

This is the first in a set of nine hymns on Jonah.⁶³⁹ After a brief statement of the story (str. 1–5), Ephrem begins a more imaginative meditation. The language of weather and agriculture (str. 6–9) quickly gives way to the language of childbirth (str. 10–28). Here Jonah's two conceptions are the center of attention: the first being a natural conception by his mother; the second an unnatural one by the whale. Since the faculty of speech or reason is what distinguishes humans from animals, Ephrem enjoys the paradox that a rational creature, Jonah's mother, conceived him as an irrational, speechless fetus, while an irrational animal, the whale, conceived him as a rational adult. A single strophe alludes to the Christological symbolism established in the gospels, which is central to Ephrem's own poetry (str. 29). This is followed by consideration of Jonah's priestly qualities (str. 30–33).

42

ON JONAH AND NINEVEH

- 1 Jonah hired a ship and went down [to sea].⁶⁴⁰
With silver he bought a watery drowning.
- 2 A bare voice entered Nineveh.
A hundred thousand souls were engaged in business there.⁶⁴¹
- 3 The naked voice that sowed—
its harvest [was] a hundred-twenty-thousandfold.

639. Although he presents the texts as if there were nine hymns, Beck argues convincingly that the last four (Virg. 47–48 and 49–50) are actually two hymns split in half. Hence there are actually only seven hymns in this set, cf. CSCO 223, vii. I have followed the numbering of Beck's text here, so it appears here as if there are nine hymns, Virg. 42–50.

640. Jon. 1.3.

641. Cf. Jon. 4.11.

HYMN 42

- 4 On the boat human mouths tore him in pieces.⁶⁴²
In the deep the whale's mouth swallowed him up.⁶⁴³
- 5 In Nineveh that He healed, thousands without limit
poured upon Him all praises.
- 6 By means of one good man He healed them,
and the cloud of mouths poured forth His glory.
- 7 Therefore twenty-two myriads of mouths
from below to above rained glory.
- 8 The boughs that have been exposed to hail⁶⁴⁴ are bereft and ugly,
since the hail has stripped the leaves and fruits.
- 9 By the hail of his sayings Jonah beat down [Nineveh],
and her boughs shed [their] splendid fruits.
- 10 By the birthpangs of his sayings⁶⁴⁵ he hastened the community
of Nineveh to bring forth voices of glory.
- 11 Instead of a living creature the prophet generated
the barren one [Nineveh] who brought forth fruits of glory.
- 12 A whale in the sea swallowed him too.
It conceived and brought him forth instead of females.
- 13 In the sea it conceived him; on land it brought him forth.
It delivered him to the all-suckling land.
- 14 He was conceived and born as in nature,
once more conceived and born unnaturally.
- 15 A woman conceived as usual,
and in addition she brought forth as in nature.
- 16 A fish conceived him unnaturally,
and in addition he brought him forth not in the usual way.
- 17 When a woman endowed with speech⁶⁴⁶ conceived him,
he took his beginning in her as a speechless one.
- 18 But again when a speechless whale conceived him,
inside him [the whale] had an advocate endowed with speech.
- 19 When a woman on land conceived him,
he was not aware of her prayers.

642. Cf. Jon. 1.8–11.

643. Jon. 1.17.

644. The Syriac *'tbrd* must be a denominative verb formed from *brd*, "hail."

645. In this and the following strophe substantial changes in word order are necessary to attain a smooth English translation.

646. Or "rational."

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 20 But when the fish in the sea had conceived him,
the fish was not aware of his prayers!
- 21 But when he was conceived within a human woman
he resembled an animal that was speechless.
- 22 An animal conceived him in the womb of the sea;
that silent one became endowed with speech.
- 23 Within one endowed with speech he was quiet;
within a silent one he became endowed with speech.
- 24 The womb on land brought forth in months.
The womb in the sea brought him forth in days.
- 25 When his mother brought him forth, he grew;
She swore a vow for her infant.
- 26 When the fish brought him forth in the sea,
the infant in the womb swore a vow.
- 27 Who has seen an infant in the womb
that swore a vow upon his birth?
- 28 Who has seen an infant that becomes a fetus?
Who has seen a fetus delivered from the mouth?
- 29 The servant bore the symbols of his Lord
in his conception and his birth and in his raising to life.⁶⁴⁷
- 30 Who has seen a priest in a fish
who offered a prayer to his God?
- 31 A pure temple the fish became for him,
and the mouth of Jonah [became] a censer.
- 32 The smell of incense rose up from within the abyss
to the High One Who sits in the highest heaven.
- 33 His Savior came down; He became the key of the mouth.
Silence delivered the Herald of words.

