

A
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TWO
TALES

Studies in Jonah and Nahum

WILLIAM P. HEATH

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to those faithful and courageous Filipino Pastors and Evangelists with whom I have had the privilege of working, from whom I have received inspiration and encouragement, and for whom, primarily, this work was prepared.

I am grateful to a dear brother in the Lord who is now with the Lord, Winfred R. Archer, who was a source of encouragement to me over the years since the day I took my first pastorate. He often urged me to put into writing some of the wonderful truths that blessed us both as we shared them together.

I want to thank also my patient family, who have shared the vision of putting these pages into the hands of our Filipino believers, and my son, Tim, for his help with the manuscript.

I am grateful to Mrs. Calvin Gardner who is handling my tape ministry and who first suggested a study in the books of Jonah and Nahum.

William P. Heath
Philippians 1:6; 2:13

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Preface

I trace my interest in studying the word of God back to an unforgettable evening when I was in my late teens. My mother's brother, Pastor Fred V. Kinzie, was visiting us. One evening he unrolled a dispensational chart, drawn on butcher paper, and tacked it up to the wall. For at least two hours he held us spellbound as we began to realize that God knew what He was doing down through the ages, and that His Word was not just a collection of ancient religious writings, but a very carefully planned and perfectly executed revelation of Himself and of His matchless ways with sinful men. That night the Word of God came alive to me.

Years later I began to realize that this age of grace was not merely the next act after the Old Testament scenario, but an alternate project temporarily inserted into a break in Israel's program - a break that had been brought about by their rejection of the risen Christ. I thrilled to see that God is calling out a heavenly people as His answer to sin in the heavenlies, even as He also has an earthly people as His answer to sin in the Garden of Eden. The distinctions that became apparent between the program that had been a mystery and not made known until revealed to and through the Apostle Paul, and that which had been the subject of revelation from the beginning, opened up and clarified my Bible in many ways. Seeming contradictions disappeared. Seemingly arbitrary actions on God's part took on meaning. Confusing passages were clarified. Christ was exalted in a new way, and the Word of God became utterly fascinating. I became convinced that the recognition of precisely what God is doing in this age of grace is a key to understanding the Bible as a whole.

I feel that there is need for Bible study materials that look at the Old Testament Scriptures with the uniqueness of Paul's ministry and the distinctiveness of this age of grace in full view. It is not enough to know that "Pauline truth" is an important key to the understanding of the Word of God. We need to USE that key. This study is an attempt to help meet that need. May we find that the Old Testament has great value both to teach truths that rise above dispensational boundaries, and to illustrate and enhance by comparison and contrast those truths that are peculiar to the dispensation of the grace of God.

W. P. Heath, 1986

Explanatory notes

(1) Unless otherwise indicated, the Scripture references are from either the King James Version or the modified K.J.V. used in the revised Scofield Bible. "NASB" indicates the New American Standard Bible. "Amp." refers to the Amplified Bible.

(2) The occasional paraphrases offered in this work are not intended as translations, but as suggested INTERPRETATIONS (as all paraphrases are to a large extent) that may help one see more clearly the thought of the verse in light of its context and existing translations.

THE CITY OF TWO TALES

Part 1 - THE BOOK OF JONAH A Tale of "Go!"

Chapter 1

The Book As A Whole

THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF JONAH¹

Is Jonah an early attempt at religious fiction, merely a pious "fish story," an Old Testament parable, or is it a reliable record of actual events?

The book does not bear indications that it is a parable. The terminology of parables is, "a certain man," "a certain city," etc. Jonah, by contrast, provides historical and factual details such as names (Jonah, Amittai, Tarshish, Joppa, Nineveh), times (three days and nights, forty days, three day's journey), and numbers (120,000 persons). That it is reliable history accurately recorded is established by the following considerations:

- Jonah was a real person, a prophet of God, referred to in [2 Kings 14:25](#).
- **Nineveh** was a real city, finding a place both in Scripture ([Gen. 10:11](#); [2 Kings 19:36](#); [Nahum 1:1](#); etc.) and in secular history. Its ruins remain to this day, mute testimony to its historicity.
- The Lord Jesus Christ testified to the historical accuracy of the book. He did not hesitate to say, "Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly ... Nineveh ... repented at the preaching of Jonas" (Matt. 12:40,41), and added with equal assurance, "Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites" (Luke 11:30).

That this book, recognized as Scripture in the New Testament period, was given by inspiration of God is claimed by Paul when he said, "ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16); implied by Christ in the verses above; and demonstrated in its numerous inter-relationships with other Scriptures.

JONAH AND NAHUM - THE TWO TALES OF NINEVEH

Jonah is most closely related to the book of Nahum. Nahum, written over one hundred years after Jonah, is a solemn pronouncement of judgment against Nineveh, a judgment which was literally carried out decades after its writing. Nahum began his prophecy by saying, "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked" (Nahum 1:3). The story of Jonah demonstrates that God was, indeed, "slow to anger" (Jonah 4:2), while the book of Nahum emphasizes that He "will

¹ See Appendix "A" for the chronology of Jonah and Nahum.

not at all acquit the wicked." Both books portray that God is "great in power," whether to use storm and fish, gourd and worm to deal with an erring prophet, as in Jonah, or to bring total destruction to a people hardened in sin, as in Nahum. Nahum without Jonah would tell only half of the story; the half that God takes the least pleasure in. That God will not fail to judge sin persisted in is necessary truth (the message of Nahum); that He will forgive sin repented of is glorious truth (the message of Jonah). Compare Micah 7:18, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy."

If Jonah is fiction, then the presentation of God's character in the Old Testament suffers a blow, for we cannot set Nahum aside as "fiction." The ruins of the city are still there to see. Is it not a form of slander on the character of God to acknowledge the historicity of His wrath but dismiss His mercy as mere fiction?

OUTLINE

1. 1:1-3. The Word of the Lord withheld.
JONAH'S concern for ISRAEL.
2. 1:4-2:10. The chastening of the Lord experienced.
JONAH repents.
3. 3:1-9. The Word of the Lord proclaimed.
NINEVEH repents.
4. 3:10. The mercy of the Lord demonstrated.
GOD repents.
5. 4:1-11. The ways of the Lord resented.
GOD'S concern for NINEVEH.

The study in Jonah speaks of the ONE true God handling TWO situations (Nineveh's wickedness and Jonah's disobedience). It centers around THREE great things (the great city - 1:2; 3:2; the great wind and tempest - 1:4,12; and the great fish - 1:17). FOUR things are "prepared" or "appointed" by God in His education of Jonah (a fish - 1:17; a gourd - 4:6; a worm - 4:7; and a "vehement" or "sultry" east wind - 4:8). FIVE times God speaks to Jonah (1:2; 3:2; 4:4; 4:9 and 4:10,11).

THE CITY OF NINEVEH - THE CITY OF TWO TALES

The city of **Nineveh** was built by Nimrod the "mighty hunter in defiance of the Lord" ([Gen. 10:8-11](#) NASB and Companion Bible margin). It was located on the Tigris River and was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was a "great city" (Jonah 1:2; 3:2; 4:11). Greater Nineveh, including the suburbs and the nearby cities Calah, Rehoboth, and Resen ([Gen. 10:11,12](#)), was an "exceeding great city" (3:3). It required three days to

travel around it (about sixty miles, according to archaeologists). It was, of course, a Gentile city.

JONAH THE MAN

Concerning Jonah himself we are merely told here that he was the son of Amittai. From 2 Kings 14:25 we learn that his home was **Gath-Hepher**, a town about three miles north of Nazareth where the Lord Jesus Christ later spent His young manhood; that he lived during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel (or earlier); and that he was a servant of the Lord. Both 2 Kings 14:25 and Matt. 12:39 tell us that he was a prophet. We detect some outstanding virtues in Jonah as the story unfolds. His good judgment may be suspect, but one cannot doubt his courage. None can even question that he was a man of action, even though his chosen course got him into trouble. Above all he was honest with God. He didn't try to cover up his resentment and anger with a lot of pious and religious talk or ritual. He was no "phony"! It is well to bear these positive characteristics in mind as we ponder his prophecy.

CHAPTER 2

The Word of the Lord Withheld

Jonah 1:1-3

God told Ezekiel that if he were sent to a "people of a strange speech and of an hard language," instead of ministering to His own people, his work would be easier. They would hearken to his message (Ezek. 3:6).

Jonah, by contrast, WAS sent to a "people of a strange speech" and he turned his back on his commission, not because he thought it would be difficult and they would not believe his message, but because he was afraid his mission would succeed and they WOULD believe!

THE REASON FOR JONAH'S FLIGHT

It is vital to the understanding of this book that we know why Jonah "rose up to flee to Tarshish."

Jonah has been accused of being a bigoted Jew, unwilling to testify to a Gentile city. If this were so would he not have delighted in preaching a message AGAINST Gentiles, a condemnation of their sin and announcement of their overthrow? He did, in fact, prophesy to Gentiles in the ship in order to spare their lives, even though it cost him his own life (1:12). Moreover, he would hardly have planned to make his home, even temporarily, in a city in Tarshish which was Gentile, and so far removed from Palestine as to be almost completely pagan, if he was such a hopelessly bigoted Jew.

It has been suggested that he was afraid that his threats of judgment would not be

carried out (because of God's forgiving nature) and he should seem to be a false prophet. One who would choose a course of action that he knew could lead to stern chastening by "the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (1:9) and could boldly prophesy, "cast me into the sea" (1:12), would surely not shrink from a dangerous commission nor fear the opinions of men. Even though Jonah had his faults, he does not appear to be the kind of man who would rather be a disobedient and rebellious prophet than to only SEEM to be a false prophet. He must have realized that if the Ninevites believed his message strongly enough to repent and be spared, they would be grateful to God for their deliverance and thankful to God's messenger.

Why then did he turn so resolutely from his assignment?

The Assyrians were known for their fierce fighting and inhuman cruelty. Living where he did, Jonah may have witnessed some bloody raid near his home and, almost certainly, had heard of attacks against the northern borders of Israel. As a thinking man he could have suspected, and, as a prophet of God, may well have known ([Gen. 18:17](#); [Amos 3:7](#)), that the Assyrians would be the tool that God would some day use to chasten Israel. Now he had been told by God that the wickedness of the Assyrians was to be judged.

"How wonderful!" may have been his thought, "their destruction will be the salvation of Israel. However, God is a 'gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest . . . of the evil!' (4:2). What if I tell them of the coming judgment and they repent? Will not God spare them? And if He spares them they will live to destroy US!

But there was another course of action open to him.

"If they don't hear about the coming judgment they won't repent, and destruction will be poured out upon them. They must not hear God's message. I have it in my power, by withholding the Word of the Lord from them, to save my beloved people, Israel!" Such may have been his thoughts.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JONAH'S FLIGHT

Before we judge him too severely, think how we would have felt if we had been in Manila when the Japanese came. Suppose that, even as the city was crumbling before their guns, we were told to announce to them that God would destroy them within six weeks for their sins. Might we not think Jonah's thoughts?

When Jonah decided to sacrifice himself and his prophetic ministry that Israel might be saved, he became a "charter member" of an exclusive club. No matter how mistaken his thinking or faulty his plan, his MOTIVE put him in good company. Speaking of Israel, Moses once said, "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin -: and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written" (Ex. 32:32). The Apostle Paul, likewise, cried out of an honest and anguished heart, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom.

9:3).

Moses was willing to die with Israel if they were to be judged. Paul was willing to be cursed instead of Israel if they could be saved. Jonah was willing to be chastened and even killed on behalf of Israel to spare them from their enemies. In their motives they all shared what Paul called "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16 and Phil. 2:5). Christ not only was willing to suffer and die instead of and on behalf of Israel, but He alone could and did effectively carry it out (Gal. 3:13). Christ loved and died for more than Israel, however, He loved and died for the whole world. This concern of God for those outside Israel is a lesson that Jonah was taught in chapter four of his prophecy.

We can then recognize Jonah, as I am sure God did, as a man who shared God's own love for Israel, but who didn't understand that God loved them even more than he did. He was evidently trying to be the "savior" of Israel. Much later God said, "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Savior" (Isa. 43:11).

Right motives neither ensure right actions nor justify wrong ones, but God, who alone knows the heart, judges actions in light of motives. Seeing Jonah's motive, God was patient with him and moved to correct his course of action.

When Jonah rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord, whether he realized it or not:

- He was acting on the principle that the end justifies the means; a principle foreign to the Word of God (Rom. 3:8).
- He was trying to outwit God, trying to defeat God's sovereign plan for both Nineveh and Israel (Contrast Rom. 11:33-36).
- He was putting his love for his people above his love for God.
- He either thought that his love for Israel was greater than God's or that he knew better than God did what was good for them.
- He was substituting sacrifice (of himself and his ministry) for obedience. God had already said, through Samuel, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).
- He was seeking to save Israel in his own way. He finally realized that salvation is of the Lord (2:9).

ALTERNATIVES TO JONAH'S COURSE OF ACTION

There are more ways than one to handle your enemies aside from just fighting them. Balaam had joined with Balak and considered Israel his enemy. Prevented by God from cursing them, his plan was to put God to work for him, in spite of Himself. He would get Israel to sin so that God would have to curse them after all (Rev. 2:14; Num. 31:15,16).

Jonah's plan was not much better than Balaam's. The Ninevites had already sinned and were facing judgment by God. He would withhold God's message from them so they would not be able to escape their doom. Paul's method was to treat the enemy kindly and thus move out of the place of vengeance and let God move in; to "give place unto (God's) wrath" (Rom. 12:17-21).

In all three methods it is God who is expected to pour out the wrath, but, in the first two, men are trying to force Him to pour out His wrath whether He wants to or not.

Paul's method is, of course, God's method. It does not bring God's anger or chastening back on one as the other methods did on Balaam, who was later slain by Israel (Num. 22:33; 31:8), and Jonah, who was cast into the sea (1:15). It may, indeed, win our enemy over to be our friend. This eliminates an enemy and gains a friend at the same time. However, if our enemy continues his stance in spite of our graciousness to him, his punishment will be greater; coals of fire will be heaped upon his head because of his returning evil for good. See Rom. 12:17-21; Psa. 140:9,10; Prov. 24:17,18; 25:21,22.

If we condemn Jonah for withholding God's Word, what can we say of those today who have a greater message than Jonah and who withhold it for much weaker and more selfish reasons? If we turn our back on our commission to beseech men to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21) we should consider that those we are to speak to are in greater danger than the Ninevites. Their peril is not just physical death, but eternal hell. (This danger was faced by the Ninevites also, but did not form a revealed part of Jonah's responsibility.)

Also, our message is greater than his. Ours is the announcement that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" and that "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:19,21). It has to do with eternal life, not merely an extension of physical life; the salvation of the soul, not just the sparing of a city. In addition, we are responsible for a whole world, not just "an exceeding great city."

Moreover, we are "thoroughly furnished" (2 Tim. 3:16,17) for our work because we have His completed Word. God is able to make all grace abound toward us so we can do the work (2 Cor. 9:8). And we can do all things through Christ who gives us power (Phil. 4:13). We have NO EXCUSE! Surely there can be no worthy motive for OUR trip to "Tarshish"!

THE PATH OF DISOBEDIENCE

Even apart from the chastening of the Lord, the path of disobedience is a hard one. When Jonah "rose up to flee unto Tarshish":

- He went AWAY. So we cannot walk in disobedience and just stay where we are. If we will not go to our "Nineveh" then we will soon be on our way to our "Tarshish." **Tarshish** was in Spain, the opposite direction from Nineveh and as

far as he could go in that direction. We cannot say "no" to the Lord and continue in His presence, the place of fellowship, ministry, and blessing. We go AWAY.

- He went DOWN. He went down to Joppa, down into the ship (1:3), down into the sides of the ship (1:5), and down to the bottom of the mountains (2:6). So the path of disobedience leads us down spiritually, morally, and emotionally. We go DOWN.
- He PAID his own way. Young people often are concerned about what it will cost to serve the Lord. They should be even more concerned about the cost of NOT serving Him. The cost of serving the Lord is high, but He will meet those costs out of "His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). The cost of not serving Him we pay ourselves. When Jonah paid his fare that was just the "down payment." He paid and paid and PAID. Before it was over, he paid with his life. If we follow his example we, too, will PAY.

How different was the reason that the apostle Paul had for wanting to go to Spain. Jonah was taking a costly journey to Tarshish (in Spain) from the presence of the Lord in order to prevent Gentiles from hearing God's Word. Paul wanted to go there so that Gentiles might hear the Word of God, the gospel of His wonderful grace ([Rom. 15:24](#); [Acts 20:24](#)).

CHAPTER 3

Chastening Experienced

Jonah 1:4 - 2:10

When one disobeys the Lord he may get into a "whale of a lot of trouble," to use a figure of speech that possibly is based on the book of Jonah. As it is put in Hebrews 12:11, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Jonah's chastening was grievous indeed but he allowed himself to be exercised by it, to be rebuked, taught, and molded by it, and it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness in his soul. It brought him to repentance.

THE FLIGHT FROM GOD'S PRESENCE

As Jonah stepped on board the ship that day he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. He certainly did not think that he was going to a place where God could not see him or reach him. As a prophet of God he surely was acquainted with what King David had written long before about the omnipresence of God. "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me" (Psa. 139:7,9,10).

In what sense, then, did he flee from God's presence? Remember that Jonah was a prophet of God. The servants of the Lord, whether prophet, priest, or king, were looked upon as serving in the presence of the Lord. Elijah the prophet once said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). King Hezekiah said to the priests of his day, "the Lord hath chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that ye should minister unto Him and burn incense" (2 Chron. 29:11). This helps us to understand what king David meant when he said, "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psa. 51:11). The Spirit of God had come upon him that he might be empowered to do the work God had given into his hands. He had ministered as in the presence of God. David was asking that his divine responsibility as king not be taken from him.

It is in that sense Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. He was taking the path Peter later took when he said, "I go a fishing." The structure of the Greek in John 21:3, according to Kenneth S. Wuest, doesn't mean he was just going on a fishing trip, but that he was going back to fishing as a business.² He was going to leave the ministry. That is what Jonah did. He left his ministry.

Every believer today has an appointment as an ambassador to a lost world. As such we are in Christ's stead beseeching men to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). May we not run from our place of privilege and responsibility as Jonah did from his.

THE STORM AT SEA

The spiritual struggle with his conscience, the hurried preparations for his flight, and the excitement of sailing time were soon behind Jonah. Weary from it all he went to his bunk below deck and dropped off into deep sleep.

The ship was well on its way when, like the ship in [Mark 4:37-41](#), its safety was threatened by a miraculous storm of great magnitude. This storm, unlike the one on Galilee later, was from God. The sailors were terrified, for the ship was about to be broken up. In those days they did not have life preservers, life boats, or the Coast Guard rescue team to depend on. Their only hope for life was the fragile wooden ship under their feet. If it went down, they went down with it. The crew were Gentiles and idolaters, for each man was praying to "his god." But the gods of wood and stone could not even handle a normal storm, much less a supernatural tempest in the hands of the true God.

THE CAUSE OF THE STORM

The plight of the mariners was due to the flight of their sleeping passenger. God's man can never go away from the presence of the Lord without becoming a source of trouble, heartache, and tragedy to those around him, specially to those nearest and

² The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament, Kenneth S. Wuest, page 46.

dearest to him. Long before Jonah's day David had discovered this principle the hard way. His sin had meant death to one of his trusted mighty men and to his infant son. It had brought division, bloodshed and shame to his family for the rest of his life (2 Sam. 12:10,11).

And where was Jonah? Sound asleep below deck.

Isn't it interesting that when he turned away from the call to the great city he also lost his awareness of the need of those around him? Here is a principle we need to weigh carefully. As a missionary I have occasionally had someone come to me after I have presented the work in the Philippines and say, "I don't know why you are going way out there. After all, there is so much to do here at home!" I have found that the ones who have no world vision (no concern for the "exceeding great city") usually have no next door vision either. They want the missionary to stay home because of the need in their own community, but they themselves DO stay home and, all too often, are doing little, if anything, to meet that need. It is only when a man (or a church) gets a vision of a lost WORLD that he can escape going to sleep in the boat.

The idea that the home church will suffer because of money and talented young people being sent to the mission field is seldom realized in experience. The deeper the involvement in missions, the greater the willingness to give sacrificially and serve tirelessly to meet the local need also.

Too many believers today have lost their world vision, are no longer concerned for those around them, and, like Jonah, are fast asleep. How they need the exhortation of Paul to some of his day, "Awake ... for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). How different was the sleep of Christ in the boat on Galilee (Mark 4:38). He was resting in the midst of His ministry, not resting instead of ministering.

The mariners called out, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon THY God, if so be that (THE) God will think upon us that we perish not" (1:6). There is a progression in verses 5 and 6 concerning God. In verse 5 it is "HIS god," the idol of the heathen. In verse 6 it is "THY God," the God of the Hebrews, the only true God, as these men were about to learn. Then it is "THE God" (the definite article is found in the Hebrew). The mariners, at this point, did not know which of the gods they were praying to was "the God" who would answer. Perhaps it would prove to be Jonah's God, for they had been praying to theirs without any results. They soon learned that Jonah's God was, indeed, THE God.

The truth about Jonah and his God came out gradually. First they came up against the POWER of God in the storm. Next they discovered the MAN of God through the casting of the lot, They learned something of the HOLINESS of God as they saw Him handle the problem of sin in the life of the man of God, and they experienced the COMPASSION of God in their miraculous deliverance from the storm. How sad that those around Jonah had to discover his relationship to the Lord by forcing it from him! Not a word of testimony did he volunteer until he was discovered by the casting of the

lot.

As they questioned Jonah, they learned more. "For what (not 'whose') cause (is) this evil upon us?" They had found out already that Jonah was responsible, but why was he the cause of such a tempest? In his involuntary testimony it was established that he was a Hebrew, feared the Lord of heaven and sea and earth, the only true God, and was running away from Him. If Jonah really feared the Lord, why did he disobey Him? His testimony did not seem to match his actions.

How easy it is for us also to say, or even sing, things that we do not really mean. Sometimes, it seems, we are not really listening to ourselves, or we wouldn't sing some songs so enthusiastically. How would it affect our song service if we only sang when we meant every word of every song? Just think of some of the words we sing so lustily and thoughtlessly: "all my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold". . ."I surrender all". . ."I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord." Do we really mean what we sing? Song leaders occasionally say, "Now sing this as if you meant it." How much better to say, "If you mean it, sing it." Jonah was willing to say, "I fear the Lord," but he was not doing what the Lord had asked him to do.

They asked, "Why hast thou done this?" "Why have you run away from the service of your God?" was their thought. Receiving no answer to their embarrassing question, their thoughts turned to the situation at hand and they asked what could be done to save them from the storm. The man who would not prophesy against Nineveh then calmly prophesied against himself. Unlike the situation in Mark 4, where the safety of the boat was ensured by the presence of the sleeper and the storm was stilled by His word, this ship was imperiled by the prophet's presence aboard and the storm could only be stilled by casting him out into the sea. His calm resignation to his fate indicates that he had expected some such chastening, had weighed it in his mind, and had decided before he ever boarded the vessel to pay the price.

THE STORM TERMINATED

The men "rowed hard" seeking to save themselves without the necessity of the prophet's sacrifice, but to no avail. Their works could not save them, only the death of Jonah could do that.

Faced with the futility of their efforts, and believing the word of the Lord through His prophet, they laid aside their idols and cried out to Jehovah. In faith they rested the blame where God had placed it, on Jonah, and cast him into the sea.

There are three cries to the Lord in Jonah. Here, in apprehension, the innocent mariners cried out for protection (1:14); later, in contrition, the wayward prophet cried out for restoration (2:2); and finally, in repentance, the wicked Ninevites cried out for mercy (3:8). All were heard and answered.

Try to imagine the remarkable scene that must have been enacted moments later. A glorious sun is shining down through broken clouds on a battered ship resting on the

bosom of a calm sea. The exhausted sailors in it are Gentiles who but an hour ago had been idolaters. Now they are bowing their knee reverently to Jehovah, the God of heaven, offering sacrifice to Him and making vows.

Their experience has been very like that described in Psa. 107:23-30. The psalmist wrote,

They that go down to the sea in ships. . . these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them into their desired haven.

Jonah had said of himself, "I fear the Lord," but his life hadn't confirmed the truth of his testimony. The actions of these men demonstrated, and God Himself confirmed that "they feared the Lord exceedingly." They had come to know the Lord, not through the faithfulness and testimony of Jonah, but in spite of his unfaithfulness and unbelief, through his casting away. Compare [Romans 11:11,12,15](#).

DID JONAH DIE?

It is commonly thought that Jonah was swallowed by the great fish while still alive. The Scriptures do not actually assert this. If this view is held, however, much of the precise language of Jonah chapter two must be viewed as poetic exaggeration. While it is true that much of this chapter is poetry, it is poetry chosen under inspiration to exactly describe the situation.

It is also usually assumed that Jonah was kept alive for three days and nights in the fish's belly. This has caused many to stumble, not just because it called for a miracle, but because it called for a rather perplexing and distressing kind of miracle.

Jonah kept alive in complete darkness and desperately confined quarters, near drowning in gastric juices, and close to suffocation for lack of any but re-breathed air for three full days and nights is not a pretty picture. It would seem to be a miracle for the sake of the vast psychological as well as physical torture endured.

J. Sidlow Baxter cites a case where a sailor was swallowed by a whale and released the next day when the whale was cut up on the deck of the ship. The authority cited says of him, "He lost his senses through fright and not from lack of air . . . but his mind was not clear and he was placed in the Captain's quarters where he remained two weeks a raving lunatic."³

³ [Explore the Book](#), J. Sidlow Baxter, Vol. 4, Page 153.

