**Passage for week 3**

#### Jonah 3

##### Jonah Goes to Nineveh

 1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. 4 Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

 6 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. 7 This 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.”

 10 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.

###### Notes from Wiersbe

**3. Redemption (**[**Jonah 2:10**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%202%3A10)**)**

“And [the fish] vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” What an ignominious way for a distinguished prophet to arrive on shore! In [chapter 1](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%201%3A1-32%201%3A17), the sailors treated Jonah like dangerous cargo to be thrown overboard, and now he’s treated like a foreign substance to be disgorged from the fish’s body. But when Jonah ceased to be an obedient prophet, he cheapened himself; so he’s the one to blame. We can be sure that he was duly humbled as he once again stood on dry land.

**The miracle.**

Few miracles in Scripture have been attacked as much as this one, and Christian scholars have gathered various kinds of evidence to prove that it could happen. Since the Bible doesn’t tell us what kind of fish swallowed Jonah, we don’t have to measure sharks and whales or comb history for similar incidents. It was a “prepared” fish ([1:17](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%201%3A17)), designed by God for the occasion, and therefore it was adequate for the task. Jesus didn’t question the historicity of the miracle, so why should we?

**The sign (**[**Matt. 12:39**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2040%2012%3A39)**;**[**16:4**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2040%2016%3A4)**;**[**Luke 11:29**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2042%2011%3A29)**).**

The “sign of Jonah” is seen in his experience of “death,” burial, and resurrection on the third day, and it was the only sign Jesus gave to the nation of Israel. At Pentecost, Peter preached the Resurrection ([Acts 2:22-26](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%202%3A22-44%202%3A26)) and so did Paul when he preached to the Jews in other nations ([13:26-37](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%2013%3A26-44%2013%3A37)). In fact, the emphasis in the Book of Acts is on the resurrection of Jesus Christ; for the apostles were “witnesses of the Resurrection” ([2:32](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%202%3A32); [3:15](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%203%3A15); [5:32](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%205%3A32); [10:39](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%2010%3A39)).

Some students are troubled by the phrase “three days and three nights,” especially since both Scripture and tradition indicate that Jesus was crucified on Friday. In order to protect the integrity of Scripture, some have suggested that the Crucifixion be moved back to Thursday or even Wednesday. But to the Jews, a part of a day was treated as a whole day; and we need not interpret “three days and three nights” to mean seventy-two hours to the very second. For that matter, we can’t prove that Jonah was in the fish exactly seventy-two hours. The important things is that centuries after the event, Jonah became a “sign” to the Jewish people and pointed them to Jesus Christ.

Jonah was now free to obey the Lord and take God’s message to Nineveh, but he still had lessons to learn.

**Preaching and Pouting**
[**Jonah 3-4**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A1-32%204%3A11)

The question is usually asked in Old Testament survey classes, “Was the great fish more relieved to be rid of Jonah than Jonah was to get out of the great fish?” Maybe their sense of relief was mutual. At any rate, we hope that Jonah gave thanks to God for the divinely provided creature that rescued him from certain death.

In these two chapters, we are confronted with four marvels that we dare not take for granted.

**1. The marvel of an undeserved commission (**[**Jonah 3:1-2**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A1-32%203%3A2)**)**

Did anybody see Jonah emerge when the great fish disgorged him on the dry land? If so, the story must have spread rapidly and perhaps even preceded him to Nineveh, and that may help explain the reception the city gave him. Had Jonah been bleached by the fish’s gastric juices? Did he look so peculiar that nobody could doubt who he was and what had happened to him? Since Jonah was a “sign” to the Ninevites ([Matt 12:38-41](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2040%2012%3A38-40%2012%3A41)), perhaps this included the way he looked.

What the people saw or thought really wasn’t important The important thing was what God thought and what He would do next to His repentant prophet. “The life of Jonah cannot be written without God,” said Charles Spurgeon; “take God out of the prophet’s history, and there is no history to write.”2-1

God met Jonah.

We don’t know where the great fish deposited Jonah, but we do know that wherever Jonah was, the Lord was there. Remember, God is more concerned about His workers than He is about their work, for if the workers are what they ought to be, the work will be what it ought to be. Throughout Jonah’s time of rebellion, God was displeased with His servant, but He never once deserted him. It was God who controlled the storm, prepared the great fish, and rescued Jonah from the deep. His promise is, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” ([Heb. 13:5](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2058%2013%3A5%204), nkjv; see [Josh. 1:5](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%206%201%3A5)). “when you pass through the waters, I will be with you” ([Isa. 43:2](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2023%2043%3A2%204), nkjv).

