

# CHAPTER 3

In this chapter we have,

- I.** Jonah's mission renewed, and the command a second time given him to go preach at Nineveh (v. 1, 2).
- II.** Jonah's message to Nineveh faithfully delivered, by which its speedy overthrow was threatened (v. 3, 4).
- III.** The repentance, humiliation, and reformation of the Ninevites hereupon (v. 5-9).
- IV.** God's gracious revocation of the sentence passed upon them, and the preventing of the ruin threatened (v. 10).

## ☞ JONAH 3:1-4

### THE PROPHET'S MISSION TO NINEVEH

We have here a further evidence of the reconciliation between God and Jonah, and that it was a thorough reconciliation, though the controversy between them had run high.

**I.** Jonah's commission is renewed and readily obeyed.

**1.** By this it appears that God was perfectly reconciled to Jonah, that he employed him again in his service; and the commission anew given him was an evidence of the remission of his former disobedience. Among men, it has been justly pleaded that the giving of a commission to a criminal convicted is equivalent to a pardon, so it was to Jonah. *The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time* (v. 1); for,

**1.** Jonah must be tried, whether he do indeed repent of his former disobedience or no, and whether he have gotten the good designed him both by his strange punishment and by his strange deliverance. He had deserted his work and duty, and had been under arrest for it, had received a *sentence of death within himself*; but, upon his submission, God had released him, had given him his life, had given him his liberty; but it is upon his good behaviour that he is released, and he must again be put

upon the trial whether he will follow the will of God or his own will. After he has been thrown into the sea, and thrown out of it again, God comes and asks him, "Jonah, wilt thou go to Nineveh now?" For *when God judges he will overcome*, he will gain his point; he will bring the disobedient stubborn child to his foot at last. Note, When God has afflicted us, and delivered us out of affliction, we must hear his voice, saying to us, Now return to the duties which before you neglected, and which by these providences you are called to. God now said, in effect, to Jonah, as Christ said to the impotent man, when he had healed him, "Now go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee (~~484~~ John 5:14), a worse thing than lying three days and three nights in the whale's belly." God looks upon men, when he has afflicted them and has delivered them out of their affliction, to see whether they will mend of that fault, particularly, for which they were corrected; and therefore in that thing we are concerned to see to it that we receive not the grace of God in vain, neither in the correction nor in the deliverance, for both are designed to be means of grace.

(2.) Jonah shall be trusted, in token of God's favour to him. God might justly have said concerning Jonah, as we should concerning one that had cheated us and dealt treacherously with us, that though we would not proceed to the rigour of the law against him, nor ruin him, yet we would never again repose a confidence in him; justly might the Spirit of prophecy, which Jonah had resisted and rebelled against, depart from him, with a resolution never to return to him any more. One would have expected that though his life was spared, yet he would be laid under a disability and incapacity ever to serve the government again in the character of a prophet. But, behold! the word of the Lord comes to him again, to show that when God forgives he forgets, and whom he forgives he gives a new heart and a new spirit to; he receives those into his family again, and restores them to their former estate, that had been prodigal children and disobedient servants. Note, God's making use of us is the best evidence of his being at peace with us. Hereby it will appear that our sins are pardoned, and we have the good-will of God towards us; does his good word come unto us, and do we experience his good work in us! if so, we have reason to admire the riches of free grace and to own our obligations to the Lord Jesus, who received gifts for men, *yea, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell* even among them, and employ them in his word, ~~485~~ Psalm 68:18.

**2.** By this it appears that Jonah was well reconciled to God, that he was not now, as he had been before, *disobedient to the heavenly vision*, did not *flee from the presence of the Lord*, as he had done. He neither endeavored to avoid hearing the command, nor did he decline obeying it; he made no objections, as he had done, that the journey was *long*, the errand invidious, the delivery of it perilous, and, if the threatened judgment did come, he should be reproached as a false prophet, and the impenitence of his own nation would be upbraided, which he had objected, ~~304~~Jonah 4:2. But now, without murmuring and disputing, *Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord*, v. 3. See here,

**(1.)** The nature of repentance; it is the change of our mind and way, and a return to our work and duty, from which we had turned aside; it is doing that good which we had left undone.

