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COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY ON
JONAH

by Adam Clarke.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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A COMMENTARY AND CRITICAL NOTES

ON THE

HOLY BIBLE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

DESIGNED AS A HELP TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE SACRED WRITINGS

BY ADAM CLARKE, LL.D., F.S.A., &c.

A NEW EDITION, WITH THE
AUTHOR'S FINAL CORRECTIONS

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.—Rom. 15:4.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JONAH

JONAH, the son of Amittai, the *fifth* of the minor prophets, was a Galilean, a native of Gath-hepher, which is believed to be the same as Jotapata, celebrated for the siege which Josephus the historian there maintained against the Roman army, a little before the destruction of Jerusalem. Gath-hepher was situated in the land of Zebulun, where was the canton of Ophir or Hopher. St. Jerome places it *two* miles from Sepphoris, in the way towards Tiberias. Some rabbins are of opinion that Jonah was the widow of Sarepta's son, restored to life by Elijah.

What we know with certainty of Jonah is, that God having commanded him to go to Nineveh, and there proclaim that the cry of the inhabitants' sins was come up to heaven, and they were threatened with approaching ruin; instead of obeying these orders, he resolved to flee away, and go to Tarsus in Cilicia. For this purpose he embarked at Joppa; but the Lord having sent a violent tempest while he was upon the sea, the mariners, with great fear, cried each of them to his god. In the meantime Jonah slept in the hold; whereupon the pilot wakened him; and they who were in the ship cast lots to know how this tempest was occasioned. The lot falling upon Jonah, they asked him who he was, and what he had done to bring upon them such a storm? He told them he was a Hebrew; that he worshipped the God of heaven; was one of his prophets; and fled from his presence to avoid going to Nineveh, whither he was sent. They asked him what was to be done to secure them from shipwreck? He replied: Throw me into the sea, and the tempest will cease.

God prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. This fish, according to some, was a whale; or, as others say, the lamia, *canis carcharias*, or the sea-dog. The prophet continued in the fish *three* days and *three* nights. He cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him, and commanded the fish to cast him upon the shore, as it is believed, at the foot of a mountain which projects a great way into the sea, between Berytus and Tripoli. Others think it was upon the coast of Cilicia, *two* leagues north from Alexandretta.

After this the word of the Lord came a second time to Jonah, and directed him to go to Nineveh. When he came into the city, which was three days

journey in extent, about twenty-five leagues in circumference, Jonah walked up and down a whole day, crying out, “In forty days Nineveh shall be destroyed.” The Ninevites believed his word; they appointed a public fast to be observed; and, from the meanest of the people to the greatest, covered themselves with sackcloth. The king of Nineveh, supposed to have been *Sardanapalus*, known in profane authors by the name of *Anacyndaraxa* or *Anabaxarus*, descended from his throne, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat down upon ashes. God suffered himself to be moved with their repentance, and did not execute the sentence which he had pronounced against them.

Jonah was afflicted at this; and complained to God, saying, that he had always questioned whether, as being a God of clemency and mercy, he would not be flexible to their prayers.

After this, in all probability, Jonah returned from Nineveh into Judea.

The Greeks have for a long time expressed their veneration for Jonah. There was a church dedicated to this prophet in the sixth age.

We do not know when it was that Jonah foretold how Jeroboam II., king of Israel, should restore the kingdom of Samaria to its former extent, from the entrance of Hamath to the Dead Sea. Whether this was before or after his going to Nineveh, we cannot tell.

Our Saviour makes frequent mention of Jonah in the Gospels. He says that the Ninevites shall one day rise in judgment against the Jews, and condemn them, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and the Jews would not hearken to Him who was greater than Jonah. And when the Pharisees required a sign of him to prove his mission, he said he would give them no other than that of the prophet Jonah, that is to say, of his resurrection, which would complete all his miracles, and render the Jews inexcusable in their hardness of heart. For a discussion of the question concerning the *three days and three nights* which Jonah lay in the belly of the fish, see <0120> **Matthew 12:40**, and the notes there. And for Oriental and Jewish legends and fabulous relations relative to the history of this prophet, see *Calmet* in his preface to this book.

That there are *difficulties* in this book every man must allow; and that learned men have differed greatly in their mode of interpreting the book, and explaining these difficulties, is well known. Some have considered it an *allegory*; referring entirely to Manasseh, and what was done *before*,

during, and *after* the war with Esar-haddon, king of Assyria. Manasseh being taken prisoner by the Assyrians, and thrust into a *dungeon*; where, having lain *three days and three nights*, on his earnest prayer to God in the dungeon, he was delivered, &c. Others have thought, that instead of a *fish*, a *ship* is meant, which had the image of a *whale* on the *stern*, and might be called **Κητος**, or the *whale*. Others have thought that the whole of the account of Jonah's being swallowed by a great fish, his praying in its belly, and being cast on dry land, was a *dream* which he had while *fast asleep* in the ship. See **Jonah 1:5**. And others state that the whole book is a *parable*, intending to point out God's *justice* and *mercy*, and how prevalent *repentance* is to turn aside the threatened stroke of Divine wrath.

