



# The Bible Is True

*A Lecture By*

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**S**TRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM to say so, multitudes of Christians today are largely ignorant of much that is set forth in the Scriptures. It is unfortunate that this is true, for they become extremely vulnerable to attack since few are able to present evidence to sustain their beliefs in order to defend the position they have taken and uphold the faith they profess. Yet the Lord intended that all of His followers should be able to do this and the Apostle Peter admonishes us:

“Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear [*i.e.*, reverence].” (I Peter 3: 15.)

The Amplified Bible offers an interesting rendering:

“But in your hearts set Christ apart as holy [and acknowledge Him] as Lord. Always be ready to give a logical defense to any one who asks you to account for the hope that is in you, but do it courteously and respectfully.”

All believers have ready access to sound information, if they will seek it out, for reliance upon the Bible, which is the Word of Truth, will enable them to act upon Peter’s advice.

## Higher Criticism

It is of interest to note that the attacks upon the authenticity of the Scriptures have succeeded, to a large extent, because so-called scholars have lent their support to a Higher Critical examination of the sacred text, thus bringing into question the accuracy of Biblical truths. The foundation on which this textual criticism rests can be expressed in one word — unbelief. Few Christians are in a position to effectively contradict the pronouncements of these intellectuals.

But they can be answered. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is the Word of God Written. Its truths are for our instruction and motivation in order that we may understand and accept the way of salvation; in order that we may comprehend the facts pertaining to the Kingdom of God and its Divine laws of justice and equity; in order that we may obtain citizenship in His Kingdom and, through the utterances of the prophets of the Lord, be guided and directed by being forewarned regarding future developments. If space permitted, it would be profitable to take up, point by point, the many objections raised by the skeptics, agnostics and atheists in their endeavor to discredit the Scriptures, for everyone of their arguments, without an exception, can be quickly disposed of to the utter abashment of all disbelievers.

## Judgment Upon Babylon

A Colonel in the Turkish army once asked Dr. Cyrus Hamlin for a proof that the Bible is the Word of God. Learning that the Colonel had been a great traveler, Dr. Hamlin said to him: "Have you ever been in Babylon?"

"Yes," replied the Colonel, "and I will tell you a curious incident. The ruins of Babylon abound in game and, wishing for a week's shooting, I engaged a Sheik, with his followers, and went there. At sundown the Arabs, to my amazement, began to strike their tents. I went to the Sheik and protested most strongly; I was paying him handsomely, and I now offered to double the amount. But nothing I could say had any effect.

"'It is not safe,' said the Sheik, 'no mortal flesh dare stay here after sunset. Ghosts and ghouls come out of the holes and caverns after dark, and whomsoever they catch becomes one of themselves. *No Arab has ever seen the sun go down on Babylon!*'"

Dr. Hamlin then took out his Bible and read from Isaiah 13: 19-22:

"And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; *neither shall the*

*Arabian* pitch his tent there. . .but the wild beasts of the desert shall lie there. . .and wolves shall cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant places."

"That is the history you have been reading," said the Turk. "No," said Dr. Hamlin, "it is a prophecy. Those words were written when Babylon was in all her glory; you know what Babylon is today."

The Colonel had not a word to say in reply. Babylon was a wonderful city. Her area was five times as large as that of London. Her wall was at least eighty feet thick and three hundred feet high, with five hundred gates of burnished brass. Enclosed were lakes, parks and 625 city squares. The Prophet Jeremiah said of her:

"Though Babylon shall mount up to heaven, and though she shall fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the Lord." (Jer. 51: 53.)

The present ruins at Babylon, and the refusal of the Arabs to remain there overnight, constitute a remarkable fulfillment of the quoted prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. We could deal with prophecy after prophecy and point out how history demonstrates the veracity of the Scriptures, with many clear examples showing how the words of the prophets have indeed come to pass.

## Coming in His Kingdom

Our Lord Jesus Christ made an emphatic statement when He said:

"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matt. 16: 28.)

This is the final verse of Matthew's 16th chapter and the first and second verses of the next chapter should be read as a part of its context:

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James and John, his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." (Matt. 17: 1-2.)

Later on Peter referred to this experience and he declared:

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (II Peter 1: 16.)

