

## Jonah 3:1-10

Jonah 3:1 – “Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,

1. Exactly the same as 1:1 except “son of Amittai” is replaced with “a second time”
2. Jonah’s attempt to flee had no effect other than causing Jonah some hardship. But, these hardships had still worked out for good:
  - a. The sailors experience the Lord
  - b. Jonah experience mercy and greater understanding

Jonah 3:2 – “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”

1. The Lord is giving Jonah the exact words. Jonah is commanded to say exactly and only the Lord’s words.
2. “call out against it the message that I tell you” is also translated “speak to it the speech which I will say to you.”

Jonah 3:3 – **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.**

3068 [e]	1697 [e]	5210 [e]	413 [e]	1980 [e]	3124 [e]	6965 [e]
Yah-weh;	kid-bar	nî-ne-weh	'el-	way-yê-lek	yō-w-nāh,	way-yā-qām
יְהוָה	כַּדְבָּר	נִינְוָה	אֶל-	וַיֵּלֶךְ	יוֹנָה	וַיִּקָּם 3
of Yahweh	according to the word	Nineveh	to	and went	Jonah	So arose
N-proper-ms	Prep-k   N-msc	N-proper-fs	Prep	Conj-w   V-Qal-ConseclImperf-3ms	N-proper-ms	Conj-w   V-Qal-ConseclImperf-3ms

3117 [e]	7969 [e]	4109 [e]	430 [e]	1419 [e]	5892 [e]	1961 [e]	5210 [e]
yā-mîm.	šə-lō-šet	ma-hā-lak	lê-lō-hîm,	ge-dō-w-lāh	'îr-	hā-ye-tāh	we-nî-ne-wêh,
יָמִים:	שְׁלֹשֶׁת	מַהְלָךְ	לְאֱלֹהִים	גְּדוֹלָה	עִיר-	הַיְתָה	וַנִּיבְנָה
days	three	a journey [in extent of]	an exceedingly	great	city	was	Now Nineveh
N-mp	Number-msc	N-msc	Prep-l   N-mp	Adj-fs	N-fsc	V-Qal-Perf-3fs	Conj-w   N-proper-fs

1. We do not know details:
  - a. Where was he?
  - b. How long before he left?
  - c. How did he travel?
  - d. What was Jonah’s attitude?
  - e. Was Jonah confident the Assyrians would reject his message, or was Jonah concerned the Lord might respond positively to what would surely be the Assyrian’s pagan response to the Almighty God of Israel.
2. “was” could be translated “is” as in Isaiah 49:5 where the translation reads “my God is my strength” not “my God was my strength.”
3. “great city” – Hebrew “a great city to God”
  - a. Joshua 10:2 the same Hebrew word for “great” is used to mean “important” city – “Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities”
    - i. Gibeon was physically small (2.5 acres) compared to other Canaanite cities.
  - b. Notice the interlinear: The Hebrew words are “gedowlah lelohim” (from *gadol* meaning “great” and *elohim* meaning “God, god”). Some translations:
    - i. NIV – “Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.”

