

## Jonah 3:1-10

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, 2 “Get up (Arise), go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.<sup>1</sup> Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across.<sup>2</sup> 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The Word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time. The language used here is very similar to the language used in 1:2, with one exception. In 1:2 we read, “Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it.” Here, in 3:2, we read, “Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you. While Jonah was originally told to cry out against Nineveh, now God is calling him to proclaim the message that God himself will supply. Even more, we are told that Jonah sets out for Nineveh according to the Word of the Lord. This phrasing helps to emphasize the new life exhibited by Jonah. No longer is he the prodigal prophet who runs away; he is the prophet of the Lord who hears, responds, and obeys because he has experienced the depths of God’s faithfulness and grace. “We can suppose that Jonah obeys Yahweh as a grateful response to the deliverance that God has afforded him. So it is always with God’s deliverance. It afford no ‘cheap grace’ that allows its recipient simply to bask in the salvation won. Rather, along with the grace there is always the demand—God’s expectation of obedient response—because God does not save for no purpose. God has a plan for this world, and God saves in order to further that purpose (Elizabeth Actemeier, *The Minor Prophets* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 274).” Jonah’s obedience is in response to the incredible saving grace of God.

<sup>2</sup> Nineveh was indeed a large city, even by the ancient world’s standards. Yet the writer of Jonah has used a flourish of style and hyperbole to over-exaggerate the size of the city. At most, the circumference of the city was 7 ½ miles (Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1976), 221). This certainly indicates that Nineveh was quite large but not a three days journey. What then are we to make of this? Is scripture lying to us? By no means. The ancient record suggests that Nineveh was a city of magnificence. And so, “the narrator’s intention in recording the colossal dimensions of the city was to convey the magnitude of the prophet’s task—and to enhance the sequel (Allen, 222).” In this way, the text itself reminds us of the critical role that Jonah plays in such a large city.

<sup>3</sup> Jonah goes throughout the city, calling for her repentance by saying, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Unlike the traditional prophetic witness, Nineveh is not told the reason for prophet’s cry. The sin of the city is known. But what of the length of time the city is given to repent? The most amazing point within the early verses of this chapter “is that God gives Nineveh time to repent at all. Why should God be concerned with Nineveh, that symbol of human evil and the ‘will to power’? Why does God not destroy is immediately and be done with it? That certainly would be Jonah’s wish. But hear the heart of Jonah looks into the heart of God and finds there only love, even for the worst of sinners. God does not want to give up on the Ninevehs of the world—the message for all readers of the book (Actemeier, 275).” And to the surprise of the reader, the people of Nineveh repent. In an unbelievable turn of events, the word of God is sown in the hearts of the Ninevites, causing them to repent, to believe in God as the people put on the appropriate garments marking their repentance.

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. 8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.<sup>4</sup> 9 Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind (repented; had compassion) about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.<sup>5</sup>

- 1) Do you think Jonah went willingly to Nineveh?
- 2) What is the cause of the people’s repentance and faith? From where does it arise?
- 3) Three-quarters of the way through Jonah, what do we discover about God’s dealing with his creation? Who is the Lord of our worship?

---

<sup>4</sup> The Word arrives to the King of Nineveh who, after hearing the Word, removes his robe, donning sackcloth and sitting in ashes. In this way, the king abdicates his throne, his dominion, his rule, his authority in favor of the call of God. Following the king’s repentance, he issues a decree that is for all the people of Nineveh. The people and their animals will observe a fast, they will all wear sackcloth, and they will cry out to the Lord God Almighty. So why are the animals commanded to participate in the city’s repentance?

There are two main elements that we can note about the participation of the animals. “First, it acknowledges that the natural world is affected by human sin, that nature falls as we fall. Second, the story is underlining the fact that God is sovereign over the world of nature, as well as over the realm of human beings, and that the natural world too needs redemption from its corrupted state. Its cries are heard by God, and so here in Jonah, animals join in the fast of repentance (Actemeier, 277).” In this way, we can understand that the king is not interested in simply “going through the motions”; rather, the king demands that everyone and everything participate in repentance. This isn’t to condition God into salvation; rather it is in response to the opportunity for new life that is made possible by God’s free gift of grace and mercy. It is light of God’s grace the Ninevites will come to know what is expected of them.

<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jon 3:1–10J). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.