647. Cf. Matt. 12.38-41 and Luke 11.29-32.

43

In this hymn Peter is contrasted with Jonah (str. 1-2). Unlike Jonah, the reluctant prophet sent to the Gentiles, he went willingly to be their apostle. He, rather than Paul, is here portrayed as the apostle to the Gentiles. Although this might be due to some remaining aversion to Paul, traceable to early Jewish Christianity in this area, it is more probably for the sake of Ephrem's extensive use of the image of Peter as a fisherman. The main theme here is the contrast between Peter's acceptance when he caught fish for their death and his censure when he caught sinners for life (esp. 3-15). Finally, the theme is brought to cosmic dimensions as a contrast between death and the Living One (str. 16-17).

43

The same melody

- 1 Simon rejoiced when he cast his net
and gathered in it living fish for death.
- 2 Jonah was distressed when he cast his net
and gathered in it thousands of dead [people] for life.
- 3 Simon obeyed the One Who said to him,
"You have caught for death, [now] make disciples for life."⁶⁴⁸
- 4 O the one who caught fish to be consumed,
come catch the peoples lest they be consumed!
[Strophe 5 is illegible.]
- 6 [Simon] put to death the living and brought to life the dead.
He was loved when he put to death; he was hated when he brought
to life.

648. Cf. Mark 1.17 and Matt. 4.19. For the same contrast with regard to all the apostles, cf. Virg. 32.8.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 7 Although he was catching fish for death,
when he caught abundantly, he was praised.
- 8 But although he was catching people⁶⁴⁹ for life,
when he caught abundantly he was insulted.
- 9 In that [time] when he brought to life, he was a helper,
but in the [time] when he put to death, he was not harmful.
- 10 For this belongs to the existence of fish,
that after life they arrive at death.
- 11 But [it belongs] to the existence of sinners,
that after death they return to life.
- 12 Indeed he caught and gave fish for food,
but he delivered the peoples from the Devourer.⁶⁵⁰
- 14 His net made human mouths rejoice;
His gospel made the mouth of death mourn.
- 14 What was given for food fed its eater.
What was not given for food tore apart its Devourer.
- 15 He held his net so it would confine the fish.⁶⁵¹
He tore apart sin that swallowed the peoples.
- 16 Death brought up to the land
fish that lived in the belly of the sea.
- 17 The Living One raised up to the height
the peoples who were dead in the belly of sin.
- 18 By the catching of fish hunger decreased.
By the catching of the peoples . . .
[Strophes 19, 20, 21 are illegible.]

649. The Syriac is singular, "son of man," meaning human being.
650. Death. Ephrem puns here on food ('*wkl*') and Devourer or eater ('*kwl*').
651. Cf. Luke 5.6 and Matt. 4.21.

In this hymn Jonah is contrasted with Abraham and Moses, always to his disadvantage. In both cases the invidious comparison is taken as typical of Jews and Gentiles as well. Whereas Abraham prayed for mercy for the city of Sodom, Jonah prayed for the punishment of Nineveh (str. 1-2). Ephrem claims this is typical of the circumcised, who expect to be chosen purely for their name, whereas the uncircumcised, such as the Gentiles of Nineveh did the deeds of repentance (str. 3-14). Likewise Moses is better than Jonah since he was a righteous man struggling with an unruly congregation (str. 15). Jonah's complaint, on the other hand, is that the people listened to him (str. 16). Again, Ephrem takes this behavior as typical of "inward" vs. "outward" circumcision (str. 17-20). The names of individuals and groups are less important than their deeds, as Cain, Abel and the Assyrians demonstrate (str. 21-23).

