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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE BOOK OF JONAH

Part 6

“And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” (Jonah 3:1-4)

In what part of the world the great fish vomited up Jonah cannot be known with any certainty. Various suggestions have been made, but all are conjecture, for the Bible gives no indication whatsoever. But seeing that his ship had originally set out from Joppa (which was on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean) bound for Tarshish (at the extreme west of that ocean), it was somewhere between these two points that Jonah was cast overboard and swallowed by the fish. Then bearing in mind that only 72 hours were spent in its belly, it is unlikely to have swum any great distance. All that can be safely concluded is, that somewhere along the coast of one of those countries bordering the Mediterranean, Jonah was cast up. What is of special interest is the fact that, the very nearest point to landlocked Nineveh at which the prophet could have come ashore was still over 400 miles away. It is wrong to think of Bible characters being confined to their immediate locality – some are recorded as travelling hundreds or thousands of miles.

There are commentators who suggest that when Jonah was brought forth to dry land, he was not immediately commissioned of God the second time to go to Nineveh; and that rather, a time-lapse occurred, during which news of the storm and the prophet being cast overboard circulated, and Jonah had opportunity to tell of his amazing experiences. Again – this is conjecture. Taking the Scriptures as they are written and ignoring chapter divisions, the conclusion must be that as soon as Jonah

came out of the fish's belly and set foot on dry land, God re-commissioned him. There is no suggestion of a time-lag in the verses. The plain sense of Holy Scripture is that as soon as the prophet was ashore, he received his 'marching orders' again: "Jonah! Get your bearings, find out your exact location, and off you go to Nineveh to preach the message that I commanded thee!"

Having said this, it is quite reasonable to suppose that news of these tremendous happenings would have spread. The mariners would have reported details of the terrible storm in every port at which they called. "In all our sea-going experience, we have never seen the like", they would have said. "It was phenomenal – but we discovered that it was a judgment from the God of Heaven – for we had on board a Hebrew prophet, and he of all people was endeavouring to flee from his own God. He told us all this himself. We exerted all our powers to bring our vessel to land – we jettisoned cargo and did everything possible – but we were powerless. Then at the request of this runaway, we threw him overboard. We hesitated to do it, but it was the last resort. And the amazing thing was, as soon as he was gone – the tempest immediately ceased. We were sorry for the poor fellow. We prayed to his God that we should not be charged with shedding innocent blood – but there it was – we cast him overboard and he was drowned."

Upon hearing this report, there would doubtless have been some who would say: "that is a fantastic tale – but it cannot be true – for we have seen this fellow. What is more, he is now on a journey to Assyria!". Others would say, "ah – but we know the full story. Yes, he did flee from his God; he did board a ship to Tarshish; God did send a great storm and the sailors did indeed cast him overboard – their report is quite true. But what they do not know is that he never drowned! God prepared a great fish that swallowed him up – and incredible as it might seem, kept him alive in the belly of a fish for three days and three nights. The fish delivered him safe to land – whereupon his God recommissioned him. This time he was obedient, and at this very moment is on the long trek

into Assyria.” There can be no doubt but that this amazing account became widespread, and long before Jonah arrived at Nineveh, the news likely preceded him there.

“*So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey*” (v. 3). Some preachers talk of Jonah having a three-day journey from the seashore where he landed, to Nineveh. They clearly have never consulted an atlas, for had they done so, they would have discovered its great distance from the Mediterranean seaboard. Those preachers who fail to adequately research and study are soon misleading their congregations by what they teach. This prophet of the Lord was on a tremendous journey. Whether he received any assistance en route, we are not told, but had he done so, it would only be by some beast of burden, not increasing his speed by any great degree. If any have imbibed the idea that Jonah was at Nineveh within three days, it should be quickly corrected, for three weeks would hardly suffice to complete such a journey on foot.

