

Jonah: The Rebellious Prophet

6. Jonah: Nineveh Repents



Nineveh was a wealthy urban city built along the Tigris River, the Assyrians were a proud and sophisticated people, emboldened by their accomplishments. In Jonah's day, this confidence was shaken. In the north, the Urartian Kingdom¹ was threatening, Nineveh had suffered two plagues and an eclipse before Jonah arrived. Jonah came with a message of judgment, and the people responded. These events were shaking the confidence of this proud city, they were willing to change their view of themselves.

From this chapter we can learn several aspects of God's economy. First God does judge nations with calamity; this was the threat to the city of Nineveh. Second, God gives time to cities and nations before he judges. Third, God will withhold judgment on a nation or city if the people turn from their wickedness. Fourth, God understand the difference between sincere and feigned repentance.

Jonah Preaches to Nineveh

Jonah 3

1 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!"

Jonah arrived in Nineveh after an over 550-mile journey from where the fish vomited him on the coast of the Mediterranean; this journey would have taken Jonah at least a month or more. There were just two ways to travel in that day, either foot or by animal power. Coming out of a fish, maybe Jonah's reputation proceeded him, its hard to not think of what was going through Jonah's mind as he was on route. Was he afraid of Nineveh and the Assyrians? One thing for sure, Jonah learned God is in control, a fish swallowed him and

¹ The Urartean Kingdom is named after the region known as Ararat in the Bible. This kingdom was near its peak in the days of Jonah, threatening the Assyrian Kingdom.

preserved him 3-days and 3-nights in the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Jonah's confidence should have been bolstered by what he has already been through. What could a city do to him that the belly of fish couldn't, Jonah must have had many thoughts going through his head as he approached the city.

The city spanned a 3-day journey, so by all accounts it was one of the worlds, largest cities at that time, with outlying areas and villages leading up to the walled portion of the city. The wall was at least 12 Kilometers with 15 great gates around the city, and with a population of at least 600,000², since Jonah tells us 120,000 lived in the city.

On the first day of his arrival, he began to proclaim the message God gave him, a message of judgment. Notice the people responded immediately, they didn't wait for their leaders they heard Jonah and responded. The King followed the people, ordering even the animals into the act of national repentance. Wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes the king showed he was serious about repentance. The king wanted his nation to cry "Mightily" to God, he wanted a passionate cry, a deep meaningful moaning to God to not judge the nation. It is not a political speech, but a powerful yearning of impending doom.

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. **Jonah 3:5-8**

So the: The people responded to the proclamation of coming judgment: *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*. The people took the warning to heart, they believed Jonah. Why did the people respond here, and not at other times? The events in their lives opened them to their own inability to solve their own problem. They knew they were dependent on God and he was their only answer. This is the dilemma many of us face; do we really believe God is serious? We mistake delay of judgment for no-judgment. How long does it take for us to respond to God? What needs to happen in our life?

People of Nineveh: The citizens of Nineveh were broken, their confidence in was lost. They were open to hear the words of Jonah. Back at home in Israel, in the northern kingdom, *Hosea*, and *Amos* delivered God's messages of judgment to Israel. The people of Nineveh were open because they were humbled. Humility comes before repentance, unless we are willing to say we are wrong, how can we repent? Only when we insist on our "Rightness" do we remain in sin.



Compare the people of Nineveh to the people Israel. Israel was proud of their status; they thought the prophets sent to them were jokes. Hosea was told to return to Judah and speak no more, lest he be killed, compare this to the response of Nineveh.

4 "They do not direct their deeds Toward turning to their God, For the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, And they do not know the Lord.

5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also stumbles with them.

6 "With their flocks and herds They shall go to seek the Lord, But they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them.

7 They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, For they have begotten pagan children. Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage. Hosea 5:4-7

Believed God: The people of Nineveh believed God, while Israel did not. Nineveh was humbled therefore they could see God, versus the pride of Israel. These two perspectives go back to the first human conflict between Cain and Able.

² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nineveh-ancient-city-Iraq>

The “*Cain and Abel syndrome*” of humanity, two brothers both wanted to be accepted by God. The one brother believed God the other relied on himself. Both brothers offered sacrifices before God, Abel offered the sacrifice from his heart, while Cain offered it because he felt he had to. Abel offered the “Firstborn” and the “Fat”, while Cain offered “an offering”. God respected Abel’s offering and did not respect Cain’s. Cain became upset, he felt rejected, how was Cain to respond?

God seeing Cain’s anger asked him *“Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?”* God then tells Cain, how to solve the problem. God says to Cain, *“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”* Cain’s offering was rejected because it was not sincere, his offering was made because he felt he had to make it. His offering was in competition to Abel’s. As a result, he became jealous of his brother’s acceptance and angry at his rejection, Cain’s pride could not handle the situation. He could not humble himself to take God’s instruction. His answer was to remove the competition rather than humble himself and do what was right. Though he wanted to be accepted by God, he wanted to be accepted on his terms, because his “Pride” demanded it. The result was he killed his brother, in the first murder of many to come.

Israel and the people of Nineveh were two great contrasts, yet the people of Nineveh were sincere in their repentance. They were willing to humble themselves, while the people of Israel, were proud and arrogant.

This is also the model in the time of Christ. The Romans and Gentiles were open to the message of Jesus, while the people of Israel were not.

Proclaimed...a fast...sackcloth: The people before the king proclaimed a national fast, wearing sackcloth. Sackcloth was a rough cheap material used for holding produce, products. The material used to make sacks. This would be the equivalent of people taking off their nice proud clothing and wearing “garbage” bags, then having their whole family do the same. God hears the repentance of nations and will withhold judgment if a nation turns. This goes for his own people as well as nations who do not know Him, such as the Ninevites.

12 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.

13 "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people,

14 "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

2nd Chronicles 7:12-14

Does God judge His people and nations? Yes, God allows calamity to fall on nations. God can also stop the calamity when a nation turns to Him. God also responds on an individual level too

This also applies to us as individuals, God will respond to sincere repentance when we turn from our ways God is willing to accept us.

Eze 18:20-23 ESV

(20) The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

(21) "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

(22) None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live.

(23) Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

Then word came: This was not a “Political Repentance”, where the leader of the country and the famous gather together and make speeches in “Prayer language”. This was movement from within, starting at the hearts of the people. The people did not wait for their politicians to lead them in repentance, they did it on their own. The movement reached the king, who followed along with the people.

king of Nineveh: The kings of this time was *Ashur-Dan III* (773–755 BC) and *Asur-Nirari V* (754-745 BC). The king was willing to humble himself because there were no answers in the political realm. Only

when we run out answers, do we turn to God, our fallen nature is in rebellion against God. Just try to imagine a national leader, with all his pomp and \$2000 suits humbling himself and putting on sackcloth and sitting in ashes. Is this guy nuts or is he really serious about how bad everything is? When you care about what God thinks, you don't care about what people think.

Nebuchadnezzar was also a great king, proud of his accomplishments he reigned over Babylon almost 200-years after Jonah, yet God humbled him for seven-years. Only when he was humbled did he see the reality and vanity of his pride. He repented and God restored him. The fourth chapter of Daniel is the written testimony of the King of Babylon.

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

2 I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me Dan

(37) Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and **those who walk in pride he is able to humble.** Daniel 4:1-2.37

Will God withdraw judgment with repentance?

9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? **Jonah 3:9**

Who can tell: The King really believed Jonah, he believed His words were directly from God. Therefore, he acted. From this point, the King had no assurance these actions would bring about change, the king hoped they would. Jonah knew the Lord, he knew if the people repented God might relent from judgment.

12 "Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.

14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him-A grain offering and a drink offering For the Lord your God? Joel 2:12-14

God will turn: God's nature is mercy. We live today because God does not judge us what we are due. God gives us space to turn, but if man does not turn, then God does judge. This applies to those who know him as well as those who do not. God judged Canaan, after 400-years with the arrival of Israel, because the sins of the land did not reach the level. God later judged Israel and Judah for their sins after they rejected the message of the prophets. God's economy of repentance applies both to individuals and nations.

Eze 18:24-32 ESV

(24) But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.

(25) "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

(26) When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die.

(27) Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life.

