

The Prophet Jonah (1)

—R. Been Sr.

Introduction

The Historicalness of Jonah

Jonah is a strange *prophetic* book. It differs from the other books written by Old Testament prophets. Generally the prophets did not write their own *history*; we only read what they received from God to preach to others. Sometimes we do encounter a few details about the prophets in their prophecies, for instance about their social position, their age and work, their profession, or their marital status. But their history we do not find. The focus is solely on the message they brought. In Jonah we *do* find *history*. Not of his entire life, but of a period concerning a specific service of his. Yet, this book is not a historical, but a *prophetic* book, one of the twelve so-called "Minor Prophets." This is so, because the history of Jonah is *one prophecy, presented in the person of Jonah*.

Jonah is not a legendary person, nor his book a poetic fantasy. Jonah truly existed, and his history did entail what is presented in his book. Some question whether all these wonderfully strange things could really have happened. They suggest that we should rather think of an allegory based on a myth, meant to give wise lessons. We answer those, that the God of Jonah is a God who performs miracles; for Him nothing is impossible. The things mentioned in this book may appear wonderful and strange to men, but not to God. Therefore, less faith is required to accept the simple Bible story than to accept the hypotheses which have as purpose to remove all the supernatural power from the Bible.

In Jonah 1:1 the prophet is referred to as: Jonah, the son of Amittai. In the book of Kings we find the same Jonah mentioned, but with the addition "the prophet, who was from Gath-hefer" (2 Ki. 14:25). That passage says of him that as prophet among the ten tribes, he had foretold the restoration of Israel. Jehovah would have mercy on the people that had no helper. Under the reign of Jeroboam II that restoration did indeed come. It must have been a pleasure for Jonah to announce the restoration of the nation that he loved. Meanwhile, this reference in 2 Kings proves *that Jonah was truly an existing prophet*.

The most important proof, however, is that *the Lord Jesus spoke several times about Jonah as a person who once lived*. The Lord speaks about what has been written of Jonah in the book Jonah. In three gospel passages, we find references to him (Mt. 12:38-41; 16:4; Lk. 11:29-32). From these it is clear that the two most important events in the book of Jonah — those that are specially doubted by unbelievers — are confirmed by the Lord Jesus. These are: first, that Jonah was in the belly of the fish; and secondly, that he afterwards went to Nineveh to preach there.

The Lord Jesus never mentioned Jonah's unfaithfulness. *Jonah's history was a sign* for he rose, as it were, from the dead. Afterwards his preaching the approaching judgment in Nineveh had the intended success, for hearing it, the city repented. The Lord used these two events to show how godless the priests and Israel were in the Lord's days. *Gentiles*, who had no relationship with God, had listened to Jonah's message of *doom*. The Jews, who did have a relationship with God, didn't want to listen to Him who spoke of *grace*.

Since Christ refers to the entire book of Jonah as being the Word of God, and as having authority over the Jews, and more particularly speaks about Jonah in the fish, will anyone then dare to question the reality of these facts? Those who do so make Christ a liar. One day they will have to give account of this before the Judgment Seat.

Jonah as Prophet

We may readily accept that Jonah himself has been the author of this book. "The Word of Jehovah came unto Jonah" says verse 1 of chapter 1. He himself, as prophet, has written down the thoughts that occupied him in the fish, thoughts given him by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for all following ages. Like David in some of his psalms, so Jonah has not left out his faults, shortcomings, and wrong inclinations. It is remarkable how he, the man who always contradicted God, lets God have the last word at the end of his book. Jonah's silence there speaks volumes.

As far as we know, *Jonah is the only prophet who on God's behalf had to fulfil a certain mission among the Gentiles*. All other prophets worked among Judah or Israel. They may at times have gone beyond the borders of the land for the sake of a single person, or they may have worked in a foreign field on behalf of Israel, like Daniel, but their mission was not toward the Gentiles. But Jonah is sent by God to a great Gentile city to announce the Lord's judgment against it, with the purpose that the city would repent of its evil deeds, so that forgiveness could be extended to it. Jonah knew this beforehand. Actually, his was good news for Nineveh. And Nineveh was the capital of the great Assyrian empire, Israel's future deadly enemy, to whose realm later the ten tribes were exiled. In the future too, the prophetic Assyrian, the King of the North, will be Israel's great enemy.

All that has happened to Jonah is prophecy, regarding Israel and regarding Christ. First let us think of *Israel's* prophecy. Each Day of Atonement the book of Jonah is read by the Jews. A believer once asked a rabbi why they did this. Softly the man answered with this acknowledgement: *Jonah? that is us*. This rabbi understood better than today's Bible-critics that Jonah's history is a picture of the Jewish nation.

