

Jonah

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Jonah and His Book.

It has been remarked by others that the Book of Jonah is as singular amongst the books of the Old Testament as the Epistle of James is amongst the writings of the New.

The Old Testament is occupied largely with God's gracious purposes concerning Israel; yet there we find the story of a special mission of mercy to Gentiles! The New Testament unfolds the purposes of God concerning Christ and the Church, yet amongst the Apostolic epistles we find one addressed to the twelve tribes! From Jonah's book we may learn that in the dispensation in which Israel was the centre of God's ways He nevertheless had a heart of compassion for those outside the chosen race. From James' Epistle we may gather that, although a change of dispensation has set in, and God is now engaged in gathering out sinners from all the nations for heavenly bliss in association with the risen Christ. He has not forgotten His ancient people.

Apart from the inspiration of the Spirit of God, the very existence of the Book of Jonah is difficult to understand. That a highly conservative people, who were accustomed to look down with contempt upon the uncircumcised, should admit such a book as Jonah's into the Sacred Canon is proof that it was given by God. However distasteful its contents might be to their prejudiced minds. Israel regarded the book as divinely authoritative.

No one could have written the Book of Jonah but the prophet whose name it bears. Another might conceivably have told of his mission to Nineveh and its amazing results; but who but himself could have told of his conversation aboard ship, or who could have given the very words of his prayer to Jehovah in the fish's belly, and of his peevish complaints afterwards, and the gracious remonstrances of God with him? In some later period in his life, when he had learned his lesson, Jonah was guided by

the Holy Spirit to write his most interesting story, which reflects the deepest discredit upon the prophet himself, while containing the most wholesome instruction for all who seek to witness for God in any age. Surely no more frank confession of grievous faults was ever published!

Everyone shines brightly in the book of Jonah but the writer The heathen mariners were reluctant to deliver him up to death (Israel's leaders had no such scruples concerning the Lord Jesus) and they turned with sacrifices to the one true God when the storm so abruptly ceased. The King of Nineveh, with his nobles and people, trembled at the word of God, and humbled themselves, before Him, thus averting the threatened judgement. The fish was obedient to its Creator, for when Jehovah spake to it, "It vomited out Jonah upon the dry land," (Jonah 2: 10).

And God what shall we say of Him? What consideration for the mariners! What care of His disobedient servant during the mysterious three days! What prompt response to the repentance of the wicked Ninevites! What thoughtfulness for children and cattle! What condescending remonstrances with His most faulty servant after all His dealings with him! These records bring home to our hearts the greatness and graciousness of the God with who we have to do.

The question has been raised whether the book of Jonah is sober history, or merely a "story" written by someone for a moral purpose. No question could be more evil, for it challenges the truthfulness of no less a person than the blessed Son of God. On various occasions in the course of His ministry He alluded Old Testament records as pointing a warning to men of His own day. When defending the divine institution of marriage, He spoke of the creation of Adam and Eve as the first pair (Matt. 19: 4-5: He spoke also of the murder of Abel (Matt. 23: 35); of the flood (Matt. 24: 38); and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17: 29). To all these He added a twofold reference to Jonah First to his preaching, and the repentance of the men of Nineveh This was intended as a solemn rebuke to the heartless men who heard the voice of our Lord and heeded it not. Then He referred to Jonah's three days imprisonment in the belly of the fish. This was meant as a warning to our Lord's hearers that as Jonah disappeared from view for three days and three nights. so would the despised Greater than Jonah become lost to Israel and the world (Matt. 12: 39-41). For the prophet's strange experience were typical of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

It is unthinkable that the all knowing Son of God should seek to warn men by reference to the flood, the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the experiences of Jonah if none of these things really happened. If the One to whom both writer and readers look for salvation from ruin is not to be trusted when speaking of mere historical events, how can we trust Him when He speaks of those things which belong to our eternal peace? A man once urged upon me that he should be accepted as a "good Christian" even though he rejected the story of Jonah! I refused the suggestion with indignation. He who casts doubt upon the trustworthiness of the Son of God courts disaster for himself, and is a peril to all who come under his influence. The hiss of the serpent is all around us. The dispensation has grown old, and the predicted apostasy draws near. Let us cleave confidently to Him who when on earth spake as no other ever spake (John 7: 6), and who concluded His public ministry with the emphatic and unmistakable words of John 12: 49-50: "I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, as the Father hath said unto Me, so I speak."

Jonah and His Experiences

"The prophet Jonah." This is our Lord's own description of Him in Matt. 2: 39; but the cursory

reader of the book may be disposed to ask, "Where are the prophecies?" Certainly Jonah's book differs in character from those of Isaiah and other prophets. Their rich and full unfoldings of glories yet to come are lacking in Jonah's chapters; but prophecy is there nevertheless, the fact is that the man himself, and Jehovah's remarkable dealings with him constitute a prophecy, and that of a deeply interesting character. In this unfaithful witness God gives us an illustration of His ways with the unfaithful nation to which he belonged. Thus there is a prophetic as well as moral instruction in the book of Jonah. It is a prophecy in picture.

"The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me." Jonah had already been entrusted with messages from Jehovah to Israel (2 Kings 14: 25); now he has the unique distinction of being sent "far hence unto the Gentiles "(Acts 22: 21). It is an unspeakable honour to be a messenger for God at any time. Have we all learned this? Are we all in the spirit of Isaiah's words 'Here am I, send me?'

Jonah, alas, was not well pleased to be sent to preach to Gentiles He had been God's willing mouthpiece to proclaim good things to his own nation; but a foreign nation a Power withal dangerously hostile to Israel that was a different matter! Even after the Holy Spirit came from heaven consequent upon the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. Peter had scruples about carrying the Gospel to the Roman garrison in Caesarea! Acts 10: 1. These lines are written while many Powers are engaged in the most terrible war the world has ever known. National feelings are running high; and even Christians although divinely separated by grace from the world and united to Christ in heaven, are sometimes influenced by what is being said and done around them. How slow are we to learn the blessed meaning of God's "whosoever"! The heart of God most assuredly goes out equally to men of every country and colour, and He desires that they may "be saved, and come to, the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2: 4). Do we desire also?

Jonah, on hearing the word of Jehovah, made a dash for the port of Joppa. He would flee from His presence! Vain effort! Ps. 139 stresses this very definitely. But why did Jonah refuse the divine commission to preach to the men of Nineveh! Jonah 4: 2 tells us. The known goodness of God was his difficulty. He was sure that if the Ninevites repented of their wickedness God would show mercy. In that case Jonah felt that his dignity would be affected to proclaim a judgement which was not executed! Rather let a whole vast city perish than that his credit should suffer! It seems almost incredible that a man born of the Spirit could be so self-important and behave so contemptibly! This story, so simply told, is written as a warning to us all. If we get out of communion with God, His tender compassions become foreign to us; harsh feelings develop, and we behave abominably. We shall doubtless meet Jonah in the glory of God ere long (like ourselves, a sinner saved by grace): but meantime let us seek to be as unlike him as possible in our service and testimony for God.

It seemed quite providential that a ship was about to sail for Tarshish when the wayward prophet reached Joppa, but circumstances are not always a safe guide for God's saints. Let us never forget this. It does not follow that because circumstances fit in nicely with our own wishes that God has ordered things so for us, Jonah, tired with his journey, like Elijah after his flight from Jezebel. went below, and was soon in a sound sleep. But 'Jehovah 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'. At a later date, Paul was exposed to a great storm in the same Mediterranean sea, but the contrast between Paul and Jonah when danger arose was very striking (Acts 27). The Apostle was travelling towards Rome in accordance with the Lord's words in Acts 23: 11: "Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou also bear witness of Me at Rome"! With these words ringing in his ears, Paul moved confidently. His moral

dignity throughout the storm was wonderful. He almost took command of the ship, even though both owner and "skipper" were on board. "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me." Yet Paul was no ordinary passenger, he was a prisoner in custody. By contrast, Jonah was a mean figure amongst the ship's company, and fully merited the rebuke of the master (Jonah 1: 6).

