Jonah - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Minor Prophets, Jonah 3: Warning to Ninevah

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Jonah 3:1-10

Returning, however, to the history itself, we may now observe that as one that had been thus taught, taught his need of God's grace, Jonah is sent on a second message to Nineveh. He goes, and with words of judgment on his lips, he enters that great city, that Nimrod—city, the representation, in that day, of the pride and daring of a revolted world. "Within forty days," he proclaims as a herald, "and Nineveh shall be destroyed."

Thus he "mourned." It was his commission. Responsively, Nineveh "lamented." The king rose from his throne, and all the nation put themselves in sackcloth; and in such condition, as humbled under the hand of God, a king of Nineveh shall find the Lord as a king of Israel had before found Him. "I said," says David, "I will confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." "Who can tell," says this royal Gentile, "if God will turn, and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" And so it was. "God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them, and He did it not."

"Is He the God of the Jews only," again I ask with the Apostle? and with him again I answer, "Nay, but of the Gentile also." Grace is divine. Government may know a people, and order them as such; grace knows sinners just as they are, whoever, wherever. The earth has its arrangements, heaven holds its court in sovereignty. Nineveh, like Jerusalem, is spared; the hand of the destroying angel is stayed over the one city as well as over the other (1 Chron. 21; Jonah 3).

Minor Prophets, Jonah 1: the Spirit of Confession Comes First

Simple, sure, and yet solemn, all this!

To accept the punishment of our sin is the first duty of an erring soul. We are not to seek to right ourselves by an effort of our own, when we have gone wrong, lest Hormah (Num. 14) be our portion. Our first duty is to accept, in the spirit of confession, the punishment of our sin, to be humbled under the mighty or chastening hand of God (Lev. 26:41). David did this, and the kingdom was his again. Jonah now does the same. "Take me up and cast me into the sea," said he to the mariners, in the midst of the tempest, "so shall the sea be calm unto you, for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you." And they did so, but with a grace that might well shame their betters, which bespeaks the hand of God with them, as it was against Jonah. And Jonah is soon wrapped among the weeds of the sea, down in the bottoms of the mountains there.