- ii. ESV – “Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth.”
  - iii. NASB – “Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days’ walk.”
  - iv. KJ – “Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.”
  - v. CEV – “The city was so big that it took three days just to walk through it.”
  - vi. Young’s Literal – “Nineveh hath been a great city before God, a journey of three days.”
- c. The words might relate to the great population of the city mentioned in 4:11
  - d. These words should stress that Nineveh was an “important” city or an “extraordinarily important” city. But, it is linguistically, historically and archaeological not the “exceedingly large” city it will be 100 years from Jonah’s day.
  - e. The point here and in ch. 1 and ch. 4 is Nineveh is important to the Lord.
4. “three days’ journey in breadth” – Hebrew “a visit was a three days’ journey”, or literally, “Nineveh...was a three day visit”
- a. Most commentators have thought the “three days” indicated the great size of Nineveh in Jonah’s day. This has led some to consider the author of the book to be historically confused or not historical at all.
  - b. “visit” – this word can be understood or interpreted several ways
    - i. Nehemiah 2:6 – this same word refers to how long it would take Nehemiah to do the specified task and did not refer to how far he had to travel. Artaxerxes was not asking Nehemiah how far away Jerusalem was or how long it would take him to travel to Jerusalem. Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah:
      - 1. NIV: “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?”
      - 2. NASB: “How long will your journey be, and when will you return?”
      - 3. ESV: “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?”
    - ii. “three days’ travel” could possibly be a description for the width of Nineveh, “but this is not the most likely meaning” (Word Biblical Commentary, vol 31, Stuart)
    - iii. Assyrian literature has the same variety of meanings with terms with parallel meanings as this Hebrew word that can refer to:
      - 1. A straight-line distance
      - 2. A circuitous or winding course that is not the most direct route
      - 3. The time spent on a task (Zondervan’s Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Walton)
  - c. “a visit of three days”
    - i. Ancient Near East practiced hospitality where a trip would include:
      - 1. Day one: arrival
      - 2. Day two: primary purpose
      - 3. Day three: return
    - ii. Mesopotamian references from this time indicate that for political and prophetic visit of men from one city-state entering another for specialist advice would mean that for a prophet to be received by the leaders of the city (as in 3:5) he would first have to establish his *bona fides* (his honesty, integrity and sincerity of his intention). So, Jonah, a prophet from out of state Israel, would have to be recognized as an official emissary only after following accepted protocol. The first (and, even third) day would involve meetings, check points, explanations, and

even formal hearings and the presentation of gifts to the city officials upon arrival (which is clearly the practice in many, many other cases from this time.

- iii. It is really ridiculous and overly simple minded to think that Jonah wandered through several countries (including warzones) meandered into a large city (which was in the midst of riots, insurgence and plagues) and aimlessly began shouting at people in the street they were all going to perish in forty days.

## 5. "Nineveh"

- a. Nineveh in Jonah's time (759 BC) could refer to:
  - i. The city
  - ii. The province that Nineveh governed. The size of this province is not certain, but 25 miles to the south the city of Kalhu was about its southern extent and twelve miles to the north the city of Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad) was still in the province of Nineveh.
- b. Nineveh was not the royal city where the King of Assyria Ashur-dan III lived in a royal palace. But, in the limmu list of Assyrian notables Nabu-mukini-ahi was the governor of the province of Nineveh in 761. The Assyrian king reigned through four powerful officials who served as governors over their province.
- c. Beginning with Ashur-dan III's brother Adad-nirari III (811-783) the king of Assyria (emperor) began to have trouble with the people of Urartu north of Assyria between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea who took land interfered with trade routes and defeated Assyria in battle. Ashur-nirari III gave large tracts of land and privileges to various governors and nobles. This would have continued into Ashur-dan III's day. But, due to the chaos of this Assyrian time period the records and details are not well documented. The point is the province of Nineveh with its leading city of Nineveh could act fairly independently with its own governor who was also called by the Hebrew word for "king."
- d. The city of Nineveh in Jonah's day (759 BC) is described by Sennacherib around 700 BC as being a city with no wall, but Sennacherib's father, Sargon, mentions the north gate of Nineveh which may merely mean the central mound or acropolis of the city had some kind of a wall while the city itself was wall less. Potential details of Nineveh of Jonah's day:
  - i. No city gates or walls (but, the administrative central part of the city may have had a simple wall with at least one gate.)
  - ii. Total city circumference was 3 miles
  - iii. Covered 1.5 square miles on 300 acres
  - iv. No royal palace
- e. The great built city of Nineveh took place after the days of Jonah when Sennacherib moved the capital of Assyria to Nineveh after his father's death in 705. It was at that time Sennacherib built a double wall sixty feet thick with the inner mud-brick wall being sixty feet high. The outer wall was faced with finely dressed limestone blocks standing twelve to eighteen feet high. The whole city of Nineveh was at that time surrounded by a moat. Details of Sennacherib's Nineveh, the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire:
  - i. A double city wall 60' thick (inside mud bricks 60' tall; outside dressed limestone block 12-18' tall) with 15 gates
  - ii. 7.5 miles in circumference
  - iii. Covered 4 square miles on 1,850 acres

- iv. Royal palace of Sennacherib called “Palace Without Rival 1600 by 800 feet covering 30 acres (70 of these rooms have been excavated all decorated with huge stones slab reliefs depicting victories in battle.)

