

## George Philip Bible Readings

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### THE BOOK OF JONAH

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## 1:1

This book begins with great dramatic power and the first three verses set the context and state the three main elements of the whole story. The word of the Lord in dynamic purpose is declared. The man summoned to be the instrument of that word is Jonah, and the purpose of the Word is in respect of the pagan city of Nineveh, apparently in terms of judgment, but in fact in terms of salvation. Running right through the story is the theme of service with the emphasis on the possibilities of revival coming through the agency of God plus one obedient man. Remember that Jonah was a man privileged to live and work in the knowledge and blessing of God's truth and grace. But, he had become so set in his ways, so preoccupied with his own spiritual position and standing, that when God purposed a great work of salvation among outsiders (Nineveh, which had a reputation for godlessness and wicked dealings with Israel) he refused to co-operate. We also, who are greatly privileged in spiritual truth and blessing, need to be reminded of our Lord's words in John 4:35; 10:16; and Matt. 9:36-38. The field is the world, the need is immense, there are many waiting for the sound of the Gospel, but if we pray for labourers to be sent, we must allow for the possibility that we will be among the first to be sent. We need to learn to think as God thinks and Jonah, who was in fact a prophet, should have known and sympathised with the heart of God as expressed in Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; and 2 Pet. 3:9. There is a lot to learn in this fascinating story.

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## 1:1

This comment from the New Bible Commentary is a useful introduction to our studies.

"A number of important scriptures should be studied alongside Jonah. In the O.T.... e.g. Jer. 1:4-10 (for the prophetic commission); Jer. 18:7-10 (for the effect of repentance on God's proclamation); Ps. 16: 8-11; 139 (for the prophet's experience). In the N.T. Acts 10:1-11,18 illustrates the missionary message of Jonah. But, in particular, the Gospel passages which refer to Jonah should be compared and studied (Matt. 12:38-41; Lk. 11:29-32). Here we may notice that Jonah is the only O.T. prophet with whom Jesus directly compared Himself. Jesus obviously regarded Jonah's experience and mission as of great significance. It is the more interesting, therefore, to recall that both Jesus and Jonah were 'prophets of Galilee'. Jonah's town, Gath-hepher, was only a few miles to the north of Nazareth, Jesus' town." (New Bible Commentary).

There is the undoubted element of miracle in this book but that is no stumbling-block because we are dealing with the sovereign God who reserves the right at any time to work outwith the normal "rules" of the order of creation. Simply because we cannot "imagine" this kind of thing nor explain it, does not give us ground for saying it could not be. God's ways are past finding out and we must humble our proud minds to accept that His ways are in fact always higher, better and surer than ours. God knows what He is doing and He does it in the most competent of ways. We all need to "learn what God is like."

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## 1:1

Jonah was a prophet in Israel in the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). That places him after Elijah and Elisha and contemporary with Amos. He exercised a faithful ministry of hope, mercy and encouragement in a day of national decline, when God's own people were a heartbreak to Him (2 Kings 14:23-27). How much he knew of the ministry of Amos we cannot really tell, but his fellow prophet did not mince his words when Israel was heading for disaster and he gave no grounds for facile hope simply because they were God's people. Read Amos 4:6-12, the disciplines of grace to turn the heart to repentance. Amos 5:14-15 speaks of hope, and in repentance Israel was to last as a nation for some time yet and Judah even longer. But this was the forgiveness and hope Jonah refused to preach to Nineveh (3:9-10). In Amos 8:11-14 a famine of the good Word of God is prophesied as coming upon God's own people. Was Jonah aware of this and did he resent Nineveh receiving the blessing of God's word unto salvation while Israel lay barren? Did Jonah excuse the sins of the "saints" while condemning the sins of the "outsiders"? Double standards are a constant temptation and God is unimpressed because He is realistic, cf. Luke 11:29-32, 35. Jonah had already exercised a fruitful ministry in time past but that does not guarantee present or future usefulness, nor is it ever a substitute for present obedience. At the same

time this story shows the forbearance of God because Jonah was not cast off. Granted he was restored by a very painful route of his own choosing, over-ruled by God's providence. But he was not cast off.

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### 1:1-3

The story is full of grace and begins with the initiative of grace in the command by God to carry the message to Nineveh whose greatness is here described not so much in terms of area or population but of wickedness. The message given to Jonah should have appealed to him for it was a word of stern judgment against this city, the capital of the heathen empire of Assyria and constant enemy of Israel. It was a necessary message for the evil of the place had reached a pitch that God was no longer prepared to tolerate. However we talk of secret sin and hidden evil, there are in fact no such things, for the eye of the Lord runs to and fro throughout the whole earth (2 Chron. 16:9; Gen. 6:5-8; 18:16-23ff., cf. Exod. 3: 6-8ff.) It is interesting to note the place of preaching in the economy of God, for in such an unpromising situation the prophet was commanded to preach, and to proclaim in no uncertain terms the day of reckoning. This is exactly what Paul did in his missionary journeys to places of entrenched paganism, cf. Acts 17:22-32. Some now say that the day of preaching is past, but while they talk of "dramatic" and "non verbal" presentations of the truth we must recognise that only a clear, comprehensive, reasoned statement of God's truth can confront unbelief and bring forth faith (Rom. 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:13; Eph. 6:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:9; Col. 4:3; Isa. 55:6-11). We have not really begun to pray for the preaching and the sending forth of God's truth. Think of the challenge of Ezek. 37:1-10 which could well be applied to Jonah and Nineveh and to our own contemporary situation. Can these bones live? God says, "Who will go for us?"

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### 1:3

The day of God's power for the salvation of Nineveh had come, but the chosen prophet resigned his commission, refused to go, and promptly ran away. No doubt he was quite sure he was doing the right thing and felt aggrieved with God for putting him in such a position. Perhaps he was comforted by the easy way everything worked out, for no divine intervention stopped him, there was a ship ready to go and there was a berth available. So he paid the fare: a single ticket, because he had no plans to return. How foolishly and glibly we often go on our way assuming that if it is wrong God will stop us. There are times when we are straying that God does check our way and hold us back. But, when we are in a disaffected state, as Jonah was, in his case motivated by prejudice and resentment, there is no saying where our terminus will be. There are grounds for saying that Jonah had been slipping away from true spiritual obedience for a long time and it was the crisis of God's call to specific service that brought it out into the open. Everything about Jonah here was wrong. He was far too angry to be reasonable. He might claim his spiritual integrity and resent any charge of backsliding and profess that his delight was in God. Yet at the same time he was running from the presence of God (cf. Ex. 33:14-15). After all, the presence of God was the particular privilege of Israel, why then did he run from it? Was not Israel blessed of God in order to be the instrument of blessing to the nations? Here is a man who has let the Devil in and the result is confusion. Watch and pray!

