



5 | JONAH 3:1-10

OVERTHROWING NINEVEH

The Spirit of God can do what none of us can do. Through personal revival, God can bring corporate revival of entire groups of hard-hearted people. He wants to use you!

Outline

1. THE PERSON THE SPIRIT USES (3:1-4)

Someone Who Hears God's Word
Someone Given Second Chances
Someone Willing to Obey
Someone Called to a Destination
Someone with God's Message

2. THE PEOPLE THE SPIRIT TOUCHES (3:5-9)

Touched with Faith
Touched with God's Calling
Touched with Repentance

3. THE PATIENCE GOD DEMONSTRATES (3:10)

Divine Judgment
Divine Mercy

Call to Worship

My heart is steadfast, O God! I will sing and make melody with all my being! ² Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! ³ I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. ⁴ For your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. —Psalm 108:1-4

Songs

10000 Reasons
How Deep the Fathers Love for us
Blessed Assurance
Behold Our God

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

In the year 430 A.D., **Patrick, a young Roman Briton, born in what is now Scotland**, was carried off by Irish raiders to be a slave. At the time he was a nominal Christian, but he turned to God in earnest in the midst of his suffering. "I would pray constantly during the daylight hours," he later said. "The love of God and **the fear of the Lord surrounded me more and more.**" After six years, he escaped.

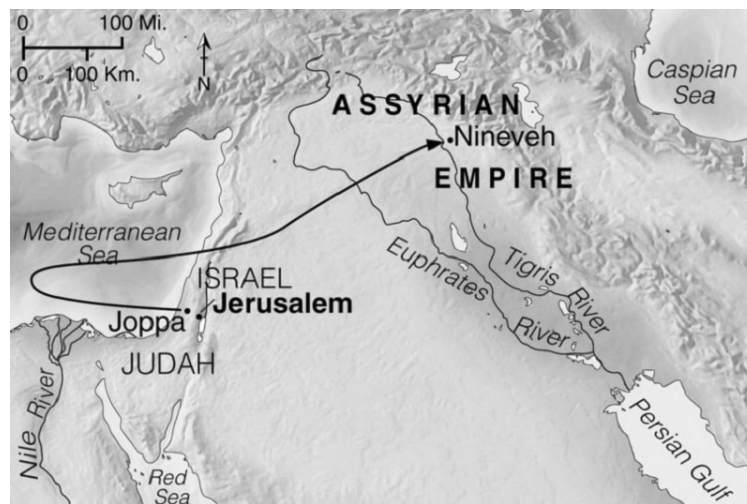
Years later, Patrick had **a dream in which he received a call to evangelize Ireland**, the country in which he'd been enslaved. At that time, Ireland was pagan and idolatrous, a difficult place to serve. Patrick faced fierce **opposition from druids** and wrote, "Daily I expect murder, fraud, or captivity, but I fear none of these things because of the promises of heaven." **Called to witness to his enemies**, Patrick obeyed. But when Jonah was called to do the same, he ran. Yet God called him back and gave him a second chance.

The connection between Ireland and Nineveh in today's text is that **it took the Spirit of God convert the nation**. We human beings are made of dust. We are nothing. The Spirit is everything. "All is vain unless the Spirit of the holy one comes down," as the old hymn says.

In the text before us, we find the meanest, baddest city in the ancient world experience a revival of divine proportions. **How does one man, without military or political power** – without power over the learning institutions or philosophical empowerment **walk into one of the greatest cities in the ancient world** and overthrow it? Jonah is just a tool in God's hand to bring one of the **greatest revivals to one of the most unlikely cities** in the ancient world. It happened through the heaven sent power of the holy Spirit on a spiritually hard hearted people.

NINEVAH

When Jonah was spit out on the dry land, likely near Joppa where he had begun his run from God. He must have been relieved to be alive. He was back from the dead. This city stood on the eastern bank of the Tigris River. *The Place*. He made a beeline for Nineveh around **six hundred miles** back to where God called him in the first place.



The Power of God. We might ask ourselves today, how do we change and transform our culture? How can we who are so small **overcome the hostile atheism, self-centered worldliness, and insane confusion of our culture?** God gives us the answer in Jonah 3.

Jonah 3:1-5 | Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." ³So 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. ⁴Jonah

began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"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.

Key Thought: The Spirit of God can do what none of us can do. Through personal revival, God can bring corporate revival of entire groups of hard-hearted people. He wants to use you!

When God wants to send revival, he often uses the most unlikely people to reach the most unlikely candidates.