What really happened, it appears, was no less a miracle, but is the kind of miracle worthy of God. That Jonah actually died and was raised from the dead is indicated by the following considerations:

- In verse 5 of chapter 2 it says that the waters compassed ("surrounded," NASB margin) him, even to the soul. The Amplified Bible translated it, "even to the extinction of life."
- It says in verse 6 that, "the earth with its bars closed behind me forever" (Amp.). This could hardly refer to his body, for his body was in the sea, not the earth.
- Verse 6 says, "Thou hast brought up my life from corruption." The word translated "corruption" can also be translated, "the pit." Isa. 38:17,18 parallels this same Hebrew word (translated, "the pit of corruption" in the King James Version) with "the grave" (Sheol) and "death." Also, in this passage, Isaiah said, "Thou who hast kept my soul from the pit of destruction" (NASB margin). That is, God prevented his death. Here Jonah's life was brought up from the pit of corruption, evidently having died. In [Job 33:22](#) this same Hebrew word is actually translated "grave."
- It specifically says that he prayed out of Sheol, the place of departed spirits (v. 2). Sheol is not just a poetic reference to the belly of the fish as being "like" Sheol, for when he prayed out of the fish's belly he recalled an earlier prayer out of Sheol (2:1,2). If Sheol is just a representation of the fish's belly, then it is like saying, "Jonah prayed out of the fish's belly and said, 'I cried out of the fish's belly.' "
- The expression in Matt. 12:40 (NASB), "JUST AS Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster; SO shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," seems too strong to be only referring to the length of time involved. If it refers to the experience itself also then how can "just as ... so" be the comparison between a man KEPT ALIVE miraculously in a living hell, and another whose body is resting in quiet but dignified physical DEATH?
- Notice the connection between 1:17 and 2:1, "Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. THEN (after three days and nights) Jonah prayed." The prayer he prayed at that time goes through verse 9 of chapter 2, and the indication is that as soon as he had completed his prayer he was vomited up. If he had been alive all this time, under such terrible circumstances, why did he wait so long before he prayed?⁴

JUST WHAT HAPPENED TO JONAH?

In order to understand this chapter it will be helpful to watch very carefully the tenses

⁴ See further discussion of this subject in chapter 7 following.

used by the translators.⁵ With this as a clue, let us seek to reconstruct what happened in chronological order.

- (1) Jonah was cast out of the ship into the sea (1:15). He referred to this in 2:3 when he said, "Thou HADST cast me into the deep." The tenses used by the translators place this event before the prayer of verse 2. The wording of verses 1 and 2 places the prayer of verse 2 before the prayer of verse 1. "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord, his God, Out of the fish's belly, and said, "I CREED... out of the belly of Sheol."
- (2) He sank under the surface of the sea. "The floods compassed me about: all Thy waves and billows passed over me" (v. 3).
- (3) While he was "fainting away" (v. 7 NASB), that is, as he was beginning to lose consciousness, he "remembered the Lord." He prayed, "I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will took again toward Thy holy temple" (v. 4). His prayer "came in unto (God) into (His) temple" (v. 7). This is prayer number one.
- (4) Jonah died. The seaweed was wrapped about his head, he sank to the very bottom of the sea (the "roots of the mountains," verses 5 and 6 NASB).
- (5) Jonah was swallowed by the great fish (1:17). There is no record of how long he was dead at the bottom of the sea before this happened, but he was in the fish's belly three days and three nights.
- (6) Jonah's soul went to Sheol and while there he prayed again. We are not told what he said except that, he "cried by reason of (his) affliction" (v. 2). His prayer was heard in the sense that it was answered. This is the second prayer. That one could pray in Sheol is implied in the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke chapter 16. The rich man made his petition to Abraham, but there is no indication that he couldn't have made it to God except that, being unsaved, he had no access to God in prayer. We know that a believer, even a straying one, could pray in Sheol, for it says here that Jonah did so.⁶ That one could, with God's approval, return from Sheol is certain, for the Lazarus of John 11 was in Sheol/Hades⁷ for four days (while his body was in the tomb) and was recalled to life by Christ.
- (7) Prayer number two was answered and Jonah was returned to life inside the fish's belly. "Yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God" (v. 6).

⁵ The Hebrew has no tenses. Those selected by the translators in order to put it into English are drawn from the context and content of the passage.

⁶ See appendix B.

⁷ The New Testament "Hades" is the equivalent of the Old Testament "Sheol."

- (8) Jonah prayed out of the fish's belly. This prayer is given at length. It is all of verses 2 through 9. It includes reference to the sequence of events leading up to it, including his other two prayers. It evidently was uttered in a short interval between his resurrection and his expulsion from the fish's belly (See previous remarks on the relationship between 1:17 and 2:1). The culmination and focal point of the prayer is verses 8 and 9 where Jonah's repentance is the outgrowth of his previous prayers, and the basis for his deliverance. This is the third prayer.
- (9) The third prayer was answered and the fish vomited up Jonah, not back into the sea, but upon the dry land. Jonah had been swallowed by the fish, not to keep him alive, much less to subject him to prolonged horror, but to transport his body back to shore so that when he was raised from the dead and vomited out he wouldn't just drown again.

This section (Jonah 1:17 - 2:10) has the following structure:

- A Jonah swallowed by the fish, 1:17
 - B Prayer from the belly of the fish (prayer # 3 begun), 2:1
 - C Prayer from the belly of Sheol recalled (prayer #2), 2:2
 - D Jonah in the sea, 2:3
 - C Prayer from the depths of the sea recalled (prayer # 1), 2:4
 - D Jonah in the sea, 2:5,5a
 - E Jonah died, 2:6b
 - E Jonah raised from the dead, 2:6c
 - C Prayer out of the depths of the sea (prayer # 1) answered, 2:7
 - B Prayer from belly of fish (prayer # 3) concluded. He repents, 2:8,9
 - A Jonah vomited out by the fish, 2:10

JONAH'S PRAYERS

Let us look more closely at the three prayers in this remarkable chapter.

Prayer #1	Prayer #2	Prayer #3
Offered while he was dying. v. 7	Offered while he was dead. v. 2	Offered after his resurrection. v. 1
In the midst of the seas. v. 3	In the belly of Sheol. V. 2	In the belly of the fish. v. 1
Regret that he had set his face toward Tarshish.	Remorse over his life and ministry being cut short.	Repentance; willing now to obey, even though reluctantly.
Looks to the temple in regret. v. 4	Looks to the Lord for help. v. 2 - NASB	Looks to the future in faith and anticipation. v. 9
Delivered from physical suffering	Delivered from Sheol by	Delivered from the fish's belly. v. 10

by death.

resurrection. v. 6

Sent to Sheol.
v. 2

Sent to the
fish's belly. v. 1

Sent to Nineveh. 3:2

The regret in the first prayer is expressed when he said, "I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple." He had turned his back on the presence of the Lord, symbolized by the Shekinah (Glory) in the temple, and had set his face toward Tarshish. Now he regretted that decision and, as Solomon suggested over and over in his prayer of dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8), he looked toward the temple in prayer. Submerged in the sea, he could not physically look toward it, but his heart was now set in that direction with regret that he had ever looked away to begin with (See [Jonah 2:4,7](#)).

We do not look toward a temple in Jerusalem today. The Shekinah (Glory) is no longer in a temple in Jerusalem, but in a Tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man ([Heb. 8:2](#)). The Word of God became flesh and tabernacled among us ([John 1:14](#)) and we see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" ([2 Cor. 4:6](#)). How we need to keep OUR eyes on HIM!

Verses 2 and 7 indicate that it is right to pray when afflictions come. The first prayer in this book was offered when Jonah was drowning (2:7). He did not pray until he was in deep trouble.⁸ Some say, "If I don't pray when everything is going well, I won't pray when I get into trouble." While this sounds like a noble attitude, it is in reality pride in disguise. The trouble may well have been sent (or allowed) by God for the express purpose of driving them to prayer. Jonah prayed when he was dying and God heard him (2:7). It is indeed wrong to cease praying as soon as God undertakes for us. That is asking for more of the same treatment! Jonah determined to pay what he had vowed (2:9, compare [Psa. 66:13,14](#)). When the crisis was past he did what he had said he would, even though he still didn't understand God's purpose and was resentful of what God did (Jonah chapter 4).

By the time he called on God out of the belly of Sheol, the whole course of events had come before him to reconsider, as verses 3 through 7 indicate. That his life and his ministry had been cut short must have filled him with remorse; sorrow over the things that, normally, would now be irreversible. Jonah's heart cry may have been, "O, if I had only obeyed the Lord, but now it is too late, too late!" But with God it was not too late. He gave him an unprecedented and never to be repeated opportunity to rectify his error.

The heart of his third petition, and indeed of the book of Jonah, is found in 2:8,9. "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

To see what was happening we need to interpret these verses in light of the context.

⁸ Jonah 4:2,3 is a subsequent prayer, but the "saying" of 4:2, uttered before he fled to Tarshish, is not referred to as a prayer. It was Jonah's self justification for his own course of action.

They are the pivotal verses of the book, for here (even though the word "repent" is not used) Jonah repented. The book up to this point involves the attitude and actions of Jonah that required repentance, and God working to bring about that repentance. In the chapters following we have Jonah's return to service as a result of his change of heart, the continuing attitude of Jonah that was inconsistent with his repentance, and God working with His repentant prophet to change his attitude.

In verse 8 the "lying ('empty') vanities" he spoke of were not "vain idols" as most notes infer. The word "vanities" does refer to idols in some Old Testament passages, but that is not the meaning of the word. It is the same word translated "vanity" and "vain" in Ecclesiastes. The basic meaning is "futile" or "useless." It is used in Psa. 94:11 of men's thoughts. In Isa. 30:7 it describes the character of the help that Israel would receive from the Egyptians, "The Egyptians shall help in VAIN." In 2 Kings 17:15, "they followed VANITY and became vain and went after the heathen ... concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them." There, "vanity" had to do with the ways of the heathen, not specifically, nor only, their idolatry.

In Psa. 31:6 David says, "I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the Lord." There is nothing in the context about idols. His problem in this Psalm was with those that laid a net for him secretly. "Pull me out of the net that they have laid secretly for me; for Thou art my strength" (Psa. 31:4). It was concerning those who took counsel together against him to take away his life that he spoke. "For I have heard the slander of many; fear was on every side. While they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life" (Psa. 31:13). He is not saying in verse 6, "I hate those who trust in idols: but I will trust in the Lord." He is saying, "I hate those who trust in their cunning and their scheming: I trust in the Lord." The same contrast is found in verses 13 and 14. "They took counsel together against me, but I trust in Thee, O Lord."

In [Jonah 2:8](#), Jonah evidently quoted the words, "regard lying vanities," from Psa. 31:6. He was saying, in effect, "I was trusting in my own cunning and scheming to save Israel and in so doing I was turning my back on the very source of my own mercy." This fits with verse 9 where he went on to say, in effect, "Alright, I'll go preach to Nineveh as I have promised (perhaps in his prayer in Sheol). If Israel is to be saved from the Ninevites, the LORD must do it. I give up!"

When he said, "Salvation is of the Lord" he did not have his own salvation in view (although his rescue from Sheol and release from his willful way was of the Lord too), nor the salvation of Nineveh (for he was against that). It was the salvation of his beloved Israel from the Assyrians in the days to come that was on his heart. He was willing to forsake the empty vanities of his scheming and plotting to be Israel's savior and entrust them to the mercies of God.

The third prayer was no sooner uttered than the Lord spoke to the fish and Jonah was vomited out on dry ground. How fortunate for him that the fish was more prompt in obeying the voice of the Lord than he had been! (Compare Balaam's ass in [Num. 22:33](#).)

CHAPTER 4

The Word of the Lord Proclaimed

Jonah 3:1 – 9

JONAH'S RESPONSE TO HIS SECOND COMMISSION

It was a different Jonah that stood once again on the very shores from which he had so recently embarked for Tarshish. Chastened of the Lord, he was now willing to follow the ways of the Lord, even though he didn't understand His purposes or appreciate His sovereign grace. He was obedient, but reluctant. He was going in the right direction, but dragging his feet. He was willing to do the work of the Lord, but missing the joy of the Lord. He was willing to do the WILL of God even though he did not yet fully know the HEART of God.

Jonah was different, but his task was the same. God had not changed His mind. Jonah was right back where he had started. Much had happened since the Lord first sent him to Nineveh but only a short time had elapsed.

How tragic it is today when a believer continues in his own way, not merely for a few days or weeks, but for years. He finally may come back to the starting point, but with most of his life wasted in serving self when he could have been serving God. Every hour spent in rebellion is an hour lost. Every step taken in self will is one to be retraced.

Before, when he was asked to "cry against" Nineveh, Jonah had fled for fear the city might repent. Now the Lord evidently did not even tell him what he should preach until later. For all Jonah knew God might ask him to actually offer mercy to the Assyrians. But now he was willing to act "according to the word of the Lord." He made arrangements for his transportation and started out on the long (well over 600 miles) trip to the great city.

JONAH ARRIVES IN NINEVEH

As noted before, **Nineveh** was both a city (eight miles or so in circumference) and a complex of cities, a "Greater Nineveh" (a three days' journey around its walls). The walls of Nineveh, as described in the commentaries, were an almost incredible feat of engineering. Though they probably were not as massive at the time of Jonah as they were later, they eventually were an estimated one hundred feet⁹ in height and were broad enough for chariots to race along the top, three abreast. Greater Nineveh provided housing for a large population and enough farm and pasture land to provide for any prolonged siege they might face. That such a well protected city should be overthrown within a few weeks would seem inconceivable, but Jonah did not for a moment think that God COULD not destroy Nineveh; his concern was that He WOULD not do so.

⁹ See estimates in the [International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia](#), article on Nineveh.

As Jonah approached the gates to the city, the greatest miracle of the book of Jonah was just ahead of him. His was an "evangelistic team" of only one man, with no radio and television coverage, no tracts or literature, and no public address system. Yet in less than forty days, an estimated 600,000 people¹⁰ were on their knees before the Lord in faith and repentance.

THE HISTORICITY OF JONAH'S MINISTRY

Did this mighty working of God actually take place? Jonah says it did. Does the history born of archeology confirm it? While no reference to Jonah has been found in the annals of Nineveh, there is a page of Assyrian history that can best be explained by taking Jonah's visit to Nineveh into account.

About three years before Jeroboam II of Israel began his reign,¹¹ the Assyrians discontinued their practice of constant savage warfare and for over fifty years were no longer a menace to Israel. It was not until after the death of Jeroboam that Assyria returned to her aggressive militarism.

It would seem that SOMETHING HAPPENED to interrupt the advance of Assyrian arms in the middle of Adadnirari's reign as sole monarch, since all recorded victories of consequence appear to date from the first half of his reign of twenty-eight years, and because, contrary to the practice of all other rulers of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, we have no detailed annals or other records of his campaigns. At all events, from about 797 on we hear nothing of further invasions of Syria and virtually nothing about any military exploits. His successors, whose reigns covered the period from 782 to 745 B.C., continued to lose ground won by Adadnirari during the first years of his reign. Syria was left almost entirely to itself after repeated thrusts had failed to win any decisive success. It thus became possible for several strong states to be established in Syria and Palestine ...¹²

What could be a more cogent reason for the interruption of Adadnirari's military career, at this particular time, than the one given in Scripture?

It was Jonah who prophesied the success of Jeroboam against the enemies of Israel (2 Kings 14:25), a feat made possible, at least in part, by the radical change of Assyrian foreign policy during his reign. Why should we doubt that God used Jonah to implement his own prophecy through his ministry to Nineveh, its people and its king?

JONAH'S MINISTRY

¹⁰ See estimates in the International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, article on Nineveh.

¹¹ In his book, Old Testament Times (pages 223,228) Harrison indicates that Joash (of Israel), father of Jeroboam II, died about 782 B.C., and that Jeroboam himself died about 753. Since we are told in 2 Kings 14:23 that Jeroboam reigned forty-one years, he must have begun as co-regent with his father about the year 794 B.C.

¹² Encyclopedia Americana, 1974 edition, Vol. 2, page 578.

It seems unlikely that God would send Jonah to Nineveh with a warning of imminent judgment at a time when they had already, for one reason or another, ceased to prey upon their neighboring kingdoms. Is it not more probable that Jonah's ministry was the CAUSE of this change in their policy? Did God send His prophet to them during a slump in their national affairs so that their fears and discouragement might predispose them to repentance? Or did He intervene at a time when they were "going great guns" for conquest, with Israel right in their sights, and stop them cold for over fifty years?

What made this national repentance of such a barbaric people possible? The reasons given in Scripture are sufficient.

It was not only the preaching of Jonah ([Luke 11:32](#)), but his very person, that brought Nineveh to repentance. We are told in Luke 11:30 that Jonah was a SIGN to the men of Nineveh. He was a sign to them because of his experience in the fish. Not just that he told them of it, or even that he had scars or skin discoloration to prove it (as some have suggested), but because Nineveh had evidently already heard of his experiences before he arrived. He was a sign as Christ was a sign much later.

The entombment and the resurrection of Christ was a SIGN, not because the disciples preached it, which of course they did, but because the leaders of Israel themselves personally KNEW that He had been placed in the tomb, that He was there for three days and nights, and that He had risen. They had been the ones to seal the tomb and to pay off the guards to suppress their report of what had happened after the three days.

How could Nineveh have known about Jonah?

When the raging sea had been calmed, the sailors had only one option open to them. They had already thrown their cargo overboard and the ship was about to break up. The nearest land was still their embarkation point, for in the storm they had "rowed desperately to RETURN to land" (Jonah 1:13 NASB). They arrived back in Joppa, and what a story they had to tell! The fierceness of the storm must have been evident to all from the condition of the ship. Their story of Jonah's part in it and the sudden calm became believable when these former idolaters proceeded to keep the vows they had made to Jehovah. The order of events in chapter 2 indicates that they had not seen the fish swallow Jonah. However, there would be no explanation for Jonah arriving back to land in only three days, alive and well, apart from Jonah's own story. Since the fish vomited him up on DRY land, the fish may well have been beached and left as evidence. There may also have been eye witnesses to the manner of Jonah's return.

With merchants from every country coming and going through the busy seaport, such a story would quickly find its way to Nineveh, particularly if the mariners had been told that it was in regard to that very city that Jonah had fled from the presence of the Lord.

Imagine the effect on those in the gateway of the great city, still excited over the story from Joppa, when a stranger appeared and announced himself as "Jonah." He

entered into the city, walked through the gathering crowds of excited people for about a day and then announced, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" This was the epitome of his message, but Jonah 3:8 indicates that he told them the reason for the verdict against them in no uncertain terms. Also questions from the people would bring out his early disobedience and the steps God had taken to bring him to Nineveh.

THE RESPONSE OF NINEVEH

With his very presence a sign, and his preaching a dramatic warning of impending disaster, word was quickly taken to the king. The king and people alike "believed God." In Luke 11:32 it says they repented. Both, of course, are true. They also indicated their repentance in ways that to them, and to God, were fitting. The meaning of the word used in Luke for "repentance" is to "think differently or afterwards, i.e., to reconsider" (Strong's Concordance). When they believed God they thought differently, and as a result they acted differently. "They turned from their evil way" (Jonah 3:10).

Some commentators suggest that 3:6 be changed to read, "For word HAD COME unto the king." This would make the fasting and sackcloth of verse 5 merely obedience to the decree of the king, whereas it specifically says, "the people believed God (not 'obeyed the king') and proclaimed a fast." From this suggested change they draw the conclusion that the repentance was shallow. The way the account is written it would be more in keeping with the context (if a change is to be made in verse 6) to insert a word and read it, "for word came EVEN to the king." The people had already believed God and made an unofficial proclamation among themselves. The king, hearing about it, evidently believed God also and made the proclamation official. The king's proclamation called for works meet for repentance (compare [Matt. 3:8](#)), specifically mentioning their ways as "wicked" (Jonah 3:8 NASB) and their hands as being filled with violence. It is not merely the KING of Nineveh who will rise at the judgment and witness against the Israel of Christ's day, but the MEN of Nineveh (Matt. 12:41). As to the reality of their repentance, it is corroborated by Christ when He cites it as an example of what the leaders of Israel in His day should have done but did not do. It is also indicated in the book of Jonah, for God spared them from the threatened judgment.

When the word of the Lord first came to Jonah he rejected it and was chastened. When "word came unto the king" he and his people believed it and were spared from judgment. God puts supreme importance on man's reaction to His word, whether he be believer or unbeliever, Jew or Gentile. Paul emphasizes this when he commends the Thessalonians saying, "For this cause also thank we 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" (1 Thess. 2:13).

There is quite a contrast between the influence of the leadership in Nineveh and that in Israel during the time of Christ. Nineveh's king joined his people in repentance at the preaching of Jonah. The leaders of Israel led their people in rebellion, twice over,¹³ in

¹³ Once when they crucified Christ and again when they stoned Stephen (Acts 7), and in so doing effectively rejected the offer of the kingdom that had been made by Peter in Acts 3:19,20.

spite of the preaching of a "greater than Jonah" and the early Acts ministry of His Spirit filled Apostles.

The repentance of the Assyrians is all the more astounding when we realize that they were not actually offered deliverance in Jonah's message. What Jonah said concerning the possibility that God, in His merciful kindness, would spare Nineveh was uttered in his own country, before he came to the great city, and not mentioned again until the Assyrians had already repented (Jonah 4:2). If deliverance had been specifically offered it would have savored of unbelief for them to say, "WHO KNOWS, God MAY turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish" (Jonah 3:9 NASB). Furthermore, they didn't know, as Jonah knew, from such Scriptures as Exodus 34:6 and Numbers 14:18, that God is a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and one who repents of evil. Their heathen gods were surely not so!

They may have been encouraged to hope for mercy, however, by the very fact that God had gone to such great lengths to bring them the warning of judgment. God had not merely spoken ABOUT their situation to others (as later He did through Nahum), but He had spoken TO them and had even raised a prophet from the dead to do so.

In contrast, Israel, in the New Testament, was not only clearly offered forgiveness, but God, through His prophets and apostles, and even Christ Himself, had wept over them and pleaded with them to turn from their wicked ways - but THEY repented NOT. The lesson seems clear that to have the Word of God is not only a glorious privilege ([Rom. 3:1,2](#)) but also a grave responsibility. Israel had heard the Word of the Lord for so long and so often that they weren't listening any more.

So people today, in so-called "Christian nations," are often more difficult to reach than those who, like the Ninevites, hear it for the first time. To have the Oracles of God is indeed wonderful IF they are heeded. If not, the very table spread with the good things of the Word becomes "a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense" ([Rom. 11:9](#), from [Psa. 69:22](#)).

The wonderful word of His grace is the greatest possession of the Gentile world today, but it has been so neglected and rejected that the time must be near when the warning of Romans 11:20-22 will be carried out. "Thou standest by faith, Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches (Israel), take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee (Gentiles), goodness, IF THOU CONTINUE IN HIS GOODNESS: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."¹⁴

At the Great White Throne Judgment many unsaved, living today, will stand ashamed before the Ninevites. The Ninevites had only a warning of judgment, these

¹⁴ The warning is not that one who has been saved may be lost. This would be contrary to the very message of grace. The warning is that the amnesty now in effect toward the Gentiles will be rescinded and the day of grace brought to a close.

had the message of the grace of God. They only had their message for forty days, these have had it available all their lives. They had only one prophet, these have the complete Word of God. They had the risen Jonah to authenticate the message, these have the resurrected and glorified Son of God. Yet the Ninevites believed God while these men of today have turned their backs on the gospel of grace! How much the unbelievers of Christendom will have to answer for!

CHAPTER 5

The Mercy of the Lord Demonstrated

Jonah 3:10

NINEVEH IS SPARED

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way and God repented of the evil, that He had said He would do unto them; and He did it not."

It is instructive to notice that it was not because the people of Nineveh covered their animals with sackcloth and denied them food and water, nor even because they themselves sat in sackcloth and ashes, that God repented. It was because they turned from their evil way. Years later God said, "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced (evil), turn from their evil, I will repent" (Jer. 18:8). He spoke again in Jer. 26:13 saying, "Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent of the evil that He hath pronounced against you." In Joel 2:12-14a (NASB) God pleads with Judah, "Yet even now (in a scene of judgment in the Day of the Lord) . . . return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments." Joel takes up the plea with the words, "Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil. Who knows whether (in spite of the grave warnings of judgment) He will not turn and relent?"

Another condition noted in the Old Testament that can bring about repentance on the part of God is the intercession of a godly man. It was the intercession of Moses that caused God to repent of His proposed destruction of Israel ([Ex. 32:12,14](#)). The intercession of David and the elders ([1 Chron. 21:15-17](#); [2 Sam. 24:16,17](#)) caused God to cut the chastening of Israel short. The intercession of Amos ([Amos 7:3,5,6](#)) twice caused God to repent of threatened judgments. When a nation has gone too far in their continual wickedness, however, even this will not avail, as Amos 7:8 indicates. Indeed, God told Jeremiah, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people" (Jer. 15:1).

The Ninevites did not have these Scriptures to guide them and they had no intercessor. In all the prayers Jonah prayed in his prophecy, he did not once pray for Nineveh. But God saw what the earnestness of their hearts wrought in them when they believed God. He repented of the threatened judgment. "He did it not."

