

The Book of Jonah.

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Contents

Johah 1.....	1
Jonah 2.....	5
Jonah 3.....	8
Jonah 4.....	11

Johah 1.

The book of the prophet Jonah stands alone. Its peculiarity is that it does not contain a single prophecy. There is the message to Nineveh — if that can be termed a prophecy — but beyond this there is no record of what Jonah was used to communicate. That he did fulfil his office is plain from a solitary statement in 2 Kings. There we read that Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, "restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher." (2 Kings 14: 25.) Nothing else has been preserved; for when we examine the book we discover that its instruction lies in Jonah's personal history, or rather in his conduct, when commissioned by Jehovah to go and cry against Nineveh, because its wickedness had come up before Him. The book therefore has, we might say, a parabolical character — Jonah, both in his unfaithfulness and when under judgment because of it, being taken up and used for typical instruction. It is this feature which has made the book in all ages so full of interest in its various applications. The facts are very simple and familiar. Sent of the Lord to preach against Nineveh, Jonah fled, and going down to Joppa, and finding a ship about to sail for Tarshish, he paid his fare, and embarked "to go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord." Such was the vain thought of the prophet, as it is often the foolish thought still even of many of the children of God. The Lord sent out a storm upon the sea, so that the ship was nearly wrecked. Brought face to face with death, the sailors in their terror cried every man to his god, and attempted by throwing overboard their cargo to lighten the ship. All this time Jonah, on whose account this "mighty tempest" had arisen, with strange insensibility, was lying fast asleep. The captain aroused him to a sense of their danger by the solemn words, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." The crew then proceeded to cast lots, having a kind of instinct — awakened, no doubt, by divine power — that the storm was occasioned by

some sinner amongst their number. God was behind the scene, and, directing the lot, it fell upon Jonah. They then demanded of him the cause of the evil that had fallen upon them, his occupation, whence he came, his country and his people. Jonah told them all the truth, and even that he had fled from the presence of the Lord. They were smitten with fear when they heard that God was dealing with them on account of the prophet, and they asked what was to be done. Jonah at once replied that the only way of safety for them was to cast him overboard. With real kindness of heart they were unwilling to do this, and laboured hard to bring the vessel to land. But it could not be; and thus, after they had prayed that they might not incur the guilt of innocent blood, they took Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea. The effect was instantaneous; the sea ceased from her raging, and they, impressed by what they had seen, feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows. More than this, the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Such is the outline of the first chapter, and we have now to enquire as to its meaning.

1. In the first place Jonah is a type of the Jewish nation in one particular character. Nineveh, there is little doubt, is a symbol of the world, or, as another has said, the haughty glory of the world, which recognizes nothing but its own importance — the world, the open enemy of God's people simply by its pride. As such it was subject to the just judgment of a holy God. Israel, on the other hand, was God's candlestick on the earth, responsible therefore to bear witness to and for Him who by His grace had called them, and, separating them from the other nations of the earth, made them His people, and dwelt in their midst between the cherubim. We read thus in Isaiah: "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified or let them hear, and say, It is truth. *Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen:* that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am He: before me there was no god formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour." (Isa. 43: 8-11.) Such was the divinely-given position of Israel in the midst of the world; and inasmuch as the God they knew, and with whom as Jehovah they were brought into relationship, was a righteous God, "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity," their mission was to cry against Nineveh (the world), because its wickedness had come up before the Lord.

How then was their mission fulfilled? The conduct of Jonah supplies the answer. He rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. This is, in one word, the history of Israel as God's messenger. They were quite willing to be exalted by their privileges above the surrounding nations. In this way, indeed, their pride was fostered; but it was quite another thing to accept the responsibility of their position. Nothing is more sad than to trace their history in this respect, from the time they were redeemed out of Egypt to the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. The light which they possessed was used only for self-exaltation and self-righteousness, until at length they compelled God — if we may so speak — to depart from them. Not only did they flee from the presence of the Lord rather than fulfil their mission towards the world, but they also sunk down lower morally than the nations against whom they were called to testify. (See, for example, Jer. 32: 25-35; Ezek. 8, Ezek. 9; Ezek. 16: 44-49, etc.) The Lord said,

indeed, through Jeremiah, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it. And though they say, The Lord liveth; surely they swear falsely." (Jer. 5: 1, 2.)