When the detail of verse three is considered, it will be noted that a full stop separates the sentences. How long it took for the prophet to reach his destination is not told, but his arrival would have been perfectly timed, in God’s purposes. The reference to ‘three days’ has to do with the vast Assyrian capital itself. “*Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city*” – this is the plain statement of Holy Writ – indeed, at this period of history one of the oldest, largest and most populous cities in the world. It owed its origins to that ‘mighty hunter’ of men and territory, namely Nimrod: “*And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city*” (Genesis 10:10-12). Nineveh was brought into existence by the descendants of Nimrod, that arch-perpetrator of heathen religion and idolatry. Such were its beginnings, and in the process of time it became the capital city of the Assyrian

Empire. Over the 1500 years between Nimrod's time and Jonah's, it had been so enlarged that it warrants the description 'exceeding great city'. Merrill Unger in his *Bible Dictionary* describes some of the libraries and palaces within the city. It had a water system incorporating an aqueduct, reputed to be the oldest in history. Sennacherib built a massive wall between 40 and 50 feet high along its two-and-a-half-mile frontage on the river Tigris. That same wall extended a further eight miles as a defence for the inner city area. Another compendium of Biblical history records the overall area of this Assyrian capital: the circumference of it measured some 60 miles. To walk around the outside of Nineveh would entail a walk of this distance, and one writer suggests this as an explanation of the description "*of three days' journey*", intending to convey its gigantic size. This could be true. But do not the Scriptures imply more positively, that three days was the time it took Jonah to cover all the streets and avenues of the city, in order that his message might penetrate into every quarter? More detail of this comes out in verse four.

But consider again God's word to His disobedient servant: "*And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee*" (vs. 1-2). 'The second time'. God could have allowed Jonah to drown in the storm. It would have been nothing for the Almighty to raise up another prophet to go to Nineveh, but no. This man had a mission; he was called of God to that office, and his responsibilities must be fulfilled – to what lengths God went in order to make him discharge his duty. What a lesson there is here! A Christian might be minded to shirk his responsibilities, and go his own way, throwing overboard that work which God has entrusted to him, in order to please himself and follow his own inclinations. Let such a one beware – for the God of Heaven can bring phenomenal happenings into the lives of men and women. He can bring the most devastating of experiences upon them, in order to bring them back to where they left off, and to resume their neglected responsibilities. That which they knew to be the right course in life, but

refused to walk in, they are faced up with again. Fellow Christian – do not ‘play fast and loose’ with the charge of the Lord. Jonah tried it – and could more frightening consequences than his ever be imagined? After it all – what advantage had he gained by his wilful disobedience? None whatsoever.

“*And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time*” – the selfsame words were given to him as at the first. The plan of God never alters. Simply because the instructions given to Jonah the first time were not to his liking, God did not ‘tone it down’ somewhat the second time. No – the word as spoken by the Eternal God forever stands. *Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.*” What had he formerly been bidden to do? “*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it*” (Jonah 1:2). “*So Jonah arose, and went*” (Jonah 3:3) The first time, he arose and fled – this time, he arose and went. In obedience now to the Lord’s command, he made the necessary preparations for the long journey, and set out on his way to Nineveh “*according to the word of the Lord*”. What must he have been thinking through those arduous miles? The storm, and those dreadful days in the fish’s belly must often have crossed his mind. Now there was no hesitation: he must be obedient and cry against that great city.

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). As fascinating as the city may have appeared, Jonah knew he must not make this a sight-seeing tour, and merely do a little preaching as opportunity arose. He was not like those globe-trotting preachers of the present day. His was an urgent mission. Even as he began to enter in the city – whilst still in its outer suburbs maybe – he commenced to preach. This he did on the very first day as he approached and entered the capital. He cried aloud – with authority and great earnestness – “*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*”. So he marches on with the same message – up the high street, through the square, down fore-street, his voice still proclaiming the same words: “yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown”.

“Why don’t you vary it a bit, Jonah?” asks the critic of the present day. “Re-phrase your message a little; make it more interesting; be more pleasing!” To such appeals, Jonah would have taken no notice. His reply would have been: “this is the preaching which God has bidden me. I am declaring the word of the Lord.” The following day, his voice is heard in the residential areas; the grounds of the palaces; the avenues where the councillors and rich merchants lived; through the parks where men and women of leisure strolled. There was not a square yard of that exceeding great city that did not re-echo the trumpet-like voice of God’s prophet, crying “yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

