

## **Jonah Preaches At Nineveh**

Intro: After his frightening experience in the belly of the great fish, Jonah is given a second chance to obey God's commission to go to Nineveh and deliver a message of God's impending judgment. Jonah delivers God's message of judgment and the entire city repents—they turned from their wicked ways and petitioned God for mercy. God graciously spared the people of Nineveh from judgment (3:10).

**First Episode: Jonah's Commissioning and Flight (1:1-3)**

**Second Episode: Jonah and the Pagan Sailors (1:4-16)**

**Third Episode: Jonah's Psalm of Thanksgiving (1:17–2:10)**

**Fourth Episode: Jonah's Recommissioning And Compliance (3:1-3a)**

This fourth episode parallels the first (1:1-3) and focuses on Jonah's obedience to God's command to arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim God's message of impending judgment.

A. God's command to preach (vv. 1-2)

**vv. 1-2**—Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, **2** "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the message which I am going to tell you."

God's word coming to Jonah a second time underscores God's gracious dealing with Jonah, and His determination to have His message delivered to the Ninevites. Aren't you glad that God gave Jonah a second chance? I am so thankful that God in His mercy and grace has given me a second, third, fourth, and more chances than I can count. How about you?

We are not told how long after Jonah was released from the belly of the great fish that God's second call came to him. Most speculate that Jonah may have been given a short time for physical recuperation, and even more for digesting the spiritual lessons learned from his experience.

Jonah is commanded to carry God's message to Nineveh, which He describes as "the great city." In Hebrew this reads "a great city to God." It was a "great city" to God because of the million or more lost people who needed Him.

I am reminded that our God is a God of mercy and grace. He is desirous that all men be saved and that none perish. If men are to be saved they must hear the message of God's love and forgiveness. Just like Jonah, the Lord Jesus commanded us in **Matthew 28:19-20** to go forth and share God's message of love and forgiveness with the lost. We have been commissioned by Jesus Christ our Lord to carry a message that the lost men and women of the world need desperately to hear. The Apostle Paul explains in **Romans 10:11-17**, "How are men to hear unless someone is sent to tell them the Good News? "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

If you and I don't share this message of God's love and forgiveness with lost people, they will never be saved. May God help us to respond to His Spirit's promptings to share the Good News about Jesus Christ with lost people.

Look next with me at Jonah's trip to Nineveh in verse 3

#### B. Jonah's trip to Nineveh (v. 3)

**v. 3**—So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

As noted in chapter 1, Nineveh was roughly 550 miles to the northeast of Israel. It would have taken Jonah about 30 days to get there, considering the average distance covered in a day was between 15-20 miles.

**v. 3**—The reference to Nineveh as the "great city" in v. 2 and the "exceedingly great city" in v. 3 refers to both Nineveh proper, and the administrative district of Nineveh, which archeologists refer to as "the Assyrian Quad-rangle." In the first century B.C., **Diodorus Siculus** correlated records from the fourth-century which stated that the total circumference of the great city of Nineveh was fifty-five miles, and encompassed the surrounding towns of Rehoboth Ir, Calah (Nimrud), and Resen. According to the biblical record, Nimrod was the founder of Nineveh [Nimrud] (Gen. 10:11). The fact that it took Jonah three days to go through the great four-city metropolis of Nineveh is reasonable seeing as how a one day's journey in open territory was usually 15-20 miles.

As noted in our introduction, archaeology has confirmed that the city of Nineveh was surrounded by an inner wall and an outer wall. The huge inner wall was 50 feet wide and 100 feet high, and was about eight miles in circumference.

**SLIDE**

### **Fifth Episode: Jonah and the Pagan Ninevites (3:3b-10)**

This fifth episode parallels the second (1:4-16) and focuses on Jonah's preaching to the pagan Ninevites.

#### A. Jonah's proclamation of divine judgment (v. 4)

**v. 4**—Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

Here then is the message God commissioned Jonah to preach, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The number forty (40) is the number used for *testing* in the Bible. For example in Genesis 7:17 it is used for the duration of the Flood. In Exodus 24:18 Moses was on the Mount with God for 40 days and nights. In 1 Kings 19:8 Elijah's flight to Horeb took forty days. Matthew 4:2 describes the Lord Jesus' trial in the wilderness for forty days. Again, the number forty is used often in the Bible for a period of testing.

Jonah was not necessarily crying out his message of Nineveh's destruction as he traveled through the city, but probably stopped to preach his message of judgment in central locations. He may have come to one of the many statues of the Assyrian god Dagon, the fish god, at which time Jonah would cry-out "I was swallowed by Dagon, but my God, the One and only true God delivered me."

