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God in the Book of Jonah

By: His Holiness Pope Shenouda III



1. God Searched for Man:

In this book we see that God is the One who searches for man and not vice versa. The life of repentance teaches us that man should return to God, as the prodigal son did. He addressed himself, saying: *"I will arise and go to my father"* (Lk. 15). But in the Book of Jonah we find that God is the One who searches for man in order to bring him to repentance. We see Him searching for all, He goes about seeking the souls that are His. He searched for the souls of those in the ship in order to save them. He Himself searched for the lost souls of the people of Nineveh in order to make them repent and save them. He also uses every possible means in order to save Jonah the prophet. If man does not go to Him, He goes to man to reform him and reconcile him. As Saint James of Seroge on the occasion of Christ's birth said, "There was a dissension between God

and man, and when man did not go to God to be reconciled, God came down to reconcile man to Him." God does not look at the action of searching for man and seeking his love as contrary to His honor. The great Creator finds pleasure in seeking the dust and ashes!

In searching for man, God used many different means among which are frightening, reprovng, convincing, showing kindness and punishment. The most important thing to Him is to reach man's heart and to find a place there. We also notice that God does not leave man to his absolute freedom. Meaning not disregarding him nor caring not for his destiny, as if He says to him: "If you come, all right, and if not, as you like!" No, but rather, "If you don't come to Me, I will seek you, run after you, and I will keep on doing so until I restore you." In this book of Jonah, we find God's search for man is very serious.

2. It is Possible to Use Punishment:

The compassionate God may use the means of punishment and fear if they are useful for man's salvation. Here are three examples:

(a) Giving a warning and a chance: This is what happened with the Ninevites. It was only a warning: I will overthrow the city after forty days, "Yet after forty day,

and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" A warning given with a long opportunity.

(b) The blow from outside: This is what happened with the mariners of the ship and the passengers including Jonah. Here the matter was not just a warning, but it was carried out with condition. God gave orders to the winds to strike the ship so that it was about to be broken. But we notice that God put limits to the wind's blows: "*Strike the ship from outside, but your water shall not enter it. Strike the ship, shake it, but do not harm any of its passengers*"

(c) The punishment entered into serious danger: The order was given to the great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah looked and found himself inside the belly of the whale.

These are the three means of punishing and God wants you to reach Him by any means that suits you or is convenient for you. Therefore, do not force God to use the severe ways to bring you back.

3. God is Prepared to Relent:

God is prepared to relent if man returns from his wrong ways. The Bible said that the Lord returned from His hot displeasure: "*The Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people*" (Exod. 32:12). And in our story, the Bible repeats the same verse: "*God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*"

God is the easiest Person you can deal with. One tear from you is enough to dissolve all His threats and punishments. However, your tears have to be true and faithful. King Herod, because he had said a word, could not, revert it, but God is always prepared to relent from His warnings and abandon His threats

when we repent.

4. God's Long Suffering:

There is no doubt that God is very patient in winning sinners. He does not give up on anyone no matter how deep their wickedness is. He did not despond of Nineveh the corrupted wicked atheist city, which could not discern between its right and left, nor of Jonah, the hardhearted person who resisted God's will, and also not of the mariners who used to worship many gods.

5. God for All:

One of God's beautiful attributes is that He takes all sorts of people and appoints for them portions in His kingdom. God's kingdom is likened to a net let down in the sea gathering all sorts of fish, good and bad. God is for all kinds of people.

6. God Likes Reasoning:

The Holy Bible gives us a marvelous picture of how God reasons with man. He says, "*Come now, and let us reason together...*" (Isa. 1:18). The story of destroying Sodom gives us a clear picture of how God reasoned with Abraham (Gen.19). The Lord also reasoned with Moses and accepted his intercession (Exod. 32). Likewise, God reasoned with Jonah and asked him, "*Is it right for you to be angry?*" He gave us prayer in order to reason with Him.