Jonah therefore in escaping to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, is but a true picture of Israel fleeing from God rather than proclaim His message to the world. And we may see, perhaps, in the ship sailing from Joppa, offering the prophet a ready method of flight, the way of Israel's moral degradation. The ship was the means of trade with the Gentiles, and hence it was through commerce that they acquired familiarity, became conformed in their habits and ways, with the nations of the world, and so lost their power of testimony. Israel thus, like the prophet, with their back toward the Lord instead of the face, and refusing the admonitions of His grace and longsuffering, fell under the chastenings and judgments of His hand. This is represented in our chapter by the statement that the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. But the guilty nation was so insensible that, though the onlookers, the mariners, were afraid, and cried every man to his god in awe before the terrible nature of the storm, they lay, as it were, fast asleep, undisturbed by the roar of the tempest which threatened their destruction.

We need not, however, enter into the details of this strikingly typical narrative, so plainly does it set forth God's dealings with His ancient people on the ground of their responsibility as His light-bearers in the world. Two other points, however, should be mentioned. The unfaithfulness of Israel involves the Gentiles also in the judgments of God. Instead of being the means of light and blessing, they become the occasion of judgment. But, secondly, after the wrath of a holy God has been visited upon his people, the cause of it learned, and the tempest stilled, the Gentiles turn to the Lord, and acknowledge His power and glory. "The men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows." So will it be after the Lord's appearing. "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent." (Zeph. 3: 8, 9.)

2. The second application of this history is to the servant. Jonah as a prophet was a servant of the Lord, and one, as pointed out, charged with a special mission to the world. His message befitting the dispensation was one of judgment, not of grace or mercy. But he fled, not from the opposition of those to whom he was sent, but from Him from whom he had received his mission. Many a servant, forgetting the source of his strength, as well as the secret of his safety, has been unable to face the power of the enemy in his own stronghold; but Jonah sought to hide himself in the world from the One who had called him to be His servant. Elijah fled from Jezebel, but Jonah, let it be repeated, fled from the Lord. In this he is surely a perfect contrast with our blessed Lord as the faithful witness. He was able to say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." (Psalm 40: 8-10.) Jonah, on the other hand, fled rather

than tell forth the message of his God, and indeed the responsibility of testimony is always the greatest test. In the case of the blessed Lord Himself, it was His testimony that evoked the bitter hatred of the world. (John 7: 7.) It was under this test that Jonah failed, and perhaps on another ground. The possession of truth, if not communicated, always produces self-exaltation and Pharisaic pride, and where these things are nourished in the heart, there will always be indifference concerning, if not contempt for, the welfare of others. Jonah was a Jew, and God Himself had fenced him off from the world, but that was no reason why Jonah's heart should be without pity for the world. But so it was, and now his real state appears in open disobedience to his Lord.

It is important to note also the amount of self-deception which a soul in an unhappy condition can practise on itself. Jonah confessed to the mariners that he feared the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, who had made the sea and the dry land, and yet he thought to hide himself from His eyes. But if the servant under temptation tries to forget God, God does not forget His servant, nor can He indeed permit him to disregard His authority. Hence He pursues him with His storm; He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, surely not for the destruction of His servant, but to awaken him to a sense of his position and peril. Yea, the Lord loves His servants too well to suffer them to continue in rebellion. But while He is active in pursuit of Jonah, Jonah is asleep in the midst of the signs of His presence and power. Who will not recall, by way of contrast, the storm on another sea, during which He who had made the sea lay asleep on a pillow! In the former case the storm is only appeased by the casting forth of Jonah in the sea; in the latter the Lord, awakened by the importunities of His disciples, manifested His glory and demonstrated His power by rebuking the wind, and commanding the sea to be still.

