

H.L. Rossier

Comments on the book of the Prophet Jonah

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FOREWORD

The Book of Jonah contains no prophecy in the strict sense, or rather contains only one which was not fulfilled because of the repentance of the people of Nineveh. A hundred years later, another prophet, Nahum, once again pronounced the judgement—which had previously been suspended—on that great city; a judgement which was not carried out until some century later. Moreover, it is not in the judgement on Nineveh that we should seek the main teaching of the Book of Jonah. What it presents to us, from beginning to end, is the very person of the prophet. This circumstance, combined with the remarkable fact that the Book of Jonah speaks to us of God's ways of grace towards the nations, assigns it a unique place amongst the prophets of the Old Testament. As for Jonah, one might say that he is himself prophecy in action. He is a man who is a sign and also a man who is a type. We see in him, first of all, the image of his rejected people, plunged into distress, then emerging resurrected from the depths of the abyss. But his story is not limited to this alone. In the person of Jonah, the witness who has strayed from

God, the proud prophet, the guilty people, and the repentant Remnant pass successively—and often together—before our eyes, traversing the stage of the nations; but moreover, a mysterious figure, ‘one greater than Jonah’, enters and emerges resurrected for the deliverance of God’s people. Finally, as the climax of this marvellous account, we find a revelation of God Himself; we come to know His Providence, His holiness, His justice in judgement, His great patience, His boundless grace—the final word of all His ways towards man, towards Israel and the nations.

What we have just said explains our division of the subject into seven chapters entitled: The Witness — the Prophet — the Nations — the people of Israel — the Remnant — Christ — God.

CHAPTER 1

The Witness

There is an immense difference between the sinful man, who became such through the Fall, and the holy man, who became such through faith in the Saviour and by virtue of redemption.

Adam, who was innocent and responsible, before the Fall, for remaining in dependence on God, remains responsible even after having lost his innocence and dependence through the Fall; but as a sinner he has acquired the knowledge of good and evil, that is to say, a conscience that judges him. This conscience renders him inexcusable and condemns him. He knows good and evil, but alas! all that remains to him, a sinful and accountable man, is the absolute inability to do good and the will to do evil.

Quite different is the believer, the holy man, the witness of God in this world. Though he has the flesh within him—the sinful nature of the first Adam—he has received through faith a new nature, divine life, the Spirit of God, the power of that life, and

the ability to do good and resist evil. This undoubtedly makes him doubly responsible. His conscience warns him of good and evil; he has but one alternative: to obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the new life he possesses, or to obey the flesh that is within him. If, therefore, he is doubly responsible, he is also doubly inexcusable for sinning, for the power of the Spirit and of the new man is at his disposal, a thousand times greater than that of the flesh and the old man.

The consequences of sin are different for the sinful man who walks in the flesh, or for the believer, if he walks according to the flesh, whilst possessing the power to walk according to the Spirit. The sinner can expect nothing but death and judgement; the saint, if he sins, encounters God's chastisement or discipline, which is exercised upon him, upon all believers, so that they may not be 'condemned with the world' (1 Cor. 11:32).

Such was the case with Jonah. He was a believer, a saint; he had the life of God; he was in communion with God; a testimony had been entrusted to him; but, faced with a command from the Lord, he allowed himself to be led astray by the will

of the flesh, which is enmity against God. Although he was a believer and a witness, he acted no better than Adam, who was deceived by Satan; he disobeyed a direct command of God. His case is even worse than that of the innocent Adam, who was seduced by the devil, since, by faith, he possessed a new nature, capable of choosing good and rejecting evil and temptation.

Adam disobeyed God and had the audacity to make excuses for himself (Gen. 3:12); Jonah disobeyed God and dared to give Him a reason (Jonah 4:2); but no excuse, no reason is valid before God for disobeying Him; a saint's reason, even less so than that of the first Adam; for, from the very beginning of his spiritual life, a saint possesses the obedience of faith by which he is saved (Rom. 1:5); and from the very first step of his journey he is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, for the obedience of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:2), that is to say, to obey as He did.

For Jonah, as for Adam, the first consequence of disobedience is the same. Adam flees from the presence of God who seeks him, and hides behind the trees of the garden; Jonah rises to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (1:3). Which of

these acts is worse than the other? Certainly the second, for Jonah is a saint who has a habitual and intimate relationship with God: to flee from one's best friend, in order to evade the obligation to respond to his desire—what an outrage such an act inflicts upon the One who loves us! But where Adam and Jonah failed, one man stands firm and remains upright—a man who did not even need a positive command to obey, though he also kept all his Father's commandments (John 15:10), a man who anticipated his will without God's asking him to. 'I have come,' he says, 'to do Your will' (Heb. 10:7). This is more than mere obedience; it is a will that merges and is absorbed into the will of another, identifies with it, and is nourished by it: 'My food,' he says, 'is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work' (John 4:34).

The second consequence of Adam's disobedience is not long in coming. Whether he likes it or not, he must appear, in his nakedness, before the face of the One from whom he was fleeing, and hear the pronouncement of his sentence. The sentence is irrevocable, yet grace can still remedy it. Adam appears before God before the sentence is carried out, and this saves him. He

finds help in God, who has garments of righteousness for him and his wife. Jonah, through his own fault, brings upon himself a punishment infinitely more grievous than that of the first Adam. It is necessary for the children of God to remember this fact, to weigh it up and to meditate upon it. Let us therefore follow this man of God for a moment on his journey to Tarshish, where he undergoes such cruel trials. Here he is ‘paying the fare’ (1:3), fulfilling his duties towards men, whilst he has failed in his first duty towards God. Let us note that the fulfilment of these duties results in further increasing the distance separating Jonah from the Lord. It is often the case that one ‘pays one’s dues’ whilst being driven by a spirit of rebellion; and by fulfilling certain obligations, one hides from oneself a far greater obligation, that of obeying God. One obeys duties to family and society, to city and nation—duties which are, moreover, highly respectable— we settle our debts, yet we disobey God’s express command. Yet this command is to bear witness to Him. Jonah was called to be God’s witness before the world. A witness for Christ is indeed what God seeks in the midst of a world of sin and alienation from Him, a world rush-

ing towards judgement. This is one of the key points of the Book of Jonah. The world is condemned, but before the sentence is carried out, God wants His own to bear witness to His justice, so that repentance may be produced in hearts, and that He may show mercy.