It took him three full days of continuous marching and shouting to give the coverage that God required, and when the evening of the third day came, there was not a soul in Nineveh unaware of that message, brought by the servant of the Most High God. The complete and utter destruction of the great Assyrian capital was threatened. As with all the warnings of God’s word, it had not varied. It was terse. It was clear. It was uncomplicated. It demanded their attention. It left them without excuse. Here we leave the story. In the next article, God willing, the response of the people to this message of woe will be seen.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee”. He is sent as an ambassador; but such are his advertisements and instructions from his Lord, that he may not vary from them. His commission is not general, to take counsel arbitrarily ... he must be but as a channel, or conduit pipe, to convey that along to Nineveh, which he received from his Master ... It is a rule invariable, that in [the matter] of salvation, we look to God the oracle of wisdom and truth; not to our own inventions, or to confirm our doctrine from this or that of our own brain: but only if we have our warrant from the Old or the New Testament, then we may safely speak it.

George Abbott (1562 – 1633)

JONAH'S REPENTANCE

His deliverance and second commission are put as if all but simultaneous, and his obedience was swift and glad. Jonah did not venture to take for granted that the charge which he had shirked was still continued to him. If God commands to take the trumpet, and we refuse, we dare not assume that we shall still be honoured with the delivery of the message. The punishment of dumb lips is often dumbness. Opportunities of service, slothfully or faint-heartedly neglected, are often withdrawn. We can fancy how Jonah, brought back to the better mind which breathes in his psalm, longed to be honoured by the trust of preaching once more, and how rapturously his spirit would address itself to the task. Duties once unwelcome become sweet when we have passed through the experience of the misery that comes from neglecting them. It is God's mercy that gives us the opportunity of effacing past disobedience by new alacrity ...

The word rendered "*preach*" is instructive. It means 'to cry' and suggests the manner befitting those who bear God's message. They should sound it out loudly, plainly, urgently, with earnestness and marks of emotion in their voice. Languid whispers will not wake sleepers. Unless the messenger is manifestly in earnest, the message will fall flat. Not with bated breath, as if ashamed of it; nor with hesitation, as if not quite sure of it; nor with coldness, as if it were of little urgency – is God's Word to be pealed in men's ears. The preacher is a crier. The substance of his message, too, is set forth: "*the preaching which I bid thee*" – not his own imaginations, nor any fine things of his own spinning. Suppose Jonah had entertained the Ninevites with dissertations on the evidences of his prophetic authority, or submitted for their consideration a few thoughts tending to show the agreement of his message with their current opinions in religion, or an argument for the existence of a retributive Governor of the world, he would not have shaken the city. The less the Prophet shows himself, the stronger his influence. The more simply he

repeats the stern, plain, short message, the more likely it is to impress. God's Word, faithfully set forth, will prove itself. The preacher or teacher of this day has substantially the same charge as Jonah had; and the more he suppresses himself, and becomes but a voice through which God speaks, the better for himself, his hearers, and his work ...

Let us learn that there is an element of threatening in God's most merciful message, and that the appeal to terror and to the desire for self-preservation is part of the way to preach the Gospel. Plain warnings of coming evil may be spoken tenderly, and reveal love as truly as the most soothing words. The warning comes in time. Forty days of grace are granted. The gospel warns us in time enough for escape. It warns us because God loves; and they are as untrue messengers of His love as of His justice who slur over the declaration of His wrath."

Alexander Maclaren (1826 – 1910)

The sum of this whole prophecy and of every part therein, I have often told you, is, in variety of examples, **the mercy of God towards His poor creatures**. The bounds whereof, if any desire to learn how large they are, let him consider that in this present history it is exhibited both to Jews and Gentiles: an example of the former was Jonah, of the latter the mariners and the Ninevites; both to prophets and others of meaner and mechanical callings; both to prince, people, aged and infants, men and beasts; that not any man may think either himself, or his seed, or even the lowliest worm that moveth upon the earth, excluded therefrom. Paul in his First [Epistle] to Timothy chapter 1 glorieth in the 'mercy of Jesus Christ which He had shewed upon him to the ensample of such as should believe in time to come'. But here are four examples at once, and as it were four Gospels, preaching to every country and language, age and condition and sex, the hope of better things. Blessed be the Lord God, who hath written a whole 'book of remembrances', and filled it with arguments to so good a purpose.

