

The Book of Jonah
Class Notes
Session 8

Jonah 3.1-5 God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance.

In Hebrew...The command to “go” is two verbs...Literally... “Rising...Go”

(v.4): On the first day...Jonah announces God’s judgement...In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!

Notice...In Jonah’s prophetic announcement there is no call for repentance or directions in what to do next!

“The message that God told Jonah to deliver may be understood in two ways: Jonah hoped that Nineveh would be overturned in destruction; instead, the city was overturned in repentance and faith...God then overturned His decision for judgment and granted them mercy (v 10). Nineveh changed and God changed His judgment, but Jonah did not. After Jonah delivered God’s message, nothing more is heard of him in ch 3.”¹

(v.5): The power of God’s Word convicts! The reality of the coming divine judgement moves the people to turn to Yahweh.

The phrase “the people of Nineveh believed God” can be understood as...the Ninevites *believed in God*!

The Hebrew idiom reflects trusting in a person.

The Ninevites repentant response is to fast and put on sackcloth... Common expressions of grief, humility and penitence in the A.N.E.

Jonah 3.6-9 As the people of Nineveh repented...Messengers likely brought word to the king about what was happening.

The King likewise is convicted and similarly repents! The King’s conviction and sorrow leads him and his nobles to issue a decree...All people and livestock are to fast...repent (Sackcloth) and pray!

“King and nobles wanted to ensure that everyone in Nineveh got the message and responded to his decree...Including animals underscores urgency of repentance. Greek historian Heroditus reported that in Persian times, animals were sometimes made part of the mourning process...this enforced the completeness of the fast but also suggests it was of short duration.”²

Again...Irony...Both Nineveh and the King *immediately* heard...obeyed...God’s word!

Jonah *immediately* rebelled!

All believed God and “rose up”... The people and King to repentance...Jonah to Joppa!

(v.9): The King hopes that the LORD would *relent*. Again...This statement reveals the power of God’s Word!

¹ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

² *Ibid*.

“This fear of judgment from God is startling because the Assyrians were a cruel, violent nation...fearing no one (cf. 2 Kings 18:33–35).”³

2 Kings 18.33-35

“Assyrian king and citizens hoped God would change His mind, show mercy, and withhold judgment. Pagan sailors had also expressed this hope (1:6)...Ninevites understood that they deserved God’s punishment. Luther: ‘A truly contrite heart wrestles with fear and with doubt. . . . If there were no faith, it would never be able to stand its ground in this struggle and distress. Therefore these words are, rather, evidence of faith, but of a faith that trembles with fear and that still contends for mastery, but that all the while keeps God’s grace before its eyes, saying: ‘God may yet repent and turn from His fierce anger, etc.,’ that is, grace still hovers in the background, and all is not wrath.’” (AE 19:88).⁴

Jonah 3.10 This is a key verse in Jonah. YHWH is compassionate and forgiving...Just as Jonah was afraid of!

Just as God had saved Jonah...He now saves...spares...Nineveh!

The Ninevites turned from their evil... שׁוּב (*shûb*)... “To return” ... This is repentance! God’s judgement (Law) leads to mercy (Gospel)...Mercy leads to repentance!

“God’s mercies are always unmerited; His grace is never earned. Repentance is never a work to be rewarded. But this is not to say that God does not act in response to such repentance. Nineveh’s repentance delayed God’s destruction of the city for about 150 years. The people evidently fell into sin again, so that later the city was destroyed, in 612 B.C.”⁵

God’s mercy, love, and desire for forgiveness and reconciliation are the themes that lead into the next chapter in Jonah’s journey!

“When Nineveh repented, God relented.” The very thought of God “changing his mind” causes difficulty for some believers. In perfect consistency with his justice, righteousness, and mercy, he spared Nineveh. There is absolutely no contradiction here. God’s character and his promises do not change...God does change his plan of action according to his purposes. In Exod 32:12 Moses prayed that Israel might not be destroyed despite their sinful behavior in making and worshiping the golden calf. He asked God, “Turn from your fierce anger, relent and do not punish your people” (cf. Amos 7:3, 6; Jer 18:7–11; 26:2–3). Again and again the Old Testament relays the truth that God is responsive to his creation.”⁶

Going Forward: “Jesus declared that “the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment . . . and condemn” His own generation of hearers who failed to repent (Mt 12:41). God continues to call us to repentance for our sins of thought, word, and deed. The men of Nineveh furnish us with an example to follow. May they not condemn us on the Day of Judgment! May the Holy Spirit rather lead us daily to repent of our sins and trust Christ for pardon and peace.”⁷

³ J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Victor Books, 1985).

⁴ *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

⁵ Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

⁶ B.K. Smith and F.S. Page. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).

⁷ *The Lutheran Study Bible*.