

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

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Historicity of The Scriptures. The matter of the trustworthiness of the Scripture narrative as a historical record has been most prominently and practically brought to the front in the Presbyterian Church very recently by three cases of application for licensure in widely separated sections, two in Eastern Presbyteries and one in the middle West.

THE BIBLE STUDENT has had something to say not long since about views promulgated in very popular and influential journals not under Presbyterian auspices; on this occasion our text is furnished by a paper standing high in Presbyterian circles and one which in times past has wrought valiantly for the conservative faith of orthodox Presbyterianism. In its early history it stood in the fore-front and was a champion indeed, bright, alert, acute, able and sound; within the last few years it has altogether shifted its ground, and while at times it seems unsettled and uncertain in its deliverances, it is very rapidly becoming radical, dragging its old anchors most fearfully, and it promises soon to be absolutely adrift. To those who were familiar with its position twenty-five years

ago, its present attitude presents a strange and sad contrast.

A Case in Point. We give herewith an account of one of the cases which furnished occasion to this journal for its declaration of principles.

The journal's own version of the matter is as follows:

On being asked, "What would you tell an inquirer with reference to the first chapters of Genesis," he answered: "I would tell him that the tendency of modern scholarship is to regard the account as legendary." It is to be noticed that he did not undertake to state his own view on the subject, but what he thought was the trend of scholarship. To the question how he would reconcile the view that Jonah was not historical with the authority of Christ, he replied: "Jesus was ignorant of the facts." And to justify himself he appealed to Bible language in Philipians ii. 7,—“But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men,”—and Mark xiii. 32,—“But of that day and that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” He evidently holds to an extreme form of the kenotic view of the person of Christ. On the subject of future probation, he would not assert that this doctrine was not taught in the New Testament.

its very essence, as most literally expressing its central significance. That propitiatory rite and that propitiatory place in which all Old Testament sacrificial functions culminated find their higher, their ideal counterpart in the Crucified Savior. In this respect also he is the end of the law, not because he does away with the idea of sacrifice as something antiquated and imperfect, but because he embodies this idea in its highest conceivable, its absolute form in himself, and thus, while rendering all previous forms superfluous, secures to it in his own Person everlasting reality.

But the passage examined does not merely bring out the promise accorded by Paul to the sacrificial conception of the atonement, it also throws light in several respects on what we may call the Apostle's philosophy of this sacrificial atonement. From this point of view we hope to examine it in a subsequent article.

THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAS.

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On several occasions our Lord spoke of the prophet Jonah as a "sign." Once he merely stated the fact without explanation. When Pharisees and Sadducees came, and tempting him desired that he would show them a sign from heaven, he answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them and departed" (Matt. xvi. 4), leaving them to ponder what this mysterious sign might be. At other times, however, his statement was accompanied by explanations (*e. g.* Matt. xii. 40), and with these before us, and especially in the light of the accomplished fact of his resurrection, all becomes clear. We readily understand that Jesus is foretelling his own resurrection, and in pointing the men of his generation to the mysterious sign of Jonas he is predicting the great event which should indeed be the sign from heaven they demanded, and the crowning proof of his Messiahship. His empty tomb, his victory over death, his deliverance from the power of the grave, his appearance to men as "he that liveth and was dead, and is alive

forever more," these shall testify of him, these shall be the unanswerable proof of his divinity.

But the meaning of the "sign" is not exhausted when it is said that the deliverance of Jonah was a type of Christ's resurrection. Other things in the prophet's history are declared by our Lord to be significant, as his preaching in Nineveh, and the repentance of the Ninevites (Luke xi. 29-32). The whole of Jonah's experience in his mission to Nineveh seems to be embraced in that sign to which our Lord directed the men of his generation. A mission so remarkable for that period of the world's history, an experience so wonderful as that of the prophet, a success so grand in the repentance of a whole nation and the salvation of a great city; all these were a sign not only to one, but to all generations of mankind.

A sign of what? Of the gospel redemption; of the grace of God that bringeth salvation, and that in Christ hath appeared to all men. Says George Adam Smith, "The truth which we find in the book of Jonah is as full and fresh a revelation of God's will as prophecy anywhere achieves. That God has granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life is nowhere else in the Old Testament so vividly illustrated. It lifts the teaching of the book of Jonah to equal rank with the second part of Isaiah, and nearest of all our twelve to the New Testament."*

I. Jonah was a sign of the *method* of divine grace. The Jews demanded a "sign from heaven," a transcendent display of divine power and glory, as proof that Jesus was the Messiah. Even in the presence of such acts of majesty on his part as the cleansing of the temple, and such displays of creative power as the feeding of the multitude, they still asked, "what sign showest thou, that we may see and believe thee" (John vi. 30 and ii. 18)? They must have something more startling and overwhelming. Their Messiah, ere they will receive him, must appear in kingly glory and advance in kingly pomp and power to the conquest of the world.