Let us not miss the lesson of this contrast. A Christian walking in communion with God is on a high level, but a Christian out of communion is a degraded spectacle. Men respect the one, but they despise the other. The one will be a blessing to men; but the other may be a stumbling-block, and even a curse!

Jonah and Christ

The Lord's words in Matt. 12: 39-40 show plainly that He regarded Jonah's descent into the depths as a foreshadowing of His own impending death. "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." But how great the contrast between Jonah's experience, and that of our Lord! Our Lord tasted death in all its terrible reality as the righteous judgement of God against sin, your sin and mine, beloved reader. Not so Jonah. The perverse critics of the Lord asked again for a sign in Matt 16, and again He referred them to the story of Jonah. But He rebuked their hypocrisy thus: "When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering. Ye can discern the face of the sky: but can ye not discern the signs of the times" It was indeed "fair weather" for the Jewish people at that moment, for the Sun was shining brightly, in their midst; but 'foul weather' was approaching judgement from God for their evil unbelief. "He left them and departed" significant words! The doom of the people was certain.

Jonah is an interesting type of Christ. He belonged to Galilee. Gath-Hepher was not far distant from Nazareth. The Jewish Counsellors were in error when they said to Nicodemus: 'Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet' (John 7: 52); but probably they ignored Jonah because his mission was to Gentiles a thought abhorrent to their pride.

When Jonah bade the seamen cast him into the sea, he was apparently not afraid to die. Backslider though he was, he had not lost all confidence in God. Jehovah could do (and did) great things for His erring servant. Here we must contrast Jonah with our blessed Lord. Disobedience led the one into the depths; Obedience led the Other.

"Jonah was in the belly of the fish, three days and three nights." God says so: let no-one doubt His word. In 1 Cor. 15: 4 we read that Christ was raised the third day according to the Scriptures! No Old Testament prophecy says this definitely. Hosea 10: 2 may occur to our minds; but if Christ is intended there. the language is certainly vague. But He who knew all things from the beginning kept Jonah three days and three nights in the depths in order to present to us an expressive picture of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The "third day" is found also in the story of Isaac the son who was raised from the dead "in a figure." (Heb. 11: 19 saw the place of his typical death and resurrection on the third day of his journey with his father (Gen. 22: 4).

Thus Jonah was "cast into the deep, in the midst of the seas, and was constrained to say. "all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me." His unfaithfulness brought him to this; nevertheless the fruit for others of all that he passed through was marvellous. The heathen mariners, who at first prayed every man to his god, were brought to know Jehovah; for Jonah, although in the path of disobedience, did not hesitate to say, "I am a Hebrew. and I fear Jehovah. the God of heaven who made the sea and

the dry land." The mariners forthwith cried to Jehovah, being reluctant to throw their troublesome passenger overboard; and when the storm abruptly ceased, it was so manifestly divine doing that "the men feared Jehovah exceedingly. and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows," This looks like true conversion. for prayer in an . hour of peril does not always yield results after the peril is past. How wonderfully God works in order to turn men's hearts to Himself! A storm at sea, an earthquake at midnight, and the quietness of a Gospel meeting all serve His purpose. He works as seems good in His perfect wisdom.

But this was not all in Jonah's day. When the prophet emerged from his watery tomb, and at last went to Nineveh, his preaching brought the whole population from the king downward, low before God, and the threatened overthrow was averted. Alas, for the contrast when Jonah's Lord preached in Jerusalem! No repentance was there, and He who will in due time sit upon the Great White Throne said, "the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here!"

But as sure as Jonah's experience and preaching brought blessing and deliverance to many who were not "of Israel, so our Lord's very real death and resurrection has brought salvation to millions everywhere. While still on earth, He maintained His position as Israel's Messiah, and refused the appeal of a woman of Tyre who addressed Him as Son of David; and when He sent forth the twelve He bade them go not into the way of the Gentiles, nor enter into any city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel "(Matt. 10: 5, 6) But, risen from the dead, "He said unto them; Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: Mark 16: 15). Israel's unbelief has caused "salvation to come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy" (Rom. 11: 11). The good news that Christ was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification have reached our ears and our hearts, and brought us into peace with God (Rom. 4: 25; Rom. 5: 1 "Blessed be God, our God! "Let us spread abroad the good news with all holy earnestness.

In the Fish's Belly

The path of obedience is the path of blessing. Peace and communion are found therein. Disobedience and self-will may seem to prosper for a time, but He who loves us infinitely will not suffer His own to continue thus. Disaster ensues from His all wise chastening hand. In the midst of the storm, while others were praying, Jonah was sleeping. Conscience was being stifled by his self-will. How different with the Lord Jesus! When the storm burst upon the Sea of Galilee, He slept peacefully in the stern of the vessel. As the perfect Man of faith, He could repose His weary head, assured of the Father's care. His sleep astonished the disciples as much as Jonah's sleep astonished the heathen mariners; but how great the contrast between the fugitive prophet and the Man Christ Jesus!

When Jonah was cast out of the ship, a great fish swallowed him. "Prepared" does not mean specially created for the purpose. (although that would be an easy matter for the Maker of the sea and the dry land"); it simply means that the fish was "appointed" for this service. The same word is thus rendered in Dan. 1: 5 with reference to the food intended for Daniel and his companions. Much labour has been expended upon the great fish, as to what it was, and also upon Paul's thorn in the flesh as to its precise nature (2 Cor. 12); in both cases there are spiritual lessons of the highest importance, which such discussions tend to obscure. Jonah could certainly have said after his weird experience, "Before I was afflicted I went astray", but now have I kept Thy Word." (Ps. 119: 67).

"Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly." "His" God, be it noted; for all sense of relationship was not lost (contrast 1 Sam. 15: 21; 1 Kings 17: 12; 1 Kings 18: 10). From many

unlikely quarters prayer has ascended to God through the ages, but never anything quite like this. Prisons, caves, mountains, etc. have resounded with cries of anguish, but not the belly of a fish. The chastened prophet owned the divine hand in what had befallen him. Jonah 1: 15 says of the sailors. "they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea": but in Jonah 2: 3, Jonah says to God *Thou* hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas." He thus owned the divine hand, and humbled himself under it. He put in practice 1 Peter 5: 6-7 several centuries before the verses were penned. He was thus in the way of recovery. Deliverance can only come to souls in distress when the hand of God is acknowledged. Jonah although in the belly of the fish, looked in faith towards God's holy temple. and he was sure that He who dwelt therein would hearken to his cry." When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thy holy temple. (Jonah 2: 7). This is very beautiful, as showing that even when a saint gets into a backsliding condition he knows to Whom to turn in his trouble, and is confident that God will not forsake him.

The prophet's reference to the temple is remarkable in another way. Jehovah's temple stood in Jerusalem, and Jonah belonged by birth to the revolted ten tribes who had turned away from God's centre. and Who Were identified with idolatrous sanctuaries in Bethel and Dan. (1 Kings 12: 25-33; Amos 7: 1-3). Nevertheless in spite of the religious confusion which disgraced Jehovah's land in his time, Jonah's heart turned towards the centre which was divinely established in happier days. To Solomon Jehovah said at the dedication of the temple, " Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually" (1 Kings 9: 3). The glory cloud still remained there, and thither the hearts of the faithful ever turned, wherever might be their abode. It was in this spirit Elijah set up an altar of twelve stones, although Carmel was in the territory of the ten tribes (1 Kings 18: 31). God's principles, and the thoughts of His heart towards His people although in grievous failure, influenced both Elijah and Jonah.