God's way with Jonah in this chapter illustrates a very important principle. When Israel failed to sanctify His name, God declared that He would sanctify His own name. (See Ezekiel 36: 16-23.) So also with His servants. If they do not glorify Him in the testimony committed to them, He will glorify Himself in them through the chastenings of His hand. Thus in this chapter Jonah proved himself to be an unfaithful servant, one that could not vindicate the name of his Lord before a haughty, wicked world. God then came in and made bare His arm in dealing with Jonah, and by the very judgment which He executed He got Himself praise from the hearts of the heathen. This is a very important principle, and should teach us that, if we are honoured to be servants, we are in no wise necessary for the accomplishment of the purposes of God. Understanding this will keep us very humble, while it will call forth praise from our hearts for the precious privilege of being in any way associated with His divine counsels.

In conclusion it might be profitable to make a twofold enquiry. First, in how far the history of Israel, as shown in this narrative, shadows forth that of the Church in her candlestick position? Alas! the full answer to this question is recorded in the message to the seven churches. (Rev. 2 and 3) Secondly, we might ask whether we, as the Lord's servants, are found more faithful than Jonah? whether many of us are not buried, like him, in profound slumber, even while the signs of coming judgment are already to be heard? May the Lord Himself awaken us to the truth of our condition, that we may no longer remain insensible to the imminent peril of a godless world.

Jonah 2.

The last verse of Jonah 1 tells us that the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and that Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. It is in this fact that we find the key of the interpretation of chap. 2; for our Lord expressly connects this circumstance with His own death. He says, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matt. 12: 40.)* And it is exceedingly interesting to trace the way in which Jonah, under the judgment of God, becomes a type of Christ in His rejection and death.

*Rationalism has sought to discover an inconsistency in this statement, alleging that our Lord was actually only two nights in the grave; but this is merely playing with the common ignorance of Jewish modes of reckoning. With them a part of a day always included the whole, so that our Lord simply adopted the usual manner of speech. Nothing is more sad than the petty criticism of human reason, ever on the outlook to discover a ground of exaltation against the wisdom of God. But "the foolishness of God is wiser than men."

We have seen, in our consideration of chap. 1, that the prophet was a type of the Jewish nation — the remnant who always take the place of the nation before God. Unfaithful in their mission to the world, God rejected them as His vessel of testimony, and caused His waves and billows to pass over them; and it is in this position we see them, as personified by Jonah, at the commencement of chap. 2. Now, it was into this very place that Christ in grace, in His unquenchable love for His people, descended. He was rejected, not by God surely — far be the thought — but by "His own," to whom He came. Their iniquity, however, black as it was, did but accomplish the counsels of God, and become, at the same time, the occasion for the display of the depths of the heart of Christ. In the same night in which He was betrayed He took bread and gave thanks; and of the cup He said, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26) He thus suffered Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, and voluntarily went down under all the judgment of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people. All God's waves and billows therefore passed also over His head. They had passed over (or rather, viewed prophetically, will pass over) the remnant because of their sins; they went over the head of Christ because in grace He took the place of the people before God, died for that nation, so that God might afterwards righteously, on the ground of the atonement, fulfil all His counsels of grace towards His ancient people.

It is in this way that Jonah in the belly of the whale becomes a figure of Christ in the grave. He thus uses expressions, as led of the Spirit of God, which have a far wider application than to his own circumstances. Look, for example, at Psalm 42. This psalm is the commencement of the second book, "in which the remnant are viewed as cast out of Jerusalem, while the city is given up to wickedness." They have fallen, therefore; under the judgments of God, and they use, in respect of this, the very words found in Jonah — "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. 42: 7); but the full significance of this statement is only seen when considered in connection with the place our Lord took, when He identified Himself, not only with His people, but also with their sins, when He bore them in His own body on the tree.

We may now trace further the way of God with Jonah, as also with the remnant, as set forth in the language here employed. The chapter commences with the significant statement, "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly." His face is now in the right direction. He had turned his back upon Jehovah; but now, under the stroke of the divine rod, he is not only arrested, but his eyes are drawn upward to Him from whom he had attempted to flee. Blessed effect of chastisement when the soul owns its dependence, and humbles itself under the mighty hand of God. "Is any man afflicted," says James, "let him pray." Yes, just as a song of praise is the channel of the soul's joy, prayer is the vehicle of its sorrow. Thus Jonah tells us, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell" (margin, the grave) "cried I, and thou heardest my voice," etc. And then the prophet recounts the whole process which had been wrought out in him, and by which his soul had been restored. (vv. 2-7.) It will be profitable to mark for our own instruction its several steps.