Peter clearly indicated that he was referring to the transfiguration of our Lord on an unnamed "high mountain apart," where they beheld the resplendent glory of the Lord as King. He stated:

"For we received from God the Father honour and glory,

when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." (II Peter 1: 17-18.)

Matthew's account goes on to state:

"And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias [Elijah], talking with him." (Matt. 17: 3.)

Not only did Jesus keep His promise that certain disciples would "see the Son of man coming in his kingdom," but what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Jesus was presented to them in His majesty as King, was an advance depiction of that which will become the experience of those of His followers who take their places in His government, in the fulfillment of what that far-reaching prophetic demonstration foretold. Moses represented those who will come forth in the resurrection and Elijah represented those who will be translated at the time of our Lord's appearing. The Apostle Paul explained:

"For this we declare to you by the Lord's [own] word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall in no way precede [into His presence] or have any advantage at all over those who have previously fallen asleep [in Him in death]. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud cry of summons, with the shout of an archangel, and with the blast of the trumpet of God. And those who have departed this life in Christ will rise first. Then we, the still living who remain [on the earth], shall simultaneously be caught up along with (the resurrected dead) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so always — through the eternity of the eternities — we shall be with the Lord!" (I Thess. 4: 15-17, *Amplified Bible*.)

### Prophecy More Sure

Peter continued his discourse with the significant comment:

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." (II Peter 1: 19.)

The Apostle contended that prophecy did not come by the will of man, but that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1: 20-21). An examination of the records of the Christian Era, as the march of history has fulfilled prophecy, establishes beyond question the accuracy of the utterances of our Lord, of His apostles and of all the prophets. The prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Himself, outlined the forthcoming events of the Christian Era.\* The history of the persecutions that would beset

\*See *The Christian Era In Prophecy* Fifty cents each postpaid.

the Christian Church, its subsequent missionary activities, and the events which would bring the age to its close, were all foretold.

It is of further interest to notice also that in the Book of Revelation, the final book of the Scriptures, we have a detailed preview of the march of events throughout the Christian Era.\* Nearly two thousand years have passed since the Apostle John recorded the visions he received while he sojourned on the Isle of Patmos. What he actually foresaw, and described as destined to come to pass, has occurred in well-defined detail, with only the final scenes yet to be enacted before the present age ends. It is all given permanent record in the Written Word of God.

### Living in Bible Times

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that prophecy is history prewritten and history is prophecy fulfilled. Today we are living as much in Bible times as the prophets were. The only distinctive difference is that the prophets were living in the day of prediction, while we are living in the time of fulfillment. Therefore, it is imperative to study what the Lord's prophets were commanded to say to this generation as we become eyewitnesses of the remarkable fulfillment of the foretold events which were to overwhelm the present world order and bring it down to ruin.

### Biblical Credibility Gap

When occasions arise for the accuracy of the Biblical record to be defended, all sorts of disparaging arguments are introduced by those who refuse to accept its record as true. One objection often raised by the skeptic, which is brought forward in the form of a challenging question, has to do with the Scriptural account of a "fish story" — the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament. The question: "Do you believe the account of Jonah being swallowed by a whale?" Our answer: "Yes, we do." Frankly, we are perfectly willing to rest our defense as to the accuracy of the Bible upon whether or not we can successfully put our case for the historical existence of this prophet and his experience of being swallowed by a great fish. The evidence establishing the fact that Jonah was an actual man in history, and that he endured the discomfitures recorded in his book in the Scriptures, can be fully documented.

Perhaps no other Bible personality, or prophet, has had as much fun made of him, and of what he was compelled to undergo, by the skeptics and unbelievers. To merely mention the name of Jonah, or refer to his strange en-

\*See *Study in Revelation*. \$12.00 postpaid, Destiny Publishers, Merrimac, Mass. 01860

counter at sea, immediately calls for a joke, while his sojourn in the belly of the great fish is considered too impossible to have actually taken place.

To accept the fact that Jonah lived, and to express belief in the account as recorded in his book, is to be castigated as an ignoramus by the Higher Critic and the Modernist. According to their judgment, the Book of Jonah is merely an allegory, or a parable, and should not be viewed as literally true. Most modern critics, since 1868, have considered it legendary, but they generously concede that it contains a kernel of truth.