THE PLACE OF REPENTANCE IN THE STORY

Jonah's repentance	Nineveh's repentance	God's repentance
1. Repentance of a believing Jew	1. Repentance of a pagan Gentile city	1. Repentance of the God of both Jew & Gentile (Rom. 3:29)
2. The word "repentance" is not used	2. Word used only in the N.T. refs (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32)	2. Word used three times (Jonah 3:9,10; 4:2)
3. Brought about by God through chastening	3. Brought about by preaching of Jonah (Matt. 12:41)	3. Brought about by Nineveh's repentance (3:10)
4. Resulted in Jonah being obedient (3:3)	4. Resulted in God repenting (3:10)	4. Resulted in Nineveh being spared (3:10)
5. It was evidence of his subjection to God in chastening (Heb. 12:9-11)	5. It was evidence of their faith (3:5)	5. It was evidence of God's compassion (4:11)

God's repentance here, and in other Scriptures, has been a puzzle in view of the clear statements in Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29 that God does not repent. It is interesting that shortly after Nineveh WAS destroyed many years later, in fulfillment of Nahum's prophecy, Jeremiah refers, in passing, to "the cities which the Lord overthrew and REPENTED NOT" (Jer. 20:16). Also God told Israel not to fear, for even as He did not repent when He thought to do them evil, so He will not repent of the good He plans for them ([Zech. 8:13-15](#)).

In the verses which speak of God not repenting, the context will indicate their significance. When repentance is equated to lying ([Num. 23:19](#)), when it would involve breaking His word ([Num. 23:19](#); [Jer. 4:28](#)), or when God has given His oath ([Psa. 110:4](#)), He will not, indeed cannot, repent. Also when there is no true repentance on the part of man God will not repent, as in the cases of Sodom and the later Ninevites of Nahum's day (Jer. 20:16); the times in Israel's history when God chastened them ([Zech. 8:14](#)); and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians ([Ezek. 24:14](#)).

Does God change when it is said that He does repent? Charles F. Baker asks on this point, "Which changes, the weather or the weather-vane? Which changes, the temperature or the thermometer?" And then he adds, "In one sense they both change, but in a truer sense the weather-vane and the thermometer do not change. The vane always points in the direction of the wind and the thermometer always registers the correct temperature."¹⁵ So when man changes, the apparent change in God is really an evidence of His CONSISTENCY in His attitude toward evil. Another writer puts it this

¹⁵ [A Dispensational Theology](#), Charles F. Baker, page 137.

way, "God's immutability is that of principle, not of plan and action. He immutably hates and punishes sin: hence, when a sinner repents, God turns from threatened vengeance to free pardon."¹⁶ In Exodus 32:11-14 God did not change. When there was an intercessor for Israel the SITUATION had changed. God was no longer acting on the basis of Israel's sin, but on the basis of Moses' intercession.

However part of the answer to the problem of God repenting has to do with the meaning of the word "repent" itself. Three words are involved: the Hebrew word *nacham* and the Greek words *metanoeo* and *metamelomai*.

The word used of the repentance of the Assyrians is the Greek word *metanoeo*, for it is only in the New Testament references that we are told that Nineveh repented. The basic idea of this word, according to W. E. Vine,¹⁷ is a change of mind. This word is not the equivalent of the Hebrew word used of God repenting. Comparing Psa. 110:4 with the quotation of it in Heb. 7:21 demonstrates it is not *metanoeo*, but *metamelomai* (which in every case could be translated, "regret") that best carries over the thought in *nacham*.

Something of the difference between the word used to describe the response of Nineveh to Jonah's message and the one used to describe God's response to their faith can be seen if we notice how they are translated in other passages. The former word is always represented by the English word "repent." The latter is used over one hundred times in the Old Testament and is translated "comfort" more than sixty times (in the Authorized Version). It is used in such places as Psa. 23:4, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me," and Isa. 40:1, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people."¹⁸ In the New American Standard Bible it is variously translated: comfort, console, appease, sorry, change the mind, regret, relent, and only once translated "repent." It is evident that *nacham* has a breadth of meaning not present in *metanoeo*.

Also the former word (*metanoeo*) is never used of God repenting (neither Rom. 11:29 nor Heb. 7:21 are this Greek word), while the latter (*nacham*) refers to God more often than to men in the passages where it is rendered "repent" in the King James Version.

In such passages as Jonah 3:10, *nacham* evidently does not indicate a change of mind on the part of God. Rather, it portrays His mercy and compassion pouring forth (in "comfort" to those involved) when His holiness has been satisfied.

The greatest demonstration of this kind of repentance on the part of God (though the word itself is not used) is in the treatment of the wicked who turn to the Lord in faith in view of Calvary. The same God who once said, "He that justifieth the wicked . . . (is) an

¹⁶ Lange's Commentary on Jonah, page 35.

¹⁷ An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine, pages 951,952.

¹⁸ It is striking that the name of the prophet who later prophesied against Nineveh, Nahum, is a form of this Hebrew word. The same God who REPENTED and brought comfort to NINEVEH later did NOT repent of the judgment on her and brought comfort to JUDAH. The meaning of the name "Nahum" draws attention to this contrast.

abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15), now justifies those who once were so wicked that He "gave them up" (Rom. 1:24,26,28), when they put their trust in Christ. The cross has satisfied the holiness of God so that He is free to deal in grace instead of judgment, without being Himself unrighteous ([Rom. 3:26](#)).

The repentance of Jonah made it possible for Nineveh to hear the word of God. The word of God brought the Ninevites to faith (compare [Rom. 10:14-17](#)). The repentance of the Ninevites made it possible for God to "repent;" to act in mercy that was in keeping with the compassion expressed in Jonah 4:11.

THE JUDGMENT DID NOT FALL.

CHAPTER 6

The Ways of the Lord Resented

Jonah Chapter 4

There must have been great rejoicing in Nineveh when the forty days were past and it became evident that God had spared them. Since the angels in heaven rejoice over only one sinner that repents, their rejoicing, too, must have known no bounds over the city-wide repentance that made possible this rescue from destruction.

JONAH'S ANGER

There was one man, however, who, like the brother of the prodigal son in Luke 15:28, wanted no part in the celebration. Jonah's anger flared and he took it upon himself to rebuke God in much the same way the older son rebuked his father in Luke 15:29,30. As the father went out to the angry son and reasoned earnestly, but graciously, with him ([Luke 15:31,32](#)), so God reasoned with Jonah and sought to bring him into the rejoicing that was in the Father's house.

There were reasons for Jonah's anger bursting forth at this time. First of all Jonah was weary. One wonders if the prodigal's brother would have spoken so rashly and harshly and so fully revealed his hidden resentment if the prodigal had arrived for breakfast. As it was, he came just as his brother was returning from the field, worn out from his day's work. Jonah had gone through a distressing experience at sea, had hastened to Nineveh over some 600 or more miles of burning desert, and then spent nearly six weeks preaching the Word of God to a wicked city. He was tired!

Also it seems that men of God are most prone to spiritual defeat right after a great victory. It was right after Elijah had stood against Jezebel and all the prophets of Baal and had seen the fire sent from heaven, having just heard the fickle multitude cry out "The Lord, He is God," that he fled to the wilderness. Tired, as Jonah was, Elijah spoke about being the only faithful man left and cried out, as Jonah did, for death.

It is important that we recognize the danger posed by physical weariness and by the "let down" after spiritual victories. It is vital not only so we can guard against becoming a "Jonah" at such times, but also so we can better understand and be patient with others when they face the same temptation.

This chapter indicates that one can be obedient to the Lord and used of God and still not appreciate why God is leading as He is. God does not dismiss us from His service for the little "peeves" that we all too often indulge in from day to day. He does not limit Himself only to those who consistently are "radiantly victorious Christians." This does not excuse our Jonah-like conduct, however, for our situation is more conducive to "total victory" than Jonah's was. We have a completed Bible, full knowledge of what God is doing, of His love for a world that motivates Him and we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This should, instead, encourage us and temper our criticism of other servants of the Lord.

The weariness and the reaction to spiritual stress were not the cause of Jonah's resentment however - they were just the occasion for the hidden thoughts and feelings to rise to the surface and boil over in rash and angry words. Back in chapter one and verse 10 the sailors had asked Jonah why he fled from the presence of the Lord. The question was not answered there. The answer is finally brought to light in verse two of this chapter. He tells us here what his reason had been for disobedience to God's commission. We can paraphrase his words, "I knew this would happen. I knew that you would spare this city if they believed my message and repented. It was to prevent this from happening that I fled to Tarshish." The NASB translation brings this thought out clearly, "in order to forestall this (the sparing of Nineveh) I fled to Tarshish." It was not the righteousness of God, or His judgments, that Jonah was rejecting. It was His GRACE. The flesh always prefers a God of law and runs away from a God of grace, particularly when that grace is shown toward others.¹⁹

Under chastening Jonah had finally repented of his disobedience and preached God's message to the city. He had not, alas, given up his hope that God's threat would even yet be carried out and Nineveh destroyed. He still could see no other hope for his people Israel being delivered from the cruel Assyrians. He had said, "Salvation belongeth to the Lord" but he still felt that his way was better than God's. It seemed to him that the "God of Israel" was more loving toward Israel's enemies than toward her.

GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL

Was Jonah right? This chapter does not even bring up God's love for Israel, but only His right to spare Nineveh. That God did indeed love Israel, that he was more concerned about her than Jonah was, is shown by a number of considerations, however.

- (1) Jonah as a type of Christ (see chapter 7) was the assurance that God's love will lead to even greater efforts (and infinitely more productive ones) than those of Jonah toward the salvation of his nation. Jonah was not

¹⁹ See chapter 10, following, where this theme is developed in detail.

Israel's savior, but, considered as a type, he pointed forward to the One who is.

- (2) Jonah as a type of Israel (see chapter 8) was the assurance that, even though Israel be chastened by the feared Assyrians, and worse, Israel too would have a national resurrection, Israel would not only be delivered from their tribulation, but from their rebellion against God. They, like Jonah, would even yet fulfill their calling and carry out their ministry as a kingdom of priests and the witnesses of Jehovah.
- (3) The revival in Ninevah no doubt softened the treatment later received from the Assyrians, even though it was terrible at best. They seemed to be vaguely aware that they were an instrument in God's hand in the chastening of God's people. When they took inordinate delight in their allotted task and went far beyond God's purposed chastening of the ten tribes, however, they brought upon themselves eventual judgment ([Isa. 10:11-15](#); [36:10](#)).
- (4) God demonstrated to Jonah the way that Israel could escape their coming chastening: by repenting as Nineveh did! When Jonah's worst fears were realized, and Assyria finally came against Samaria, the southern kingdom did escape as a result of the revival under Hezekiah. Later Joel apparently quoted Jonah 4:2 and 3:9a as the basis of an appeal to the nation of Judah when they were about to be taken into captivity by the Babylonians ([Joel 2:13,14a](#)). It was as though Joel was saying, "If God repented of the evil against Nineveh, He will do the same for you if you, like Nineveh, repent." The very graciousness and merciful kindness of God that Jonah thought was a THREAT to ISRAEL (when applied to Nineveh) was cited by Joel as JUDAH'S only HOPE.
- (5) If God was able and willing to deal with His wayward prophet to spare Nineveh, surely He would be able and willing to keep Nineveh in check to spare Israel, if only Israel would believe God.
- (6) Any chastening that Israel might receive at the hands of Nineveh would be the evidence of God's love for her. Proverbs 3:12 was written long before Jonah's day. "For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth: even as a father the son in whom He delighteth."
- (7) Quite aside from the considerations in Jonah, other Scripture leaves no doubt as to God's love for Israel. "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you" (Deut. 7:7,8). See also [Deut. 23:5](#); [33:3](#); [Isa. 63:9](#); [Jer. 31:3](#); [Hos. 14:4](#) and many other passages.

JONAH'S DESPAIR

Jonah now prayed in bitterness of heart, "Take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. "

Years before, God's prophet, Elijah, had made the same request. Not trusting God to keep His testimony alive in Israel he said, in effect, "I'm the only one left. You may as well take me and be done with it!" God demonstrated that Elijah was not indispensable, and that he was not the only one left, by "retiring" him. He is almost immediately told, "Elisha ... shalt thou anoint in thy room" (1 Kings 19:16). His request to die was not granted; he hasn't died to this day! He will even be given a further glorious ministry during the tribulation period and will die, not as a religious "suicide," but as a martyr ([Rev. 11:7](#)). Here is a case where God answered prayer. He said, "NO!" But this answer was exceeding abundantly above all Elijah could have asked or thought!

I wonder how many discouraged and confused servants of the Lord will be in the midst of praying, "Take, I beseech Thee, my life from me" when their prayer will be interrupted by a shout and a trumpet blast from heaven and they will find that the answer to their prayer is a wonderful, glorious, and eternal "NO!" (1 Thess. 4:16-18)?

GOD'S MINISTRY TO HIS ANGRY PROPHET

Jonah requested twice to die, in effect to be returned to Sheol, but God, in great grace, denied his supplications. God not only had returned him to life to preach to Nineveh, He KEPT him alive that He might minister to Jonah. The saying, "The man of God is immortal until his work is done" is a half truth. God does not keep us here only that we might work for Him. He may keep us here long after our work is done that HE might work IN US. The truth that we are His workmen, laborers together with Him, is eclipsed by the even grander truth that "We are His workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). What God did FOR Nineveh can be stated in a few words, "God repented of the evil ... and He did it not." What He did IN His servant Jonah takes up at least three chapters.

It was not enough that God's man knew his theology (important and basic as that is). It was not enough until he knew and shared the heart of God in love and compassion. There is more to our responsibility than to be "true to the message" we have been given. In 2 Cor. 5:20 Paul didn't say that we are to believe in reconciliation or even teach it (though we must do both), but that we are to BESEECH MEN TO BE RECONCILED. We can be ever so straight in our theology and yet never warn men "night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Notice how the priest and the Levite were willing to argue the "theology" of "who is my neighbor?", while the Good Samaritan went to the afflicted man and poured in the oil and the wine. HE had COMPASSION on the MAN. The story of the woman taken in adultery in John 8 illustrates the same fatal weakness in the leaders of Israel in Christ's day. It tends to be the plague of fundamental Christianity today also.

It was His very concern for Nineveh that caused God to concentrate on Jonah. Solomon once said, "If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength" (Ecc. 10:10). God takes time to whet the edge of His instruments.

In Matt. 25:24-30 the "one talent man" misjudged his master as a "hard man" and was dealt with harshly. Jonah knew God as gracious and kind, and was handled graciously and kindly (See [2 Sam. 22:26,27](#) on this principle). In response to Jonah's outburst He merely asked, "Doest thou well to be angry?"

Perhaps Jonah saw in the mildness of God's response a ray of hope. He left the city and made himself a little shelter from the sun where he could watch and see what would happen to the city. If he thought that God might even yet destroy the city, he was right! But he would have had a long wait if he remained until it happened. It was well over 175 years later that God did destroy Nineveh in fulfillment of the prophecy of Nahum. What a contrast we have between Jonah looking out over a believing and repentant Gentile city, angrily longing for its destruction, and Christ gazing upon a wicked Jerusalem, weeping over it and longing for its salvation!

God proceeded with Jonah in a way reminiscent of the way He had once worked with David. David had sinned grievously before God, but was unwilling to face the enormity of what he had done. When the prophet Nathan related his sin to him disguised as the deeds of another man, David was able to see clearly and judge righteously. Then he was told, "Thou art the man." Jonah, too, was made to see his fault objectively, but it is left up to the reader to make the judgment. Jonah was left, at the close of the book, with not a thing to say.

When God graciously provided him with a gourd to shade him from the sun, he was as exceedingly glad as he had been exceedingly displeased when God graciously spared Nineveh. When a worm took away his shade, a hot sultry wind blew, and the desert sun boiled down on his head, he was as angry as he had been when God spared the city. Surely he must have thought as Jacob once did when he said, "All of these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). In reality each of these distressing things were specifically "prepared" (or better "appointed") by God and were FOR him - working to bring him to a place where he could find joy in his ministry. God was working a gourd, a worm, and a sultry wind together for Jonah's good. We shouldn't be too quick to judge him for not seeing the hand of God in it all. We have [Romans 8:28](#) to assure us, yet we often fail to see the good in the worms and sultry winds which God appoints for us.

Jonah had done the will of God, but he had no joy in it. He had responded to the "call of duty" but he did not share the concern for men that was in God's heart. Such service is full of frustrations. When one is where God wants him to be, but resents being there, every inconvenience or hardship becomes a source of irritation and even bitterness. A sense of duty may take a missionary to Philippi, but he can sing in prison there only if the love of Christ constrains him.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

God asked Jonah three questions in this chapter. He asked, "Doest thou well to be angry?" in regard to the sparing of Nineveh (v. 4). Jonah ignored the question and stalked off to his observation post outside the city. In verse 9 He asked, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" because it was NOT spared. Jonah's answer was, "I do well to be angry, angry enough to die!" (Amplified Bible). The third question called his attention to the gross reversal of his values. The words "had pity" (v. 10) and "spare" (v. 11) are the same word in the Hebrew. The "you" in v. 10 and the "I" in v. 11 are emphatic. The passage reads in part, "YOU had compassion on the plant ... should I not have compassion on Nineveh?" (NASB). God's pity was for the whole city of Nineveh and the very lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Jonah's pity was not actually for the gourd, but for HIMSELF, involving merely the comfort of only one man.

Jonah had sinned wilfully and had been forgiven, even though his repentance had been almost forced upon him by the chastening hand of God. Should not God forgive those who had sinned in ignorance, not having the oracles of God? Should He not spare those who had repented by faith apart from any chastening, and whose children (not even knowing right from wrong) and cattle (not having moral responsibility) would share in either their judgment or their rescue?

This question remains unanswered by Jonah, partly because he really had no answer, and partly that it might remain for every reader of the book to ponder and answer for himself. It is a powerful appeal for all to see the compassionate heart of a loving God and reflect that compassion and share that love.²⁰

There is no excuse for us when we find ourselves in Jonah's place. We have an almost infinitely greater demonstration of God's heart of compassion and love in this age of grace. We are indwelt by His Holy Spirit, by whom the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. We stand in Christ's stead beseeching men to be reconciled to God and are able to do all things through Christ who gives us power. Since Paul has said, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8), we never need to be a Jonah.

CHAPTER 7

Jonah and Christ

"As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40).

²⁰ Jonah was asked four significant questions for which he offered no answers. The ship master asked, "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" (1:6). The mariners asked, "Why hast thou done this?" (1:10). God asked, "Doest thou well to be angry (over Nineveh being spared)?" (4:4). The book closes with God asking, "Should I not spare Nineveh?" Jonah's insensitivity, disobedience, and resentment are thus measured against God's gracious love and mercy, and found wanting!

WHAT IS A TYPE?

A "type" is a person, object, or event in the Old Testament which was divinely intended to point forward in description and illustration to some New Testament truth. That in the New Testament which corresponds to the type is called the "antitype." The relationship between the type and the antitype is similar to the relationship between a hammer mark in the wood and the hammer that made it, or between a wound and the instrument that caused it. In [John 20:25](#) the word "type" (Greek, "*tupos*") is twice used of the "PRINT" of the nails in the hands of Christ. It is almost as though the realities in the New Testament have left their finger-prints in the Old Testament as proof that they were there, in the mind of God, long before they were revealed in full.

Since there is disagreement as to what is typical and what is not, it may be convenient to think of types under four somewhat arbitrary headings as follows:

- **Confirmed type.** The relationship to antitype is specifically acknowledged in Scripture. The rock smitten by Moses is a type as confirmed in the Word of God. 1 Cor. 10:4 says, "that rock was Christ."
- **Evident type.** Not specifically confirmed as a type by Scripture, but bearing striking analogies to the antitype and thus generally recognized as a type. Joseph is never actually referred to as a type, yet the similarities between Joseph and Christ are numerous and very clear.
- **Possible type.** The correspondences with the antitype are vague or incidental. Such correspondences are not generally accepted as being a type. The burning bush could be thought of as a type of Israel, hated by men, chastened by God, but miraculously preserved. Yet there would not be general agreement that it was intended by God to be typical of this.
- **Illustration.** Not a true type at all, but simply an illustration. The Mount of Olives split in two, and creating a valley between its halves, is a good illustration of the insertion of this age of grace between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel 9 ([Zech. 14:4](#)). It could not be considered a TYPE of this by any stretch of the imagination. The Old Testament is an endless source of valuable illustrations, but these should not be presented indiscriminately as types.

Concerning any specific type, there may be some details in which the typology is "confirmed" and others in which it is "evident," or "possible," or only "illustration."

JONAH AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

Jonah is a confirmed type of Christ. It is Jesus Christ Himself who tells us so. He foreshadows:

- (1) The fact of His burial. As before noted, the expression in Matt. 10:40 (NASB), "just as. . . so" seems to be too strong to be referring only to the

length of time involved. Where that time was spent appears to be of at least equal importance. Jonah was in the belly of the fish, Christ was in "the heart of the earth." If Jonah was alive for the duration of his stay in the fish's belly, then he must be a type of Christ's sojourn in Sheol (Greek, *Hades*), with the fish's belly only likened to Sheol. Many commentators, perhaps most, take this view. It presents some problems however:

- In Jonah 2:2 the fish's belly is not "likened to" Sheol. Rather, in the fish's belly Jonah was praying and recalled a previous prayer offered from another place, SHEOL.
 - If Jonah was equating the belly of the fish to Sheol, he was surprisingly uninformed about the place. It is true that he may not have known that believers in Sheol/Hades were "in Abraham's Bosom" ([Luke 16:22,23](#)) and "comforted" ([Luke 16:25](#)). But for a prophet of God to think that the location of the righteous dead was like the dark, sweltering, sickening, suffocating, and terrifying belly of a fish is highly improbable. If this was his view of Sheol he would hardly have volunteered to go there, saying that it would be better than life ([Jonah 4:3,8](#)).
 - It is hardly likely that Christ was referring to Sheol/Hades by the expression, "heart of the earth." While the word translated "earth" IS used when the planet is in view, it is also used when the ground under one's feet is meant. It is from the word meaning "soil" according to Strong's Concordance. It is the word used in [Matt. 13:5](#), "some fell on the stony places where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth." In [Acts 9:4,8](#), where it speaks of Saul of Tarsus who "fell to the earth . . . rose up from the earth," this is the one used. The heart of the earth could refer to the tomb in which His body was buried. This fits the context of [Matt. 12:40](#) better, for those to whom the sign was given saw Him placed in the TOMB, not in Sheol/Hades. It was the tomb they sealed and which showed up visibly empty after three days and nights. That His soul was in Sheol/Hades is true (and noted in [Acts 2:31](#)), but the Pharisees could not witness what happened to His soul, only what became of His body. So also the gospel for us is not that Christ died and went to Sheol/Hades, but that He died and was buried ([1 Cor. 15:4](#)).
- (2) The time duration of Christ's burial ([Matt. 12:40](#)).
 - (3) The fact of His resurrection; by implication from the termination of His entombment and from His subsequent ministry. Both Jonah and Christ became a "sign" after the three days and nights were past.
 - (4) The fact that Christ was to be a sign to His generation by virtue of His

resurrection ([Luke 11:30](#)). J. Sidlow Baxter points out,

The three notable prophets who came in quick succession during the last period before the destruction of the ten-tribed kingdom, namely, Elijah, Elisha and Jonah, are a kind of 'type trio.' Elisha dies and is buried, but in his death gives life to another - as our Lord by His death gives life to others. Jonah, in symbol, not only dies but goes down into Sheol, and then comes up that he should not see corruption, as did our Lord. Elijah ascends to heaven and casts down his mantle, as our Lord ascended and sent down the Pentecostal Spirit.²¹

This is lovely, but it seems inconsistent to so compare one who really did die and another who in fact ascended, to a third who only "in symbol" went to Sheol. To omit the words "in symbol" would be true to the text of Jonah and would enrich the parallel.

- (5) Christ's greatness ([Matt. 12:41](#); [Luke 11:32](#)). The surpassing greatness of Christ is demonstrated in some specific ways in contrast to Jonah. Christ is infinitely greater in His person, being not just a godly man, but the God-man. He is majestically greater in His offices, for He is not only a prophet, in a sense that no other prophet ever was, but also priest and king. Christ was perfect in obedience as God's sent One ([Heb. 10:7](#)) while Jonah had to be pushed every inch of the way. Our Lord spent about thirty-three years on His earthly mission while Jonah begrudged the forty days spent in Nineveh. How much the Savior's love surpassed that of the prophet! His love for the children is in stark contrast to the callous indifference for which Jonah was rebuked in his prophecy's closing verse. Christ wept over a doomed city while Jonah sulked over a rescued one. It is true that Jonah loved Israel and was willing to sacrifice Nineveh, but Christ loved the WORLD and sacrificed HIMSELF.

OTHER PARALLELS BETWEEN JONAH AND CHRIST

There are numerous other comparisons that can be made between Jonah and Christ which are not necessarily typical but are, at the very least, interesting.

- (1) Both Jonah and Christ are identified with Galilee. Jonah was born there, only about three miles from Nazareth where Christ spent His young manhood. In a rather characteristic example of misinformation the Pharisees based their rejection of Christ partly on their statement, "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52). They were wrong twice in one short statement. They assumed that Christ had been born in Galilee when in fact He had been born in Bethlehem. They implied that no prophet had ever come from Galilee when in fact Jonah was from there, and probably Nahum also.

²¹ [Explore the Book](#), J. Sidlow Baxter, Vol. 4, page 183.