John King (ca. 1559 – 1621)

LONG SHADOWS

4. Nationalism

This series of articles considers aspects of the Jewish religion, described in the Old Testament, which have been erroneously perpetuated in the New Testament church, and continue to cast a benighting shadow upon Christian doctrine and practice to the present time. Perhaps of all the themes that it is hoped to address in this series, the one now before us casts the blackest shade of all – because of the consequences it has had, and continues to have, not for the church only, but the entire world. It is a doctrinal error, the damage of which can be measured in hundreds of thousands of human lives. It is the subject of Jewish nationalism.

It might be asked, ‘how could the geo-political aspirations of one tiny foreign land have harmed worldwide Christendom?’ Incredible as it may seem, such is the case. In broad terms, its detrimental influences have been threefold, and could be described as:

1.) **Adoption.** The long-held desires of the Jewish people for nation-hood, independence, international recognition and prestige (with accompanying religious or prophetic justifications) have been adopted, and actively promoted, by a majority of Christians – particularly since the mid-nineteenth century.

2.) **Appropriation.** The imagined necessity of a biological connection to Israel has prompted certain groups and sects to claim descent from its former tribes. Hebrew ancestry has been appropriated by, or for, such diverse peoples as: the Mormons, African-Americans, Native Americans, Pashtuns, Scandinavians, the Japanese, French, and British.

3.) **Emulation.** On the understanding that the political arrangements of ancient Israel represented a Scriptural ideal, certain Christian groups have agitated for the implementation of similar standards in their own countries of origin, or attempted the establishment of ‘theocracies’.

Additionally, much confused thinking on the relationship of Church and State often arises through misapprehensions about the Old Testament order among the Jews.

We focus upon the first of point in these pages, and reserve the other matters until a future edition, in the Lord's will.

At the time of writing, the Middle East is once again embroiled in conflict and bloodshed. Twelve months of Israeli offensives and reprisals have caused over 50,000 fatalities and the creation of some two million refugees (even by conservative estimates) with no signs of abatement, but only escalation. Upon all which, the Christian press has been surprisingly muted – some modest handwringing over the scale of the human tragedy, some expressions of hope for resolution, some striking a conciliatory or even apologist tone. Those with a longer and more objective view of the situation, will perhaps be less surprised. The guilty and awkward silence of Christians concerning these matters over the decades is the product of false teaching. The name of this particular strain of error is 'Christian Zionism'. It largely created the Middle East problem in the first place, and continues to justify and perpetuate it to the present day.

It is important to understand the terms. 'Zionism' is an ideology that asserts the right of the Jewish people to a state, or homeland, in Palestine. It arose in its modern form in the late 19th Century, was instrumental in establishing the state of Israel in 1948, and became its national dogma. 'Christian Zionism', also called 'Restorationism' is essentially the maintenance of these same beliefs by Christians, often coupled with the notion that accomplishing Zionism's objectives is necessary to the fulfilment of prophecy, and the end of the world. This also gained popularity in the mid 1800s.

Taking a more Biblical view, what are the true origins of 'Zionism'? It would be easy to assume that Abraham was the primordial 'Zionist'

(although the term would be anachronistic), since to him were certain covenants made, as: “*I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land [Canaan] to inherit it*” (Genesis 15:7). But as has been previously demonstrated in these pages, the patriarchs were much more spiritually minded. Though arriving in the ‘promised land’, Abraham and two succeeding generations continued to dwell there in tabernacles, regarding it as a ‘strange country’, and looking towards a spiritual, heavenly and eternal fulfilment of God’s word (cf Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16). Political Zionists they most certainly were not.

Moving forward in time another two centuries finds the descendants of Jacob as a race of slaves in Egypt. From the rigors of enforced servitude they cried and sighed, but only it seems, “*by reason of the bondage*”, and without any aspirations for relocation to another land. It was God who recalled the covenant, and not they (cf Exodus 2:23-25). It was God who bestowed upon them a Law, effectively constituting them a nation at Sinai – but the people themselves showed little appetite for it, “*which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more*” (Hebrews 12:19). These were hardly Zionists, either.

