Introduction

The Ordinary Gloss was the most widely used edition of the Bible in the later Middle Ages and well into the sixteenth century. Medievalists know the commentary element as the Gloss to which theologians as diverse as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, John Wyclif, and Martin Luther habitually referred. As the foremost vehicle for medieval exegesis, the Gloss framed biblical narratives for a wide range of vernacular religious literature, from Dante’s Divine Comedy to French drama to a Middle English retelling of the Jonah story, Patience.

A wider audience might be most familiar with the Gloss’s distinctive page layout, its large-point biblical text nestling up against slabs of commentary on either side—the “outer gloss”—and bristling between the lines with forerunners to the footnote, the “interlinear gloss.” This intricate and surprisingly user-friendly format gathered onto one page the best historical, textual, natural-philosophical, and theological resources available, distilled by “masters of the sacred page” such as the likely glossator of Jonah, Gilbert the Universal, so called for his command of all knowledge (Andrée 37–40). Its layout provided quick, synoptic access to multiple traditions and styles of exegesis and guided five centuries of students into, around, and beyond the sacred page. Even the most successful early English Protestant Bible, the Geneva Bible, owed its layout and note structure, if not its theological apparatus, to the page-design innovations that the Gloss had introduced (Tribble 31–36). In its manifold incarnations, the Gloss harnessed advanced design and codicological technologies to shape scripture’s reception and empower readers to navigate a text that divagates and diversifies just as much as it witnesses to its own unity.¹

The backbone of the Gloss is Jerome’s fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible, known in the medieval church as the Vulgate. A community of scholars gathered around Anselm of Laon compiled the glosses on the Vulgate from patristic authorities around 1100; the text was well established by 1140, and by 1200 the Gloss had become “the most commonly available type of late-twelfth-century text,” with at least some parts of it in practically every European scholastic library and in many monasteries (Smith, Glossa Ordinaria 180).² The Gloss on Jonah relies almost exclusively on Jerome’s commentary on
Jonah (c. 396), so its Latin often has a tone of urbane classicism. But the Gloss also chops up, compresses, and rearranges Jerome with scholastic delight and directness that render the Latin authentically medieval. I have tried in my translation to register this range of formal rhetoric and blunt immediacy.

The base text for my translation of the commentary comes from a midpoint in the Gloss’s production history, just as it made the leap to print, but before the printed editions permanently accrued additional layers of commentary by Nicholas of Lyra and others in subsequent centuries. When Adolf Rusch produced the first printed edition, in 1480–81, at Strassburg, he pushed the limits of possibility for the complexity of the printed page, employing an elaborate system of tie-marks to use all the space on the page (Froehlich and Gibson).

These innovations change the way we read, literally distancing commentary from base text. The text’s material disposition influences what the rhetorical traditions call readers’ *ductus*—their movement through a text, simultaneously affective and spatial, and the maneuvers of thought the text invites them to perform (Carruthers 77–81). (I have attempted to emulate the patterns of Rusch’s edition here, though my choices are influenced in part by the limitations of a *PMLA* page.)

In the Gloss on Jonah, literal-historical exegesis and allegorical exegesis interanimate each other. Here we are light-years away from the mechanistic “levels” of scripture many literary scholars once imagined as fourfold exegesis. Instead of a schematic semiosis where the literal sense equals X and the allegorical sense equals Y, the Gloss sets historical and allegorical reading in a productive oscillation embodied in the movements of the reader’s eyes as they navigate from column to column, gloss to gloss.

For example, the outer glosses on the first word, “And,” explain both the source of the author’s invention and the odd stylistic quirk of beginning with a conjunction. They attribute this oddity to spiritual inspiration, while the interlinear gloss on “saying” suggests the Trinitarian context in which spiritual inspiration might take place. Like modern-day form critics in biblical studies, the glossator determines the context of composition, its *Sitz im Leben*—in this case, a prophetic ecstasy—to explicate the passage’s form and style and find clues about its purpose.

Inner and outer glosses interact with the biblical text in such a way that none of the three parts can convey its full meaning on its own. This all adds up to a dizzyingly complex theological and critical thought machine that depends on the physical layout of the page to lead readers from center to periphery, from main text to commentary, and back again.