**(2.)** The benefit of affliction; it reduces those to their place that had deserted it. Jonah might truly say with David, “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word; and therefore, though it was dreadful, though it was painful to me, and for the present not joyous, but grievous, yet it was good, very good, for me, that I was afflicted.*”

**(3.)** See the power of divine grace working with affliction, for otherwise affliction of itself would rather drive men from God than bring them to him; but God by his grace can *turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, and make those *willing in the day of his power*, freely willing to come under his yoke, whose *neck had been as an iron sinew*.

**(4.)** See the duty of all those to whom the word of the Lord comes; they must in all points conform themselves to it, and yield a cheerful faithful obedience to the orders God gives them. *Jonah arose*, and did not sit still in sloth or sullenness; he went directly to Nineveh, though it was a great way off, and a place where, it is likely, he never was before; yet thither he took his journey, *according to the word of the Lord*. God's servants must go where he sends them, come when he calls them, and do what he bids them; whatever appears to be the word of the Lord we must conscientiously do according to it.

**II.** Let us now see what was the command or commission given him, and what he did in prosecution of it.

**1.** He was sent as a herald at arms, in the name of the God of heaven, to proclaim war with Nineveh (v. 2): “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city,” that metropolis, and *preach unto it, preach against it*, so the Chaldee. What is against us is preached to us, that we may hear it and take warning; and what is preached to us, if we do not give ear to it, and mix faith with it, will prove to be against us. Jonah is sent to Nineveh, which was at this time the chief city of the Gentile world, as an indication of God's gracious intentions in process of time to make the light of divine revelation to shine in those dark regions. God knew that if Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, had had the means of grace, they would have repented, and yet he denied them those means, <sup>412</sup>Matthew 11:21, 23. He knew that if Nineveh had now the means of grace they would repent, and he gave them those means, sent Jonah, though not to preach repentance to them expressly (for we find not that he had that in his commission), yet to preach them to repentance, for that was the happy effect of what he had in commission. If God thus in dispensing his favours, in giving the means of grace to some places and not to others, and the spirit of grace to some persons and not to others, acts by prerogative and in a way of sovereignty, who may say unto him, What doest thou? *May he not do what he will with his own?* He is debtor to no man. Go, and preach (says God) *the preaching that I bid thee*. That is,

**(1.)** “The preaching that I did bid thee when I first ordered thee to go thither (<sup>310</sup>Jonah 1:2); go, and *cry against it*; denounce divine judgments against it; tell the men of Nineveh that their wickedness has come up to God, and God's vengeance is coming down upon them.” This was the message Jonah was then very loth to deliver, and therefore flew off and went to Tarshish; but, when he is brought to it the second time, God does not at all alter the message, to gratify him, or make it the more passable with him; no, he must now preach the very same that he was then ordered to preach and would not. Note, The word of God is an unalterable thing, and will not be made to bend to the humours either of its preachers or of its hearers; it shall never comply with their humours and fancies, but they must comply with its truths and laws. See <sup>2459</sup>Jeremiah 15:19. *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them*. Or,

**(2.)** “The preaching that I shall bid thee when thou comest thither.” This was an encouragement to him in his undertaking, that God would go along with him, that the Spirit of prophecy should abide upon him, and be ready to him, when he was at Nineveh, to give him all the further instructions

that were needed for him. This intimated that he should hear from him again, which would be his great support in this hazardous expedition; as, when God sent Abraham to offer up Isaac, he gave him a similar intimation, by telling him he must do it upon *one of the mountains which he would afterwards direct him to. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord*; he leads his people step by step, and so he expects they should follow him. Jonah must go with an implicit faith. Though he knows whither he goes, he shall not know, till he come thither, what message he must deliver, but, whatever it is, he must deliver it, be it pleasing or displeasing. Thus God will keep us in a continual dependence upon himself, and the directions of his word and providence. What he does, and what he will have us do, we *know not now*, but we *shall know hereafter*. Admirals, sometimes, when they are sent abroad, are not to open their commission till they have got so many leagues off at sea; so Jonah must go to Nineveh, and, when he comes there, shall be told what to say.