He had once entrusted this witness to Israel, His people; since they disobeyed, God places it in the hands of the Church. The Church abandons the truth and becomes apostate Christendom, a subject which, incidentally, the Old Testament does not address. Finally, a Jewish Remnant becomes the Lord's faithful future witness to the nations, a role which, in the past, neither the people nor their leaders had ever been able to fulfil. The Book of Jonah speaks to us of this Remnant in a mysterious way, as we shall see later.

But let us return to Jonah, as representing the saints, God's witnesses in this world. Lest his disobedience lead, like that of sinful man, to the final judgement, he must be stopped on the path that leads him ever further from God. The Word tells us: 'The Lord sent a great wind upon the sea; and there was a great

storm on the sea, so that the ship seemed as though it would break apart' (1:4). This is still only the beginning of God's chastisement of His servant, but this chastisement inaugurates, as we shall see later, His ways of grace towards the nations. Yet, during the storm, Jonah, lying at the bottom of the ship, "was fast asleep" (1:5).

Often the most threatening circumstances do not reach the consciousness of God's children. Neither the storm nor the sailors' distress affect Jonah. He does not realise that he is personally undergoing the judgement of the God he has offended, and he is not filled with fear. This is the indifference of a sleeping conscience. When it comes to the sinful man and his moral state, he is always asleep. A child of darkness and of the night, he sleeps (1 Thess. 5:4, 7); but for a Jonah, a son of light, to sleep is a far more serious matter, and the case is, alas, all too common. The disciples slept in the face of their Saviour's sufferings in Gethsemane; they slept in the face of his glory on the holy mountain; the disciple Jonah sleeps in the face of the judgement falling upon the world, without realising that this judgement is intended for him.

Very often, since a terrible war has raged amongst the nations, we have wondered whether the saints would wake up to the realisation that this storm is intended for them first and foremost? Undoubtedly, God, who is rich in resources, uses, as we shall see, a calamity to achieve other ends and fulfil other purposes, but let us not forget that, in the case of Jonah, the primary purpose was to speak to the conscience of God's servant.

Often, to our shame and confusion, it is the world that must rouse us: 'What are you doing, you who sleep? Rise up, cry out to your God; 1 perhaps God will take pity on us, and we shall not perish,' says the master of the rowers (1:6). 'You, servants of God,' he says, 'do you not think of those who are perishing? Are you then numbed by your selfishness? We, for our part, are working, toiling, sacrificing all we have; our entire cargo is sinking in this storm. What are you doing? Are you praying, are you pleading with your God? We, at least, are crying out, each to his own God! Is it not true that the world is often justified in addressing the children of God in this way, because they have not understood that this judgement is upon them?'

God seeks Jonah, the witness, just as he once sought Adam, the sinner. The ‘master of the rowers’ is the voice of God who once said to Adam, ‘Where are you?’ But here, in a first humiliation for Jonah, the world is the instrument through which God reminds him that he is lost. The Lord answered these ignorant but sincere beings—who had no knowledge of the God to whom they were addressing themselves—by means of a sign, and revealed to them that it is His witness with whom they are dealing. A second humiliation for Jonah: he, a Jew, receives no direct communication from God. Moreover, the final humiliation is that it is again the world that says to Jonah: ‘What have you done?’ (1:10). Once God Himself had said to Eve: ‘What have you done?’ (Gen. 3:13). The world now becomes the judge of the deeds of a witness of the Lord! How so! You yourself confessed that you ‘fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’ (1:9), and yet you fled from him! Guilty folly! The conscience of these pagans is more upright, less dormant, than that of Jonah! But in the end, the latter is overcome. Jonah acknowledges the full justice of God’s judgment: ‘Take me and throw me into the sea’ (1:12). He knows he

deserves to be cast into the abyss and declares it. There will be deliverance for you, he tells the sailors, but I have deserved to lose my life. Like Adam, he receives the sentence of death, but for Jonah, it is carried out at that very moment. So it is with us: 'I am dead.' 'I count myself as dead.' 'I am crucified with Christ.' Yes, my judgement is just and I bear witness to it, but I find Christ in the depths of the waves, identifying with me in the judgement, to deliver me!

God does indeed intervene, and how could He not? Another, like Jonah, has taken his place in the belly of the fish. It is there, under discipline and in the depths of affliction, that the guilty witness rediscovers the dependence he had so foolishly lost: He prays (2:2). He would never have dared to disobey if, through prayer, he had remained in dependence. The abandonment of dependence had led to the downfall of the first Adam; here, the witness of God must relearn it as something entirely new. To this restoration, God can respond only with deliverance. Jonah acknowledges that this blessing is due solely to the grace of God: 'Deliverance comes from the Lord' (2:10). It is of this that Elihu speaks in the Book of Job: 'He will sing be-

fore men and say: “I have sinned and perverted what is right, yet he did not repay me; he delivered my soul from going down to the pit, and my life shall see the light” (Job 33:27, 28). Such, then, is the fruit of discipline for the Lord’s witness: complete self-judgement, deep knowledge of grace. From now on, Jonah will no longer flee to escape the Lord.

CHAPTER 2

The Prophet

Before receiving the command to go to Nineveh, Jonah had been entrusted with a prophetic mission to Israel (*). This event took place under Jeroboam II (2), or shortly before this king came to power. In 2 Kings 14:25, it is stated that Jeroboam ‘restored the borders of Israel, from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Plain, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he had spoken through his servant Jonah the prophet, the son of Amittai, who was from Gath-Hepher’. Hosea, Amos, and no doubt Jonah too, were aware of the sorry state of the ten tribes and the monarchy in Israel. With what in-

dignation did the first two denounce the sins of this people and their leaders, announcing the judgement that awaited them all! Yet the Lord had seen that ‘the affliction of Israel was very bitter, and that there was no one left, whether bond or free, and that there was no one to help Israel; and the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; and he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, son of Joash’ (2 Kings 14:26, 27). It is said in another place: ‘The Lord gave Israel a saviour’ and they came out from under the hand of the king of Syria (13:5). Thus, whilst the other prophets announced God’s judgements upon Israel, Jonah was called to announce a temporary deliverance through a saviour raised up for that purpose (regardless, moreover, of his character).