Jesus himself commented allegorically on Jonah (Matt. 12.41), rendering the book a touchstone for Catholic and Protestant allegorical theory. The Gloss on Jonah can thus serve as an excellent undergraduate or graduate course text for discussions of premodern biblical exegesis, medieval Jewish-Christian relations, book history, and, in combination with works such as *Patience* and *Moby-Dick*, the Bible as literature.

NOTES
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1. An excellent guide to these developments may be found in Christopher de Hamel’s *Glossed Books of the Bible and the Origins of the Paris Booktrade*, a book as intelligently and handsomely designed as its subjects.

2. Beryl Smalley’s groundbreaking *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* remains a touchstone for historical research on the Gloss. Lesley Smith’s *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* expertly consolidates subsequent research.

3. While the past decade has yielded the first critical edition of a book of the Gloss (Dove, *Glossa ordinaria: In Canticum canticorum*) and translations of a few other books (Andrée; Dove, *The Glossa Ordinaria on the Song of Songs*; Woodward), only one has attempted to transmit the distinctive Gloss formatting (Smith, *Medieval Exegesis*).
WORKS CITED


The Ordinary Gloss on Jonah

The prologue for the prophet Jonah begins

The Hebrews say that Saint Jonah was the son of the widowed woman Sareptana [of Zarephath], whom the prophet Elijah raised from the dead. Afterward Jonah’s mother said to Elijah, Now I know that you are a man of God and the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth [1 Kings 17.24]. For this reason they call this boy Amathi, for Amathi means “truth” in our language. And because Elijah spoke a true thing, the one who was raised is said to be the son of truth. Therefore, a dove is born from truth because Jonah means “dove.” Jonah, then, is sent to the nations for the condemnation of Israel because, while Nineveh pursued repentance, they [Israel] continued in wickedness. Indeed, 2 Kings shows that Jonah was a prophet in the time of Jeroboam, king of Israel, who, having forsaken God, made sacrifice to idols with his people in Samaria. When by means of illuminating prophecy Jonah saw the sinners of the city of Nineveh about to obtain the mercy of God, he did not want to go to proclaim the destruction of Nineveh because he did not want to seem to preach false things. For just as God said to Abraham concerning the wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, “The cry of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah has reached me” [Gen. 18.20–21], so also he says to Jonah concerning Nineveh that the cry of its wickedness has ascended to him. And because when God made his judgment concerning the people of Sodom, it was hardly revoked, so also Jonah, ignorant of the dispensation of God, who desires the salvation of men converting to him more than [their] destruction, did not want the judgment
And the word of the Lord was made:

Seeing many things in the Spirit, as is the custom of a prophet, concerning these many things, he bursts forth into these words.

City: The world. So that the whole world might accept what the Jew despises. This [world] that God made as if a beautiful house so that he should be served by man, who, because he wandered away through pride, is called back to repentance.

Jonah, which means “dove,” is sent to Nin­eveh, which is said to be splendid. Thus Christ, full of the Holy Spirit, is sent to the world, which is called in the Greek tongue “cosmos”—that is, or­nate and beautiful, be­cause of the design of the Creator. Whence God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good [Gen. 1.31]. There­fore the whole world praises him whom Israel despises so that the humble man, having put down corrupting pride, might ascend into heaven by the Son of God descending.

Although Jonah, according to the interpreta­tion, displays the igure of Christ himself, it is not necessary for us to strive to refer the whole sequence of the story to Christ by allegory, but only those things that are able to be understood clearly without the risk of interpretation. For just because the apostle says that in our first parents the sacrament of Christ and the Church is prefigured [Eph. 5.32], not all things that are
said about our first parents can be referred to this sacrament.

¶For their wickedness has risen up: Similarly in Genesis: “The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is multiplied” [Gen. 18.20]. And to Cain: “The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth” [Gen. 4.10].

¶And Jonah rose up: Because the Spirit revealed it to him, the prophet knew that the repentance of the nations was the fall of the Jews, and so the lover of his homeland does not so much begrudge Nineveh as he desires that his people not perish. For he knew from the prayer of Moses [Deut. 33] that the Lord had in mind the liberation of the Israelites. He saw also that God sent the prophets to the Jews in order to provoke them to repentance and that prophetic Balaam had prophesied about the salvation of the Jews. It pains him that he alone was chosen to be sent to the city of enemies, where there is the worship of idols and contempt for God. He also knew that whenever the Gentiles believed, Judea would be blinded. He feared that once the Gentiles were converted by his preaching, the Jews would be completely abandoned in his own lifetime, and for this reason he fled.

