

the alternation of light and darkness from the first day onwards (Gen. 1:3-5) which was regulated three days later (and since) by the sun and the moon (14-19).

The Bible's history of the worldwide flood (Gen. 6-9) emphasizes that God's covenant of grace embraces the creation (Gen. 6:18f.; 9:8-17; Isa. 54:9-10). Though the earth was totally covered with water and most animals were destroyed, yet Jehovah restored the dry land and saw to it that the representatives of the various creatures were preserved in Noah's ark to multiply and fill the earth on their release.

In the patriarchal age, Eliphaz the Temanite declared, "At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee" (Job 5:22-23). This "league" or "covenant" relationship with "the stones of the field" (23) would mean that the earth would produce crops for penitent Job without any "famine" (22). Likewise, there would be "peace" between him and the animals (23).

Hosea also speaks of God's covenant of grace with His people and the brute creation: "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground" (2:18; cf. 21-22). All this is integral to Jehovah's covenant marriage with His people (16, 19-20).

God's covenant with the creation is perfectly fulfilled in the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (Rev. 21:1), pictured in the last two chapters of the Bible (Rev. 21-22), after its purging with fire on the day of the Lord's return (II Pet. 3). Romans 8:18-25 speaks of the longing of both believers and the creation for this glorious renewal.

Of the Old Testament prophets, it is Isaiah who speaks of the "new heavens" and the "new earth" (65:17-25; 66:22), with a prophesy of this glorious new world (11:6-9) sandwiched between predictions of the coming of Jesus Christ the King (1-5) and His salvation of both Jews and Gentiles (10-16). The manifestation of the covenant Christ's headship over creation (e.g., Col. 1:15-17) is the eternal purpose of God: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him (Eph. 1:10).

Jehovah's pitying and sparing the "much cattle [or livestock]" of Nineveh (Jonah 4:11) must be understood within this scriptural framework. Some of the various types of livestock and even the vegetation type of the gourd (6-10)—whatever it may be—will be in the new heavens and the earth where the covenant God will tabernacle perfectly with redeemed mankind in Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:3).

God's covenant of grace in Jesus Christ embraces both believers and their (elect) children, out of both the Jews and the Gentiles, and even the brute creation—these are three lessons adumbrated in God's last words to Jonah in his book. *Rev. Stewart*

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The Lessons of Jonah's Gourd (4)

The lessons of Jonah's gourd (Jonah 4:10-11) point to three important biblical truths regarding Jehovah's glorious covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.

First, God's covenant is with believing *Jews and Gentiles*. This is a major theme throughout the book of Jonah, explaining why the prophet did not want to go to pagan Nineveh in the first place (he was afraid that God would convert them) and why he was very angry at their repentance (he saw God's turning to this heathen city as His turning away from Israel) (1-3).

Right from father Abram's call in Ur of the Chaldees, "all families of the earth" were to be "blessed" in him (Gen. 12:3). God explained His changing his name to "Abraham" as indicating that he would be "a father of many nations" (17:5; Rom. 4:16-18). In the New Testament age, the church has become catholic or universal, as the prophets had predicted in many places (e.g., Ps. 117; Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17; Mal. 1:11) and as the book of Jonah foreshadowed.

Second, God's covenant is with *believers and their children*. In Jonah 4:11, Jehovah could have simply said that there were, say, some 750,000 people in greater Nineveh. But He did not. Instead, the Lord stated that the city had over 120,000 infants: "more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand."

Clearly, there were some elect infants, who were the children of Ninevites converted through Jonah's preaching, whom God pitied. Therefore, the salvation of Nineveh must have been at least two generations. Even in this Gentile city, even in the Old Testament, even in a city which was to be destroyed some decades later (cf. Nahum), God's covenant was with believers and their seed!

In this regard, too, Jonah 4:11 is part of a strong current of biblical teaching. God's covenant was with Noah and his seed (Gen. 6:18; 9:8-9) through Abraham and his seed (17:7; 18:18-19), right from the Old into the New Testament age, as Christ taught and demonstrated (Mark 10:13-16) and as Peter preached on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:39). Since, according to apostolic Christianity, the children of even one believing parent are "holy" (I Cor. 7:14), whether they be ethnic Jews or Gentiles, we read in Scripture of the baptisms of Lydia, the Philippian jailor, Crispus, Stephanas *and their households* (Acts 16:14-15; 31-33; 18:8; I Cor. 1:14, 16).