The same melody

- 1 That Sodom not be overthrown Abraham prayed.⁶⁵²
That Nineveh be overthrown Jonah hoped.⁶⁵³
- 2 That man prayed for [a city that] abused Watchers.⁶⁵⁴
This man was angry at [a city that] made the Watchers rejoice.⁶⁵⁵
- 3 Although I sent you,⁶⁵⁶ you have not gone from me.
When you preached, they ran [and] believed in you.⁶⁵⁷

652. Cf. Gen. 18.22-33.

653. Cf. Jon. 4.1-5.

654. Cf. Gen. 19.1-11.

655. Cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 148-52.

656. Christ, as Logos and thus the Divine Presence in the Old Testament, speaks to Jonah.

657. Cf. Jon. 3.1-9.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 4 You who are downtrodden broke the yoke,
but those rebels rush to the yoke.
- 5 You, son of the People who showed [what] your people [is],
but the peoples showed this of their brothers.
- 6 Discernment showed you [were one] of the circumcised,
but they showed the acceptableness of the uncircumcised.
- 7 Although you are quite suitable by virtue of your lineage,⁶⁵⁸
and although they are rejected,⁶⁵⁹ their election is in them.
- 8 I chose the circumcised, but they have rejected themselves.
I rejected the uncircumcised, but they have dedicated themselves.
- 9 Election, therefore, is not [a matter] of names,
for deeds enter and dismiss the names.
- 10 The furnace of testing of the name is the deed.
In it is tested whether it is the true name.
- 11 For there is fruit that is very splendid,
but its taste is the opposite of its beauty.
- 12 Even the despicability of the bee,
the most despised of all, is a spring of sweetness.
- 13 Splendid names—the house of the Hebrews—
are sweet names that make bitter things flow.
- 14 The mention of their name is sweet to the ear.
The taste of their fruit ravages your mouth.
- 15 Moses who sweetened the water with wood—⁶⁶⁰
his congregation was made bitter by the molten calf.⁶⁶¹
- 16 And you, who by your flight made the sea bitter,⁶⁶²
sweetened Nineveh by the sound of your trumpet.⁶⁶³
- 17 He whose body is circumcised but whose heart is uncircumcised
is circumcised outwardly but uncircumcised in secret.
- 18 But he whose heart is circumcised but whose flesh is uncircumcised
is circumcised for the Spirit but uncircumcised for the eye.
- 19 In the name of his circumcision the circumcised fornicates.
With the cup of his purity he drinks mire.

658. Literally, "you in whom is your lineage."

659. Probably due to a misprint, Beck's text lacks the seyame to indicate this is the Afel pl. masc. participle.

660. Cf. Exod. 17.1-7.

661. Cf. Exod. 30.

662. Cf. Jon. 1.4.

663. Cf. Jon. 3.3-10.

HYMN 44

- 20 By a circumcised heart the uncircumcised becomes holy.⁶⁶⁴
In the bridal chamber of his heart dwells his Creator.
- 21 It was not his name [that] made Abel fair.
Because he desired innocence, his name was desirable.⁶⁶⁵
- 22 Eve chose the name of Cain,
but since he hated his brother, his name was hated by all,
- 23 The Assyrians! Inflammatory names!
They gave fruits of desirable tastes!⁶⁶⁶

664. Or "chaste."

665. On Cain and Abel here and in the following strophe, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 220.

666. Cf. Nat. 19.3-6.

Here Ephrem dwells on a series of paradoxes. First, rather than willing the destruction of the repentant people of Nineveh, Jonah ought first to look for the destruction of the disobedient Jewish people (str. 1-9). Next, playing on ideas of awakening and calming, he presents a series of images to show that Jonah aroused when he should have assuaged and vice versa (str. 10-16). This leads to the next paradox, swallowing and disgorging (str. 17-22). Finally, the lot cast against Jonah tended toward death, while the sackcloth of the Ninevites led them toward life (str. 23-31).