(*) We say ‘Before’, because the word ‘And’ which begins both the Book of Jonah and other books of the Old Testament (Joshua, Ruth, 1 Samuel, Ezekiel) seems to us to always be connected with preceding events, however more or less immediate.

The borders of Israel were restored; Hamath, the main barrier against enemies coming from the north, was recaptured. Jonah

had been chosen to proclaim these mercies of God in the days when Israel groaned under the terrible yoke of the king of Syria. A prophet who proclaimed only deliverance was a phenomenon, if not unique, then at least quite rare in Israel. When he was sent to Nineveh, Jonah therefore knew the Lord (and he expresses this later) as a God who shows grace and is merciful, slow to anger and abounding in kindness, and who relents from the disaster he has threatened (4:2). When it came to Israel, Jonah had not hesitated to proclaim the deliverance of his people. His heart rejoiced in this and his patriotism found satisfaction in it, but, in his spiritual pride, he could not accept a unique and special mission towards the nations, as had previously been his mission in Israel. It might have been different had he been certain that the threat of Nineveh's destruction would be fulfilled, but he had already experienced the merciful nature of the Lord, just as He had revealed Himself to Moses in the past: 'The Lord, the Lord! A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin' (Ex. 34:6, 7). He was prepared to ac-

knowledge a grace—tempered, moreover, by the law—towards his own nation, but he could not accept it when it came to the idolatrous nations. God had not bestowed the law upon them; how could he accept that grace should be freely granted to them?

But another motive, and perhaps the most important one, drove the prophet to disobey: Jonah was thinking of himself. We see this throughout his conduct in chapters 3 and 4. He was going to cry out in Nineveh: ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown’. But what if it did not happen? What if God relented from his threat? What would become of his standing as a prophet? God’s mercy would spell the collapse of his own authority and dignity! It never once occurred to Jonah that Nineveh might repent, and thereby alter the course of God’s ways towards him. Yet other prophets, and later the greatest among them, John the Baptist, preached judgement and repentance. Jonah did not even aspire to such a mission. What he wished to safeguard was his standing, his dignity, his authority as a prophet. What would become of all these attributes if what he had announced did not come to pass? When he had pro-

claimed in advance the recapture of Hamath, his word had established his credibility with his people; he now wanted the announcement of judgement to establish his credibility with the nations. Sad indeed is the selfishness of man; but even sadder is the selfishness of a prophet!

That is why Jonah fled and bears the penalty for this act of disobedience. How many Christian vocations have been rendered fruitless by the very will of God's servants, whatever their motives may have been. God wants to send me to Nineveh; I prefer to go to Tarshish in Spain! Nowadays, this has become so ingrained in the habits of the Lord's disciples that they find such disobedience quite natural. One boards the ship that takes one away from God's purpose, and one does worse than Jonah, for one adorns this disobedience with the name of divine mission and obedience to the leading of the Spirit. In a sense, Jonah was less guilty than those of whom we speak, for he was not afraid to declare that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord (1:10). In another sense, he was more guilty than they, for he knew he was doing his own will by fleeing. In their case, it is often sheer ignorance, so discipline is spared them,

whereas the servant who ‘has known his master’s will... and has not done according to his will, shall be beaten with many blows’ (Luke 12:47). May those servants or evangelists who are unaware of what a true call from God really is, be true before Him and not ease their consciences by calling that which is exactly the opposite ‘obedience’!

At the end of chapter 2, Jonah seemed to have learnt, as a witness, his lesson under discipline, for the fish had vomited him out onto dry land and the former Jonah, so much like, alas, the former Adam, had become, in a sense, a resurrected Jonah; but, as a prophet, he is far from having learnt his full lesson—a lesson, it seems from this account, that is very difficult to learn. He had, no doubt, discovered through punishment that it was hard to resist the goads and that, come what may, one had to obey. Thus, at the second summons, he did not refuse to do what the Lord commanded him: ‘And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord’ (3:3). But how, and in what spirit, did he obey? Just as a Jew obeyed under the Law, in a spirit of national pride and self-righteousness, with the thought that God must judge the nations who had no cit-

izenship in Israel, who were strangers to the covenants of promise, and who were without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). Jonah would have to learn that a prophet's final word is not judgement: however certain it may be, there remains hope as long as the sentence has not been carried out. God had said: 'Forty days more'. But in the past, no more than that had been needed for judgement to be averted, by virtue of Moses' intercession (Ex. 34:28; 24:18); nor, later on, for all Satan's wiles to be thwarted, by virtue of Christ's obedience (Luke 4:2). The final word of the prophecy is grace and glory, and this is something Jonah had not the slightest inkling of. His heart was legalistic, proud, hard, and took pleasure in judgement. He, whom that very judgement had just struck, ought to have known grace, not only for having proclaimed it in the past, but for having been its object himself. What, then, is the hardness of man's heart, when we see that very heart beating beneath the robe of a prophet? Ah! How humiliating it is to think that our lesson is so difficult to learn!

Jonah's prophecy had a profound effect on the consciences of the people of Nineveh. God's purpose was fulfilled, for He re-

veals His judgements so that souls may be converted and return to Him. Then the heart of the God of grace can be revealed. But when grace is proclaimed, the prophet's pride and self-righteousness give way to a quiet irritation. This is, in fact, what has always characterised the Jews. They were irritated to see salvation proclaimed to the nations, and could not bear to be placed on the same level as them under judgement. Jonah brings to mind the elder brother of the prodigal son, who became angry with his father and refused to enter, because his brother was an object of grace and a cause for joy. Like the father in the parable, God rebukes Jonah—with what patience!—but ultimately leaves him to his stubbornness, in the hut he had made for himself, deprived of his fig tree and under the scorching sun. The story ends there; but whilst we do not learn what change took place in the prophet's heart, we know that the Lord's grace has not changed to this day towards the nations, and we are its happy witnesses.