In what has happened to Jonah, God wanted to picture Israel. This chosen people should have been a blessing among the Gentiles. The word of the Lord came to this privileged nation, it ought to have walked according to that word so that the Gentiles would have been attracted thereby and would have acquired a blessing. But Israel didn't do this. To the contrary, through the sins and wickedness of Israel, the name of the Lord has been blasphemed among the nations. Israel met the Gentiles with pride, considering them to be dogs. The thought that God would show mercy to the Gentiles, forgiving them, was to Israel, as it was for Jonah, an unbearable, tremendously offensive idea. We will speak more about the prophetic character regarding Israel later.

Now we will see what prophecy it contains regarding *Christ*. Though we see many differences between Christ and Jonah, Jonah still presents a prophetic picture of Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself has pronounced this with His: *"for even as Jonas...thus shall the Son of man..."* Yet, there is a great contrast between the Lord and Jonah.

The Lord was *faithful*. He came to do the will of God, and He *also did* His will in everything and that perfectly. Still He went into the grave and remained there three days and three nights. Jonah *did not do the will of God*, and as a result came into the "grave," in the great fish. The Lord had a message of *grace*, Jonah of *judgment*. The Lord thirsted for the salvation of the lost, Jonah was unwilling because *he wanted to prevent the Gentiles to receive a blessing*. The Lord slept *peacefully* in the midst of the heavy storm, which could not harm the Lord of creation. Jonah *slept*, but it was *the sleep of a hardened man*, of one who slept as a heavy sleeper. When he awoke, he acknowledged his guilt. Jesus offered Himself for others. He Himself was entirely without guilt. Jonah gave himself up, but it was because of his own guilt. The Lord placed Himself voluntarily under God's wrath against *sin for the sake of and in the place of others*. Jonah came under this wrath because of his own sin.

There are more points of difference. But these are enough! Yet, there is also this *similarity*: the "billows" of God's wrath were stilled in the three hours of darkness on the cross. The old world-sea became quiet when Jonah was cast overboard. For the rest, it is difficult to point out points of similarity, since there are more points of contrast than of agreement.

"And behold, more than Jonas is here," the Lord once quietly said. Jonah is no more than a shadow; Jesus is the reality. In pride, man once wanted to be like God. In Jesus, God became Man. Man once exalted himself, Jesus went the way of self-abasement.

To be cont'd

Joshua 1 (1)

—H. L. Heijkoop

In the Book of Joshua we see how the people of Israel take possession of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. God had given them this land, but they must fight to take possession of it.

God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. When we want to have the practical enjoyment of these blessings, we must make them our own, we must take possession of them. That involves a battle for us also, because Satan will do all he can to hinder this.

Joshua and Moses

Joshua leads the people in the battle. Moses led the people on their journey through the wilderness. Moses is a picture, a type of the Lord Jesus. "Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet... like unto me," says Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. Moses is a picture of the Lord Jesus as the great Teacher, who speaks the word of God with authority. The Lord Jesus often quotes the writings of Moses. In John 5:46-47 He even says that the Scriptures of Moses are of greater weight than His own words when used as testimony to prove a point!

Joshua and the battle against Amalek

We read for the first time of Joshua in Exodus 17:8-16 at the battle against Amalek. Amalek is a picture of Satan, who uses the flesh within us to hinder us in our life for the Lord Jesus. During that battle, Moses is on the mountain praying. Here Moses is a type of the Lord Jesus, who also prays for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). Joshua is the leader in the battle below.

Outside the camp

We also encounter Joshua in Exodus 33 after the Israelites have made the golden calf and Moses has set up a tent outside the camp. In that tent God comes to Moses and speaks with him face to face, the way someone speaks with a friend. We read that Moses' servant, Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent (vv. 7-11). He remained in God's presence, where God was on earth, in a holy place. We, too, are called to go out to Him outside the camp (Heb. 13:13).

Joshua, the son of Nun, the grandson of Elishama

Joshua is the grandson of Elishama: *God hears* (1 Chr. 7:26), and the son of Nun, which means *eternity, everlasting*. The Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua is Jesus: *Jahweh is Saviour*. He typifies the Lord Jesus, not so much as the Man Christ Jesus who lived on earth, but as the One who is from eternity, and who is now also Man in heaven.

The land that I will give to thee

In the first verses of the Book of Joshua, God doesn't speak to the people, but to Joshua: "Moses My servant is dead; and now, rise up, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, into the land which I give unto them, to the children of Israel. Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread have I given to you, as I said unto Moses." It is not just any land, but it is *the* land — the land which God had already promised to Abraham that He would give it to him and his descendants.