The same melody

- 1 O son of Mattai,⁶⁶⁷ how has the city of Nineveh offended you that you awaited its dying?
- 2 If you are a zealous man, go uproot first the city that I made pleasant, that gave withered [fruits].⁶⁶⁸
- 3 But if you are merciful with the faithless, why is your anger poured out upon penitents?
- 4 The vine as a bride I led out from Egypt.⁶⁶⁹
Instead of blossoms she bore sins.
- 5 Nineveh as clusters [of grapes] bore fasts
and as bunches [of grapes] all just deeds.⁶⁷⁰
- 6 Instead of clusters arrayed in leaves
her children put on sackcloth.
- 7 And instead of watering that makes fruits flourish
milk was withheld from the mouths of her children.

667. Cf. Jon. 1.1, Pes.

668. Cf. Isa. 5.1-7.

669. Ps. 80.8.

670. On the vineyard imagery, cf. Virg. 31.13 and note ad loc.

- 8 The swine that loved the calf
ate the vine of Jacob under its shade.⁶⁷¹
- 9 Nineveh that acquired graven images by Error
overthrew her idols lest she be overthrown.
- 10 He sent him to land; he fled to sea.
He sent him to Nineveh; he boarded a ship.
- 11 To Nineveh He sent him to awaken the peoples.
He slept on the ship; the peoples awakened him!⁶⁷²
- 12 Instead of assuaging the sins of land
he went to awaken the waves on the sea.
- 13 He abandoned silencing the iniquity of the city.
He went to stir up a storm of the sea.
- 14 Instead of sanctifying the wicked city
he went to overturn a ship of the sea.
- 15 [Instead of] keeping watch on land and putting wickedness to sleep
he went to sleep at sea and awakened the water.
- 16 One who was quiet on the ship made the water cry out.
One who cried out on land silenced wickedness.
- 17 A fish swallowed him who had not gone to set free
the city that the greedy mouth⁶⁷³ swallowed.
- 18 The visible mouth disgorged him.
The hidden mouth disgorged the city.
- 19 Disgorged, the swallowed one became a preacher
to the city that swallowed him on land and disgorged him.⁶⁷⁴
- 20 When he fell into the sea, he sated the fish.
When he preached on land, he annihilated the greedy one.
- 21 On the ship they asked him, "Who are you and whose?"⁶⁷⁵
In Nineveh they believed him without questioning.
- 22 On the ship all the sailors buried him [in the sea].
In Nineveh all the sinners healed him.
- 23 By his entering the ship the lots⁶⁷⁶ fell on it.
By his entering Nineveh sackcloth spread on it.

671. Cf. Ps. 80.13.

672. Cf. Jon. 1.5f.

673. Sin and death, as Beck has suggested.

674. That is, he entered the city, preached and then left the city, cf. Jon. 3-4.

675. Jon. 1.8.

676. Or "sentence." Cf. Jon. 1.7-16.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 24 Scripture was scattered on all the lots.
Ashes were scattered on all the sackcloth.
- 25 The lots that fell [were] as for death.
The sackcloth that was spread [was] as for life.
- 26 The lot caught the servant who had fled,
but the sackcloth put down the city that had rebelled.
- 27 The lot incited the many against one,
but the sackcloth revived many by one.
- 28 By this [lot] were opened mouths to blame.
By this [sackcloth] was opened a mouth of supplication.
- 29 The lot accused the one to kill him,
but the sackcloth had mercy on and saved the many.
- 30 This [lot] became the cause of judgment to kill,
but this [sackcloth] became the treasure of life to save,
- 31 The lot wrote names in the deep.
The sackcloth wrote names in the height.

The hymn begins with a consideration of the symbolic significance of the judgment of Jonah, which was in reality mercy for the Ninevites (str. 1–9). It represents baptism, on the one hand (esp. str. 3–5), and Christ's condemnation to death, which saved all people, on the other (str. 6–9). But there is still a judgment to come for us (str. 10–16). This leads him to a consideration of sins after baptism, which are to be atoned by a combination of ablutions (or anointing?) for the sick (str. 17f.), God's mercy (str. 19f.), repentance (str. 22) and good works (str. 23–26).