- (2) Both Jonah and Christ were involved in a miraculous storm at sea (Mark 4:37-41). Some parallels have been noted and a careful study of the two passages will reveal others.
- (3) Jonah was guilty, but those who threw him into the sea were innocent. Christ was innocent, but those who crucified Him were guilty. Nevertheless, by divine imputation Christ was ACCOUNTED guilty (2 Cor. 5:21) and made it possible for the guilty to be ACCOUNTED righteous by imputation if they would but believe the gospel.
- (4) The idolaters in the boat tried in every way to save themselves. They tried sacrifice of worldly goods (they threw their cargo overboard), works (they rowed hard), and religion ("then prayed every man to his god"), but their salvation came only through the death of Jonah. So also with Christ, in regard to spiritual salvation.
- (5) Jonah died at the hands of Gentiles (the pagan mariners who cast him into the sea). Christ died at the hands of Gentiles (the Roman soldiers).
- (6) Jonah's death was at the hands of God. "THOU hadst cast me into the deep" (Jonah 2:3). Christ's death was at the hands of His Father, "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him" (Isa. 53:10). This is the aspect of His death pictured in the offering of Isaac by his father, Abraham.
- (7) Jonah's death was voluntary. He willingly died to deliver the lives of the mariners. Christ's death was voluntary, to save our souls (John 10:17,18).
- (8) Jonah prayed as he was dying (Jonah 2:4,7), but he died. The prayer was answered however (Jonah 2:7) and he was able to go back to his place "before the Lord" in ministry. Christ prayed as He was dying (Psa. 22:19-21) but He died. The prayer was answered (Psa. 22:22-24) and He was raised from the dead.
- (9) Jonah was in Sheol and came forth because of HIS prayer WHILE THERE, rather than another's prayer from outside Sheol, as in the case of Lazarus (John 11:41-44). Christ was in Sheol/Hades and came forth by His OWN POWER in resurrection as the CONQUEROR of Sheol (Eph. 4:8-10, Compare Judges 5:12 for the meaning of "led captivity captive"). In both cases it was the ONLY incident of its kind.
- (10) Jonah preached to Gentiles and they believed. Christ sent the gospel to Gentiles (under the kingdom program, Matt. 28:19,20) and many will believe (Rev. 7:9,10). Also, the gospel goes out to Gentiles today (under the mystery program) and multitudes have believed.
- (11) Jonah, looking out over a city of believing and repentant Gentiles, angry because they are not destroyed, stands in stark contrast to Christ looking

out over a city of unbelieving Jews and weeping because they will not be spared ([Matt. 23:37,38](#); [Luke 13:34,35](#); [19:41-44](#)). The city that Jonah wished destroyed WAS destroyed many years later. The city that Christ longed should be spared will one day be rebuilt in greater glory that ever and will be the capital of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

- (12) Set forth in detail in chapter 2, it should be noted briefly here that Jonah, like Christ, loved Israel and was willing to die for her safety. Unlike Christ, he did not love Israel's enemies.
- (13) When Christ died He had been disowned by Israel, turned over to Gentiles, and thrust out of the city to die outside the gates of the "Holy City." His death, then, was shown to be not only, nor even primarily, for Israel as such. They had rejected Him. It was outside the camp and for SINNERS that He died. In spite of their unbelief, God honored the covenants by giving Israel the first opportunity to have the salvation He purchased at Calvary. But only when they were willing to forsake their pretensions to superior holiness, identify themselves as sinners, and cast themselves on the mercy of God could they be saved. So it is for the sake of the wickedest nation on earth, a Gentile nation, that Jonah died and arose from the dead! What a type (evident) of Christ! And how this consideration gives point to Jonah being chosen as the only sign to the hardened and unbelieving leaders of Israel!

Salvation does not depend on believing the story of Jonah. It depends on believing what God says about CHRIST. Once a man has believed the "record that God gave of His Son" (1 John 5:10) he will be born again, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and will have little trouble believing the rest of the Word of God. It is sad, however, that a false issue has been raised concerning this book. The question of whether a man can live for three days in a fish's belly has obscured the real issue here, whether or not God can raise the dead. The matter of resurrection is vital, for if God cannot raise Jonah then is not Christ risen, who is specifically foreshadowed by Jonah in this regard. The unbelieving heart of many will still reject the book, but let it be, at least, over a real and important issue.

CHAPTER 8

Jonah and Israel

The book of Jonah closes abruptly with God's rebuke of His prophet for not sharing His concern for the Ninevites and his lack of appreciation for what had been accomplished on their behalf. The subsequent history of Israel and Assyria indicates that Jonah's nation shared his fault.

It is noted by several commentators that Nineveh's repentance was shallow and short lived, although it lasted over fifty years, if the suggested dating of Jonah in the midst of Adadnirari's reign is valid. If there be any truth in this, this temporary

repentance may well have been because of Israel. Having believed God, the Ninevites needed teachers to bring them God's word and priests to represent them before Him.

OLD TESTAMENT "EVANGELISM"

The questions arise here, "Was Israel sent to the Gentiles? Where is there a 'great commission' in the Old Testament?"

It must be admitted that there is no specific "go ye into all the world and preach" until New Testament days. However, Israel was commissioned to an evangel and had a responsibility to carry it out.

They were to be a kingdom of priests, according to the proposal made in Exodus 19:6. Since the whole nation would be involved in the priesthood, this mediation would have to be carried out on behalf of the Gentile nations.

They were God's witnesses in the world. Isaiah 44:7 refers back to the time that God established Israel as a nation. In this context God says to them, "You are my witnesses" (v. 8). This fits with Romans 11. There Paul speaks of an olive tree and indicates that Israel composed the "natural branches" of the tree. The olive tree is not Israel, but represents God's witness in the world, finding its rich roots in Abraham who was to be a blessing to all nations. The only significant reference to an olive tree in the New Testament is found in Revelation 11 where the "two olive trees" are two WITNESSES ([Rev. 11:3,4](#)). Israel had been God's witness in the world, but largely lost that place to Gentiles due to their rejection of the risen Christ.

A limited testimony has actually been carried out in the Old Testament as evidenced by the experiences of the Queen of Sheba, Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar and the people of Nineveh.

The sons of the stranger (Gentiles) are assured of a reception by God if they will join themselves to the Lord, take hold of Israel's covenant and keep Israel's sabbath. "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:7. See also verses 3, 6 in this same chapter).

Large portions of the Old Testament prophecies are addressed to Gentile nations. Jeremiah was appointed a "prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:5) and Jonah was actually sent to a Gentile city.

The New Testament recognizes this truth. Christ did not reprove the Pharisees because they compassed land and sea to make one proselyte, but because, when they had obtained his conversion, they made him more a "child of hell" than themselves ([Matt. 23:15](#)).

That Christ was sent, not to Gentiles, but to the lost sheep of Israel does not rule out

Israel's commission. It only brings out that they were in no condition to carry it out until they had benefited from Christ's redemptive ministry to them. The very expression, "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22), indicates that Israel was to be a channel of salvation to Gentiles. He did not say, "Salvation is only FOR Jews."

It was not that they SHOULD not have been witnessing to Gentiles, but that all too often they WOULD not do so.

ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO "EVANGELIZE"

If Israel had followed up the ministry of Jonah, the repentance of the Ninevites might have been but the beginning of a long and glorious history of God working among Gentiles through Israel (see [chapter 11](#)). Israel could have had the benefit of converting a foe and potential conqueror, making them their friends. At the same time, they could have put themselves into a place of obedience to God that would have rendered them no longer deserving of the divine destruction that later came at the hands of the Assyrians.

During the battle for Britain a faithful and courageous pastor in England wrote somewhat as follows,

We would not give our young men as missionaries, now they are taken as soldiers. We would not give even ten percent of our income to convert the heathen across the channel, now we are taxed over fifty percent to slay them. We would not give our love, now they demonstrate their hate.

Another has said, "If we do not evangelize, we must militarize." The PREACHING of Jonah saved Nineveh from destruction, but the ATTITUDE of Jonah,²² representative of that of his nation, caused the newly "converted" people to stumble and resulted, ultimately, in Israel's destruction at their hands.

Instead of Israel ministering to Nineveh they failed to respond to the word of God themselves. Assyria had been spared because they believed one lone prophet. Israel rejected and persecuted the MANY prophets sent to THEM, and were severely chastened; and God used Assyria to do it; "Poetic justice" indeed.

The Man Jonah and Israel

JONAH AS A TYPE OF ISRAEL

In some ways Jonah stands as an evident type of the nation Israel, and in others as at least an illustration of God's relationship to that nation.

²² Once Jonah had carried out his specifically assigned task, he did not even stay in the city to teach them or exhort them to continued faith. Instead he hurried outside to manifest his angry disapproval of their rescue!

- (1) Like Jonah, Israel was given a commission to minister to the Gentiles. See [Exodus 19:6](#); [Isa. 44:7,8](#).
- (2) Jonah turned his back on his commission and got into what was evidently a merchant vessel. Israel turned her back on her ministry and "went into business," becoming deeply involved in selling and commerce all over the world.
- (3) Jonah left the land of Palestine and was traveling among the Gentiles. Compare Israel since the time of her kings.
- (4) Jonah became a source of trouble to his fellow passengers. Israel has for centuries been a source of trouble to the Gentiles. Even today the Jewish problem is the most explosive issue in the world.
- (5) Jonah was cast out by the Gentiles. Israel has been cast out by the Gentiles down through the centuries.
- (6) Jonah was swallowed by the fish. Israel will be engulfed in a time of tribulation specifically called "the time of Jacob's trouble" ([Jer. 30:7](#)).
- (7) Jonah was in the fish for three days and was raised from the dead at the end of that time. Israel will be in her time of trouble (the last half of the seventieth week of [Daniel 9](#)) for three years and over. See [Hosea 6:2](#) where we have Israel "in her affliction" ([Hosea 5:15](#)) saying, "After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight."
- (8) Jonah was vomited out of the fish. Israel will be kept through the tribulation and will emerge safely.
- (9) Jonah became obedient to his calling and preached to Gentiles. Israel will yet carry out her assigned ministry and be God's witnesses and a kingdom of priests. In the revised Scofield Bible, in a note on [1 Pet. 2:9](#), it says, "In the church age, all Christians are unconditionally constituted a 'kingdom of priests'. . . the distinction which Israel failed to achieve by works." This view fails to take into account the fact that Peter is writing to believing JEWS ([1 Pet. 1:1](#)) who constitute the "nation bringing forth the fruits" of the kingdom of God ([Matt. 21:43](#)); the "Israel of God" ([Gal. 6:16](#)).²³ Isaiah, writing long after Israel violated the Law, and speaking of the nation (not just the tribe of Levi) during the Millennium says, "But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord; men shall call you the Ministers of our God; ye shall eat the riches of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" ([Isa. 61:6](#)). [Isa. 66:21](#) and [Zech. 8:23](#) agree with this. (It is noteworthy that Paul never calls us "priests," though he does mention priestly functions of which we carry out a

²³ The church of this age is neither a "nation" nor a "kingdom," though it is a PART of the kingdom of GOD ([Acts 28:31](#)).

counterpart.)

(10) Jonah's ministry was effective. So with Israel, see [Zech. 8:20-23](#).

JONAH AN ILLUSTRATION OF DISPENSATIONAL TRUTHS

While we would not expect to find that typified in Jonah which was not the subject of prophecy, "not made known (but) hidden in God" (Eph. 3:5,9), still we do find a wonderful illustration here that touches on the age of grace. Looked at in this way we have:

- (1) Jonah in the boat - Israel rebellious but still dealt with by God - the situation in the early chapters of Acts where they are in rebellious unbelief ([Acts 2:23](#)) but are offered the kingdom if they will repent ([Acts 3:19-21](#)).
- (2) Jonah cast into the sea - the "fall" and "casting away" ([Rom. 11:11,12,15](#)) of Israel because they have rejected the risen Christ as preached in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7). As the casting away of Jonah resulted in a few Gentiles turning to Jehovah, so the casting away of Israel resulted in the "reconciling of the world" and "salvation (coming) unto the Gentiles" ([Rom. 11:15,11](#)). The "fall" of the Jew, Jonah, was deliverance for the mariners. The fall of Israel is the riches of the world ([Rom. 11:12](#)).
- (3) Jonah dead in the sea - Israel today, cast out, scattered among the nations, nationally "dead" ([Ezek. 37:11](#)) and not being dealt with by God.
- (4) Jonah in the fish - Israel in her tribulation.
- (5) Jonah raised to life - all Israel saved ([Rom. 11:26](#)), born in a day (Isa. 66:8). Compare [Ezek. 37:14](#) and the context.
- (6) Jonah released from the fish and preaching to Nineveh - the "fulness" of Israel, the "receiving of them ... life from the dead" ([Rom. 11:12,15](#)).
- (7) Jonah's success in Nineveh - Israel being "much more" the riches of the Gentiles ([Rom. 11:12](#)). The casting away of Jonah resulted in the conversion of a small group of Gentiles; his "life from the dead" resulted in the conversion of an exceeding great city. If Israel's casting away is riches to the Gentiles, how much more their fulness!

GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE WORLD - TODAY

While Israel is set aside, God is calling out a people from all nations and His Spirit is baptizing them into a mystical body, the Body of Christ. Men have sought for, worked for, dreamed of and expected a world-wide turning to the Lord. It has not come. The greatest triumphs for the Gospel were in the days of Paul, but though the message

reached out to "all the world" (Col. 1:6) and had "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6),²⁴ it was, nevertheless, "everywhere spoken against" (Acts 28:22). The "triumph of the Gospel" in the conversion of Constantine did not lead to a converted world, not even to a truly converted Rome. It led to a corrupted church instead. Though from time to time the influence of the church has made itself felt in many dramatic ways, true believers have never been a majority world-wide. Seldom have they even been a very significant minority. Churchmen have preached long and earnestly about the "conversion of the world" but it has continued to be only the calling of a relatively small remnant out of the world.

In this age there is salvation FOR ALL and offered TO ALL, freely and without distinction. Yet IT IS NOT GOD'S PURPOSE TODAY TO SAVE THE WORLD but to call out of it a people for the Body of Christ. This is a paradox indeed!

The former statement, that there is salvation offered to all, reveals the compassionate heart of God. The latter, that the salvation of the world is not God's purpose, springs from the hard and unbelieving heart of man as foreknown by God. The former is in view when God in Christ reconciled the world and made it all saveable (2 Cor. 5:19). The latter when He sent us as ambassadors beseeching men to be reconciled, to avail themselves of His salvation (2 Cor. 5:20). The former is the LONGING of God's heart (as it should be of ours), "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). This latter is the PLAN of God in view of man's innate unbelief. If the salvation of the world were the plan and purpose of God for today, then He would stand defeated. Since His plan and purpose is that the full number of Gentiles come into the Body of Christ (Rom. 11:25), He is gloriously triumphant in spite of all Satan and the evil heart of man can do.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE WORLD - ULTIMATELY

When all Israel is saved and becomes God's nation of Priests, ministers of God, THEN, and only then, will there come the TOTAL WORLD-WIDE turning to the Lord that we have not yet seen, and will not see, during this age of grace. Today is glorious for what God is doing by pure grace in spite of Israel's unbelief. Tomorrow will be glorious for what God will do in gracious and faithful fulfillment of His promises and the honoring of His covenants. It will be brought about through the faith and obedience of redeemed Israel. Jonah is both an illustration of this and a pledge that it will indeed be carried out. No scheme of Jonah could frustrate the sovereign purposes of God for Nineveh and nothing will prevent God from carrying out His sovereign and gracious purposes for Israel, and for the nations through Israel.

"O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

²⁴ May the Lord grant us a ministry at least approaching this before the Lord returns for His Church!

CHAPTER 9

Jonah and Paul

While Jonah is a confirmed type of Christ and an evident type of the nation of Israel, he is not in any respect a type of the Apostle Paul. There are, however, many striking parallels and interesting contrasts between these two men of God. This is not intended to show a consistent one to one correspondence between their experiences, for such a correspondence does not exist except in a very limited way. It is hoped that the following comparisons will prove instructive.

- (1) Both Jonah and Paul were sent to Gentiles. Jonah was disobedient - Paul was not ([Acts 26:19](#)).
- (2) Jonah preached the BAD news of judgment INTENDING on Nineveh. Paul preached the GOOD news of judgment ACCOMPLISHED at Calvary.
- (3) Jonah preached judgment but God manifested mercy. This was grace in a dispensation. Paul preached the "Gospel of the grace of God" ([Acts 20:24](#)), and that God is dispensing all grace ([2 Cor. 9:8](#)), glorious grace ([Eph. 1:6](#)), abundant grace ([2 Cor. 4:15](#)), exceeding grace ([2 Cor. 9:14](#)), exceedingly rich grace ([Eph. 2:7](#)), and sufficient grace ([2 Cor. 12:9](#)). This is not just grace in a dispensation, this is "the dispensation of the grace of God" ([Eph. 3:2](#)).
- (4) Jonah's love for Israel caused him to go against God's will by not going to Nineveh. He was leaving the ministry. Paul's love for Israel caused him to go against God's strong warnings by going to Jerusalem ([Acts 19:21; 20:22-24; 21:4,11-14](#)). He was attempting additional ministry not planned for him by God. Jonah determined to do nothing; Paul was trying to do too much. While the latter course of action is more commendable, it is still a serious error of judgment. It took time and energy away from a more fruitful ministry, If he had laid down his life for Israel (as he was fully prepared to do, [Acts 21:13](#)) the Church would have been deprived of the "prison epistles" containing some of the greatest truths for this age of grace. To merely say that "the need constitutes the call" is to ignore the individual guidance of the Holy Spirit. The need is everywhere and so vast that the Lord must lead us to the particular place and ministry He has for us. In trying to do everything, we may end up doing nothing well. That is still far superior to doing nothing at all!
- (5) Both Jonah and Paul were acting from high motives. It is expressly said that it was Paul's (human) spirit, not his flesh, that bound him to his decision to go to Jerusalem ([Acts 19:21; 20:22](#)). This surely teaches us that men of God, acting with high motives, and thinking in the realm of the spirit, can be acting against the warnings of God (as Paul) or even against the very commands of God (as Jonah). Good motives, sincerity, and high

principles do not guarantee that a man is acting, according to God's will.

- (6) God overruled Jonah's disobedience and took him back to shore, captive in a fish, for the sake of the Gentiles. God overruled Paul's self determination and took him, on a ship under Roman guard, as HIS captive ([Eph. 3:1](#)) for the Gentiles.
- (7) Both were planning to go to Spain; Jonah to avoid preaching to Gentiles and Paul that the Gentiles might hear the Gospel of grace ([Rom. 15:24](#)). Neither arrived, as far as Scripture records. Interestingly, Tarshish is specifically mentioned in [Isa. 66:19](#) as one of the places to which believing Israel will be sent during the Millennium. "And I will send those who escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish ... and they shall declare my glory among the nations." That Tarshish is mentioned first may be intended to call attention to the contrast with the situation in Jonah. Also, in [Psa. 72:10](#), the kings of Tarshish shall bring presents to Christ during His Millennial reign.
- (8) Both were involved in a storm at sea. Note the comparisons.
 - Both sea voyages resulted from self will.
 - Jonah was asleep on the ship while Paul was tirelessly ministering to those on board.
 - The men on Jonah's ship were rescued in spite of his unbelief and disobedience, through his being cast into the sea. The men in Paul's craft were preserved through his ministry, faith, and intercession.
 - Because the sailors followed Jonah's advice, the ship was spared. Because the master of the vessel failed to follow Paul's advice, the ship was lost.
 - The men's safety depended on them throwing Jonah into the sea. The safety of those with Paul depended on all remaining in the ship ([Acts 27:31](#)).
- (9) Jonah went to Sheol and returned; Paul was caught up to Paradise and returned. (Paradise is the same place to which Jonah went, but it has been relocated from under the earth to the third heaven since the resurrection and ascension of Christ, [Eph. 4:8](#); [2 Cor. 12:2-4](#)).
- (10) When Jonah went to Sheol his body was in the great fish so we know that he died. When Paul went to Paradise he didn't know whether he was in the body or not, so he did not know (and hence we cannot know) whether he died or not.

- (11) Part of the success of Jonah's ministry was because he had died and been raised from the dead. This was typical of the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul's ministry was powerful largely because he had died with Christ and been raised with Him to walk in newness of life ([Gal. 2:20](#)).
- (12) Jonah said that life was worse than death, because the Gentiles were not judged and destroyed, and asked to die. Paul said that death was better than life, because to die was to be with Christ, yet he chose to live so he could continue to minister to Gentiles ([Phil. 1: 21-25](#)).
- (13) Compare Jonah's unwillingness to preach to Nineveh with Paul's statements in Acts 20. "I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God ... I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you" etc. ([Acts 20:21,26,27](#). See also [26:19,20](#)).
- (14) Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites (Gentiles), a sign which also had a significance to the Jews of Christ's day. Paul is an illustration to us of what God is doing today (a Jew and a Gentile - Roman - in one body, reconciled to God by His matchless grace) and is both a token that God has not "cast away His people" (Rom. 11:1) and a preview of the coming salvation of all Israel. Once Israel had rejected the risen Christ in Acts 7, the next time for them to see Him is when they shall look upon the One they have pierced ([Zech. 12:10; 13:6; Rev. 1:7](#)) and shall be "born at once" ([Isa. 66:8](#)). This national birth through seeing the risen Christ is still to come, but Paul experienced it as an individual Jew ahead of time ([1 Cor. 15:8](#)). The very event that began a new program based on the setting aside of Israel (Paul's conversion) is at the same time a reminder and a pledge that God is not through with Israel. The day will yet come when they, like Paul, will see Christ and be converted!
- (15) The city ministered to by Jonah later turned back to its wicked ways and was destroyed by God. God warns the Gentile world through Paul that if they become highminded and do not continue in God's goodness He will close the day of grace and go back to the prophetic program ([Rom. 11:18-23](#)).

How much greater is the grace shown to us than that shown to Nineveh. How much more faithful has been our Apostle than their Prophet. Then how much greater our responsibility to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, not as other Gentiles!

CHAPTER 10

The Gospel in Jonah

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE BOAT - The application of the Gospel

This section might be entitled, "Two Adams in a boat," for Jonah is a picture of both the Adam of Genesis and the "Last Adam" of 1 Cor. 15:45. He first illustrates the truth that "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). The men in the vessel were under the wrath of God because of the sin of one man. See [Rom. 5:12,17](#). In presenting this truth it is well to note that man is a sinner and under the condemnation of God because of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:18a,19a), but he will be judged and punished on the basis of his OWN sin ([Rev. 20:12](#)).

In regard to the salvation of these mariners Jonah became an illustration of the "last Adam," Christ. (See [1 Cor. 15:22,45](#) and [Rom. 5:19](#) with its context.) Their safety came about through the obedience of one man who yielded himself to be thrown overboard. In presenting this truth it is well to note that we become righteous and have life through Christ's obedience in going to the cross (Rom. 5:18b and [Heb. 10:9,10](#)), but our rewards will be given on the basis of our OWN obedience in our Christian walk and service ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)).

As already noted, all their religion, sacrifices and works could not save them. Only the death of Jonah could do that. In addition, let us now observe that they had to believe God's message through Jonah ([John 3:16,36](#)) and identify themselves with him in his death. He did not jump overboard, they had to take him in their own hands and throw him into the sea. This illustrates the kind of identification that was pictured when the Israelite laid his hand on the head of his animal sacrifice ([Lev. 3:2](#)); the kind of identification that is experienced today when we realize that it was for OUR sins that Christ died, that He was our PERSONAL SUBSTITUTE.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SEA - The substance of the Gospel

Covered elsewhere, let us note again that the content of the Gospel as given in 1 Cor. 15:3,4 is typified in Jonah's experience in the sea. He died, he was buried, and he rose again after three days. When he came forth, in resurrection, from his "tomb," the "billows and waves" of judgment did not so much as touch him. He evidently didn't even get his feet wet for he was "vomited out ... upon dry land." So Christ came forth from the tomb with the judgment completely behind Him. The cross had fully met the sin problem. Not one small sin remained to be paid for!

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CITY - Further application of the Gospel

Nineveh had nothing to commend it to God. It was fully worthy of the judgment pronounced against it. See [Romans 3:9-19](#).

Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh. This centers around his death and

resurrection experiences. The story is so written and designed that the sparing of Nineveh becomes contingent upon the WORK of God in that death and resurrection of Jonah. This illustrates the truth that Christ's death and resurrection is the basis for our salvation. See [1 Cor. 15:3,4](#).

Jonah preached to them. Thus the WORD of God was the instrument used to rescue them from judgment. See [Rom. 10:17](#); [1 Pet. 1: 23](#).

They believed God; the necessary response. [John 6:29](#); [Rom. 3:28](#).

They were spared; the grace of God in action. [Eph. 2:1,8](#).

WHAT HAPPENED OUTSIDE THE CITY - Understanding the Gospel

Chapter four of Jonah is by far the least understood and appreciated part of the book, yet it is here that the application of its message is made. This theme will be developed more fully in chapter twelve of this book, but here we want to see how this chapter of Jonah relates to the Gospel. Jonah's attitude indicates, among other things, that he was confused about the relationship existing between the GRACE of God and His RIGHTEOUSNESS. Jonah would not have been so perplexed if he could have read Romans. We who have read Romans can better understand and appreciate Paul's masterpiece on the Gospel if we try to see what Jonah's problem was.

Jonah knew that God is a gracious God. He tells us this plainly in Jonah 4:2. "I know that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." But to Jonah this was not an unmixed virtue in God. He seems to have felt strongly that God should, first, last, and always, be a righteous God; that His "easy going" forgiveness of grievous sin was to be deplored and even censured. He had accepted the death penalty against his own disobedience with serenity, for he knew it was what he deserved and that God was acting righteously. The total forgiveness of wicked Nineveh was quite another thing in his eyes. Jonah was more concerned about the "principle of the thing" than he was about the lives of the people involved.

Jonah could have justified his views from Scripture already written. Had not God said that even a man who picked up sticks for his fire on the Sabbath must die? How much more this wicked city. Had not God Himself said through Solomon, "He that saith unto the wicked Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him" (Prov. 24:24)? How could God spare this people unless He considered them righteous? And how could He see them as righteous without failing under the condemnation of His own word, without becoming unrighteous Himself?

As a prophet he was no doubt deeply concerned that Israel keep the Law of God, warning them that if they did not they would be judged. Yet here was a people who had transgressed every law of God with zest. True, they didn't have the Law of Moses, but they had utterly violated the universal voice of conscience. They were cruel, proud, and vile. They were uncircumcised "dogs," "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and

strangers from the covenants of promise" as Paul described the Gentiles later (Eph. 2:12). How could a righteous God acquit the wicked?