First he owns the hand of the Lord. "Thou," he says, "hadst cast me into the deep." There was no entanglement in second causes, as is so often the case with ourselves, and by which we lose all the blessing of the Lord's dealings with us. Jonah at this moment thought neither upon the storm nor upon the sailors. It was the Lord who had cast him into the deep. So with our Lord, in a more blessed and perfect manner, when suffering upon the cross. "Thou," he said, "hast brought me into the dust of death." (Ps. 22.) And what rest of soul it gives to take everything that befalls us, as it is our privilege to do, from the hand of the Lord Himself! It stills every murmur, opens the ear to the divine voice, and puts the soul into the condition for profiting by the discipline through which it may be passing. Moreover, he confesses that the Lord's hand was upon him for judgment. All the figures he employs - the seas, the floods, billows and waves — though literally true in his case, explain this; for they are all the symbols everywhere in the Scriptures of God's judicial wrath. The effect was, that he felt he was cast out of God's sight, and his soul fainted within him. (vv. 4, 7.) In other words, like Paul, though in another manner, he had the sentence of death in himself. He was brought to a sense of his utter nothingness before God, and all the more because it was on account of his own sin. From a rebel fleeing from the divine Presence, he is changed into a penitent, having no plea of justification for what he had done, but taking the place of having nothing, and deserving nothing but the judgment from which he was suffering. And this, the only true place for the soul, whether of a sinner or of a backslidden saint, and the only place where God can meet the soul, on the ground of accomplished atonement, with forgiveness and restoring grace.

Let us, then, now see in what way the Lord responds to the cry of the prophet. Jonah says, "I cried . . . and thou heardest my voice." Again, "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple." (vv. 2, 7.) What could more strikingly illustrate the grace of God, or display the tenderness of His heart! The object of His dealings accomplished, He immediately answers the cry of His servant. In the folly of our unbelief how often are we tempted to think that He cannot forgive us after our sinful and rebellious wanderings. But His grace never fails; nay, He waits upon His people, His ear ever being open to their cry; for His attitude towards us does not depend upon what we are, but solely upon what He is in Himself. Satan would always fain deceive us now as he deceived Eve in the garden of Eden, and hence the importance of learning the character and the ways of God from His own word, and from the revelation He has made of Himself in Christ Jesus. Many examples of His readiness to hear His people's cry, spite of their conduct, might easily be collected from

the Scripture. Psalm 107 is a collection of such; see also Hosea 4; and especially the Lord's message to Peter on the morning of His resurrection. (Mark 16: 7.) These words of the prophet, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me," should therefore sink deep into our hearts. They are a blessed encouragement to timid, and, beyond all, to backslidden souls, teaching as they do that God waits for nothing, if we have wandered, but our return to Him. We have a sheet anchor whose hold no storm can loosen when we have learnt the simple truth, that God never changes His attitude toward us, that His love is always the same — the same when we have fallen into sin as when we are walking in the enjoyment of the light of His countenance. And it is just because of His unchanging love that He deals with us in chastening and affliction. "Whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." It was, too, on this same principle that He acted with Jonah, and the issue was that the prophet could declare, "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God." (v. 6.)

Thus restored, the prophet now can testify of the folly of sin. "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." And surely this witness is true. Will not all our hearts, indeed, set their seal to it? For whenever we have been beguiled by the lying vanities of the flesh, of the world, or the devil, have we not proved the truth of the prophet's instruction? Ah! yes, there is a way that seemeth right unto a man (when under the power of these allurements), but the end thereof are the ways of death. Mercy is never found in the path of sin. Under the influence of this truth, wrought out by practical experience in Jonah's soul, he cries, "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving: I will pay that I have vowed." He thus recognises the source of his preservation and blessing, and renders his thanksgiving and praise.