But not thus does the God of grace and salvation manifest himself; not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire; but in the still, small voice; in the gentle expression of his mercy and love. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." And in pointing us to Jonah as a sign Jesus points us to a Savior whose grace is

**The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, II., p. 495.

displayed, not in overpowering majesty, but in lowly humility; even in deep humiliation under the power of death and the grave. Not with signs from heaven comes the true Savior of men, but up from "the belly of hell" (Jon. ii. 2), himself as crucified and risen the most wonderful of all signs. "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The sign is one not of splendor and majesty, but of deep abasement, of lowly humiliation.

And this is in accord with God's uniform method in the manifestation of his grace. When angels announced to the shepherds of Bethlehem the glad tidings of the Savior's advent, they gave to those lowly men a sign whereby they might recognize the Redeemer of the world. And what was this? Should they behold a mighty warrior, marching with his armies to the conquest of the world? Should they see one arrayed in the soft clothing of kingly palaces, surrounded by the luxury and pomp of royalty? No; "this shall be a sign unto you," said the angels, "ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke ii. 12). Not the majesty of a king, but the lowliness of an infant; not the splendor of a palace, but the poverty of a stable; a *babe* in a *manger*. God saves men not by might, but by weakness; not by wisdom, but by that which the world counts foolishness; by suffering and sacrifice, by death and the grave. God manifest in the flesh in the babe of Bethlehem's manger, God reconciling the world unto himself in the blood of Calvary's cross, this is the mystery revealed in the gospel as the hope of a sinful world.

God's ways are not our ways. His works are not carried forward with the sound of trumpets or the pomp of outward display. The worlds move in silence in their orbits; the human frame is "made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth;" golden harvests grow from the dull, dead soil; and vast treasures of mineral wealth are hid in the dark mine and disguised in substances apparently worthless. And the gospel is "hid treasure;" its beauty and worth are embodied in forms that are common. Blind unbelief sees no divinity in the man Christ Jesus, no attraction in his cross, no saving power in his death. Proud reason scorns the thorn-crowned King, and like the children of Belial at the coronation of Saul asks, "how shall this man save

us?"

But God's ways are higher than our ways. And as from the carcass of Samson's lion comes honey, so from the cross and the tomb of Jesus there issue "sweetness" and "meat" for the souls of men. As from the corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies there springs a harvest, so the death of Christ is the germ of life to the world. In his death and resurrection faith beholds a complete redemption. It asks no sign but the sign of the prophet Jonas, for in the crucified and risen Redeemer it beholds the fullness of divine wisdom and power. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 22-24).

II. Jonah was a sign of the *magnitude* of divine grace. For, as our Lord declares, he was a sign not only to the Jews, but to the people of Nineveh (Lk. xi. 30). And from this we infer that the remarkable experiences through which the prophet passed were made known by him in his preaching to the Ninevites. His threatening message was doubtless accompanied not only by an explanation of its ground, but also a declaration of its authority in his own divine mission. Jonah would tell of the word of the Lord which had come to him in his native land, saying, "arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me." And to emphasize his message he would tell of his attempted flight, his punishment, his deliverance and his second commission. How otherwise could the people of Nineveh have felt encouraged to repent? For repentance is induced, not by unmingled dread of divine wrath, which drives men to despair, but rather by hope in the mercy of God.

Of that divine mercy the deliverance of Jonah from the belly of the fish was a sign to the Ninevites. It inspired the hope that he who had been gracious to his disobedient prophet would be gracious to them also. The message was one of wrath and judgment, but the messenger was an unmistakable sign that God was merciful and gracious, ready to forgive, mighty to save. He had been a great sinner and judgment had overtaken him. Cast into the sea he seemed beyond the reach of hope. But even from the depths God had brought him up. Delivered from his living grave

he stood before the people of Nineveh. A sinner saved by grace he was the best of all signs of the magnitude of grace.