**III.** He faithfully and boldly delivered his errand. When he came to Nineveh he found his diocese large; it was an *exceedingly great city of three days' journey* (v. 3); a city *great to God*, so the Hebrew phrase is, meaning no more than as we render it, *exceedingly great*; this honour that language does to the great God that great things derive their denomination from him. The greatness of Nineveh consisted chiefly in the extent of it; it was much larger than Babylon, such a city, says Diodorus Siculus, as no man ever after built. It was 150 furlongs long and 90 broad, and 480 in compass; the walls 100 feet high, and so thick that three chariots might go a-breast upon them; on them were 1500 towers, each of them 200 feet high. It is here said to be of *three days' journey*; for the compass of the walls, as some relate, was 480 furlongs, which, allowing eight furlongs to a mile, makes sixty miles, which may well be reckoned *three days' journey* for a footman, twenty miles a day. Or, walking slowly and gravely as Jonah must when he went about preaching, it would take him up at least *three days* to go through all the principal streets and lanes of the city, to proclaim his message, that all might have notice of it. When he came thither he lost no time; he did not come to look about him, but applied closely to his work; and, when he began to enter into the city, he did not retire into an inn, to refresh himself after his journey, but opened his commission immediately, according to his instructions, and he *cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*. This, no doubt, he had particular warrant and direction to say; whether he enlarged upon this

text, as is most probable, showing them the controversy God had with them, and how provoking their wickedness was, and what reason they had to expect destruction and give credit to this warning, or whether he only repeated those words again and again, is not certain, but this was the purport of his message.

**1.** He must tell them that this great city shall be overthrown; he meant, and they understood him, that it should be overthrown, not by war, but by some immediate stroke from heaven, either by an earthquake or by fire and brimstone as Sodom was. The wickedness of cities ripens them for destruction, and their wealth and greatness cannot protect them from destruction when the measure of their iniquity is full and the measure of their vengeance has come. Great cities are easily overthrown when the great God comes to reckon with them.

**2.** He must tell them that it shall shortly be overthrown, at the end of forty days. It has a reprieve granted. So long God will wait to see if, upon this alarm given, they will humble themselves and amend their doings, and so prevent the ruin threatened. See how slow God is to wrath; though Nineveh's wickedness cried for vengeance, yet it shall be spared for forty days, that it may have space to repent and meet God in the way of his judgments. But he will wait no longer; if in that time they turn not, they shall know that he has *whet his sword, and made it ready*. Forty days is a long time for a righteous God to defer his judgments, yet it is but a little time for an unrighteous people to repent and reform in, and so turn away the judgments coming. The fixing of the day thus, with all possible assurance, would help to convince them that it was a message from God, for no man durst be so positive in fixing a time, however he might prognosticate the thing itself; it would also startle them into preparation for it. It may justly awaken secure sinners by a sincere conversion to prevent their own ruin when they see they have but a little time to turn in. And should it not awaken us to get ready for death, to consider that the thing itself is certain, and the time fixed in the counsel of God, but that we are kept in the dark and uncertainty about it in order that we may be always ready? We cannot be so sure that we shall live forty days as Nineveh now was that it should stand forty days; nay, I think it is more probable that we shall die within thirty or forty days than we should live thirty or forty years; and so many years in the day of our security we are apt to promise ourselves.

*Fleres, si scires unum tua tempora mensem;  
Rides, cum non sit forsitan una dies.*

*We should be alarmed if we were sure not to live a  
month, and yet we are careless, though we are not  
sure to live a day.*