In like manner, souls who to-day are taught of God maintain, there is one Body and one Spirit" (Eph. 4: 4) and firmly refuse to recognize any other religious unity of any kind whatsoever; and for His saints now God's centre is not a material structure, but the name of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 18: 20). Do our hearts respond to this?

Jonah's prayer in his second chapter is largely made up of quotations from the Psalms. His mind was evidently saturated with the written Word. Is this true of us also? It was not a day of pocket Bibles, nor indeed were the Scriptures all yet written; but if Jonah was unable to read in his strange prison, he could feed upon the Word already learned and stored up in his mind and heart. Let us not be behind him in this. The whole revelation of God is in our hands, containing wonderful counsels of grace and glory unknown in Old Testament dispensations; shall we not seek to possess the whole in our inmost souls, so that if ever our Bibles are torn from us, we shall still have that which will nourish and sustain our faith?

Meditation upon the Psalms, and the deliverances wrought for the writers, gave Jonah confidence. In his apparently hopeless condition he expressed his confidence in God given terms. He was sure of deliverance! He was persuaded that he would once more worship in the house of Jehovah! "Salvation is of Jehovah," was his triumphant finish! The work was done; the lesson had been learned; pride and self-will had received a heavy blow; the prophet was at the end of his resources; and his hope was in God alone. Every sinner has to learn this when he first draws near to God; and the erring saint has to come back to it whenever he goes astray.

Grace to the Fallen

The words of the poet are certainly true, and we frequently sing them with real delight-

"To those who fall how kind Thou art,

How good to those who seek."

The proof of this is found in both Old and New Testaments. When Elijah fled from the post of duty, terrified by Jezebel's threat, an angel was sent from heaven to prepare for him a fire and a breakfast (1 Kings 19.). Nothing like this happened while he walked in the path of obedience. At Cherith ravens were employed to supply his need, and that for a long period. But when he was all wrong with God he was granted special angelic service. The heavenly messenger apparently remained by him while he ate and drank and slept, and then a second time he urged him to eat more, adding compassionately, "because the journey is too great for thee." Yet the journey should never have been undertaken! All this was divinely intended as a proof to the fugitive prophet that God had not forgotten him, spite of his break-down in service. What a God is ours!

Again, when Peter denied his Lord so painfully (after solemn warning) Luke tells us "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22: 61). That tender glance broke his heart, and "Peter went out and wept bitterly." After the Lord's resurrection, an angel bade the women (by divine authority, assuredly), "Go your way, tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee" (Mark 6: 7). This touching introduction of Peter's name was intended to assure him that his Lord had not cast him off, notwithstanding his great sin. This was followed by a private conversation with the fallen Apostle, which put everything right (Luke 24: 34). Accordingly, when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Peter was able to stand boldly and testify to the resurrection of his Lord, with mighty results (Acts 2: 41).

Jonah, when imprisoned within the fish, said, "I am cast out of Thy sight" (Jonah 2: 4). Surely he had no ground for complaint in this respect, seeing that he fled to Tarshish expressly to get away from the presence of Jehovah! He even told the shipmen that this was the meaning of his voyage in their vessel (Jonah 1: 3, 10). Possibly Jonah familiar as he was with the Book of Psalms, had in mind David's words in Ps. 31: 22, "I am cut off from before Thine eyes," but David said this in haste! We must quote the whole verse: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes: nevertheless Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee." Oh, that precious "nevertheless"! It is not the way of our God to cast off His saints, however deeply they may fail; but He is always willing to hear the voice of their supplications when they cry. But let us beware of speaking in haste. Such utterances are seldom wise. Peter on the holy mount spake "not knowing what he said" (Luke 9: 33). There is "a time to keep silence" as well as "a time to speak" (Ecc. 3: 7).

Our brethren are not always as merciful in their dealings with us as our gracious God. When David was given the choice of three forms of chastisement after his proud blunder in numbering the people without reference to God, he said, "I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of Jehovah; for very great are His mercies; but let me not fall into the hand of man" (1 Chron. 21: 13). The "hired razor" can be very cruel (Isa. 7: 20); and was not David himself unnecessarily cruel when he cut the Ammonites "with saws and with harrows of iron, and with axes"? "Even so dealt David with *all the cities of the children of Ammon*" (1 Chron. 20: 3).

Even after the Day of Pentecost, when the Assembly of God had come into being, with the Holy Spirit dwelling therein, and when the fullness of divine grace was being proclaimed as never before in the world's history, Paul had to admonish the Corinthian brethren to seek out, and forgive and comfort

the man they had been obliged to put away for grievous sin. First, they were careless and indifferent to the evil; then after they had been roused to action. they were disposed to have done with the man for ever. But he was repentant, and must not be "swallowed up with over-much sorrow." (2 Cor 2: 6, 8). "I beseech you," says the Apostle, "that ye would confirm your love toward him." When shall we learn these lessons of divine grace towards the erring? The merciless tyrant of Matt. 18: 28-34 was meant to be a warning to all who bear the name of the Lord Jesus. and that to the end.

Jonah came up from the depths of the sea humbled and chastened Scarcely *broken*, for the concluding chapter of his book shows that he still had much to learn. But he had experienced the power of God to lay low those who rise up against His will, and he was also assured that, come what may. God will never cast off His own Jonah was one of the earliest of the prophets whose writings have, come down to us; but from his short book we may learn that God chastens His messengers as well as those to whom He sends them but with a heart full of mercy which only seeks the blessing of it objects. May the messengers of God in this Gospel dispensation walk humbly before Him. and not misrepresent His character by ways of disobedience. Those who demand obedience from other! should be models of obedience themselves. Moses was sharply dealt with by Jehovah because he had neglected to circumcise his son (Ex. 4: 24-25). He had apparently yielded to his wife in the matter; but until this was put right, Moses could not consistently summon Pharaoh to be obedient to the divine commands. The lesson for us is the more important when we remember that circumcision signifies the judgement of the flesh. Only those who have learned to mortify their members which are upon the earth (Col. 3: 5) are competent to stand forth as witnesses For a holy God.

Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, "if any will do His will, he shall know of" the doctrine" (John 7: 17) " I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38).

The Second Commission.

We need not suppose that the great fish remained stationary during the three days and three nights of Jonah's imprisonment; but whatever might have been its movements, the eye of the Creator was upon it, and it was guided to drop the prophet just where Jehovah wanted him. The fish might have deposited him in Italy or Greece; more probably it was in the land of Israel that Jonah set foot upon dry ground again. The obedience of the humblest creatures, as recorded in Scripture, is deeply instructive. The Lord Jesus when on earth wanted a fish which possessed a shekel, and that particular fish, and no other, caught at Peter's hook (Matt. 17: 27). The colt upon which never man sat — an untamed novice for work obediently carried the Lord through the streets of Jerusalem, although surrounded by a shouting multitude (Matt. 21: 7). It might not have been wise for either reader or writer to mount that colt! In like manner, the Mediterranean Sea monster was at the appointed place when Jonah was cast Out Of the ship; it took care of him for the divinely appointed period, and then released him in God's time, and in the place where God required him. Alas, that man, the most gifted of all earthly creatures, should be the arch rebel of this planet! The revolt of its head has involved the whole creation in groans and travail throughout the ages, which will only end at "the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8: 19-22).