How beautifully does this illustrate the wisdom of God in choosing as his ambassadors to mankind, not angels, but men; men who have sinned and suffered and repented and found mercy. Angels could indeed reveal more of the deep things of God; they could speak with loftier eloquence and more winning grace than men. But when a *man* stands forth to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, not only the message but the messenger is a sign to the hearers of the wonderful grace of God. He preaches a gospel whose saving power he has experienced. He is able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God. He is a standing illustration of his theme, and can say to his hearers, in the words of Paul, "for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. i. 16). Every true minister of Christ is, like Jonah, a sign of the grace he proclaims, an encouragement to repentance and faith.

"As Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation." Yes, and to every generation of mankind. In the resurrection of Christ we behold the grandest of all displays of divine grace, and the mightiest of motives to repentance. As the deliverance of Jonah proved that his prayer was heard and his sin forgiven, so the resurrection of Christ demonstrates that his offering for sin is accepted of God, and a full and free pardon purchased for every believer. "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. iv. 25). In Christ's resurrection God has set his seal to the gospel of grace, and declared his readiness upon the terms of faith to pardon and save the guiltiest of sinners.

III. Jonah was a sign of the *extent* of divine grace. His position among the prophets is peculiar. Although other prophets foretold the conversion of the gentiles in the latter days, yet it is a significant fact, in relation to our Lord's selection of him as a sign, that he was the only one of the prophets through whom gentiles were, in any large numbers, actually brought to repentance. Perhaps we may see in this fact one of the reasons of his unwillingness to go to Nineveh; and also of his displeasure at the

sparing of the city. In that city he saw not merely a heathen people, but a power hostile to his own country. And although we might suppose that his enmity to this hostile power would make him not only willing but eager to pronounce its doom, yet Jonah knew the forbearance and mercy of God too well to hope that the sentence would be irrevocable. "Therefore," he says to the Lord, "therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (Jonah iv. 1).

This mission to the heathen, unique in the history of the prophets, is something very striking. Eight centuries before the rising of the Light which should lighten the gentiles, a ray of heavenly truth illumines the darkness of a heathen city, sweet harbinger of the distant but certain dawn. Although God has for a time suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, yet he has not lost sight of them in their wanderings, nor ceased from his loving care over them. They are his creatures, his children, upon whom he has bestowed labor, and toward whom he has purposes of grace. Their vast multitude gives emphasis to the appeal which comes up from their perishing condition, their helplessness bespeaks the divine sympathy and succor, their immortal nature makes them precious in his sight. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd," he says to his complaining prophet, "Thou hast had pity on the gourd for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow, it came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand" (Jonah iv. 10, 11)?

The mission of Jonah was a sign of God's purpose to give salvation to the gentiles, a promise that the gospel should be preached among all nations, and that the hosts of the Lord's redeemed should be gathered out of every nation and kindred and people and tongue.

But along with its precious promise the sign of Jonas brings a solemn warning. How full of meaning is the fact that at the time when the people of Nineveh were giving reverent attention to the message of the prophet and turning from their sins unto God, the Jewish nation was departing from him and entering upon a downward course of idolatry and wickedness, which at last

resulted in its overthrow and the captivity of its people. The grace of God could no longer find lodgment in the hearts of his favored people; and so it was withdrawn from them to find a welcome among those who were not his people. And his prophet, turning from a disobedient and gainsaying people to whom he had stretched out his hands in vain, found believing and submissive hearers in the despised heathen. Could they have understood its meaning what thrilling significance must the declaration of Christ have had to the men of his generation when he said to them that no sign should be given them but the sign of the prophet Jonas. How solemn the warning embodied in that mysterious sign! But it was unheeded; and the nation that had enjoyed God's peculiar favor was left in its hardness and unbelief to sink into swift and final ruin, while the gospel it rejected went on its way to gladden the despised gentiles and carry its saving message to the ends of the earth.

A solemn warning is this "sign" to all generations. Privileges abused will be withdrawn. Grace rejected will go on its way, to find worthier recipients. And in the conversion and salvation of those who were far from God, the sin of those who perish in the midst of exalted privileges will be the more conspicuous and their condemnation the more severe. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold a greater than Jonas is here."

A greater than Jonas is here; not merely a sign of grace, but he who is grace itself; the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Crucified and risen, he comes forth from the grave with power to save all that put their trust in him. And crowning his redemptive work with the gift of his Spirit and the sending forth of his ambassadors, he gives the blessings of his grace, not to one favored nation, but to all the nations of the earth. This is the commission which he puts into the hands of his servants, each word throbbing with love to mankind: "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."