There is a *fable*, most probably of Phœnician origin, which, bearing some similitude to the history of Jonah, may have been taken from this book. Laomedon, king of Troy, having displeased Neptune, to appease him, was required to expose his daughter *Hesione* to be devoured by a *sea-monster*. She was chained to a rock, and was awaiting her fate at the next flux of the tide. In the interim *Hercules* slew the sea-monster, and delivered the princess. To this *Lycophron*, in his *Cassandra*, ver. 33, &c., is supposed to allude:—

Τριεσπερου λεοντος, ον ποτε γναθοις
Τριτωνος ημαλαψε καρχαρος κυων.

*“Of the lion the offspring of three nights,
which the fierce dog of Triton swallowed down greedily.”*

The scholiasts explain this in the following manner: While the princess was standing chained to the rock, expecting the greedy dog (**καρχαρος κυων**, the *shark*) to come and devour her, Hercules stood by ready armed; and when the monster came forward with open mouth, he jumped directly down his throat, and spent *three days* in cutting and hacking his entrails; and afterwards *came out of the monster*, with the loss of all the hair on his head. *Cyril*, in his comment, says this was occasioned by the *incredible heat* of the *monster's stomach*.

This *fable* might have been easily taken from the *true history*; though some have been ready enough to intimate that the history of the prophet was taken from the *fable*.

The appeal made to the *main facts* of this history by our Lord, proves that we are to admit of no *allegorical* exposition of these facts. 1. There was

such a person as Jonah. 2. He was swallowed by a sea-monster, in whose belly he was miraculously preserved three days and three nights. 3. This same prophet preached to the Ninevites; and they repented, and turned from their sins, under his ministry. This testimony puts an end to all mythological, allegorical, and hypothetical interpretations of those great facts. And in its literal sense alone, I undertake the interpretation of this book.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JONAH

Chronological Notes relative to this Book, upon the supposition that the repentance of the Ninevites happened in the twenty-third year of the reign of Jehu, king of Israel.

- Year from the Creation, according to Archbishop Usher, 3142.
- Year of the Julian Period, 3852.
- Year since the Flood, 1486.
- Year from the foundation of Solomon's temple, 150.
- Year since the division of Solomon's monarchy into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, 114.
- Year before the *first* Olympiad, 86.
- Year before the building of Rome, according to the Varronian computation, 109.
- Year before the birth of Jesus Christ, 858.
- Year before the vulgar era of Christ's nativity, 862.
- Twelfth year of Charilaus, king of Lacedæmon, of the family of the Proclidæ.
- Fifty-second year of Archelaus, king of Lacedæmon, of the family of the Eurysthenidæ.
- Second year of Phereclus, perpetual archon of the Athenians.
- Fourteenth year of Alladius Sylvius, king of the Albans.
- Twenty-third year of Jehu, king of Israel.
- Seventeenth year of Joash, king of Judah.

CHAPTER 1

Jonah, sent to Nineveh, flees to Tarshish, 1-3. He is overtaken by a great tempest, 4-14; thrown into the sea, 15, 16; and swallowed by a fish, in the belly of which he is miraculously preserved alive three days and three nights, 17.

NOTES ON CHAP. 1

Verse 1. Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah] All that is certainly known about this prophet has already been laid before the reader.

He was of Gath-hepher, in the tribe of Zebulun, in lower Galilee, ^{<61913>}**Joshua 19:13**; and he prophesied in the reigns of Jeroboam the Second, and Joash, kings of Israel. Jeroboam came to the throne *eight hundred and twenty-three* years before the Christian era, and reigned in Samaria *forty-one* years, ^{<21423>}**2 Kings 14:23-25**. As a prophet, it is likely that he had but this one mission.

Verse 2. Go to Nineveh] This was the capital of the Assyrian empire, and one of the most *ancient* cities of the world, ^{<01100>}**Genesis 10:10, 11**; and one of the *largest*, as it was *three days' journey in circumference*. Ancient writers represent it as *oblong*; being in length *one hundred and fifty* stadia, and *ninety* in breadth, the compass being *four hundred and eighty* stadia. Now as the *stadium* is allowed to have been equal to our *furlong*, eight of which make a mile, this amounts to *fifty-four* English miles: see on ^{<0088>}**Jonah 3:3**. But we must not suppose that all this *space* was covered with compact streets and buildings; it took in a considerable space of country, probably all the cultivated ground necessary to support all the inhabitants of that district. *Calmet* computes the measurement of the circumference to be equal to *twenty-five* French leagues. It is reported to have had walls *one hundred feet high*, and so *broad* that *three chariots* might run abreast upon them. It was situated on the *Tigris*, or a little to the *west*, or on the *west side* of that river. It was well peopled, and had at this time *one hundred and twenty thousand* persons in it reputed to be in a state of infancy, which on a moderate computation would make the whole number *six hundred thousand* persons. But some, supposing that persons not being able to distinguish their right hand from their left must mean *children under two years* of age, and reckoning *one* such child for every *twenty* persons from that age upwards, make the population amount to *two millions five hundred thousand*. Nor can this be considered an exaggerated estimate, when we know that London, not one-tenth of the size of ancient Nineveh, contains a population of upwards of *one million*. But calculations of this kind, relative to matters of such remote antiquity, are generally precarious, and not very useful: and ancient authors, though the only guides, are not always safe conductors. *Mosul* is generally supposed to be the same as the ancient *Nineveh*. It is in the province of Dearbekir, on the west bank of the Tigris.