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### 1:1-3

Before moving on to the developments of the story under the good and gracious hand of God, pause to consider the deep danger of spiritual pride. In our own lives its fruit is blindness which causes us to go on with great determination in ways that can bring nothing but harm. We rush off on the journey and in a profound spiritual, moral and physical sense, we pay the fare. In respect of others it makes us dangerous (as we shall see) and indifferent. When Israel began to feel consciously, "We are the people," they forgot that the riches of their blessing and privilege were given to make them servants of others (Lk. 22:27; Matt. 20:28). This was the sin of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:13-15). This was also the sin of the disciples, especially at a time when their own powerless lives testified to their spiritual immaturity (Lk. 9:46-56). But Jonah was not willing even to be a preacher of judgment to Nineveh. As he confesses in 4:1-2 he had some idea that grace lay behind the judgment. Why did he run away? Was it to go somewhere where people would appreciate him more and bow to

his spiritual leadership? He was quite a character and impressed the seamen even though he was no use to them. But spiritual pride makes us aloof, indifferent, hard, self-centred and critical to the point that we tend to denigrate and devalue those who are "not of us". Perhaps one of the best tests of our spiritual calibre is how and with what grace we fit in to situations very different from our home congregations.

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### 1:4-6

Jonah began to discover that it was not quite so easy as he thought to get away from God. The whole of Psalm 139 should be read carefully and appreciatively, not least to remind us of the persistence of God's grace. How easy it would have been for God to forget about Jonah, to leave him to his own devices which he had chosen and which he was no doubt prepared to justify, and to find someone else to do His work. *But God* worked differently. He let Jonah go and yet He did not let him go. God began to demonstrate the versatility of His resources and methods and He summoned a great storm. The winds obey His voice whether for calm or storm (Mk. 4:39-41). Here there is no half measure in God's methods, for even experienced seamen recognised the danger of foundering. God was in the storm, but if we look at it from the human standpoint we must recognise that Jonah, by transgressing the will of God, had set in motion circumstances that affected the lives of many people who had only the slightest connection with him. A believer, especially a prophet, out of touch with God is not only no use to others, he is a positive menace, whether or not he realises it. Jonah did not think along these lines for he was fast asleep, but this was a situation in which calm unconcern was a very bad sign. There was, at that point, more hope for the pagan seamen than for Jonah. In all our thinking about life we have to recognise that the sin of man has brought into the natural order of creation and into history a ghastly disorder and disruption. But here we must not think that the men involved were at the mercy of blind fate and unfeeling circumstances. The God of grace was in this.

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### 1:4-6

We may well feel sorry for Jonah, and we should, but we must not think that God was being too hard. He never uses greater trial when lesser will serve His good purpose. Read Heb. 12:5-11 and 1 Pet. 1:6 (A.V.) emphasising the words "if need be." We must never make superficial assessments of a situation without considering the "ways" of the Almighty (cf. Rom. 11:33; Job 23:1-10) or we will come to wrong conclusions which will only further confuse our thinking and reduce our benefit. Shallow thinking here could conclude that God was angry, or that He was unreasonable in making others suffer for Jonah's sins. Of course, "no man is an island"; no man lives or sins unto himself. The truth is that God was mightily concerned with the prospects of salvation for thousands of people in the city of Nineveh and was not prepared to sit back and leave them to their dark fate because of the proud rebellion of a once useful prophet. In the storm the poor seamen did the two things which seemed basic to their situation. They prayed, sensing that there was something more than just human at issue, and they dumped the cargo. That is wisdom. Sometimes we get as far as praying but never get round to dumping from our lives hazards that will only hinder the solving of the situation. It was left to a pagan man, the captain, to suggest that Jonah should wake up and speak to his God. We must follow this thought tomorrow.

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### 1:6

Jonah did not want to speak to God nor did he give any indication that he might know the reason for the unfortunate crisis that had come upon the ship. Jonah was as self-assured as he had ever been. It seems that he had shut God out of his thinking and was not prepared under any circumstances to consider that he was in any way in the wrong. This kind of deliberate blindness is frightening. Only God can open such eyes and it may take this kind of storm to do so. Read Psalm 107, especially v. 23-32. But Jonah was nowhere near this kind of repentance. When the captain spoke to him, he made no response, gave no witness, and offered no explanation. There may well have been a bland detachment manifest in his whole attitude, as if God just did not come into things at all. Of course, Jonah could not speak to God; he could not pray for he was at cross-purposes with the Almighty (cf. Ps. 66:18). He had not yet reached the stage David speaks of in Ps. 32:1-5, for conviction had not

yet taken hold of him. Had it done so he would not have been asleep. But it is strange that a prophet of Israel should be addressed in the words of v.6 without giving that glorious testimony which was part of the very substance of his life (Deut. 6:4). How could this man be silent while a rough pagan set the God of Israel on a par with other gods? Without doubt he would still think himself vastly superior to such a spiritual ignoramus, but there is no doubt who is the tragic character. This is what spiritual disobedience does.

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### **1:7-10**

Whatever the process of casting lots may have been, the object of the exercise was clear. It would reveal the individual responsible for the present calamity (cf. Josh. 7:14ff; 1 Sam. 14:36-46). It did, and with calm thoroughness they questioned the Hebrew who responded with an unqualified statement of his theological and religious position. These heathen men might well have been sarcastic and have passed caustic comment on Jonah's adherence to his God and the manifest lack of success in the venture of running away from Him. But there is no evidence of this cynical reaction, the cynicism was all on Jonah's side. Of course, what Jonah said in v.9 was the truth about the man, truer than his present backsliding. Did the prophet realise that in confessing the sovereignty of God the Creator he was testifying to the futility of ever trying to run away from Him? It seems from the reaction of the seamen that, as in the case of the story of Jericho (Josh. 2:9-11), news and knowledge of the God of Israel had spread far and wide and this is something that might well have shamed Jonah who, by his prejudice, was limiting God to the confines of Israel. The prophet had not been expecting any signs of spiritual awareness on that ship and indeed had not been looking for any. Of course, it was the storm and the fear it awakened that made the opening for testimony. God brings good out of evil in a way that exposes evil for what it is. Jonah is a long way yet from reinstatement in spiritual service. Read Acts 27:9-26. It is so different: but then Paul was not running away from God.

