

**Intro:** In chapter 3 of Jonah, Jonah goes to Nineveh to tell the people that in forty days Nineveh would be overthrown.

Imagine how America would respond if some Jewish preacher were to buy time on all the major networks and satellite providers and proclaim that within 40 days America will be overthrown; that God's judgment was coming to America?

The vast majority would laugh. Others would try to have him committed to a mental institution, but few would take him seriously.

So why would a ruthless, pagan, non-believing city listen to a Hebrew man from Israel deliver a message of gloom and doom? Why should America listen to a prophet that preaches gloom and doom?

We have thousands upon thousands preaching from pulpits this morning all across the nation. Why should those within hearing distance listen? Why should you or I listen to anyone who claims to speak for God? Why should we consider any warnings they share with us? And why should we repent? Why should we stop doing, thinking, or behaving in ways that are proclaimed evil to be evil by God?

I think the answer is in our text. **Turn with me to Jonah 3 in your Bible or if you're using our pew Bibles, turn to page 983.**

There are two things we need to keep in mind as we look at this chapter. Jonah was a prophet of God. This meant he believed in God. As a prophet, God would at times clearly convey messages to Jonah.

The second thing we need to remember is that Jonah was a reluctant messenger. He didn't want to go to this pagan, violent, evil people. He heard the horror stories and feared for his life. He also may have wanted this evil nation destroyed to make the world a better place.

Now look at the **first three verses** of our text. They read, *"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, <sup>2</sup> 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.' "*<sup>3</sup> *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD."*

### **I. The Word of God**

Why should America listen to a prophet of doom and gloom? Why should you or I listen to anyone who claims to speak for God? Why should we as individuals, America as a whole, or the Ninevites as a people, repent simply because some preacher or prophet preaches God's judgment and our need to repent.

We shouldn't. If it's just some man or woman preaching doom and gloom, we shouldn't. It doesn't matter how sincere they are, we have nothing to fear from a prophet or preacher. But, if what they are preaching and proclaiming is actually the Word of God, then we had better listen, we had better respond.

Jonah may have been a reluctant prophet, but he wasn't stupid when it comes to the Word of God. In this short book we find Jonah running from God and obeying God, but we never find him ignoring God. Jonah respected the Word of the Lord. He believed the Word of the Lord.

Today, the Word of God is largely ignored by America.

Today, the Word of God is largely absent from the pulpits of American churches.

Today, the Word of God is largely dismissed by church people as having no power.

But Jonah knew different. And with the help of the Holy Spirit I pray that this message will help you to know that the Word of God is not something to ignore, not something to dismiss, and not something to turn a deaf ear to. The Bible says in **Hebrews 4:12**, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*

Jonah never ignored it. He did try to run from its power, but soon discovered he couldn't. After a raging storm at sea, a rescue by a large fish, and then having been dumped back on dry land, our text says the Word of God came to Jonah a second time and this time Jonah listened.

### **1. Jonah Listened to God**

God gave Jonah the same message a second time and this time Jonah accepted it. Unlike many today, Jonah was listening to God. He may not have always obeyed, but I think he always listened.

In my pre-marriage counseling we do one session on communication. The video that the couples watch stresses that the most important element of communication is listening.

The debt of our nation has never been higher. The morality of our nation has never been lower. The problems among families in our nation have never been greater. I believe these problems can all be traced back to one fact. In our day of mass communication, we've stopped listening. We don't take time to listen to one another, nor to God.

I learned a long time ago that I can't listen to more than one thing at a time. Ladies, if you didn't know it already, if you talk to your husband while he's listening to a ballgame, or watching something on TV, he's not really listening to you. He may be nodding his head and saying "yes dear, okay dear." But he's not getting it. Ask for the TV to be turned off or find another time, if you want him to listen.

The same is true with God. We can't listen to the world and God at the same time. We can't be tuned in, plugged in, connected by way of Facebook, Instagram, twitter, and a hundred other ways and at the same time listen to God.