The same melody

- 1 Jonah intended to go down to the sea
to flee on a ship from God.
- 2 But waves rolled him about like avengers.
A lot seized him and gave him to the waves.
- 3 The lot caught him for the name of fugitive,
but not immediately and at once did it judge him.
- 4 It submerged and brought [him] up and then judged him.
That he would sink and emerge, it prophesied to him.
- 5 It portrayed a symbol even of our sins
that after the resurrection will rebuke us.
- 6 The lot portrays him who would come to save
Nineveh since it resulted in delivering her [from] death.⁶⁷⁷
- 7 The lot that resulted as if for death⁶⁷⁸
saved one hundred twenty thousand.

677. Ephrem plays on the meanings of *ps*' "lot or judgment" and "to deliver." No doubt he alludes to Christ as well as to Jonah as the one "who would come to save Nineveh;" cf. str. 10–12, below.

678. Jonah's death—and Jesus' too.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 8 One judgment that took place at sea
annulled the judgments of thousands on land.
- 9 The writ⁶⁷⁹ that judged the one
tore up twelve myriad letters of bondage.
- 10 Therefore the letter of bondage of sins that is hidden within us
is well-silenced now so that it may cry out at the End.
- 11 With us it is buried; with us it rises.
When the judgment seat is established it will cry out to rebuke.
- 12 Insofar as tears are found in our eyes,
we will blot out with our tears the letter of bondage of our sins.
- 13 Insofar as just deeds are in [our] hands,
we will close up with our just deeds all the breaches.
- 14 Who will give us [the possibility] that visible tears
will blot out concealed sins?
- 15 Who gives us [the possibility] that by visible things
an invisible wound may be healed?
- 16 Insofar as free water is found,
give to drink a valuable cup.
- 17 The baptized washed the feet of the holy ones,
so that there is no baptism [but] there is sprinkling.⁶⁸⁰
- 18 The spattering of sins after you have been baptized
can be washed with the washing of the sick.
- 19 Justice encompassed and confined us.
There is a chance for us again—grace.
- 20 Lest we be ravished, justice confined us.
Lest we succumb, grace had mercy on us.
- 21 Since there is no baptizing again, there [should be] no sinning again,
but since there is spattering, there is sprinkling.
- 22 He Who gave hope in baptism
gave repentance lest hope be cut off by Him.
- 23 But harsher is the work after you have been baptized
than that work before you have been baptized.
- 24 Sins before baptism
by simple work are able to be atoned.

679. Greek, *πιπτάμιον*.

680. Ephrem seems to present Jesus' washing of the apostles' feet, in John 13.4–17, as a precedent for the washing of the sick—or the anointing of the sick. The enigmatic statement that "there is no baptism" is best explained as Beck suggests, that there is no second baptism.

HYMN 46

- 25 And if the imprint of scars sullies [the Christian],
baptism whitens and wipes clean.
- 26 But sins after baptism
with double works are able to be overturned.
- 27 When works and mercy have truly healed,
the imprint of scars will call for a miracle.

This hymn is an alphabetical acrostic in reverse order, although the aleph strophe is missing and a few others are repeated. It continues into the following hymn. The hymn begins with the repentance of the Ninevites (str. 1–5) and God's desire for the fruits of that repentance (str. 6–10). The exchange of repentance and mercy results in their mutual joy (str. 11–15), but in the discontent of sin and justice (str. 16–18). Since sins are like waves, the ship of Nineveh needs the rudder of fasting to stay afloat (str. 19–20). Jonah was a poor sailor since he did not wish to keep his ship, Nineveh, afloat (str. 21–24).

The same melody

- 1 The Ninevites repented to give offerings:
a pure fast of pure babes.
- 2 Flowing breasts they withheld from babes,
that they might suck floods of mercy.
- 3 In [Nineveh] flowed tears of repentance,
and her land shed forth all exploits.
- 4 For easy is the growth of the fruits
of this land of repentance.
- 5 Tears moistened her; mercy shone on her;
weeping rained in her; pity sprouted in her.
- 6 The King of the height saw and desired
the fruits that Nineveh grew in the depth.
- 7 The Heavenly One desired the delicious fruit,
the fruit that a flow of tears grew.
- 8 The High One hungered very much for her tears,
since He tasted remorse in her fruits.⁶⁸¹