The phrase, "Don't be a Jonah," is based upon the assumption that, whether this prophet lived or not, he has become the symbol of a troublemaker. But what do we know about Jonah? While the school of Higher Criticism questions that such a man ever existed, Jesus referred to Jonah as an actual person who lived and carried out his assigned mission.

Those who question the existence of Jonah are overlooking Scriptural references to this prophet other than his book in the Bible. A statement of the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Jonah is given in II Kings 14: 25. There it is stated of the King of Israel:

"He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher."

### Jonah a Sign

Jesus vouched for the authenticity of Jonah and his experience when he announced:

"For as Jonas [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." (Matt. 12: 40.)

The King James version translates the Greek word, which means a "huge fish," as a "whale." While we do not know the actual name of the fish that swallowed Jonah, the King James translators evidently reasoned that the great fish must have been a whale.

Not only did Jesus use Jonah as a sign of His own three days and nights in the grave, but He also declared that Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites. Furthermore, He asserted that, in the Day of Judgment, Nineveh will condemn our Lord's generation, for the Ninevites repented as a result of the preaching by Jonah "and, behold," Jesus said, "a greater than Jonas [Jonah] is here" (Matt. 12: 41).

If Jonah was a myth, just how could the Ninevites repent under his preaching? Then, too, how could Nineveh be a

witness to condemn our Lord's generation in the coming Day of Judgment, because the people of that generation listened to Jonah, if there had been no Jonah? Certainly, if the account given in the Book of Jonah is merely an allegory, some very foolish statements are attributed to Jesus which would, at best, be deceptive.

But Jesus did not lie. Let those who doubt His word take heed how they view that which He has confirmed as true. This would not only apply to what He said about Jonah, but about everything else to which He testified. He indicted those in His own day who refused to believe Him:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin, and if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (John 8: 44-46.)

Jesus did not qualify His condemnation of all those who question the truth of what He said, stating:

"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." (John 8: 47.)

The Bible is God's Word and, in the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is called "The Word of God" (Rev. 19: 13). Thus, those who are of God will believe the Word, and this includes the acceptance of all that Jesus said, for He and the Word are one. John confirmed this when he stated:

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." (John 1: 1 & 14.)

We emphasize the fact, therefore, that even if there were no other evidence to verify the account in the Book of Jonah, we would believe it, based upon Jesus' statement alone.

### Jonah the Prophet

Let us now review the facts of the story of Jonah, who lived in a generation when the prophets were continually warning Israel about coming trouble for the nation if the people refused to repent of their evil practices. During that time of forewarning, Jonah was called upon to go to Nineveh to proclaim to the inhabitants of that great city that, unless they repented, they would perish. This took place when Jehu was King in Israel, who was paying tribute to Shalmaneser II, King of Assyria. The city of Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and it is obvious that Jonah was of no mind to do anything that would prevent the destruction of

the hated metropolis, which was inhabited by the enemies of his people.

As a prophet, Jonah was a member of the School of the Prophets and the call to go to Nineveh occurred about thirty-two years after the Prophet Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Evidently Jonah had been a student in the School of the Prophets under Elisha, who assumed leadership following the ascension of Elijah. He had apparently graduated from that training school and had become a full-fledged prophet.

Jonah was well aware that the Great Captivity spoken of by Moses would certainly come upon his people if they continued in their disobedience and their refusal to abide by the terms of the covenant (Deut. 28: 15 & 41; 31: 16-21). Time was running out and, with a perceptive eye, the mind of a seer, and the wisdom of a statesman, Jonah realized that, unless the people turned away from unrighteousness and wholeheartedly obeyed the Lord, the Assyrian Empire, to whom they were paying tribute, would lead them into captivity.

The Word of the Lord had come to Jonah to go to the despised city of Nineveh, Assyria's capital, and warn them of coming destruction unless its inhabitants repented of their wickedness. As a prophet in Israel, Jonah was intensely patriotic. He loved his own people and nation to the point of being willing to make any personal sacrifice on their behalf. He later proved that he was willing to die to enable them to escape captivity at the hands of the cruel Assyrians.