The first part of Jonah's story reveals more grace in the prophet's heart than the second. This is often the case in the careers of God's servants. As their legitimate importance grows,

so does their self-satisfaction, leading to a conflict with God's thoughts that renders them unfit for service. How many of them are left there, like Jonah, with a shattered career, for having walked in self-satisfaction instead of progressing in the knowledge of grace. In chapter 1, the discipline that befalls the prophet is full of instruction for him. He recognises, with painful realisation, that he, a prophet of the Lord, is the cause of the judgement that befalls his companions and their ship (1:12); he accepts, as legitimate, the judgement that befalls him personally and proclaims that his rejection becomes the deliverance of the nations. How precious it would have been to see this humiliation bear fruit in the second part of the prophet's story!

Let us learn from all these things, and above all, let us not start where Jonah started. Let us not avoid God's presence; let us walk in the light; let us say to him: 'Search me and know me'. In this way, we shall avoid more than one painful punishment. God does not send us into the world as prophets, but entrusts us with a mission as servants. Not to fulfil it faithfully would be to turn our backs on God, just as Jonah did!

CHAPTER 3

The Nations

Their condition is represented by Nineveh, which is like a picture of the moral state of the Gentiles in God's eyes. 'Arise,' says the Lord to Jonah, 'go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me' (1:2). Wickedness, the complete absence of goodness—this is what characterised them in the eyes of the holy God. His patience had long endured this wickedness, and it had taken the opportunity to develop to its very limits; thus, for Nineveh, there remained nothing but judgement, unless there were on God's part some recourse or some means of salvation. But who could proclaim it? The prophet Jonah, here a type of the people of Israel, was under the same judgement. He had shown himself disobedient, rebellious against God, and could expect nothing from Him but condemnation. Another prophet, Isaiah, a type of a faithful remnant in Israel, later stood before God and did not seek to flee from His presence (Isa. 6). Before being sent, he acknowledged his defilement and was purified by the

burning coal that had consumed the burnt offering. The Lord then said, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And the prophet replied, ‘Here am I; send me.’ God sent him to Israel to announce the judgement that would befall them and the grace that would spare a small remnant. Jonah, far from standing before God, fled from His presence, so as not to be sent to the nations. Yet it was precisely these nations that God wished to spare, and Jonah was well aware of this.

The sailors are a cross-section of all nations, aboard a ship that is carrying them further and further away from God. Each cries out to ‘his god’ (1:5), but, faced with the storm that threatens to engulf them, they learn the worth of these silent idols that do not answer them. ‘Perhaps’ the God of Jonah will take pity on them, and they will not perish? (1:6). But what is the cause of their distress? Ignorance of their own condition leads them to attribute this misfortune to someone else, perhaps to one of their own number: ‘Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us’ (1:7). Not knowing God, they call upon a power unknown to them—the lot—to be informed. Here we see the ignorance of man’s nat-

ural heart, lacking knowledge of himself and of God; the two great subjects in which the whole of revelation is summed up are unknown to them. They are blind, but God, in His grace, answers them by bringing Himself down to their level of understanding; the lot speaks and points to Jonah. Jonah, despite the judgement that has befallen him, despite his flight from God which he had previously declared to them (1:10), bears witness to the character of God, according to what their clouded understanding could grasp: ‘I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land’ (1:9). The testimony of Israel’s faith in one Creator God reminds the nations of what God had revealed to them through His works, so as to render them inexcusable (Rom. 1:20). Paul’s preaching to the Athenians (Acts 27) is of the same nature.

These poor, ignorant Gentiles utter three questions: To the first: ‘Tell us, on whose account’ this evil has come upon us (1:8), God replied by the decree, but by using Israel, the object of his judgement, to bring light to the nations, for, as it is said: ‘Salvation comes from the Jews’ (John 4:22). To the second ques-

tion: ‘What have you done?’, Jonah had already answered in advance, so that these Gentiles could not be mistaken: Jonah was fleeing ‘from the presence of the Lord, for he had told them so’ (1:10). So it is they who rebuke the prophet: You say you fear God, yet you do not fear disobeying him! How often have the Jews, to their shame, found themselves under the rule of the nations, just as Christians today are under that of the world! Their third question is: ‘What shall we do to you?’ (1:11). Trust in the word of the Lord springs up in their hearts, and instead of turning away from Israel, the unfaithful servant, they realise that only its representative can inform them of the Lord’s will. Jonah acknowledges that his unfaithfulness is the cause of God’s dealings with the nations; he says: ‘I know’ (a true expression of a heart that knows God) ‘that it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you’ (1:12). ‘Take me and throw me into the sea.’ Thus the rejection of Israel is the reconciliation of the world (Rom. 11:15).

These men hesitate to carry out the prophet’s order and exhaust every means before obeying it, but they cannot succeed, for ‘the sea grew ever more violent’ (1:13). For them to be saved, a

sacrifice is needed; otherwise, the judgement will swallow them up. We shall see later what this sacrifice is, but what concerns us here is Jonah, as a type of rejected Israel. The judgement having been executed, the ship of the Gentiles can now continue its course. Rejected Israel has opened the door to the blessing of the nations. This scene is a picture of the present time, a foreshadowing of the salvation of individuals, part of all the idolatrous peoples who cried out ‘each to his own god’, as it is said: ‘You have purchased for God with your blood, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation’ (Rev. 5:9).

The imminence of danger causes them to ‘cry out to the Lord’, for this is always how our relationship with God begins; but the revelation of a sacrifice for which they are responsible, and which can avert judgement forever, is repugnant to their natural hearts. They would far prefer to ‘row back to land’; moreover, they cannot fail to recognise that by casting the Lord’s servant into the waves, they are charged with ‘innocent blood’ (1:14). They are therefore guilty, but God teaches them that, despite their part in the sacrifice, it is for them the only means of salvation. Now note the moral change that takes place in the crew:

‘And the men feared the Lord greatly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and made vows’ (1:16).