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### **1:11-16**

The increasing intensity of the storm signified that the issue was by no means settled yet and we may interpret this in two ways. We could suggest that the fury of the storm was the continuing work of the Devil who felt that a significant man of God was falling into his grasp. Some extreme action by the seamen or Jonah himself might seal the whole disaster. On the other hand the fierce storm together with the deference of the men to this strange Hebrew may be seen as God's opportunity to Jonah, both for repentance and for an asserting of his spiritual authority and leadership. It was a time fraught with possibility for sanctification and for evangelism. In like manner Jonah's attitude and words may be thought of in two ways. In v.12 we may see repentance and the willing giving up of his life unto death which issues in the salvation of the heathen (16). If this be so we see something of the moral stature of the man of God manifested in spite of his being spiritually adrift. It may well have been this that caused the seamen to recognise Jonah as a "right" man and to try with all their power to bring the boat, and him, safely to land. There was a humanity in these seamen that highlighted Jonah's indifference. They were under no obligation to this stranger whose presence so disturbed them, and they had no sense at that time that they were instruments of God in glorious, far-reaching purposes. But they did their best for their fellow-man and only in distress did they at last bow to the inevitable.

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### **1:11-16**

The second way of regarding Jonah's attitude is to see the man as having been humiliated but not humbled in heart. He was not going to belittle himself any further by allowing innocent men to suffer on account of him and that is why he pointed them to the sure way of resolving their predicament. But at the same time there was no movement of his heart toward God even though he seems to have accepted, at least in a theoretical way, that God was involved in the storm. Having been confronted by God, and that publicly, Jonah was angry and appears to have been willing to die rather than submit to God's command and commission in respect of Nineveh. This is a strange perversity of heart and signifies the devilish madness that can take possession of even a man of God when his heart is not right with God. The one thing Jonah was determined to do was to defend his actions and attitudes in respect of God. He was not going to yield. This is the way of destruction, and

it was the way followed by the nation in the time of Amos, as is made plain in the reiterated statement, "Yet you did not return to Me," in Amos 4:6-13. Think of Jesus' words in John 5:40, "You refuse to come to Me that you may have life." This was exactly Jonah's attitude. He simply declined to prove that God's will is good, perfect and acceptable (Rom. 12:1-2). This kind of trifling with God is dangerous as the story of Esau teaches (Heb. 12:15-17). It has possibility of sad and lifelong consequences as Paul warns in 1 Cor. 9:24-27. To be "disqualified", "castaway" or "laid aside as of no further use" must be the most desolating of experiences for a Christian to live with.

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### **1:17**

There seems to have been no sense of repentance in Jonah, no awareness of disqualification, and no strong crying to God for pardon or restoration when he was cast into the sea. He would know nothing of the stilling of the storm nor of the apparent conversion of the seamen. He went down into the depths of darkness and in the next chapter we learn of his reaction. Note very clearly that Jonah was not allowed to call the tune. God was in charge of this whole operation. The man was not spared from the deep and yet he was not lost. If Jonah desired death either out of despair, or resistance to God or as a final act of consecration for the salvation of the men on the ship, it was denied to him in the mercy of God. Yet God withheld His pity until sore circumstances of the most devastating kind had completed the work of grace in Jonah's soul. God appointed a great fish to stand by as an instrument of mercy, protection and deliverance, not as a judgment. Even in the very moment of consigning His man to the terrible disciplines of the deep, God was looking beyond that to the man's future service and blessing. We must learn to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand so that we might have a future (1 Pet. 5:6). We must be careful not to sit lightly to the disciplines of God (Heb. 12:5-11) because we are not meant to cope with them easily. We must also be careful in our praying not to be too insistent that God should lift the sore weights from our lives without delay, lest we cut short the work of grace and so limit our continuing usefulness. Think of the story of Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7ff.). Think of the story of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:1-6. In the years of respite granted to him he fathered a son Manasseh who became the scourge of the nation. It would have been better if Hezekiah's prayer had not been answered. There are mysteries in providence. That is why we must look to God and walk close to Him.

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### **1:17**

The terribleness of Jonah's experience will be felt if we think of how he spent the three days and nights with no means of measuring the time. It must have felt like an endless eternity of darkness. That is exactly what it is to be without God and without hope. We do not need to be unduly concerned to argue as to the species of "big fish" or "whale" and try to decide or "prove" that it could or could not swallow a man and afterwards eject him alive. We are dealing with miracle and with the appointments of a sovereign God. It could conceivably have been an advance prototype of a heavenly submarine which, of course, the seamen, who apparently reported the facts about Jonah, would not have been able to describe. When we think of the inventiveness of modern technology and the coming to pass of many things our forefathers stated categorically to be impossible, we must not reduce the capacity of God the Lord to less than that of man the creature. Let us admit that we know very little about anything on any level. There was a time when high rise flats were hailed as the ultimate breakthrough in housing, and men acted on the "assured result" of investigation. Now it is recognised they are disaster. God is far surer of His methods and objectives. He is the God of miracle and, whether it be Old Testament or New Testament miracle, you cannot explain it away. Let God be God.

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### **2:1**

It took a lot to make Jonah pray. It was not until he was brought totally into the depths that he stopped fighting with God and began to listen. Until then his proud wilfulness had been making so much noise and his proud heart had been so preoccupied with itself that he could not hear what God was saying. That is why God had to do so much, and why He was utterly resolute in the doing of it. The man who had slept in indifference and had refused to pray, even when urged to do so by pagan men in sore need of salvation, now cried to his God. In one

sense the man feared that he was irretrievably lost. "Hope was gone and fear distressed him," but the basic reality of his spiritual life then asserted itself and throughout this chapter we are made aware of the biblical nature of the prayer and its language. This is a man who knew his Bible. He had stored up God's word in his heart and now he began to think again in God-centred categories and in God-given language. The Word of God became a glorious means of grace bringing home to Jonah's heart that he was in fact in God's hand. That is a solemn fact but it is full of hope. My times are in Thy hand (Ps. 31:15); why should we ever try to have it otherwise?