And thus the people were brought ultimately to Canaan, and began under Joshua the occupation of it. But to these matters also, they seemed disinclined. The Book of Judges commences with a list of failures, compromises and concessions with the inhabitants of the land (ch 1:19-36), prompting a Divine rebuke – which though it moved them to tears, produced little other effect (cf Judges 2:1-15). For the following 450 years, a cyclical pattern of sin, judgment, and temporary restoration under the governance of a God-appointed Judge, developed. But so frequent and various were the enemy invasions and occupations, that the people could scarcely call the land their own, and certainly not a ‘kingdom’.

If Zionism then – with its cravings for conventional state-hood, international recognition, and prestige amongst surrounding countries –

has its prototype anywhere, it is perhaps in 1 Samuel 8:4-5, “*Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and . . . said . . . now make us a king to judge us like all the nations*”. Contrary to the God-given pattern, the people aspired to be a kingdom, with a monarch as the head of state. And this, they were briefly granted, but not to their moral or spiritual benefit. Says the Lord: “*O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath*” (Hosea 13:9-11). The monarchy was relatively short-lived. Only three kings, Saul, David and Solomon, reigned over the whole land; a 120-year period that began and ended in wickedness. For the remaining three centuries after the civil war, Judah’s kings ruled a much-reduced territory, with no designs to reunify the country, or reclaim the north, either before or after the Assyrian invasion of Israel.

After 20 generations, the dynastic line of David was dethroned by the Babylonian conquest and exile, where for a brief time, it could be said, ‘Zionism’ gained some currency: “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy*” (Psalm 137:1-6). But this was all ‘too little, too late’. Indeed, within the space of 70 years, the Jews were so far assimilated into Babylonian culture, and so forgetful of their former condition, that only the likes of Daniel seemed conscious of the word of God upon the matter (cf Daniel 9:1-2). And when opportunity for return was granted, only a tiny remnant of the people showed any desire to go, and their faltering efforts at re-establishment were so weak, that it would be another 100 years before the city walls

of Jerusalem were repaired under Nehemiah. Meanwhile, a Jewish diaspora remained content to live throughout the Persian empire, as the Book of Esther reveals.

With the passage of time, the population of Israel grew, but the region remained under the control of the larger world powers: the Greeks, the Seleucids, and ultimately the Romans. During the four-century period which separates the two Testaments, nationalistic sentiments were fomenting among the Jews, and briefly found expression under the Maccabees. By the time of the Lord Jesus' life and ministry, they had reached fever pitch. The recorded conversations of the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and lawyers reflect their great preoccupation, whether in opposition to foreign taxation (cf Matthew 22:17), vocal patriotism (cf John 8:33), attempts at direct action (cf John 6:15), or revolutionary anticipation (cf Luke 17:20, 19:11). The disciples themselves – who should have known better – were not immune to the prevailing mindset, and their words frequently betray the same way of thinking (cf Mark 10:37, Matthew 18:1, Acts 1:6).

Against this constant Zionistic rhetoric the Lord Jesus was clear in His teaching, and consistent in His interpretation of prophecy. He responded to the Jews: *“Did ye never read in the scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes’? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”* (Matthew 21:42-43); He reminded His disciples: *“it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given”* (Matthew 13:11); and He plainly told Pilate: *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence”* (John 18:36). The New Testament epistles reflect the same fundamental truth, making clear that the ‘kingdom’, ‘nation’, and ‘people’ with which God is concerned are not earthly, but spiritual, and

comprise true believers (cf 1 Corinthians 15:50, Hebrews 12:28, 1 Peter 2:6-10, Romans 9:22-33).

The dramatic events of 70 AD, which resulted in the total destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, with the depopulation of the entire region, served to underline the doctrine of Scripture – so conclusively and definitively, that for generations, neither Jews nor Christians gave any thought or credence to ‘restoration’. As in the days of the Babylonian exile, the Jewish diaspora very quickly adopted the nations and mores of the countries to which they spread, and were soon integrated and subsumed – except perhaps in times of political upheaval, or economic crisis, when ethnic minorities become easy targets of blame. Amongst Christians meanwhile, some conflict of opinion is evident. Between the early Church Fathers, the Reformers of the 16th Century, the Puritans of the 17th, and the Post-millennial Evangelists of the 18th, some diversity of thought is seen. However, all were largely agreed upon the necessity of faith and salvation, and of preaching the gospel to the Jews, and their conversion – whatever else they may have taught about political nations or geographical location. An outright and unqualified resumption of Judaism was not envisaged.