Commemoration of the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople

On the first day of the blessed month of Amshir of the year 381 A.D., 150 fathers assembled in the city of Constantinople. That was for the trial of Macdonius, Patriarch of Constantinople, Sabilius and Apolinarius, for their blasphemies against the Holy Spirit, the Trinity and God the Word

When these blasphemies became widespread, the fathers of the Church became alarmed and made the matter known to Emperor Theodosius the Great who ordered a council to be assembled. He invited Anba Timothy the 22nd Pope of Alexandria, Pope of Rome, Patriarch of Antioch, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem. They attended with their bishops, except the Pope of Rome who delegated others to attend. Anba Timothy, chaired the council.

When the holy council met, Macdonius was asked to explain his belief. He said, "The Holy Spirit was created like any other creature." Anba Timothy responded "The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. If as you claim that the Spirit of God is created, you are saying, in essence, that His Life is created, and thus, He is "lifeless" without it." Anba Timothy advised Macdonius to renounce his erroneous belief. As he refused, he was excommunicated and anathematized. Then Anba Timothy asked Sabilius about his belief, he answered, "The Trinity is one being and one person." Anba Timothy replied, "If the Trinity is as you claim, then to refer to the Trinity is unfounded and your baptism is invalid, because it is in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the saying of the Gospel is untrue as the Gospel says, "*When the Son was in the Jordan River, the*

Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the likeness of a dove, and the Father called upon Him from heaven." Then Anba Timothy advised him to renounce his belief. When he did not, he was excommunicated, and anathematized.

Then Anba Timothy asked Apolinarius about his belief. He said, "The Incarnation of the Son was by uniting with the human flesh without the rational soul. For His Divinity replaced the soul and the mind of the human being." Anba Timothy replied, "God the Word united with our nature to save us, therefore if He united with the animal body only, then He did not save mankind but the animal human. Men will rise on the resurrection day with the rational speaking souls with which they will be judged and be granted the blessings or the condemnations. Accordingly, the Incarnation would be in vain. If that was the case, why did Christ call Himself a man if He did not unite with the rational speaking soul?" Then Anba Timothy advised him to renounce his belief and as he refused, he was excommunicated, as his other two friends.

The fathers also excommunicated all those who agreed with those heretics. Then they completed the Creed which was established by the fathers at the Council of Nicea, which ended with, "Whose kingdom shall have no end." They added, "Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit,... and the life of the coming age. Amen." May the prayers of those holy fathers be with us. Amen

Short Story

The Ticket



Jack took a long look at his speedometer before slowing down: 73 in a 55 zone. Fourth time in as many months. How could a guy get caught so often? When his car had slowed to 10 miles an hour, Jack pulled over, but only partially. Let the cop worry about the potential traffic hazard.

The cop was stepping out of his car, the big pad in hand. Bob? Bob from Church? Jack sunk farther into his trench coat. This was worse than the coming ticket. A guy from his own church. A guy he was about to play golf with tomorrow. Jumping out of the car, he approached a man he saw every Sunday, a man he'd never seen in uniform. "Hi, Bob. Fancy meeting you like this." "Hello, Jack." No smile. "Guess you caught me red-handed in a rush to see my wife and kids." "Yeah, I guess." Bob seemed uncertain. Good. "I'm afraid I bent the rules a bit-just this once." Jack toed at a pebble on the pavement. "Diane said something about roast beef and potatoes tonight. Know what I mean?" "I know what you mean. I also know that you have a reputation in our precinct." Ouch. This was not going in the right direction. Time to change tactics. "What'd you clock me at?" "Seventy! Would you sit back in your car please?" "Now wait a minute here, Bob. I checked as soon as I saw you. I was barely nudging 65". The lie seemed to come easier with every ticket. "Please, Jack, in the car." Flustered, Jack hunched himself through the still-open door. Slamming it shut, he stared at the dash board. The minutes ticked by. Bob scribbled away on the pad. Why hadn't he asked for a driver's license? Whatever the reason, it would be a month of Sundays before Jack ever sat near this cop again.



