

Jonah 3:1-10

Jonah 3:1-10 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, (2) “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.” (3) So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. (4) And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (5) So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. (6) Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. (7) And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. (8) But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. (9) Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? (10) Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Questions On The Text

What happened when Jonah was back on dry land?

Verse 1-2: Yahweh spoke to Jonah again and recommissioned him. This was his second chance to walk in obedience to God's will. God told the prophet that he was to go to Nineveh and preach the message that he would be given. Nineveh is described as “that great city.” There were only two cities described as being “great” in Israel: Gibeon (Joshua 10:2) and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 22:8) and neither of them was sizeable. The greatness of Nineveh, therefore, is probably not so much a reference to its size as much as its importance, experience as a religious centre.

What was the response to Yahweh's word?

Verse 3: This time Jonah obeys the word of Yahweh and goes to Nineveh. The description of Nineveh as “a three-day journey in extent” is uncertain in meaning, since Nineveh wasn't very large. It could be meant to include the surrounding environs. More likely, however, is the possibility that, given the city's importance and population, three days would be considered a reasonable amount of time in which to pass through the suburbs, conduct business, and then return. Since “journey” can also be translated “visit,” this is probably a good interpretation.

What was God's message to Nineveh?

Verse 4: Jonah enters Nineveh and delivers his message from Yahweh that it will be overthrown in forty days. The word “overthrown” was also used in connection with God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:21,25. However, the word can also mean “to turn upside down, to have a change of heart.” So Jonah's message could equally mean that in forty days Nineveh could fall under the judgment of God, or that it could experience a move of repentance. And only God knew which; certainly the prophet would have had no idea which meaning was intended by Yahweh.

How did Nineveh respond to God's Word?

Verses 5-9: The response was one of faith and repentance. All the people believed God and, in addition, they fasted and put on sackcloth. In that time period and locality, fasting and sackcloth were common ways of expressing mourning over sin and humility towards God. Even the king took off his royal robe and vacated his throne to participate in the self-humiliation. The inclusion of animals in the fast, while strange to us,

occasionally happened in ancient times. As part of the process of repentance, the king's decree commanded everyone to cry out to God, turn from their evil ways, and especially to turn from their violence. All this was an appropriate response in line with John the Baptist's preaching in the New Testament (see Luke 3:8) that genuine repentance should be accompanied by suitable works. Having now responded to God's message, the people still did not know whether God would have mercy, but hoped and left it in His sovereign hands.

How did God respond to the people's repentance?

Verse 10: God saw their works of repentance and turned away from the disaster He had planned.

Further Questions For Discussion:

What sort of God gives a second chance to a rebel like Jonah?

Has God given you a second chance?

Why do you think Jonah obeyed God this time?

God's message to Nineveh could be interpreted two ways. Do you think God intentionally made it unclear? What is the reason for your answer?

Why do you think the people so quickly repented at the word of a foreign prophet?

When Nineveh repented, God turned away from His planned disaster. What does this tell you about God?