God has also given us something very special, namely heaven. God always intended to give this to us, and what God intends to do happens. It is important that we believe it, that we make it a practical reality in our hearts. If we do, we may already enjoy it today. To take possession of the land is difficult, you say? Nevertheless, it is possible. Perhaps there are parents whose children live far away, perhaps in another land. Can you transfer yourself in thought to the place where your children live, as if you are now with them and enjoy things together with them? Yes, you are able to do that. In spirit we can transport ourselves to other continents as if we are there and experience certain things there. Would that not be possible in a spiritual way in regard to our new life that is in heaven? Christ is my life and He is in heaven. In thought we can transport ourselves to heaven and take possession of "the land." Yes, for us the promise holds true as well, "Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread have I given to you." Faith is needed for this. We must believe that what God says is true.

The extent of the land

In verse 4 we find the extent of the land that God had promised to Abraham: "From the wilderness and this Lebanon to the great river, the river Euphrates, the whole land of the Hittites, to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border." God had promised Abraham that the land would be for his descendants; from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18). Yet, we read in verse 3: "Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread have I given to you." Consequently, the people of Israel have never possessed the land in its entirety. They did possess it only partly, and then only for a short time during the days of David and Solomon. Only in the Millennium will Israel possess the land in its entirety.

We know in part

Applying this to ourselves, we can say: What we will receive in heaven will always be infinitely larger and more glorious than what we can take possession of through faith now. Then we will share in full all that belongs to the Lord Jesus. The Father has given us the Son's own part. God loves us with the same love with which He loves the Son. More than this could even the almighty God not give us. We can take possession of much, just as Israel in its days. Still, just as Israel did not take possession of everything, so none of us takes possession of all that God makes available to us.

Seek the things that are above

How rich would we be if we would take as much in possession as we possibly could. To achieve this, we must search the Scriptures. Even now we may enter heaven and take possession of all, despite the battle, despite the hindrances Satan puts in our way. We must, however, take the time for this, and bring up the spiritual courage and strength to be occupied with this. We must seek the things that are above, not the things that are on the earth (Col. 3:1). Although God has promised us everything, yet, from a practical point of view only that which we take possession of we can call our own.

None shall be able to stand before thee

In verse 5 we read: "None shall be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee; I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee." What a tremendous promise this is, which the Lord gives to Joshua.

It is a great privilege to know that our Leader, who goes before, is unconquerable. He has conquered Satan. He has conquered hell and its powers. He goes before us and no enemy is able to resist Him. When do we suffer defeat? When we allow the enemy to enter our lives, when we depart from our Leader and permit something to come between our souls and Him. Then He can no longer support us and He allows us to suffer defeat to make us aware that we are dependent upon Him and that the victory comes only through Him. This we see in the following chapters.

Be strong and courageous

Taking possession of the land leads to unavoidable battles for which we need strength. What held true for Israel, holds true for us as well. "None shall be able to stand before thee... I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee... Be strong and courageous" (vv. 5-6). When are we strong? When we believe in God and entrust ourselves to Him. When we know that we have no strength within ourselves. It is as the sons of Korah once expressed it: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, — they, in whose heart are the highways... They go from strength to strength; each one will appear before God in Zion" (Ps. 84:6,8). Paul had learned this too. He could say: "When I am weak, then I am powerful" (2 Cor. 12:10). In what condition had Joshua (and his people) to be? They had to be strong and courageous. That was essential for the battle lying before them. In connection with our battle we are told: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the might of His strength" (Eph. 6:10).

God performs what He has promised

It is of course also true that the Israelites would obtain possession of the land because God had sworn this to their fathers. What God promises, He will also do. In Exodus 15 we read in the song of Moses at the Red Sea that the Israelites first sing that God *will bring them* to His dwelling. But later they sing to God, "Thou *hast guided them* by Thy strength unto the abode of Thy holiness" (v. 13). When God says that He will do a thing, it is as certain as if He has already done it.

Courage to obey

In verse 7 Joshua is again told that he must be strong and courageous, but even stronger than in verse 6: "only be strong and very courageous." Then there is an additional remark. He must carefully act in accordance with the entire law that Moses had commanded him; he should not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that he might prosper. To be prosperous, to reach the goal, strict adherence to the Word of God, to the entire law, is a prerequisite.

The Old Testament can be divided into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. To the Psalms belong not only the Book of the Psalms, but also the Proverbs and the other Poetic Books. The Lord Jesus maintains this division too. Again and again the New Testament speaks of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Under the Law we understand the five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy). That was the only part the Israelites possessed in Joshua's days. For this reason it is said to him that he must act precisely according to the whole Law.