Jonah 3:4 – **Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”**

7121 [e]	259 [e]	3117 [e]	4109 [e]	5892 [e]	935 [e]	3124 [e]	2490 [e]
way-yiq-rā	'e-hād;	yō-wm	ma-hā-lak	bā-'îr,	lā-bō-w	yō-w-nāh	way-yā-ḥel
וַיִּקְרָא	אֶחָד	יוֹם	מֵהֵלֵךְ	בְּעִיר	לְבוֹא	יוֹנָה	וַיִּחַל 4
and he cried out	first	day's	on the walk	the city	to enter	Jonah	And began
Conj-w   V-Qal-Conseclmperf-3ms	Number-ms	N-ms	N-msc	Prep-b, Art   N-fs	Prep-l   V-Qal-Inf	N-proper-ms	Conj-w   V-Hifil-Conseclmperf-3ms

2015 [e]	5210 [e]	3117 [e]	705 [e]	5750 [e]	559 [e]
neh-pā-keṭ.	wə-nî-ne-wêh	yō-wm,	'ar-bā-'îm	'ō-wd	way-yō-mar,
נְהַפְּכֶתָּ:	וַיִּגִּידָהּ	יוֹם	אַרְבָּעִים	עוֹד	וַיֹּאמֶר
shall be overthrown	and Nineveh	days	forty	yet	and said
V-Nifal-Prtcpl-fs	Conj-w   N-proper-fs	N-ms	Number-cp	Adv	Conj-w   V-Qal-Conseclmperf-3ms

- The presentation of his message on the first day was enough to accomplish the task.
- This would mean that the mere introductory phase of entering the city legally was enough to trigger the entire city and the throne.
- Jonah’s message:
  - Oracles of the Ancient Near East typically are instruction and encouragement for the king from the gods. If there is a rebuke it is due to neglected ritual activity in the god’s cult.
  - OT oracles of the prophets include announcements of coming judgment along with naming the offenses – idolatry, neglect of the Law of Moses, injustice, etc.
  - Jonah (and, the message the Lord gave Jonah) does not mimic a Jewish prophecy from the covenant Lord, but follows closely with the practice of the Ninevites and Ancient Near Eastern culture.
  - Jonah does not confront them with idolatry or instruct the in the Law of Moses. But, neither does he encourage their king or give the people hope.
  - Jonah is a prophet. Prophets are NOT evangelists or missionaries. Prophets announce the Lord’s message. Prophets do not preach the good news of the Gospel.
  - Jonah is on a short lease and is given a message word for word.
  - There are only five words in his message in the Hebrew and five words in the Assyrian Akkadian
- Pagans understood that justice was important to the gods if cultural order was to be maintained. Thus, even the Ninevites knew that lawlessness (general illegal, lawless behavior; not considering the Mosaic Law) was offensive to the gods.
- “Yet forty days” can mean “there are still forty days before...” to repent and avoid this disaster.
- “shall be overthrown” is *nehpaket* from *haphak* which means “to turn” and “overturn”
  - There is some obscurity in the message itself which is focused on the word
  - It can mean: “an overthrow”, “a judgment”, “a turning upside down”, “a reversal”, “a change”, “a deposing of royalty”, “a change of heart”
  - The statement Jonah made for God can mean both:

- i. "In forty more days Nineveh will be overthrown."
- ii. "In forty more days Nineveh will have a change of heart."

d. Jonah did not compose these words, but the Lord told him what five words to say.