### One Witness

Although Israel refused to repent, Jonah was prepared to violate his oath as a prophet if this would free them from the oppressor. He would gladly have gone to Nineveh to preach destruction, but the circumstances associated with the call to do so made him realize that the dwellers in Assyria's capital were likely to repent and the city would be saved. How did Jonah, as a prophet, know this? After completing his mission, following the repentance of the people of Nineveh, Jonah attempted to justify his action in the Lord's sight:

"Was not this my own saying, while I was yet in mine own country? Therefore, I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." (Jonah 4: 2.)

Under the Law of the Lord, two witnesses are required to make the verdict certain. Jonah recognized the fact that he constituted only one witness and the law states:

"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any

iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." (Deut. 19: 15.)

If another prophet had been assigned to accompany Jonah to Nineveh, this would have constituted two witnesses appearing against the city and Jonah would have known that the capital of Assyria was doomed.

This principle of Divine jurisprudence always operates, as demonstrated in other Scriptural accounts. For instance, the Bible records the occasion when three men (who were angels) visited Abraham. Two of them went on to Sodom and Gomorrah, while one, the Angel of the Lord, remained with Abraham to talk with him. The two angels entered the cities of the plain to witness against them and thus the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah was sealed, followed by their destruction by fire.

Jonah was fully acquainted with the law; therefore, he boarded a ship at Joppa to flee to Tarshish. He resolved to face the anger of the Lord, violate his oath as a prophet if necessary, or be destroyed himself, if it would save his people from the suffering and anguish of captivity in a foreign land.

### A Man of Courage

Because Jonah was a fearless man, and intensely fond of his country and his people, God chose him for this mission, being well aware of what his subsequent actions would be. Contrary to popular conception, Jonah was no coward. The Lord selected him because he was capable of great courage.

An analysis of the account confirms this prophet's willingness to face any type of hardship if, by so doing, he could accomplish the destruction of the enemies of his people. Jonah's disobedience and flight, with the experience that followed, were all used by God to bring about the very conditions Jonah feared; that is, the repentance of the Ninevites by heeding Jonah's preaching and the sparing of the city.

Jonah had selected Tarshish as the goal of his journey, for he decided to go as far away as possible from the scene of his mission. Evidently the Lord had informed the prophet, at the time he was called to go to Nineveh, concerning the number of days accorded the Ninevites in which to repent or be destroyed. Upon Jonah's return, only forty of those days remained in which to warn of coming destruction. Jonah had taken the time element into consideration and apparently reasoned that, if he could get far enough away, the lapse of time would prevent his return before the city was destroyed.

## Tarshish

Where was Tarshish? It is a well-known historical fact that the tribe of Dan had planted colonies in Ireland and in other parts of the British Isles in those early times. Their ships were known as the ships of Tarshish because they made the long journey to and from the Isles which were north and west of Palestine. In very ancient times those Isles were known as the Isles of Tarshish. Jonah had taken passage on one of those ships that was going out beyond the Gates of Hercules; that is, passing through the Straits of Gibraltar.

It was the considered opinion of the nations around the Mediterranean Sea that the gods did not rule beyond the Gates of Hercules (Gibraltar). The sailors on the ship on which Jonah had purchased passage to Tarshish were aware that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. As a prophet of the Lord, Jonah was not so simple-minded as to believe his God did not reign over all the earth and sea. Yet the prophet was determined to put so much distance between himself and Nineveh that it would be impossible to bring him back in time to allow the inhabitants of Nineveh to repent before their allotted days expired.

### Jonah the Troublemaker

The ship set sail with Jonah aboard, but before it reached the Gates of Hercules a great storm arose, causing the sailors to fear that they were going to be wrecked. The crew threw the cargo overboard to lighten the vessel and, during all this commotion, Jonah lay sleeping unconcernedly in his quarters below deck. It mattered little to him whether the ship sank or not, for if he drowned, Nineveh would not hear his message, would not repent and would be destroyed. Thus he reasoned and thus he behaved. The sailors became angry because of his indifference to their plight and the captain of the vessel went below and cried out to Jonah:

“What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.” (Jonah 1: 6.)