681. On the "hunger" of God, cf. Nat. 13.13f. and Virg. 4.1.

- 9 He came down and opened the treasury of mercy
to purchase by His mercy the fruits of His servants.
- 10 When mercy was consumed and He took fruits,
the avenger rejoiced that it was demanded.
- 11 Who has seen servants exchanging ~
with their master fruits for mercy?
- 12 Indeed what measure served there
that sufficed to measure [both] tears and mercy?
- 13 It is a measure that two weighed and stamped:
repentance and grace.⁶⁸²
- 14 By it repentance gave fruits.
By it grace gave mercy.
- 15 The two tasted of the two.
In giving and taking the two rejoiced.
- 16 The two rejoiced but [another] two were discontented:
sin below, justice above.
- 17 Sin was discontented that evil had cooled,
and justice was discontented that love had cooled.
- 18 The shedding of tears conquered the shedding of anger,
and the sentence of fasting released the sentence of judgment.
- 19 And since sins became waves and submerged [sinners],
fasts became a rudder and rescued [them].
- 20 For Nineveh had become a ship.
Anger shook⁶⁸³ it; pity steadied it.
- 21 Every sailor rescues his ship.
Jonah expected to sink his ship.
- 22 They threw him over into the sea so he would learn⁶⁸⁴
not to overthrow the city on land.
- 23 A man sank; by mercy he came up.
The one whom [mercy] rescued, expected to sink.
- 24 By mercy he came up, but he forgot mercy.
What he learned at sea, he rejected on land.

682. Here and in the following strophe Ephrem puns on *tybw'w'* and *tbtwt'*, "repentance" and "grace." In this strophe reference is made to the official stamp on certified weights used in trade.

683. Apparently the Afel of *mw't*, otherwise attested only in P'al and Ethp. as Beck notes.

684. A pun on *y'lp*, "learn," and *'lp'*, "ship."

This portion of the alphabetical acrostic of the previous hymn dwells on God's merciful propensity to correct the imbalances wrought by human perversity, rooted in the free will. The judgment of Jonah overturned the natural order of things; he became food for a fish and Nineveh became food for death (str. 1-5). God's mercy set this disarray into order again, as he had created it (str. 6-12). Our freedom is the source of the problem for us as for Adam (str. 13-15). But God rescues us and makes an adornment of our flaw (str. 16-22).

48

- 1 A judgment took place on the ship of Jonah.
There has not been one like it in all the houses of judgment.
- 2 The lot became for him like a judgment seat.
The fish snuffed him in like a judge.
- 3 He shut him in [his] belly, a prison,
so he could not escape from the Creator of all.
- 4 The great sea to the great fish
handed over the miserable one [who] fled from the Great One.
- 5 Since he fled, he became food for a fish,
and he gave Nineveh [as] food for death.
- 6 The Gracious One Who makes straight all perversities
set in order Jonah's contradictions.
- 7 For him He returned from within the fish.
Nineveh He snatched from the mouth of the greedy one.
- 8 He saw the man the fish swallowed.
He created [the fish] for eating, [the fish] swallowed its [intended]
eater.
- 9 Again, He saw Nineveh that the coward had captured.

HYMN 48

- He created [Satan] for captivity, [Satan] captured his [intended]
captors.
- 10 Mercy rushed to straighten the perversities,
and contradictions were set in order.
 - 11 He ordered the fish to spit out the man
and to return to being food for us.
 - 12 He chided the evil one, and he released Nineveh.
The captured one recaptured her captor.
 - 13 What is overturned⁶⁸⁵ and perverted is from freedom.
What sets in order and is made straight is from grace.
 - 14 Our freedom does not cease to prevent.
His grace does not cease to make straight.
 - 15 Freedom made hateful the beauty of Adam
that he might be god . . . human.
 - 16 But grace adorned its flaws,
and God came to be human.
 - 17 Divinity flew down
to rescue and lift up humanity.
 - 18 Behold the Son adorned the servant's flaw,
so that he became god as he had desired.
 - 19 To You be glory, Straightener of every fault!
To You I give thanks, Adorner of all flaws!
 - 20 Since our freedom ceases not to break through,
Majesty wearies not to repair.
 - 21 Your grace accompanies our evil—
the spring of peace for a raging fire.
 - 22 Since wherever the fire kindles its flame,
the light of Your mercy presses hard to extinguish [it].

