

In the final two chapters of Jonah, we discover the reason that the prophet did not want to preach the LORD's message of judgment to Nineveh. He knew that the LORD would be merciful to Nineveh if they were to repent of their sins and Jonah did not want Israel enemies to be shown mercy. After Nineveh repents, the LORD then proceeds to teach Jonah a lesson on compassion for his enemies.

Jonah 3

1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

The LORD repeats the command that He initially gave Jonah (Jonah 1:2), knowing that the prophet would be much more receptive to these instructions than the first time. The LORD could have sent another prophet, but the LORD may have been insistent on sending Jonah for at least two reasons: 1) His desire to spare Nineveh from destruction if they repented; 2) to teach Jonah a lesson on compassion toward one's enemies.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD" – After spending 3 days and nights inside the belly of a great fish, Jonah knew better than to disobey this command a second time.

"Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey" – Historians comment on the huge size of the city of Nineveh, measuring to be about 60 miles in circumference. Thus, a man traveling 20 miles a day would take three days to walk all the way around the city. Commentators are divided on whether the three days refers to the circumference of the city or the diameter (walking from one end of the city to the other). Regardless of what is intended, Nineveh was one of, if not the largest, city of its time, which why its described as being "exceeding great."

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

"And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey" – This could be interpreted in a couple of different ways. For instance, Jonah may have traveled a whole day's journey into the city before beginning to preach. Another interpretation is that Jonah began traveling through the city and he began preaching during the first day (i.e. virtually immediately after entering the city).

"and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" – Jonah begins preaching the message that the LORD had given to him, which was a warning of the judgment of the LORD. This statement is likely a summary of the essence of Jonah's message and he likely went into more detail during his preaching. We are not told in what manner that Nineveh would be overthrown, whether by an invasion from an enemy nation or a the direct judgment from God (earthquake, fire and brimstone, etc.). However, the LORD gave Nineveh a deadline of 40 days to repent of their wickedness or their destruction would result.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God" – Jonah's preaching obviously had an impact, empowered by the LORD. They believed that what Jonah was preaching was a message from the LORD and it struck fear into their hearts.

"and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" – The fact that they genuinely believed God's warning motivated them to take action. They demonstrated their mourning over their sin by proclaiming a city-wide fast and putting on sackcloth (a common practice in the day). Everyone participated, no matter where they were on the social/economic/political ladder. Such wholesale repentance has been rare in human history.

Verses 6-8: These verses expand on the city-wide display of repentance. The king heard what Jonah was preaching and the LORD apparently touched his heart so that he humbled himself in repentance. The king decreed that the entire city should also fast and turn away from their sins as they cried out to God for mercy.

9 Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

This question is apparently quoted from the king's decree. His hope was that the LORD would see their repentance and compassionately change His mind about destroying the city of Nineveh.

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way" – God recognized that they had genuinely repented of their evil ways. Contrary to what some critics might say, God has no pleasure in destroying the wicked (**Ezek. 18:23** "*Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?*").

"and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not" – The LORD had compassion on Nineveh and changed His mind about the "evil" (bad things) that He had threatened to do because of their sins.

Jonah 4

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry” – The original Hebrew for the phrase “displeased Jonah exceedingly” says “it was exceedingly evil [*bad*] to Jonah.” The LORD’s decision to spare Nineveh made Jonah angry because it was the exact opposite of what he wanted. He wanted the enemies of Israel destroyed, although some commentators believe that Jonah saw Gentiles as undeserving of God’s mercy.

“And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country?” – Before he rebelled against God’s command, Jonah had apparently complained to the LORD about this potential result if Nineveh heard the message of God’s judgment. He’s essentially saying “Didn’t I say that this would happen while I was still at home?”

“Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish” – Jonah specifically says that this is the reason he rejected the mission and tried to run.

“for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” – God wanted to give Nineveh the opportunity to repent and received His mercy (v. 11) and Jonah knew that the LORD was merciful, kind and compassionate, and only resorted to judgment when necessary. Thus, if Nineveh repented when they heard the message of judgment then Jonah knew that the LORD would show mercy, which was the result that Jonah did not want.

3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is* better for me to die than to live.

Jonah allows his emotions to control him and calls on the LORD to kill him. He is so angry that the LORD decided to show mercy to Nineveh that he decided that he would rather be dead than live. We too can say and do foolish things when we let our anger control us.

Verses 4-5: The LORD asks Jonah if he has a legitimate reason for being angry, but apparently Jonah doesn’t respond. Instead, he builds himself a crude shelter outside the city on the east so that he could watch what would happen to the city. Perhaps Jonah was hoping that the repentance of the people of Nineveh wouldn’t last long and the LORD would still have to destroy it.

6 And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

“And the LORD God prepared a gourd” – Just as the LORD prepared a fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 1:17), the LORD prepared a “gourd” to serve His purposes with Jonah. It’s unknown exactly what species of plant this was, but many commentators believe it to be a castor oil plant, which grows quickly in hot climates and has large leaves.

“and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief” – Jonah apparently did not have much shade from the hot sun, so the LORD decided to give him some relief from his misery by providing the gourd plant to give him shade. As we will see, however, the point of the “gourd” was not necessarily to give Jonah relief from the hot sun but to teach him a lesson about compassion.

“So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd” – Jonah appreciated the shade and relief from the hot sun that the gourd provided.

7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

The LORD prepared a worm to kill the gourd so that it withered and was no longer able to provide Jonah with shade. The LORD was not playing games with Jonah; He was setting the stage to help Jonah understand why He showed compassion to Nineveh.

Verses 8-9: The LORD did not stop with merely allowing the sun to beat down on Jonah’s head. He also sent a hot east wind to blow, making Jonah miserable and faint in the hot sun. Once again Jonah began to wish that he could die and the LORD again asks him if he was justified to be angry because of the gourd. Jonah replies that his anger was indeed justified and that it would be better for him to die.

10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

“Then said the LORD, Thou hast had *pity* [to have compassion] on the gourd” – Jonah had compassion for the gourd, although it was for selfish reasons (because of the shade it had provided).

“for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow” – Jonah had no effort invested in the gourd. He couldn’t justify his anger or pity because he had no part in the gourd growing or even being there.

“which came up in a night, and perished in a night” – Jonah’s pity and anger were fixed on something so trivial as a plant whose lifespan is so short. Plant life is not nearly as valuable as human life (**Matt. 6:30** “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”).

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?

“And should not I *spare* [pity; to have compassion] Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons” – The word “spare” is the same Hebrew word used for “pity” in v. 10. If Jonah could have pity and compassion for something so trivial as a gourd, why shouldn’t the LORD have compassion for a large city full of people? A “score” is 20, so 6 x 20 = 120 or 120,000 people.

“that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand” – Many commentators believe this description refers to young children who do not yet understand right from wrong. If so, the population of Nineveh could have been well over a 600,000 people. However, this description could also refer to the general population who hadn’t had the benefit of God’s law or teaching. They could have been morally ignorant, not knowing right from wrong. The LORD is always righteous in His judgment.

“and *also* much cattle” – The LORD does not want to indiscriminately destroy life, even if it’s animal life.