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## 2:1-10

It is best to read this chapter as a whole because it is a cry from the heart rather than a theological essay. These are the words of a prodigal son who has "come to himself" in the far country and is beginning to turn his heart home to the Father. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, still not sure what was going to happen to him, and yet aware of the fact that he had cried to the Lord as he sank through the swirling waters of the deep and that he was still alive. He did not yet realise that what he was enduring was not to be interpreted simply in terms of his own spiritual experience with God. Nineveh still waited for God's evangelist, and God still waited for the response of Jonah's heart (Isa. 30:15-18). Do not fail to sense the fear and panic that laid hold on the drowning man. Perhaps all his past life did flash before him and he would remember not only his recent encounter with God, which had ended in disobedience and flight, but also the days when he served the Lord in the joy and power of prophetic ministry. What regrets there must have been. Think of William Cowper's lines:

"Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His word?"

"Return, O Holy Dove, return  
Sweet messenger of rest!  
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,  
And drove Thee from my breast."

The "dearest idol" that hymn goes on to speak about is not any thing or activity but proud self that must be dethroned. The issue here is not salvation but service and to be "disqualified" from that is loss indeed. Read Psalm 51 and see what David felt about it.

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## 2:1-10

It was from the "grave" of God's dark and stern disciplines that Jonah cried (1). It was when he was brought to a dead end and to utter barrenness that he remembered the Lord and began to think in spiritual terms (7). Only then did he begin to realise what his proud stubbornness of will had cost him and how he had lost out on the most valuable things that life affords, even the "solid joys and lasting treasure" of walking with God and doing His will. Read Psalm 137:1-6. Spiritual blessing and privilege are seldom truly valued until we no longer have them. And we can lose the blessings of the Lord both by carelessness and worldliness as well as by deliberate disobedience (Heb. 2:1). It is when we are too comfortable that we begin to slide. Many a man has had to confess, "I still find prosperity produces a dryness in my spirit and an indifference to or at least a lack of warmth towards things above." Remember that it was when David had won many battles and his work was established that he began to grant himself the privilege of taking things easy. It was then that the Devil snared him (2 Sam. 11:1, 2ff.). There is a dying to self and to circumstances that is of the very essence of Christian life and service. Read 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 4:7-12. John the Baptist had the right attitude to work and reputation when he said, "He must increase, I must decrease" (John 3:25-30).

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## 2:1-10

The way to deal with spiritual depression and desolation is to look to God, and this is what Jonah did. In v.4 he confesses, "Yet will I look again toward Thy holy temple." This is exactly what the Psalmist does: "My soul is cast down .....therefore I remember" (Ps. 42:6). Read Psalms 42 and 43. These are prayers quarried out of deep experience. Remember of course that Jonah had wilfully withdrawn himself from standing in God's presence (1:3). Now it seems that God had taken him at his word and cast him out (2:4). But it is in this sore predicament that Jonah seemed to become aware that his true identity and calling were to be found in the fact that he was a child of God within the covenant of God, and in v. 8-9 he stopped fighting with God and made a new vow. He recognised that he was not his own and could never be his own (1 Cor. 6:19, 20) and in that knowledge he yielded to the grace of God in the disciplines of His judgments. Here is a servant of God who had got away from the place of blessing and fruitful service because there was a death that he had refused to die. Now that he had been brought back to the place where he was willing to die, he was ready to live and his deliverance was imminent. Read Psalm 119: 65-72, and Jer. 31:15-20 for spiritual realism. The God with whom we have to do is the God who acts for our blessing.

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## 2:11

There is something gloriously immediate about this verse and it signifies just how closely and accurately God had watched over and governed this whole situation. There was no delay or uncertainty and no difficulty in the execution of Jonah's deliverance. No doubt the man himself was somewhat bewildered. An impossible situation had been resolved in a moment and all the frightening pressures had been lifted. We are not told if Jonah was back on his home territory or on some foreign shore, nor are we told if he was instantly ready to do business with God, or if some time elapsed to allow the man to gather his wits and piece together again the shattered fragments of his spiritual life. The forgiveness of God is glorious and total and yet it does not "put the clock back". Things *may* never be quite the same again. Some say, for example, that David never again rose to the same heights after his sin with Bathsheba. Jonah had to come to terms with all that had happened to him and the effects on him physically, mentally and spiritually. He was a man, not a machine, and any servant of God who forgets this is likely, sooner or later, to land in a predicament as Elijah did in 1 Kings 19:4 where the spiritual depression was caused by and led to distorted thinking, all complicated by exhaustion. God does restore the backslider (Hos. 14:4 A.V.) and He does it in full measure. He also promises to restore the wasted years (Joel 2:25) and this also is on the scale of His glorious grace. But scripture, history and our own limited experience all testify to the fact that when the pressure is off we can slip back so easily into our old ways rather than go forward in new consecration. Jonah was on dry land again and he was vastly relieved. But the future was still to be decided. Was Jonah a changed man?

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## 3:1-2

Read the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11ff. and note how his return led not only to gracious reception but to reinstatement in the family and in the Father's service. The same was true of Elijah after Horeb (1 Kings 19:15ff.) for he was told to go on his way to carry out further significant work in God's purposes. So it was with Jonah, for the word of the Lord came the second time to this man who had failed so manifestly and who by proud refusal forfeited all right to be trusted with such a valuable message. This is the reinstatement of grace that Peter experienced after the resurrection (Mk. 16:7). We do not know how much of Jonah's failure was generally known among the people or among the prophets. But when God makes plain that He has forgiven and that He trusts someone, then all others must hold their peace. In any given case we will have little knowledge of God's dealings with an individual but we can be sure that there has been no easy repentance. Of course, not all who rebel, who backslide, who get adrift from God are restored. Think of the story of Lot in Gen. 19:12ff. Even when the pressures of his situation together with direct angelic intervention caused him to speak to his own family, they would not listen and he himself had to be dragged from disaster only to end up in shameful disgrace. Sodom never listened to Lot (they knew him too well) in the way Nineveh listened to Jonah. And in the fulness of time Israel did not listen to Jesus the way Nineveh listened to Jonah (Matt. 12:41).

