

— The Amazing Pregnancy of the Woman of Revelation 12 —

In the last *News*, we saw that the radiant woman of Revelation 12:1 is the church. Now we note that the (Old Testament) church was pregnant, pregnant with the Messiah (5): “she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered” (2).

Thus the church not only rejoices that the “Wonderful Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” is “a child [that] is born” and “a son [that] is given” “unto us” (Isa. 9:6); she also marvels at the truth that He was born *out of her*.

What an amazing 4,000-year pregnancy! The church was pregnant with her seed, Christ, right from the very day of the fall in the Garden of Eden, according to Jehovah’s mother promise: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Who ever heard of such a long pregnancy? This is what the Old Testament days were: a gestation period of four millennia, not just nine months!

For these 4,000 years, the believing church was *conscious* that Christ was coming through her, as a pregnant woman knows that she is with child, especially as her due date approaches. As we saw above, Eve was told that her seed would crush Satan’s head. Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day and was glad (John 8:56). Jacob and his sons looked forward to the coming of Shiloh (Gen. 49:10). A great prophet like Moses was in Israel’s womb (Deut. 18:15-19). The Messiah was to be the son of David (II Sam. 7:12-14). The prophets taught that the church would bring forth the Branch (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). He would even be Immanuel, God with us (Isa. 7:14)!

The Old Testament church’s consciousness that she was pregnant with the Messiah included her experiencing, for some four millennia, the *pain and struggle* of bearing Him, yearning for His birth and bringing Him forth. She longed for God to show His face and glory—in the incarnation of His only begotten Son. Out of the deep sense of her sin and misery, she struggled in prayer for forgiveness and righteousness—in the coming Christ and His cross. She sought for strength to fight against iniquity and for deliverance from her enemies—in the Messiah who would slay Satan and sin. She prayed for the extension and growth of God’s people, including the conversion of the Gentiles—through Christ who builds His church and saves His elect out of all nations. She desired the coming of God’s kingdom and the realization of His covenant—in the advent of the King of kings and “the messenger of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1).

“O Lord, hasten the coming of Thy Son, and bring His birth and our deliverance, for our labour pains are hard!” Such was, in essence, the prayer and hope of the woman, the church, in the Old Testament.

As members of the New Testament church, we cannot and do not groan in pain for Christ’s *first* coming, since that has already happened. But we ought and can and do pray earnestly for His *second* advent: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). In this, we join with the creation itself which groans and travails, suffering birth pangs, for Christ’s return and His renewal of the entire universe (Rom. 8:19-23)! *Rev. Stewart*

Covenant Reformed News

September 2020 • Volume XVIII, Issue 5

Universal Grace in Jonah?

A reader has asked about the meaning of three texts, two of them from the book of Jonah, which some use in support of a universal divine grace.

(1) First, he mentions Jonah 2:8 which some claim teaches a well-meant offer of the gospel. Jonah 2:8 reads in the Authorized Version, “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.”

I was sent nearly 35 translations of the verse, most of which are different from each other. Apparently, translators cannot agree on what is the proper translation and some, such as the NIV, clearly support the idea of a well-meant offer (WMO) of salvation to all men.

I have discussed the issue of this heresy of the WMO over and over again in the *News*, but it keeps coming up because many in Reformed and Presbyterian and other circles are determined to introduce into the Reformed faith this heresy which is a crucial component in Arminianism.

Let me give a brief summary of the teachings of the well-meant offer. The WMO presents the preaching of the gospel as an expression of God’s love for all men absolutely and His passionate desire to save everybody. It is up to man either to accept this love of God and believe in Christ or to reject it.

Implicit is the heretical doctrine of universal atonement, that Christ died for every man head for head. This is necessary because God cannot desire the salvation of all men unless it is available to them and all of salvation comes only from the cross. I cannot offer to give a man £10,000 if I do not have it, without making a mockery of my offer.

Further, along with the preaching of a universal love of God comes His grace to all men head for head. God’s grace is shown in His love, for grace to sinners is unmerited favour and God’s favour includes love. But that grace in giving all men a chance to be saved is also a grace bestowed on all men that enables them to accept the proffered salvation. Jonah 2:8 is appealed to as proof for God’s universal love.

I must make a few remarks about Jonah in general. First of all, Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh to preach repentance to this arch-enemy of Israel, which was poised to destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel where Jonah lived.

Second, Jonah did not flee the land of Canaan because he was scared to go to that godless city. Jonah was no coward; after all, he was asleep and unafraid in a boat that was being tossed around by a storm that terrified seasoned sailors. He fled Canaan because ordinarily only in that land did God speak to His people. Jonah thought that, if he could get out of Canaan, God could not send him to Nineveh.