However, a significant shift in Christian doctrine may be traced to the early 19th Century, when the theories of certain Jesuit priests, including the ‘Futurist’ system of prophetic interpretation, reached the British Isles. They were translated and popularised by the Scottish Presbyterian minister Edward Irving (1792 – 1834), and quickly spread to other denominations, including Brethrenism (through J. N. Derby) and the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England. With its heady mixture of pre-millennialism, dispensationalism, secret raptures, tribulations and importantly, the restoration of the Jewish nation (with its Temple and religion), it was soon widely accepted. Amongst those coming under its influence were American evangelists and preachers such as D. L. Moody and C. I. Scofield, exerting a disproportionate effect on Christian denominations in the United States; while in Britain, churchgoing

statesmen including Shaftesbury, Palmerston, Lloyd-George and Balfour were exposed to these new doctrines. Still, it might have remained nothing more than a curious religious theory, until a succession of conflicts in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries made control of Palestine an important military and tactical objective. The Ottoman Empire (to whom the land at that time belonged) fell during the First World War. The Balfour Declaration, issued in 1917, was both an attempt to cultivate Jewish support for the Allied cause, and an expression of those errors to which professedly Christian politicians had fallen prey. In the aftermath of that dreadful war, Britain assumed control of Palestine, and thus were set in motion events that would ultimately result in the creation of an independent state of Israel – which occurred in 1948.

The presumption and peril involved in such an act cannot be overstated – ‘forcing the hand of history’ in the attempted fulfilment of misinterpreted prophecy. The carnage that has resulted in the Middle East over the following seven decades is hardly to be wondered at. Imagine the chaos that would ensue if the history-books were ‘re-wound’ in any other nation of the world, and land-masses compulsorily reassigned to the peoples who occupied them two millennia ago? But such has been done in Israel.

In the romanticised view of many Christian Zionists, modern-day Jews are commonly regarded as the direct descendants of the patriarchs, pining through the centuries on account of their displacement from Judea, and yearning to return, the better to conduct that religion described in the Old Testament, including the services of the temple. The reality is very different. The passage of the years and amalgamation with nations of the world has effectively eradicated any demonstrable links to the genealogies of Scripture; whilst proselytization has created new religious Jews, with no biological connection whatsoever. The debate concerning definitions of ‘Jewishness’ rages on within the community itself, various factions making claims for matrilineal descent

versus patrilineal descent – and whether the qualifying criteria should be religious or ethnic, or both, or neither. A brief survey of those adopting the title in the present time serves to highlight the disparities. Indeed, it has been suggested that between one-quarter and one-half of persons identifying as ‘Jewish’, also claim to be atheists, while less than half are described as ‘practicing’, the others being ‘secular Jews’. Even the cause of Zionism is a relatively recent invention, coming to prominence only at the end of the 1800s, and originally much opposed by Jews themselves. Ironically, it was non-religious in its nature, intentionally promoting ethnic and geographic specifications for Jewishness, above those of faith or practice (which did not require relocation to Palestine). At about the same time, the Hebrew language, long since extinct except for its use in the Scriptures, was re-invented, and began to be re-introduced. The modern Zionist movement, with its attendant policies and synthesised vocabulary, is not the restoration of ancient Jewry. It is a thing scarcely 200 years old.

These facts are described, in order that discerning Christian readers might understand that the present-day situation in ‘Israel’ is **not** a long-overdue continuation of the Old Testament, nor the fulfilment of prophecy, nor a portent of the end of the world. It is in fact, a delusion, an artifice, a fabrication, founded upon false teaching, and a ‘wresting’ of the Scriptures. Misguided Christians of the 19th and 20th Centuries were in no small measure responsible for its creation – and the extent to which this is deserving of praise or blame, the record of history will testify.

Another sad consequence of Christian Zionism and its theology, is that it robs the Church of a large part of its Bible, and with it, much vital teaching, and innumerable precious promises. The nature of prophecy, the way of salvation, the work of Christ, and the doctrine of the last times, are all marred by the imposition of this false teaching; all plunged into darkness by this particularly ‘long shadow’.