Once more Jonah was commissioned by Jehovah to go to Nineveh (Jonah 3: 1). Similarly, Peter, when restored from backsliding, was divinely appointed to carry a great message from God to men Acts 2). Jonah knew not what his message was to be when he set out. He proceeded "under sealed orders," as men say. "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching. that I bid

thee." The spirit of obedience having returned to him (at least in measure) Jonah did not venture to reason with his Lord, after the manner of Ananias in Damascus when told to call upon Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9: 13, 14); but he "arose and went according to the word of Jehovah." This is as it should be, and it reminds us of Elijah when told to go and hide himself by the brook Cherith, "He went and did according to the word of Jehovah" (1 Kings 17: 5).

This is the line that is proper for us all. The Apostle, when referring to his own movements, burst into praise thus: "thanks be unto God who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ (see R.V.) and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place" (2 Cor. 2: 14). He felt like a captive in a triumphal procession (such as the Romans were accustomed to give successful Generals on their return from the wars); but it mattered nothing to him where God led him Troas, Corinth or elsewhere, so long as the will of God was carried out, and the savour of Christ was spread abroad. This made his life a great spiritual success.

Abraham's servant furnishes us also with a lovely example in Gen. 24. He went abroad in the spirit of prayer to seek a wife for his master's son. Having found the right person, he bowed his head, and worshipped Jehovah, saying, "I being in the way, Jehovah led me."

The only perfect servant and messenger was the Lord Jesus. When the anxious sisters sent from Bethany to tell Him, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick"; the Evangelist records, "when He heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Why the delay? Because He had as yet no word from the Father; but when the word came, even the warnings of His disciples that trouble awaited Him in Judea, could not hold Him back. (John 11).

We are only of use to God when we are just where He wants us. He knows the right country in which we should serve, and the right town. and the right time. office. factory, workshop or home. wherever it may be, if that is His place for us, there only can we be spiritually useful. And even when we are in the right place, we need the Spirit's guidance every hour as to what we should do or say. Simple lessons indeed; but not necessarily learned and practiced by us.

When Jonah set out for Nineveh "according to the word of Jehovah," it is to be feared that there was some uneasiness in his mind as to the real object of his mission. Jehovah's new charge was vague: "preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." When he was first commissioned, the word was, "Arise, go to Nineveh that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me." This was pure denunciation, which might reasonably be expected to be followed by judgement. But nothing of this is suggested in the new charge, and when Jonah arrived in Nineveh, he was told to cry, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 2: 1-4). Here we detect the grace of the divine heart. Time was granted for repentance. Alas, this did not suit the Galilean prophet! Patience and grace for erring Israel — yes, but not for Gentiles! When shall we learn that God has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, whatever his nationality may be? (Ezek. 18: 32).

In The Great City

Jonah's visit to Nineveh, with its amazing results, was perhaps unique in the world's history. The entire population of the greatest city of that time brought low before God, their despotic ruler setting the example.

Let us endeavour to realize the situation. The prophet apparently went quite alone. Fellowship in service is very sweet, as Paul and many others could testify. but there is no hint of a companion for Jonah. He faced the consequences of his terrible message alone. No organising committee was behind

him, no flaming advertisements announced his coming; neither choirs nor notable singers were secured in order to draw the multitude together. Many modern witnesses appear to consider these things necessary if the masses are to be reached. When shall we all learn that the power of God is worth more than all the machinery that the wit of men can devise. Even penniless men, such as Peter and Paul, have accomplished great things for God as the fruit of simple dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Jonah "cried" his solemn message through the streets of Nineveh. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3: 4). He was not regarded as a public nuisance, and arrested and jailed as such: nor did the inhabitants scoff at him, as the dissolute youths of Bethel (*not* "little children") scoffed at Elisha at an earlier date (2 Kings 2: 23-24); his message was heard with all due gravity. "The people of Nineveh believed God." This is good. It was not the mere speaker who was accredited; the people felt that their Creator was speaking to them in him. This is exactly what is recorded of the Thessalonians: "We thank God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thess. 2: 13).

The King of Nineveh doubtless lived in the seclusion of a palace, surrounded by officials all ready to obey his commands, however arbitrary and cruel they might be. It was not easy for any subject to approach an Oriental despot. Esther, although Queen, felt that she would endanger her life by venturing into the presence of the King without a summons (Esther 4: 11). But Jonah's serious message was carried right into the throne room of Nineveh, and reported to the King. He acted promptly, for conscience told him that the wickedness of his people well deserved divine judgement. Accordingly the King stripped off his robes, "and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." The whole population were charged to do likewise, and even the beasts were to have both food and drink withheld from them that they might join the people in their cry of distress. The people were not only to "cry mightily unto God," they were also to turn every one from his evil way, and from his deeds of violence. Prayer without action is worthless. Repentance is an absolute necessity with God. The King concluded: "who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not?" This proclamation, and that by Nebuchadnezzar telling the story of his conversion (Dan. 4) are perhaps the most remarkable proclamations ever sent forth. Would God the rulers of men in the Twentieth Century would address their peoples in like manner! What change would come about in world conditions! What disasters would be averted!

Luke 9: 30 suggests that God's dealings with Jonah were known. "Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites." This would give point to his message, and who could so well warn of impending overthrow as the man who had proved in his own experience the power of God to lay low those who presume to oppose His will? The repentance of Nineveh and its King is as great a miracle in the moral sphere as Jonah's experience in the physical. In a later book than that of Jonah, God states plainly His principles with regard to the nations. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against which I have pronounced, turn from their evil I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jer. 18: 7-8). No nation but Israel has ever been in direct relationship with God; but this does not mean that He is not interested in the masses outside the seed of Abraham. The time had not yet come for the sweet "whosoever" of the Gospel to go forth, for the Son of God had not yet been given as God's great love gift to the world; but His heart nevertheless yearns at all times over men everywhere, not desiring the ruin of any. Therefore when "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them; and He did it not." Even so would it be at the terrible moment in which we live; if any nation that seems doomed to destruction would get down

humbly before God, His heavy hand would be lifted, and respite would be graciously granted.

Elohim and Jehovah

The Spirit's use of divine names and titles in the Scriptures is most instructive, and should be observed carefully by all who seek to understand the ways of God throughout the ages with men, and especially with Israel. Unfortunately our generally excellent Authorised Version does not help us in this as it should. The words "God" and "the Lord" (the latter sometimes in capitals and sometimes in small letters) really hide important truths. In the book of Jonah we read of "God" and "the Lord." "God" stands for the Hebrew "Elohim," and occurs 15 times; "the Lord" stands for "Jehovah," and occurs 26 times. Divine names are abundant throughout the sacred Word, each having its own meaning; each therefore having its own sweet message to the heart. Psalm 68 is particularly rich in divine names and titles. At least twelve will be found there. The latest and fullest revelation of God is the name "Father," brought down to us by the Son of His love, and it is under this name the saints of this era are in relationship with Him His children, sons, and heirs.

The Bible opens with "Elohim." No other title is found until we pass Gen. 2: 3. This title tells us of the divine supremacy God as the mighty cause of all. "Jehovah" is His title of relationship (wonderful indeed that He should condescend to enter into relationship with His humble creature man); accordingly throughout Gen. 2 (from v. 4) we read "the Lord God," i.e. "Jehovah Elohim." Note the various relationships in that chapter: —

vv. 4-6 — The heavens and the earth in relation to Him. He created them. They are the work of His hands.

vv. 7-15 — Man in relation to Him. The special inbreathing.

vv. 16-20 — Man in relation to the lower orders. Their lord.

vv. 21-25 — Man in relation to woman. Her head.