His ability to draw a crowd may have been due to his bearing, his dress, or quite possibly to his pale white skin which had been bleached from the stomach acid of the fish.

Jonah's message from the LORD was short and to the point, He cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Many scholars are of the opinion that Jonah preached his message in Aramaic, the international *lingua-franca*, the universal language of the day.

God's message of judgment is always wrapped in grace. That is, God graciously provides a warning of coming judgment to give men a chance to turn to Him in faith before the judgment comes. This is an expression of God's mercy and grace. For if all He wanted to do was destroy wicked men, He would hardly need to take the time to warn them of His intention to destroy them. He would just do it!

## B. Nineveh's repentance (vv. 5-10)

### 1. The repentance of the people (v. 5)

**v. 5**—Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

The sudden repentance of the Ninevites is nothing short of miraculous. We read in verse 5, “The people of Nineveh, from the greatest to the least of them, believed in God.” This is the greatest evangelistic turning to God in all of human history. Here we have an entire city, an exceptionally wicked city at that, literally shaken by a single sermon from a foreign prophet. It is, I believe the result of the Holy Spirit's supernatural work.

The NIV translates this phrase “The Ninevites believed God,” which places the emphasis not on a conversion to faith, but on what they believed—that Jonah's God was going to bring judgment on them for their wicked ways.

I would argue, that since God did not destroy the people of Nineveh, this would support the literal Hebrew “the people of Nineveh believed in God” (NASB and others). Jesus' words in Luke 11:32 “that the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah” and therefore they will stand up in the final judgment to condemn the self-righteous Jews who rejected Jesus Christ, would provide further support that “The people of Nineveh, from the greatest to the least of them, believed in God.”

In fact, God may have prepared the people of Nineveh psychologically with two severe famines (765 and 759), and a total solar eclipse of the sun on June 15, 763 B.C. People in the ancient world looked upon such events as indicators of divine wrath. The people of Nineveh would have responded to Jonah's message of divine judgment with true contrition.

### 2. The repentance of the king (vv. 6-9)

**vv. 6-9**—When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes.

We note here that the initial turning to God began with the common people, and not with royalty. It took some time for God's word of judgment to reach

the secluded king. However, as soon as the word—Jonah’s message of doom reached the king, he too responded immediately. While the identity of this king is not given, many believe it was the Assyrian king Assur-dan III.

In any event we read in verses 7-9 that the king issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?”

Not only does the king repent, he issued a royal proclamation calling on all men and animals *to fast*, and *to cover themselves with sackcloth*; and *to call on God earnestly*. Notice that the repentance the king called for each person to exercise involved a turning away from the wickedness and violence they previously practiced. True repentance will always involve a turning away from sin to embrace God and His righteous standards!

The king hoped that God would be merciful and relent from the judgment He determined to bring on the Assyrian people, so they would not perish.

### 3. The reaction of God (v. 10)

**v. 10**—When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Keep in mind that judgment is the last thing God desires to do. He has made provision for man’s sins, and desires that all men come to the knowledge of the truth so as to be saved! Seeing the Ninevites repentant actions, caused God to relent or put off His threatened destruction.

God’s pardoning of the wicked Assyrians was in keeping with His promise in **Jeremiah 18:7-8**, that any nation or kingdom who repented of its evil in light of His message of judgment, He would relent and not destroy them as He had determined to do. Look at **Jeremiah 18:7-8**,

7 “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, 8 and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I

will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned” (NIV).

God had spared Jonah in chapter 2; now He spared the people of Nineveh. The irony here is that the wicked people of Nineveh repented and were shown mercy. Israel refused to repent of their wickedness and suffered divine judgment, destruction, death, and deportation.

The sad truth is, the Assyrians repentance only lasted for about 50 years. They returned to their wicked and vile ways, and just as Jonah had feared, they destroyed and deported the ten northern tribes of Israel in 722 B.C.

As prophesied by Nahum, Nineveh was eventually destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C.

#### Conclusion:

We see from this lesson that God desires for all men to be saved, delivered from the power and consequences of sin. Over and over again, the Old Testament relays the truth that God is compassionate and merciful to anyone who will cry out to Him for forgiveness. This same truth has been experienced by every believer who has embraced God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

Have you accepted God’s gracious offer of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ? If not, ask God to forgive you of your sins and invite Christ to come into your life as I close in prayer.

Christian, are you praying for opportunities to share the good news of God’s love and forgiveness with lost people. Remember Paul’s words in **Romans 10:17** “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.” The only way most lost people will hear the Good News is if you and I surrender to God and allow His Holy Spirit to use us to share His message with them.