

Let's Go to Nineveh

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Jonah 3

We are dealing with a disobedient prophet of God, namely Jonah, or dove. He heard God's call, he ignored it, he escaped to the opposite direction. There was a storm, he was thrown to the sea. God provided a great fish to rescue him. Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish. It was a prayer of thanksgiving to God Yahweh who rescued him. The fish vomited Jonah, and now we are in chapter three.

-God gives a Second Chance

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ² "Arise *qoum*, go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

(Jonah 3:1-2 NIV11)

Please compare it with the first calling:

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Arise up *qoum*, go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." (Jonah 1:1-2 NIV11)

Let us compare:

- Arise, go, great city Nineveh, preach (proclaim): those are similar...
- First calling: "they are wicked..." (Jonah 1) Second calling: "the message I give you" (Jonah 3).

Basically, it is the same message with some different details. God gives Jonah a second chance.

"Jonah, go to this great city. It is important for me that you go to this great city, even if it is not important for you to go this place..." (*My words*)

Don't you love when God does not give up from humanity? God gives a second chance to our fugitive prophet.

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. (Jonah 3:3a NIV11)

Do you see the contrast from chapter one? This time Jonah obeys the command the Lord. Quite different from chapter one, right?

-They Repented

Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." ⁵The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. (Jonah 3:3b-4 NIV11)

Nineveh is quite a large city. It took three days for Jonah to proclaim the message. It seems he went from street-to-street proclaiming God's message. What was the message that God gave to Jonah?

"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." (4b)

A short message, (five words in Hebrew) yet so powerful that the inhabitants of Nineveh repented. I mean you don't expect this kind of a result. Jesus preached in different places and people were going to kill him. Paul was beaten and thrown out of the city. Here, the opposite is happening. These wicked people turn to God. Here is what is going on here:

"The first story of reconciliation (between Jonah and God) concludes, and the second story of reconciliation (between Nineveh and God) begins."¹

So what was this short message, especially the word **"overthrown"**?

The Hebrew root *hapak* can mean **"turn over,"** that is, **"destroy"** (as with Sodom in Gen. 19), or **"turn around,"** meaning **"bring to repentance."**²

I think Nineveh understood this word in two ways: there is a destruction coming if they don't repent; there is a second chance if they repent. They get it.

We read: "The Ninevites believed God."

They did two things:

A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. (Jonah 3:5 NIV11)

Fasting is a means of seeking **God's mercy,**
sackcloth is a symbol of **repentance.**

The Ninevites believe that Jonah's words are God's words, so the text says that they "believed God." The sense is that they trust the word they have heard to be a true and reliable word for them.³

-The King Joined the People in Repentance

When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

**“By the decree of the king and his nobles:
Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”** (Jonah 3:6-9 NIV11)

In the narration, there are some words that describe how the repentance is continuing.

he (the king) rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. (6)

A He *rose* from his throne

B *took off* his royal robes

B´ *covered* himself with sackcloth

A´ *sat down* in the dust

I see the king, the vicious king learning a big lesson...

I find a genuine surrender to God; the king rose and took steps of repentance. He left his throne. That is big acknowledgement that there is new KING!

Not only that he stood up and took some practical steps, he asked for a decree to be signed.

The NIV commentary says:

- intensification of the general fast
- expansion of the sackcloth of repentance (even animals)
- command to cry out to the God of Israel
- command to repent from evil ways and violence
- the possibility of hope and God’s compassion offered.⁴

Brothers and sisters, like the sailors, no more crying out to their gods. There is a *metanoia* (turning to God). Assyria was known for its false gods and its self-worship. Please notice the change, the king says

“Let everyone call urgently on God.” (8)

“Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.” (8)

There is a serious decisions here.

Now, the king does not know if Yahweh will have mercy and compassion on them. He says, “Who knows”?

Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. (9)

God's Compassion

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

(Jonah 3:10 NIV11)

God relented and had compassion on those people.

Some translations say God repented. I think that is bad translation. God does not sin, meaning He does not repent.

The word is *naham*, it means to have compassion, relent, back off. We use anthropomorphic language to describe God.

God felt sorrow towards the people. God's sorrow for the consequences people must face as a natural result of their sin. This "sorrow" is expressed in "compassion."⁵ (NIV 95)

Can you imagine how much joy was in heaven for the repentance of the great city?

Jonah would throw his hat in the air in joy, right? (Halleluiah!)

Jonah was worried about this compassion of God. "But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry." (4:1)

We will see next week.

Application:

Repentance and Compassion

-We all can learn from this chapter, that we should take seriously God's message towards us to repent and turn from our wicked ways to Him. (personal)

We should always share this message without hesitation, everyone needs to turn to God. We all have sinned and fall short in the sight of God. (collective)

-Nations are under the threat of destructions, including the nation chosen by God or those who think they are chosen by God if they don't turn towards God.

If we repent, God is compassionate to give us new life.

-Although the Assyrians turned to God, and that is incredible, but the hero of the story is not them, it is God and his love (*hesed*), the loyal love, the extravagant love of God.

God welcomes sincerely repentant.

This is what Jesus taught us.

We had a baptism today.

It is testimony. Every time I baptize a person, it brings back my commitment to God and my baptism.

Paul said to the Roman church:

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were *baptized into his death*? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into *death* in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a *new life*.

If we have been united with him like this in his *death*, we will certainly also be united with him in his *resurrection*. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (Rom. 6:1–7, italics added)

There is JOY in heaven.

1. James Bruckner, *NIV Application Commentary (Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah)*. P90

2. *ibid* p 91

3. *ibid* p 91

4. *ibid* p 92

In chapter one going “down” was major theme. Now in this chapter the theme is “upside-down” (3:5-6)
(1) The people proclaim the fast before the king. Usually king declares this not the people. (top to down)
(2) The king goes down from the throne, and removes his robe, surrender to Yahweh. He joins the common people (“from the greatest to the least”) in sackcloth and sits in the dust in his humility (3:6).
(3) The king’s proclamation calls for everyone to “**call urgently on Yahweh God**” the Ninevites are “overturned”—not yet “destroyed” but in every other way, “turned upside down.” (NIV Com.)