(28) Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

(29) Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

(30) "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.

(31) Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

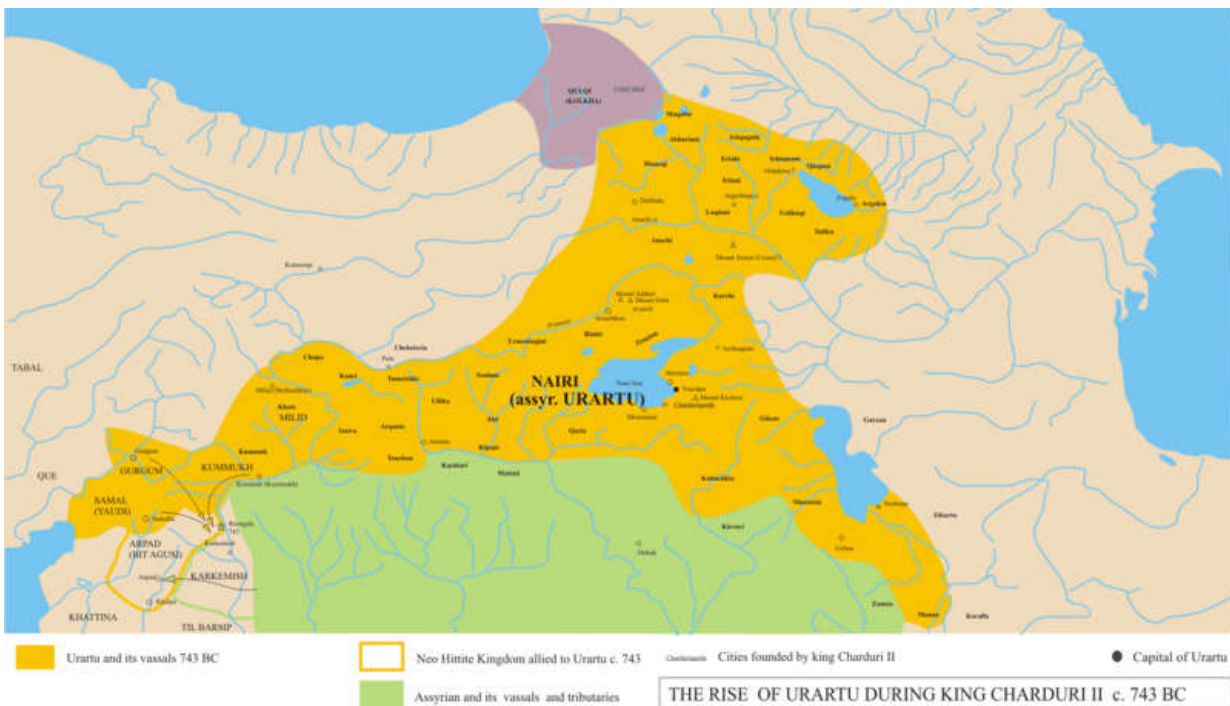
(32) For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."

God sees our acts of repentance

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. **Jonah 3:10**

God saw their works: The people repented; the king repented. Their actions included wearing sackcloth and fasting water and food for both man and beast. The people also repented from their violence and God saw these actions. God does the same for us, if we will sincerely approach God and repent of our actions God will hear us.

They turned: This is key point; the people changed their ways and God responded. This is the point of God allowing affliction in our life, God wants us to respond. He wants us to change. For the lost he wants them to seek Him. For those who know Him, he wants us to be conformed to His image.



Kings of Assyria	
KING	B.C. DATE
Shalmaneser III	858 - 824
Samsi-Adad V	823 - 811
Adad-Nirari III	810 - 783
Shalmaneser IV	782 - 773
Assur-dan III	772 - 755
Assur-nirari V	754 - 745
Tiglath-Pileser III	744 - 727
Shalmaneser V	726 - 722
Sargon II	721 - 705
Sennacherib	704 - 681
Esarhaddon	680 - 669
Assurbanipal	668 - 627
Assur-etel-ilani	626 - 623?
Sin-sumu-lisir	623?
Sin-sar-iskun	623 - 612?
Assur-uballit II	611 - 609?