To be cont'd

Three Rests

—R. K. Campbell

Three rests are mentioned in Scripture. In the words of the Lord, recorded in Matthew 11:28-30, we have two of these rests. He said, "Come to Me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you *rest*. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find *rest* to your souls; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." These two rests refer to two different and separate rests which the Lord gives to those who come to Him. The first is the rest of conscience, the second the rest of soul.

Rest of conscience

First there is the loving invitation to those who labour and are burdened with sin to come to the Saviour and find rest of conscience, peace and quietness of heart and mind, in Him. There is no rest or peace in sin. The conscience dreads the thought of God and of having to give an account to Him who knows all about us. The convicted sinner, burdened by sin and guilt, fears the judgment to come. In vain he may labour to be free from sin, and do religious works to gain favour with the God he has sinned against. One may be weary with life's long struggles with problems, difficulties, and pain and be full of anxiety, doubts, and fears.

To all such burdened ones who are weary, worn, and sad with troubles, sins, and disappointments, the Saviour calls even now to come to Him and receive rest of mind and peace of heart. He tenderly entreats the sinner to come to Him for this wonderful rest and peace of conscience which comes from knowing forgiveness of sins.

When a woman who was known as a sinner came weeping to Jesus and washed His feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, He said to her: "Thy sins are forgiven... Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace" (Lk. 7:48-50). She found rest of conscience in coming to Jesus with her burden and guilt of sin. Every one that comes to Him in repentance and faith will receive the same.

That which gives peace of heart and rest of conscience is knowing that "Christ died for our sins" and that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanses us from all sin" as Scripture assures us (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Jn. 1:7). The finished work of atonement of the Saviour is the only true resting place for the burdened sinner's conscience. Trusting in that perfect accomplished work of redemption and in the Lamb of God who satisfied divine justice, gives true peace and rest. Those who accept the perfect atonement which Jesus Christ made for sinners are privileged to "approach [God] with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from a wicked conscience" (Heb. 10:22). The trusting believer can thus sing the song of Francis Bevan:

*On the Lamb my soul is resting,
What His love no tongue can say:
All my sins, so great so many,
In His blood are washed away.*

*Sweetest rest and peace have filled me,
Sweeter praise than tongue can tell;
God is satisfied with Jesus,
I am satisfied as well.*

*Conscience now no more condemns me,
For His own most precious blood*

*Once for all has washed and cleansed me—
Cleansed me in the eyes of God.*

The apostle Paul writes that, "we enter into the rest who have believed," but also that "the word of the report did not profit" some, because they did not mix it with faith. So they entered not into God's rest because of unbelief (Heb. 4:1-5). The rest of conscience which the Lord gives, then, is obtained by faith that lays hold of what the grace of God freely offers. Unbelief, which rejects God's way, shuts one out of the rest God has provided in the atonement in which God Himself has found His rest, for it has met all the righteous demands of His holy throne, glorifying Him. God speaks of this rest as "My rest."

Rest of soul

The second rest which the Lord spoke about in Matthew 11:29 is connected with taking up His yoke and learning of Him. He said: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

We may inquire as to what is meant by taking Christ's yoke upon us and learning of Him as a means of finding rest to our souls. A yoke was a bar or frame of wood by which two animals, especially oxen, were joined together at the necks of heads for working as one in pulling loads or plowing. The yoke is figuratively used as a symbol of servitude to others. A yoke is for two to pull together as one. The neck is involved and it calls for submission of will and subjection to another.

So when the Lord asks us to take His yoke upon us, He means that we are to submit our will to Him and work together with Him in happy servitude. Taking the Lord's yoke upon us means for the believer to be practically joined together with the Lord, to be subject to Him and accepting His will for our life. Having Christ's yoke upon us, we are then called to learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart. We are to learn of Him as our Teacher and in obedience to Him copy the perfect life He lived here on earth in devoted obedience to the will of His Father.

Examples of Jesus bearing the yoke

In the same eleventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we read how the Lord was disappointed in service and met with unbelief and rejection in the cities where most of His mighty works had been done. He had to upbraid them and declare coming judgment upon the inhabitants. But then we read: "At that time (the time of rejection and disappointment) Jesus answering said, I praise Thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in Thy sight" (Mt. 11:5-26).

Here we have a touching illustration in the life of Jesus Christ of His bearing the yoke of submission to His Father's will. This was when, as a true Man, He felt the rebuffs, indifference and unfulfilled hope and expectation in devoted service to God and man. He turned at that moment of sorrow to His Father in acceptance of it all as being the will of God. So He gave thanks to the Father and rested in His purposes and counsels of passing by the wise and prudent and revealing Himself to babes, the simple and common people who heard Him gladly. This was the yoke of submission to the will of God which Jesus bore. It is the yoke which He called "My yoke" that we as His disciples are to take up in learning of Him.