Third, God's covenant is with the *creation*. Genesis 1-2 describes His creation of the beautiful, sinless universe in six days. Thousands of years later, Jeremiah speaks of the Lord's "covenant of the day" and "covenant of the night" (33:20; cf. 25), referring to

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Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy (1)

A brother from continental Europe writes, “In a recent conversation, I was told that, when Jesus comes back, He will arrive on the earth on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4) and come through the Golden Gate. I found it a really strange and false idea, but I couldn’t think of a good argument against it. (Personally, I reckon it’s senseless to talk about the *place* of Christ’s return as, first, it shall be seen from each point of the earth, and also the earth and heavens shall be destroyed, and, second, we cannot imagine that event and the Bible also uses only pictures for illustrating it.) If you have a brief answer, that would be nice for me.”

In my experience, discussions with premillennialists and premillennial dispensationalists are hampered by the fact that they use a different hermeneutic or method of Bible interpretation from the Reformed and that which has been historically used in the church. The result is that premills (using this word to describe both groups of premillennialists) and Reformed come to different conclusions with regard to the interpretation of prophetic texts.

These hermeneutical differences have primarily to do with the unity of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, and the unity of the church. Generally speaking, the difference is that the premills claim that the nation of Israel is not the church, but is the kingdom people. That kingdom people is a national people, a historical body of people who are given earthly prerogatives, earthly promises, an earthly inheritance in the land of Canaan and a special, though earthly, relationship to God. Christ is the king of an earthly kingdom and of the Jews only.

The nation of Israel lost its special status with God when the Jews crucified their king. The premills argue that a hiatus in God’s work resulted, in which the nation of Israel is temporarily set aside and another work of God is performed: the saving of the Gentiles. This work will be concluded in the future, when God will return to Israel, the racial Jews, and fulfill His earthly promises for them, according to the premills.

In order to maintain this utterly wrong opinion, premills insist that the Old Testament prophecies have to be taken literally and interpreted in an earthly way. This leads to the conclusion, as the questioner points out, that Christ will return to the literal Mount Olivet, for that is what the text says literally. Christ will then establish an earthly kingdom in Palestine with the Jews for one thousand years.

Premills are captivated and enthralled with the earthly Jews, and cannot seem to get it straight that God’s works are performed through Christ who establishes the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Himself reminds us that His kingdom “cometh not with observation” but is “within” us, that is, spiritual and heavenly (Luke 17:20-21).

The historic and Reformed view is simply this: 1) The church chosen by God eternally and redeemed through the blood of Christ is composed of all the elect in the old and new dispensations. Stephen calls the nation of Israel “the church” (Acts 7:38). 2) Because the Spirit of Christ was not yet poured out on the church in the old dispensa-

tion (John 7:37-39), God taught His people of the coming of Christ and the salvation of His church in pictures, for the church was in its childhood (Gal. 4:1-3).

Let me give a couple of biblical proofs that Old Testament prophecy concerning Israel is not to be interpreted literally—in the sense in which premills speak of literal.

First, Amos 9:11 reads, “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.” If this text in Amos is taken literally, as the premills insist it should be, then the temple or palace of Solomon will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. But Scripture interprets Scripture, and James at the Jerusalem synod says that prophecy is fulfilled in the gathering of the Gentiles, not in any building project (Acts 15:13-18)!

A second Old Testament prophecy which the premills insist on taking literally with respect to ethnic Jews is Hosea 2:23: “And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” This verse alludes to the names of the three children who were born to Hosea’s wife: Jezreel (God sows), Loruhamah (no mercy) and Loammi (not my people) (1:2-11).

The premills insistently claim that God deals with Israel as His kingdom people and with the Gentiles as the church. They reckon that the Old Testament is a book addressed to Jews, whereas the New Testament is primarily about the church. In their view, the Scriptures are not the infallibly inspired record of the revelation of God in Christ and in the church as Christ’s body. They are two books written for two different people. Thus, for premills, Hosea’s prophecy refers to God’s salvation of the Jews, bringing them to Palestine to a renewed form of the old kingdom of David and Solomon.

However, Paul says, “Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee [i.e., Hosea], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved which were not beloved” (Rom. 9:24-25). This inspired apostle of Christ declares that Hosea’s prophecy is not fulfilled in a restoration of the Jews but in the gathering of elect Jews and Gentiles—as does Peter (I Pet. 2:10)!

This error of the premills, by the way, is also the reason why most premills are baptistic, for they hold that, although God promised that He would be Abraham’s God and the God of Abraham’s seed, this promise is only for the ancient Jews. They say that circumcision as a sign and seal of this promise was administered to Jews only as a sign of salvation for Jews only—in the line of generations. Now, baptism is the sign given to the church. The church may not baptize the infant children of believers, Baptists argue, because God’s promise to save believers and their seed is an old dispensational promise. In the new dispensation, baptism is only to be given to those who make a credible confession of their faith in Christ, they claim.

This premill and Baptist position is tenaciously maintained, in spite of Paul’s words: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). But this is such an important point that it seems wise to devote another article in the *News* to it.

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