

attributes. Second, the prophet is referring to God's people, this time (elect) Gentiles. Third, Jonah knew God's self-revelation at Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:6-7) and Kadesh-barnea (Num. 14:17-18), and so understood that, since Jehovah had sent him to preach to Nineveh, God had His people there to whom He would show Himself longsuffering, gracious, merciful and kind.

This is the reason why Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh in the first place. He did not want to see the wicked Assyrians—Israel's enemies—saved. Especially was this the case because Jonah knew, given the wickedness of the N. Kingdom, that God, in turning to the Gentiles, would turn away from the Jewish people whom the prophet loved.

Our third and final passage in the minor prophets is from the vision of Nahum: "The LORD is *slow to anger*, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet" (1:3).

Like the two verses from the Pentateuch (Ex. 34:6-7; Num. 14:17-18), Nahum first mentions God's "positive" perfection in saving His people ("The LORD is slow to anger") and then His "negative" attributes ("The LORD is ... great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked") in His mighty punishment of the impenitent wicked, as the One who "hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm."

Though Nahum 1 mostly concerns the judgment of the Most High upon Assyria, verse 3a ("The LORD is slow to anger") is not the only bright note for His elect people in the chapter. We read that "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (7). We hear the gospel in Nahum 1: "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off" (15).

Moving from the above three passages in the twelve minor prophets, we come finally to the only reference to God's longsuffering in the four major prophets, Jeremiah 15:15: "O Lord, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy *longsuffering*: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke."

Here only one divine attribute is mentioned: God's longsuffering. In this text, it is not towards Israel as a nation, for the elect's sake. Instead of being exercised towards a corporate body, God is longsuffering to an individual believer: Jeremiah himself. The prophet's prayer is this: "Do not, O Lord, in Thy longsuffering over me, allow my persecutors to destroy me." God is not longsuffering towards the wicked who afflict Jeremiah for he asks the Lord, "revenge me of my persecutors." *Rev. Stewart*

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God's Longsuffering in the Psalms and Prophets

In the last issue of the *News*, we considered God's longsuffering (or His being slow to anger) in the Old Testament historical books: Exodus 34:6-7, Numbers 14:17-18 and Nehemiah 9:17.

We turn now to three references in the Psalms: "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, *longsuffering*, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (86:15); "The LORD is merciful and gracious, *slow to anger*, and plenteous in mercy" (103:8); "The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; *slow to anger*, and of great mercy" (145:8).

These three texts have at least four things in common. First, they were all inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by David, according to their headings, as the fruit of his meditation upon God's law, especially Exodus 34:6-7 and Numbers 14:17-18. Second, only God's "positive" attributes are mentioned in all three verses: His compassion, grace, mercy and truth are spoken of in connection with His longsuffering. Third, all three are references to Jehovah's longsuffering to His beloved people (including us). Fourth, all three references to God's longsuffering in the Psalms are found in songs of praise. There is a lesson here for us too!

Moving to the twelve minor prophets, we come first to Joel 2:13: "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, *slow to anger*, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

Again, we notice, first, that only God's "positive" perfections are here mentioned: His grace, mercy and kindness are spoken of in connection with His longsuffering or being slow to anger. Second, like the three passages from the Old Testament historical books (Ex. 34:6-7; Num. 14:17-18; Neh. 9:17) and the three verses from the Psalms quoted in the second paragraph, Joel 2:13 is addressed to God's people, Israel. Third, this text is a call to repentance in which the prophet appeals to part of God's earlier self-revelation to strengthen his exhortation. For us too, God's longsuffering, both in Himself and to us, is an encouragement to confess our sins from our hearts.

The next minor prophet to refer to God's longsuffering is Jonah: "And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, *slow to anger*, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (4:2).

A pattern is emerging! First, along with God's longsuffering or being slow to anger, we read here of His grace, mercy and kindness. Again, they are all "positive" divine

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The Theodicy and “Like a Dove”

1) The first of the two questions in this issue of the *News* was prompted by my three recent articles on the theodicy, God’s public justification of all His actions, especially His just wrath against the wicked in sending them to hell and His great grace in taking His elect to heaven, though they are sinners. A reader asks, “Will you please show us in Scripture where it says that all our iniquities will be publicly revealed?”

The simple and short answer is Romans 14:10-12 and II Corinthians 5:10. According to these texts, “every one” will “appear,” “stand” and “bow” before Christ’s “judgment seat,” including believers (“we”). Each human being will “give account of himself [or herself] to God,” concerning all “the things done in his [or her] body,” “whether it be good or bad.” Thus the believer’s sins are included.