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### 3:1-2

In spite of his failure, Jonah was quite clear as to what constituted a prophet and a prophetic ministry. He was in no sense an independent operator expressing his views on matters religious, sociological and political. That is not preaching! He was a man under orders, entrusted with a message that had been given him to proclaim. The message was not his but God's (Gal. 1:11-12); his job was to deliver it. It is this sense of being "under orders" that marked out the prophets in the Old Testament (cf. Jer. 1:1-10; Amos 7:14-16a). The same was true of Paul. His experience was not always simple yet there came upon him this persuasion of the call of God and with it the reassurances of God concerning the outcome of his work (Acts 16:6-10; 18:5-11; 26:16-19). Sometimes when a situation seems most unpropitious and on a human level hard and hopeless, as Nineveh was in Jonah's eyes, God has purposes of grace and mercy which he will carry out through the instrumentality of willing servants who must put their trust in God and in His message. It is only God who can work salvation and when He is set on doing so He will do it. Revival is God's sovereign work, but the story of Jonah tells us that it waits for God's people to be ready and that readiness is a spirit of willing obedience. There must also be an honest dealing with the Word entrusted to us, as Paul makes plain in 2 Cor. 4:1-2. Remember that all stewards must give an account of their dealings with what belongs to God and we need to be able to say, as Paul did, that we have been faithful, cf. Acts 20:17-27.

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### 3:3-4

It is the Word of God, all the Word of God, which constitutes the evangelical message of the Gospel. We tend to have an inbuilt reaction against and resistance to the preaching of judgment as if this is in some way a contradiction or denial of the love of God. That cannot possibly be the case here, for we have seen the determination of God to bless the great and evil city of Nineveh. But people can be blessed only in being turned away from their sins and sinful ways and this is the objective of the gospel (Acts 3:26). The instrument or method God ordained for Nineveh was the preaching of imminent judgment, for that evil city needed "law work" so that by the Holy Spirit the consciences of men and women might be awakened to God and convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment to come (John 16:7-11). This was the message announced by Paul to the intellectual city of Athens (Acts 17:30-31) and it is a neglected element in too much evangelical preaching. Perhaps if more men preached this solemn aspect of God's Word some others would not need to do it so much. It is not a pleasant message to preach and the preaching of it is no pleasure, for in anticipation, in execution and retrospect it involves heaviness of heart. But for unrepentant sinners and for careless sinners the message of accountability to God is both necessary and healthy (1 Cor. 4:1-5).

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### 3:5-6

The city of Nineveh, whether one unit or a complex of communities, was vast and we do not need to go into the technicalities of how far Jonah penetrated or whether he went straight through or ranged throughout the community. The point is that the results so far exceeded the human activity that we must see in this movement of repentance and revival the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit. That work had been going on in preparation before the prophet ever came so that, even though Jonah did not realise it, he was going to territory prepared for his ministry. This must be a great encouragement to ministers and missionaries alike as they start their work. Of course, some may be given preparatory work to do, as John the Baptist was, making the way and the situation ready for what is to come later. This is an element in our work that we must not forget (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Another thing to note here is that the movement began among the common people, not among the political or religious executives. It was the preaching of the Word at "grass-roots" level that so influenced public opinion that the authorities eventually had to take note. The Word of God is not bound and the work of the Holy Spirit is sovereignly extensive. What happened in Nineveh was possibly similar to what happened in Israel at the time of John the Baptist's stern ministry when the whole community *went out* to hear him (Matt. 3:1-6). When the Word of God is reinstated in the church and then in society, God is brought back into the thinking and awareness of men and women, and by the Holy Spirit people are constrained to seek and to find repentance through Christ. If this can happen in Nineveh, it can happen anywhere. But God's men and women must be willing.

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### 3:7-9

Where there is no vision the people perish and society casts off restraint (Prov. 29:18; 1 Sam, 3:1,19-4:1). When the Word of the Lord comes there is an awakening of reality and an awareness of the principle that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people (Prov. 14:34). In Nineveh evil and violence were confessed and repented of just as they were in the wicked devilish city of Ephesus (Acts 19:17-20). There came upon Nineveh, hitherto blind and insensitive to moral and spiritual issues, a great exercise of heart as king and people alike began to realise the immediate and the eternal consequences of what they were and what they were becoming. This is something our contemporary society needs to be compelled to do. On all levels thinking is focused only on the immediate situation and we go on in the crisis-legislation-solution-crisis pattern. The city and the nation need to be called to consider, "Where are we going, what are we doing and what are the results going to be?" Until lawlessness is challenged and moral righteousness affirmed, there is no hope. But how can this happen but by the Word of the Lord, and how can they hear without a preacher (Rom. 10:14ff.)? But there will be no preachers raised up in a church that has ceased to pray and that has lost its confidence in both the Word of God and the God of the Word. The fields are white to harvest and the harvest will be either judgment or salvation. Pray therefore! (Matt. 9:37, 38).

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### 3:10

Some suggest that Nineveh knew about the basic facts of Jonah's experience, having been told by the seamen, and therefore they were awed by the presence among them of a man virtually back from the dead. They knew also that Jonah's God had dealt with him graciously and with forgiveness, in spite of his pride and rebellion, and they felt that in such a God there was hope even for them. However they did not presume (9). They did not say, as too many say in practice, if not in word, "God will forgive, that's His business," cf. 2 Sam. 12:20-23; Joel 2:11-14; Jer. 26:1-3; Amos 5:14-15; Zeph. 2:3. This is not to deny the goodness, the willingness or the forgiveness of God. It is simply the authentic spirit of penitence of those who bow before the God who has been grievously sinned against. They wait for His mercy. It is a reflection on our spiritual awareness and lack of depth that we can treat sin so lightly. Read David's great penitential Psalm (Ps. 51) and note the realism of his attitude to God and to his own wrongdoing. Think of the depth of the man's exercise of heart when, considering the possible premature ending of his useful service, he prayed, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." To be made aware that God's day of reckoning has come upon you and to sense the issues that are at stake is a solemn business. It creates a spirit of prayer that is free from levity and cynicism as it is free from presumption (cf. Acts 8:23-24). The forgiveness of God is a glorious wonder, but if it makes us careless there is something wrong.