Their first step on the path to wisdom is to fear the Lord greatly. They then take the attitude of worshippers before Him by offering Him a sacrifice. Then ‘they made vows’. A vow is a free dedication to God, to serve Him without restriction (Deut. 23:21; Lev. 7:16). We therefore find here a whole group of saved men, brought to God, who have become witnesses of His grace, worshippers and servants consecrated to Him. In this vessel of the nations there are now the saved, whilst Jonah, representing Israel, is swallowed up in the depths of the sea of the nations.

The first chapter of this book shows us how the obedience of faith has now become the portion of the nations; the third chapter turns our gaze towards a future time. Judgement is announced upon Nineveh, the ‘great city’, representing, as a capital, the whole of the nations. We are told that ‘the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least’ (3:5). Note that

this is a national fast. One could not say that it is not genuine, for it is based on faith in the word of God; yet, among the inhabitants of Nineveh, this faith 'lasts only a short time' (Matt. 13:21). Despite this, an outward repentance, based on fear of judgement, postpones it for a time. Two centuries later, the fate of Nineveh becomes final and the city is utterly destroyed. It will be the same when Christ's reign is established. Faced with His judgements, the nations will submit to Him and acknowledge the God of Israel (Ps. 18:44), but when, after a thousand years of this glorious reign, Satan is loosed and can once again deceive them, they will face the final judgement.

This repentance of Nineveh turns our thoughts to the grave days we are living through. The hand of God weighs heavily upon the nations. It seems as though His voice is being heard, saying: 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown'. Should not the nations, as such, repent and 'proclaim a fast'? Should not emperors and kings, great and small, cry out to God with all their might and turn, each one, from their evil ways and from the violence in their hands? 'Who knows? God may relent' from the fierceness of his anger, and they will not per-

ish. God can repent, change the course of his ways towards mankind, when they change their own ways and turn back. May these words, like those of Jonah of old, find an echo in the hearts of the peoples!

CHAPTER 4

Israel

We have seen that Jonah, despite his faith and his character as a prophet, embodies within himself the spirit of the people to whom he belongs—a spirit of disobedience, independence from the Lord, spiritual pride and self-righteousness—which God constantly points out through His prophets. This is not a matter of idolatry, so often condemned, but which had left this people long before they were scattered among the nations through their rejection of Christ. It is of that time that the Book of Jonah speaks to us in figurative terms. We are witnessing the moment when the history of Israel is about to come to an end. The people persist in their ways of independence and self-will, without having truly repented of the ‘deceptive vanities’ (2:9)

that had characterised them for so long. The house was empty, swept clean and adorned (Matt. 12:44); the state of this people, no longer haunted by the demon of idolatry, was particularly marked in the time of the last prophets and during the Lord's lifetime. It was an unbelieving and perverse generation, white-washed tombs full of corruption within, a hypocritical race, yet proud of its own righteousness, haughty and boasting of having Abraham as their father, fleeing from the light and the testimony of God, hostile to the truth and rebellious against grace. This is what lay beneath all the outward appearances of piety, the strict adherence to the forms of the law—external forms to which, moreover, they added their own traditions that nullified God's commandment (Mark 7:9). The leaders made every effort to preserve their dignity, their reputation, and their influence over the people. But what characterised them above all was their hatred of the grace that brought them the truth about their own condition. If they were condemned, there was therefore no difference between them and other men, and grace opened the door of salvation to every poor sinner among the nations. Jonah, though he was a man of God, offers us more

than one feature of this picture. There came a time when, through the rejection of the Saviour and the Holy Spirit, the final condemnation of the Jews was pronounced: ‘I will carry you beyond Babylon’ (Acts 7:43). Israel is cast into the sea of nations, where it is kept until the day of its national resurrection.

It will therefore be reborn, but in chapter 3 we enter the second period of its history. Will its heart be changed? Not in the slightest! Whilst outwardly, even under the Antichrist, it resumes the ancient forms of its worship (Dan. 9:27), its moral state is characterised by irritation against God. It is angry to the point of death and considers itself to be in the right (4:9). Here the book is silent on the end of its history. It is as though this rebellious people were sinking into oblivion. Let us ourselves observe this solemn silence regarding it.

The rejection of Israel, in connection with the prophecy of Jonah, is announced to us by the Lord in a most striking manner. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 12, Jesus speaks of Jonah as a sign of His death and resurrection. We shall consider this sub-

ject further on; but in chapter 16, He returns to it, and, I have no doubt, with a quite different intention. The Pharisees and Sadducees ask Him again for a sign. He speaks to them of the signs of the heavens, fair weather and storms (images of grace and judgement), which they knew how to discern well, whilst they could not discern ‘the signs of the times’. Judgement was at the door and they knew nothing of it: ‘No sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah’ (v. 4). Israel was to be cast into the sea once and for all, abandoned, to make way for God’s ways of grace towards the nations. Thus the evangelist adds: ‘And leaving them, he went away’.

But the true Israel will be resurrected and will become, as we shall see, the Lord’s messenger and witness, to bring the ‘great multitude of nations’ to repentance.

CHAPTER 5

The Remnant

The main purpose of the book of Jonah emerges, it seems to us, from chapter 2, which we have deliberately omitted until now. We have seen that the person of Jonah presents to us the characteristics which the witnesses of the Lord ought to have possessed, then the Jewish prophet as a witness; finally, that this same person also illustrates for us the history of the people who, despite everything, have been and will again be God's witnesses to the nations. We say 'will be', for although the people, as a whole, were definitively rejected when God's patience had reached its limit, a Remnant will emerge from them in the future—the nucleus of a future people, burdened, like their entire race, with 'the guilt of blood', that is to say, the responsibility for the Messiah's death, and by suffering the consequences during the tribulation of the end. Distress will produce in the hearts of these faithful a repentance leading to salvation. They will not seek to separate their responsibility from that of the people to whom they belong; they will acknowledge

that their punishment is deserved, that the storm which is ‘ever growing’ is the just retribution for their crime, and that they must be cut off from the land of the living for having crucified the Son of God! But, swallowed up by the great fish, they will discover, in their distress, that their Messiah went through the same anguish, and that the Lord answered him. This conviction will give great assurance to these faithful ones, so they will cry out to God with the certainty that he hears them. Their experiences are described to us in chapter 2 of our prophet. Jonah’s prayer contains two themes: the first, the experiences of the believing Remnant, of true Israel, on the day of distress (*) (2:3) from which he is saved; the second, the death and sufferings of Christ, which will be the subject of another chapter.