We need alone time with God. We need quiet time with God. And this will only happen if we first believe in the Word of God. This was true of Jonah. He believed the spoken Word of God was worthy of listening to. Do you?

### **2. Jonah Obeyed God**

Our text says, *"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD."*

During the storm and subsequent deliverance by a great fish, Jonah either learned or was reminded of a great truth about God--He's all powerful. We can't fight against God and win. We can't hide from God. We can pretend He doesn't exist, but He is still there.

Before we can obey God, we have to believe in God and in what He has to say. This was true of Jonah. It was also true of the Ninevites.

But what would it take, what kind of evidence would God have to provide to get a pagan, non-believing, ruthless, people to believe that (a) Jonah was a prophet of God, (b) the God he spoke for was worthy to obey, and (c) the message he brought deserved to be heard and obeyed?

### **II. The Ninevites Believed**

The acceptance of Jonah's message was so quick that it sounds surreal or unbelievable to us. Let's first look at the fact that they believed Jonah was from God.

#### **1. They Believed Jonah was from God**

To believe Jonah should be listened to meant they believed Jonah's God was real. Although we know the Holy Spirit didn't function the same way in the Old Testament the way He now does following Christ crucifixion and accession into Heaven, the Holy Spirit did work among the prophets and the people in the Old Testament. He could have given the people of Nineveh the faith to believe. In other words, it could have been a supernatural thing.

There could also be a more natural, yet still, a God thing that made them believe Jonah. In one account from an old newspaper clipping I read years ago there was the story of a whale that had been caught and inside of it was a human that had been swallowed whole. The person was completely white from the bleaching effect of the whale's stomach acid. If Jonah appeared looking like an albino, combined with the superstitions of the Ninevites, the two factors may have combined to create a sufficient fear to motivate them to accept Jonah and his message.

The one thing we do know is they believed. Because they did believe Jonah was from God, they believed his message.

#### **2. They Believed Jonah's Message**

**Verses 3-4** says, *"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began to go into the city,*

*going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*

The city was a massive one even in today's standards. Jonah says it would take three days to walk across it. One commentary points out that it "may mean that it took Jonah three days to visit the various quarters of this huge place. The area of the vast quadrangle containing the remains of the four cities comprised under the name *Nineveh* is estimated by Professor Rawlinson at two hundred and sixteen square miles." (Pulpit Commentary).

Jonah went about one third of the way into the city and then begin to deliver his message. It was short and to the point much like John the Baptist's in the New Testament. He began to preach, *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*

Jonah apparently went throughout the city proclaiming this message. The forty days is a Biblically significant time frame. One writer says this about the number 40 in the Bible: *"The number 40 shows up often in the Bible. Because 40 appears so often in contexts dealing with judgment or testing, many scholars understand it to be the number of "probation" or "trial." This doesn't mean that 40 is entirely symbolic; it still has a literal meaning in Scripture. "Forty days" means "forty days," but it does seem that God has chosen this number to help emphasize times of trouble and hardship.*

*The following are examples of the Bible's use of the number 40 that stress the theme of testing or judgment: In the Old Testament, when God destroyed the earth with water, He caused it to rain 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:12). After Moses killed the Egyptian, he fled to Midian, where he spent 40 years in the desert tending flocks (Acts 7:30). Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights (Exodus 24:18). Moses interceded on Israel's behalf for 40 days and 40 nights (Deuteronomy 9:18, 25). The Law specified a maximum number of lashes a man could receive for a crime, setting the limit at 40 (Deuteronomy 25:3). The Israelite spies took 40 days to spy out Canaan (Numbers 13:25). The Israelites wandered for 40 years (Deuteronomy 8:2-5). Before Samson's deliverance, Israel served the Philistines for 40 years (Judges 13:1). Goliath taunted Saul's army for 40 days before David arrived to slay him (1 Samuel 17:16). When Elijah fled from Jezebel, he traveled 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:8).* (<http://www.gotquestions.org/40-days-Bible.html#ixzz3azlqh9kx>).

And in the New Testament Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness and it was 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension into heaven.