Their wickedness is come up before me.] This is a *personification* of evil. It ascends from earth to heaven; and stands before the Supreme

Judge, to bear witness against its own delinquency, and that of the persons whom it has seduced.

Verse 3. To flee unto Tarshish] Some say *Tartessus*, in Spain, near the straits of Gibraltar, others, *Tarsus*, in *Cilicia*; and others, *Taprobana*, or the island of Ceylon, formerly called Taprobah; and *Tabrobavagh* in Sanscrit, to the present day.

And went down to Joppa] This place is celebrated as that where *Andromeda*, daughter of *Cepheus*, was chained to a rock, and exposed to be devoured by a sea-monster, from which she was delivered by the valour of Perseus. It is the nearest port to Jerusalem on that side of the Mediterranean.

And he found a ship] The Phœnicians carried on a considerable trade with *Tartessus*, ^{<35712>} **Ezekiel 27:12**; and it was probably in one of their ships that Jonah *embarked*.

He paid the fare thereof] He paid for his *passage*. This shows that there was *traffic* between the two places, and that each passenger paid a stated *fare*.

From the presence of the Lord.] He considered that God was peculiarly resident in Judea; and if he got out of that land, the Lord would most probably appoint another prophet to carry the message; for Jonah appears to have considered the enterprise as difficult and dangerous, and therefore wished to avoid it.

Verse 4. A great wind] They were overtaken with a *storm*, which appears from the sequel to have come by the immediate direction of God.

Like to be broken] They had nearly suffered *shipwreck*.

Verse 5. Cried every man unto his god] The *ship's crew* were all heathens; and, it is probable, heathens who had each a different object of religious worship.

Cast forth the wares] Threw the *lading overboard* to lighten the ship, hoping the better to *ride out* the storm.

Jonah was gone down] Most probably into the *hold* or *cabin* under the deck; or where they had berths for passengers in the sides of the ship; something in the manner of our *packets*.

Was fast asleep.] Probably quite exhausted and overcome with distress, which in many cases terminates in a deep sleep. So the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane.

Verse 6. The shipmaster] Either the *captain* or the *pilot*.

Arise, call upon thy God] He supposed that Jonah had *his* god, as well as they had *theirs*; and that, as the danger was imminent, every man should use the influence he had, as they were all equally involved in it.

Verse 7. Come, and let us cast lots] This was a very ancient mode of endeavouring to find out the mind of Divine Providence; and in this case it proves that they supposed the storm to have arisen on account of some hidden crime of some person *aboard*.

A philosopher being at sea in a violent storm. when the *crew* began to call earnestly to the gods for safety, he said, “Be silent, and cease your prayers; for should the gods know that *you* are here, we shall all be lost.”

The lot fell upon Jonah.] In this case God *directed the lot*.

Verse 8. Tell us—for whose cause] A very gentle method of bringing the charge home to himself, and the several questions here asked gave the utmost latitude to make the best of his own case.

Verse 9. I fear the Lord] In this Jonah was *faithful*. He gave an honest testimony concerning the God he served, which placed him before the eyes of the sailors as infinitely higher than the objects of their adoration; for the God of Jonah was *the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land*, and governed both. He also honestly told them that he was *fleeing from the presence of this God*, whose honourable call he had refused to obey. See <30110> **Jonah 1:10.**

Verse 11. What shall we do unto thee] In these poor men there was an uncommon degree of *humanity* and *tender feeling*.

Verse 12. I know that for my sake] I am not worthy to live; *throw me overboard*. God will not quiet the storm till I am cast out of the ship. Here was deep compunction; and honest avowal of sin; and a justification of the displeasure which God had now manifested.

Verse 13. The men rowed hard] Were very unwilling to proceed to this extremity, and thought they would risk every thing rather than cast this disobedient prophet into the great deep.

Verse 14. They cried unto the Lord] Under a conviction that he was the self-existing Being, the Maker of the heavens and the earth, and the author of the present storm, they put up their prayers to him.