He then proceeds a step further. "Salvation is of the Lord." And, together with these words, we are told that "the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry ground." This is undoubtedly a remarkable foreshadowing of the truth of deliverance. All the exercises of Jonah's soul lead him up to this beautiful conclusion — "Salvation is of the Lord;" and immediately he is set free. So with the soul in Rom. 7: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God" (is the answer) "through Jesus Christ our Lord." And the deliverance is reached and enjoyed. Blessed conclusion, again we say, whether for the sinner or the troubled saint — "Salvation is of the Lord." It brings peace into the soul; it stills all doubts and questionings; it puts an end to self-occupation, and it turns the eye upward to the only source of blessing and deliverance. The knowledge of this truth is essential to the whole of the Christian life, and brings ineffable rest to the soul when weary with its burdens and conflicts. "Salvation is of the Lord." Then we have only, like the king of Israel, to say, "We know not what to do: but our eyes are up unto thee;" and we shall find, as he did, that the Lord will come in with His delivering mercy beyond our utmost thought and expectation.

The prophetic application of Jonah's deliverance to the Jewish remnant in the future is easily perceived. We have already called attention to the identity of the expressions used by the prophet with those found in Psalm 42. And the Lord's way with them will be precisely the same as that found here. Bringing in upon them all His waves and billows, He will, by thus exercising their souls, reach their consciences, produce in them the sense of their guilt and utter helplessness, and turning their eyes up to Himself, evoke from their hearts cries and supplications for succour and deliverance. Then, as in the case of Jonah, the Lord, who had been

waiting with yearning compassion upon His people, will instantly answer their cry and appear for their salvation. Thereon they will cry, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." (Read Isa. 11: 12; also Isa. 25, Isa. 26; and Zechariah 12-14.)

Jonah 3.

The moment Jonah was delivered "the word of the Lord came unto him the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee;" for if the Lord pursued His servant with His storm and tempest, and cast him into the deep, in the midst of the seas, it was for restoration as well as correction, and to put the prophet into a right condition of soul to be the vessel of the divine will. Accordingly he did not now attempt to flee, but he arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. It is always so in the Lord's dealings with His people. If we turn back from the path which He marks out for us, we surely must encounter the chastenings of His hand, and the object of His dealings is never accomplished until we are brought face to face again with the path from which we declined, and made willing, by grace surely, to enter upon it. It is on the principle enunciated by the psalmist — "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy word."

This teaching lies on the surface; but the typical import of this chapter has, we apprehend, the deeper significance. Jonah is, in figure, a risen man; for he says, "Out of the belly of hell" (or the grave) "cried I." Jehovah had brought death in upon him; and together with this, it must be borne in mind, as shown in the last chapter, he is identified with the remnant. There is therefore a double symbolical meaning. Israel, in the person of Jonah, is set aside, on account of their unfaithfulness, as the vessel of testimony. Judging according to man the light is quenched; all hope for the world has for ever disappeared. When all God's waves and billows were rolling over the heads of those whom He had chosen as His witnesses on the earth, where was the possibility of any further testimony in the world? We might ask with the psalmist, "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps. 88: 10-12.)

The answer to these questions is only found in the death and resurrection of Christ. All hope, as founded upon man's responsibility, was indeed gone; but God in His grace and mercy sent His beloved Son, and when He came He identified Himself with His people, went down in His compassion into the very place where they lay dead in trespasses and sins, Himself died, undertaking the whole of their responsibility, that He might glorify God in the very scene and place where they had dishonoured Him. As He Himself said, "Like as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man" (the rejected One) "be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." But it was not possible that He should be holden of death, not possible, whether we consider the glory of God, or the rights of His own person; and hence He rose on the third day as the first-begotten of the dead, and it is of Him as the risen One that Jonah becomes a figure. As the risen One, He is (though He was ever that), the faithful and true witness; and Israel being now set aside, He can, in the fulfilment of the purposes of God, bear testimony to the Gentiles, and the issue shows, in figure, that the casting away of the Jew is the

reconciliation of the world. (Rom. 11.) The two things are in the chapter — the historical fact of Jonah's mission, and that of which this mission is an emblem.