Jonah 3:5 – **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.**

1. Jonah's message (since he was an unknown prophet to the Assyrians) would likely have been tested and authenticated through these pagan procedures practiced in this day (revealed in the Mari documents):
  - a. The imprint of the hem of his garment would have been provided to the king and tested through divination.
  - b. The movement of the heavenly bodies would have been checked and observed to test if Jonah's words were possible
  - c. The actions of animals including the flight patterns of birds would have been checked
  - d. The configurations of the intestines of a sacrificed animal would have been evaluated
2. The gods of the Ancient Near East behaved erratically and for selfish reasons, so the people of Nineveh would not have expected Jonah to list their sins or command them to repent of certain behavior. They would have tried to manipulate the gods with acts of humility, submission and ritual while recognizing their failures to be just and lawful (consider the riots and overthrow within the kingdom at this time).
3. The gods even had needs and people would try to meet those needs or remove anything that irritated the gods in an attempt to earn the goodwill of the gods.
4. Jonah may have been offended by the fact that his God, the Lord, who was committed to righteousness, standards of justice, and the character of his Name would be so underrated and mis-evaluated by the people of Nineveh as a mere pagan deity who could be manipulated and pleased with his needs being met. Jonah's theological sensitivity may have been completely repulsed by the Assyrians interpretation of the Lord's message and their application of appeasing the Lord.
5. "Fasting" was practice in Nineveh as a sign of mourning.
6. "Sackcloth" was used in the Ancient Near East. It was called *basamu* in Akkadian. Esarhaddon writes in an inscription that he "wrapped his body in sackcloth befitting a penitent sinner." And the mother of Nabonidus says, "In order to appease the heart of my god and my goddess, I did not put on a garment of excellent wool, silver, gold, a fresh garment; I did not allow perfumes or fresh oil to touch my body. I was clothed in a torn garment. My fabric was sackcloth."
7. The people of Nineveh were polytheists and would have taken any god's oracle seriously.
8. The fact that Jonah came from another land to speak for his god to the people of Nineveh would have caused special attention. Remember, Jonah is not evangelizing or serving as a missionary asking the people of Nineveh to change their religion. Jonah has nothing to lose or gain. Jonah is merely relaying a message from the god. The people of Nineveh will be the winners or the losers. Jonah stands to gain nothing. He is not evangelizing them, but prophesying to them god's plan.



**Clay tablet showing the bowels of a sheep used to read or divine the meaning of an animal sacrifice.**

Jonah 3:6 – **The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.**

1. “King of Nineveh”

- a. Jonah may not have encountered the King of Assyria, Ashur-dan III, but instead the governor of the province of Nineveh, Nabu-mukini-ahi, who resided in the city of Nineveh.
- b. The Hebrew term for “king” is *melek*. This is the term used throughout the OT for “king”
  - i. The Akkadian (Assyrian) word for king is *sarru*.
  - ii. The Akkadian word *saknu* meaning “governor” is translated into Hebrew with the Hebrew word *melek* in the bilingual inscription from Tell Fekheriye discovered in the 1970’s on a Neo-Assyria statue from the 800’s BC
  - iii. This shows a secular use of the Hebrew *melek* (“king”) to translate the Assyrian title *saknu* (“governor”) in an inscription from the time of Jonah.
  - iv. In the limmu list of Assyrian nobles (858-699 BC) in the year 761 BC Nabu-mukin-ahi is called the “governor” (Assyrian, *saknu*, or, Hebrew, *melek*) of the province or region of Nineveh

2. The king (governor) is showing himself to be responsive to the words of the god.

Jonah 3:7 – **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,**

1. The fact that the animals are included is logical when it is considered that the whole of the land is dressing up and putting on a show for the god(s). We dress up at funerals in black. We even have black hearses and horses dressed in black in funeral processions.
2. Herodotus mentions that the Persians had the custom of cutting the manes of horses when the people shaved their heads in mourning.

Jonah 3:8 – **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.**

1. The fact that the animals are included indicates how serious the people and the king that this sever warning from Jonah.
2. The Ninevites call the Lord “God” (*Elohim*) because that is how they knew him. They do not call him Yahweh, or “LORD”, as the sailors did. The sailors knew the LORD in a way that was closer to the way Jonah and Israel knew him. It seems obvious the Assyrians are not brought that far along in their understanding of the LORD, and merely know him as God.
  - a. See Exodus 6:3 – “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty (El Shadday), but by my name the LORD (Yahweh) I did not make myself known to them.”
3. The Ninevites called for everyone to turn from fourth generation behavior:
  - a. “evil way” –lawlessness and rebellion towards established order
  - b. “violence” – *hamas* – injustice and social oppression

Jonah 3:9 – **Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”**

Jonah 3:10 – **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.**

1. “relented” (NASB), “repented” (KJV), “changed his mind” (NRSV)
2. God does not change his mind concerning his covenant (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29), but he can respond to people and situations when they change by changing his planned response.