Let us not perish for this man's life] They were now about to *cast him overboard*; but seemed to call God to witness that it was with the utmost reluctance, and only in obedience to his command. There is a parallel passage in the *Argonautics*, which has been quoted to illustrate this:—

Πολλα δε μερμηριζον ενι φρεσι πευκαλιμησι,
 Η μεν αποφθισωσι, και ιχθυσι κυρμα βαλωσιν
 Αινολεχη Μηδειαν, αποτρεψωσι δ Ερινυυ.

Ver. 1171.

*“And much they doubted, in their prudent minds,
 Whether to kill and cast a prey to fishes
 Wretched Medea, and avert their fate.”*

See Newcome.

Verse 16. Offered a sacrifice] The first perhaps ever offered on board a vessel since the ark floated on the waters of the great deluge; and it is most probable that these heathens, witnessing what was done, became sincere converts to the true God.

Verse 17. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish] *l wdg gd dag gadol*. This could not have been a *whale*, for the throat of that animal can scarcely admit a man's leg; but it might have been a *shark*, which abounds in the Mediterranean, and whose mouth and stomach are exceedingly capacious. In several cases they have been known to swallow a man when thrown overboard. See the note on ^{<0124>}**Matthew 12:40**, where the whole subject of this verse is considered at large. That *days and nights* do not, among the Hebrews, signify *complete* days and nights of *twenty-four* hours, see ^{<07416>}**Esther 4:16**, compared with ^{<07501>}**Esther 5:1**; ^{<071417>}**Judges 14:17, 18**. Our Lord lay in the grave *one* natural day, and part of *two* others; and it is most likely that this was the precise time that Jonah was in the fish's belly.

JONAH

CHAPTER 2

This chapter (except the first verse and the last, which make a part of the narrative) contains a beautiful prayer or hymn, formed of those devout thoughts which Jonah had in the belly of the great fish, with a thanksgiving for his miraculous deliverance.

NOTES ON CHAP. 2

Verse 1. Then Jonah prayed—out of the fish’s belly] This verse makes the *first* of the *second* chapter in the Hebrew text.

It may be asked, “How could Jonah either pray or breathe in the stomach of the fish?” Very easily, if God so willed it. And let the reader keep this constantly in view; the whole is a *miracle*, from Jonah’s being swallowed by the fish till he was cast ashore by the same animal. It was God that had *prepared the great fish*. It was the *Lord that spake to the fish, and caused it to vomit Jonah upon the dry land*. ALL is miracle.

Verse 2. Out of the belly of hell] Among the Hebrews **l wav sheol** means the *grave*, any *deep pit*, the *place of separate spirits*, &c. Here the prophet represents himself as in the *bottom of the sea*; for so *sheol* must be understood in this place.

Verse 3. All thy billows and thy waves passed over me.] This may be understood *literally*; while the fish, in whose belly he was, sought its pleasure or sustenance in the paths of the deep, the waves and billows of the sea were rolling above. This line seems borrowed from ^{<19407>}**Psalm 42:7**.

Verse 4. I am cast out of thy sight] See ^{<19812>}**Psalm 31:22**.

Thy holy temple.] Then Jerusalem was not yet destroyed, for the *temple* was standing.

Verse 5. The waters compassed me about even to the soul] So as to seem to deprive me of life. I had no hope left.

The weeds were wrapped about my head.] This may be understood literally also. He found himself in the fish’s stomach, together with *sea*

weeds, and such like marine substances, which the fish had taken for its aliment.

Verse 6. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains] This also may be literally understood. The fish followed the slanting base of the mountains, till they terminated in a plain at the bottom of the great deep.

The earth with her bars] He represents himself as a prisoner in a dungeon, closed in with *bars* which he could not remove, and which at first appeared to *be for ever*, i.e., the place where his life must terminate.

Yet hast thou brought up my life] The substance of this poetic prayer was composed while in the fish's belly; but afterwards the prophet appears to have thrown it into its present poetic form, and to have added some circumstances, such as that before us; for he now speaks of his deliverance from this imminent danger of death. "Thou hast brought up my life from corruption."

Verse 7. When my soul fainted] When I had given up all hope of life.

My prayer came in unto thee] Here prayer is *personified*, and is represented as a *messenger* going from the *distressed*, and entering into the temple of God, and standing before him. This is a very fine and delicate image. This clause is one of those which I suppose the prophet to have added when he *penned* this prayer.

Verse 8. They that observe lying vanities] They that trust in idols, follow *vain predictions*, permit themselves to be influenced with *foolish fears*, so as to induce them to *leave the path of obvious duty*, *forsake their own mercy*. In leaving that God who is the *Fountain of mercy*, they abandon that *measure of mercy* which he had treasured up for them.

Verse 9. But I will sacrifice unto thee] I will make a sincere vow, which, as soon as my circumstances will permit, I will faithfully execute; and therefore he adds, "I will pay that which I have vowed."