Jonah, now obedient, goes to Nineveh; but before his preaching is described the Spirit of God pauses to call attention to the magnitude of the city. It was a city great before God, of three days' journey. Such was the result of the activity of man in his alienation from God, priding himself upon the greatness, the pomp, and magnificence of his works which tempt him to say with Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" And, intoxicated with his own pride, he cares not, even if he remembers, that the judgment of God has been pronounced upon all his works. It was this judgment of which Jonah was the herald, proclaiming in the face of the "haughty glory" of the world, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

The character of the message demands our attention. It is one of pure judgment, unaccompanied by any offer of mercy whatever, even though the people should repent. This may seem strange; but it must be remembered that Jonah's preaching had reference only to God's government upon the earth. As a rule indeed the prophets generally were not concerned with eternity; i.e. the judgments threatened, and the blessings promised on condition of obedience or repentance, were confined to this world. The subject of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest, was not within the scope of their ministry. Connected as they were with the kingdom, they spake only of God's ways, claims, righteousness, and government as displayed in this scene.

Looked at in a typical way, the message of Jonah has another significance. The number forty has a distinct meaning in the word of God, as may be seen in the forty years' wandering of Israel in the desert, the temptation of our Lord during forty days in the wilderness, etc. It indicates the period of full probation. Thus understood in this passage, and bearing in mind that Nineveh sets forth the world — the world, especially in the aspect of its exaltation through its own pride against God, we have simply the annunciation of the fact, that after the world has been fully tested, tested in every variety of way, it will be destroyed. It is the cross of Christ that gives us the culmination of God's test of the world; and hence our Lord said, "Now is the judgment of this world." Judgment irreversible was passed upon it in the death of Christ; for thereby God demonstrated openly, before all, the character, the hopelessness of the evil, of the world, inasmuch as it accepted the leadership of Satan in crucifying God's beloved Son. True it was that God withheld the execution of the judgment; for in the death of Christ was laid the foundation on which God could righteously offer salvation to that same world in its guilty and lost condition, and accomplish His own counsels of grace in redemption. But the judgment has not been recalled, could not be consistently with the glory of God. It has only been suspended, because the Lord "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But," Peter goes on to say, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (2 Peter 3: 9, 10.) Yes, it remains true — "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

The effect of the preaching was wonderful. We read, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them." It began with the king, who "arose from his throne" on hearing the word, "and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." Moreover, in conjunction with his nobles, he issued a decree that neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, should taste anything; they were not to feed nor to drink water. In a word, an universal fast was proclaimed. All were to be covered with sackcloth, to cry mightily unto God, and to turn from the evil of their ways, in the hope that God would turn away from His fierce anger, that they might not perish. (vv. 5-9.) The reader will remark that they believed GOD. In Jonah 1 the sailors cried to Jehovah, because there it was the glory of Jehovah in His relation to the Jew that had been manifested in His judgments. Here it is the world in relation to God as such, and this will explain the difference; and being in this chapter on the ground of creatorial relationships, the cattle are also mentioned; for the whole creation (and this includes them) shall one day be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. (Rom. 8.)

Our Lord refers, in a striking way, to the repentance of Nineveh — "The men of Nineveh," He says, "shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here." (Matt. 12: 41.) It was proof indeed of the hardness of the hearts of those to whom the Lord came preaching repentance because the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matt. 4: 17), that they were insensible to His appeals, even though His appeals were enforced by the miracles which He wrought in their midst. The Ninevites were heathen; the Jews were God's chosen people, and He who came to His own was their own Messiah, Jehovah indeed the Saviour; but they turned a deaf ear to His entreating cries. (Matt. 23: 37.) What clearer demonstration could there have been of the utter depravity of their hearts? And are "the men of this generation" any better? Combined with the ministry of reconciliation which is still carried on (2 Cor. 5) in the tender mercy of God, the proclamation is still made — "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown;" and who heeds it? A few here and there, through grace; but the mass, the world, is as insensible today as it was in the days of our Lord. And further, suppose that some divinely sent messenger were to stand today in the midst of London with the message of Jonah, what would be his reception? It is not too much to say that he would be regarded either as a fool or a madman. Oh, that it were better understood that the bestowment of light and privileges do but bring an increase of responsibility and of condemnation, when the light is refused, and the privileges are despised! Beautiful spectacle this of the repentance of Nineveh, and no mean foreshadowing of the time when the Gentiles shall serve the Lord with one consent!