Jonah came on deck, but the fury of the tempest continued to increase, with the result that the sailors decided to cast lots to see whose fault it was. This was a common practice in those days. The lots were cast and the Lord directed the lot so that it fell upon Jonah. The sailors immediately began to cross-examine him:

“Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? And whence comest thou? What is thy country? And of what people art thou?” (Jonah 1: 8.)

In their desperation because of the violence of the storm,

they pressed Jonah to reveal to them why they were in this trouble. When they heard the prophet's story, they were extremely disturbed, for Jonah told them he was fleeing from a task God had called him to perform. Furthermore, Jonah testified to the fact that his God was the true Lord God in heaven who had made the sea and the dry land. The very sea that Jonah's God had made was raging furiously against them. This greatly increased the fear of the sailors and they implored him:

“Why hast thou done this? . . . Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.” (Jonah 1: 10-11.)

The instructions Jonah gave the sailors, in order that the storm would subside, was the advice of a courageous man, not of a coward. He said:

“Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.” (Jonah 1: 12.)

Reluctant to carry out Jonah's directions, the sailors made an attempt to reach land, but without success. They finally gave up the struggle and, praying God not to charge them with shedding innocent blood, they cast Jonah into the sea. The stormy waves ceased their raging at once. The sailors were astonished at this Divine response, with the result:

“Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.” (Jonah 1: 16.)

### The Sea Monster

As for Jonah, he expected that, when the sailors cast him overboard, he would perish. But the Lord had prepared a great fish to be there in the water to swallow Jonah. Let us visualize for a moment Jonah's predicament as he was thrown into the sea. Very likely, before he struck the water, he saw the open mouth of that sea monster, awaiting his coming.

The average man, in such a position, would have begun to pray immediately, but not Jonah. He went down the throat of that great fish and the account states that, for three days and three nights, he held his peace. Apparently, he was endeavoring to endure his terrible plight until Nineveh was destroyed or he himself perished. Finally, unable to stand the acute discomfort any longer, he resorted to prayer.

### James Bartley

There is an intriguing story of an event that occurred in the year 1891 which is actually added testimony in cor-

roboration of the Biblical account concerning Jonah and upsets the contentions of those who challenge the accuracy of the Scriptures. In February of 1891, the whaling ship, *Star of the East*, was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands and the outlook sighted a large sperm whale three miles away. The boats were launched and, in a short time, one of the harpooners was able to spear the mammal.

The second boat attacked the whale but was upset by a lash of its tail and the men were thrown into the sea. One man was drowned; the other, James Bartley, disappeared and could not be found. The whale was killed and, within a few hours, the great body was lying by the ship's side and the crew was busy with axes and spades, removing the blubber. They worked all day and part of the night.

The next morning they attached some tackle and the stomach was lifted on deck. The sailors were startled by something in it which gave spasmodic signs of life. They opened up the stomach and found the missing sailor, doubled up and unconscious. Bartley was laid on deck, treated with a bath of salt water, which soon revived him. But his mind was not clear and he was moved to the captain's quarters where he remained for two weeks, a raving maniac. He was kindly cared for by the captain and by the officers of the ship. Gradually he regained possession of his senses and, at the end of three weeks, he was entirely recovered from the shock and resumed his duties.

During his confinement in the whale's stomach, Bartley's skin, where it was exposed to the action of the gastric juices, underwent a striking change. His face, neck and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness and took on the appearance of parchment. Bartley affirmed that he would probably have lived inside that "house of flesh" until he starved, for he lost his senses through fright and not through lack of air.

In recounting his experience, Bartley said he remembered the sensation of being thrown out of the boat and dropping into the water. He described a fearful, rushing sound which he believed to have been the beating of the water by the whale's tail. He was then enveloped in a great darkness and realized he was slipping along a smooth passage of some sort that seemed to move in carrying him forward. This was the throat of the whale that was swallowing him. The sensation lasted but a short time; then he realized he had more room. He felt about him and his hands came into contact with a yielding, slippery substance. This was the walls of the stomach, which seemed to shrink from his touch. It finally dawned upon him that he had been swallowed by the whale and he was overcome by the horror of his situation.