(*) Also called ‘the distress of Jacob’ (Jer. 30:7), and ‘the great tribulation’, a more general term. See, for the word ‘distress’, a number of passages in the Psalms and the Prophets.

As for the first subject, we assume that our readers are sufficiently familiar with the Old Testament to know that the prophets and the Psalms constantly speak to us of the believing Jewish remnant of the end times, and of the tribulations it endures.

Jonah's prayer is evidence in support of this truth. The eight verses echo so many passages from the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah that to quote them all would unnecessarily overload our text. Every reader, equipped with a good Concordance, can compile the list for themselves; we shall therefore confine ourselves to quoting a few essential passages.

‘Jonas prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, and said: “I cried out to the Lord in my distress, and he answered me”’ (2:2, 3).

It is remarkable that Jonah's cry comes here only after that of the nations. Such will indeed be the case. Today the ship of the nations, carrying those who, through faith, have become worshippers of the true God, continues its course, and those aboard have obtained deliverance after crying out ‘to the Lord’ (1:14). Israel, on the other hand, is engulfed in the sea of nations, but a Remnant will awaken from the bosom of Sheol; from the depths of its distress, from the midst of this great tribulation which will weigh most heavily upon the faithful of God's an-

cient people, it too will cry out to the God whom it has offended.

This verse takes the customary form of the Psalms. It is a summary of the entire content of the prayer and foretells its outcome, whilst the following verses describe the path by which this outcome will be achieved. Cast into the depths of the abyss, swallowed up by the monster prepared by God as an instrument of his preservation, the faithful one prays and cries out. With what joy he notes that the answer has come! Psalm 120, which serves as a preface to the small collection of the Songs of Ascents, speaks in exactly the same terms. This Psalm concerns the Remnant driven out of their land once more by persecution, after having returned there in the company of the unbelieving nation: It is the day of Jacob's distress (see Rev. 12:13–16). Then he says: 'To the Lord I cried in my distress, and He answered me' (Ps. 120:1). The Lord delivers him from all his troubles, as is so often stated in Psalm 107, which in turn serves as a preface to the fifth book of the Psalms, where the Songs of Ascents are found. 'He answered me'; this is the summary of all the experiences of the faithful: complete deliver-

ance. The same is true in Psalm 130: ‘I called to you from the depths, O Lord!’ This Psalm describes to us the solemn exercises of conscience of the Remnant, and the eternally blessed results of their deliverance (see also Ps. 18:6; 86:7).

‘From the depths of Sheol I cried out; you heard my voice’ (2:3).

Following the summary we have just discussed, Jonah’s prayer recounts the sequence of events that led to this response from the Lord. First, the faithful one cries out from the depths of Sheol, and God hears him. The answer has not yet come, but he has the comforting assurance that his prayer of faith has reached the ears of the Lord. Hezekiah’s prayer (Isa. 38:10) shares many features with Jonah’s, though the distress is less severe: Hezekiah descends into Sheol, Jonah is there, whilst David, in Ps. 30:3, ascends from it (see also Ps. 18:4, 5).

‘You cast me into the depths, into the heart of the seas, and the current surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me’ (2:4).

We find exactly the same expression in Ps. 42:7. Any reader somewhat familiar with prophecy knows that the second book of the Psalms (Ps. 42–72) describes the feelings and experiences of the Remnant of Judah, driven out among the nations during the great tribulation. Now it is precisely these experiences that Jonah’s prayer presents to us (*).

(*) See: *The Prophetic History of the Last Days and the Songs of Ascents*, by H. R., p. 11.

‘And I said: “I am cast out from before your eyes; yet I will still look towards the temple of your holiness” (2:5).

Here we find Hezekiah’s prayer (Isa. 38:10, 11); the many passages in the Second Book of Psalms (43:2; 44:9; 60:1, 10), and other passages besides (Ps. 74:1; 77:7; 31:22; Lam. 5:22). The awareness of being rejected does not destroy the assurance of faith in the poor Remnant in distress. Driven out of Jerusalem, he ceases not to look towards the temple, just as Daniel looked towards Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10. See also Ps. 42:4; 43:3, 4; 18:6; Hab. 2:20). Today’s saints, who can apply this passage to them-

selves when they are in affliction, know that this temple is for them the Father's house in heaven.

'The waters have come up to my soul; the deep has surrounded me; seaweed has wrapped around my head' (2:6).

In distress, the soul experiences what God's judgement for sin is like. In the second book of the Psalms, which we have mentioned, this terrible state is depicted in indelible terms: 'The deep calls to the deep at the sound of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me' (Ps. 42:7). Psalm 69 describes the magnitude of this anguish. Entering the deep mire of sin brings judgment: the depth of the waters that engulf and the current that submerges, whilst a bottomless abyss opens up (Ps. 69:2, 15). We shall see later that the faithful meet Christ in the abyss, that Jesus who descended there for them. We too, as Christians, have had the same experience, but without being compelled, like the Remnant, to know the abyss, other than in our conscience.

‘I went down to the foundations of the mountains; the bars of the earth were shut upon me for ever; but, O Lord my God, thou hast brought my life up from the pit’ (2:7).

Distress reaches its very limits; the afflicted cannot sink any lower. It is death in all its horror. The gates that shut off access to the land of the living are closed forever. These same experiences are found in Hezekiah’s song (Isa. 38:10, 11), and also the same response from God: ‘But you have loved my soul, delivering it from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.’ ‘The Lord has chosen to save me’ (vv. 17, 20).

It is through Christ’s resurrection that all our sins are cast into the abyss, never to be found again.

“When my soul was fainting within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came before you, into the temple of your holiness” (2:8).

In the moment of supreme anguish and agony, the faithful remember the Lord, and their prayer is not merely heard, but received in the place where God dwells.

“Those who set their hearts on deceitful vanities forsake the grace that is theirs” (2:9).