The chapter concludes with the action of God consequent upon Nineveh's repentance — "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." We see again what is in the heart of God towards men — that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked; and hence, that if He proclaim judgment it is with the object of turning them from their evil way. The people of Nineveh did not know what He would do. They only said, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?" And God responded to this feeble faith, as He ever does, and spared them from destruction. It is but a human mode of speech, it need scarcely be added, when it says that He repented. His aim was to produce repentance on the part of Nineveh; and this having been done,

He could, consistently with His ways in government, show His compassion and forgiveness. What abundant encouragement for the sinner is found in this record.

"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him." But then, blessed be His name, there is also written, "He that heareth my word, and believeth Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life." (John 5: 24.) E. D.

Jonah 4.

The instruction of chap. 4 is derived, as in chap. 1, from the conduct of the prophet. At the close of chap. 3 we have the grace of God displayed in sparing the people of Nineveh on their repentance — the revelation, in fact, of God's heart. In the first verse of this chapter we have in contrast with this the unfolding of the heart of Jonah. As we read elsewhere, God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner; but on this very account Jonah was displeased exceedingly and very angry. Not only was he out of communion with, but he was in positive antagonism to, the mind of God. Like the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal, he was angry because those who had no claim upon God had found mercy. By this he only showed that he could not enter into the thought of grace. And how often is it so with ourselves! Spite of the fact that we ourselves have been the objects of mercy, and that, apart from the sovereign grace of God, we could have no standing before Him, we, in the folly of our natural thoughts and feelings, desire that others should be dealt with on the ground of justice. How strikingly this was exemplified in the apostolic days may be seen in the conflicts of Paul. Even Peter was afraid to maintain the truth of grace (Gal. 2); and hence the apostle Paul, as guided by the Holy Spirit, not only withstood Peter to the face, but has also elaborately shown, both in the epistle to the Galatians, and in that to the Romans (Rom. 9 - 11), that the Jew, equally with the Gentile, was utterly without claim upon God; that had God dealt with Israel on the ground of justice, they, equally with the Gentiles, could not have escaped His judgment. But now He had concluded all, both Jews and Gentiles, in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all. No; the natural man can never understand the grace of God.

But we may go a little deeper, and enquire into the special grounds of Jonah's anger. We read: "And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." (vv. 2, 3.)

That is, he was afraid lest God might show mercy to Nineveh, and, himself desiring judgment and destruction, he was unwilling to be the bearer of the divine message. What narrowness and hardness of heart! we might say. But there is more than this. There is in this foolish prayer the very essence of self and self-importance. To proclaim the message of judgment to godless Nineveh Jonah was quite willing — if he were but sure that it would be executed — for that would exalt Jonah both in his own eyes, and in the eyes of all who believed in the truth of his mission. Even James and John said to the Lord, "Wilt thou that we command

fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" But the Lord turned, and rebuked them; for God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Jonah was of the same spirit with these disciples, only he went further, and opposed the manifestation, of mercy. For if, on the one hand, the annunciation of unsparing judgment exalted the preacher, the exhibition of grace set aside the messenger and exalted God. As another has said, Jonah, instead of caring for Nineveh, thinks only of his own reputation as a prophet. Wretched heart of man, so unable to rise up to the goodness of God! Jonah thought only of himself, and the horrid selfishness of his heart hides from him the God of grace, faithful to His love for His helpless creatures. And we may add that he was entirely without excuse. He says, "For I knew that thou art a gracious God," etc, and yet he was angry — not satisfied with the character of the God he knew!

So great indeed was his disappointment and anger that he requests that he might die. Sad state of soul! for what led him to desire this? The fact that God had spared Nineveh, and, together with this, his chagrin that he and his preaching had apparently been set aside! So petty and narrow is the human heart when occupied with its own things — with its own importance, pride and reputation. The case of Elijah, which, from its seeming similarity, every reader will recall, is very different. In his doubt and despondency he imagined that his work had been entirely in vain. In answer to the Lord's question, "What doest thou here, Elijah? he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." (1 Kings 19: 11.) For the moment he had lost confidence in God, as he saw the power of the enemy on every hand. Doubtless he was also disappointed that the Lord did not intervene in judgment to vindicate the honour of his name. But this was quite a different thing from Jonah's desire. He thought neither of the Lord's honour, nor of poor guilty Nineveh; only, we repeat, of his own reputation as a prophet. Nothing, indeed, could be more humiliating than his state of mind.

