

Story 1344 (1988 Tape 15)

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Jonah and the Dolphin

As you know, the great Holy book is divided between the Old Testament<sup>1</sup> and the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> In the Old Testament there are many stories about ancient prophets. One of those prophets was Prophet Jonah<sup>3</sup>

Prophet Jonah was intimidated by his assignment to explain the rules of God to the common people. He was disturbed both because the people refused to listen to his preaching and because they sometimes persecuted him. Such persecution had happened to other prophets, but most of them had been braver than Jonah. Jonah's anxiety about carrying out God's command to preach became so great that he finally decided to escape from the sight of God. At that time, Gibraltar was considered the end of the world, and it was to Gibraltar that Jonah decided to go. Accordingly, he went to a port city on the Mediterranean and boarded a ship going to Gibraltar.

When the ship reached that part of the Mediterranean

<sup>1</sup>The Turkish word here is Tevrat.

<sup>2</sup>The Turkish word here is Ahit.

<sup>3</sup>The Turkish name for Jonah is Yunus.

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abreast of Algeria, it encountered a severe storm. Everyone aboard started to pray, but the storm grew worse and worse. Finally, one of the crew members said, "Why does God not answer our prayers by calming the storm? There must be a cursed person aboard. Let us find out who that is and throw him overboard."

Being conscience-smitten for having disobeyed God's orders, Jonah immediately confessed, "I am the cursed person on this ship." As soon as the seamen heard this, they threw Jonah into the sea.

It so happened that there was a dolphin<sup>4</sup> passing the ship at that time. That dolphin grabbed Jonah and carried him to a distant coast. After the dolphin had dropped him there Jonah saw some children playing on the beach. There was one

<sup>4</sup>Both the Bible and the Koran describe Jonah as having been swallowed by a fish. Although technically a whale is not a fish, the creature that swallowed Jonah is usually said to be a whale. Obviously a dolphin cannot swallow a human being, but the narrator here does not make that claim. He says only that the dolphin carried him to the shore.

Neither the Bible nor the Koran says a dolphin was involved, and its appearance in this folktale apparently involves linguistic confusion on the part of the peasant narrator. The word yunus in Turkish means dolphin, and the dolphin may have been suggested by the fact that the same word capitalized is the Turkish name of Jonah.

It should be said that the story of Jonah has proliferated into a whole corpus of legends in Moslem lands. As early as the 9th and 10th centuries these legends were being

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child who sat aside and did not participate in the games of the other children. By observing this child closely, Jonah realized that he was blind. Feeling compassion for this child, Jonah prayed, "O God, please restore the eyesight of this child." His prayer was answered, and the child jumped up, shouting, "I can see! I can see!"

While playing with the other children, this formerly blind boy said, "Let us throw stones into the sea!" While they were all doing this, they discovered Jonah's hiding place on the beach. When the formerly blind child saw Jonah, he exclaimed, "Let us throw our stones at that man!"

Then Jonah thought, "God was correct again in what He did. There was wisdom in making such a child blind. I made another mistake in asking to have his sight restored."

incorporated into religious and historical works. See, for example, Volume I of Al-Tabari's History. See also The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Volume 8 (1987 reprint).