This is the way in which we can find true rest of soul in the trials and disappointments of life. The first rest Jesus gives to all who come to Him with their burden of sin. This second rest of soul the Lord said we shall find and experience as we take His yoke of submission to the all-wise and perfect will of God in our lives. It is the peace which passes all understanding which we receive. It will keep our hearts and minds when we submit and commit everything to God in prayer and thanksgiving according to Philippians 4:6-7. Then we experience what the prophet Habakkuk spoke of: "That I might rest in the day of trouble" (Hab. 3:16).

Is it not true that we may have rest of conscience and peace with God about our eternal destiny and yet be very troubled and restless about the affairs of tomorrow? Thus we are not enjoying the rest of soul which comes from taking the yoke of Christ upon us and submitting to His good, acceptable, and perfect will for us. May we find that blessed rest of soul which comes by taking Christ's yoke and learning of Him, the meek and lowly One, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

The rest that remains

Hebrews 4:9 instructs us that "there remaineth a rest to the people of God." This is a future rest when we cease from all efforts, labours and works in this scene of conflict and struggles in this world system that is ruled by Satan, our enemy. In this scene there is warfare and we are called to "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). Inwardly we may enjoy rest of soul, yet there is conflict to engage in. But the time is coming when individually, and then collectively at the Lord's coming for His redeemed ones, we will leave this world of conflict and sin and enter into the presence of the Lord where there is perfect rest. Nothing will trouble the perfection of our rest when our hearts will repose in the presence of God. This is the rest that remains.

Of this future rest Revelation 14:13 speaks: "Blessed the dead who die in [the] Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them." Those that die in faith in Christ enter into the eternal rest of God. They cease from their labours and sorrows here. Their spirit and soul is with Christ in whose presence there is fulness of joy. The prophet Daniel was told, "Go thy way until the end; and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:12). He would die and enter into rest and stand in the resurrection of the righteous.

There is also the blessed future prospect of rest on earth in the coming kingdom of Christ. Then He will give rest from sorrow, fear and hard bondage and the whole earth will be at rest and quiet and break forth into singing according to the promise in Isaiah 14:3,7. At that time the Lord will rejoice over His earthly people, the true Israel, with joy. He will rest in His love and joy over them with singing as the prophet Zephaniah proclaimed (Zeph. 3:17). What a glorious rest is before the believer in Jesus Christ.

May we enjoy the rest of conscience and rest of soul and anticipate the future rest.

The End

Fruit-bearing and Testimony

—A Bible Reading on John 15:1-17

The great truth that underlies the teaching of the last discourses is that it is God's desire that, when Christ personally is gone back to the glory, Christ morally should still be seen in His people. In other words, as the disciples of Christ, believers should be in this world to represent Christ.

John 13 and 14 are introductory to this end. In chapter 13 we find that we are to have part with Christ in His things where He is. This leading thought is expressed in the Lord's words "part with Me" (v. 8). In chapter 14, the Lord speaks of the coming of the Spirit, and as a result it will be possible for the Lord to have part with us (v. 21-23). These two things are beautifully expressed in the Lord's touching appeal, in the address to Laodicea, when He says, "If any one hear My voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with Me." It shows that in the last days it is possible to get back to the Lord's teaching at the beginning.

The discourses of chapter 13 and 14 take place in the Upper Room, and the truths unfolded prepare the disciples for the outside place of testimony. At the end of chapter 14, the Lord says, "Arise, let us go hence." Immediately they pass from the privacy of the Upper Room to the public street, and the truths connected with testimony before the world begin to be unfolded.

The leading truths of chapter 15 are fruit-bearing and testimony. That which goes up to the Father as fruit will go out to the world as testimony.

In verses 1 to 8, the Lord instructs us as to fruit-bearing.

In verse 9 to 17, we have a lovely description of the new Christian company in which fruit is found.

In verses 26 and 27, we hear of the power of the Spirit that will enable the disciples to witness for Christ in the world that hates Christ.

Fruit is the reproduction of the character of Christ in His people. Galatians 5:22 gives a beautiful description of fruit, or, in other words, the character of Christ. There we read, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control." Fruit, as presented in the fifteenth of John, is not preaching, or teaching, or other forms of service. Were it so, fruit would be confined to the few who have gifts. Fruit is possible for every one, the youngest as well as the oldest; and where there is no fruit the branch is taken away.

Of all trees, the vine is chosen because it is the one tree that is perfectly useless unless it bears fruit. Ezekiel, speaking of the vine, asks, "Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?"