He could easily breathe, but the heat was terrible. It was not of a scorching, stifling nature, but it seemed to open the pores of his skin and draw out his vitality. He became very weak and sick to his stomach. He felt there was no hope of escape from this strange prison. Death stared him in the face. He tried to look at it bravely, but the terrible quiet, the darkness and heat, combined with the shocking recognition of his whereabouts, overcame him and he lost consciousness. The next thing he remembered was being in the captain's cabin.

This is a true account of James Bartley's experience, verified by the captain and crew of the *Star of the East*, and by the investigation of scientists. Bartley was in the belly of the whale for two and one-half days.

### Jonah's Fortitude

Now consider Jonah, who remained conscious during his imprisonment for three days and nights, waiting that length of time before he turned to the Lord in prayer for deliverance. A man of fortitude and endurance, Jonah finally found the heat and misery too much to endure. According to scientists, while there would be air to breathe in the stomach of a whale, the temperature would be fever heat; that is, 104 degrees. One could live for a while under such conditions, but it is entirely logical to assume that any man would react as Bartley did. Not Jonah! He remained silent, although in complete possession of his senses, enduring the stygian darkness and torment for three days and three nights.

Finally the prophet came to the realization that even death would not be granted to him so that relief could come. God's hand was resting heavily upon him, preserving his life but increasing the severity of his distress until he became willing to fulfill his prophet's vow.

Jonah eventually concluded it was physically impossible for him to cope with the intense agony of mind and body for the time remaining before Nineveh would be destroyed if the Ninevites heard no call to repent. So Jonah began to pray. Even yet, however, he was not fully committed to do God's will, for his first prayer was to the effect that, if the Lord would deliver him, he would go up to worship in the Tabernacle; in other words, he would go to church! But the Lord would not countenance compromise; He was not asking the prophet to go to the Tabernacle, the place of worship. The Lord was demanding that Jonah keep his prophet's vow and carry out the mission assigned to him.

Following his first prayer, Jonah spoke of the pressure increasing as he went down deeper and deeper into the depths of the sea. Then he said:

"I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice." (Jonah 2: 2.)

In the end Jonah was convinced that deliverance would come only if he obeyed the Lord and he testified to this:

"But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2: 9.)

### Thanksgiving and Obedience

Today multitudes have lost sight of the fact that God requires obedience rather than sacrifice. This is exactly what the Prophet Samuel told King Saul:

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken [to the Lord] than the fat of rams." (I Sam. 15: 22.)

Furthermore, in order to obtain answers to prayers, the conditions enumerated by the Psalmist must be complied with:

"Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Ps. 50: 14-15.)

Note the order to be followed:

- 1) Offer thanksgiving unto the Lord.
- 2) Resolve to keep all vows, even to one's own hurt.
- 3) Then call upon the Lord in the time of trouble.
- 4) Be assured that the Lord will bring about deliverance.
- 5) Finally, when the prayer is answered, do not fail to give glory to God. In fact, be in a spirit of thanksgiving even before the petition is granted.

### Deliverance From Hell

The Prophet Jonah had learned an essential lesson and his book in the Bible has perpetuated his testimony. He was ready at last to do God's bidding and there was no delay in the Lord's action on his behalf:

"The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." (Jonah 2: 10.)

When one tries to imagine the revolting conditions under which Jonah was compelled to spend three days and three nights, even to the mode by which he was delivered from his captivity, it can be readily understood why Jonah referred to his experience as being in hell.

### The Mission To Nineveh

The word of the Lord came again to Jonah, giving him the command:

"Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." (Jonah 3: 2.)

Time was of the essence, for only forty days remained of the original number allotted in which Nineveh would have the opportunity to repent. It is stated that "Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey" (Jonah 3: 3). It was more than sixty miles in circumference. The walls of the city were 150 feet high, with a moat of water 200 feet wide on three sides, while the fourth was protected by the Tigris River. The first 50 feet of the wall were of polished limestone, supporting a series of battlements. At that height the thickness of the wall was diminished and then carried up 100 feet higher with sunbaked brick. Along this top were ornamental battlements, with 1,500 towers at regular intervals, rising 50 feet above the top of the wall. On the top of that wall, three chariots could drive side by side. This description affords an idea of the greatness of the city of Nineveh, to whose people the Lord commissioned Jonah to preach.