¶Tharsis: According to Josephus, [it] is the city of Cilicia; according to Chronicles, the place is in India. But the Hebrews believed that the sea generally is called Tharsis. Whence With a vehement breath you will pound to pieces the ships of Tharsis [Ps. 47.8]—that is, the sea. It is more fitting for a fearful, fugitive man that he does not choose a specific place for his flight, but is content to be carried away wherever the sea takes him. Or according to the interpretation in which Tharsis is said to be the contemplation of joy, the prophet hurries to go to the joy of rest, wanting more to hand himself over completely to contemplation and perfectly to enjoy beauty and the variety of knowledge that is signified by Joppa, which is called beautiful, than that by the salvation of the Gentiles the people [of Israel] should perish, from which people Christ was about to be born, according to the flesh.

¶Mystically, Christ, having assumed the flesh, in a certain way fleeing his homeland—that is, heaven—comes to Tharsis—that is, the sea of this world—in which he called out, “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me” [Matt. 26.39], for fear that, the people of the Jews having been damned, the multitude of the Gentiles would believe. And he loved that people [the Jews] so much, on account of his love for the patriarchs and the promise to Abraham, that on the cross he said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” [Luke 23.34]. For on account of this love, when he was on the farthest point of the shore (which was said to be most beautiful because it was in Judea), he does not want to take bread from the children and give it to the dogs. But because he had come to the sheep of Israel, he pays the fare to the ferrymen so that he who had come at first to save his own people might save the people who dwell near the sea and so that in the midst of storms—that is, his passion...
and cries on the cross—[and] submerged in hell, he might save those whom he was neglecting, it would seem, by sleeping on a ship.

The human race may be signified by the light of the prophet, when, scorning the commands of God, it withdrew from his face and handed itself over to the world, and later, with the shipwreck of the world raging against it, it is compelled to turn back to him whom it fled. And those things which it had thought sources of salvation for itself are turned into destruction. Not only does the help of men not benefit those to whom it is offered, but those who offer it are deftly smashed to pieces, just as we read about Egypt laid waste by the Assyrians, since Egypt was offering help to the Israelites against the will of God [Isa. 20].

And the men cried out: Not knowing the truth, the sailors do not know the providence of God, yet even under the error of religion, they know that something must be worshipped. Israel, on the contrary, perceives God neither in good things nor in bad things, and while Christ mourns for the people, Israel has dry eyes.

And slept: Even as the others were thrown into confusion, the prophet is described as carefree and tranquil, as one who thoroughly enjoys a peaceful sleep in the hold of the ship. Or it can be said that conscious of his flight and sin, while the others do not know the cause of the storm, he himself does not dare to see the waves surging up against him, and he sleeps not out of insouciance but out of melancholy, like the apostles in the Lord’s passion.

The heavy sleep of the prophet signifies man languishing in the slumber of his going astray, for whom it does not suffice to flee from the face of God, but on top of that, overcome by a certain madness, he ignores the wrath of God, and he sleeps without care, and his deep sleep resounds through rau cous nostrils.

Tropologically: Many are those who, sailing with Jonah and having their own gods, hasten to go to the contemplation of joy, but after Jonah had been caught by lot, and by that man’s death the storm of the world was calmed, and peace was restored on the sea, then the one God will be adored, and spiritual offerings will be sacrificed, which, according to the literal sense, they did not have in the midst of the waves.

And a man said to: Those who have frequently experienced the nature of winds and of storms see that these waves do not rise up from usual causes. Because if it were [from usual causes], they would not be seeking the cause of the shipwreck by lot, nor would they desire to avoid a certain danger by means of an uncertain thing.

That Matthias is chosen by lot and that this fugitive is caught by lot is accomplished not by the power of a lot but by the power of God, who guided the uncertain lots. Therefore we should not because of this example trust in or use lots, because the rights and immunities of individuals cannot make common law. By the will of God Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar come to know future things by the interpretation of dreams; on
account of this, nevertheless, credence ought not to be given to dreams everywhere.

Tell us: With wondrous brevity his person, region, and city is asked, so that from these things the cause of the danger might be understood.