This problem was not Jonah's alone to ponder. Long before his day, Bildad the Shuhite had asked Job, "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). To the nation of Israel as a whole the answer to Bildad's question seemed to be the Law of Moses. Had not Moses said, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which if a man DO, he shall LIVE in them" (Lev. 18:5)?²⁵ Had not Solomon said, "Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:13)?

This thinking was characteristic of all too many in Israel. Centuries later Paul gave it as the basic cause of Israel's lost condition. They were occupied with establishing their own righteousness (Rom. 10:3) and, as a necessarily parallel belief, rejecting any salvation that did not depend on man's own upright life.

Jonah no doubt, like the Pharisees who came later, thought of himself as a champion of justice. He strongly felt that God should, above all, be righteous. As a result he felt duty bound to find fault with God and seek to lead Him back to the only course of action that seemed justifiable. Was he not saying, in effect, "God, you are wrong to pass over the grievous sins of this city. Manifest your righteousness and judge their wickedness"? (Jonah was not the last to try to dictate to God!)

What Jonah did not realize was that in his very zeal for justice, he was demonstrating ignorance of the righteousness of God!

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Jonah exhibits an ignorance of the infinite perfection of God's righteousness. He expected God to see that Nineveh did not escape the penalty for their sin but failed to see that, measured against the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), his own sin and the sin of his beloved Israel constituted them as worthy of judgment as Nineveh. The legalist can never fully face this truth and long remain a legalist. The righteousness of God, as seen by the legalist, must of necessity be a delicately balanced thing; lax enough to accept the legalist with his works, but severe enough to bring down the wrath from heaven upon all others. Once he sees that he is just as guilty and worthy of wrath as the vilest wretch on earth, he can find no shelter from judgment in legalistic righteousness. He must then cast himself on the grace and mercy of God like any other sinner. Only those who expect salvation for themselves through Law can remain zealous for the Law.²⁶

²⁵ The principle that if a man keep the Law he will live is stated plainly in the New Testament also. In Rom. 2:13 it says, "the DOERS OF THE LAW shall be JUSTIFIED." The problem is that there ARE NO DOERS. Rom. 3:12 states, "there is NONE THAT DOETH GOOD, NO NOT ONE." This way of gaining righteousness is purely hypothetical due to man's total inability to keep the Law. It was that he might learn this very lesson, and abandon this false hope of gaining acceptance with God, that God gave the Law in the first place (Rom. 3:19,20).

²⁶ That is, as a way of becoming righteous. Those who were under the Law, when they believed, demonstrated within the compass of the Law the outworking of the righteousness they already had received by faith. In this age of

The cutting verbal attacks made on the religious leaders by Christ ([Matt. 23:13-36](#)) were not merely to expose their sin, but, by exposing it, to bring them to discard their confidence in legal righteousness. He longed that they might see themselves as deserving the wrath of a Holy God and be willing to take their places beside the harlots and tax collectors in dependence on God's grace!

If Jonah had really known the limitless extent and total integrity of God's righteousness he would not have been complaining about God sparing Nineveh. He would have been on his knees with tears of gratitude streaming down his face because God had spared HIM!

In the second place, Jonah appears to be ignorant of the imputed righteousness of God available by faith to sinful man, or felt that it was available only to Israel. He should have recollected that in Genesis 15:6 an uncircumcised sinner, of necessity an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, since that nation did not yet exist, was made righteous when he merely believed God. All of the privileges and blessings of his nation that Jonah prized so highly were based on this righteousness of his ancestor, Abraham. What Jonah did not, or would not, see was that God had not spared a SINFUL city. When the Assyrians BELIEVED GOD they became just as righteous as Abraham, and in the same way that he had become righteous! He had spared a RIGHTEOUS city.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD AND THE GRACE OF GOD

The very reason that Paul gave for the Gospel being the power of God to save both Jew and Gentile was, "For in it the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD is revealed" (Rom. 1:17 NASB). This is the only righteousness that is acceptable to God. It is better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20) not merely in degree, but in KIND. This is God's own righteousness given to the believing sinner as a gift. Both the Law and the Prophets speak of it ([Rom. 3:21](#)). In connection with salvation ([Psa. 71:15](#)) the psalmist cried out, "I will make mention of THY righteousness, even of Thine ONLY" (Psa. 71:16). The Lord said, in Isa. 56:1, "my salvation is near to come, and MY RIGHTEOUSNESS to be revealed." See also [Isa. 61:10](#); [Jer. 23:6](#); [33:16](#); etc.

But how can God do this without being Himself unrighteous? The answer to this question is the heart of the Gospel and the justification for God's treatment of Nineveh. That which demonstrates God's righteousness, in having passed over sins committed in the Old Testament, is the setting forth of Christ as the Redeemer. "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed" (Rom. 3:24,25 NASB).

God did not dishonor or bypass the Law. He honored it. He did not save men in spite of the Law, but by satisfying its demands completely. The Law condemned us all

grace we are not under Law (Rom. 6:15). It is grace that teaches us to live godly in this present age (Titus 2:11,12) for we are "under grace."

and demanded the death penalty. God fully agreed with the "guilty" verdict and the death sentence. Then He became a man to take our place and pay that penalty. God did not save us by setting aside the penalty in sentimental piety but by paying it in unswerving dedication to perfect justice. It is because Christ died for us that grace can flow out to the sinner.

The legalist often quotes Romans 3:31 to prove that the Law of Moses has not been set aside. "Do we then make void ('nullify' - NASB) the Law through faith? God forbid: yea we establish ('cause to stand') the Law."²⁷ The Law was like a legal contract binding man to payments beyond his ability to meet. God did not just tear up the contract. In Christ He impoverished Himself in order to pay its demands for us "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes HE BECAME POOR, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Even today the Law is not destroyed: it is, so to speak, "framed and hanging on the wall" for all to see. But over it in crimson letters large and clear is written in the handwriting of God Himself, "PAID IN FULL!" It is now "established," not as our condemnation, not as a way of righteousness, nor as a rule of life for the believer, but as our receipt for a contract honored and its obligations fully met!

Grace is not in contrast to righteousness, but made possible by it. Paul says in Galatians 2:19, "I THROUGH THE LAW am dead to the Law, that I might live unto God." Grace bears testimony that God has totally satisfied His own holiness and that sin has been fully dealt with. The legalist denies that God has completely satisfied the Law's demands for us and intrudes himself into the picture to supply the righteousness that God lacks! Such blasphemy!

All this is suggested in Jonah. It was because Jonah died and rose again that the sinners were delivered. Without his death he would have been sitting out their prophesied doom in Tarshish, leaving them without the necessary warning from God. If he had not been raised from the dead they would not have heard either, for he would have been in Sheol. With death and resurrection behind him, his message brought wicked Nineveh to faith and the resulting "by-faith-righteousness" that spelled out deliverance for them. It is because Christ (typified by Jonah in this very respect) died and rose again that God can now be seen to have been fully justified in sparing Nineveh ([Rom. 3:25](#)). He had known what Jonah did not know, that He Himself would one day pay the penalty of the Law for Nineveh (and for Israel and Jonah as well). Then and today God does NOT spare the WICKED, as the book of Nahum amply demonstrates ([Na. 1:3](#)). Instead He spares the RIGHTEOUS, those who have become so by faith. Jonah spoke more accurately than he knew (speaking as a prophet) when he said that those who observe lying vanities, that trust in their own cleverness and reasoning, forsake their own mercy. In rejecting a "by-faith-righteousness" for Nineveh he was

²⁷ It is interesting that, in a context which places Law and grace over against one another as contrasting systems of God's relationship with men, it says three times that the Law IS "made void." In 2 Cor. 3:11,13,14 the expressions "done away" (vs. 11,14) and "is abolished" (v. 13) are the same word rendered "make void" in Rom. 3:31. The conclusion seems to be justified that, while the Law as a system has been set aside today and God is not relating to us on the basis of law, it is nevertheless retained as a historical testimony to man's utter guilt (Rom. 3:19) and God's complete righteousness in having met its every demand at Calvary.

turning his back on the only kind of righteousness that was available for himself, or for his nation, that would be acceptable to God!

THE HEART OF ISRAEL'S FAILURE

It was the failure of Israel as a nation to know about and avail themselves of this glorious justification by faith that kept them from entering into their ministry to the nations. It was this terrible blunder that caused them to reject the risen Christ and miss the opportunity to enter into their kingdom. It was their stubborn refusal to seek righteousness in Christ that caused them to so relentlessly persecute another who loved them enough to go to hell for them if that had been possible ([Rom. 9:3](#)).

One of the great contrasts between the Old Testament messenger to the Gentiles and the Apostle to the Gentiles in the New Testament is found here. Jonah (standing on legal ground in the dispensation of the Law, preaching bad news of coming judgment) thought he was honoring the Law in resenting and rejecting grace. Paul (standing on the grace of God in the dispensation of grace, preaching the good news of judgment already accomplished) truly honored the Law in the very message that so completely sets it aside.

In this book that so clearly pre-figures God's good news, the last chapter underscores the necessity of understanding the Gospel. Allowance may be made for Jonah's failure to understand in view of the fact that the entire New Testament revelation, and much of the Old Testament as well, were not available to him. Today we can find, in the very story of Jonah, the satisfying answer to his bewilderment, for we see the book of Jonah in the light of a completed revelation setting forth a finished redemption. Those today who are ignorant of the righteousness of God, and concerned with a "do it yourself " righteousness, are clearly seen as needing to be saved, in spite of their religious zeal ([Rom. 10:1-3](#)).²⁸ Those today who resent grace and try to tie God's hands with His own Law are under God's curse ([Gal. 1:6-9](#)).

So then it is not the LAW that is the ultimate revelation of the righteousness of God, but the GOSPEL OF HIS GRACE! It is not the preacher of grace who is ignorant of God's righteousness but the legalist! If we do not clearly see this we have not seen the message of Romans and we do not really understand the Gospel of the grace of God.²⁹

²⁸ It is not Jonah's salvation that is in question. His understanding of how God can save others, particularly Gentiles, seems faulty.

²⁹ Romans presents other truths concerning God's righteousness that are not in view in Jonah. Among them are the following.

- The RIGHTEOUSNESS of the Law (not the LAW) may be fulfilled IN (not BY) us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). This revelation of IMPARTED righteousness is not, of course, an Old Testament truth.

- God's righteousness is not violated in the setting aside of Israel and the introduction of the age of grace (Romans 9-11).

- His righteousness renders the saved one SAFE (Rom. 5:9,10; 8:1,33-39). The Old Testament saint was safe also (Psa. 37:18,24,40; 97:10; 119:117; 121:3-8; 138:8; 145:20; John 5:24; 10:27-29). The verses in John were spoken before the cross, which is Old Testament ground, and were put in the present tense rather than as prophecies

Let us not be Jonahs because for us there is no excuse.

CHAPTER 11

Jonah and the Prophetic Office

As one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of the prophetic books, Jonah is a fitting and significant introduction to the remainder of them.

- (1) Jonah demonstrates that the prophet himself was very human, a man of "like passions" with us, as James says of an even earlier prophet, Elijah ([James 5:17](#)). This truth occasionally surfaces elsewhere, as when Jeremiah is told not to pray for Israel, and promptly prays for them ([Jer. 14:11-22](#)). Nowhere is it so vividly portrayed as here however. The prophets were "Holy men of God" (2 Pet. 1:21) but they did not start out as a special kind of people, they had to LEARN. Paul confessed that he had to "be instructed" and "learn" before he could do all things through Christ's power ([Phil. 4:11-13](#)). Most of the prophets may have been apt pupils, but Jonah stands as proof that God was as concerned with what His prophet WAS as with what he SAID.
- (2) Jonah further demonstrates that prophecy did not come by the will of men ([2 Pet. 1:21](#)). Jonah's message to Nineveh was totally against his own will both before and after he gave it.
- (3) Jonah illustrates the difference between an erring prophet and a false one. Taken in contrast to Balaam this shines out clearly.
 - Balaam was willing to prophesy a lie, while Jonah, son of Amittai (meaning "truth"), would remain SILENT, but would NOT LIE.
 - Balaam was ready to curse Israel for pay, while Jonah was willing to pay, even with his life, to spare Israel.
 - Balaam was told not to prophesy but was determined to do so anyway. Jonah was sent to prophesy and tried to avoid doing so.
 - God overruled Balaam's will by putting him into a trance.³⁰ He molded Jonah's will through chastening and patient teaching.

of something to follow His death and be applicable only then. While the Old Testament believer had security, he may well have lacked the assurance of it due to the scarcity of abundant and clear revelation concerning it. Today we have crystal clear teaching that we are safe in Him, and additional reasons for security. With all of the security of the Old Testament saint, he was not sealed by the Spirit, joined to the Body of Christ, nor seated in the heavenlies as we are in the age of grace.

³⁰ This type of thing happened rarely in Scripture, but it did happen. Compare John 11:49-52.

- Balaam rejected God's grace toward the children of Israel and plotted against them. Jonah resented God's grace toward the Ninevites and sulked over them.
 - Balaam became a type of the false teachers of the last days ([2 Pet. 2:15](#); [Jude 11](#); [Rev. 2:14](#)). Jonah became a type of Christ ([Matt. 12:40](#)).
- (4) Jonah portrays the truth that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). Not only is this true concerning Israel as a nation, who will yet be God's ministers and witnesses, but concerning the prophet himself. A Jeremiah may decide, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name" but he will find that God's word will be like a fire shut up in his bones and he will not be able to refrain ([Jer. 20:9](#)). God repented concerning the destruction of Nineveh, but He did NOT repent regarding Jonah PREACHING to them!
- (5) The prophetic office was not to be exercised for Israel alone, but for the nations as well, particularly as the nations touched Israel. The writers following Jonah also prophesied to and concerning Gentiles. It was often a message of judgment, as was Jonah's. However, the Gentiles were to be blessed through Israel, and their glorious future is also a subject of prophecy. One such prophecy is notable because it touches on the Assyrians. Long after destruction fell on them as prophesied by Nahum they will share in Israel's kingdom glory. Isaiah tells us, "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and ASSYRIA THE WORK OF MY HANDS, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isa. 19:24,25).

Just who the Assyrians in the last days will be is not clear. They may be the descendants of those Assyrians who escaped the destruction of the ancient empire or just those Arabs living in the land that once was Assyria. Perhaps at least part of them may be some of the very individuals who believed God, under Jonah's preaching, raised from the dead to share in Israel's glorious kingdom. What a wonderful solution to the Arab-Israeli problem! And what a wonderful conclusion to the book of Jonah! The book closes with the open question, "Should not I spare Nineveh?" The God who knows the end from the beginning left that question open partly that it might have its final answer in the book of Isaiah. Jonah himself, in resurrection, will see it and, at long last, be GLAD!

CHAPTER 12

Great Lessons from Jonah

Some of the outstanding lessons brought to our hearts by the book of Jonah are listed below even though they may have been touched on before.

- One obvious lesson is that no man, not even a prophet, can outwit God.
- Closely allied to the above is the assurance that God does know best. Abraham based his case for the deliverance of Lot from the wrath due to fall on Sodom on the statement, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). God not only knows best, He is also able to work all things together to accomplish that which He knows to be good (whether we see it as good or not). Here He took a prophet in hand to work for the good of a Gentile city. In Esther He took a whole Gentile empire in hand to work for the good of Israel. Both are illustrative of Paul's words to us in Romans 8:28. "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (NASB). That this outworking of His sovereignty does not set aside man's will, but includes it as part of the "all things," is clear in both Jonah and Esther.³¹
- Surely one important truth presented in the book is that the "God of Israel" is the God also of the Gentiles (Rom. 3:29). He is not merely a "tribal deity," as some have represented the Old Testament idea of God. As the God of all He is concerned for all, not just for Israel. As illustrated in Jonah, His word is not just TO Israel (1:1; 3:1) but THROUGH Israel for the Gentiles also (1:2; 3:2).
- Salvation is of the Lord; whether the salvation of Israel or of Nineveh, whether the salvation of a few sailors or of an exceeding great city (2:9).
- That God cares about children not yet accountable, and even the cattle (Jonah 4:11), is probably not the chief lesson of Jonah, but it is surely a comforting one. Perhaps those who would discount this theme are the very ones who need it most. Jonah knew of God's graciousness and kindness, but because he did not share it in his own heart he did not appreciate it. If we do not value highly His loving compassion for children, and even His "cattle on a thousand hills," it may be because we do not share that love in our own hearts.
- The very fact that God is, not just in theory, but in practice, the gracious, merciful, and kind God that Jonah confessed Him to be is a grand lesson. Set over against the equally important message of Nahum, that He will not acquit the wicked, it must be considered a major theme of this book. Jonah was angry that God

³¹ Though the specific promise of Rom. 8:28 is not to be applied retroactively, and the "purpose" mentioned is that for this age of grace, the principle that God overrules "all things" on behalf of His people is active in the Old Testament in many places.

should be as kind and gracious toward His enemies as He was toward Israel, but the marvel of God sparing Nineveh is all but eclipsed by the gracious way He treated Jonah! It is not enough for us to be able, like Jonah, to "quote the verses" on the love of God. We need to know that His love and grace are practical realities, both for ourselves and for others.

THE CENTRAL LESSON

I believe the chief lesson, the one for which the book may well have been written, has been largely overlooked. God's great underlying purpose for Israel was that they be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, His messengers and witnesses (See [chapter 8](#)). The great message of the book is that God was ready, willing, and abundantly able to work among the Gentiles if only His servant (Jonah, picturing Israel) would be willing to turn from self will and obey His call.

ISRAEL'S OPPORTUNITY UNDER SOLOMON

Earlier in her history Israel had had a golden opportunity to embark on a positive witness and ministry to the nations around her. Solomon was endowed with wisdom from God and given wealth and a long life in which to utilize it. We are told that "the Lord loved him" (2 Sam. 12:24), and that "Solomon loved the Lord" (1 Kings 3:3). There was peace in the world during his reign. "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:25). It was a peace bought by the sword of David and left for his son to exploit for God.

Things started out well. There streamed into Jerusalem those "of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth, which heard of his wisdom" (1 Kings 4:34). He spoke to them of the marvels of God's creation and the wisdom now, at least partially, incorporated into the book of Proverbs ([1 Kings 4:32,33](#)). What an opportunity to follow up this interest in what Jerusalem represented and demonstrated with an all out effort to win the heathen over to Israel's God.

There was an "outreach" program in effect, but hardly to take the blessings of Abraham to the nations! Solomon reached out to Egypt for horses. He had a navy of oceangoing ships of Tarshish that evidently ranged as far as India and East Africa. They were reaching out for "gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks" (1 Kings 10:22). It had been forbidden that Israel's kings should multiply to themselves horses or wives or that they should greatly multiply to themselves silver and gold ([Deut. 17:16,17](#)). Solomon did all of these things to ridiculous extremes and added to the list ivory, apes, and peacocks, which seem to hint of luxury, folly, and pride.

He spent thirteen years building a palace for himself. This stands in sharp contrast to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who "by faith" lived in tents. He withheld not from his heart any joy ([Ecc. 2:10](#)) but brought little joy to those in darkness. He looked for joy and found vexation, despair, travail, grief, and sorrow. He "rejoiced in all (his) labor" ([Ecc. 2:10](#)) but was laboring for himself ([Ecc. 2:4-6](#)) and found his labor "vanity and

vexation of spirit" (Ecc. 2:11,20,22). If he had invested his time and talent in teaching his people to be the witnesses that from the beginning of Israel as a nation they had been appointed to be, he might not have found that all was vanity.

He looked upon his riches as sent by God to be spent on himself. He was "living it up." He looked upon the peace during his reign as an opportunity to "enjoy the good life" and sit in his garden listening to men singers and women singers. It sounds much like all too many of us believers in the United States today doesn't it?

The result was that he oppressed his people with taxation until they finally rebelled (under Rehoboam - [1 Kings 12:3,4,13,14](#)). The surrounding nations lost their admiration and respect for Israel. He missed a God given opportunity to lead Israel out into a ministry that now will only be theirs under a "greater than Solomon." They missed their chance to exercise Old Testament "evangelism" and had to militarize to the hilt. They were led by Solomon to look upon Israel as a storehouse of blessing instead of a channel of blessing. The sad history that follows is commentary enough on their folly!

ISRAEL'S OPPORTUNITY AT THE TIME OF JONAH

In Jonah's day another break-through came to Israel.³² There was little in Jerusalem then to impress the Gentiles. Even among the Israelites only two of the twelve tribes worshipped there any more. God sought to move them out to where the Gentiles were with His message. The trouble which came to Jonah was not just because he was "out of the land" for God had SENT him out of the land. It was out of the land that he ministered to Nineveh. It was out of the land that he saw a whole city of Gentiles on their faces before the God of Israel. His trouble came because he was out of the land for the wrong reason and going in the wrong direction.

Think what could have been accomplished if the prophets following Jonah could have spearheaded the ministry of Israel to the heathen world. Ezekiel was specifically told that if he had been sent to the heathen they would have hearkened to him ([Ezek. 3:5,6](#)). Instead of representing a holy nation in their work as God's Ministers he had to be sent to a rebellious, impudent, and hard hearted Israel ([Ezek. 2:3,4](#)).

The book of Jonah was for Israel a call to service, an encouragement to obedience, an assurance of success and a warning against self will with regard to God's call. The nation, like Jonah, spurned the call, ignored the warning, and went their wilful way. They would not venture out of the land to minister for God and ended up being driven out of the land into captivity. They would not speak for God to those of a hard language and ended up being spoken to by those of stammering lips and another tongue (Isa.

³² It is true that Jonah was a native of the northern kingdom, had its interests at heart, and prophesied concerning their king, Jeroboam. However, as a type, he speaks of the nation as a whole, and it is to the entire nation that God speaks through his prophecy. The ten tribes alone could not have followed up Jonah's ministry. But if the ten tribes had turned to the Lord they might have challenged Judah to new heights of faith and obedience, and a re-united kingdom, at least in spiritual things, might have resulted.

28:11).³³ They would not proclaim the glories of Jehovah to the world, so God terminated any possible ministry in Jerusalem by destroying the city and temple, and then sent His message to the whole world through Nebuchadnezzar.³⁴

What greater message could there be from a short four chapters? What tragedy that Israel did not heed it!

ISRAEL'S OPPORTUNITY LATER

Israel had another and even greater opportunity to enter their glorious ministry and missed that one also. A greater than Solomon, a greater than Jonah came to Israel, lived a perfect life, died a redeeming death, and accomplished a victorious resurrection. Having returned to heaven, He sent word to the leaders of Israel that if they would repent as a nation and receive Him, He would return and they would have times of refreshing. They would enter into that day when Israel shall be named the priests of the Lord, the Ministers of God ([Isa. 61:6](#)). Their program had already been outlined and their commission given. They needed only to be converted and begin their ministry. They rejected the offer and were set aside while again men of other languages spoke to them ([1 Cor. 14:21,22](#)).³⁵ Their glorious ministry was postponed while God reached sinners from all the nations of the earth through a largely Gentile ministry. They were driven from Jerusalem afresh, the temple was again destroyed, and now they await the time of Jacob's Trouble that will at long last bring them weeping to the Savior. Israel will finally respond to the challenge of the book of Jonah, but only when they know and love a greater than Jonah, the matchless Lord Jesus Christ.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

God grant that WE will not miss the lesson of Jonah! Never in the history of the world has there been such an open door set before men to serve the Lord in reaching lost men. The message entrusted to us is greater and the responsibility to take it to the whole world is very much clearer. The provisions for our ministry are vastly more complete and sufficient, and the wealth and resources of the richest country the world has ever seen are available if we in America do not duplicate Solomon's tragic mistake. God is doing something among the Gentiles today more glorious than a thousand Ninevehs. Let us not only have a PART IN IT, but let us have a HEART FOR IT.

³³ Jer. 40:2,3 is an example of this. It was a Gentile who spoke to the Jew, Jeremiah, and said, "The Lord thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. Now the Lord hath brought it, and done according as He hath said: because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed His voice."

³⁴ The whole of Daniel four is a decree that was distributed to every part of the Babylonian Empire and copies of which doubtless reached even farther.

³⁵ See Appendix "C".

THE CITY OF TWO TALES

Part 2 - THE BOOK OF NAHUM

A Tale of Woe!

CHAPTER 13

From Jonah to Nahum

Both Jonah and Nahum were prophets to the city of Nineveh. Jonah relates the sparing of the city, while Nahum has a different tale to tell. His prophecy is wholly involved with its destruction over 175 years later.

In the days of Jonah, God's heart had been touched with the plight of the ten tribes. He "saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter ... nor (was there) any helper for Israel. And the Lord said not that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash" (2 Kings 14:26,27). If the overthrow of Nineveh, prophesied in Jonah 3:4, had been carried out it would have facilitated this deliverance for Israel, as Jonah well knew. The repentance of the Ninevites, much to the dismay of Jonah, stayed the execution of the edict and the city lived on. Yet this experience appears to have brought about the demilitarization of Assyria for over fifty years, paving the way for the victories of Jeroboam II, and postponing the captivity of the ten tribes for many years.

When it became increasingly evident that Israel had not learned her lesson, and was intent on following her sinful course, God allowed the Assyrians to return to their militarism and used them as His tool to chasten her. The ten tribes were put under tribute during the reign of Menahem (2 Kings 15:19,20). Also, "In the days of Pekah, King of Israel, came Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria" (2 Kings 15:29). Hoshea followed Pekah and was destined to be Israel's last king. "Against him came up Shalmanezzer, king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant" (2 Kings 17:3).

At about this time God wrought a wonderful work in the southern kingdom. Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah in the third year of Hoshea ([2 Kings 18:1](#)). This godly king (no doubt under the influence and ministry of the prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah) brought about a real revival in Judah. "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kings 18:5).