Third, he had to go to Nineveh because God would save one generation among the worst of all the uncircumcised heathen because their salvation was prophetic of a coming day in which the gospel would be sent to the four corners of the earth to save a catholic or universal church. However, though God did not ordinarily speak to people outside Canaan in the Old Testament era, He could also speak through raging storms and huge fish. Apparently, Jonah forgot that.

Fourth, when Jonah was in the belly of the fish, his prayer was almost entirely quotations from the Psalms.

Finally, Jesus Himself tells us that Jonah's three-day stay in the fish's belly was a type of His burial and resurrection (Matt. 12:40); that is, the Gentiles, such as the Ninevites, could be saved only through Christ's being raised from the dead on the third day. But our Lord's mighty work was atonement for both Jews and Gentiles, markedly different from God's saving work in the old dispensation, which was largely with the nation of Israel.

It is in this general context that Jonah 2:8 must be understood—not as proponents of the WMO, who grab texts out of their context and sing, “Hallelujah, we have found a proof text for our heresy.”

On the surface of the matter, I wonder why WMO advocates have to interpret the phrase “their own mercy” in Jonah 2:8 as being *God's* mercy. If we take the translation of the AV/KJV as correct—as it probably is—it speaks of the mercy demonstrated by the wicked, not by God. So why make it proof for the WMO?

You may argue that the wicked exercise no mercy and that there is only that mercy which God gives to or shows human beings, but that is not true. Proverbs 12:10 states that “the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” They surely display a “mercy” which is a kindness shown to the underprivileged or others in distress. Many philanthropic organizations manifest a certain concern for others. James even speaks of a wisdom that the wicked have but calls it “earthy, sensual, devilish” (3:15).

Jonah, inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus speaking the word of Christ in the great fish's belly, in his prayer to God in which he cites many different passages from the Psalms, expresses the truth that the wicked who worship idols do indeed perform their acts of mercy (as shown to Jonah by the sailors, for example). However, their acts of worship are idolatry. It is probable that Jonah implied the petition that God please show mercy to him.

There is in the world among the wicked a development of sin. The philosophy of common grace does not improve men and make them better than they would be without it; sin reaps the harvest of more and more terrible sin. More importantly, in the context in Jonah, God will save Gentiles too, although that must wait for its full realization when Christ comes. The unbelieving Jews and the wicked among the Gentiles, who reject the gospel and disobey the command to believe, develop in sin until they become ripe for judgment. Remember a command is not an offer.

The same reader continues, “The Lord has pleasure in the penitence, the sorrow and the conversion of the ungodly, even if these are temporal and absolutely without any signs

of genuine repentance.” The texts appealed to are Jonah 3:5-10 and I Kings 21:27-29.

(2) Now we move from Jonah 2 to Jonah 3. The questioner's interpretation of Nineveh's repentance at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:5-6) is wrong. It was a *genuine* repentance, as our Lord Jesus makes clear (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32). God saved the Ninevites as a prophecy of the salvation of the Gentiles in the New Testament age.

It is striking that only one generation was saved, for Nineveh returned to its idolatry. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, which later brought the Northern Kingdom into captivity. One can find the subsequent judgment on Nineveh in the book of Nahum. But before all this, Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah. That generation of Ninevites will rise up in judgment against the people of Israel who did not repent, even though the incarnate Son of God, one far greater than Jonah, preached to them (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32).

I am aware of the fact that not all commentators believe that Nineveh's repentance was genuine but these words of Christ cannot be explained in any other way than that Nineveh truly repented.

(3) Concerning I Kings 21:27-29, it is clear that Ahab's penitence was not the true repentance of a heart-broken sorrow for sin but was “the sorrow of the world” (II Cor. 7:10). That wicked king of Israel merely regretted what he had done because the *consequences* of God's judgment upon him were frightening (21-24). Thus the next chapter speaks of Ahab's hatred of the godly prophet Micaiah, whom he kept imprisoned (I Kings 22:8, 26-27). Nor did God give him a “temporal” blessing; Ahab's “extra days” meant more sin and a worse punishment for him in hell.

A drunkard whose family is suffering the effects of his drunkenness may be sorry for it, go to Alcoholics Anonymous, learn to quit drinking and restore his home. He may even ask for forgiveness from his badly-treated family. If he remains sober, a normal functioning family life may be recovered but that has nothing to do with salvation.

Similar principles concerning Ahab's penitence are treated in a pamphlet written by Herman Hoeksema entitled, “The Curse-Reward of the Wicked Well-Doer,” which especially deals with Jehu. It is available to all on-line (<https://cprc.co.uk/pamphlets/cursereward>) and we will post it free to any in the UK who request it.

The lesson is that all who promote a WMO and a universal grace do wrong when they flit from one text here and another there and, without any thought of the context or the Reformation principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, loudly claim to have found proof for their heresy. That kind of exegesis does injustice to Holy Writ and tears it apart as God's revelation of Himself as the One who saves His elect people in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son.

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