(Ezek. 15:2-5).

We have to keep out of the passage the truth of the Head and the Body; otherwise we might be led to think that a true believer can be cut off from Christ. Here it is a question of those who profess to be the disciples of Christ. The life is in the vine and in every true branch there is life flowing from the vine, and this life manifests itself in fruit. But the figure speaks of withered branches and thus leaves room for a lifeless profession. The Lord goes on to show the means used in order that the branches that bear fruit may bear "more fruit" and "much fruit."

First, we have what the Father does that we may be fruitful. The Father is the husbandman, and "every branch bearing fruit, He purges it that it may bring forth more fruit." Do we not get this gracious work brought before us in Hebrews 12:6-11, where we read of the Father's dealing with His children that they may be partakers of His holiness?

Secondly, in verse 3, we have the Lord's work to the end that we may bear fruit. He applies His Word to the conscience and heart in order to remove every defilement that would hinder the development of fruit. Is not this the feet-washing of chapter 13?

Thirdly, there is what we ourselves do — our responsibility to abide in Christ, in order that we may bear fruit.

Abiding in Christ implies a walk in constant dependence upon, and loving communion with the Lord. Alas! we can preach and teach, and be very active in service, even when out of touch with the Lord, as was the case with the Corinthian saints, and with some of whom the apostle said, they "preach Christ even of envy and strife"; but to wear the beautiful character of Christ will only be possible as we are in the company of Christ. In the matter of bearing fruit, the Lord's words are ever true, "Without Me ye can do nothing."

Verse 6 proves that the figure sets forth profession, which may be real or lifeless. Judas would appear to be a solemn example of one who made a profession of being a disciple, but, having no life, brought forth no fruit, and was "cast forth." Verse 2 would seem to be rather different. The figure seems to contemplate a branch with life but no fruit. Possibly it answers to those that we read of in 1 Corinthians 11:30, who, though believers, were walking so badly that they brought forth no fruit, and were taken away. In verse 2, we have a fruitless believer, in verse 6 a lifeless professor. In the first case we read, "He takes it away"; in the second case the dead branch is "cast out."

In verses 7 and 8, we have the results of bearing fruit. First, as to ourselves; if we abide in Christ, and thus bear fruit, we shall ask according to the mind of the Lord, and our prayers will receive an answer.

Secondly, if we bear fruit, the Father will be glorified. In all that Christ was, said, and did, He displayed the Father. It follows that if we set forth anything of the character of Christ, in that measure we shall go forth, and glorify the Father.

Thirdly, if we bear fruit, and thus set forth the character of Christ it will become evident before the world that we are the disciples of Christ. The character of Christ in believers, that goes up to the Father as fruit, will go out to the world as testimony.

In the verses that follow (9-17), we have the marks of the new Christian company in which alone fruit will be found. It is obvious that many of the beautiful qualities of Christ, such as kindness, gentleness and long-suffering, could hardly be set forth by an isolated individual. It requires a company to set forth the loveliness of Christ.

The first great mark of the Christian company is that they are loved by Christ. The Lord walked through this world in the consciousness of the Father's love. Now He would have us to face all the opposition and hatred of this world in the consciousness that the love of Christ is ever streaming down upon us.

Christians are to be characterized also by obedience. "If ye shall keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love." Again, the Lord is the perfect pattern of this beautiful quality. Walking in the sunshine does not make the sun shine, but it leads to the enjoyment of the sunshine. So obeying His commands does not draw out the Lord's love but it leads to the enjoyment of the love.

The next mark is "joy." But it is the Lord's joy; may we not say the joy of the Father's love? Abiding in the love of the Lord we should be walking in the joy of the Lord. This joy is to remain in us. It is not the joy of the world, which depends on outward circumstances. David can say, "Thou hast put joy in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their new wine was in abundance" (Ps. 4:7).

Then the Lord desires that the new company should be a loving company. They are, indeed, loved by the Lord; but they

are to love one another. The love to one another received its greatest expression when Christ died for His friends.

This new company is also one that the Lord takes into His confidence and treats as His friends. We are, indeed, privileged to be His servants, but the Lord treats us not merely as servants, to whom the Master would speak only concerning their work, but as friends to whom the Master confides the inmost thoughts and purposes of His heart. Thus, treating His disciples as friends, the Lord says, "All things which I have heard of My Father I have made known to you."

The next mark is that they are a company "chosen" by the Lord. It would be no wonder if we had chosen Him; it is a great wonder that He should have chosen us. Having chosen us, He will never give us up. Here it is that we have been chosen to bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain. We are "set" (not "ordained") each in our place to set forth Christ, and all that is of Christ; and only what is of Christ in us will remain.