I am a Hebrew: He did not say, “I am a Jew,” because the cutting of the ten tribes from the two imposed that name on the people. But he said “Hebrew” because that was a general name as much for the two tribes as for the ten.

When he had told [them] that he feared the Lord, he told [them] that he also had fled from the face of the Lord, and that he had not done his commands. Therefore, the men are afraid because they understand that he is a holy man and of a holy race, and that he who flees is a great man. But [they also understand] that he who is seeking him is greater. They do not dare to hand him over; they are not able to hide him.

Since he confesses the creator of the sea and the dry land, why does he think that, leaving the land, he is able to avoid the creator of the sea in the sea?

And they said to him: In rebuke, as if [to say], “If you fear God, whom you declare is so powerful, how do you think that you are able to escape him?” Or, inquiring, wishing to know the reason for his flight, they say, “Why would he, having left his own land, seek for safety on the sea?”

What should we do with you? They ask so that he who was the author of the sin might be the remedy himself: “Just as you explained the cause of the disease, show also its cure. From the swarming of the sea we understand that the wrath of God is against us because we picked up the fugitive. But we will kill you so that we might ease this anger. But since you are a worshipper of this God, it is yours to order what is necessary for the deed, and it is ours to lay hands on you so that, with the anger of God turned away, the sea might desist.”

And he said to them: Now that he has been caught, the fugitive does not conceal or deny his guilt, but having confessed it, he willingly accepts the punishment, preferring to perish alone because of his own sin, rather than that others should sin and perish with him. It is also prepared, by the salvation and conversion of the sailors, that the great multitude of Nineveh can be saved by a similar confession.

Allegorically, these winds, these waves refer to Christ and to the Church in danger, or to the apostles when they awoke [Christ or when], deserting him in the passion, [they] are cast about in the waves. Therefore Christ says,
Since the world sees that I sail with you to the contemplation of joy, just as you also will be where I am, therefore it roars and wants to devour me, so that it might kill you likewise, nor does it understand that just as it seizes bait on a hook, so also it will die by my death. Take me up and cast me into the sea. The storm that rages against you on account of me will be calmed when I die. It is not yours to arrest death, but to accept a death that has freely been brought on by another, except where love is endangered.

¶ And the men rowed: Although he had brought the judgment against himself, nevertheless they do not dare to lay a hand on the worshipper of God. For this reason, they labor to return to the land, preferring to die rather than to spill blood. However, they row because they think that without the sacrament of him who was about to suffer, the ship is able to be freed from danger, although the submersion of Jonah is the re-lightening of the ship.

¶ And they cried out: They appeal to God that he not ascribe to them the guilt of what they are about to do. As if it were said, “We do not want to kill your prophet, but he himself confessed that you are angry and your storm reveals him; your will is fulfilled by our hands.” What Pilate does and says is similar—Pilate who, washing his hands, says, “I am clear from the blood of this just man” [Dan. 13.46, Matt. 27.24]. The Gentiles do not want Christ to perish; they testify to his innocence, and the Jews say, “His blood be upon us and upon our children” [Matt. 27.25].

¶ Because we took him on board, because the sea rages, because he is revealed by lot, because he himself shows what ought to happen because of him, it is necessarily your will. Whence the Savior in the Psalm: “Lord, I have desired that I should do your will” [Ps. 39.9].

¶ Before the passion of Christ, errors and diverse teachings were tossing about the little ship of the Church and the whole human race like opposing waves, but after the passion there is the tranquility of faith, the peace of the world, all things secure. Thus after the headlong fall of Jonah, the sea desists from its fury.

¶ And the men feared: Before the passion, they were shouting to their gods in fear; after the passion, they fear God by worshipping and honoring him, and they sacrifice offerings, which, according to the literal sense, they did not have among the waves, but [they did have] the sacrifice of an afflicted spirit, and they made an oath that they would not turn away from God anymore, discerning from the flight of the storm that the words of the prophet were true.
And the Lord prepared: Either from the beginning when he was creating, or he made it [the whale] come alongside the ship so that it might catch him falling headlong, so that he might provide a dwelling instead of death, so that he who felt God angry on the ship might feel God favorably inclined in death.

And Jonah was: Just as Jonah points to the passion through his being in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so also his prayer is a type of Christ’s prayer.

