

Jonah Chapter 3

Jonah 3:1 "And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,"

"And the word of the Lord": The same oracle as that before given; and which, from what he had felt and seen of the justice and mercy of the Lord, he was now prepared to obey.

God has not removed the call for Jonah to go to Nineveh and carry them a message. Now that God has Jonah's attention, He speaks to Jonah again.

Jonah 3:2 "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee."

Gracious in giving Jonah a second chance, God again commissioned him to go to Nineveh. Jonah is the only prophet actually sent by God to preach repentance in a foreign land.

This is telling Jonah to get on with the ministry. He has already wasted time. He must go now and preach to all of these people.

1 Corinthians 1:21 "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Preaching is for the purpose of saving people. The Words that come from Jonah's mouth will not be his own. They will be the Words God put there, to cause these people to repent of their sins and be saved. We mentioned before, that this city has over 600,000 souls in it.

Jonah 3:3 "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."

"An exceeding great city of three days' journey": Literally "a great city to God," the text emphasizes not only its size (1:2), but its importance (4:11). A metropolitan city the size of Nineveh, with a circumference of about 60 miles, would require 3 days just to get around it. These dimensions are confirmed by historians.

Stopping to preach would only add to the time requirement.

Jonah has learned his lesson well. He obeys God this time, and goes to Nineveh. Jonah did exactly as the Word of the LORD commanded him to do.

Jonah 3:4 "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."

"Yet forty days": The time frame may harken back to Moses' supplication for 40 days and nights at Sinai (Deut. 9:18, 25). Jonah's message, while short, accomplishes God's intended purpose.

The number 40 is a time of testing. He preached as he went across the city. It appears; he preached more than once across the city.

These Assyrians had no trouble understanding what Jonah was saying to them. There was a short time to repent, or their city would be totally destroyed. Jonah probably wandered around the city giving this warning at every place he could speak to a crowd.

Jonah 3:5 “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.”

“The people ... believed God”: Jonah’s experience with the fish (2:1-10), in light of the Ninevites’ pagan beliefs (see note on 1:2), certainly gained him an instant hearing.

From the divine side, this wholesale repentance was a miraculous work of God. Pagan sailors and a pagan city responded to the reluctant prophet, showing the power of God in spite of the weakness of His servant.

Jonah's preaching was accepted by the people. They all believed Jonah's message, from the king to the poorest person in the community. There was a massive repentance. They showed the seriousness of their repentance by fasting and wearing sackcloth. The whole city repented. The most important thing in the verse above, is they believed God.

Jonah 3:6 "For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered [him] with sackcloth, and sat in ashes."

The king of Nineveh, thought to be either Adad-nirari III (810-783), or Assurdan III (772 – 755), exchanged his royal robes for sackcloth and ashes (Job 42:6; Isa. 58:5). Reports of Jonah’s miraculous fish experience may have preceded him to Nineveh, accounting for the swift and widespread receptivity of his message (1:2).

It is generally believed that acid from the fish’s stomach would have bleached Jonah’s face, thus validating the experience.

The king set the example for all the rest. He humbled himself before God (removed his kingly robe). He covered himself with sackcloth, and poured ashes upon his head, which was a sign of great sorrow and mourning.

Verses 7-9: “Man ... beast”: It was a Persian custom to use animals in mourning ceremonies.

Jonah 3:7 "And he caused [it] to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:"

"And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh": By a herald or heralds, sent into different parts of the city.

"By the decree of the king and his nobles": With whom he consulted, and whose advice he took. And who were equally concerned at this news, and very probably were present when word was brought to the king concerning it.

"Saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing": A very strict and general fast was this. Abstinence from all food was enjoined; not only men of every rank and age, but the cattle likewise, horses and camels, they used either for their pleasure or business. Their oxen, cows, and calves, of their herd; their sheep, goats, lambs, and kids, of their flocks.

"Let them not feed, nor drink water": no food was to be put into their mangers or folds: or were they to be allowed to graze in their pastures, or to be allowed the least quantity of food or drink. This was ordered, to make the mourning the greater. Thus, Virgil describes the mourning for the death of Caesar by the oxen not coming to the rivers to drink, nor touching the grass of the field.

And to afflict their minds the more, and for their greater mortification, since these creatures were for their use and pleasure, fasting was used by the Heathens; as well as the Jews, in some cases. Particularly the Egyptians, as Herodotus observes, from whom the Assyrians might take it.

This was a total fast. They even made the animals fast as well. This fast did not even allow the drinking of water. They believed the message Jonah brought and repented.

Jonah 3:8 "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that [is] in their hands."

"But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth": As the king was, and so the people also were. This order included the beasts, horses, and camels, whose rich trappings were to be taken off, and sackcloth put upon them, for the greater seriousness of the mourning.