Salvation is of the Lord.] All *deliverance* from *danger*, *preservation of life*, *recovery* from *sickness*, and *redemption* of the *soul* from the *power*, *guilt*, and *pollution* of sin, is from Jehovah. He *alone* is the *Saviour*, he *alone* is the *Deliverer*; for all *salvation* is *from the Lord*.

Verse 10. And the Lord spake unto the fish] That is, by his influence the fish swam to shore, and cast Jonah on the dry land. So the whole was a

miracle from the beginning to the end; and we need not perplex ourselves to find out *literal* interpretations; such as, “When Jonah was thrown overboard he swam for his life, earnestly praying God to preserve him from drowning; and by his providence he was thrown into a *place of fish*—a *fishing cove*, where he was for a time *entangled among the weeds*, and hardly escaped with his life; and when safe, he composed this poetic prayer, in *metaphorical language*, which some have wrongly interpreted, by supposing that he was *swallowed by a fish*; when *gd dag* should have been understood, as a *place of fish*, or *fishing creek*,” &c. Now I say the original has no such meaning in the Bible: and this gloss is plainly contrary to the *letter of the text*; to all *sober and rational modes of interpretation*; and to the express *purpose* for which God appears to have wrought this miracle, and to which *Jesus Christ* himself *applies* it. For as Jonah was intended for a *sign* to the Jews of the resurrection of Christ, they were to have the proof of this *semiosis*, in his lying as long in the *heart of the earth* as the prophet was in the *belly of the fish*; and all interpretations of this kind go to deny both the *sign* and the thing *signified*. Some men, because they cannot work a miracle themselves, can hardly be persuaded that GOD can do it.

The *text*, and the *use* made of it by Christ, most plainly teach us that the prophet was literally swallowed by a fish, by the order of God; and that by the Divine power he was *preserved alive*, for what is called *three days and three nights, in the stomach of the fish*; and at the conclusion of the above time that same fish was led by the unseen power of God to the shore, and there compelled to eject the prey that he could neither kill nor digest. And how easy is all this to the *almighty power* of the *Author and Sustainer of life*, who has a sovereign, omnipresent, and energetic sway in the heavens and in the earth. But foolish man will affect to be wise; though, in such cases, he appears as the recently born, stupid offspring of the wild ass. It is bad to follow *fancy*, where there is so much at stake. Both *ancients* and *moderns* have grievously trifled with this prophet’s narrative; merely because they could not rationally account for the thing, and were unwilling (and why?) to allow any miraculous interference.

JONAH

CHAPTER 3

Jonah is sent again to Nineveh, a city of three days' journey, (being sixty miles in circumference, according to Diodorus Siculus,) 1-4. The inhabitants, in consequence of the prophet's preaching, repent in dust and ashes, 5-9. God, seeing that they were deeply humbled on account of their sins, and that they turned away from all their iniquities, repents of the evil with which he had threatened them, 10.

NOTES ON CHAP. 3

Verse 1. And the word of the Lord] The same *oracle* as that before given; and which, from what he had felt and seen of the justice and mercy of the Lord, he was now prepared to obey.

Verse 2. And preach unto it the preaching] hayrqh ta arqw *vekera eth hakkeriah*, “And cry the cry that I bid thee.” Be my herald, and faithfully deliver my message. The word κηρυξ in Greek answers to the Hebrew arwq *kore*: both signifying a *crier*, a *herald*, a *preacher*; one that *makes proclamation* with a *loud and earnest cry*. Such was John Baptist, <340B> **Isaiah 40:3**; such was Jesus Christ, <347B> **John 7:18-37**; and such were all his apostles. And such earnestness becomes a ministry that has to do with immortal souls, asleep and dead in sin, hanging on the brink of perdition, and insensible of their state. The soft-speaking, gentle-toned, unmoved preacher, is never likely to awaken souls. As we preach, so the people hear; scarcely receiving any counsels that appear to have no importance by the *manner* in which they are *delivered*. But this earnestness is widely different from that noisy, blustering, screaming rant, that manifests more of the turbulence of disorderly passions, than of the real inspired influence of the Spirit of God.

Verse 3. Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of three days' journey.] See on <330B> **Jonah 1:2**. *Strabo* says, lib. xvi., πολυ μειζων ην της Βαβυλωνος, “it was much larger than Babylon:” and Ninus, the builder, not only proposed to make it the *largest* city of the world, but the largest that *could be built by man*. See *Diodor. Sic. Bib.* l. ii. And as we find, from the lowest computation, that it was at least *fifty-four* or *sixty* English miles in circumference, it would take the prophet *three* days to walk round upon

the walls, and announce from them the terrible message, “Yet *forty* days, and Nineveh will be destroyed!”