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### 3:10

We must still consider this "change of mind" on the part of God. How does this accord with His sovereignty, omnipotence, and omniscience, and with the immutability and unchangeability of all His ways and workings? Commenting on a similar statement in Gen. 6:6 Kidner says, "This very human description conveys the poignancy of the situation, leaving the word 'repented' (AV) to be safeguarded on another occasion against the implication of caprice (1 Sam. 15:29, 35). This is the Old Testament way of speaking, using the boldest terms, counterpoised elsewhere if need be, but not weakened." Ellicott comments that the situation is portrayed from a human standpoint and in human language because of the necessity to emphasise human responsibility in the context of sin. J.L. Packer in his book "Knowing God" (a treasure of instruction much to be commended to all who would understand Biblical theology) deals with the matter under the heading of the unchanging purposes of the unchanging God. He speaks of how God has never any need to revise His judgments or plans and this is a great source of comfort to the believer (1 Sam. 15:29; Num. 23:19; Ps. 33:11; Heb. 6:17ff.). He goes on: "It is true there is a group of texts (Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam, 24:16; Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:13ff) which speak of God as repenting. The reference in each case is to a reversal of God's previous treatment of particular men, consequent upon their reaction to that treatment. But there is no suggestion that this reaction was not foreseen,

or that it took God by surprise, and was not provided for in His eternal plan. No change in His eternal purpose is implied when He begins to deal with a man in a new way."

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#### **4:1**

It is shattering to discover that in spite to of the judgments and blessings of God on a personal level, and in spite of the blessing of God on his work, Jonah was still the same old Jonah, a creature of self-will and prejudice. Some people just never learn, and that can sometimes be fatal (Heb. 12:15-17). Jonah was not right with God because he was not right in himself and he would never be right in himself until he was right with God. There was enough 'consecration' in this man for him to be the instrument of God in fruitful service for others (why should Nineveh suffer because of Jonah's miserable-mindedness?) but there was not enough 'consecration' for fellowship with God, nor for God to enjoy Jonah or Jonah to enjoy God. He was indeed a 'miserable Christian' who would cast a cloud wherever he went. Here is a man who was restored from backsliding in terms of action, activity and service but not in thought and attitude of heart. He was still motivated by self and he was determined to make God and everyone else think as he did and, if that was not possible; he would sulk, withdraw, become bitter and cynical. He even got as far as resigning, which can sometimes be a healthy and honest thing to do. But it was Jonah who was out of sorts, not God, nor Nineveh, nor the purposes of salvation. Poor, proud Jonah was missing out on such a lot. He could have been so happy.

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#### **4:1-3**

Jonah was very angry with God; it was burning him up, clouding his moral and spiritual sensitivity and making him so self-absorbed that he felt the only thing to do was to withdraw from God as if the Almighty had done some terrible wrong. Ellicott compares Jonah's reaction to that of David in 2 Sam. 6:6-11; and 1 Chron. 13:11-14, and says, "Selfish jealousy for his own reputation, jealousy for the honour of the prophetic office, a mistaken patriotism, disappointed that the great enemy of his country should go unpunished, Jewish exclusiveness which could not endure to see the Divine clemency extended to the heathen, have each been adduced as the motive of Jonah's anger. Possibly something of all these blended in his mind." It seems preposterous that a man of faith should insist that God was in the wrong. But we have the instance of Peter in Acts 10:14 (Not so, Lord!); the disciples in Luke 9:53-56; and the elder brother in Luke 15:28 who refused to join the father's rejoicing because a worthless penitent had been welcomed. We can have the same kind of thing when outsiders begin to come to church and sit in our favourite seats and begin to change the "atmosphere" of the church. Some resent it because, as they say, "We are fine as we are." Some, who do not themselves pray, resent it when others begin to take the lead and the load at the prayer meeting. Jonah's problem is a perennial one.

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#### **4:1-3**

That there was a streak of selfish meanness in Jonah's personality, and that that streak had not been dealt with, came out into the open in this time of crisis. Of course meanness is not a sign of grace, rather a contradiction of it (Matt. 18:23-35), and in Jonah's case the particularly sad thing was that it was manifest in a man of some maturity of Christian experience and service, a man who had been richly blessed and greatly privileged in having been given a share in God's glorious work. But to live in the sphere of God's blessings is a challenging thing for, if we receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1), refusing to allow it to do its crucifying and healing work in our hearts, we will become complacent, careless, indifferent to the lost, unwilling to work, more and more exclusive, and deteriorate into spiritual and moral ineffectiveness. The last thing we will do is to question our own spiritual condition. We will be, like Jonah, sure that we are indispensable to God and yet at the same time we will live and work at cross-purposes with God. The sin of "self" more than any other sin has a blinding effect, and in such a condition the great enemy of our souls is always active, adding to the confusion and making us more and more dogged and determined to stand our ground and argue it out with God. In this frame of mind the words, "I'm quite sure," will be often on our lips. But we can be too sure.

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### 4:1-3

Jonah's being angry and yet praying may seem a contradiction but it is in fact the most hopeful sign in the situation. The battle was not yet lost. There was a weariness in Jonah similar to that in Elijah in 1 Kings 19 and in Moses in Num. 11:10-15, with physical, emotional and spiritual elements. Carrying the work of God can take it out of a man or woman and that is why Paul, for example, always coveted the prayers of his people. Neither Elijah nor Moses was "on the run from God" as Jonah was, yet their situations were similar. All three were disappointed at the way things had worked out and inevitably they felt somewhat disappointed in themselves, failing to realise that they had done what God wanted them to do and that *that* is success. Jonah's ministry (2 Kings 14:23-27) had led to national recovery, but not to national repentance such as was manifest in Nineveh and the man was confused. The confusion accentuated his loneliness and that in turn increased his insecurity and sense of failure. Little wonder he was depressed! His thoughts were centred on himself not on God, and what he was reckoning to be deeply held spiritual convictions involving the character of God were in fact reactions to human situations. Jonah's discontent with himself was transferred to God. This can often explain a Christian's discontent with and disaffection from his own congregation. It may not have been a spiritual issue at all, especially at the beginning, but rather a human situation not working out as had been hoped. But, as the story of Jonah makes plain, this can bring you to an attitude of dogged, unreasonable pride, in which you are at cross-purposes with God.

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### 4:4-5

It is amazing and wonderfully comforting to see how persistent God was with His disgruntled servant. Of course it was Jonah (not God) who had the problem and who was likely to lose out in the end. God's work would go on with or without him. No man is indispensable. But God is very kind and patient. He not only allowed *but* actively encouraged the man to express his anger, disappointment and frustration and to argue out with Him the complaint he felt so deeply. This is much healthier and more productive spiritually than bottling things up inside. To speak it out gets it into perspective, whereas keeping it all within leads to magnification and distortion. Think of how, again and again in the Psalms, God's man pours out his questionings and complaints. Think of Habakkuk's argument with God (Hab. 1:1-4; 2:1), or think of Jeremiah's astonishing accusation against Him (Jer. 20:7). God did not strike them into silence. He welcomes honesty. He leads us on with wise encouragement to clearer and stronger faith. It is not His business to crush or break (Isa. 42:3). Jonah was far too angry and that simply clouds clear thinking. That is why God addressed him with a question, calling him to consider again the grounds for his bitter attitude. Did Jonah know all the facts and the possible issues both short-term and long-term? The truth is that we know only in part (1 Cor. 13:9) and that requires us to be full of caution.