As at this day, at the funerals of great persons, not only the horses which draw the hearse and mourning, coaches are covered with black velvet, to make the seriousness even more awful. But others are led, clothed in like manner.

"And cry mightily unto God": Which clause stands so closely connected with the former, as if it respected beasts as well as men, who sometimes are said to cry for food in times of drought and distress (Joel 1:20). And who here might purposely be kept from food and drink, that they might cry, and so the more affect the minds of the Ninevites, in their humiliation and abasement.

But men are principally meant, at least who were to cry unto God intensely and earnestly, with great passion, fervency, and desire or need. Not only aloud, and with a strong voice, but with their whole heart. As Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret it; heartily, sincerely, and devoutly, for the averting divine wrath, and the pardon of their sins, and the sparing of their city.

"Yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way": As well knowing that fasting and prayer would be of no avail, without leaving everyone their sinful courses, and reforming their life and manners.

"And from the violence that is in their hands": Their violent seizure and oppression, their thefts and robberies, and preying upon the substance of others. Which seem to be the reigning vices of this city, in doing which many murders were committed also (see Nahum 3:1).

The Jewish writers interpret this of making restitution for plunder and violence, which is a genuine fruit of repentance (see Luke 19:8). The Septuagint version understands this, not as a direction from the king to the men of Nineveh what they should do, but as a narrative of what they did.

No doubt but they did these things, put on sackcloth, fast, pray, and turn from their evil ways. Yet they are the instructions of the king unto them and the orders he gave them.

Not only did they repent, but they changed their lifestyle. They became new creatures. Their old lifestyle is gone. Now, they live to please God. Crying mightily unto God shows the sincerity of their prayers.

Jonah 3:9 "Who can tell [if] God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

"Who can tell": The Septuagint and Arabic versions prefix to this the word "saying", and take them to be, not the words of the king, but of the Ninevites. Though very wrongly: or "who is he that knows"; which some connect with the next word, "he will return". That is, that knows the ways of repentance, he will return as Kimchi and Ben Melech.

Or that knows that he has sinned, as Aben Ezra: or that knows the transgressions he is guilty of, will return, as Jarchi. "Whosoever knows that sins are in his hands, he will return", or let him return, from them.

But they are the words of the king, with respect to God, encouraging his subjects to the above things, from the consideration of the probability. Or at least possibility of God's being merciful to them.

"If God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" He speaks here not as or as absolutely doubting, but as between hope and fear. For, by the light of nature, it is not certain that God will pardon men upon repentance; it is only probable or possible he may.

Neither the light of nature nor the Law of Moses connect repentance and remission of sins, it is the Gospel that does this. And it is only by the Gospel revelation that any can be assured that God will forgive, even penitent sinners.

However, this Heathen prince encourages his subjects not to despair of, but to hope for, the mercy of God, though they could not be sure of it. It may be observed, that he does not put their

hope of not perishing, or of salvation, upon their fasting, praying, and reformation, but upon the will, mercy, and goodness of God.

Their prayers are so God will see that they have sincerely changed, and perhaps, He will not destroy them. Of course, that is why God sent them the message by Jonah. He did not want to destroy them. He wanted them to repent.

Jonah 3:10 "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did [it] not."

"God saw ... God repented" (see notes on 2 Sam. 24:16; Jer. 42:10; 18:7-8). The Ninevites truly repented.

God did not change in His ultimate intention toward the Ninevites: rather, they changed in their attitude toward Him. On the basis of that change, God could deal with them in grace, rather than in judgment as their failure to repent would have necessitated.

Praise God! He saw the sincerity of their repentance, and He changed His mind about destroying them. He forgave them, instead of destroying them. One of the strong lessons in this is that Jew and Gentile are loved of God and can be saved, if they repent and live Godly lives. God loves us all, one at a time.

He is quick to forgive and to set us up in right standing with Him. We must be truly sorry for our sins, and believe that Jesus is our Savior. It is really important to confess with our mouths the belief that is in our hearts. If we do all of this, then we will want to be baptized, to show the world we have been buried in the watery grave with Jesus, and have risen to new life in Him.

Jonah Chapter 3 Questions

1. Why does God tell Jonah, again, about his calling?
2. What is the first thing He says to Jonah?
3. What will come from Jonah's mouth?
4. Again, how large is Nineveh?
5. What did Jonah cry out to them?
6. The number 40 is a time of _____.
7. Where did he preach?
8. The people of Nineveh _____ God.

9. What did they do, because of the message?
10. Who believed the message?
11. What is the most important thing spoken in verse 5?
12. What humbling thing did the king do?
13. What decree was made by the king?
14. What were man and beast to be covered with?
15. Not only did they repent, but they changed their _____.
16. What were they praying God would do?
17. What effect did this have on God?
18. What is one strong lesson to be learned here?
19. What must we do to be saved?