lord having sent a violent tempest while he was upon the sea, the mariners, with great fear, cried each of them to his god. In the meantime Jonah slept in the hold; whereupon the pilot wakened him; and they who were in the ship cast lots to know how this tempest was occasioned. The lot falling upon Jonah, they asked him who he was, and what he had done to bring upon them such a storm? He told them he was a Hebrew; that he worshipped the God of heaven; was one of his prophets; and fled from his presence to avoid going to Nineveh, whither he was sent. They asked him what was to be done to secure them from shipwreck? He replied: Throw me into the sea, and the tempest will cease.

God prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. This fish, according to some, was a whale; or, as others say, the lamia, canis carcharias, or the sea-dog. The prophet continued in the fish three days and three nights. He cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him, and commanded the fish to cast him upon the shore, as it is believed, at the foot of a mountain which projects a great way into the sea, between Berytus and Tripoli. Others think it was upon the coast of Cilicia, two leagues north from Alexandretta.

After this the word of the Lord came a second time to Jonah, and directed him to go to Nineveh. When he came into the city, which was three days journey in extent, about twenty-five leagues in circumference, Jonah walked up and down a whole day, crying out, "In forty days Nineveh shall be destroyed." The Ninevites believed his word; they appointed a public fast to be observed; and, from the meanest of the people to the greatest, covered themselves with sackcloth. The king of Nineveh, supposed to have been Sardanapalus, known in profane authors by the name of Anacyndaraxa or Anabaxarus, descended from his throne, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat down upon ashes. God suffered himself to be moved with their repentance, and did not execute the sentence which he had pronounced against them.

Jonah was afflicted at this; and complained to God, saying, that he had always questioned whether, as being a God of clemency and mercy, he would not be flexible to their prayers.

After this, in all probability, Jonah returned from Nineveh into Judea.

The Greeks have for a long time expressed their veneration for Jonah. There was a church dedicated to this prophet in the sixth age.

We do not know when it was that Jonah foretold how Jeroboam II., king of Israel, should restore the kingdom of Samaria to its former extent, from the entrance of Hamath to the Dead Sea. Whether this was before or after his going to Nineveh, we cannot tell.

Our Savior makes frequent mention of Jonah in the Gospels. He says that the Ninevites shall one day rise in judgment against the Jews, and condemn them, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and the Jews would not hearken to Him who was greater than Jonah. And when the Pharisees required a sign of him to prove his mission, he said he would give them no other than that of the prophet Jonah, that is to say, of his resurrection, which would complete all his miracles, and render the Jews inexcusable in their hardness of heart. For a discussion of the question concerning the three days and three nights which Jonah lay in the belly of the fish, see Matthew 12:40 (note), and the notes there. And for Oriental and Jewish legends and fabulous relations relative to the history of this prophet, see Calmet in his preface to this book.

That there are difficulties in this book every man must allow; and that learned men have differed greatly in their mode of interpreting the book, and explaining these difficulties, is well known. Some have considered it an allegory; referring entirely to Manasseh, and what was done before, during, and after the war with Esar-haddon, king of Assyria. Manasseh being taken prisoner by the Assyrians, and thrust into a dungeon; where, having lain three days and three nights, on his earnest prayer to God in the dungeon, he was delivered, etc. Others have thought, that instead of a fish, a ship is meant, which had the image of a whale on the stern, and might be called *İşl-İ, İçl-İ*, or the whale. Others have thought that the whole of the account of Jonah's being swallowed by a great fish, his praying in its belly, and being cast on dry land, was a dream which he had while fast asleep in the ship. See Jonah 1:5. And others state that the whole book is a parable, intending to point out God's justice and mercy, and how prevalent repentance is to turn aside the threatened stroke of Divine wrath.

There is a fable, most probably of Phœnician origin, which, bearing some similitude to the history of Jonah,

may have been taken from this book. Laomedon, king of Troy, having displeased Neptune, to appease him, was required to expose his daughter Hesione to be devoured by a sea-monster. She was chained to a rock, and was awaiting her fate at the next flux of the tide. In the interim Hercules slew the sea-monster, and delivered the princess. To this Lycophron, in his *Cassandra*, verse 33, etc., is supposed to allude: -

[illegible]

• Of the lion the offspring of three nights, which the fierce dog of Triton swallowed down greedily. •

The scholiasts explain this in the following manner: While the princess was standing chained to the rock, expecting the greedy dog ($\text{ἰὸί} \pm \text{ἰῖ} \pm \text{ἰῖ} \pm \text{ἰῖ} \pm \text{ἰῖ}$, ἰὸί...ἰοῖ½, the shark) to come and devour her, Hercules stood by ready armed; and when the monster came forward with open mouth, he jumped directly down his throat, and spent three days in cutting and hacking his entrails; and afterwards came out of the monster, with the loss of all the hair on his head. Cyril, in his comment, says this was occasioned by the incredible heat of the monster's stomach.

This fable might have been easily taken from the true history; though some have been ready enough to intimate that the history of the prophet was taken from the fable.

The appeal made to the main facts of this history by our Lord, proves that we are to admit of no allegorical exposition of these facts.

1. There was such a person as Jonah.
2. He was swallowed by a sea-monster, in whose belly he was miraculously preserved three days and three nights.
3. This same prophet preached to the Ninevites; and they repented, and turned from their sins, under his ministry.

This testimony puts an end to all mythological, allegorical, and hypothetical interpretations of those great facts. And in its literal sense alone, I undertake the interpretation of this book.