**God Spoke to Jonah.**

After the way Jonah had stubbornly refused to obey God’s voice, it’s a marvel that the Lord spoke to him at all. Jonah had turned his back on God’s word, so the Lord had been forced to speak to him through thunder and rain and a stormy sea. But now that Jonah had confessed his sins and turned back to the Lord, God could once again speak to him through His word. One of the tests of our relationship to God is, “Does God speak to me as I read and ponder His Word?” If we don’t hear God speaking to us in our hearts, perhaps we have some unfinished business that needs to be settled with Him.

**God commissioned Jonah.**

“The victorious Christian life,” said George H. Morrison, “is a series of new beginnings.” When we fall, the enemy wants us to believe that our ministry is ended and there’s no hope for recovery, but our God is the God of the second chance. “Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time” ([Jonah 3:1](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A1)). “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me” ([Micah 7:8](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2033%207%3A8%204), nkjv).

You don’t have to read very far in your Bible to discover that God forgives His servants and restores them to ministry. Abraham fled to Egypt, where he lied about his wife, but God gave him another chance ([Gen. 12:10-13:4](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%201%2012%3A10-1%2013%3A4)). Jacob lied to his father Isaac, but God restored him and used him to build the nation of Israel. Moses killed a man (probably in self-defense) and fled from Egypt, but God called him to be the leader of His people. Peter denied the Lord three times, but Jesus forgave him and said, “Follow Me” ([John 21:19](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2043%2021%3A19)).

However encouraging these examples of restoration may be, they must never be used as excuses for sin. The person who says “I can go ahead and sin, because I know the Lord will forgive me” has no understanding of the awfulness of sin or the holiness of God. “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” ([Ps. 130:4](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2019%20130%3A4%204), nkjv). God in His grace forgives our sins, but God in His government determines that we shall reap what we sow, and the harvest can be very costly. Jonah paid dearly for rebelling against the Lord.

God challenged Jonah.

Four times in this book, Nineveh is called a “great city” ([1:2](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%201%3A2); [3:2-3](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A2-32%203%3A3); [4:11](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%204%3A11)),2-2 and archeologists tell us that the adjective is well-deserved. It was great in history, having been founded in ancient times by Noah’s great-grandson Nimrod ([Gen. 10:8-10](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%201%2010%3A8-1%2010%3A10)).2-3 It was also great in size. The circumference of the city and its suburbs was sixty miles, and from the Lord’s statement in [Jonah 4:11](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%204%3A11), we could infer that there were probably over 600,000 people living there. One wall of the city had a circumference of eight miles and boasted 1,500 towers.

The city was great in splendor and influence, being one of the leading cities of the powerful Assyrian Empire. It was built near the Tigris River and had the Khoser River running through it. (This fact will prove to be important when we study the Book of Nahum.) Its merchants traveled the empire and brought great wealth into the city, and Assyria’s armies were feared everywhere.

Nineveh was great in sin, for the Assyrians were known far and wide for their violence, showing no mercy to their enemies. They impaled live victims on sharp poles, leaving them to roast to death in the desert sun; they beheaded people by the thousands and stacked their skulls up in piles by the city gates; and they even skinned people alive. They respected neither age nor sex and followed a policy of killing babies and young children so they wouldn’t have to care for them ([Nahum 3:10](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2034%203%3A10)).

It was to the wicked people of this great city that God sent His servant Jonah, assuring him that He would give him the message to speak. Alter making the necessary preparations, it would take Jonah at least a month to travel from his own land to the city of Nineveh, and during that trip, he had a lot of time available to meditate on what the Lord had taught him.

The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God can’t keep you and the power of God can’t use you. “And who is sufficient for these things? … Our sufficiency is of God” ([2 Cor. 2:16](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2047%202%3A16) and [3:5](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2047%203%3A5)).

**2. The marvel of an unparalleled awakening (**[**Jonah 3:3-10**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A3-32%203%3A10)**)**

From a human perspective, this entire enterprise appears ridiculous. How could one man, claiming to be God’s prophet, confront thousands of people with his strange message, especially a message of judgment? How could a Jew, who worshiped the true God, ever get these idolatrous Gentiles to believe what he had to say? For all he knew, Jonah might end up impaled on a pole or skinned alive! But, in obedience to the Lord, Jonah went to Nineveh.

**Jonah’s message to Nineveh (**[**Jonah 3:3-4**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A3-32%203%3A4)**).**

“Three days’ journey” means either that it would take three days to get through the city and its suburbs or three days to go around them. The niv translation of [verse 3](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A3) suggests that it would take three days to visit all of the area. According to [Genesis 10:11-12](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%201%2010%3A11-1%2010%3A12), four cities were involved in the “Nineveh metroplex”: Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen (niv). However you interpret the “three days,” one thing is dear: Nineveh was no insignificant place.