Verse 4. Yet forty days] Both the *Septuagint* and *Arabic* read *three* days. Probably some early copyist of the *Septuagint*, from whom our modern editions are derived, mistook the Greek numerals μ *forty* for γ *three*; or put the *three* days’ journey in preaching instead of the *forty* days mentioned in the denunciation. One of *Kennicott’s MSS.*, instead of $\mu\gamma$ [*bra arbaim, forty*, has $\mu\gamma\upsilon\iota$ \vee *sheloshim, thirty*: but the Hebrew text is undoubtedly the true reading; and it is followed by *all* the ancient versions, the *Septuagint* and *Vulgate* excepted. thus God gives them time to *think, reflect, take counsel*, and *return* to him. Had they only *three* days’ space, the denunciation would have so completely confounded them, as to excite nothing but terror, and prevent repentance and conversion.

Verse 5. The people of Nineveh believed God] They had no doubt that the threatening would be fulfilled, unless their speedy conversion prevented it; but, though not expressed, they knew that the threatening was conditional. “The promises and threatenings of God, which are merely personal, either to any particular man or number of men, are always conditional, because the wisdom of God hath thought fit to make these depend on the behaviour of men.”—Dr. S. Clarke’s *Sermons*, vol. i.

Proclaimed a fast] And never was there one so general, so deep, and so effectual. Men and women, old and young, high and low, and even the cattle themselves, all kept such a fast as the total abstinence from food implies.

Verse 6. Word came unto the king] This, some think, was *Pul*; others, *Sardanapalus* his son, king of Assyria, who flourished in the reign of Jeroboam the Second: but it seems more probable that the monarch here alluded to was a king of Assyria contemporary with Joash, king of Judah. It was by the decree of the king that the fast was instituted, and became general.

Verse 8. Let man and beast be covered] This was done that every object which they beheld might deepen the impression already made, and cause them to mourn after a godly sort. *Virgil* tells us that the mourning for the death of Julius Cæsar was so general, that the *cattle* neither *ate* nor *drank*:—

*Non ulli pastos illis egere diebus
Frigida, Daphni, boves ad flumina: nulla neque amnem
Libavit quadrupes, nec graminis attigit herbam.
Ecl. v. 24.*

*“The swains forgot their sheep, nor near the brink
Of running waters brought their herds to drink.
The thirsty cattle of themselves abstain’d,
From water, and their grassy fare disdain’d.”
DRYDEN.*

And that they sometimes *changed*: or *reversed* the harness and ornaments of cattle, as indicative of mourning, we have a proof in Virgil’s description of the funeral procession in honour of Pallas, slain by Turnus, *Æn.* xi. ver. 89.

*Post bellator equus, positus insignibus, Æthon
It lacrymans, guttisque humectat grandibus ora.*

*“Stripp’d of his trappings, and his head declined,
Æthon, his generous warrior-horse, behind,
Moves with a solemn, slow, majestic pace;
And the big tears come rolling down his face.”*

Verse 9. Who can tell if God will turn and repent] There is at least a peradventure for our salvation. God *may* turn towards us, change his purpose, and save us alive. While there is life there is hope; God has no pleasure in the death of sinners; he is gracious and compassionate. Himself has prescribed repentance; if we repent, and turn to him from our iniquities, who knows then whether God will not turn, &c.

Verse 10. And God saw their works] They repented, and brought forth *fruits* meet for repentance; works which showed that they did most earnestly repent. He therefore changed his purpose, and the city was saved. The purpose was: If the Ninevites do not return from their evil ways, and the violence that is in their hands, within *forty* days, I will destroy the city. The Ninevites did return, &c., and therefore escaped the threatened judgment. Thus we see that the threatening was conditional.

JONAH

CHAPTER 4

Jonah, dreading to be thought a false prophet, repines at God's mercy in sparing the Ninevites, whose destruction he seems to have expected, from his retiring to a place without the city about the close of the forty days. But how does he glorify that mercy which he intends to blame! And what an amiable posture does he give of the compassion of God! 1-5. This attribute of the Deity is still farther illustrated by his tenderness and condescension to the prophet himself, who, with all his prophetic gifts, had much of human infirmity, 6-11.

NOTES ON CHAP. 4

Verse 1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly] This hasty, and indeed inconsiderate prophet, was vexed because his prediction was not fulfilled. He had more respect to his high sense of his own honour than he had to the goodness and mercy of God. He appeared to care little whether *six hundred and twenty thousand* persons were destroyed or not, so he might not pass for a deceiver, or one that denounced a falsity.

And he was very angry.] Because the prediction was not literally fulfilled; for he totally lost sight of the *condition*.

Verse 2. I know that thou art a gracious God] See Clarke's note on "^{Exodus 34:6}Exodus 34:6".

Verse 3. Take, I beseech thee, my life from me] *yvpn ta an j q kach na eth naphshi*, "Take, I beseech thee, even my soul." Do not let me survive this disgrace. Thou hast spared this city. I thought thou wouldst do so, because thou art *merciful* and *gracious*, and it was on this account that I refused to go at first, as I knew that thou mightest *change thy purpose*, though thou hadst commanded me to make an absolute denunciation of judgment. God has left this example on record to show that an inconsiderate man is not fit to be employed in his work; and he chose this one example that it might serve as an endless warning to his Church to employ no man in the work of the ministry that is not scripturally acquainted with God's justice and mercy.