God’s people from the early days of the Reformation believed this to be true and Reformed people have taught it through the ages till the present. The *Belgic Confession* (1561), only a few more than forty years after Luther began the Reformation, states that at the coming of Christ “the books (that is to say, the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest; and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all” (37).

First, it must be shown that God alone is the author of salvation and that the vast difference between those in heaven and those in hell is due to nothing but His electing grace. God accomplishes this by showing that eternity in hell for the wicked displays His fury against man’s sin. And God will publicly show His wrath against sin so that His infinite holiness is shown to all. Those who deny hell lose God’s holiness that demands punishment of sin.

Second, the Arminian will not be able to brag in heaven that he is there because he accepted Christ. If he could do that, the Arminian would take away from God His glory. The Arminian will show (if he could) his notebook full of all his good works and point out to everyone willing to look that he earned salvation and helped God along in the work of saving him. Then God does not receive all the glory that is due His name for He must share it with man (Eph. 2:8-9).

Finally, a light can be seen only in the darkness. Turn on the world’s most powerful light in the dazzling brightness of noon and one sees no light. Turn on a small torch in pitch darkness and the light is visible to all. The dazzling light of God’s grace, mercy and love can be, and will be, seen against the background of our dreadful sinfulness and the darkness of evil into which we plunged ourselves. It will be the brilliant light of God’s grace against the dark background of our terrible sin. That light will be seen by us and the entire world, because our sins will also be revealed and the great power of grace will be shown to have saved us from the pit of hell. God’s grace will be magnified. That is also the idea of the antithesis. It is more important that God be glorified than

that our sins be hid in the judgment day.

2) A reader asks about a possible revision of *Belgic Confession* 9: “For when our Lord was baptized in Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard, saying, *This is My beloved Son*; the Son was seen in the water; and the Holy Ghost appeared in the shape of a dove.” The reader proposes to make this more in harmony with Scripture, with the last part reading, “The Holy Spirit appeared in a bodily shape like a dove.”

Before I answer this question, I want to go on record as being strongly opposed to any changes in the confessions of the Reformed churches, unless they are clearly shown to be contrary to Scripture and concern an important change in doctrine.

If changes in the confessions are allowed, even minor and insignificant changes, there are many within Reformed churches who would pounce on the opportunity and, with smooth words, propose major changes in doctrines with which they do not agree.

This change, suggested by the questioner, seems to me to be a minor change.

The reader’s argument is as follows. “Like a dove” is not the same as the expression “as a dove” or, its equivalent, “in the shape of a dove.” “Nowhere in Scripture has the Godhead revealed Himself in the form of an animal—this actually is a pagan thought,” the reader adds. Luke writes, “And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him” (3:22). The questioner is asking, therefore, if it would not be better to use the language found in Luke.

I have not been able to ascertain the difference between “as” and “like.” Both words introduce a comparison. “As” introduces a simile or a comparison between two things, usually one thing from the creation and another thing that belongs to the spiritual world. “Like” often introduces a metaphor. Similes and metaphors are very much alike: a metaphor is an extended simile, such as in Christ’s parables. Matthew, in speaking of this event, uses a Greek word that literally means “as if.”

I do not entirely agree with the statement: “The voice of the Father was heard ... The Son was seen in the water and the Holy Spirit appeared in a bodily shape like a dove.” In this remarkable incident in the life of our Lord, the Triune God (not the First Person of the Trinity) was speaking of His Son, the eternal God in our flesh, and publicly gave Him the Spirit to qualify and ordain Him for His work of accomplishing salvation for us. The voice of the Triune God, saying almost the same words, was heard twice more in our Lord’s ministry. Also, Christ was baptized with water that He might “fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). It indicated that He took our sins upon Himself so that He might earn for us everlasting righteousness. That the Spirit came upon Christ in a visible form was to demonstrate publicly that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed the Servant of Jehovah anointed to do His Father’s will, as Isaiah had prophesied. The dove was a symbol of peace of which Isaiah spoke (Isa. 54:13; 55:12).

It is interesting that in his marvellous book, *Noah’s Ark*, Rien Portvliet notes that the dove that left the ark and did not return was not seen again until the baptism of Christ.

Taking all these things together, a change our creeds is not necessary. Whatever words the narrative of the three gospels use, they mean the same thing. *Prof. Hanko*