Whoever believes that three young men were indeed freed from the furnace, so that the odor of the fire did not cling to their clothes [Dan. 3], should not doubt about Jonah’s salvation in the belly of the whale.

Some say [the count of three days and nights begins] on Friday during preparation for Passover, when with the sun setting from the sixth hour up to the ninth hour, the night has succeeded the day; two nights and days then must be calculated up to the morning of the Sabbath, and with the Sabbath meal served on the following night, three days and nights are calculated. Some understand this as a synecdoche—that is, the whole from the part.

I cried out of my tribulation: As I looked at the enormous beast, I remembered the open jaws of God—and “I cried out”: either with the cry finding a place among yielding waters, or with the emotion of the heart alone.

As much as it is clear regarding Jonah that he has been trapped in a belly in the middle of the sea, the savior even more so, appearing in the flesh, fully knew life in the storms of this world, which is called “the sea and the storm” by comparison to his heavenly lodging. Whence, I am stuck in the mire of the deep and I cannot stand firmly. And again, I have come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest has overwhelmed me [Ps. 69.3].

According to anagogy, he remembers that he is in the heart of the sea—that is, in the middle of storms, and among the bitter waters, tempted in all things without sin [Heb. 4.15], yet he did not perceive the bitterness of the waters, but he was surrounded and revived by the sweetness of the stream, which gladdens the city of God [Ps. 46.5].

It is clear that all these things happened literally in the person of Jonah. In Christ every temptation, which happened by the will of God, was without sin, not overwhelming but fleeting, because in him every temptation lost its power, so that in him those who were accustomed to be imperiled might be freed through his conquering.

I am cast away: I who took on the form of a slave, having imitated the frailty of man. Before, when I was light in your light, I was heard shouting; when this happened, I said, “I am cast away,” so that through this I might lead the human race back to you.
I will see your temple: This is appropriate to Jonah either as one desiring or as one trusting, who in the prophetic spirit was contemplating this future thing; it is also appropriate to Christ, as we read: “And now glorify me, O Father, along with yourself, with the glory which I had before the world came to be” [John 17.5]. Just as the temple of the Father is the Son, so also the temple of the Son is the Father, about whom he himself said, “I went forth from the Father and have come into the world” [John 16.28].

The abyss: By “abyss” here is understood hostile forces, or powers devoted to tortments, to which in the gospel the demons beg that they not be forced to go to be tortured.

The sea has covered my head: The historical sense is clear that Jonah came all the way to the depths of the earth, by which the globe of the land is held up, as if by bars and columns, by the will of God. Allegorically: in Christ as a man, the soul was the principal part and, as it were, the head, which descended toward the lower regions where the souls of men were being held under the power of the devil. These are the bars that prevent souls from going out from hell; the Lord breaks these levers and frees those who were held confined.

When my soul was anguish: These [words] are fitting for Christ when he says, “My soul is sorrowful even unto death” [Matt. 36.38; Mark 14.34], and again, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” [Luke 23.46; Ps. 32.6].

That my prayer might come to: For this reason, I was mindful of God in tribulation so that out of the bottom of the sea my prayer might ascend to the heavens and so that it might come to your holy temple in which you enjoy eternal beatitude. And he prays because he is the high priest, so that his prayer might ascend to God so that in his own body the people might be freed.

Those who observe: Since all things are vanity, everyone necessarily does what is vain, but not all guard it like a treasure nor love what they do. Therefore he does not deny mercy to the whole human race.

God, by nature merciful, was prepared to save through mercy those whom he was not able to save through justice, but we by our vice abandoned the mercy he offered. And notice that the prophet in the belly of the whale is oblivious to his own danger; he philosophizes concerning the general nature of things.

The Jews, while they preserve the traditions of men, forsake the commandments of God, who always had shown mercy toward them.

But I with the voice: Before his passion, Christ had in a certain sense tried to escape
obeying God, when he says, “It is not good to take the bread of the children” [Matt. 15.26]. And again, “Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me” [Matt. 26.42]. But after his Resurrection, willingly leaving behind the faithless ones, he preaches to the world what had been commanded before the passion.

§ Whatever I have vowed: In the passion he vowed all of us to the Father, so that none of those whom the Father had given him might perish. He promised for the salvation of all. Let us not make him a liar; let us be pure so that he might offer [us] to the Father.