His father, Ahaz, had been one of Judah's wickedest kings and Hezekiah knew that Judah richly deserved judgment. He told his people, "Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us" (2 Chron. 29:10). He opened up the temple that Ahaz had closed, cleansed it, and

restored the worship there. Among other reforms, he prepared a passover and sent messengers to invite those of the ten tribes who had not yet been taken captive by Assyria to come and participate in it. His impassioned plea to all Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, was "turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria" (2 Chron. 30:6). He warned them not to harden their hearts against the call to repentance. He told them that if they would turn to the Lord, not only would they be spared the wrath in store for them, but "your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you, if ye return unto Him" (2 Chron. 30:9).

How little did those of the northern kingdom realize that this was their LAST CHANCE to be spared from the Assyrians! What a contrast with the book of Jonah! There, Gentiles heard only a decree of wrath against them, yet they repented. Here God's own people were offered, even at the last moment, gracious deliverance, but they laughed the messengers to scorn and mocked them. Only a remnant from three of the tribes responded to the call.

It was just three years later that Shalmaneser put Hoshea in prison and came against his capital city, Samaria. After three further years of siege, Samaria fell and the ten tribes were uprooted from their land and taken into captivity.

They could not honestly blame God for their plight, saying, "If Nineveh had not been spared in the days of Jonah this wouldn't have happened." God had offered to spare them too if, like Nineveh, they would believe God and repent.

2 Kings chapter 17 clearly places the responsibility where it belongs. They had "sinned against the Lord their God" (v. 7) and had followed the heathen in their idolatry. When God pleaded with them to turn from their evil ways "they would not hear, but hardened their necks ... they rejected His statutes and His covenant ... they followed vanity and to do became vain" (vs. 14,15). They had "sold themselves to do evil" (v. 17) and now God had sold them into bondage.

The revival under Hezekiah rescued Judah from the same fate. Even so, Judah's sins had been so great that they were chastened at the hands of the Assyrians.

In Isa. 5:26 and 7:18 (NASB) he had said that God would whistle³⁶ for Assyria to come and chasten Judah. When he spoke of sending the Assyrians against "a godless nation" (Isa. 10:6, NASB) he meant Judah! The Assyrians were spoken of as the rod of God's anger and staff of His indignation (Isa. 10:5) that would be used to complete a work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem (Isa. 10:12). Hezekiah paid tribute to Sennacherib after the king of Assyria seized many of the cities of Judah (2 Kings 18:13-16). Jerusalem itself was besieged, intimidated, and insulted by the arrogant Assyrians.

³⁶ The Filipino people would understand the King James translation "hiss" better, for it is their custom to hiss in order to get one's attention or summon him to their side.

Their deliverance was like that described earlier by David in Psa. 124:7. "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped." Sennacherib left a description of his campaign against Hezekiah in which he said, "He himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem."³⁷ Understandably, he did not mention the escape of his "caged bird."

After Hezekiah's day, Judah was led back into greater wickedness than ever by his son, Manasseh. Again Assyria came against them, taking Manasseh captive for a time. In his captivity, Manasseh came to know the Lord ([2 Chron. 33:12,13](#)) and, when he was allowed to return to Jerusalem, tried to undo his former evil. It was too late, however, to stem the tide of wickedness that his earlier life had encouraged. The Assyrians would no doubt have been whistled for again had it not been for the conversion of Manasseh, late though it was, and, even more, the remarkable (though evidently shallow) revival under Judah's last godly king, Josiah.

Even though Judah remained deeply under the shadow of Assyrian domination during Josiah's reign, there is no record in Scripture that they came against him in battle. By the time of his death, the prophecy of Nahum had been fulfilled and Josiah had lived to see on the mountains the feet of him who brought good tidings, who announced peace ([Nahum 1:15](#)). It was to him, about two years before his death, that the welcome report came, "Nineveh is destroyed!"

CHAPTER 14

The Book of Nahum

Little is known about the author of this prophecy aside from the fact that he was an "Elkoshite." Elkosh cannot now be located with certainty, but is thought by some to have been situated in the area formerly occupied by the tribe of Naphtali, the first tribe taken into captivity by Assyria ([2 Kings 15:29](#)). The Galilean city of Capernaum, located in this same general area, also suggests a Galilean origin for Nahum, for the name Capernaum means "village of Nahum." This is borne out by his familiarity with Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon ([Nahum 1:4](#)), all surrounding Galilee.

The name of the prophet is a form of the word translated "comfort" and "repent" in the Old Testament. While Jonah tells of God repenting and sparing Nineveh, Nahum represents God as repenting with regard to the chastening of Judah. "Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no longer" ([Nahum 1:12b](#), NASB). That this brought "comfort" to Judah is obvious.

There was no comfort for Nineveh, however, for this time God did not repent of the evil He had planned for her. Aside from the name of the prophet, the word "repent/comfort" is used only once in the book, in [Nahum 3:7](#). God asks, "Where shall I seek comforters for thee?" Instead of comforters, all who would hear the news of

³⁷ [Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible](#), page 280.

Nineveh's fate would clap their hands in complete approval of what God had done (Nahum 3:19).

While the SUBJECT of the book is the destruction of Nineveh, the PURPOSE of the book appears to be comfort ("I will afflict thee no more" 1:12) and instruction ("celebrate your feasts, O Judah, pay your vows" 1:15, NASB) for Judah.

The author addresses himself variously to Judah (1:15), Nineveh (2:1 etc.), the king of Assyria (3:18), the "wicked counselor" (1:11,14), and the invaders of the city (2:9). His message is poured out with such fervor that he often addresses first one and then another with only pronouns or context to indicate to whom he is speaking. For instance, in 2:13 he says to Nineveh, "I am gainst YOU," then inserts what is evidently a comforting aside. "I will burn HER chariots in smoke," he assures Judah, whereupon he addresses the Assyrians again, "A sword will devour YOUR young lions." See also 2:8,9 (NASB) where "Stop, stop!" is the Ninevite leaders' call to their terrified troops, and the instruction "Plunder the gold, plunder the silver" is addressed to the invaders, urging them on in their victory.

Because of the characteristics noted above, this book is not easy to outline in detail. It is not so much a carefully thought out treatise as it is an impassioned "on the scene" type of report (though written, in superb poetry, years before it happened) of a fierce battle to the death between rival empires. The following outline is suggested.

1. 1:1 - 2:2 Nineveh, Israel, and the Hand of God.
 - a) 1:1 - 3a God's sentence against Nineveh announced.
 - b) 1:3b - 6 God's power to carry out His sentence.
 - c) 1:7 God's goodness in the day of trouble.
 - d) 1:8 - 15 God's deliverance of Judah.
 - e) 2:1 Nineveh's doom is upon her.
 - f) 2:2 Israel's deliverance awaits her (all 12 tribes apparently).

2. 2:3 - 10 Nineveh and the invaders.
 - a) 2:3 The attack.
 - b) 2:4, 5 The frantic defense.
 - c) 2:6 The key to Nineveh's defeat - the river in God's hands.
 - d) 2:7 - 10 Nineveh's defeat.
 - 1) 2:7 Captives taken.
 - 2) 2:8 Soldiers fleeing.
 - 3) 2:9,10a The city plundered.

- 4) 2:10b The terrified survivors.
3. 2:11 - 3:7 Nineveh and her guilt.
 - a) 2:11 - 3:3 Her greed and cruelty ("I am against thee" 2:13).
 - b) 3:4 - 7 Her harlotry and witchcraft ("I am against thee" 3:5).
 4. 3:8 - 19 Nineveh and her doom.
 - a) 3:8 - 13 Her outlying fortifications cannot prevent the siege.
 - b) 3:14, 15a Her frantic preparations for defense will not delay the irruption.
 - c) 3:15b - 19a Her great leadership cannot mitigate her plight.
 - d) 3:19b She has no friends to regret her collapse.

The date of the fall of Nineveh has been set by archeological discoveries at 612 B.C., but the date that Nahum wrote his prophecy is not known with certainty.

There are internal considerations that favor a time during the reign of Hezekiah. If Nahum was written while Jerusalem was under siege by Sennacherib, Nahum 1:9-13 could be understood as applying, primarily, to the deliverance recorded in [2 Kings 19:32-35](#) (about 701 B.C.). The wicked counselor of Nahum 1:11 could refer to Rabshakeh, and the Prophecy of Nahum 1:14 could be speaking of the death of Sennacherib some twenty years later. Adopting this dating, Nahum 1:15 could have the revival under Hezekiah in the background, even if referring primarily (as it evidently does) to the revival later under Josiah.

As attractive as this view is, it seems to be ruled out by 'the reference to the defeat of Thebes ("Populous No") as an accomplished fact ([Nahum 3:8-10](#)). The fall of Thebes at the hands of Ashurbanipal took place about 665 to 661 B.C. This would mean that the date for the writing of Nahum would probably fall between 664, at the earliest, and 616 when "the Babylonians under Nabopolassar, allied with the Medes, attacked Assyria, and began a systematic reduction of strong points throughout the empire."³⁸

The New Bible Commentary favors a date shortly before the fall of the city because, "The prophet speaks of the fall of the city with a clarity and an intimacy possible only if the event were almost immediate."³⁹ This argument loses some of its force if one reads Psalm 22 and recalls that the event there described with such "clarity and intimacy" did not take place until about a thousand years had rolled by. A time soon after the fall of Thebes appears more reasonable in light of the following considerations:

³⁸ [Old Testament Times](#), Harrison, page 245.

³⁹ [The New Bible Commentary](#), Davidson, page 727.

- The prophecy would have only limited significance if it were written at a time when any astute and thoughtful person could have foreseen what was in store for the city by watching current happenings. God delights in telling of coming events long before man could anticipate them. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10).
- Assyria was apparently still in her prime when the book was written. She is spoken of as plotting against the Lord (Nahum 1:9,11) and being "at full strength and likewise many" (Nahum 1:12, NASB). Harrison says, "In about 652 B.C. the power of Assyria was shaken by violent internal strife." This was forty years before the fall of Nineveh and about ten years after the fall of Thebes. He adds, "Ashurbanipal himself died in 627 B.C., and at once the Assyrian empire crumbled."⁴⁰ This was a full fifteen years before the fall of Nineveh. Thus it seems likely that Nahum wrote before 652 B.C., and surely before 627.
- It appears that Sennacherib's attack on Judah was still fresh in the mind of the author and, humanly speaking, influenced the wording of his prophecy. This would tend to place the writing as early as other considerations would allow.
- Reference to the conquest of Thebes by the Assyrians would have the greatest force soon after the event, when the Ninevites were still flushed with the excitement of an outstanding victory.
- Judah did not need the comforting assurance of Nahum so much after the Assyrian empire was on her way down as when she was swelling with pride over her undisputed might. The instructions given in Nahum 1:15 need not have been written during an existing revival. They could have been intended as comfort, during dark days, through a prophecy of future revival.

With these considerations in mind it is suggested that Nahum may have been written about 660 to 655 B.C., after the fall of Thebes and before the internal strife began to visibly weaken the might of Assyria. This would be about forty-five years or so before it was literally and minutely fulfilled and Nineveh met her doom.

CHAPTER 15

Nineveh, Israel, and the Hand of God

Nahum 1:1 - 2:2

GOD'S SENTENCE AGAINST NINEVEH ANNOUNCED (1:1-3a)

"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" had been Jonah's message so

⁴⁰ Old Testament Times, Harrison, page 244.

many years before. The judgment was deferred when they believed God and turned from their wicked ways. They had seen that God is "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and One who relents concerning calamity" (Jonah 4:2, NASB).

Now a later generation is to learn that the same God is avenging and wrathful" and that "The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies" (Nahum 1:2, NASB).

Other prophets also foretold the judgment awaiting the Assyrians. Both [Isaiah 10:12](#) and [30:27-33](#) appear to have the defeat of the Assyrians in Josiah's day at least partly in view. Zephaniah, probably writing during the reign of Josiah, prophesied, "And He will stretch out His hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness" (Zeph. 2:13).

It was to Nahum, however, that the assignment was given to set forth in graphic detail the magnitude and the finality of God's vengeance on Nineveh.

The situation in Nahum is very different from that in the book of Jonah, and God is seen in quite another side of His holy character. A comparison between Jonah 4:2 and Nahum 1:2,3a will bring this before us clearly:

- Jonah knew that God is gracious and his prophecy demonstrates this characteristic. In Nahum God is jealous. Jonah had not been wrong in being jealous for the nation of Israel, in seeking to preserve her interests. He erred in not recognizing that God was more jealous for Israel than he could ever be - and able to defend her against her enemies without his clever interference.

Jealousy is not always an evil thing. Paul said later of the believers in Corinth, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Similarly God had espoused Israel to Himself ([Jer. 2:2](#); [Ezek. 16:8](#)) and He was jealous over them with a holy jealousy. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very much displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction" (Zech. 1:14b,15).

- Jonah knew that God is a merciful God. Nahum tells us that He is an avenging God. The Hebrew word for vengeance occurs three times in [Nahum 1:2](#). Much later Paul wrote, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Jonah had reluctantly given place unto God's wrath: in Nahum God takes that place left to Him by Jonah.
- Jonah knew that God is slow to anger. Nahum acknowledges this, but insists that God's patience has come to an end and He is furious. What an illustration Nineveh's history affords of Paul's words, "Or despisest thou the riches of His

goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:4,5). A generation or so after Jonah, Nineveh began to despise the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering. Finally all the wrath that their hard and impenitent hearts had been storing up was to be poured out. The wrath withheld in God's longsuffering became wrath reserved because of their impenitence.

- Jonah knew that God is a God of great kindness. Nahum warns Nineveh that God's restraint in judgment is not a sign of weakness. He is great in power. When God does not immediately destroy the wicked it must not be thought that He cannot, or that He will not!
- Jonah knew that God "relents concerning calamity" (Jonah 4:2, NASB). Calamity had been determined for Nineveh but God relented (repented) and did it not. Nahum declares that God "will not at all acquit the wicked." The book of Jonah demonstrated that no repentant heart need ever despair. Nahum warns that no impenitent heart should dare to presume.

GOD'S POWER TO CARRY OUT HIS WRATH (1:3b-6)

It is not merely that the phenomena of nature are under God's control. This is true, of course, but the point is that often God's way of bringing temporal judgment is through what man sees as "nature." The flood of Noah's day, the part played by the storm flooded river in the victory of Deborah and Barak ([Judges 5:4,21](#)), the tempest upon Jonah, and countless other super-controlled "natural" forces, are sprinkled liberally all through Scripture. Indicated here are storms, drought, earthquake, volcanic activity, and flood.

With all of man's vaunted knowledge today he still stands relatively helpless before the powers of nature. When the very earth he stands on buckles beneath his feet, "who can stand, before His indignation?" When the volcano spews forth its lava and ash, "who can endure the burning of His anger?" (1:6, NASB). (Not every natural phenomenon is a judgment from God, of course, any more than every sickness is due to sin in one's life.)

Man has often preferred to worship nature, the handiwork of God, rather than the personal, intelligent, and powerful God who created and sustains it. This takes many forms, from the worship of sun and moon to the man who goes fishing on Sunday and claims, with a straight face, that he is worshipping God in nature. The whole evolutionary explanation for our world attributes to "nature" prolific creative power that the evolutionist would scorn to attribute to a personal God.

But God often uses the very nature that foolish men have been blindly worshipping to accomplish His wrath.

While Scripture teaches that God has revealed Himself in nature, it also teaches that this revelation is limited and insufficient. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Psa. 19:1), but it is the written revelation, the "law of the Lord," that is "perfect, converting the soul" (Psa. 19:7). "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (Rom. 1:20, NASB). This knowledge renders man without excuse for his idolatry, but leaves him without salvation.

Nature reveals something of God's knowledge, glory, power, and wrath, but it is only in Scripture that His love and His grace may be seen. Only when God broke through natural law in the miracles of incarnation and resurrection was redemption provided for the lost.

In Jonah, a scene of loving and gracious deliverance for sinners, the heart of the story is the miracle of Jonah's resurrection. In Nahum, where all is judgment, "nature" reigns - there is not a single "miracle" The knowledge of God gained from nature is insufficient, but a step in the right direction. To cling to natural revelation and reject the written word of God is not only grossly inconsistent, it is fatal folly! But to WORSHIP nature INSTEAD OF GOD is culpable, rebellious idolatry.

It was God's way to speak to His enemies, in Nineveh, through the raging forces of nature. When, earlier, He had spoken to His servant, Elijah, His voice was not in the mighty wind, the earthquake, nor the fire. He spoke to him through a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:11,12). For the true believer today the forces of nature are but a part of the "all things" which God is working together for good (Rom. 8:28). Even the "still, small voice" has been replaced for us with a gloriously complete and amazingly adequate written revelation, illumined for us by the Holy Spirit who gave it (1 Cor. 2:12,14).

GOD'S GOODNESS IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE (1:7)

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth those who trust in Him" (Na. 1:7).

Israel had seen His goodness, in the days of Hezekiah, when He sent revival to Judah and invited the northern tribes to participate in it. Judah had trusted in Him and found Him a stronghold indeed. Rabshakeh had laughed at the idea that trusting in the Lord would save Judah from the hand of Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:30,35; 19:10), but the next day the Assyrians hurried home with a decimated army! The promise of the utter destruction of Nineveh, given later through Nahum, was also an evidence of God's goodness to Judah.

The context, however, seems to indicate a strong application of Nahum 1:7 to those in Nineveh. In their previous day of trouble, when their destruction had already been determined and announced, the Ninevites had trusted in Him and He was their stronghold - much to Jonah's dismay. As time had passed, succeeding generations had come to despise His forbearance, and judgment became certain. God promised to

make a complete end of Nineveh's site (Na. 1:8, NASB).⁴¹ But for the individual Assyrians or captive Israelites living in the city who trusted in 'the Lord, He would be their stronghold when the city fell. This seems to be the main force of verses 7 and 8 taken together. It is as if He was saying, "I know the individuals in Nineveh who trust in me and I will deliver them, but I will destroy the city!" (This reminds one of Lot and the city of Sodom, does it not?) This consideration modifies the idea that in Nahum there is an unbroken theme of judgment. We have no way of knowing how many were in Nineveh who were trusting the Lord, but if there was even one, he found that "the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble." Years later, when the city of Babylon was taken, there was at least one in the city who trusted the Lord. He found the Lord his stronghold in the day of trouble. He was not only spared, but was given a place of leadership in the new government. His name was Daniel.

Today, too, "the Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19) and we who know Him have a relationship with God that ensures our spiritual safety for time and eternity (Rom. 8).

THE DELIVERANCE OF JUDAH (1:8-15)

These verses appear to look back to what happened in the days of Hezekiah as well as forward to the events due to transpire during the reign of Josiah. Both were times of revival in Judah.

Rabshakeh, a wicked counselor, had come out of Nineveh (Na. 1:11) with an evil plan - to capture and destroy Jerusalem (Isa. 36:10). God had considered it as a plan against Himself (Na. 1:9,11), not only because He took personally their enmity against Judah, but because Rabshakeh, in his insolence, had challenged God Himself (Isa. 36:20; 37:23). Though the Assyrians had come against Jerusalem with a mighty army, they were cut down when the Lord passed through their camp (Na. 1:12). With 185,000 men slain in one night by the Lord, they had made a hasty retreat. Sennacherib himself was slain twenty years later while he was worshipping in the house of his gods (Isa. 37:38). How striking are the words of Na. 1:14 in the Amplified Bible. "Out of the house of your gods will I cut off the graven and molten images; I will make their temple your tomb, for you are vile and despised."

With this background doubtless in view, Nahum prophesied of a future time when the Assyrians were again under a vile king and a wicked counselor.

Their evil plan against the Lord may well have been to defy the God of Israel and try again to destroy Jerusalem. Since the ignominious defeat of Sennacherib, Judah had been brought under their power (2 Chron. 33:11), but Jerusalem itself still stood intact as God's answer to Rabshakeh's boasts. Nahum warned them that God would spare

⁴¹ This was literally fulfilled. "Its destruction was so complete that even its site was forgotten. When Xenophon . . . passed by 200 years later he thought the mounds were the ruins of some Parthian city. When Alexander the Great fought the famous battle of Arbela, 331 B.C., near the site of Nineveh, he did not know there had ever been a city there." Haley's Bible Handbook, page 292. Compare Zeph. 2:13-15.

Jerusalem a second such all out attack by making a complete end of their plan (Na. 1:9). He predicted that God would destroy their city and pursue their remaining armies "into darkness (Na. 1:8, NASB). As He had demonstrated to Sennacherib before, the great Assyrian military machine stood no more chance of survival against the Lord than a tangle of dry and withered thorns would when cast into the fire (Na. 1:10). Judah was to be rescued from affliction and freed from the shackles of Nineveh (Na. 1:12,13). Like Rabshakeh, these later leaders had challenged Israel's God. Now Nineveh's gods were to be challenged. Being unable to even save themselves, they would be of no help to the king. They were to be cut off out of their own temples, and the king and his family slain. "The Lord has issued a command concerning you: your name will no longer be perpetuated. I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are contemptible" (Na. 1:14, NASB).

In Ezekiel 32:22,23 Egypt is pictured as going down to hell in national death, as other nations before her had gone. Assyria is there to greet Egypt, having already been brought to her terminal judgment as a nation. Thus, in a real sense. God had prepared the grave for Assyria as well as for her king.

There is still to come on the stage of world history a man who is at least shadowed by the "wicked counselor" of Na. 1:11. He is called "The Assyrian" in [Micah 5:5](#) and will be one of the end time leaders that will come up against Jerusalem.

Nahum 1:15 deserves special attention, for it may well be the very heart of this book as far as Judah is concerned. It reads, "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows; for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." (History records that this king, Sin-shar-ishkun, perished in the fall of the city.)

It was during the closing days of the reign of Josiah that this good news came over the mountains.

Under Josiah Judah had returned to the prescribed feasts of Jehovah in their worship. Of the passover they celebrated it is said, "there was no passover like that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel, the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept" (2 Chron. 35:18). Josiah had made a vow before the Lord "to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant ... and he caused all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it" (2 Chron. 34:31,32).

Nahum had written directly to Judah and told them what they were to do when they heard the tidings of Nineveh's fall. They were to give their attention to continuing the revival. "Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely" (Na. 1:15, NASB).

Unfortunately Josiah did not follow instructions.

After the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. a remnant of the Assyrian army occupied Haran and held out for about three years before they were totally crushed by the Babylonians and Medes. (Perhaps this is what is meant by the expression "He will ... pursue His enemies into darkness" in Na. 1:8, NASB). R. K. Harrison relates, "With the fall of Assyria, Pharaoh Necho asserted himself and marched into the coastal plain of Palestine. The Revised Standard Version interprets his motive as expressed in 2 Kings 23:29 correctly by saying that he went 'to' the king of Assyria rather than 'against' him, as in the King James Version and the Revised Version. The Babylonian Chronicle ... makes it clear that Necho was marching to the aid of the Assyrian forces, who were in temporary possession of Haran. Josiah did not wish Necho to assist the hereditary enemies of Judah and attempted to stop him at Megiddo, but he was assassinated there in 609 B.C."⁴²

Josiah, as king of Judah, had been warned by Nahum to attend to his spiritual revival and leave the Assyrians to the Lord. He was further warned by Necho that Assyria was none of his business. "But he (Necho) sent ambassadors to him saying, 'What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not' " (2 Chron. 35:21).

Josiah paid no attention to the double warning. "Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo" (2 Chron. 35:22). There he lost his life.

The last of the Assyrian army in Haran was defeated in spite of Necho, and with no help from Josiah. Within about twenty-three years it was the Babylonians, whom Josiah had tried to help, that destroyed Jerusalem and took Judah into captivity!

The futility of Jonah's earlier plan to save Israel is demonstrated clearly here. He had thought that if Nineveh were destroyed it would deliver Israel from the chastening that was ahead of them. In this passage Nineveh WAS destroyed, but God just raised up another nation to chasten Judah when they continued in their sin. "Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They shall come all for violence ... and they shall gather captives as the sand" (Hab. 1:6,9). As I found out when I was a child, it doesn't save you from a whipping when you burn your father's switch!

One wonders what might have happened if Josiah had heeded the very explicit instructions given to him in Nahum. He could have lived on to deepen the revival in Judah. The destruction of Jerusalem could not have been averted, as Huldah the prophetess had told Josiah, "My wrath shall be kindled against the place, and shall not be quenched" (2 Kings 22:17). But it might have been postponed much longer.

⁴² Old Testament Times, Harrison, page 245.

Like Jonah, Josiah was unwilling to entrust the fate of Assyria to God. Like Jonah, it cost him his life. Unlike Jonah, he was not raised from the dead and given a chance to rectify his error. Jonah was raised up to share, grudgingly, in God's gracious handling of Nineveh. Josiah had done too much already, as far as Assyria was concerned, and his further "help" in destroying them was not needed.

How kind of God to allow us, today, a part in dispensing His grace (as in Jonah) but not to ask us, or even allow us, to have a part in pouring out His wrath! When Christ returns to take vengeance on them that know not God we will be resting with Paul ([2 Thess. 1:7,8](#)).

NINEVEH'S DOOM IS UPON HER (2:1)

"The one who scatters has come up against you. Man the fortress, watch the road; strengthen your back, summon all your strength" (NASB).

When Sennacherib came against Judah, Rabshakeh had ridiculed the defenses of Jerusalem. "I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How, then, wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants?" (Isa. 36:8,9). He had also scorned Israel's God. "Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, 'The Lord will deliver us.' Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?" (Isa. 36:18).

Now the shoe is on the other foot. It is the Assyrians who will be surrounded by hostile armies, and God is mocking THEIR defense. "Your day has come" God seems to be saying, "now see what YOU can do to deliver yourselves out of MY hand." This same theme of the futility of their defenses is taken up in detail in chapter three of Nahum.