When Jonah was one day into the city, he began to declare his message: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be over-thrown.” Throughout Scripture, the number forty seems to be identified with testing or judgment. During the time of Noah, it rained forty days and forty nights ([Gen. 7:4](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%201%207%3A4), [12](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%201%207%3A12), [17](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%201%207%3A17)). The Jewish spies explored Canaan forty days ([Num. 14:34](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%204%2014%3A34)), and the nation of Israel was tested in the wilderness forty years (Deut 2:7). The giant Goliath taunted the army of Israel forty days ([1 Sam. 17:16](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%209%2017%3A16)), and the Lord gave the people of Nineveh forty days to repent and turn from their wickedness.

At this point, we must confess that we wish we knew more about Jonah’s ministry to Nineveh. Was this the only message he proclaimed? Surely he spent time telling the people about the true and living God, for we’re told, “The people of Nineveh believed God” ([Jonah 3:5](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A5)). They would have to know something about this God of Israel in order to exercise sincere faith (see [Acts 17:22](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%2017%3A22)). Did Jonah expose the folly of their idolatry? Did he recount his own personal history to show them that his God was powerful and sovereign? We simply don’t know. The important thing is that Jonah obeyed God, went to Nineveh, and declared the message God gave him. God did the rest.

**Nineveh’s message to God (**[**Jonah 3:5-9**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A5-32%203%3A9)**).**

In the Hebrew text, there are only five words in Jonah’s message; yet God used those five words to stir the entire population, from the king on the throne to the lowest peasant in the field. God gave the people forty days of grace, but they didn’t need that long. We get the impression that from the very first time they saw Jonah and heard his warning, they paid attention to his message. Word spread quickly throughout the entire district and the people humbled themselves by fasting and wearing sackcloth.

When the message got to the king, he too put on sackcloth and sat in the dust. He also made the fast official by issuing an edict and ordering the people to humble themselves, cry out to God, and turn from their evil ways. Even the animals were included in the activities by wearing sackcloth and abstaining from food and drink. The people were to cry “mightily” (“urgently,” niv) to God, for this was a matter of life and death.

When Jonah was in dire straits, he recalled the promise concerning Solomon’s temple ([Jonah 2:4](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%202%3A4), [7](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%202%3A7); [1 Kings 8:38-39](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2011%208%3A38-11%208%3A39); [2 Chron. 6:36-39](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2014%206%3A36-14%206%3A39)), looked toward the temple, and called out for help. Included in Solomon’s temple prayer was a promise for people outside the nation of Israel, and that would include the Ninevites. “As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel … when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of You, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You” ([2 Chron. 6:32-33](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2014%206%3A32-14%206%3A33)). Jonah certainly knew this promise, and perhaps it was the basis for the whole awakening.

Like the sailors in the storm, the Ninevites didn’t want to perish ([Jonah 3:9](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A9); [1:6](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%201%3A6), [14](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%201%3A14)). That’s what witnessing is all about, “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” ([John 3:16](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2043%203%3A16%204), nkjv). Their fasting and praying, and their humbling of themselves before God, sent a message to heaven, but the people of Nineveh had no assurance that they would be saved. They hoped that God’s great compassion would move Him to change His plan and spare the city. Once again, how did they know that the God of the Hebrews was a merciful and compassionate God? No doubt Jonah told them, for this was a doctrine he himself believed ([Jonah 4:2](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%204%3A2)).

**God’s message to Nineveh (**[**Jonah 3:10**](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A10)**).**

At some point, God spoke to Jonah and told Him that He had accepted the people’s repentance and would not destroy the city. The phrase “God repented” might better be translated “God relented,” that is, changed His plan. From the human point of view, it looked like repentance, but from the divine perspective, it was simply God’s response to man’s change of heart God is utterly consistent with Himself; it only appears that He is changing His mind. The Bible uses human analogies to reveal the divine character of God ([Jer. 18:1-10](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2024%2018%3A1-24%2018%3A10)).

How deep was the spiritual experience of the people of Nineveh? If repentance and faith are the basic conditions of salvation ([Acts 20:21](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2044%2020%3A21)), then we have reason to believe that they were accepted by God; for the people of Nineveh repented and had faith in God ([Jonah 3:5](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2032%203%3A5)). The fact that Jesus used the Ninevites to shame the unbelieving Jews of His day is further evidence that their response to Jonah’s ministry was sincere ([Matt 12:38-41](file:///D%3A%5CGrace%5Csteplinkto4%2040%2012%3A38-40%2012%3A41)).