§ And the word of the Lord was made: All of this is fitting for Christ according to the form of a servant: that he is ordered; that he obeys; that he does not want it; that he is compelled once again to want it; that the second time he follows the Father’s will.

§ And Jonah rose up: Allegorically: Christ is rightly said to have risen after hell, and to preach when he sends the apostles to baptize people in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; this is the journey of three days. But this sacrament of human salvation is a journey of one day—that is, it is completed by the confession of the one God. With Jonah—that is, Christ—preaching among the apostles, Christ who said, “I am with you even to the end of the age” [Matt. 28.20].

§ And Nineveh was: Nineveh was so large that it could scarcely be circumnavigated by a journey of three days. But he, mindful of the command and of his shipwreck, completed the journey of three days in one day’s haste. But some say that he preached only in a third of the city and immediately the word of his preaching spread to the other people.

§ It did not say in three days and nights or one day and night, but [it said] days and day precisely, in order to show that nothing is shadowy in the mystery of the Trinity and the confession of the one God.

§ Yet forty days: According to the Septuagint, Yet three days and Nineveh will be destroyed. The same Christ is signified, whether by forty days or by three days. It is by forty, of course, because he brought to conclusion forty days with his disciples and ascended into heaven; by three days because he rose again on the third day.

§ It is not a prophecy descending from the present time of God where all things are such that they endure, but the threat is for correction,
proposing a just retribution according to the present sins of the Ninevites.

A period of forty days is fitting for sinners for the sake of penitence and fasting and prayer and sackcloth and ashes and perseverance in begging for mercy. According to this number, Moses and Elijah and Christ himself fasted. This number is indicated for us for preparing our souls to eat the body of Christ.

A beautiful sequence: God commands the prophet; the prophet preaches to the city; the men believe first; when they preach fasting, people of every age are clothed with sackcloth. The men do not preach sackcloth but only fasting, but those to whom penitence is commanded add sackcloth so that their empty belly and their mournful clothing might more boldly beseech God.

Those who had offended God by luxury and ambition appease their condemnation through those things which had given offense before: first fasting, which is offered to God in secret, then sackcloth, which is displayed externally to men.

Nineveh according to Jerome: Nineveh, which was evil and well built, was overturned not with respect to its standing fortifications and build-
ings. The city was overturned in the destruction of its customs. And although what those men had feared did not happen, when Jonah prophesied the future, what he had predicted at God’s command did happen after all.

And the word came to the king: After the weak and ignoble people had been chosen, at last the word of Christ arrived to the philosophers and powerful ones who seemed to rule the world. First Peter the fisherman enters, then Cyprian, formerly a champion of idolatry, finally believes, and having become a champion of truth after he heard the message of Jonah, he summons the Carthaginians to repentance and publicly preaches Christ. Behold the king of Nineveh rises from his throne and exchanges purple-dyed cloth for sackcloth, lotions for mud, purity for filth. It is a difficult thing for the powerful and eloquent of the world to convert to the humility of Christ.

And one cried out: He cried out, saying in Nineveh, from the mouth of the king and from all of his elders.

Who knows: He speaks to express uncertainty so that while the people are doubtful about
their salvation, they might perform penance more boldly and provoke God more to mercy.

¶ And God saw: At that time God threatened the Ninevites and every day he threatens the people of the world so that they might do penance. If they have converted, God also converts his judgment and is changed by the conversion of the people. He did not hear the words that Israel often used to send up—"All that the Lord has spoken, we will do" [Exod. 24.7]—but he, who desires the life more than the death of a sinner, saw their works. Seeing their changed works, he gladly changes his mind. Rather let us say that he persisted in his purpose, wishing from the beginning to show mercy. For he did not want to punish, nor was he who threatened about to punish.

¶ And Jonah was tormented: He is not grieved that a great number of the Gentiles are being saved, but that he sees his own people perish, and he, chosen out of such a great number of prophets, who announced the ruin of his own people through the salvation of others, is now in a certain way despairing of the salvation of Israel. Thus the Lord wept over Jerusalem, and he did not want to cast the bread of the children, etc. [Matt. 15.26, Mark 7.27]. The apostles also preach first to Israel. Paul also wishes to be cursed for the sake of his brethren [Rom. 9.3].