In the book of Jonah we observe that when the mariners first spoke of God it was as "Elohim." They were not conscious of any special relation to Him; but they acknowledged Him as the Supreme Being, who could quell the storm if it pleased Him. Many alas! in this day of Gospel light, have no higher thoughts of their Creator than these seamen. When His divine hand became plainly manifest, and after they heard Jonah's confession of faith as in Jonah 1: 9, "they cried unto Jehovah," "they feared Jehovah," "they offered sacrifice to Jehovah and made vows." This looks like true conversion. "The God of heaven, Who made the sea and the dry land" became something more to them than a mere Creator; they came to know Him as far as He could be known before the Son of the Father's love came from heaven to declare Him fully. The simple faith of those shipmen might well shame many of Jonah's own countrymen who, with the word of God in their hands, were following the idolatrous ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Now observe how Jonah spoke of God. Throughout the book the name "Jehovah" is upon his lips. The name so suggestive to every instructed Jew of divine faithfulness (Malachi 3: 6) Under this great name God took the nation into relationship with Himself at the deliverance from the land of Egypt (Ex. 6.) Although Jonah is shown to us in a more or less undesirable spiritual condition throughout his book, he never lost the sense of his relationship to God. "I fear Jehovah," said he. The Spirit says, "Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's belly." At the close of his prayer, he cried out in faith, "Salvation is of Jehovah," and even when he peevishly objected to the divine mercy shown to Nineveh, "he prayed unto Jehovah" (Jonah. 4: 1). This is worthy of note. The God with whom

we all have to do knows how to keep alive within us the spark of faith, and the sense that we belong to Him, even when we get sadly astray. But let us nevertheless heed Peter's exhortation in the first chapter of his second Epistle, and cultivate a vigorous and progressive faith. This is our responsibility.

In contrast with Jonah, the King of Nineveh and his people, although repentant, spoke only of God ("Elohim.") The name under which Israel had to do with Him came not to their lips. It was a national movement. The people became conscious that they had sinned grievously against their Maker; they trembled at the mention of His judgement; and they humbled themselves before Him. Jer. 18: 7-10, as we have already seen, lays down the principles of God's dealing with nations. His eye sees their doings, and He visits them from time to time in His wrath, but is always prepared to show mercy. God's government must not be confounded with His grace. Such respite as the Ninevites experienced is not the same thing as the eternal forgiveness of sins; proclaimed to men everywhere in the Gospel message (Acts 13: 38-39). We shall not necessarily meet the whole population of Nineveh in Heaven because of the repentance described in Jonah 3:10; although it is not unlikely that some individuals (possibly many) found eternal blessing as the result of the great alarm.

At the present crisis the nations of the earth are suffering as never before. He who sits upon the throne judging righteously is displeased with them all, but if any nation (if only one) would face up to its own condition in His sight, and acknowledge its manifold transgressions and its long contempt for things divine, He would forgive, and peace and quietness would return. Mutual recriminations lead nowhere. To nations disposed to accuse and destroy their neighbours, the prophet Obed's words in 2 Chron. 28: 9-11 may well have a voice. When the victorious ten tribe army brought back 200,000 Jewish captives, the prophet met them boldly, saying, "Behold because Jehovah God of your fathers was wrath with Judah, He hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. and now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you; but are there not with you, even with you, sins against Jehovah your God?"

A Strange Dove

It is not only Divine names that have meanings; there is also meaning in human names at least in Scripture history. Sometimes they were expressive of the faith of those who conferred them; Eve, Noah, and Joseph are examples of this. Sometimes new names were given as marks of lordship or proprietorship. Thus Pharaoh renamed Joseph (Gen. 41: 45); Nebuchadnezzar did the same to Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1: 7); and the Lord Jesus granted the surname Cephas to Simon the fisherman (John 1: 42). And what shall we say of the Saviour's own name and the meaning of it? "Thou shalt call His name Jesus (Jehovah the Saviour); for He shall save His people from their sins " (Matt. 1: 21).

Jonah means "dove." What was in the minds of his parents when they named him is not recorded; but the fact reminds us that it was in a bodily form like a dove the Holy Spirit descended upon the man Christ Jesus (Luke 3: 22). This lovely emblem of purity, gentleness, and peace perfectly suited Him upon whom it came. But Jonah, Where do we discover anything dove-like in his ways and words relative to the people of Nineveh? Surely his cruel talons are suggestive of a very different bird!

We cannot help contrasting our prophet with Joses the Levite of Acts 4: 36-37. So kindly were his deeds, and so gracious was his ministry, that the Apostles surnamed him Barnabas which being interpreted, means "son of consolation." Barnabas deserved his name before he received it; Jonah received a sweetly suggestive name that he never seems to have deserved at all!

Nineveh repented; king, nobles, and people fell low together at the feet of their justly indignant Creator. Heaven was thus filled with rejoicing as the Lord teaches us in Luke 15. But while heaven rejoiced, it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry" (Jonah 4:1). Alas, what is man! What an exposure of the narrowness and selfishness of the human heart, even in a divinely chosen and specially favoured servant of Jehovah! He would have preferred the whole population of a vast city to perish than that his own reputation as a prophet should suffer! He was amazed that he should have gone through the streets of Nineveh denouncing judgement within forty days, and then find the divine sentence withdrawn! Yet why should God have given forty days notice, unless He desired to give time for repentance? Does not Peter tell us that He is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish. but that all should come to repentance"? (2 Peter 3: 9). Did He not say, long before Peter's day. "I have NO pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; therefore turn yourselves and live ye." (Ezek. 18: 32.) Even ecclesiastical Jezebel (Popery), the foulest evil upon which the eye of a holy God ever rested, has had space given her to repent of her fornication (Rev. 2: 21). Had Jehovah dealt with Jonah's own nation as he would have liked Him to deal with Nineveh, not an Israelite of any tribe would be found on earth today. Jonah's behaviour reminds us of the churlish elder son of Luke 15: 25 who "was angry and would not go in," because the father was lavishing grace upon a returning sinner. Where should we have been — reader and writer alike — if the God against whom we have all sinned were like some of His poor faulty servants.

The disappointed prophet — by no means a friend or neighbour (at least for the time being) of the God who delights in mercy (Luke 15: 7) — prayed that he might be allowed to die. If death was so desirable, pity that he ever asked to be released from the fish's belly! Elijah also once asked that he might die, because his testimony was not prospering as he expected (1 Kings 19: 4). Happily God intended for him a triumphant translation, without passing through death at all. A similar wonderful departure is the proper hope of all Christians today.

Although as wrong as he could be spiritually when he prayed his peevish prayer, Jonah had not lost all sense of his true relationship with God. Thus he addressed Him as "Jehovah," and said, "I pray Thee, O Jehovah, 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? "If he really knew all these delightful things about God, it should have been his joy to proclaim them to sinners everywhere. We know God more intimately still. The cross of Calvary has revealed grace and mercy such as Jonah could not have imagined. Is it our joy to proclaim it to young and old? If we are to be successful in our testimony, our hearts must be in tune with the great compassionate heart of God. We must develop a yearning over the perishing, and it should be our prayer and labour that we may "by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9: 22).

Now mark the contrast between Jonah and the servant of Matt. 25: 24. The latter looked his Lord in the face and said. "Lord. I know that Thou art a hard man, reaping where Thou hast not sown, and gathering where Thou hast not sowed." But Jonah said. "I knew that Thou art a gracious God. and merciful." Is there anything so perverse and contradictory as the heart of man? He of Matt. 25 charged his Lord with being hard and unreasonable; and Jonah complained that He was too good! We are reminded of the children in the market place of whom the Lord spoke in Luke 11: 32. Neither John the Baptist nor the Lord Jesus suited their carnal taste. John was too austere, standing aloof from the people, and Jesus was over gracious, mixing too freely with all sorts and conditions seemingly giving the preference to publicans and sinners. "But wisdom is justified of all her children." (Luke 7: 35). This means that wisdom's true children, i.e., all who have been born of God understand and approve wisdom's ways; while the wise ones of earth expose their folly by their failure to understand what God

is doing. Unhappy Jonah! He was doubtless born of God. but He was utterly out of harmony with His great heart of mercy. His mercy to the Ninevites was therefore vexation to him, instead of delight. Let us not miss this serious lesson. The Lord's own disciples were slow to learn it (Matt. 14: 15; 15-23) although His companions from day to day.