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### 4:4-5

Reserving our judgment about things and people, leaving the issues open with a real element of doubt, is not a denial of faith, as was made plain by the young men in Daniel 3:16-18. They were not "hedging their bets" in case God let them down by not delivering them. They were simply acknowledging in a practical sense that they knew considerably less about God's specific intentions than He did, and were prepared to trust Him no matter how things worked out. There are some things we cannot understand at a given stage (John 13: 7) and we are not meant to understand. We must trust, and not jump to conclusions. We must consider the possibility that *we* might be wrong, partly through lack of knowledge, partly by wrong deductions, and partly by having too short-term a view of things. Did Jonah think that the averting of judgment from Nineveh in his generation meant impunity for all time? Did Jonah feel that God's judgments on Israel (its decline becoming more evident) were harsh in view of His "leniency" with Nineveh? Did Jonah feel that the bringing in of the Gentiles would lessen the "share" of God's love and favour for Israel? Did he not know that "the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind"? Was Jonah comparing the costliness of his service with the apparent "easiness" of Nineveh's blessing? If God is going to bless the heathen persecutors of His Kingdom what was the point or profit of being a Jew? Much in every way (Rom. 3:1ff. 9:4-5), not least in the privilege of being enlightened by

truth and blessed by grace to be messengers of salvation. Jonah had a lot of thinking to do but needed a lot of help to get into the frame of mind and spirit to do it. This was what God proceeded to give.

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#### **4:4-5**

Read from the beginning of the chapter and keep in mind that it was Jonah himself who told this story. Who else could have given all these details and who else could have exposed so totally the confused inconsistency of the man's religious thinking? Note clearly how totally the confession of this bigoted Jew gives the lie to the slander that the God of the Old Testament is a harsh, legalistic God of judgment. He is the God of infinite tenderness, patience and pardon, as Jonah was about to learn in respect of himself. It would have been so easy for God to have been angry with this stubborn creature. There is something pathetic and very sad about the whole story. Jonah was a man behaving like a spoiled child. He was a much used servant of God who had become so accustomed to getting his own way that now, having been countered in one public issue, he lapsed into a common form of blackmail in which he "sulked" and even hinted at suicide. He was putting pressure on God, holding Him to ransom, making things difficult, withholding his service and refusing to participate, in order to bring the whole situation round to his way of thinking. But blackmail has to be resisted. It is the only way for the good of the community and the only hope for the complicated blackmailer.

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#### **4:6**

There was a strange confidence in Jonah when he built his little shelter over against Nineveh, keeping a disdainful silence and possibly giving no answer to the questions posed by the puzzled citizens of the city. He was aloof and also very lonely in his spiritual contest with God. There may well have been a smile of self-congratulation on his face when God appointed the plant, a quick growing bush with broad leaves, ideal for providing shade. But this was only the first of God's actions as the succeeding verses will show. There seems to have been no awareness at all in Jonah so far of how sad and needy a condition he was in, and it is right here that we see just how kind and tender God was in dealing with him. God did not leave him, cast him off, or consign him to judgment. Nor did He at first deal with the spiritual symptoms. God relieved the man's physical distress, just as He did in the case of Elijah (1 Kings 19:4-8). This does not mean that God was "giving in" to Jonah nor does such gentleness of method mean that in the business of pastoral counselling we are to ignore people's wrongs. It is simply a recognition that some things have to be done before others, and that often a man is not open to the wisest of spiritual advice and guidance because of his physical and mental condition. God knows our frame and makes allowance for it (Ps. 103, 14). He is the physician and surgeon who is prepared to wound, when it is necessary, in order to heal (Job 5:18). But He is not a bulldozing demolition agent. Jonah was about to discover just how great and kind a God he had.

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#### **4:7**

Having begun the good work of Jonah's restoration, God pursued His plan with rigorous efficiency (Phil. 1:6; Gen. 28:15). There seems to have been no spirit of thanksgiving to God for the blessing provided in the sheltering bush, and consequently there was only bitterness and resentment when it was removed. No doubt Jonah had begun to feel better as he rested, but "help" that comes from creature comforts does not necessarily turn the heart to God. God has given us all things in rich measure to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17) and we are not to despise these gifts, nor are we to lapse into false asceticism and self-denial which may in fact be a fleshly not a spiritual thing (Col. 2:20-23). But we must not put our trust in earthly comforts, for they, being of the earth, are essentially temporary (Jas. 4:14). Note also in the story of Jonah that it was something small and unseen, a worm attacking the root of the plant, something quite undiscerned that ate away the life of the "blessing" and made it less than useless. There are many shelters that can be pressed into use to make life easier for us when we are at odds with God. Home, family, job, hobbies, all good in themselves, can be "blessings" that divert attention from the fact that we are not doing God's will. In fact, a living church with buoyant worship and lots of friends of like mind can be one of the best places to hide from God. So long as you are part of the activity, even in a qualified sense, your reputation is safe. Jonah was still recognised by the men of Nineveh as God's

man, but what was he doing for Nineveh? Jonah was no longer a worker, only a complainer, and God was working hard to retrieve him. We need to ask what we care most about in our lives - the blessings or the service. Think of Paul's words in Phil. 2:3-8.

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#### 4:8

Jonah's life and circumstances turned sour on him. The shelter which the good God had given him was now taken away and God was causing the sultry wind to blow quietly and relentlessly on him in a way that made the heat of the sun unbearable. Jonah's reaction was almost predictable. Consider these words of Matthew Henry: "It is just that those who love to complain should never be left without something to complain of, that their folly may be manifested and corrected, and, if possible, cured. And see here how the passions that run into an extreme one way commonly run into an extreme the other way. Jonah, who was in transports of joy when the gourd flourished, is in pangs of grief when the gourd has withered. Inordinate affection lays a foundation for inordinate affliction; what we are over-fond of when we have it we are apt to over-grieve for when we lose it, and we may see our folly in both." Just as we have to discipline our attitude to our circumstances, refusing to be conditioned by them, refusing to let our minds and hearts be weaned away from God by them, so we must maintain a truly spiritual attitude to our experiences. We are not promised an easy road to Heaven and we must guard against that spirit of murmuring that afflicted the children of Israel (cf. 1 Cor.10:1-13). And at the same time we must affirm our pilgrim status (Heb. 11:13-16). We do not belong here and our hope and peace both centre on God, in whose hands all our experiences lie (Ps.31:15).