R. J. Steward

JEWISH FABLES

“Not giving heed to Jewish fables” (Titus 1:14)

Jewish fables (literally, ‘myths’) are no new thing. Paul has plainly warned the household of faith not to give heed thereto. He has not given us a list of those grievous heresies; but it is well known that the one that was most fondly cherished, and that constituted the gravest menace to the truth of the gospel, was the notion that the leading purpose of the mission of the coming Messiah would be the reconstitution of the Jewish nation and its elevation to the highest pinnacle of earthly dominion and glory; for that fatuous doctrine was the cornerstone of orthodox Judaism in Paul’s day; and because of his sturdy opposition to it he was persecuted, his enemies plotted to take his life, and he was sent a prisoner to Rome. No wonder that, during the term of his imprisonment there, he wrote to Titus his plain-spoken warning against ‘Jewish fables’.

Such being the case, we question if there be anything in all the long history of Christianity that is more difficult to account for, than the fact that the particular fable concerning the purpose of Christ’s mission to the Jewish people has become the central feature of a system of doctrine which in this 20th century (sic) of our era has found numerous and zealous advocates amongst orthodox Christians. In view of this extraordinary phenomenon, it surely behoves those who take the Holy Scriptures for their guide and instructor in all matters of faith and doctrine to search them with the utmost care, ‘whether these things be so’ ...

Those who accept this [false] doctrine cannot realise what is involved in it. It is easy for the writer to [assert] this, because he himself at one time accepted that doctrine without the faintest idea that it involved the denial of important truth. But in course of time, after prolonged study of the word of God, he was compelled to acknowledge upon the testimony of the New Testament Scriptures (particularly that of the apostle Paul) that,

not only is the doctrine under consideration directly contrary to the Scriptures, but it is the setting up, for the benefit of a future generation of Jews, of **another hope**, different from the “*one hope*” of the gospel of Christ; that, in other words, it is “*another gospel*”, the very thing against which Paul utters that tremendously solemn warning of Galatians 1:8-9.

Because of this, and because also of the great benefits that have followed the writer’s deliverance from the ‘strange doctrine’ referred to above, he deems it a duty to all the household of faith to bring to their attention, by every available means, the true teaching of the Bible, touching the future of the Jewish people. It is with a view to the performance of that duty that these pages are written.

What then **is** the true and biblical ‘hope of Israel’? To obtain a full answer to this question, it is necessary that we search the Scriptures from beginning to end. But in order merely that we may have in mind a general idea of the answer . . . it will suffice to refer to a few incidents in Paul’s ministry, as recorded in the last chapters of Acts. The subject is very prominent there, and indeed it was because of Paul’s views and his preaching in regard thereto that he was so furiously persecuted by the Jews and was finally sent in chains to Rome. For we have his own testimony to the ‘chief of the Jews’ at Rome, to whom, when he had called them together, he said: “*For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you and to speak with you; because that for **the hope of Israel**, I am bound with this chain*” (Acts 28:17-20).

Inasmuch as what Paul had been preaching, both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles, was the gospel of Jesus Christ, and nothing else (cf 1 Corinthians 2:2), it follows that the true ‘hope of Israel’ is an essential part of that gospel; and therefore it is a matter regarding which we cannot afford to be mistaken.

The above quoted statement of Paul to the Jewish leaders at the imperial city is very illuminating. It shows, to begin with, that whatever it was he had been preaching as the ‘hope of Israel’ it was something **so**

contrary to the current Jewish notions thereof, that it caused the people to clamour for his death (cf Acts 22:22), and led to his being formally accused before the Roman governor as “*a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world*” (Acts 24:5). Had he been preaching what the Jews themselves believed to be, and what their rabbis had given them as, the true interpretation of the prophecies (namely that God’s promise to Israel was a kingdom of earthly character, which should have dominion over all the world) they would have heard him with intense satisfaction. But what Paul and all the apostles preached was, that which God had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures was, a kingdom over which Jesus Christ of the seed of David should reign in resurrection [power], a kingdom, which flesh and blood **cannot inherit**, a kingdom which does **not** clash with the duly constituted governments of this world, and one into which Gentiles are called **upon terms of perfect equality** with Jews (cf Acts 13:23, 34; Acts 17:2, 3, 7; Romans 1:1-4, 14:17; 1 Corinthians 15:50; 1 Peter 1:12; Luke 24:26).