Here comes the condemnation pronounced against the apostate people, once again overrun by the demon of idolatry (Matt. 12:43–45), who forsake the grace set before them for deceitful vanities. Better to be plunged into distress with hope than to share the fate of those who have the Antichrist as their master. In Psalm 31, we see the difference between those who ‘set their hearts on worthless idols’ (v. 6), and the one who trusts in the Lord and whose grace is his only resource.

‘But I will sacrifice to you with a voice of praise; I will fulfil my vow. Salvation comes from the Lord’ (2:10).

Here, the faithful remnant returns to the worship that the nations had practised in the days of their unfaithfulness. This worship is now rendered by Christians; however, in the proph-

etic future, the nations will offer sacrifices to the Lord, the God of Israel, under the reign of the Messiah, and will go up to Jerusalem to worship Him, together with His people (Ps. 116:14, 15; 22:25). There will then be, for Israel as well as for the nations (1:16), ‘vows’, the service of the Lord, free and unrestricted, of a ‘people of willing hearts’ (Ps. 56:12; 61:8; 66:13; 76:11; Lev. 8:16; Deut. 23:21).

The final words of this prophetic prayer are: ‘Deliverance comes from the Lord’. It is here; He alone has brought it about; it is solely the fruit of His grace (Isa. 38:20; 52:10). In the last days, Israel will discover this great truth which today is the joy and security of all believers, and upon which their assurance is founded for ever. How will this deliverance come about? That is what we shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Christ

The person of Jonah represents Christ in two different aspects, the first of which—the death and resurrection of Christ to accomplish the work of Redemption—is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

In Matt. 12, the scribes and Pharisees, who had just accused the Lord of casting out ‘demons only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons’ (v. 24), ask him for ‘a sign from him’ (v. 38), a miracle that might prove his authority in their eyes! To ask Jesus what would prove his worth, when his whole life and the miracles of goodness he performed at every turn proclaimed that he was Emmanuel, God with us! Could this wicked and adulterous generation still be convinced by a sign? So the Lord replied to them: No sign will be given to you, ‘except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’ (vv. 39, 40). A marvellous type, given in the person of Jonah, of the

sufferings of Christ, nearly 900 years before his coming! Indeed, his sufferings and death are the primary subject of the prophecy.

But Christ's stay in the tomb was also a sign that it was now too late for the people; that there was no longer any possibility for them to receive the Prophet, the Sent One, the Son of Man, the Son of God, as their King. From that moment on, all God's former relations with his people were severed and, to be restored, could only be based on his rejection, and no longer on his presentation to his people as Messiah and as King. Christ came to take, in love, the place of Israel, rejected because of its disobedience, so that the latter, by virtue of the atonement accomplished, might regain its place in the Kingdom. For us Christians, he took our place, as sinners, under judgement, so that the heavens might be opened to us.

To these words, Jesus adds (v. 41): 'The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, there is more here than Jonah.' The nations, so despised by the Jews,

were far less guilty than this people. Nineveh had repented without any sign, and through the simple preaching of a prophet of judgement; — had Jerusalem repented at the preaching of one greater than Jonah, who was not only the Prophet of grace, obedient to the will of God, but the Son of God? Thus these men of the nations will, on the day of judgement, be the damning witnesses to the just condemnation of Israel, which rejected God in the person of Christ who came in grace.

In Luke 11:29–32, the teaching is somewhat different. After saying, in v. 29, that no sign would be given to this wicked generation other than that of Jonah, Jesus adds: ‘For as Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation’ (v. 30). He likens this guilty Jewish generation to the people of Nineveh, a pagan people.

Jonah, who died and was raised as a type, was not only a preacher but a sign to the Ninevites, a sign that gave him credibility in their eyes. Indeed, this passage is not about his preaching, but about the person of Jonah. A Christ who died and rose again, now received among the nations as Saviour,

and of whom Jonah is the type, henceforth condemns Israel. This people was guilty of his death, and, by raising him from the dead, God declared his full satisfaction with the work of his Beloved, whom Israel had rejected, which condemned them without remission. The Lord adds: ‘The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, there is more here than Jonah’ (v. 32). Indeed, the Ninevites had repented without a sign, whilst the Jews demanded one. Jonah’s preaching had led them to repentance; his word had produced this result. What had these Jews done with Christ’s preaching? And yet, what a difference between these two testimonies! Jonah came to announce the judgement and destruction of Nineveh; Christ came to announce grace to his guilty people. What, then, was the hardness of Israel’s heart that it rejected such a message?

Such is the type of Jonah in the New Testament: Jonah rejected, Jonah spending three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, Jonah raised from the dead: this is Christ, and as such, he is presented today as the Saviour of all mankind.

The book of Jonah shows us, moreover, more than any other, that prophecy cannot be interpreted by the fulfilment of historical events—one of the many errors of modern theology—but that Christ is its ultimate goal and the only solution.

Christ is presented to us in this book from a second perspective. Jonah serves as a type of Christ, himself enduring God's wrath in His governance and being delivered from it, so that the faithful of the end times (the remnant of Israel), as they pass through the great tribulation, may find the encouragement and consolation they will need to endure it themselves. This important truth is summarised in a passage from Isaiah: 'He became their Saviour. In all their distress, he was distressed, and the Angel of his presence saved them' (Isa. 63:8). Thus the remnant of Judah, guilty of rejecting the Messiah, passing, by virtue of this sin, through the furnace and distress, and finding itself rejected, according to Matt. 16:4, will find, when engulfed in the deep waters, that another, his Saviour and his Redeemer, had been there before him and for him, and had been delivered from them. What assurance such a discovery will give to his soul! Indeed, in the scene at Gethsemane, he was

able to say: ‘In the day of my distress, incline thine ear unto me’; and: ‘I have mingled my drink with tears, because of thy indignation and thy wrath; for thou hast lifted me up high, and cast me down’ (Ps. 102:2, 9, 10). He himself also said: ‘The waters have come up to my very soul’ (Ps. 69:1). He himself, in the days of his flesh, offered ‘with loud cries and tears, prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save him from death’, and was heard because of his godliness (Heb. 5:7). We see in these passages, and in many others, Christ in Gethsemane, passing through the day of ‘distress’ (Ps. 102:2), and the anguish of the judgement deserved by his people; sympathising with them, realising in his soul what God’s wrath against guilty Israel is like. It is by considering this that the faithful of the Remnant of the end times will be encouraged in their piety, in their trust in God, in the assurance of their final deliverance, and that they will be able to say: ‘How long?’ certain that one day they will be heard. They will come to know Christ in the depths of the waters, sharing in their distress, yet they will know that He has risen from the great abyss, so that they may regain the blessing upon ‘the land of the living’.