"On The East Side of the City."

Jehovah, instead of sharply disciplining His refractory servant, graciously condescended to reason with him " Doest thou well to be angry?" Oh, the contrast between our God, Sovereign in the universe, and the petty despots of earth! Such peevish rebelliousness as Jonah manifested might have cost him his life at the hands of the latter. But God always seeks to win men's hearts. both in dealing with sinners without and with wayward saints within.

The gracious question of Jonah 4: 4 was repeated in v.9. To the first enquiry the prophet appears to have made no answer but we have the astonishing statement "Jonah 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." What a picture! A man who has been handled with the utmost grace by his God positively sitting down (making himself comfortable withal) in the hope that God would change His mind and destroy the city! Thus would his vanity be gratified and his reputation as a true prophet be maintained! Wretched self importance, almost without parallel in the history of the world!

Our thoughts travel to Another Prophet "greater than Jonah" and "greater than Moses" (Deut. 18: 15) Who at a later date sat on a hillside overlooking a different city, guilty before God beyond any other if only because it had been for many centuries the most favoured. Our Lord's last approach to Jerusalem was from the east. He followed Joshua's route from across Jordan. Arrived at Jericho (Rahab's Descendant, be it remembered Matt. 1: 5), the city did not fall before Him as before Joshua, for He had "not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them!" Blessing tracked His footsteps, as Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus will be able to testify eternally. Then as He descended the Mount of Olives, and the long loved, but grievously guilty Jerusalem came into view, tears filled His eyes. "If thou hadst known even thou at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round and keep thee in one every side and shall lay thee even with the ground and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19: 41-44).

Lovely manifestation of tender feeling, and that on the part of the Judge of quick and dead! He who wept over Jerusalem is the same august Person who said in Hosea's day "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee up, Israel. Mine heart is turned within Me" (Hosea 9: 8). If judgement must need be, it was nevertheless painful to the divine heart to be constrained to execute it. Judgement is "His strange work" (Isa. 28: 11). To such gracious sentiments the heart of Jonah was a stranger. How is it with ourselves? As faithful witnesses for God, it is our duty to warn an evil world of the judgement appointed (woe unto us if we neglect to sound the warning!) but how do we do it? Is it in the stern spirit of denunciation, or is it with trembling lips and compassionate hearts? Are we unmindful of the fact that but for the infinite grace of God and the costly sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, we should ourselves be in the lake of fire? May God preserve us from the spirit of Pharisaism as we proclaim the fearful things which are certainly coming upon the world of the ungodly.

Jehovah had not yet finished with Jonah. Accordingly He 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

exceedingly glad of the gourd." Again we say. what a God is ours! Here we have a man who deserved severe chastisement, and whom God might justly have banished from His service for ever, granted special divine relief from the effects of his own bad temper. But this was not the end. The relief was short lived. for God prepared a worm the next morning. which smote the gourd that it withered." Job, after immeasurable losses property. servants. children. etc. "fell down upon the ground and worshipped. And said. Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1: 20, 21). And He who suffered more than either Jonah or job, when all was painful around Him, said, "I thank Thee, O Father; Lord of heaven and earth . . . even so, Father, for it seemeth good in Thy sight" (Matt. 11: 25-20).

But Jonah was rebellious. Twice he tells us in his book that he prayed unto Jehovah; in the fish's belly, and in the neighbourhood of Nineveh. The first was a genuine outpouring of the heart under the mighty hand of God, and it brought a speedy reply; the second was a peevish outburst because his journey to Nineveh did not result as he expected. Twice the angry man said, "it is better for me to die than to lived. It is true enough that any of us had better die than live if we are not willing to "show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2: 9). A witness who misrepresents the character of Him who sends him is worse than useless in a needy world.

The worm by the will of God did his destructive work in the early morning. Then the sun waxed hot and a sultry east wind arose. Poor Jonah was overwhelmed, and dared to say to his Lord. "I do well to be angry, even unto death." This drew forth Jehovah's final remonstrance: "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?"

The book thus closes abruptly. Jonah was left to answer the challenge as best he could, and the reader of to day is left to answer it for himself. The God whom we know blessedly revealed to us in Christ could do no otherwise than spare a repentant city. But this did not suit the surly preacher. His personal dignity was at stake (at least so he judged). and he would prefer Nineveh to be destroyed, with its immense population of old and young, rather than his words should fall to the ground. He had pity on the gourd, a creature of a day, because it was of advantage to himself, but there was no pity in his heart for hundreds of thousands of precious souls. If Jonah wrote his book in later life, as seems probable, surely he blushed with shame as he penned its concluding chapter under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let us not miss the lesson. Away with all pride and self importance. Let us learn to say with Paul, "I am nothing" (2 Cor. 12: 11). The Apostle had learned the meaning of his baptism. He had with all simplicity of faith accepted the death of Christ as his own, and he willingly passed out of sight. His dignities and attainments he counted loss for Christ. It was henceforward his earnest expectation and hope that Christ might be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. (Phil. 1: 20). " For me to live is Christ." "Be ye therefore imitators of me, as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11: 1.)

"The Compassionate Creator".

The last verse of the Book of Jonah should be carefully considered, for it gives us a delightful insight into the heart of God as Creator. His love and compassion for perishing sinners is happily familiar to us. It has reached us in the Gospel message. The cross of Christ tells out, as nothing else

could, God's earnest desire for the salvation of men, and His unwillingness that any should perish eternally; But Jonah 4: 11 is not quite as John 3: 16. In the latter passage we hear the voice of the Son of God speaking on earth; but in the former it is the Creator who is speaking, and that in terms of remonstrance with His ungracious servant. "Should not I spare Nineveh that great city, wherein there are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" Thus God in His government of the earth took account of 120,000 helpless children in Nineveh, "and also much cattle"; and it rejoiced Him that the repentance of the King and his people enabled Him to sheathe the sword of judgement, at least for the time being.

It is deplorable when the servants of God are not in sympathy with His dealings. When the Lord Jesus was on earth there were two occasions when the compassion of His heart specially went forth. In Matt. 9: 36 He felt for the people's spiritual need. The land was full of religious leaders, but the people were unfed. "When He saw the multitudes. He was moved with compassion, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." In Matt. 14: 15 He was concerned about their temporal need. He "saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them." Thousands of hungry men. women. and children were around Him. with nothing obtainable in the wilderness. But His disciples did not share the distress of their Lord. Indeed, they urged Him to send the multitudes away, regardless of consequences. The pressure of the people annoyed them, and interfered with their comfort!

A great lesson is here! We live and serve in the midst of a suffering creation, and the suffering increases with the growing violence of men: but are our hearts really moved by the serious universal need? God's heart yearns over the masses, young and old, but do our hearts yearn in sympathy with Him? It is terribly possible to become formal and stereotyped in our service, and thus to serve out of harmony with the One who has sent us. Let us seek to keep near the heart of the God of infinite compassion.