Although we don't see in Jonah's message the call to repent, the Ninevites understood what Jonah's

message was about. They responded to the message by repenting.

### 3. They Responded to The Message

They believed Jonah was a prophet of God. They believed that this God who sent Jonah was powerful enough to destroy their city and nation. But why did they believe it?

In my life I can look back in the years and months leading up to the time I accepted Christ into my life and see the hand of God working. We don't just suddenly believe in God. We don't just suddenly believe the Word of God. We don't just suddenly repent and accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, and I don't believe the people of Nineveh did either.

I think something provided the evidence they needed to believe. We know that Jonah's ministry was during the time of king Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-28), who ruled in Israel from 782 to 753 B.C. Could something have happened that prepared them to receive Jonah's message. According to records found in the ancient libraries of Nineveh, there were years of horrible floods, followed by years of drought and famine around, or just preceding the time of Jonah. This could have been viewed as God's judgment at that time, then when Jonah shows up preaching doom and gloom, they quickly accepted the message and begin repenting and showing remorse over their actions.

I believe that we each have different standards, or criteria that must be met or satisfied for us to come to a place that we can believe in God, in Christ, and in His Word. I also believe that if we are willing to look for it, God will give it to us.

When Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples said, He would not believe Jesus rose from the dead unless he touched the nail prints in His hands and the spear print in His side; Jesus shows up and offers them to him.

The evidence is all around if we will only look for it. For Andrew Flew it came by way of science. Mr. Flew was not just an atheist for most of his life, he was one of the leading atheists promoting, debating, and writing about atheism. But in 2007, he came to believe that God does indeed exist. In the last book he wrote, titled, "There is a God," he writes, that he came to believe in God, "almost entirely because of the DNA investigations. What I think the DNA material has done is that it has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved in getting these extraordinarily diverse elements to work together. It's the enormous complexity of the number of elements and the enormous subtlety of the ways they work together. The meeting of these two parts at the right time by chance is simply minute. It is all a matter of the enormous complexity by which

the results were achieved, which looked to me like the work of intelligence' (p. 75).

Another man by the name of **Simon Greenleaf** (1783-1853) was one of the founders of Harvard Law School. He authored the authoritative three-volume text, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence* (1842), which is still considered "the greatest single authority on evidence in the entire literature of legal procedure."<sup>1</sup> Greenleaf literally wrote the rules of evidence for the U.S. legal system. He was certainly a man who knew how to weigh the facts. He was an atheist until he accepted a challenge by his students to investigate the case for Christ's resurrection. After personally collecting and examining the evidence based on rules of evidence that he helped establish, Greenleaf became a Christian and wrote the classic, *Testimony of the Evangelists*.

The evidence is there for the existence of God. The evidence is there for the belief that Jesus did rise from the grave and is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. For the Ninevites, the evidence was there that God was going to bring judgment, so they repented. They did so in hopes that God would change His mind. **Verses 5-9** read, "*And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.*"<sup>6</sup> *The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.*<sup>7</sup> *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,*<sup>8</sup> *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.*<sup>9</sup> *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."*

They were hoping for mercy. They were hoping for forgiveness. And their hope was well founded.

### III. The Mercy of God

**Verse 10** states, "*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*"

They repented. They turned from the evil ways, at least temporarily. According to records found in the libraries of Nineveh, the most prosperous times for the Ninevites were in the late 8th century and early 7th century which would have been shortly after their time of repentance.

God is holy. Sin cannot be ignored. But God is also merciful and loving. **Psalm 145:8-9** states, "*The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.*"

God will forgive and God will bless all those who do repent.

**Conclusion:** The Ninevites received God's mercy and so can you. He will forgive. He will save. You may not be ruthless and violent like the Ninevites, but you have refused to let God be in control of your life. The sin that separates us from God is the sin of rejecting God's authority over our lives. It's what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden and it's what we often do.

Seek God through Jesus and you will find Him. Surrender control of your life to Jesus and you will find Him. He bids you to come to Him. Come now.

Series: BOOK OF JONAH

# The Warning

**Text: Jonah 3:1-10**

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