This deliverance which we, as Christians, possess today has opened heaven to us; that of Israel, in the last days, will open to them the renewed earth under the reign of the King of Peace, so that this people may say, with the same certainty as we do today: ‘Deliverance comes from the Lord!’

CHAPTER 7

God

God reveals Himself in the book of Jonah in two ways. Whilst He sends the storm as a judgement upon His unfaithful prophet and upon the nations, He has a purpose of grace towards the latter. Until then, they had been completely indifferent and without knowledge of the true God, but He brings the sailors to the brink of death to make them cry out to the Lord (1:14; Ps. 107:23–32). Then He reveals Himself to them as the Saviour God who sacrifices His prophet on their behalf. The servant of God must be delivered over to death so that souls, alien to God, may come to know Him and be led to serve Him. But God is also a Saviour God for His people. He cannot tolerate disobedi-

ence and must punish transgressions, for He cannot abandon His justice and holiness; yet the belly of the fish that swallowed Jonah harbours, so to speak, another Jonah—obedient and faithful—who suffers without cause but is raised up, so that, for Israel, ‘deliverance comes from the Lord’.

The second attribute of God, revealed in this book, is: ‘One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all’ (Eph. 4:6). He is the Creator and Sustainer of all mankind and of all animal creation. He directs the elements, the winds and the sea as He pleases; He prepares a great fish, a kikajon, a worm, an east wind, to accomplish His purposes. His Providence watches over all; his universal goodness is everywhere. This ‘God of heaven, who made the sea and the earth’ (1:9), the nations will worship him in the end, when they recognise the ‘Father of all’ in the God who, ‘without partiality, judges according to each one’s work’ (1 Peter 1:17). God’s love for all His creatures is universal, and people today are quite willing to acknowledge this, provided it does not require them to repent. Such was not the case with Nineveh: when these people of the nations learnt that the God of patience and long-suffering was

going to judge them because they had offended Him, they were moved to repentance. God did not reveal Himself to Nineveh as the Lord, the God of Israel, but as God, Elohim, the Creator (3:5, 8, 9, 10). This city, whose wickedness had risen before God and which bowed down before its idols, repented. A fast was proclaimed, and it was not the Saviour God, but the Creator God who took it into account and spared Nineveh for a time.

The conversion of the nations, in the last days, through the everlasting Gospel, will be no different. The angel who announces it will say aloud: ‘Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgement has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth and the sea and the springs of water’ (Rev. 14:7). The nations will repent and be spared for a thousand years, just as Nineveh was spared for two centuries.

This elementary truth—God’s universal love, the providence of the ‘Father of all’—Jonas had to learn. He knew the Lord, the God of Israel, as a merciful God under the law; he knew Him as a Saviour God who had delivered him, but his Jewish pride

could not admit that God’s heart was equally open to all His creatures. His selfishness led him to think that God’s care must be directed exclusively towards him alone. Let Jonah be spared, so be it; let the great city be destroyed, that was necessary to safeguard the prophet’s honour! Is it not true that our self-love often causes us to ignore the most basic truths concerning God’s character? Thus the final lesson of this book is intended for the prophet. God’s Providence provides a gourd to cast a shadow over Jonah’s head and ‘deliver him from his misery’. Full of joy, he relies on the protection offered by a plant, a lowly creature of God, instead of looking to the One who prepared it. God gives the plant as food to a worm which He has likewise prepared. Thus everything is linked together in the ways of Providence. The Creator thinks of everything: a plant, a worm, a Jonah (what humiliation for the prophet!), a great city with its entire population and its king, little children unable to distinguish between their right and left hands, the numerous livestock filling the stables. ‘Where, then, is your heart,’ says the Father of all to Jonah, ‘in comparison to mine? Your selfishness blinds you to who I am, and you grow angry.

Is it right for you to be angry? And have I been angry with you?’ Jonah’s heart is judged, or at least found guilty of selfishness and pride. The righteous Job had to go through a similar experience, but the Word reveals the outcome to us. When he met the Creator God, the Father of all, face to face, he said: ‘I loathe myself, and I repent in dust and ashes.’ Jonah, alas! met Him and said: ‘I am right to be so angry that I wish to die.’ Such is the final word of the prophet of Israel! The sailors sail happily and joyfully upon the calm sea; repentant Nineveh enjoys its deliverance; the gaze of the Father of all seeks out the most ignorant of his creatures to bless them; only one remains apart, he who is the keeper of God’s secrets, gloomy and angry, because, being preoccupied with himself, he is ignorant of the heart of his God!

But, as we have already said, this universal benevolence of the Father of all is never indifference to evil. This same Father ‘judges according to each one’s deeds’. He judges those who venture out to sea, trusting in the protection of their false gods; He judges His witnesses who, in a spirit of disobedience, turn away from Him; He judges a nation full of ‘wickedness and vi-

olence’; He spares no one in order to save all these people, and when the will of man—more obstinate in a saint than in the most wretched sinner—persists in opposing Him and contradicting Him, He, the Father of all, does not grow angry, but exercises patience, a patience of which we see neither the result nor the end in this story.

Thus, in this book—so unique among the prophetic writings—we have reviewed the entire history of mankind from beginning to end: the history of the fallen creature, yet endowed with new life; that of Israel’s rejection; that of grace extended to the nations; that of a remnant preserved in distress; that of the nations of the end receiving the Gospel of the kingdom; and, crowning it all, Christ giving himself up and rising from the dead, the Creator God in whom the nations shall hope, and the Saviour God of whom it is said to us: ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant... to bring back the remnant of Israel; I will also make you a light to the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth’ (Isa. 49:6).