The warning in Proverbs 1:24-31 finds an illustration here. Like "Wisdom," God, the source of all wisdom, will laugh at their calamity when their fear comes (Prov. 1:26). Their calamity will be because they have refused His call, spurned His invitation, made light of His counsel, and rejected His reproof (Prov. 1:24,25). They will eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices (Prov. 1:31) "because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:29). The lessons they had learned in Jonah's day, and at the hand of Hezekiah's God later, had been all too quickly forgotten. Part of their punishment was to be the stinging reproach of being held up to ridicule.

Early in the book of Psalms, so filled with the compassion of the Lord on those who seek Him, there is a grim warning to the nations who "imagine a vain thing. . . (and) take counsel together against the Lord" (Psa. 2:1,2 & compare Na. 1:9,11). God will "speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His great displeasure" (Psa. 2:5) and "He who sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision" (Psa. 2:4). The account in Nahum illustrates this principle and should be a further warning to those

nations in the last days who are preeminently in view in Psalm 2.⁴³ Why should not God mock those who have mocked His Son (as in [Matt. 20:19; 27:41](#)), the Holy Spirit's work (as in [Acts 2:13](#)) and His prophetic Word (as in [Jude 18](#))? Ignorance of God's existence is inexcusable ([Rom. 1:19,20](#)); seeking to approach Him on the basis of human righteousness is pitiful ([Rom. 10:1-3](#)); but blatant defiance of the Almighty God by puny men is ridiculous! He who laughs last laughs best, and God will have the last laugh! Nations today had best not ignore this principle.

ISRAEL'S FULL DELIVERANCE AWAITS HER (2:2)

In the NASB, Nahum 2:2 reads, "For the Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, even though devastators have devastated them and destroyed their vine branches."

This verse suggests that God's purpose in the judgment goes beyond the temporary relief of only Judah; that the destruction of Nineveh and her king is part of a larger plan and a pledge of its fulfillment. God will not have completed His design until JACOB (meaning "supplanter," emphasizing the character of Israel that made the chastenings necessary), having been fully chastened, will be returned to the glory of ISRAEL (meaning "Prince with God," a REDEEMED JACOB).

The devastation and destruction of the vine⁴⁴ (representing both the northern and southern kingdoms, Isa. 5:7) had not yet been completed at the time God judged Nineveh. Just a few short years later the "pleasant plant," Judah, would be "trampled down" ([Isa. 5:5](#)) under the feet of Nebuchadnezzar. The vine is still under foot today.

There is coming a day, happily, when the "vine branches" will be grafted into the true Vine, Christ, and will no longer bear "wild grapes" ([Isa. 5:2](#)). They will bear "much fruit" ([John 15:5](#)) and will be restored to their former glory and far more!

The history of the vine is described in Psalm 80, verses 8 through 19. The vine brought out of Egypt and planted in Palestine was glorious (vs. 9-11) but later was wasted and devoured (vs. 12,13,16). Its restoration (v. 19) will nevertheless come about in the future:

- Through God returning and visiting the vine. "Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and behold, and VISIT THIS VINE" ([Psa. 80:14](#)).
- Through the strength of "the Man of (God's) right hand ... the Son of Man" ([Psa.](#)

⁴³ While Psalm 2 is quoted in Acts 4:25,26 as referring to the crucifixion, it appears, from the wording of the Psalm itself, that a much more literal fulfillment will take place when Satan leads the nations against Christ in his final rebellion in Rev. 20:7-9. The principle, that God derides and laughs at the futility of men fighting against Him, is timeless. See [Psa. 37:13;59:8](#).

⁴⁴ The word translated "vine branches" here is not the same as that used in the other references to Israel as a vine. It is a word meaning a twig that has been pruned from a vine (according to Strong's Concordance). This word may be used to indicate that the devastation of the devastators is a chastening (pruning of the vine).

80:17). This appears to be a reference to Christ.

- When Israel calls upon the name of the Lord and is saved. "So will not we go back from thee; revive us, and we will call upon thy name. Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved" (Psa. 80:18,19).

Isaiah takes up the story from here, describing the "vine" during the Millennium. "In that day sing unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I, the Lord, do keep it; I will water it every moment. Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day" (Isa. 27:2,3).

He assures Israel that there will be no more chastening at the hands of their enemies, "fury (against Israel) is not in me." If any should presume to come against Him (and His vine), as many will at the close of the Millennium, He will "go through them ... burn them together," though He had longed that they would turn to Him and "make peace" with Him (Isa. 27:4,5). As for His vine, "He shall cause those who come of JACOB to take root; ISRAEL shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6). The splendor of JACOB will indeed be restored like the splendor of ISRAEL.

It is in connection with Egypt that Israel is first called a vine. "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt" (Psa. 80:8). [Isa. 52:4](#) (NASB) refers to Israel's bondage in Egypt and then to their oppression by Assyria. "My people went down at the first into Egypt to reside there, then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause." God's deliverance from Egypt and Assyria is used as an assurance that He will also emancipate them from the coming Babylonian captivity. They will come back to Zion, not in haste or by flight, but bearing the vessels of the Lord and with the Lord as their leader and their "rear guard" (Isa. 52:8-12). Ezra and Nehemiah have recorded the literal fulfillment of this prophecy.

Isaiah 52 looks forward (as prophecy often does) to a still future time when it will be even more literally fulfilled.⁴⁵ Their liberation in this future day will come when the speaker, the LORD (Jehovah), will be able to say to an Israel who finally know His name,⁴⁶ "Here I am" (Isa. 52:6, NASB). This is an evident reference to the literal return of Christ in glory (and an incidental proof of His deity). It will result in salvation for Israel and the reign of God over Israel ("who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' " (Isa. 52:7b, NASB); the comforting of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem ("the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem" Isa. 52:9b, NASB); and the demonstration of God's power in the sight of all nations and the provision of salvation for all the ends of the earth ("The Lord has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations; that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God" Isa. 52:10, NASB).

The words used in heralding this wonderful time are the ones quoted later, almost

⁴⁵ See Appendix "D".

⁴⁶ Israel has for centuries known the names "I Am," "Jehovah," "Elohim," etc. One name that they do not know, AS THE NAME OF GOD, is "Jesus." Saul of Tarsus knew both the name "Jesus" and the name "Lord," but it was when he found that the LORD'S name WAS "JESUS" that he was converted (Acts 9:5).

verbatim, by Nahum, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace" (Isa. 52:7a. Compare [Na. 1:15a](#)). It is at this future deliverance, spoken of by Isaiah, that the vine shall be restored.

In Romans 10:15 Paul referred back to both of these passages and wrote, "And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." His point is that any message of good news requires a faithful messenger, a "sent one." Surely the elated messenger bringing word of Nineveh's fall did not tarry nor turn aside until all Judah could share in his astounding news.

We have a message of peace today that is even more wonderful. It is based not on sinful men bearing the judgment of God, but on God bearing judgment for sinful men. Our message is not for one nation only, but good news for all men. Let us deliver it eagerly to those around us, to the whole world!

In connection with this future rescue of Israel, Micah writes, "Therefore will He (Christ, see previous verse) give them (Israel) up until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return unto the children of Israel ... for now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace, when THE ASSYRIAN shall come into our land; and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principle men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances of it; thus shall He deliver us from THE ASSYRIAN, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders" (Micah 6:3-6).

This can hardly refer to the reprieve in Hezekiah's day, for the land of Assyria was not touched then, only the leaders of the Assyrian army were killed. Neither can it refer to the fall of Assyria in 612 B.C., for Judah had no part in that battle. (When Josiah, contrary to instructions and in spite of warning, tried to get in on the tail end of the battle he was rebuked and lost his life).⁴⁷ The words, "Then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principle men," indicate that Judah WILL have a part in this LATTER DAY victory. This is amply confirmed in Zechariah 12. There, when Jerusalem is surrounded by "all the nations of the earth" (Zech. 12:3, NASB), Judah will be like a torch among sheaves in consuming the enemy ([Zech. 12:6](#)). The Lord will so work among them that the weakest will be like the famed warrior, David, and their leaders (the "house of David") like God in their military exploits (Zech. 12:8). They will win a decisive and impressive victory. When they turn to their heaven-sent leader, the "Angel of the Lord," who was before them in the battle, to thank Him they will see the nail prints in His hands. Suddenly, like Saul of Tarsus before them, they will realize how

⁴⁷ It is of great interest that Josiah fought and lost his life at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29,30, NASB). Josiah, godly king that he was, surely had knowledge of the prophetic writings of Nahum and Micah. Both had been written early enough to have been circulated, and recently enough to be well remembered. Instead of following the instruction addressed to him in Nahum to leave the conquest of the Assyrians to God, he may have tried to fulfill the prediction in Micah which speaks of the participation of God's people in the battle against the Assyrian. If so, he was biblical, but not dispensational. He was following Scripture, but not the passage related to HIM. He was in the right PLACE, Megiddo, but not at the right TIME. He did not distinguish things that differ, and it cost him his life!

very wrong they have been for the centuries past in refusing to receive Christ as the Messiah; "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his firstborn" (Zech. 12:10). Even though it is Judah and Jerusalem that is specifically mentioned here, this must be the day that Paul speaks of in Rom. 11:26, "And so ALL ISRAEL shall be saved; as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

The whole context of Micah 5:3-6 (not excluding Micah 5:2 where the emphasis is that the one coming out of Bethlehem is to be the RULER over Israel) confirms that it is speaking about the same period as Zech. 12, the close of the Tribulation period. The end time battle (Rev. 16:16) will take place at Megiddo (or "Megiddon" or "Armageddon"), the very place where Josiah was killed fighting against Pharaoh Necho, the ally of Assyria. Although the conversion of Judah (and Israel) following the battle will be in Jerusalem the valley of Megiddo is brought into the picture again as the mourning of Judah (described in Zech. 12:10,11) is compared to the mourning of Judah earlier in the city of Hadadrimmon over the death of king Josiah.⁴⁸

How beautifully all of this links together! At the FUTURE RESTORATION of the vine, deliverance from "The Assyrian" will take place, and good news will come over the mountains of peace. Earlier, at the PROMISE of restoration of the vine, there was deliverance from Assyria (with special attention to the Assyrian who may well foreshadow the coming Assyrian of Micah's prophecy) and good news came over the mountains of peace!

Thus Nahum used the prophecy against Nineveh as a foretaste of things yet to come. Her destruction points to the final defeat of all those nations, or leaders of nations, that plot evil against the Lord, leading to the full restoration of all Israel. The scope and significance of his book goes far beyond merely a graphic and poetic description of the overthrow of one Gentile city.

CHAPTER 16

Nineveh and the Invaders

Nahum 2:3 – 10

It was a coalition of Babylonians and Medes that came against Nineveh. Their campaign began in 616 B.C. with a systematic conquest of cities and forts throughout the empire. By 614 B.C. the attack centered on Nineveh. After two years of siege the city was taken when a flood undercut part of the wall, causing a long section of it to fall into the river. We are introduced to the battle at that highly critical moment when the enemy was rushing toward the opening in the wall. One wonders how they managed to cross the swollen river to take advantage of their door of access. Perhaps they had

⁴⁸ "Hadadrimmon is believed to have been a city in the valley of Megiddo, where Josiah was slain." The New Bible Commentary, page 760.

already prepared a pontoon bridge, for they would have to have had some way of crossing the water barriers surrounding the city even if the wall had not fallen. Perhaps, too, the high wall falling into the stream formed a temporary, but very substantial, causeway for the invaders.

THE ATTACK (2:3)

Verse three describes the approaching army. "The shields of his mighty men are colored red, the warriors are dressed in scarlet, the chariots are enveloped in flashing steel when he is prepared to march, and the cypress spears are brandished" (2:3, NASB). What a terrifying spectacle this must have been to the besieged Ninevites!

THE FRANTIC DEFENSE (2:4,5)

The wild confusion implied in verse four seems to fit the situation of the defenders who, quite evidently, were taken by surprise, rather than the well ordered advance of the enemy.

The Assyrians had boasted when they came against Hezekiah (Isa. 37:24), "By the multitude of my chariots I come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon." In Nahum, Assyria's chariots are mentioned in connection with her past military exploits (3:2), her feverish efforts at defense (2:4), and her final defeat (2:13). The chariot was a symbol of military power, but when the might of Assyria was pitted against God they were helpless against One who also has chariots, "chariots of fire" (2 Kings 6:17). Though unseen by men, they are more numerous than those of any earthly power. Facing the chariots of Syria years before, Elisha had said, "Fear not; for they who are with us are more than they who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). Today the symbol of military might has become the atomic bomb, but the judgments God will pour out at the close of the Great Tribulation will prove that there, too, God's power stands awesomely supreme.

How graphic is the description of the defense efforts. "The chariots race madly in the streets, they rush wildly in the squares, their appearance is like torches" (2:4, NASB). Abject fear and utter confusion seem to have been reigning as they tried to organize their forces.

The king was gathering his nobles (2:5, NASB - the same word occurs in 3:18). His men were stumbling in their rush to the wall. Perhaps they had just been awakened out of sound sleep. Possibly they had been having a drinking party, feeling secure behind their walls, as the Babylonians did years later under similar circumstances ([Dan. 5:1,30](#)). This might explain the expression in Nahum 1:10, "while they are drunk like drunkards, they shall be devoured like stubble fully dry." How different was their reaction to impending doom from that of their ancestors in the days of Jonah, and how tragically different the result!

The preparation of the defense mentioned in 2:5 is described in the NASB as the setting up of a mantelet. This was a movable protection for soldiers who were

advancing against a city. The defenders would normally not need this piece of equipment, for the wall would be their protection. The Assyrians suddenly had no wall and seem to have reverted to the mantelet as an emergency measure for protection against the invaders. All was frenzied confusion.

THE KEY TO NINEVEH'S DEFEAT - THE RIVER IN GOD'S HANDS (2:6)

The king of Assyria had no hand writing on the plaster of the wall to warn him, as did Belshazzar later, but, when the earth shook with the toppling of the wall and the diverted river began to eat away at the foundations of the palace, the king may well have reacted as Belshazzar did. "Then the king's face grew pale, and his thoughts alarmed him; and his hip joints went slack, and his knees began knocking together" (Dan. 5:6, NASB). He must have seen the hand of God at work every bit as clearly as if it were writing on the wall. Not only could no human enemy have arranged the flood, but this prophecy of Nahum had doubtless been brought to Assyria's attention years before the event took place. In the past they may have laughed at the prediction. They may have said, Don't let Israel's God frighten you. He said once before that Nineveh would be destroyed and nothing ever happened!" Now they were not laughing any more! How many today who laugh at the idea of hell will one day strangle on their mirth as they find themselves suddenly "tormented in ... flame" ([Luke 16:24](#)).

Although God uses men and nations to accomplish His judgments, He often enters personally into the matter in a decisive way. As we have noticed, a long section in Nahum's short book expounds the theme that natural disasters are God's way of showing His hand when He is pouring out His wrath. Nahum had pinpointed a flood as the particular tool that God would use to deliver Nineveh into the hands of her enemies. "With an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site," he had stated plainly (1:8, NASB). "The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved," he had added (2:6). The reference to Nineveh as "like a pool of water throughout her days" (2:8, NASB) appears to refer to her past serenity and security, due partly to the river and canals protecting her. But her tranquility was to be rudely interrupted. Nahum had called their attention to the fact that Thebes had similarly been protected by the Nile (3:8, NASB), but had fallen. He was saying that they would be devastated by the very river they were counting on to protect them. According to a footnote in the Amplified Bible (page 1,049), there had been a legend that Nineveh could never be taken until the river became its enemy. One wonders if the legend could have found its source in the prophecy of Nahum.

The prophet had also indicated their wall would fail them. He predicted they would be involved in making bricks (to repair the wall, or to replace part of it) when the enemy would engulf them (3:14).

As surely as God gave Jericho into the hands of the Israelites, He turned Nineveh over to ruin by her enemies. To identify His part in it all He gave them a detailed account of just how He would do it, years in advance. Unlike the earlier Ninevites, they repented not.

NINEVEH'S DEFEAT (2:7-10)

Once the river had breached the wall and the enemy had come pouring into the startled city, its subjugation was swift and sure. What could be more alarming proof of the hopelessness of their plight than to see their queen,⁴⁹ stripped of her crown and all her royal apparel and jewels, being led off helplessly by the invaders? Her attendants could only grieve for her with stifled sobs as they preceded her into captivity (v. 7).

Nineveh had for so long been a place of imperturbable security behind its massive walls, like a placid mountain lake, that it must have been hard to believe their own eyes when they saw their soldiers running away in panic. The years of stern discipline were forgotten. "Stand, stand!" their officers shouted, but they could only think of self preservation and they did not even look back.

The crumbling of the defenses was a signal to loot the city. The cry "Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold!" (2:9, NASB), may have been heard midst the mingled shouts of war and screams of the wounded, but also these words may well have been GOD'S instructions to the invaders. They were His servants in punishing this wicked people. When the Assyrians had been the rod in God's hand to chasten Israel and Judah, He said, "I send it (His "rod," Assyria) against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury TO CAPTURE BOOTY and to SIEZE PLUNDER, and to trample them down like mud in the streets" (Isa. 10:6, NASB).⁵⁰ Their turn had now come to be plundered. The "arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness" were to be punished. They were to be spoiled by God's new rod of vengeance, and at God's direction. That the invaders of the city followed this instruction fully is attested. "She is emptied! Yes, she is desolate and waste" (2:10a, NASB).

When Assyria had captured Thebes, "her small children were dashed to pieces at the head of every street; they cast lots for her honorable men, and all her great men were bound with fetters" (3:10 NASB). Those taken into slavery, however, had been the fortunate ones. It is said of Assyria, "they practiced cruelty. They skinned their prisoners alive, or cut off their hands, feet, noses, ears, or put out their eyes, or pulled out their tongues, and made mounds of human skulls, all to inspire terror."⁵¹ Most of the Assyrian writings consisted of boastful accounts of their military cruelty.

As the survivors recalled how their counterparts in other nations had been treated by them in the past there were, "hearts melting and knees knocking! Also anguish ... in the whole body, and all faces ... grown pale!" (2:10, NASB). They were about to take a large dose of their own medicine and it was bitter indeed.

Writing to encourage believers suffering persecution, Paul wrote, "it is a righteous

⁴⁹ "She is stripped, she is carried away" could refer to Nineveh under the figure of a queen, but "her handmaids" seems to favor the queen herself as being in view (2:7 NASB).

⁵⁰ See also Ezekiel 29:18-20 where God gave Nebuchadnezzar the plunder of Egypt as "wages for his army" because they had been working for God when they fought against Tyre.

⁵¹ See Halley's Bible Handbook, twenty-third edition, page 151.

thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you" (2 Thess. 1:6). When we hear, today, of the cruelties being practiced against God's saints in many parts of the world, when we ourselves face persecution and possibly death, we can be comforted by Paul's further word, "And to you who are troubled, REST WITH US, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God," (2 Thess. 1:7,8). When God's judgment was poured out on their enemies in Nineveh, the people of Judah were supposed to be resting at peace in Jerusalem, keeping their solemn feasts. When Christ comes in glory, to pour out His wrath on our enemies, we will be resting in heaven with Paul and the other saints of this age of grace. It will be His battle, not ours.

CHAPTER 17

Nineveh and Her Guilt

Nahum 2:11 - 3:7

Much could be written about the specific sins that brought God's wrath against Nineveh. Their treatment of Israel and Judah is mentioned in Nahum 1:12b,13; 2:2b. Their pride and insolence, their plotting against the Lord and outright defiance of Him, all these are suggested in Nahum 1:9-15 and more fully developed elsewhere. Nahum defines the underlying causes for the condemnation of this mighty city as existing in two inter-related areas: her military activities and the situation at home that spawned them.

HER GREED AND CRUELTY (2:11-3:3)

This section is introduced on a "Where are the good old days?" note. "Where is the den of the lions and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion, lioness, and the lion's cub prowled, with nothing to disturb them?" (2:11, NASB). Whatever the cost of Assyria's wars to her soldiers, their homes and families had previously been largely safe and secure. Now their parents, wives and children were lying in pools of their own blood or were being taken away captive by the enemy. The anguish and agony of war had come home to them at last. No more were they secure with nothing to disturb them.

Militarily, they had committed two major offenses. They had not waged war just to meet their needs as a nation, but had given themselves over to the lust for plunder and power. "The lion tore ENOUGH for his cubs, killed ENOUGH for his lioness" but he was not satisfied until he had "FILLED HIS LAIRS with prey and his dens with torn flesh" (2:12, NASB).

Also they had become enamored with the excitement of battle for its own sake and were glorying in the bloody carnage it entailed. They found a fierce exhilaration in the "noise of the whip, the noise of the rattling of the wheels, galloping horses, and bounding chariots!" They saw nothing in life better than the stirring sight of "horsemen charging, swords flashing, spears gleaming." The "many slain, a mass of corpses, and

countless dead bodies" that stacked up until they stumbled over them, only added sadistic zest to their whole way of life (3:2,3, NASB). Their annals are filled with their glorying in these things. They were indeed a "bloody city" (3:1).

To add to their guilt, they had become inordinately proud of their prowess. Their spokesmen waxed long and loud in the praise of Assyrian might. The insolent speech of Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18:19-25, 27-35) and the shorter, but equally arrogant, letter of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:10-13) are examples of this. This pride and insolence is cited in Isa. 10:7-19 as a basis for God's judgment on Assyria at the time of Hezekiah. "So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness'" (Isa. 10:12, NASB). Truth was not a necessary ingredient in their propaganda. They were "full of lies" (Na. 3:1).

God had been using them and rewarding them with the spoil of battle. Not content with this, they took things into their own hands, claimed all the credit for their victories, and even defiantly challenged the God who had once so graciously spared their city and later had given them power over their enemies. Now God declares that the situation has changed. "'Behold, I am against thee' declares the Lord of hosts" (2:13). He will destroy her and her armed might (symbolized in her chariots), cut off her amassing of slaves and plunder, and terminate forever the political propaganda and psychological warfare of her "messengers."

HER HARLOTRY AND WITCHCRAFT (3:4-7)

In these verses Nahum points out the two things that had been allowed to determine the extravagantly militaristic policy of savage world domination which Assyria followed.

First of all there was behind their national policies a self-aggrandizing profit motive. Not seeking any semblance of national honesty and integrity, the lust for wealth led them into shameless treachery against other nations.

When Israel had turned to other nations in a time of danger, instead of calling on the Lord, it was not only termed "adultery," since it violated their relationship to God, it was also spoken of as "harlotry" because the "loving protection" they were seeking was theirs by paying a price. It was purchased love. Hosea wrote concerning Israel, "they have gone up to Assyria ... Ephraim has hired lovers. Even though they hire allies among the nations, now I will gather them up; and they will begin to diminish" (Hosea 8:9,10, NASB). Judah, too, in the days of Ahaz, turned to Assyria as protection against Israel and Syria. "And Tilgath-pilneser, king of Assyria, came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the Lord, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria, but he helped him not" (2 Chron. 28:20,21). Assyria did not care about Ahaz, she just loved his wealth.

These were not isolated cases. In 2 Kings 15:19,20 Menahem of Israel paid 1,000 talents of silver (nearly two million dollars) to turn back the attack of Pul, king of Assyria.

Hoshea of Israel gave a present each year to Shahn aneser, but he failed to bring his "present" one year and was put in prison and his people taken into captivity (2 Kings 17:4-6).⁵² Hezekiah even stripped the gold from the doors of the temple and gave it to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:16), yet the Assyrians came against him anyway (2 Kings 18:17). It is evident that the Assyrian equivalent of the "Almighty Dollar" was the basis for their foreign policy. Their "love" was for hire, and they would sell nations to the highest bidder.

The fact that Nineveh had multiplied her merchants above the stars of heaven (3:16) seems to indicate that she had used her armed might to further enrich the "well favored harlot" by supporting and defending a world trade monopoly. Here her sins may have been similar to those of the harlot city, Babylon, in Revelation 18. The kings of the earth are said to have "committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her" (Rev. 18:9), and then several verses are taken up describing her commercial interests.

It would seem that Satan has been, in some special way, behind this sin of wanton commercialism. Ezekiel 28 twice links Satan with "traffic." This word is changed to "merchandise" in the revised Scofield text. And in the NASB the passages read, "By the abundance of your TRADE you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned" (Ezek. 28:16); and "By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your TRADE, you profaned your sanctuaries" (Ezek. 28:18). Satan is viewed here with his influence on Tyre in the foreground, even as his original sin in heaven is in the background. In one way or another he is linked with unlimited and unrighteous trade.

The blame for this sin of Nineveh cannot be rested on Satan alone, nor only upon the leaders of government or big business. The ones who sparked and maintained the whole system were the many individuals who sought avidly after an ever higher and higher "standard of living" without regard to the methods used to procure it. It was crass materialism. As James says, "From where come wars and fightings among you? Come they not here, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:1-3).

The lust for wealth may have been their motive, but they apparently looked to demons for their guidance. Nineveh, like Egypt, Babylon, and others, depended strongly on omens, prognostications, and advice from mediums, soothsayers and astrologers in making national, as well as personal, decisions. Just because "everyone was doing it" did not make it one whit less offensive to God. It meant that the leadership in Nineveh was largely under the control of God's arch-enemy, Satan.

One of Satan's chief activities has been to "shake kingdoms" and make the world "like a wilderness" (Isa. 14:16,17). He will one day be cast into the bottomless pit so that he shall "deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years (shall) be fulfilled" (Rev. 20:3). When he is given one last chance to exert himself he will immediately go

⁵² He had sent to the king of Egypt for help against the Assyrians, and so was considered guilty of conspiracy also.

forth "to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth" (Rev. 20:8). To accomplish his ends Satan evidently has a "Prince" over the affairs of each nation to influence their activities, as Daniel 10:13,20 indicates.