One of Jonah's faults was his intense nationalism. He could rejoice in divine forbearance towards his own people, although deeply guilty, but he felt unable to rejoice in God's forbearance towards others. We are reminded of the Apostle's query in Rom. 3: 29 "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles?" Note the answer: "Yea, of the Gentiles also, seeing God is one" "Neither is there respect of persons with Him." (Eph. 6: 9).

Paul loved his own nation. and longed for their blessing (Rom. 11: 1). At one moment of exceeding fervour he had even wished himself accursed from Christ for his fellow countrymen (Rom. 9: 3). The self sacrificing prayer of Moses in Ex. 32: 32, and the passing wish of Paul in Rom. 9: 3, were doubtless acceptable to God; but in no circumstances can sinners be saved by the self sacrifice of preachers.

But Paul did not love Israel only. His heart went out after the uncircumcised to the world's end. He delighted to preach Christ where He had never been named (Rom. 15: 20). He could scarcely have told out the largeness of divine grace more explicitly than in Rom. 10: 12: "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him, for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." But the largeness of the Apostle's heart was bitterly resented by the Jewish people. When he addressed them from the stairs of the Castle in Jerusalem. they listened quietly until he quoted the Lord's words to him, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Then their fury burst forth, and they cried, "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22: 21-22). When detailing offences in 1 Thess. 2: 16, he solemnly concluded thus, "forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up

their sins away: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." National feeling could scarcely go further; even the unwanted Gospel must not be published abroad!

The whole World is ablaze while these lines are being penned. God in His righteous government has let loose the wild beasts of the earth and the havoc that is being wrought is incalculable. But has God ceased to care for His creatures? Is He not still the "King of nations?" (Jer. 10: 7). Does He not now, as always, "do according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth?" (Dan. 4: 35). His hand has gone forth against the guilty nations of all Continents because of their neglect of His word; yea, because of their ever increasing contempt for everything that is divine.

The heart of God yearns over men notwithstanding all. His interest is not confined to any one nation, nor to a group of nations. He never was in special relationship with any nation but Israel, and against Israel the "Lo-Ammi" sentence ("not My people") went forth long years ago, and has not yet been recalled. But the compassionate Creator can never cease to care for the afflictions of His creatures, however wayward, and He would have His saints share His compassion. Isaiah was deeply distressed when obliged to utter judgement against Moab, the bitter enemy of his own people. "My heart shall cry out for Moab" (Isa. 15: 5). "My bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab, and my inward part for Kirharesh" (Isa. 16: 11). Similarly, when Babylon's doom came before him in prophetic vision, he cried out. "My loins are filled with pain: pangs are taken hold upon me as the pangs of a woman that travaileth" (Isa. 21: 4). Jeremiah also howled for Moab, "mine heart shall sound for Moab like pipes." (Jer. 48: 31-36).

Where do we stand with reference to such sentiments in this day of unparalleled' devastation and sorrow? The public Press, and also the "wireless" would fill our minds with national feeling if we were to allow ourselves to come under their influence. Against this, God's saints must be continually on their guard. The house of God ("whose house are we" Heb. 3: 6) was intended to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 9: 17; Isa. 56: 7); and we are exhorted in 1 Tim. 2 to make supplications, prayers, intercession and giving of thanks for all men, irrespective of nationality, and for kings and for all that are in authority whether friendly or unfriendly. Only as we are able to rise to this shall we be really helpful to men in their calamities. The great distinguishing principle of Christianity should aid us in this. God is at this time (while Christ sits on high and the Holy Spirit is on earth) visiting the nations "to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15: 14). Consequently, we have brethren in every land, and if all these conscious of their union with Christ the Head, were to cry to God with one accord, the relief to the nations, amongst whom we all live and serve would be incalculable.

God's heart is full of compassion towards all; shame on us if we feel otherwise.

"A Type of Israel"

It has already been remarked that Jonah's book is prophetic in character although it contains no such predictive utterances such as are found in Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc. The Christ who was to come is clearly foreshadowed in Jonah's three days sojourn in the belly of the fish: and the history of Israel may be clearly perceived in the disobedience of the prophet and its results for himself and others.

It was a great honour for Jonah to be divinely selected to carry a message from God to Nineveh, the imposing capital of the greatest earthly power in his day. Jonah should have endeavoured to enter into Jehovah's thoughts and feelings in the matter, so that he might faithfully represent Him to the dark heathen. In this the prophet most miserably failed. In like manner, the nation of Israel was divinely chosen and separated to be God's channel of blessing to all the people of the earth. "Ye are My

witnesses, saith Jehovah, and My servant whom I have chosen" (Isa. 43: 10). The most cursory reader of the Old Testament cannot fail to see that Israel occupies the central place therein. About four centuries after the flood when all the newly formed nations had gone into idolatry God called Abram and blessed him; but this was with a view to universal blessing. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12: 3). This word was confirmed and expanded after the offering up of Isaac: "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22: 17-19).

It was never intended that this highly favoured stock should be exclusive. Their very sanctuary was to be "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isa. 56: 7). It does not appear that Israel was meant to be a *missionary* people, earnestly propagating what they knew of the one true God, but they were certainly meant to be a *model* people. Possessing laws that were perfect, having been received direct from Heaven, all their ways should have been well pleasing to God, and a rebuke to the nations around them. But, alas, they were untrue to their privileged position of separation to God (which alone could have made them a blessing to the world); they copied the evil ways of their neighbours; and so brought down upon themselves the stern censure: "the name of God is blasphemed among the nations through you" (Rom. 2: 24). It will be a great day for the world when Zech. 8: 23 becomes true "thus saith Jehovah of hosts: In those days ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying. We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you"

As surely as the unfaithfulness of Jonah brought a storm upon the pagan mariners. so the unfaithfulness of Israel has brought sore trouble upon the nations in general as well as their own guilty heads. When Jehovah could no longer bear with the iniquity of the chosen people, He employed Nebuchadnezzar to chastise both them and all the nations around them. The whole system of nations, of which Israel was the divinely established centre, was broken up. Abraham's seed thus became a curse in the earth, not a blessing.

Jehovah's patience with both Jonah and his nation is arresting. How graciously did He plead with the perverse prophet! And how graciously did He bear with the hypocrisy of the Jewish remnant from the days of Ezra to the coming of the Lord Jesus! Even when, in full view of their hatred He pleaded that the unfruitful fig tree be granted one year more (Luke 13: 6-9). But the further testimony of the Holy Spirit after our Lord's return to heaven was all in vain, and once more the people were cast out of their land, and flung amongst the nations. The casting forth of Jonah typifies this. The chosen people are now most unlovable and unloved of all. and the whole earth has been plunged into confusion and disaster by the terrible transgressions in which Israel has led the way.

But the outflow of God's grace is not checked by the sin of man; thus, while Israel continues obdurate, the Holy Spirit is working amongst the Gentiles, gathering out from amongst them millions for heavenly blessing. All these will stand in relationship with Christ as His body and bride for ever. Israel's fall has become the riches of the world and their loss the riches of the Gentiles (Rom. 11: 12). While hundreds of thousands of people in Nineveh were rejoicing in the mercy of God, Jonah was displeased and angry. Similarly, when a number of Gentile believers in Antioch were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, the Jews "were filled with envy, and spake against the things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13: 44-52).