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#### 4:9

Jonah's bitter outburst that death is better than life (8) signified that he was still resentful at the crossing of his will. Even when God again challenged him about his anger, he stuck to his resentment, and we need to see that while in the first instance his hatred and rejection were in respect of Nineveh, now they were towards God. What is more, in speaking out his determination in direct answer to God, Jonah was confirming his attitude which was increasingly requiring God to repent. Jonah featured so largely in Jonah's thinking that he could see nothing but his own rightness. He could not or would not see that he was in the wrong and that God was dealing with him. Here is a man who would grasp at every explanation of his situation, except the one that God was spelling out so clearly in the happenings of providence. If God were to weary of such a man, his story would be negation and disaster. Perhaps we should read Ps. 139 before going any further. Jonah was a man of faith gone so sadly wrong that he was both speaking and praying foolishly. His trials, far from having a sanctifying effect, had so far simply served to reveal how shallow his spirituality was and how deep his pride, self-will and prejudice were. This was a lesson Jonah would not learn in an easy way. But he had a persistent teacher.

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#### 4:9

We must consider further this snare of Satan by which we find ourselves in an angry frame of mind. It is not easy to be angry without sin, and it is never justifiable to be angry with God, for it imputes wrong to Him. It suggests He has misunderstood us, undervalued our service, mistaken our attitudes, been taken in by evil men and failed to see the fundamental issues. Put like this such anger is seen to be ludicrous. Of course, when we are angry we insist that the cause is to be found in the wrongs of others and the consequent pressures of circumstances. But this is to place ourselves in the position of total innocence, which is seldom, if ever, the case. If we believe we have been wronged, then we must recognise that such a wrong has been permitted by the good God who rules over us in all our ways, and in that attitude of faith we are guided by Rom. 12:14-21 together with such passages as Heb. 12:7-11 and 1 Pet. 1:3-9. We must learn not to be angry with God whatever He does or fails to do or when He declines to explain or interpret our circumstances. God's ways are always right and often with significance beyond our understanding. Think of the story of Job (Job 1:13-22; 2:7-10; 23:1-17). The strange thing is that Jonah was not complaining about God's hardness on him but rather about God's kindness to others. It was salvation for Nineveh Jonah objected to and yet, all unknown to himself, he was being prepared to be a better messenger of the good news of salvation.

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#### 4:10-11

God kept on reasoning with His disaffected servant, showing how unreasonable he was being. Jonah wanted the plant spared, not for what it was in itself nor because of any labour he had spent on its cultivation, but simply because it had been of value to him. Jonah felt it was right and reasonable to spare the plant and God simply said it was therefore clearly right that He should spare the people of a whole benighted city who had lived in darkness without the light of discernment and knowledge that comes only through the Gospel. God was saying to Jonah what the Son of God said to the disciples (who also tended to be exclusive to the point of shutting out others from the good grace of God), "Other sheep have I who are not of this fold. Them also I must bring." (John 10:16) Think of the missionary hymn,

"Can we, whose souls are lighted  
With wisdom from on high,  
Can we to men benighted  
The lamp of life deny?"

We can and we do when we think like Jonah and this is a contradiction of our calling to be the light of the world and to shine in this perverse generation (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15). If *we* do not carry the truth to the cities and nations, who will? How will people hear if those who are sent refuse to go (Rom. 10:14-17)? Who will care, if we do not care? The Word of God's grace was made flesh and dwelt among people so that they might see and hear and believe. We have to be God's word to our city as Jonah was to Nineveh.

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#### 4:10-11

In some ways the story seems to end in an unsatisfactory way, but it had to be so because Jonah's story was not finished. Is it not good to think that God's man who failed and grew bitter was in fact restored in grace not only to have humility enough to tell us this story for our good but also to go and minister to the new converts in Nineveh? In past days Jonah had opposed the iniquity of the heathen and stood for righteousness against the tides of evil in his own nation, and rightly so. But now the nation was quiet and the heathen had repented. Was the prophet evangelist redundant? He thought so and it desolated him to feel that he had no more work to do. Compare Jonah to Alexander the Great who when he had conquered his world wept because there were no more nations to conquer. But who was better fitted than Jonah to lead these new converts from dark paganism into the light, truth and spiritual maturity of God's grace? Jonah was needed more than he had ever been but he had not seen it. God plus one obedient man led to revival, but Jonah had confused the start with the finish, and we do the same far too often. What we have to do here is to marvel at the patience of God with His prejudiced and jaundiced servant. He is a patient God. (Heb. 4:14-16) and if we are to be used by Him we must learn to be like Him (Phil. 2:5ff.).

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#### 4:10-11

Make these words of C.H. Spurgeon our closing meditation in the Book of Jonah. "Sometimes God puts us through an unusual experience in order that we may the better understand Him; and sometimes that we may the better know ourselves. Men who are of a hard nature must have hard usage, diamond must cut diamond, that at last the purpose of the great owner of the jewels may be accomplished.....with your sore afflictions God is preparing you to be a comforter to others....God is training you to be a very Barnabas, the son of consolation, to the sons and daughters of affliction in times to come. I would suggest to some of you who have to bear double trouble that God may be preparing you for double usefulness, or He may be working out of you some unusual form of evil which might not be driven out of you unless His Holy Spirit had used these mysterious methods with you to teach you more fully His mind..... I am probably speaking to some who are not yet converted to God. You have not yet believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, yet you have a world of troubles. You think that God is so angry with you that He means to destroy you, for ever since you have begun to think of divine things you have had nothing but trouble..... I thank God for your trouble, for I think that, as God dealt with Jonah to teach

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him a lesson, He is dealing with you to bring you to Himself. It was a good thing for Jonah when he had finished that quarrel with his God, for no good ever comes that way. What a blessing it would be for you also to finish your quarrel with God! Finish it soon. Let the God of Love end your discussions and end your questionings; may His blessed Spirit come and sanctify your troubles, and bring you to Himself."

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