## 3185 JONAH 3:5-10

### NINEVEH'S REPENTANCE

Here is

**I.** A wonder of divine grace in the repentance and reformation of Nineveh, upon the warning given them of their destruction approaching. *Verily I say unto you, we have not found so great an instance of it, no, not in Israel; and it will rise up in judgment against the men of the gospel-generation, and condemn them; for the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas, but behold, a greater than Jonas is here,* <sup>4124</sup> Matthew 12:41. Nay, it did condemn the impenitence and obstinacy of Israel at that time. God sent many prophets to Israel, and those well known among them to be *mighty in word and deed*; but to Nineveh he sent only one, and him a stranger, whose aspect was mean, we may suppose, and his *bodily presence weak*, especially after the fatigue of so long a journey; and yet they repented, but Israel repented not. Jonah preached but one sermon, and we do not find that he gave them any sign or wonder by the accomplishment of which his word might be confirmed; and yet they were wrought upon, while Israel continued obstinate, whose prophets chose out words wherewith to reason with them, and confirmed them by signs following. Jonah only threatened wrath and ruin; we do not find that he gave them any calls to repentance or directions how to repent, much less any encouragements to hope that they should find mercy if they did repent, much less any encouragements to hope that they should find mercy if they did repent, and yet they repented; but Israel persisted in impertinence, though the prophets sent to them drew them *with cords of a man, and with bands of love*, and assured them of great things which God would do for them if they did repent and reform. Now let us see what was the method of Nineveh's repentance, what were the steps and particular instances of it.

**1.** They *believed God*; they gave credit to the word which Jonah spoke to them in the name of God: they believed that though they had many that they called gods, yet there was but *one living and true God*, the sovereign Lord of all, — that to him they were accountable, — that they had sinned against him and had become obnoxious to his justice, — that this notice sent them of ruin approaching came from him, and consequently that the ruin itself would come from him at a time prefixed if it were not prevented by a timely repentance, — that he is a merciful God, and there might be some hopes of the turning away of the wrath threatened, if they did turn away from the sins for which it was threatened. Note, Those that *come to God*, that come back to him after they have revolted from him, must believe, must believe that he is, that he is reconcilable, that he will be theirs if they take the right course. And observe what great faith God can work by very small, weak, and unlikely means; he can bring even Ninevites by a few threatening words to be *obedient to the faith*. Some think the Ninevites heard, from the mariners or others, or from Jonah himself, of his being cast into the sea and delivered thence by miracle, and that this served for a confirmation of his mission, and brought them the more readily to believe God speaking by him. But of this we have no certainty. However, Christ's resurrection, typified by that of Jonah's, served for the confirmation of his gospel, and contributed abundantly to their great success who in his name *preached repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*.

**2.** They brought word to the king of Nineveh, who, some think, was at this time Sardanapalus, others Pul, king of Assyria. Jonah was not directed to go to him first, in respect to his royal dignity; crowned heads, when guilty heads, are before God upon a level with common heads, and therefore Jonah is not sent to the court, but to the streets of Nineveh, to make his proclamation. However, an account of his errand is brought to the king of Nineveh, not by way of information against Jonah, as a disturber of public peace, that he might be silenced and punished, which perhaps would have been done if he had cried thus in the streets of Jerusalem, who *killed God's prophets and stoned those that were sent unto her*. No; the account was brought him of it, not as of a crime, but as a message from heaven, by some that were concerned for the public welfare, and whose hearts trembled for it. Note, Those kings are happy who have such about them as will give them notice of the things that belong to the kingdom's peace, of the warnings both of the word and of the providence of God, and of the



tokens of God's displeasure which they are under; and those people are happy who have such kings over them as will take notice of those things.

**3.** The king set them a good example of humiliation, v. 6. When he heard of the *word of God* sent to him he *rose from his throne*, as Eglon the king of Moab, who, when Ehud told him he had a message to him from God, *rose up out of his seat*. The king of Nineveh *rose from his throne*, not only in reverence to a word from God in general, but in fear of a word of wrath in particular, and in sorrow and shame for sin, by which he and his people had become obnoxious to his wrath. He rose from his royal throne, and laid aside his royal robe, the badge of his imperial dignity, as an acknowledgment that, having not used his power as he ought to have done for the restraining of violence and wrong, and the maintaining of right, he had forfeited his throne and robe to the justice of God, had rendered himself unworthy of the honour put upon him and the trust reposed in him as a king, and that it was just with God to take his kingdom from him. Even the king himself disdained not to put on the garb of a penitent, for he *covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes*, in token of his humiliation for sin and his dread of divine vengeance. It well becomes the greatest of men to abase themselves before the great God.