Lastly, they are to be a praying company, and thus dependent upon the Father, that "whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name He may give you."

To sum up the Lord's desires for His people, as unfolded in this great passage, we may say that the Lord would have such:

1. to be walking in the consciousness of His love;
2. to obey His commands;
3. to have His joy in them;
4. to love one another;
5. to be in His confidence as His friends;
6. to realize that they are chosen to bring forth fruit;
7. to be dependent upon the Father as a praying people.

It will be noticed that in all these lovely marks there is a total absence of the things in which the flesh seeks to exalt itself. For anyone to seek distinction in this company by boasting in birth, or social position, or riches, or intellectual attainments would be to introduce elements of this world that at best could only be possible for the few, and would mar the unity of the company. All the marks of this new company are moral, and as such can be enjoyed by the youngest believer as well as the oldest.

Here, then, we have the desires of the Lord for the whole Christian company. Any local company of believers, even when small, having these marks will bear fruit for the Father and be, in their little measure, a testimony before the world. Let us remember that, however great the corruptions of Christendom, it is still possible for any company of believers to have these marks, for they are all moral, and call for no exercise of miraculous power. Nevertheless, they accomplish something far greater for they set forth the loveliness of Christ.

The Unity of the Spirit

—*Translated from De Bode des Hells, Volume 30*

In the Church we must act and behave according to God's Word. In Ephesians 4:3 we read that we should "keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace." Verses 4 to 6 tell us what this unity of the Spirit consists of: one body, one Spirit, one hope; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and one God and Father of all. All who believe belong to this one body, having one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father.

Therefore believers are not allowed to separate from each other, for that is the very opposite of keeping the unity of the Spirit. They must express fellowship with each other, praise the Lord together, and sit with each other at one table. This is incompatible with the idea of "membership" in any of the organized "churches."

All those churches, assemblies, or whatever you want to call them, are nothing but parties and sects into which the body of Christ is divided. Every single one of them is the denial of the one body of Christ, and is a hindrance to the showing forth of the unity of the Spirit, the oneness of the body of Christ.

Outline for Bible Study (68)

137. Entry into Jerusalem. The Temple Cleansing. The Lord at Simon the Leper's Home. — Matthew 21:1-17; 26:6-13. Mark 11:1-19; 14:3-19. Luke 19:28-48. John 12:1-50.

Outline

1. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem Lk. 19:28-44
2. The request of the Greeks Jn. 12:17-50
3. The cleansing of the temple Mk. 11:15-19
4. Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus Jn. 12:1-8

Explanation

1. From Jericho the Lord went to Bethany where the Lord stayed during the last week before the passover. When it became known that the Lord would come to Jerusalem, a great crowd met Him. The Lord came as King and Lord according to Zephaniah's prophecy (9:9), yet in meekness and in humility on a colt of an ass and not war-like on horse-back. Bethphage lies between Bethany and Jerusalem. The owner of the foal must have been a disciple of Jesus. A very great crowd honoured Him as King by throwing their garments and palm-branches on the way. God worked in the hearts of the people to greet the "Son of David" with the words of Psalm 118, praising the Messiah who will establish the kingdom of peace.

Approaching the city, the Lord wept over it. He foresaw that soon the words "Crucify Him" would follow and that Jerusalem, because of its great guilt, would be destroyed. God's grace, which in the Lord had come to fulfil the promises, was not recognized in Jerusalem, therefore it was set aside: "the vineyard was given to others."

God could not permit His Son to be rejected, without the people having testified that He was truly the Messiah and King. The raising of Lazarus had left no doubt. Now the Lord made known His rights as the Messiah, by offering the people once more salvation and glory. If Israel would reject Him now, it could only be intentionally.

2. The "Greeks" who would see Jesus were worshipping Gentiles (proselytes). The Jews themselves did not accept Him. To accept the Lord now will bring the hatred of the world (v. 25; cf. 1 Jn. 3:1-2). Since this will be entirely different in the kingdom, the Jews did not expect this.

These last days the Lord Jesus revealed Himself:

As Son of God by raising Lazarus

—as testimony to the Church (Jn. 11:4; 12:28);

As Son of David by entering Jerusalem

—as testimony to the remnant of Israel (Mt. 21:9; Jn. 12:13);

As Son of Man to the "Greeks"

—as testimony to the nations, whom the Lord will rule and judge as such (Jn. 12:23; Isa. 66:19; Mt. 25:31; Ps. 8:3-6).