⁶⁸⁵. This should be *hpyk* rather than *hpsy*.

49

This hymn together with the following one is an alphabetic acrostic. Many letters are repeated; some are out of order. Here as in a previous hymn, Ephrem contrasts the behavior of Jonah with that of other models from the Old Testament. Joshua (str. 1-3), Moses (str. 4-10, 13) and Isaac (str. 11-12) all dealt better with their people and their God. Yet Jonah, because he is a type of Christ, par excellence, was the most successful (str. 15-21): In spite of him, his is the most effective Medicine of life (str. 15-17, 21); his oarsmen and God have rescued the sunken ship of Nineveh (str. 18-20).

49

The same melody

- 1 The High One sent a circumcised healer
to circumcise the heart of the uncircumcised people.
- 2 By the sword of Joshua the Hebrews were circumcised.
By the voice of Jonah the Ninevites were circumcised.
- 3 The circumcised Jonah was ashamed of the circumcised,
since he saw the uncircumcised had circumcised [their] heart.
- 4 When Moses delayed, he exposed the circumcised
since they showed by the calf the uncircumcision of [their] heart.
- 5 In the contest of forty days
the circumcised were put to shame; the uncircumcised triumphed.
- 6 The Ninevites conquered in forty days.
Instead of their bodies they circumcised their hearts.
- 7 The leaven of Egypt was hidden among the People.
It overthrew their heart for strangeness.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁶ I.e., the leaven of Egypt overthrew true faith from the heart of the Israelites and led them to the worship of strange gods.

HYMN 49

- 8 The leaven of Abraham was hidden among the peoples.
It overthrew their idol for faith.
- 9 The people of Moses tasted the sweetness.
but for forty days they vomited up bitter [words] to him.
- 10 Jonah gave Nineveh bitter [words] to drink,
but for forty days her fruits were sweet.
- 11 Isaac with words and mournful sounds
for forty days persuaded his father.
- 12 Jonah lifted Nineveh up as if at the judgment seat,
and for forty days he tortured it with his words.
- 13 Moses taught; the People apostatized.
The healer was irritated that his remedy did not avail.
- 14 Nineveh repented; it grieved Jonah.
The healer was irritated that his medicine triumphed.
- 15 The medicine of which one of the healers
has healed ten myriads of the sick?
- 16 The Medicine of penitents came down from the height.
He scattered pardon among the sins.
- 17 As much as you are irritated, Jonah, rejoice
that of all the prophets your medicines are most triumphant.
- 18 As much as you are irritated, be joyful, sailor,
that your oarsmen have rescued the sunken ship.
- 19 The High One answered the sunken ship,
for the sunken ship was all of the penitents.
- 20 He answered at sea; He answers on land.
He rescued on land as at sea.
- 21 Jonah's voice became a medicine of life.
He sowed death with it, but life sprouted.

This continuation of the previous hymn commences with a description of the effectiveness of the Ninevites' fast (str. 1-12). Jonah's words of judgment really belong to God, who was more pleased with the Ninevites than with the Israelites (str. 13-17). God's manner of exchange is to begin with anger, but then to show mercy if the fruits of repentance are forthcoming (str. 20-23). Since Jonah failed to understand God's ways with human beings, he needed the symbol of the gourd plant (str. 18f. and 24-27).

The same melody

- 1 "The generations that you saved, blessed you, Jonah.
You bore blessings instead of curses.⁶⁸⁷
- 2 "They made crowns of repentance.
They crowned Me through you since they lived through you.
- 3 "They wove blossoms that did not fade.
Instead of flowers they wove an ascetic life.
- 4 "Prayers they wove like lilies
that flourished in the flowing of tears.
- 5 "Fasts they mingled with humiliation
and prayers by means of just deeds.
- 6 "In ashes and sackcloth that make beauty fade
the crown of the saints rejoiced.
- 7 "Ashes and weeping that blind the eyes
enlightened the eyes of the Ninevites.
- 8 "Ashes and sackcloth she offered [as] blood money.
She conquered the injustice of her adversary at law.