**4.** The people conformed to the example of the king, nay, it should seem, they led the way, for they first began to *put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them*, v. 5. The least of them, that had least to lose in the overthrow of the city, did not think themselves unconcerned in the alarm; and the greatest of them, that were accustomed to lie at ease and live in state, did not think it below them to put on the marks of humiliation. The wearing of sackcloth, especially to those who were used to fine linen, was a very uneasy thing, and they would not have done it if they had not had a deep sense of their sin and their danger by reason of sin, which hereby they designed to express. Note, Those that would not be ruined must be humbled, those that would not destroy their souls must afflict their souls; when God's judgments threaten us we are concerned to *humble ourselves under his mighty hand*; and though bodily exercise alone profits nothing, and man's *spreading sackcloth and ashes under him*, if that be all, is but a jest (it is the heart that God looks at, <sup>288B</sup> Isaiah 58:5), yet on solemn days of humiliation, when God in his providence *calls to mourning and girding with sackcloth*, we must by the outward expressions of inward sorrow *glorify God with our bodies*, at least by laying aside their ornaments.

**5.** A general fast was proclaimed and observed throughout that great city, v. 7-9. It was ordered *by the decree of the king and his nobles*; the whole legislative power concurred in appointing it, and the whole body of the people concurred in observing it, and in both these ways it became a national act, and it was necessary that it should be so when it was to prevent a national ruin. We have here the contents of this proclamation, and it is very observable. See here,

**(1.)** What it is that is required by it.

**[1.]** That the fast (properly so called) be very strictly observed. On the day appointed for this solemnity, *let neither man or beast taste any thing*; let them not take the least refreshment, no, no so much as *drink water*; let them not plead that they cannot fast so long without prejudice to their health, or that they cannot bear it; let them try for once. What if they do feel it an uneasiness, and feel from it for some time after? It is better to submit to that than be wanting in any act or instance of that repentance which is necessary to save a sinking city. Let them make themselves uneasy in body by *putting on sackcloth*, as well as by fasting, to show how uneasy they are in mind, through sorrow for sin and the fear of divine wrath. Even the *beasts* must do penance as well as man, because they have been made *subject to vanity* as instruments of man's sin, and that, either by their complaints or their silent pining for want of meat, they might stir up their owners, and those that attended them, to the expressions of sorrow and humiliation. Those cattle that were kept within doors must not be fed and watered as usual, because no meat must be stirring on that day. Things of that kind must be forgotten, and not minded. As when the psalmist was intent upon the praises of God he called upon the inferior creatures to join with him therein, so when the Ninevites were full of sorrow for sin, and dread of God's judgments, they would have the inferior creatures concur with them in the expressions of penitence. The beasts that used to be covered with rich and fine trappings, which were the pride of their masters, and theirs too, must now be *covered with sackcloth*; for the great men will (as becomes them) lay aside their equipage.

**[2.]** With their fasting and mourning they must join prayer and supplication to God; for the fasting is designed to fit the body for the service of the soul in the duty of prayer, which is the main matter, and to which the other is but preparatory or subservient. *Let them cry mightily to God*; let even the brute creatures do it according to their capacity; let their

cries and moans for want of food be graciously construed as cries to God, as the cries of the *young ravens* are (<sup><B88E></sup>Job 38:41), and of the *young lions*, <sup><A42></sup>Psalms 104:21. But especially let the men, women, and children, *cry to God*; let them *cry mightily* for the pardon of the sins which cry against them. It was time to cry to God when there was but a step between them and ruin — high time to seek the Lord. In prayer we must cry mightily, with a fixedness of thought, firmness of faith, and fervour of pious and devout affections. By crying mightily we wrestle with God; we take hold of him; and we are concerned to do so when he is not only departing from us as a friend, but coming forth against us as an enemy. It therefore concerns us in prayer to stir up all that is within us. Yet this is not all;