3. In the court of the Gentiles, animals for sacrifices, incense, oil, and wine were sold and Roman money exchanged for temple-coins. The temple, the house of prayer (Isa. 56:7), had become a den of robbers where lying and deceiving, even by the priests, prevailed. As Lord of the house, Jesus cleansed the temple unopposed.

4. Mary not only anointed the Lord's head, often done to honour a guest during the meal (cf. Ps. 23:5), but also the Lord's feet, which were normally only washed with water. Obviously, He was very precious to her. The value of the ointment (spikenard) was almost a year's wages. Mary anointed the Lord because her Saviour was about to be killed. She understood that He had to suffer and die as the Lamb of God. Judas and some of the disciples were indignant. The Lord did not say that we should not give to the poor. Mary's great sacrifice was no waste, but pleasing to God. Everybody recognized the value of Christ for the heart of this believer.

Lesson

Many heathen happily believe the gospel, while many so-called Christians refuse to accept Him in their hearts.

It was necessary that the Lord Jesus, as the grain of wheat, should die for our salvation.

Mary had earlier chosen "the good part," now she could do "the good work" at the right time (Lk. 10:42; Mt. 26:12).

The three persons in Bethany illustrate three marks of the true Christian: fellowship, service, and worship.

136. The Fig Tree. The Parable Of The Vineyard — Matthew 21:18-46; 22:15:22. Mark 11:12-14,20-26; 12:1-17. Luke 20:1-26.

Outline

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| 1. The Lord cursed the fig-tree | Mk. 11:12-26. |
| 2. The Lord's authority questioned | Mt. 21:23-27. |
| 3. The parables of the sons and the vineyard | Mt. 21:28-46. |
| 4. The question about the taxes | Mt. 22:15-22. |
| 5. The Lord's question | Mt. 22:41-46. |

Explanation

1. When the Lord Jesus went from Bethany to Jerusalem, He was hungry. He had probably risen early for prayer as was His custom (Mk. 1:35) and had eaten nothing. Fig trees with leaves normally carry fruit: though this tree had many leaves, it had no fruit. Israel is often compared to a fig-tree. For three years the Lord Jesus had tried in vain to find fruit in Israel (Lk. 13:6-9). Now the Lord's cursing the tree spoke of Israel. Instead of producing true fruit (a walk with God, being a testimony for Him in the midst of the nations), Israel was self-righteous and bragged about its religious forms (abundance of leaves).

2. The Lord's cleansing of the temple revealed Him as the Lord of the temple. The rulers, who considered themselves to be the keepers of the faith, had allowed trading in the temple. Because their reputation was at stake, they asked Him: "By what authority doest Thou these things?" (Mt. 21:23). The Lord's question touched their consciences. It proved that they could not consider John the Baptist to be sent of God while rejecting the Lord. By saying, against their better judgment, "We do not know," they brought judgment on themselves.

3. The Lord's parable showed how the Jews acted like the second son. Pretending to do God's will by outwardly appearing to be law-abiding, they were transgressors. Tax-gatherers like Matthew and Zacchaeus may at first not have followed God but they repented. Despite the preaching of John the Baptist and with the clear testimony of the tax-gatherers' repentance, the rulers had only hardened their hearts!

The vineyard pictured Israel. The husbandmen, its rulers, had killed God's prophets (2 Chron. 36:14-17). When the owner sent his son they, afraid that they should lose their power, killed him (Jn. 11:48). The vineyard would be given to the nations (v. 43; cf. Rom. 11:21-22; Ps. 118:22). Israel stumbled over this stone and crucified the Lord. When the Lord comes, the stone shall fall on Israel in judgment and all but a small remnant of Israel shall be destroyed (vv. 42-44).

4. The Pharisees and their bitter enemies, the Herodians (who favoured Roman rule), now sought to ensnare the Lord. They sent their disciples with a question giving the impression of a quarrel between them. The Lord's "Yes" would seem to favour the Roman oppressor, condoning Roman rule. His "No" would mark Him as a rebel. As ever, His answer (cf. Mt. 21:23-24) touched their consciences. Their money bore the Emperor's image. The Jews had failed "to render unto God what is God's," Thus God had put them under Roman rule.

5. The Jews expected a Messiah and Saviour from earthly parents. Psalm 110 presents the Son of David as David's Lord. This was incomprehensible to the unbelieving Jews. As man He was David's Son; as Son of God He was David's Lord. After His death, God exalted Him, the rejected Son of man, to His right hand where He waits till all His enemies are destroyed and the kingdom will be given Him (Acts 2:33-36).

Lesson

Israel, like all men, might make a fair show (leaves), by keeping the law, but thereby nobody can produce fruit for God.

This can only be done on the principle of grace and truth through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17).

To be cont'd