The affairs of state have been further influenced by the Satanically inspired heathen religions. His underlings, the demons, dictate doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1-3), receive worship (1 Cor. 10:20; Rev. 9:20), and will one day be involved in gathering the nations together for Armageddon (Rev. 16:14). What part demon possessed or demon influenced leaders have had in the bloody pages of history is an open question.

It is not insignificant that as the Day of the Lord draws near, when Satan's man and Satan's "church" will totally control the nations, we see more and more witchcraft abounding everywhere. The phenomenal growth today, worldwide, of all kinds of occult religions, including outright and open Satan worship, is frightening.

There are three religious movements in the world today that have an ominous significance in light of the prophetic description of the religious situation during the Great Tribulation. All three minimize doctrine to a large degree.

The Ecumenical Movement, mistaking UNION for UNITY, and with a passion for political power, seeks a world church. In days to come, when it is powerful enough to do so, it will no doubt attempt to crush all non-conformist groups. It has already moved in this direction in some areas.

The Charismatic Movement, at times confusing CREDULITY and even GULLIBILITY, for FAITH, and with its penchant for the miraculous, is deeply infiltrating existing groups of all kinds, taking over their leadership as they are able. Of the three movements noted here, this one has a larger percentage of "evangelical truth" than the others and hence has a greater potential to deceive the fundamental churches.

The occult groups, putting SATAN for GOD (whether they realize and admit it or not), led by demons, are reviving the worst of the ancient heathen religions under the outward cloak of respectability provided by Christendom.

Once the true believers are taken out of all facets of the world's religious scene at the rapture, it will not take long for the "one world church" to mature. The Ecumenical Church has the organization and political connections that will be needed. The Charismatic Movement can provide the common basis in religious experience (chiefly healing and tongues) for piously overlooking far reaching and fundamental differences in doctrine.⁵³ The occult sects will provide the direct tie-in with the Satanic power and direction that will make it a worldwide success. The "harlot" of Revelation 17:1-6 will have arrived on the scene! The occult connections of the "Man of sin" will be more direct and complete than anything known in Nineveh (or even today), but it was

⁵³ That very many true believers are involved in the Charismatic movement today is not denied. Yet the basic errors are there and will be even more prominent when the believers are removed. The "gift of tongues" is practiced today by such widely divergent groups as Roman Catholics and Mormons, to name but two.

foreshadowed there, and so was the judgment upon it!

Thus it seems that "big business" and false religion gave birth to the ruthless and barbaric militarism of Nineveh. Does this sound familiar? If the motive of selfish and unrestrained profit on the one hand, and the dictates of religious (or anti-religious) leaders on the other, were removed from BOTH SIDES of the conflicting forces today, even an amateur diplomat might resolve most of the remaining obstacles to peace.⁵⁴

Satan is still busy using materialism, with its appeal to our vanity, and false religion, with its emotional drives and its diabolical influence, to prevent any real or lasting peace until the Prince of Peace comes to reign.

In connection with both the bone crushing militarism and the factors that inspired it, God said, "Behold, I am against thee!"⁵⁵ We glory today in the wonderful question of Paul, "If God be FOR us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The question Nineveh should have been asking herself is, "If God be AGAINST us, who can be FOR us?" Indeed there were none to even grieve for her or offer a comforting word. She had destroyed nations, now she was to be destroyed (Na. 2:13). She had acted like a harlot, now she was to be treated like one (Na. 3:5b-7).

The principle, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7), applies to the believer's life for the Lord, but it is not strong enough here. Even the stronger words addressed to Israel, "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7) will not suffice. Chastening of the believer, though severe, is restrained with a view to correction and will come to a glorious end, even though prolonged. The judgment of the wicked is unrestrained with a view to total destruction and, though it may be long delayed, is administered midst the rejoicing of the saints and the derision of the Almighty. The believer may be, yea, WILL BE, chastened as a son. The Christ rejecting world is being reserved unto the pouring out of the vials of God's wrath. To them Christ will come "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. 1:8,9). In that day what will the wicked be able to do? They, like Nineveh, will hear the solemn words of God, "Behold, I am against thee!"

⁵⁴ What is said does not rule out legitimate profit as an acceptable motive any more than Paul's warning against the love of money in 1 Tim. 6:10 rules out the use of money.

⁵⁵ Occasionally God says to Israel, "I am against thee!", as in Jer. 21:13 and Ezek. 5:8. That it is the wicked among them He is against and not the nation as a whole is well illustrated in Ezek. 20. God is against the "rebels" in Israel and He will purge them (Ezek. 20:38). The remnant will be chastened (v. 37) but accepted by God (vs. 40-44) to be His people.

CHAPTER 18

Nineveh and her Doom

Nahum 3:8 - 19

Following the twice repeated statement by God, "Behold, I am against thee," and enclosed between the question, "Where will I seek comforters for thee?" and the answer, "All who hear about you will clap their hands over you" (3:7,19, NASB), the utter hopelessness of Nineveh's well deserved fate is proclaimed.

HER OUTLYING FORTIFICATIONS CANNOT PREVENT THE SIEGE (3:8-13)

Located far up the Nile from what is now Cairo, protected by the waters of the Nile and with many strong allies to come to her aid, the Egyptian city of **Thebes** had still fallen to the Assyrians. The magnitude of their victory was still fresh in their memories when Nahum wrote, in effect, "You are no more invincible than they were. As Thebes fell before your sword, you will fall before the sword of your enemies."

Even though Thebes had strong allies for protection, they had been unable to save her. By the time Nahum's prophecy began to be fulfilled, Assyria stood virtually alone. "When the Babylonians and Medes first marched on Nineveh (615-614 B.C.) the Seythes helped the Assyrians repel the attacks. Two years later, however, the Seythes were persuaded to desert Assyria and join the attack against it."⁵⁶ The Egyptians came to their aid only after the fall of Nineveh, and then, probably, more from fear of the rising power of Babylon than from any love for Assyria.

Like Thebes, Nineveh counted on protection from a water barrier, but, in the case of Nineveh, God used a flooding of the river to break down their wall.

To the Assyrians, their conquest of Thebes had been a proof of their military might. To Nahum it was but a blueprint of the collapse of Nineveh herself. Like Thebes, their city would fall. As they had treated their captives, so they would be treated. They had lived by the sword, now they would perish by the sword.

The "fortifications," "gates," and "gate bars" (3:12,13) probably refer to the outer defenses located on the roads and in the mountain passes leading into Assyria. They were methodically attacked and destroyed over a two year period until Nineveh had only the rivers and her walls to protect her.

THE FRANTIC PREPARATIONS FOR DEFENSE WILL NOT DELAY THE IRRUPTION (3:14,15a)

In addition to the normal measures to prepare for a siege, storing up sufficient

⁵⁶ Encyclopedia Americana Vol. 24, page 471. The Seythes were a nomadic nation from the southern part of what is now Russia.

supplies and making sure that all is as secure as possible, there will be a sudden desperate need for great quantities of brick to replace a long section of their wall. Their frenzied efforts will be of no avail. While they are still preparing the clay and laying out the brick molds, the enemy will be upon them. Their blood will defile the still moist clay at their feet. Nineveh will learn, the hard way, a truth that we need to give attention to today. "Unless the Lord guards a city, the watchman keeps awake in vain" (Psa. 127: 1, NASB).

HER GREAT LEADERSHIP CANNOT MITIGATE HER PLIGHT (3:15b-19a)

The leadership that had made Assyria the greatest empire to that time will not be able to take care of her now. As the locusts strip the fields of every green leaf and then fly away, so the merchants, who have profited so greatly from the commerce of the city, will drop everything and leave Nineveh to her fate. As locusts settle on a stone wall for protection on a cold day, but rise in clouds and fly away when the sun warms them, the religious⁵⁷ and military leaders will be "long gone." The shepherds and nobles,⁵⁸ the civil leaders, will be "lying down" (3:18, NASB) in perpetual sleep, they will be dead. Their sheep ("thy people") will be scattered and no shepherd will remain to gather them together. There will never be another Nineveh!

SHE HAS NO FRIENDS TO REGRET HER COLLAPSE (3:19b)

The statements in verses 7 and 19 are the more remarkable when we compare the destruction of Nineveh with that of Babylon in Revelation 18. As vile and wicked as the future Babylon will be, it tells us that, "the kings of the earth ... shall bewail her and lament for her" (v. 9), "the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her" (v. 11), and "every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying 'What city is like unto this great city?' " (vs. 17,18). There was to be no such lamentation for Nineveh!

God had once said to Judah, "Who shall be sorry for thee? ... by whom shall I comfort thee?" (Isa. 51:19), but He Himself became their comforter. "Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again" (Isa. 51:22). The cup was passed on to Assyria. "But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict thee" (Isa. 5 1:23).

But for Nineveh NONE grieved for her, NONE tried to comfort her, ALL clapped their hands at the word of her destruction! "The Assyrian Empire collapsed completely ... to the great delight of their former subjects, who had suffered from the cruelty and rapacity of their overlords for so long. So far as we know, no attempt was ever made to restore

⁵⁷ The word translated "crowned" in 3:17 (KJV) is used only here. It comes from a root word translated "consecrate" and "separate." The root word is always used of separation unto the Lord (as in the case of the Nazarite) or from the Lord because of idols (Ezek. 14:7) or unto Baal (Hos. 9:10). Thus these leaders are evidently religious leaders.

⁵⁸ This word is the same one used in 2:5 ("He shall recount his WORTHIES") and is translated "famous" in Psa. 136:18. These are evidently those the king can best count on to help him in his work.

the Assyrian state."⁵⁹

Because David could say confidently, "God is for me," he could add, "I will not be afraid what man can do unto me" (Psa. 56:9,11). But both Nineveh (Na. 1:9) and its "wicked counselor" (Na. 1:11) had imagined evil against the Lord and the Lord was against them. In Romans 8:31, Paul, sharing David's confidence, asks, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" As before noted, the Assyrians might well have asked themselves, "If God be against us, who can be for us?" The mouldering ruins of Nineveh stand to this day as the solemn answer to that question! Proud nations of today, take care!

CHAPTER 19

Why Judgment?

Jonah had difficulty understanding how a righteous God could spare the wicked city of Nineveh. The book of Jonah answers that question. Today there are hosts of intelligent and sincere people who find it hard to see how a God of love and grace could so summarily and thoroughly destroy Nineveh with, this time, not so much as a mention of the children and cattle that would suffer in its fall. In addition to light thrown on this question elsewhere in this study, there are a few general considerations that may help as we ponder the problem.

The purpose of such physical judgments as the flood of Noah's day and the obliteration of Nineveh is largely to protect and instruct those left behind. The sins of the individuals involved will be adjudicated later at the Great White Throne judgment. While all but Noah and his family suffered alike in the flood, at the Great White Throne each will be judged individually "according to his works" ([Rev. 20:11,12](#)), and perfect justice will prevail. While the wrath poured out on Nineveh served as a deliverance for Judah and a warning to other nations, each Ninevite will have his "day in court" later.

God does not resort to judgment until more than ample time has been given for a change of heart. The principle stated by Peter, that God "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9) underlies every judgment of God. The delay in the execution of God's judgments is intended by Him as opportunity for man to make the performance of the edict unnecessary. "And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you" (Isa. 30:18). When given only forty days of grace by God (Jonah 3:4), Nineveh had believed God, repented, and the devastation was averted. Too often man despises the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God, not knowing that the goodness of God is intended to lead him to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Then, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily ... the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11). When this happens, God has no other recourse and the judgment falls.

⁵⁹ [Encyclopedia Americana](#), Vol. 2, page 540.

God does not act arbitrarily when He judges sin. Though God is sovereign, He is not totally free in His decisions. He is bound by principles that are the very laws of existence itself, and have stood for eternity flowing out of His eternal and holy nature as God. He MUST act consistently with His nature. There are things He CANNOT DO! We are specifically told that He cannot deny Himself ([2 Tim. 2:13](#)), He cannot lie ([Titus 1:2](#)), and He cannot be tempted with evil ([James 1:13](#)). So also His very nature, and the fixed spiritual laws of His universe, make it impossible for Him to allow sin to go unpunished. How wonderful that this is so! If wickedness in a righteous universe can cause so much disaster, think what it would be like to live in a WICKED UNIVERSE! The very cosmos would be chaos!

The believer who faces no judgment for his sin ([John 5:24](#); [Rom. 8:1](#)) is not an exception to this rule, but the supreme proof of it. He is saved because his sin has been FULLY PUNISHED ALREADY at Calvary! If there had been any possibility for sin to go unpunished, Christ would not have died. If ever God could make an exception, surely it would have been when His only Son was the one involved, particularly since it was not even His sin!

Man is in no position to judge God concerning His execution of justice. He could not render an unbiased verdict, even if asked for one. He is not the jury or an innocent bystander, but the accused! He is thinking of what is "GOOD" in terms of his own temporal welfare. God has His eye on what is RIGHT in terms of the eternal welfare of all creation.

Nor does man have all the facts before him. Moses, on the mountain top, dared to question God and asked, "Why doth Thy anger wax hot against Thy people?" (Ex. 32:11), but when he went down from the mount and saw with his own eyes what God had seen from afar, "MOSES' anger waxed hot" (Ex. 32:19). If we could clearly see what God sees when He renders His verdicts we would cry out, as the great multitude in heaven will one day cry out, "Hallelujah! - Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord, our God; for TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS ARE HIS JUDGMENTS" (Rev. 19:1,2).

We do not fully see the overall picture of what God is doing. It seems that God has "inoculated" His vast universe against rebellion by allowing sin to enter a limited sphere under a controlled situation. What is happening on earth is under close observation by those not of Adam's race. Not only is Satan watching ([Job 1:6-12](#); [2:1-6](#)), but so are the principalities and powers in the heavenlies ([Eph. 3:10](#)). That the (unfallen) angels of God are also watching is indicated in such passages as [Daniel 9:23](#); [10:12](#); [1 Cor. 4:9](#); [11:10](#); and [1 Pet. 1:12](#). Unless the witnesses in Hebrews 12:1 are the Old Testament saints, as represented by those listed in Hebrews 11, the "great cloud of witnesses" could also refer to the creatures of God's universe watching the developments on earth's stage. As they behold the TRAUMA OF JUDGMENT on sin, a universe of creatures is being taught the utter folly of rebellion. They are seeing clearly the exceeding sinfulness of sin without becoming sinners. They will cry out with Paul, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God: How unsearchable

are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). Only against the background of sin and judgment can the DRAMA OF REDEMPTION reveal to that same watching universe the matchless love and the manifold grace of God. As the creation beholds, not just God's power to put down rebellion, but His ability to turn it into supreme triumph, the principalities and powers in the heavens are coming to know the manifold wisdom of God that is so dramatically demonstrated in this age of grace (Eph. 3:10).

Another consideration worth notice is that the physical judgments of God involve a large element of mercy:

- Since each must die eventually anyway (Heb. 9:27), and since (if he is an unbeliever) he will be judged according to his works, a shorter life, to an incorrigibly wicked man, means less evil for which to be punished.
- The physical judgment of some warns others of the error of their way, and can be a strong influence to restrain their wickedness and, hopefully, turn them to God.
- The removal of some reprobates from the earthly scene prevents them from oppressing and slaying the righteous, or infecting them with the venom of their evil ways.

"But what about children?" I can hear someone ask.

While the children are not PUNISHED for their parent's sin (Deut. 24:16), they may share in the CONSEQUENCES of it (Ex. 34:7). This is part of the responsibility of parenthood. The realization that their children may suffer the consequences of their evil ways is a deterrent to irresponsible parental conduct, one that would be removed if the children were always spared when the judgment fell.

Jonah demonstrates that God will go to great lengths to save the parents, as a redeemed people, for the sake of the children (who seem to be in view in Jonah 4: 11). Nahum indicates that the death of the children is preferable to having them either continuing under the evil influence of hopelessly ungodly parents, or left derelict as orphans.⁶⁰

The Word of God is, wisely, not specific about the provision made for children dying before reaching the age of accountability,⁶¹ but is, comfortingly, interspersed with assurances that they are in good and loving hands, partakers in some way and to some degree of the results of Calvary.

⁶⁰ What could Jonah have done with 120,000 children on his hands if the city had been destroyed and the little ones spared? What the Babylonians and Medes would have done with any children escaping the eventual fall of Nineveh would probably disclose that a quick death in the city would have been a mercy.

⁶¹ If the Scriptures clearly taught that children under some specific age were automatically saved, parents might well wait until the children approached that age to begin speaking to them of the Savior. It is by no means impossible that some misguided zealot might even seek to ensure the salvation of the children by taking their lives before they became accountable! Equally shocking and repulsive things are scattered all through church history.

Someone has said, "It is better to light a lamp than to curse the darkness." Likewise it is better to warn men of judgment and tell them of redemption than to judge the Judge. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? When men finally face their Judge, the final answer to any charge that He is cruel and merciless will be the mark of the nails in His hands (John 5:22)!

CONCLUSION

The Two Tales of Nineveh

Jonah refutes the notion that God only loves the "elect," for the Assyrians were not a part of the elect nation. God is cleared of the charge that He created some men for the express purpose of venting His wrath on them. It was Jonah who had no concern for the Ninevites, not God! God IS LOVE.

So Nahum declares that God's love for all does not necessitate the salvation of all. God does not forsake justice to implement His mercy. God is HOLY.

The two tales about Nineveh indicate that there is no contrast between the "God of the Old Testament" and the "Jesus of the New Testament." This contrast is an illusion arising out of failure to notice the love, mercy, and longsuffering of God in the Old Testament and the "wrath of the Lamb" in the New. The God of Jonah and the God of Nahum are the same God. It is the two generations of Ninevites that are in contrast.

These vivid accounts stand as an assurance of total deliverance for the repentant and believing, and a warning of total judgment to the unrepentant and unbelieving. Just as there is "therefore now no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1) for the one, there is "no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13) for the other. There is no punishment at the mercy seat and no mercy at the Great White Throne. As surely and effectively as God was FOR Nineveh in Jonah's day, He was AGAINST it in Nahum's.

The message committed to us will be either a savor of death unto death, as was the tale of Nahum, or the savor of life unto life, as was Jonah's. Either way it will be unto God a sweet savor of CHRIST, so let us not hesitate to GO to those facing eternal WOE! (2 Cor. 2:15,16).

APPENDIX "A" (Ref. chapter 1, page 1)

The chronology of the times of Jonah and Nahum.
(All dates are B.C.)

797 Jonah's ministry in Nineveh⁶² – c. 75 years

⁶² Dates suggested in this work.

- 722 The ten tribes taken into captivity.⁶³ (page 190) - c. 57 or 58 years
- 665/664 The fall of Thebes (No).⁶⁴ - c. 1 to 10 years
- 663-655 The time of writing of the book of Nahum. c. 43 to 51 years
- 612 Fall of Nineveh. (page 927) c. 3 years
- 609 Death of Josiah & defeat of Assyrian army at Haran. (page 192) - c. 22 years
- 587 Fall of Jerusalem & captivity of Judah. (page 1167)

APPENDIX "B" (Ref. chapter 3, page 20)

In reacting against the unscriptural teaching of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the dead "saints" praying for us, we must not ignore the following considerations:

- Believers who have died are conscious. Concerning the situation before the cross we find the believer, Abraham, fully conscious in [Luke 16:25](#). Concerning the situation now, when Paul was caught up into the third heaven he was conscious also. He heard words ([2 Cor. 12:2-4](#)). He didn't know whether he was alive ("in the body") or dead ("out of the body"). If the dead are unconscious, however, he would have known that he was in the body because of his consciousness.
- If a dead unbeliever can address a request to Abraham (Luke 16:24), why couldn't a believer who is dead talk also to God? After all, the Psalmist said, "If I make my bed in hell (Sheol), behold, Thou art there" (Psa. 139:8).
- In [Rev. 6:9-11](#) the souls of those who were slain for the Word of God, and are under the altar, are praying and their prayers are heard and answered.
- It specifically says, "Out of the belly of hell (Sheol) cried I and Thou heardest me" (Jonah 2:2).

The following considerations should be well noted however:

- Scripture never records a prayer by a living believer addressed to a dead believer to solicit his intercession, or for any other reason.
- There is no exhortation to seek the help of those who have died. King Saul sought help from dead Samuel (not by praying to Samuel, however) and was

⁶³ From [Introduction to the Old Testament](#), R. K. Harrison. (Pages noted in parentheses above.)

⁶⁴ From [Explore the Book](#), J. Sidlow Baxter, Vol. 4, page 197.

judged for it. In response to Saul's request, Samuel did not pray for him but prophesied to him, rebuking him for even asking help from the dead. The practice was strictly forbidden by God. "Should not a people seek unto their God? Should they seek on behalf of the living to the dead? To the Law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:19,20).

- Even if the dead wanted to help the living it would not be allowed. The rich man in Luke 16 wanted Lazarus to be a missionary from Sheol back to earth and his request was refused.
- The prayers of the dead that are referred to in Scripture are never in behalf of the living. The rich man's request was not a prayer, being addressed to Abraham, not to God. The prayer in Rev. 6:10 was not on behalf of believers but AGAINST UNbelievers. Jonah's prayer was not on behalf of the people of Nineveh or he would have welcomed their deliverance. It was, obviously, on his own behalf. What GOD had in mind in granting it is another matter.⁶⁵
- When the word "saint" is used in connection with prayer it is not suggesting that we get saints to pray for us, but that WE pray for THEM (living saints, not dead ones) (Eph. 6:18).

APPENDIX "C" (Ref. chapter 12, page 88)

Phillips translates 1 Cor. 14:22, "That means that 'tongues' are a sign of God's power, not for those who are unbelievers but to those who already believe." In his footnote he remarks, "This is the sole instance of the translator's departing from the accepted text. He felt bound to conclude, from the sense of the next three verses, that we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist's error."

This altering of the verse is not warranted by the context. The tongues were a sign of CONDEMNATION to the UNBELIEVING NATION OF ISRAEL, as verse 21 indicates. The reaction of unbelieving Israel may well have been much as that of unbelieving or unlearned Gentiles (as noted in [1 Cor. 14:23](#)). It was not a justifiable attitude, however, any more than the reaction of the unbelievers in Israel to the Pentecostal tongues ([Acts 2:13,15](#)). Their response would indicate, rather, that they had rejected the testimony of their own prophets and stood condemned.

The tongues, then, were specifically intended as a sign of condemnation to the unbelieving nation of Israel, and were not intended for unbelieving Gentiles. To them they would be but a pointless stumbling block. Once God had concluded His final appeal to Israel as INDIVIDUALS (they had been set aside as a NATION when the

⁶⁵ In Luke 16:31 Abraham justifies the decision to refuse a resurrection ministry by Lazarus to the brothers of the rich man, pointing out, they already had the Word of God and were not heeding it. The Ninevites did not have this advantage - the resurrection ministry of Jonah was their only hope of knowing God's message for them.

Sanhedrin officially rejected God's offered kingdom and stoned Stephen in Acts 7), at the close of the book of Acts, there was no more need for the tongues. After the writing of 1 Corinthians there is not one word in the epistles of Paul concerning this gift.

During the time it stood as a sign of condemnation to Israel, the gift had some value to believers. That this was incidental to the main purpose of the gift seems clear from the way Paul speaks of it in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 through 14. It is listed last in both [12:8-10](#) and [12:28-30](#). It is contrasted unfavorably with prophecy in [14:2-25](#). In 14:39, where the gift of prophecy is to be desired, tongues is only to be tolerated. In the church it was FORBIDDEN unless there was an interpreter. This indicates the blessing came not through the tongues, but through the message they contained, a message that could easily and more profitably be brought through prophecy without the tongues. Tongues are specifically said to be temporary and useful only for the early "childhood" of the church, when revelation was not yet completed. Obviously the very limited usefulness of this gift in the church did not warrant it being retained after its primary purpose was fulfilled.

APPENDIX "D" (Ref. chapter 15, page 112)

Many passages in the prophetic writings very evidently refer either to only a local situation or to only an event in the distant future. In other prophetic writings, a much needed key to understanding is a recognition of their double view. As one reads a passage that clearly has a contemporary problem in view, the language may change, sometimes suddenly, sometimes gradually, so that it must either be far reaching figures of speech, gross "poetic exaggeration," or a change of subject. What is the explanation for this common phenomenon?

In view of certain New Testament references to Old Testament prophecies, it is evident that the prophet is seeing not just one situation, but two (and sometimes three). He is looking at his PRESENT, with its near future implications and applications, and sometimes using language that takes a PAST occasion as the point of contact. But as he speaks of the contemporary scene, the Spirit of God causes him to see into the DISTANT FUTURE also (or the distant past, as in Ezek. 28). Events that are called to mind by the present situation, illustrated by it, and possibly related to it, come into focus. Sometimes this is brought about by a complete transfer of thought to the future day, introduced without a break in the prophecy. Sometimes it is obtained by the prophet describing the present in metaphors and figures of speech which, when taken literally, much more accurately portray the end times.

There are two errors that have at times hindered prophetic study by even the godliest and most sincere Bible teachers.

There are those who are so concerned with the future events portrayed that they lose the sense of objective reality which could be gained by seeing how these prophecies are rooted in the historical past. That which had only the prophet's contemporary situation in view may be spiritualized and given a future meaning that can hardly be justified from the text or context of the passage.

Others may be so closely engrossed in the historical background and local application that they are reluctant to see the future element. They see the wording of many passages as being metaphorical and thus may miss glorious truths that come to light when they are taken literally.

The first group are inclined to think of the second as lacking in spirituality and deep insight. The latter, in turn, may think of the former as lacking in scholarship and honest treatment of the historical background of the prophets. Neither of these opposing views do full justice to the prophetic Scriptures.