Verse 4. Doest thou well to be angry?] *Ël hrh bcyhh haheitib harah lac*, "Is anger good for thee?" No, anger is good for no man; but an angry

preacher, minister, bishop, or prophet, is an abominable man. He who, in denouncing the word of God against sinners, joins his own passions with the Divine threatenings, is a cruel and bad man, and should not be an overseer in God's house. A *surly bishop, a peevish, passionate preacher*, will bring neither glory to God, nor good to man. Dr. Taylor renders the clause, "Art thou very much grieved?" A man may be very much grieved that a sinner is lost; but who but he who is of a fiendish nature will be grieved because God's mercy triumphs over judgment?

Verse 5. So Jonah went out of the city] I believe this refers to what had *already passed*; and I therefore agree with Bp. *Newcome*, who translates, "Now Jonah HAD gone out of the city, and HAD sat," &c.; for there are many instances where verbs in the preterite form have this force, the *W vau* here turning the *future* into the *preterite*. And the passage is here to be understood thus: When he had delivered his message he left the city, and went and made himself a tent, or got under some shelter on the east side of the city, and there he was determined to remain till he should see what would become of the city. But when the *forty* days had expired, and he saw no evidence of the Divine wrath, he became angry, and expostulated with God as above. The *fifth* verse should be read in a parenthesis, or be considered as beginning the chapter.

Verse 6. And the Lord God prepared a gourd] I believe this should be rendered in the preterpluperfect tense. The Lord HAD prepared—this plant, *ʷyqyq kikayon*. It had in the course of God's providence been planted and grown up in that place, though perhaps not yet in full leaf; and Jonah made that his tent. And its thick branches and large leaves made it an ample shelter for him, and because it was such, he *rejoiced greatly* on the account. But what was the *kikayon*? The best judges say the *ricinus* or *palma Christi*, from which we get what is vulgarly called *castor oil*, is meant. It is a tree as large as the olive, has leaves which are like those of the vine, and is also quick of growth. This in all probability was the plant in question, which had been already planted, though it had not attained its proper growth, and was not then in full leaf. *Celsus*, in his *Hierobot.*, says it grows to the height of an olive tree; the trunk and branches are hollow like a kex, and the leaves sometimes as broad as the rim of a hat. It must be of a soft or spongy substance, for it is said to grow surprisingly fast. See *Taylor* under the root *qyq*, 1670. But it is evident there was something *supernatural* in the growth of this plant, for it is stated to have *come up in*

a night; though the Chaldee understands the passage thus: “It was here last night, and it withered this night.” In one night it might have blown and expanded its leaves considerably, though the plant had existed before, but not in full bloom till the time that Jonah required it for a shelter.

Verse 7. But God prepared a worm] By being eaten through the root, the plant, losing its nourishment, would soon wither; and this was the case in the present instance.

Verse 8. A vehement east wind] Which was of itself of a *parching, withering* nature; and the *sun*, in addition, made it intolerable. These winds are both scorching and suffocating in the East, for deserts of burning sand lay to the east or south-east; and the easterly winds often brought such a multitude of *minute particles of sand* on their wings, as to add greatly to the mischief. I believe these, and the sands they carry, are the cause of the *ophthalmia* which prevails so much both in Egypt and India.

Verse 9. I do well to be angry, even unto death.] Many persons suppose that the *gifts of prophecy* and *working miracles* are the highest that can be conferred on man; but they are widely mistaken, for the gifts *change not the heart*. Jonah had the gift of prophecy, but had not received that grace which destroys the *old man* and *creates the soul anew in Christ Jesus*. This is the *love* of which St. Paul speaks, which if a man have not, though he had the gift of prophecy, and could miraculously remove mountains, yet in the sight of God, and for any good himself might reap from it, it would be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Jonah was a prophet, and yet had all his old bad tempers about him, in a shameful predominancy. *Balaam* was of the same kind. So we find that God gave the *gift of prophecy* even to *graceless* men. But many of the prophets were sanctified in their nature before their call to the prophetic office, and were the most excellent of men.

Verse 10. Which came up in a night] St. Jerome, speaking of this plant, the *kikayon*, assigns to it an extraordinary rapidity of growth. It delights in a sandy soil, and in a few days what was a *plant* grows into a *large shrub*. But he does not appear to have meant the *ricinus*; this however is the most likely. The expressions *coming up in a night* and *perishing in a night* are only metaphorical to express *speedy growth* and *speedy decay*; and so, as we have seen, the Chaldee interprets it, *dba anrj wa ayl yl bw hwh*

ִּיִּדְה אַיִל יֵל בַּיָּד “which existed this night but in the next night perished;” and this I am satisfied is the true import of the Hebrew phrase.