Thus the teaching of Christ and His apostles in respect to the vitally important subject of the Kingdom of God, the hope of Israel, came into violent collision with that of the leaders of Israel; and because of this, **He** was crucified and **they** were persecuted.

It was not a question then, any more than it is a question now, whether or not the prophets of Israel were the mouthpieces of God; for the Jewish rabbis, as well as Christ and His Apostles, held firmly to the full inspiration of ‘the scriptures of the prophets’. It was solely a question then, as it is solely a question now, as to how those prophecies are to be understood – a question of interpretation. The Jewish teachers understood the scriptures and still interpret them, in what is now (wrongly) called the ‘literal’ sense (i.e. that ‘Israel’ is an earthly people, ‘Zion’ an earthly locality, ‘Christ’ an earthly conqueror like David, etc.) but Paul declared, when speaking of Jesus Christ in one of their synagogues, that it was “because they knew Him not, **nor yet the**

voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him (Acts 13:27).

And now, in concluding... let me impress it upon the reader's mind that the choice presented to orthodox Christians today as to the interpretation of the prophecies concerning 'the hope of Israel' lies between that held by the Jews of those days, and that for which Christ was crucified, and Paul was sent in chains to Rome.

from *The Hope of Israel*,
Philip Mauro (1859 – 1952)

“The Christian Church being then the legitimate and proper continuation of Israel, to it must belong most of the promises which, superficially examined, are supposed to furnish a pledge of the future salvation of the Jews. They have already found their fulfilment in the victorious career pursued by the Church through all past centuries, in its irrepressible tendency to spread out to the very ends of the earth, in the spirit of reformation by which it is swayed, and in the light which arises to it ever afresh out of the darkness. In a word, these promises are being every day fulfilled before our eyes. It is a sad denial of the grace vouchsafed by God to His Church, to refer the glorious promises of Scripture almost exclusively to the future, not to be able to follow out the hidden traces of divine blessing both in the past and the present, to fail to discern in the Church the true Israel, and in its place to dress up an Israel of the fancy out of the Jews; to speak slightly of the Church, and contrast with it that kingdom of God which is [supposed] to come when the Jews are converted. This is one of the many subjective aberrations of the present day, which must vanish as soon as the Church has been awakened to a sounder estimate of its position and privileges. Indeed, one might prophecy the downfall of these opinions from the circumstance of their late origin: they have against them the consentient voice of all the various sections of the entire Christian Church.”

E. W. Hengstenberg (1802 – 1869)

EDITORIAL

In this ‘relativistic’ age in which we live, nothing, it seems, can be absolute any more – and everything is become merely a matter of personal opinion or interpretation. The latest victim of this mindset is **reality** itself – as society at large, and influential figures in particular, expect us to accept today that ‘evil is good’, or ‘male is female’ or ‘black is white’, or ‘lies are truth’ – or to accept the opposite of those statements, tomorrow. Rarely has there been a time, when the words of Scripture in Isaiah 5:20-23 have been so entirely fulfilled.

Increasingly one hears the word ‘truth’ prefaced with personal pronouns, as in: “you need to live **your** truth”, or “that’s **my** truth” – as though truth were a thing entirely subjective, and that there could be as many ‘truths’ as there are people to create them, all equally valid in their own right. This is, of course, a complete contradiction of the word’s meaning. If the details of a crime come before a court of law, there is a true description to be had – the events as they actually occurred. Some witnesses may state partial truth; some give their interpretation or opinion of the truth; and an almost infinite number of false accounts could be invented – but only one truth exists. Opposite statements cannot simultaneously be true. Truth is exclusive of all other pretenders to the title.

John the Baptist expresses it thus: “**God is true**” (John 3:33). That being declared, it is evident that only one pronoun can ever rightfully precede the word “truth”, namely: **His** truth. This is the only ‘truth’ that matters. And, mercifully, God has promised to remember **His truth**, and to send it forth; it is according to **His truth** that He will judge the earth, and its inhabitants; in Him His people may implicitly trust, and prove **His truth** to be their shield and buckler; “*For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations*” (Psalm 98:3, 57:3, 96:13, 91:4, 100:5).