On the other hand, could anything surpass the tender gentleness of the Lord with His wayward servant? For the moment, He contents Himself with a single word: "Doest thou well to be angry?" or, as in the margin, "Art thou greatly angry?" That is all. Like a mother with a petulant child, who knows that it is useless to reason with him when his temper is being displayed, and therefore pays no attention to his foolish requests, but waits until the passion has subsided, so the Lord dealt with Jonah. Ah, how often have we also in our folly ventured, in the spirit of Jonah, to arraign the ways of our God, and to prefer our foolish petitions, which, if they had been granted, would have entailed sorrow upon us for the rest of our lives! But the Lord loved us better than we loved even ourselves.

Jonah did not reply to the Lord's tender remonstrance; he was too angry for that. And he "went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." Poor man! he was evidently hoping still that the Lord would destroy Nineveh, spite of its repentance; so little did he understand the heart of the One who had sent him on his mission. But God had done for the present with Nineveh. "He had repented of the evil He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." That, therefore, was irrevocable; and He could not, consistently with His holy name, gratify the evil desires of Jonah. Hence His attention, in His love and grace, was now

directed to His servant — to correct and instruct, as well as to explain and justify His own ways. We thus read: "And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd." (v. 6.)

It is exceedingly touching to see God thus watching over and caring for His wilful servant, and the pains He takes to convince him of the unreasonableness of his anger. Why did the prophet now rejoice with great joy? (See margin.) Because of the relief he experienced from the shadow of the gourd. As his anger, so was his joy entirely selfish. Accordingly, "God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live." Wholly absorbed in the circle of self, he is wretched and miserable; now because the gourd which had been a comfort to him had been destroyed, and perhaps also because of his bodily suffering. It was to this point that God had been leading him, and He once more intervened, and said to Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death." He had been angry because Nineveh was not overthrown, and now he is angry because the gourd had been destroyed; angry in both cases because of the influence both the one and the other had upon himself, so wretched was his poor contracted heart. It was on the latter point that the Lord took him up, saying, "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (vv. 10, 11.)

In this manner was Jonah convicted by the words of his own mouth; and God was justified, yea, abundantly justified, by the pity which Jonah had felt for the gourd to which he was bound by no ties of relationship, and which he only valued because of its usefulness to himself. Thus, as always, God overcame when He was judged. (See Rom. 3: 4.) There were two things which the prophet (and, may we not add, many Christians also?) had not yet learned. First, that God's tender mercy is over all His works. (Psalm 145: 9.) How beautifully this is shown by the words, "*and also much cattle*!" This tender mercy will be displayed by-and-by, when Christ shall take His rightful power, and reign over the earth; but the heart of God is ever the same, and He has proved it in that He "so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" in the fact that Christ tasted death for everything (Heb. 2), as well as in the lengthening out of the day of grace in His long-suffering, because He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3); and, finally, in His purpose to reconcile all things unto Himself, through the death of Christ, whether things in earth or things in heaven. (Col. 1.) But to enter into this we must lose sight of self, and selfish aims, and be filled with divine thoughts and divine affections. The second thing Jonah had not learned was, that God was "good and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Him." (Psalm 86: 5.) It was this same lesson that Peter had to teach the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 21); that Paul had to press earnestly upon the Hebrew believers of his day (Rom. 10: 11-13); and it is this same truth that many of us, while owning it by the lip, need to hold in greater power at the present moment. If grace is sovereign, as it surely is, on this very account it is unrestricted, and flows out in blessing wheresoever God

wills. Oh! how often, in folly similar to Jonah's, do we narrow the heart of God; but in the issue He will show that He has been above and beyond all our thoughts. And, in the meanwhile, let it instruct and comfort our hearts to remember that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

It was no small honour, it may be said in conclusion, for Jonah to be taken up, even in his disobedience, self-will, and anger, and to be thus made a vessel for the exhibition of the mind and heart of God. This also was of grace, and therefore to God is all the praise. E. D.