Verse 11. And should not I spare Nineveh] In ^{<3340>} **Jonah 4:10** it is said, *thou hast had pity* on the gourd, **tsj hta attah** CHASTA; and here the Lord uses the same word, **swj a al yna** *veani lo* ACHUS, “And shall not *I have pity* upon Nineveh?” How much is the *city* better than the *shrub*? But besides this there are in it *one hundred and twenty thousand* persons! And shall I destroy them, rather than thy *shade* should be withered or thy *word* apparently fail? And besides, these persons are *young*, and have *not offended*, (for they knew not the difference between their *right hand and their left*.) and should not I feel *more pity* for those innocents than thou dost for the fine *flowering plant* which is withered in a night, being itself exceedingly *short-lived*? Add to all this, they have now turned from those sins which induced me to denounce judgment against them. And should I destroy *them* who are now *fasting* and *afflicting their souls*; and, covered with sackcloth, are lying in the dust before me, bewailing their offenses and supplicating for mercy? Learn, then, from this, that it is the incorrigibly wicked on whom my judgments must fall, and against whom they are threatened. And know, that to that man will I look who is of a broken and contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word. Even the *dumb beasts* are objects of my compassion; I will spare *them* for the sake of their penitent owners; and remember with the rest, *That the Lord careth for oxen*.

The great number of *cattle* to which reference is here made were for the support of the inhabitants; and probably at this time the Ninevites gathered in their cattle from the champaign pasture, expecting that some foe coming to besiege them might seize upon them for their forage, while they within might suffer the lack of all things.

No doubt that ancient Nineveh was like ancient Babylon, of which *Quintus Curtius* says the buildings were not close to the walls, there being the space of an acre left between them; and in several parts there were within the walls portions of cultivated land, that, if besieged, they might have provisions to sustain the inhabitants.

And I suppose this to be true of all large ancient cities. They were rather *cantons* or *districts* than cities such as now are, only all the different inhabitants had joined together to wall in the districts for the sake of mutual defence.

This last expostulation of God, it is to be hoped, produced its proper effect on the mind of this irritable prophet; and that he was fully convinced that in this, as in all other cases, God had done all things well.

FROM this short prophecy many useful lessons may be derived. The Ninevites were on the verge of destruction, but on their repentance were respited. They did not, however, continue under the influence of good resolutions. They relapsed, and about *one hundred and fifty* years afterwards, the Prophet *Nahum* was sent to predict the miraculous discomfiture of the Assyrian king under Sennacherib, an event which took place about 710 B.C., and also the total destruction of Nineveh by Cyaxares and his allies which happened about 606 B.C. Several of the ancients, by allegorizing this book, have made Jonah declare the *divinity, humanity, death, and resurrection* of Christ. These points may be found in the Gospel history, their true repository; but *fancy* can find them any where it pleases to seek them; but he who seeks not for them will never find them here. Jonah was a type of the resurrection of Christ; nothing farther seems revealed in this prophet relative to the mysteries of Christianity.

In conclusion: while I have done the best I could to illustrate the very difficult prophet through whose work the reader has just passed, I do not pretend to say I have removed every difficulty. I am satisfied only of one thing, that I have conscientiously endeavoured to do it, and believe that I have generally succeeded; but am still fearful that several are left behind, which, though they may be accounted for from the briefness of the narrative of a great transaction, in which so many surprising particulars are included, yet, for general apprehension, might appear to have required a more distinct and circumstantial statement. I have only to add, that as several of the facts are evidently *miraculous*, and by the prophet stated as such, others may be probably of the same kind. On this ground all difficulty is removed; for God can do what he *pleases*. As his power is *unlimited*, it can meet with no *impossibilities*. He who gave the *commission* to Jonah to go and *preach to the Ninevites, and prepared the great fish* to swallow the disobedient prophet, could maintain his life for *three days and three nights* in the belly of this marine monster; and cause it to *eject him* at the termination of the appointed time, on *any sea-coast* he might choose; and afterwards the Divine power could carry the deeply contrite and now faithful prophet over the intervening distance between that and Nineveh, be that distance greater or less. Whatever, therefore, cannot be accounted for on mere natural principles in this book, may be referred to this

supernatural agency; and this, on the ostensible principle of the prophecy itself, is at once a mode of interpretation as easy as it is rational. God gave the commission; he raised the storm, he prepared the fish which swallowed the prophet; he caused it to cast him forth on the dry land; he gave him a fresh commission, carried him to the place of his destination, and miraculously produced the sheltering gourd, that came to perfection in a night and withered in a night. This God therefore performed the other facts for which we cannot naturally account, as he did those already specified. This concession, for the admission of which both common sense and reason plead, at once solves all the real or seeming difficulties to be found in *the Book of the Prophet Jonah*.