687. God addresses Jonah, as becomes apparent in the second strophe.

- 9 "She who spread ashes passed by suspicion:
She who put on sackcloth lessened anger.⁶⁸⁸
- 10 "Ashes and tears were the offering.
At the gate of heaven they made reconciliation.
- 11 "Flowing were tears hidden in eyes.
Flowing was mercy hidden in heaven.
- 12 "Flowing were tears, and they saddened faces.
Flowing was mercy, and it made them rejoice.
- 13 "O Jonah, you lifted [and] brought forth woes
and bore and brought enviable blessings.
- 14 "For they heard from you sounds of anger,
and they made Me hear [what is] Mine: sounds of praise.
- 15 "You took a hoe and went to uproot.
Your hoe belonged to the Fruit Grower.
- 16 "The vineyard that put to shame the vineyard of My beloved⁶⁸⁹
bore blessings instead of husks."
- 17 The fruits of the hateful vineyard ripened.
its fruits moistened its vineshoots.
- 18 Jonah rejoiced at the young gourd plant,
but he grieved over the vine bearing exploits.
- 19 The young plant was cut off; Jonah was irritated.
The fruits of the vineyard made the Watchers rejoice.
- 20 Give thanks to the One Who sent His anger to Nineveh
that His anger might be a merchant of mercy.
- 21 For two treasures His anger opens:
the treasure of the deep and the treasure of the height.
- 22 Urgently the fruit went up from below to the height.
Urgently mercy rained from above to the deep.
- 23 Urgently the blood money went up from below to the height.
Urgently pity came down from above to the deep.
- 24 The fig tree had reached the time of its cutting.
With the tranquil fruit⁶⁹⁰ her worker pledged.

688. Here are puns on *qtm'*, "ashes," and *qm'*, "suspicion," and on *mkt*, "put on," and *mkk*, "lessened."

689. The beloved of God is Israel. Israel's vineyard is put to shame by the vineyard of the Gentiles, here the people of Nineveh who repent.

690. Or the dead fruit.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 25 Jonah lifted his axe to uproot
the fig tree that suddenly had acquired health.
26 Since he wanted to cut down the beloved of the King,⁶⁹¹
the worm cut down his beloved young plant.
27 Since he did not rejoice in peace as a son of peace,
he was poured into the sea as a contentious man.⁶⁹²

691. The city of Nineveh, cf. Jon. 4.5-11.

692. Although a postscript reads, "Completed are the nine hymns on Jonah and Nineveh," there are only seven hymns in this set since 47-48 and 49-50 are each a single alphabetic acrostic.

51

This hymn has themes common to Middle Platonic-philosophy, for example, the theme of light as representative of the presence of God and the *epinoiai* or manifestations of God appropriate to the spiritual level of the seeker.

51

- On the melody: My brothers and my fathers and my sons, be persuaded by
my instruction
- 1 On Sunday the light conquered and was exalted as a parable.⁶⁹³
Each one of the six days approached him and crowned him,
and also the creatures that were pleasing to him.
The new males rejoiced to see the new females:
the sheep, flocks and herds that were created,
doves with all the flying creatures,⁶⁹⁴ fish in their varieties.
He was exalted and also exalted [them].
Blossoms they wove only recently into a symbol of our Lord,
a crown that conquered the darkness.
- Refrain: Praise to the One Whose truth confuted the liars!*
- 2 For three days the light served and was hidden.
For three years our Light served and was exalted.
Of all cities He was manifested⁶⁹⁵ in Judea alone.
A second symbol is the sun that as its Lord

693. The light at the beginning of time is a symbol of Christ, who conquered sin and death on Sunday, the day of the resurrection.

694. Literally, bodies.

695. The Syriac *dnh* means "shine forth" or "manifest." The related noun *dnh'* means "dawn," "manifestation," or "epiphany." Ephrem plays on the nuances of these words, especially in the context of his major symbol here, Christ, the Sun, the Light; cf. also Nat. 1.6 and 4.69.