¶ Beautifully Jonah—that is, suffering—is troubled even unto death [cf. Matt. 26.38, Mark 14.34] because he endured many things, to the extent he was able, so that the people of the Jews might not perish; the prophet is weighed down by his labors, his travels, and his shipwreck.

¶ For I know that: I knew that you were merciful and that you were going to do this. I did not want to bear an offensive message, but I wanted to flee to Tharsis—that is, to be free for contemplation and to enjoy quiet and leisure in the sea of this age; I departed my home having gone out from your bosom. If I said that you were forgiving and merciful, no one would do penance; that you were a cruel judge, I knew that this was not your nature. In this dilemma, therefore, I preferred rather to flee than either to deceive penitents by leniency or to proclaim what you were not [forgiving and merciful]. Therefore, take my life. The saddened prophet wishes to die, lest Israel perish forever once the multitude of the Gentiles converted.

¶ Do you think: He does not say, "You are wrongly angry," lest he seem to rebuke the
saddened one; nor does he say, "You are rightly angry," lest he go against his own opinion, but God asks the angered one himself so that he might respond with the causes of his anger, or if he remain silent, the true judgment of God might be confirmed by his silence.

§ And Jonah went out: Jonah—that is, the dove, or the grieving one—departed from the city, the city which Cain built, and he dwells facing the east, where the sun rises, and there he is in his tabernacle. He waits while some time passes, contemplating what might happen to the city of the world before Nineveh is saved through the gospel of Christ, and before the gourd is dried up and the true man rising is manifested. Jonah was under the bower because the truth had not yet appeared.

§ And the Lord God prepared: In Hebrew we read cicerion for gourd (cucurbita), which sprouts quickly and withers quickly. It is compared to Israel sending down little roots into the earth and trying to be raised on high, but not equaling the height of the cedars of God or of the fir trees.

§ Gourd (cucurbita) or ivy (hedera) is a kind of brushwood or shrub that has broad leaves and supports a very dense canopy, which creeps along the ground, and without props to lean on it does not seek higher parts. But God prepared this so that it might provide for the prophet a bower suddenly rising into the sky without any supports—in which God’s power was shown. Israel is compared to this ivy or gourd. Israel once protected Jonah under its own shade—that is, Christ—awaiting the conversion of the nations. He made for himself a bower there, or if one diminished in his dignity, and he sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would happen to the city.

6 And the Lord God prepared an ivy, and it ascended over Jonah’s head to be a shade over his head and to cover him, for he was fatigued. And Jonah was delighted with the ivy.

7 And God prepared a worm when the morning arose on the following day, and it struck the ivy and it withered. And when the sun was risen, Whence in Hosea, the Lord will bring a burning wind that will rise from the desert, and it will dry up his springs and make his fountain[s] desolate [Hos. 13.15].

8 The Lord commanded a hot and burning wind, and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, and he burned. And he desired for his soul that he might die, and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” 9 And the Lord said to Jonah, “Do you think you better for me to die than to live?” 9 And the Lord said to Jonah, “Do you think you
over the salvation of the Gentiles. But here since the gourd has been dried up Israel burns, and because he was questioned with a qualification, “Do you think you are rightly angry about the ivy?” he confidently says, “I am rightly saddened, even unto death. For I did not want thus to save some that others might perish; I did not want thus to benefit aliens that I might destroy my own people.” Thus Christ is bewailing Jerusalem even unto a death not his own, but that of the Jews, so that those who deny the son of God might die and the ones who confess him might rise again.

§You have not labored: As far as the people of the Gentiles are concerned, whence Israel confidently says, “Behold, I serve you for so many years... and yet you have never given me a kid, ... but... you have killed the fatted calf for this one who has devoured his inheritance with whores.” Whoever is not shocked at this, but hears it, “All that I have is yours. But it was fitting that we should make merry for the return of the brother” [Luke 15.31–32]. For the sake of the Gentiles, indeed, the precious blood of Christ was poured out and he himself descended to hell so that that people might ascend to heaven. No work of such magnitude was done on behalf of the sons of Israel, and because of this he envies his younger brother.

¶More than a hundred twenty thousand: We can understand this with regard to the age of infancy, which is innocent and simple, and since the number of little ones is so great, it is clear that the multitude of advanced age was greater. Or because Nineveh is a great city and in a great house there are vessels not only of gold but also of clay, it can be said that there was a very great multitude who, before doing penance, did not know the difference between good and evil.