[3.] They must to their fasting and praying add reformation and amendment of life: *Let them turn every one from his evil way*, the evil way he has chosen, the evil way he is addicted to, and walks in, the evil way of his heart, and the evil way of his conversation, and particularly *from the violence that is in their hands*; let them restore what they had unjustly taken, and make reparation for what wrong they have done, and let them not any more oppress those they have power over nor defraud those they having dealings with; let the men in authority, at the court-end of the town, turn *from the violence that is in their hands*, and not *decree unrighteous decrees*, nor give wrong judgment upon appeals made to them. Let the men of business, at the trading-end of the town, turn *from the violence in their hands*, and use no unjust weights or measures, nor impose upon the ignorance or necessity of those they trade with. Note, It is not enough to fast for sin, but we must fast from sin, and, in order to the success of our prayers, must no more *regard iniquity in our hearts*, <sup><A68></sup>Psalms 66:18. This is *the only fast that God has chosen* and will accept, <sup><B06></sup>Isaiah 58:6; <sup><B05></sup>Zechariah 7:5, 9. The work of a fast-day is not done with the day; no, then the hardest and most needful part of the work begins, which is to turn from sin, and to live a new life, and not return with the dog to his vomit.

(2.) Upon what inducement this fast is proclaimed and religiously observed (v. 9). *Who can tell if God will turn and repent?* Observe,

[1.] What it is that they hope for — that God will, upon their repenting and turning, change his way towards them and revoke his sentence against them, that he will *turn from his fierce anger*, which they own they deserve and yet humbly and earnestly deprecate, and that thus their ruin will be

prevented, and they perish not. They cannot object against the equity of the judgment, they pretend not to set it aside by appealing to a higher court, but hope in God himself, that he will repent, and that his own mercy (to which they fly) *shall rejoice against judgment*. They believe that God is justly angry with them, that, their sin being very heinous, his anger is very fierce, and that, if he proceed against them, there is no remedy, but they die, they perish, they all perish, and are undone; for who knows the power of his anger? It is not therefore the threatened overthrow that they pray for the prevention of, but the anger of God that they pray for the turning away of. As when we pray for the favour of God we pray for all good, so when we pray against the wrath of God we pray against all evil.

[2.] What degree of hope they had of it: *Who can tell if God will turn to us?* Jonah had not told them; they had not among them any other prophets to tell them, so that they could not be so confident of finding mercy upon their repentance as we may be, who have the promise and oath of God to depend upon, and especially the merit and mediation of Christ to trust to, for pardon upon repentance. Yet they had a general notion of the goodness of God's nature, his mercy to man, and his being pleased with the repentance and conversion of sinners; and from this they raised some hopes that he would spare them; they dare not presume, but they will not despair. Note, Hope of mercy is the great encouragement to repentance and reformation; and though there be but some glimmerings of hope mixed with great fears arising from a sense of our own sinfulness, and unworthiness, and long abuse of divine patience, yet they may serve to quicken and engage our serious repentance and reformation. Let us boldly cast ourselves at the footstool of free grace, resolving that if we perish, we will perish there; yet who knows but God will look upon us with compassion?

II. Here is a wonder of divine mercy in the sparing of these Ninevites upon their repentance (v. 10): *God saw their works*; he not only heard their good words, by which they professed repentance, but saw their good works, by which they brought forth *fruits meet for repentance*; he saw that they *turned from their evil way*, and that was the thing he looked for and required. If he had not seen that, their fasting and sackcloth would have been as nothing in his account. He saw there was among them a general conviction of their sins and a general resolution not to return to them, and that for some days they lived better, and there was a new face of things upon the city; and this he was well pleased with. Note, God takes notice of

every instance of the reformation of sinners, even those instances that fall not under the cognizance and observation of the world. He sees who turn from their evil way and who do not, and meets those with favour that meet him in a sincere conversion. When they repent of the evil of sin committed by them he repents of the evil of judgment pronounced against them. Thus he spared Nineveh, and *did not the evil which he said he would do against it*. Here were no sacrifices offered to God, that we read of, to make atonement for sin, but the *sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart*, such as the Ninevites now had, it what he *will not despise*; it is what he will give countenance to and put honour upon.