A great and wonderful change is coming. Israel's blindness is not total; when the fullness of the Gentiles is gathered in "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11: 25-26). This means the believing remnant, "for they are not all Israel which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:7). Obstinate rebels will be purged out (Ezek. 20: 38). The restored nation will stand before the world as though risen from the dead. Ezekiel's vision

of the valley of dry bones shows this (Ezek. 37). Dan. 12: 2 (a passage frequently misunderstood) teaches the same thing. The physical dead are not in view; the nation as such is meant. After centuries of degradation in the dust they will come upon the political stage once more. The believing remnant will enjoy eternal life (in earthly conditions) and the rebels will be consigned to shame and everlasting contempt. Jonah's reappearance after being "three days in the heart of the seas" is typical of this. The following Scriptures should also be read in this connection: — Rom. 11: 15; Hosea 6: 2. Being then in the enjoyment of mercy themselves, the people, unlike Jonah, will gladly dispense blessing to others. Ps. 67 gives us their joyous language in that great day. Note the words "all the nations;" "all the ends of the earth;" "all rejoicing and singing for joy." "O sing unto Jehovah a new song: sing unto Jehovah, all the ends of the earth" (Ps. 96: 1). Alas, Jonah was not in singing humour as he contemplated the goodness of God to the Ninevites!

The whole earth will be fully blessed at the appearance of the Lord Jesus; and Israel, completely purged of the Jonah spirit, will rejoice in it. God will be known, not merely as Creator, but as the faithful covenant keeping Jehovah. "I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ezek 38: 23). This blessed result was reached in the case of Jonah's ship-mates. They turned from their own empty deities, and they "offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows" (Jonah 1: 16).

When Israel, after ages of antagonism to God and His blessed ways, perceives how marvellously He has wrought, they will say with the Apostle. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11: 33). In deplorable imitation of Joseph's brethren they have intended evil in all that they have done to Christ and to His saints; but God in His perfect wisdom has turned it to good (Gen. 41: 20). He will be victorious at last over all the workings of the enemy; and every purpose of His grace will reach glorious fulfilment.

Alas, that the book of Jonah should close with the prophet murmuring outside while within the city there was gladness and peace. In this he was not a type of his nation. In the coming age of universal blessing Israel will be the centre and heart of it all. With the long rejected Christ honoured in their midst, the people will be happy themselves, and will be delighted to see everyone happy around them even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

May the God of all grace grant to us all true largeness of heart. Thus shall we understand and approve His ways and find pleasure and profit therein for our souls.

The Destruction of Nineveh.

These studies would scarcely be complete without some reference to the after history of Nineveh, the great city in which Jonah preached, with results that will never be forgotten. It was founded by Asshur not long after the flood, apparently as a rival to Nimrod's Babylon (Gen. 10: 11). The latter was built on the Euphrates, and the former on the Tigris (otherwise Hiddekel), both rivers being branches of the river which watered the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2: 13, 14). But where is Nineveh to-day? Opposite the town of Mosul there are miles of ruins from which many objects of interest have been excavated, and which are now in the Museums of Europe and America. The city was taken and destroyed by the Medes in B.C. 625. There has been no effort to rebuild it since that time, and it is not the will of God that it should ever be rebuilt. Its destruction was predicted with much detail by Nahum remarkably, a Galilean prophet, as was Jonah. Nahum's book was written about 100 years after Jonah's mission, and the ruin therein foretold was still another century ahead. Who told Nahum about the great disaster? The

very principle is largely discredited in our time; but if God be God, it is as easy for Him to speak of the future as of the present. This was His challenge to the deities of the heathen: "Let them bring forth and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them and know the latter end of them; or declare us things to come" (Isa. 41: 22).

Nahum's book begins thus: "The burden of Nineveh." The word "burden" occurs a number of times in the books of the Old Testament prophets. It means a heavy message a message of judgement, a message which tends to weigh down the soul of him who has to deliver it. Nineveh was the capital of the Kingdom of Assyria. It is the city rather than the Kingdom that is denounced in Nahum; whereas in Isaiah the Kingdom is condemned, with no special mention of its capital. This distinction is important. In the wonderful ways of God Assyria is to be restored and blessed in the Kingdom age (Isa. 19: 23-25), but its proud capital will never rise again. Why is this. The reason is that Nineveh was singularly favoured by God in its day. He sent Jonah there on a special mission, and the whole population trembled at the preaching, and cried to God for mercy. It does not appear to have led the Ninevites to the knowledge of Jehovah, as the great storm led the sailors in Jonah's vessel: but the merciful Creator does not despise national repentance at any time. What wonderful results might be seen to-day if any' of the Contending nations were to humble themselves before God! In His righteous Government He is chastening many nations as we write. for all deserve it in a greater or lesser degree. What joy it would give to the hearts of those who know God could we hear that any King. President or Premier has called upon his people to repent, and that all have humbly responded!

Nahum says that "God is jealous, and Jehovah avengeth: Jehovah avengeth. and is furious; Jehovah will take vengeance or, His adversaries and He reserveth wrath for His enemies; "but he also says that "Jehovah is slow to anger," and that "Jehovah is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble: and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nahum 1: 2, 3, 7).

God is indeed "slow to anger." The evil of the Canaanitish nations was great in Abraham's day; but even so He held back their judgement 400 years, "for;" said He "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15: 16). From Rahab's words to the spies we learn that the guilty nations were aware that God's executioners were on their way. She said, "I know that Jehovah hath given you the land, and your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you " (Joshua 2: 9). They had heard of God's heavy hand upon Egypt, and of the destruction of Sihon and Og, Yet their was no repentance on their part.

Nineveh was granted forty days respite, with blessed results but the people soon returned to their wicked ways. Hence Nahum 3: 1: "Woe to the bloody city: it is full of lies and robbery." This, as we have already remarked, was about 100 years after Jonah's visit, and even then the execution of judgement was delayed another century. We have said that Nineveh will never rise again, but in contrast with this, Sodom and her daughter cities are to be divinely restored for Millennial blessing (Ezek. 16: 55). Does this strike any reader as strange? The explanation is that Nineveh was favoured with a special message from God and submitted to it; but the generations that followed profited nothing by the fact, and returned to the old vomit. But Sodom was never favoured as Nineveh was. In Matt. 11: 25 we hear our Lord saying that it shall be more tolerable . for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement than for Capernaum, which city was honoured by His presence, ministry. and miracles. Favour divinely granted but despised brings heavy judgement from. God. In Luke 12: 47-48 the Lord distinguishes between those who know His will and do it not, and those who sin without knowing: His will. He says: "Unto whosoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much. of him they will ask the more." What could be more equitable? In the light of our Lord's words where do the people of Great Britain stand? Where in all the earth has the Gospel been so

fully preached and the Scriptures more abundantly circulated? The responsibility of people so privileged is great, and judgement will be meted out accordingly.

It is said. that the overflowing of the river facilitated the capture of Nineveh by the Medes. Nahum 2: 6 seems to teach this. Assyria — the nation — is to be blessed; but to the once favoured city of Nineveh God has said: "Jehovah hath given commandment that no more of thy seed be sown." Deeply solemn words! Truly. "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10: 31).

Jonah's behaviour as Jehovah's witness to the wicked city was most reprehensible. He was evidently puffed up with a sense of his own importance as he marched through the streets of Nineveh. the most famous city on earth at that time, and pronounced its impending overthrow. When the sentence was cancelled in answer to the people's repentance, Jonah should have rejoiced. Instead he felt piqued! His dignity was touched! Oh, the pettiness of poor flesh! How ready it is to clothe itself with importance even in connection with the ministry of the word of God! Had the prophet been right with God, he would have delighted to proclaim that He is a gracious God, merciful. slow to anger. and repenting Him the evil (Jonah 4: 2). Jonah's own nation, so persistently unfaithful has proved this repeatedly; why should not others, less favoured, and therefore less guilty, also taste the mercy of a pardoning God?

How blessed to be living in this Gospel age! Let us feast our souls upon the words of our Lord Jesus: "God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not judged: but he that believeth not is judged already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only Begotten Son of God" (John 3: 17-18). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but is passed from death unto life " (John 5: 24).