There were a number of gates in the wall of the city, but the most important one was in the center of the north wall. No city of antiquity was protected by a more elaborate and well-devised system of defense than the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was Jonah's fervent wish that God would destroy this powerful metropolis, whose King was exacting tribute from the monarch of Jonah's people.

### A Prophet From Dagon

What would lead the citizens of such a magnificent city to pay any attention to the preaching of a lone Hebrew prophet? Actually Jonah himself provided the setting that would compel the Ninevites to give heed to his warning. In this extraordinary series of events in Jonah's life, we see the directing hand of the Lord, leading us to agree with the Apostle Paul, who later extolled the Lord:

"How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11: 33.)

If Jonah had gone to Nineveh when he was first called to do so, his message might have fallen on deaf ears! It goes without saying that Jonah's miraculous arrival upon the shore of the sea, disgorged from the mouth of a great fish, did not go unnoticed. In fact, when this strange happening was noised abroad, it guaranteed a hearing throughout the city, from the people in the street to the king who sat upon the throne in Nineveh. Dagon, the fish god, was Nineveh's deity and, consequently, the Ninevites assumed that a prophet from their god had come to warn them.

Let us recall again the circumstances in regard to James Bartley, who was swallowed by a whale in the whaling incident in the year 1891. It was told that his skin, "where it was exposed to the action of the gastric juices, underwent



a striking change. His face, neck and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness and took on the appearance of parchment." If Jonah's experience was similar to this, it would have given him an otherworldly countenance that would strike terror into the hearts of those who saw him as a prophet from their god.

Jonah was truly a sign to the people of Nineveh and as he walked throughout the length and breadth of the city — no doubt he was a forceful speaker — his preaching was immediately effective. As a result of a proclamation issued by the King, all the people donned sackcloth and went into mourning. The King proclaimed:

"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah 3: 9.)

In the Assyrian ruins, stone carvings have been found, depicting a fish with a man coming out of its mouth. The Ninevites were either commemorating the occasion when a prophet had come to them from their god or else such archaeological findings would indicate the Ninevites had a prophecy that a prophet would come to them from their fish god, Dagon. At any rate, the inhabitants of Nineveh did heed the call to repent and they escaped the Divine judgment that would have destroyed the city at that time.

#### Jonah a Faithful Witness

Jonah was greatly disappointed because Nineveh had been spared. The prophet felt justified in being angry, particularly with himself. In a way there is much dry humor in all this. In his endeavor to make sure Nineveh would experience Divine judgment, Jonah had taken ship to go to Tarshish and thereby set in motion conditions which assured the repentance of the people.

Jonah was so vexed with himself that he desired to die. But the Lord did not reprimand His prophet. He demonstrated to Jonah that, without repentance, Israel could not escape the coming captivity, while repentance on the part of the enemies of His people did save them from destruction for the time being. It was a bitter lesson for the prophet to learn, for he had been determined to save his people at all costs, and he savored the possibility of bringing about the destruction of Nineveh.

Jonah was given as a sign to our Lord's generation. Its fulfillment came about in the death and burial of Jesus who, after three days and three nights, arose from the grave. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated beyond question that He was from God. The Ninevites accepted Jonah as a prophet from their god, Dagon, but the populace of our Lord's day failed to listen to One who was a far greater Witness than Jonah.

The witness of Jonah extended to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem also. The Ninevites were given forty days to repent and they did turn from their evil practices. The preaching of our Lord went unheeded in the city of Jerusalem and, following His three days and three nights in the grave, forty years later, taking a day for a year, Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus and the Temple was burned. Thousands of the inhabitants of the city were slain for their refusal to accept their Messiah.

Jonah was not only a witness to the Ninevites, and to our Lord's generation, but he is a faithful witness to our generation as well. The repudiation of his book exposes the faithlessness of theologians and all other critics who question the accuracy of any portion of the Scriptures, either in the Old or in the New Testament. God will not be mocked and those who ridicule His messengers invite severe exhortation. The ancient admonition is completely relevant to the times and seasons in which we now live (II Chron. 20: 20): "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper."

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