A tap on the door jerked his head to the left. There was Bob, a folded paper in hand. Jack rolled down the window a mere two inches, just enough room for Bob to pass him the slip. "Thanks." Jack could not quite keep the sneer out of his voice. Bob returned to his police car without a word. Jack watched his retreat in the mirror. Jack unfolded the sheet of paper. How much was this one going to cost? Wait a minute. What was this? Some kind of joke? Certainly not a ticket. Jack began to read: "Dear Jack, Once upon a time I had a daughter. She was six when killed by a car. You guessed it -- a speeding driver. A fine and three months in jail, and the man was free. Free to hug his daughters, all three of them. I only had one, and I'm going to have to wait until Heaven before I can ever hug her again. A thousand times I've tried to forgive that man.

A thousand times I thought I had. Maybe I did, but I need to do it again. Even now. Pray for me. And be careful. My son is all I have left." signed "Bob" Jack turned around in time to see Bob's car pull away and head down the road. Jack watched until it disappeared. A full 15 minutes later, he, too, pulled away and drove slowly home, praying for forgiveness and hugging a surprised wife and kids when he arrived. Life is precious. Handle it with care. This is an important message, please pass it along to your friends. Drive safely and carefully. Remember, cars are not the only thing recalled by their maker.



THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE GALATIANS

BY: MARK MICHAEL

This letter written to the Galatians tells us that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Many people at the time believed that it was possible to earn salvation through certain good deeds that they can perform. St. Paul refutes these ideas and “reveals the arrogance of such thinking.” He says that this thinking results in an abandonment of the truth of the gospel and a turning away from God.

This book is dated as one of the earliest written books in the New Testament. It is believed to be written around the time of 48AD. This, however, depends on where the church was founded in Galatia. If the church was established in northern Galatia, then the book was probably written around the time of St. Paul’s second ministry; around 52 AD. However, the church is believed to have been established in northern Galatia thereby dating its establishment to St. Paul’s first ministry. The similarity between the letters to the Romans and Galatians indicates this letter was written in the mid-50’s.

There were many “false teachers” that infested the Galatians' Church, preaching about salvation through the “works of the law.” St. Paul’s letter was a “swift and decisive attempt to counter this message.” He wrote the letter out of love and not hatred. He saw that his followers, whom he loved, started to go astray and began to follow the wrong path. This letter was intended to combat the false teachings of the Judaizing teachers.

“From The Nelson study Bible: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville”

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" The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow
to anger and abounding in mercy."

(Ps. 103: 8)



**The Church offers its condolences to
Deacon Ragaey Metry and his wife Ger-
maine for the loss of her father Mr.
Adel Latif. May the Lord repose his sole
in the paradise of joy.**



*Please do not forget to pray to the Lord that He
may heal the sick
and
repose the souls of those who have passed away in
the paradise of joy.*

This Newsletter is a free publication of the church, under the supervision of Fr. Antonious Tanious.

The committee welcomes your participation in the form of articles, reviews, news, or comments.

Please mail your articles, comments, ...etc. to the church at:

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If you would like this newsletter mailed to a friend or wish your name to be deleted from our mailing list please fax your request to 732-821-1512.

Church Services

February, 2001

Fridays, February 2, 9, 16 and 23

-7:30 PM-8:30 PM Hymns Lesson
-8:30PM-8:45PM Prayer Meeting
-8:45PM-9:30PM Bible Study

Saturday, February 3, 10, 17 and 24

-8:30AM-11:30AM Divine Liturgy
-11:30AM-1:00PM Sunday School & Youth group meeting

COPTIC FEASTS

February 5 ----- The first day of Jonah's fast
February 8 ----- Jonah's feast
February 9 ----- Departure of St. Paul the first Anchorite
February 15 ----- Presentation of the Lord into the Temple
February 19 ----- Beginning of the great Lent