1. THE PERSON THE SPIRIT USES (3:1-4)

God's persistent grace can transform you if you let it. It certainly transformed Jonah. God's grace is what gives us a **second chance**. If necessary, he will provide us with a third, and a fourth, and so on. God's grace is truly unrelenting!

Jonah wasn't much, but he was a man with a message. Right now, he was a soaking wet mess! **Fresh from the fish's belly**, Jonah stood on **shaky legs**, thirsty and hungry, but he was alive. You can imagine Jonah looking around with his heart beating, surveying the Mediterranean Sea for any signs of that great fish. Seeing none, Jonah likely submerged back into the water to **wash his face and clothes and body from the blubber** and mess of the interior of the great fish. Even with all the scrubbing, we can imagine that **Jonah's skin was pale, and his hair bleached white** from the gastric acids of the fish's digestive system.

Mustering all the strength he could, Jonah walked on his tender, bare feet a short way up the beach **toward Joppa**. Jerusalem wasn't far from here. He could very **easily just go home, or at least stay in Jerusalem and rest**. He just wanted to go home. But before he could contemplate running from God again, the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.

SOMEONE WHO HEARS GOD'S WORD

Jonah 3:1-2a | Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,² "Arise, go to Nineveh."

Jonah was **prepared** for the word. Jonah had been in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. God's word had been hidden and treasured in his heart. He sang his own psalm to God. Jonah is spit out by the great fish onto dry land, probably in the vicinity of Philistia, near Joppa, where his journey away from God had begun. Suddenly, he hears the word of God!

Jonah was **pierced** by the word. "**Arise, Jonah!** Get up and **go to Nineveh**," came the Lord's gentle but firm voice. **God's voice was so much clearer now**. Jonah's heart was pierced by the word. You know you are experiencing personal revival when God's voice cuts deep into you.

Jonah was **persuaded** by the word. There was **true fear in his heart** when he heard God's voice. His head was bowed. He was **a broken man**. He had defied God and lost. He had run from God, but there was no escape from the Lord's reach. God did a mighty work when Jonah was in the belly of the great fish. Now he hears the word of the Lord. **Broken, he now obeys**. He begins to make his trek to Nineveh, some five hundred and fifty miles away.

SOMEONE GIVEN SECOND CHANCES

God has never used perfect people. The only perfect one was his only Son, Jesus Christ. It seems that through human eyes, Jonah was not just imperfect, but squarely **disqualified**. He had run from his call.

He would rather die than go to Nineveh. But rescued him with a great fish. He set his feet on dry land after three days. If God were to say, "Go home now, Jonah. I am glad you have repented of your disobedience, but you are no longer useful to me," he would be just and reasonable in so doing. But this is not God's way. Thus, instead of reading of God's rejection of Jonah, we find **God gives Jonah a second chance.**¹

Jonah 3:1-2a | Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh."

Does God always give us a second chance? Does God stoop to use those who have rejected his calling, turned a deaf ear to his word, and pursued a course of determined disobedience? Yes, he is like that. If he did not, none of us could serve him.² **He gives a second, and third, and fourth, and hundredth chances!**

God is the God of second chances! God comes back to Jonah and says, "I'm ready to send you to Nineveh." Now that doesn't make any sense. Jonah has let God down. Do you take an officer who has just been court-martialed and immediately give him the command in the most crucial battle of the war? I mean these heroic quests ought to be for the cream of the crop, for the people who had the highest grade point, for the guy who whipped everybody else in the tryouts. You don't give it to Jonah, but God does. In fact, God has this funny habit of doing that.³ God loves to use people who have been greatly humbled through deep suffering. Jonah was in the belly of a fish. His hard heart had been somewhat softened. He's ready to go, and God says for the second time, "Go..."

Consider **Peter**. In Matthew 16:17 Jesus refers to Peter as "Simon son of Jonah," which suggests some connection between the apostle and the prophetic protagonist of the book of Jonah.⁴ Peter's track record is awful. Who would put this guy in charge of laying the foundation for New Testament Christianity? Why, after Peter's incredible denial of Christ for the third time would the Lord choose him to be chief of the apostles? Like Jonah, it was like Peter died to his call as an apostle. He goes back to his fishing business. I can just hear Peter, "I'm a failure at this apostle thing, but I sure can fish" (cf Jn 21:3). But Jesus pursues Peter. He restores Peter and commissions him for Pentecost. Remember? He tells Peter, "Feed my sheep" (cf Jn 21:15-19). What we learn from Jonah and Peter and so many others in the Scriptures is that failures make us useful. **Fifty days after denying Christ, Peter preaches Pentecost** and three thousand are born again!

And what about **Abraham**? He twice doubted God's protection when he essentially gave his wife to the king's harem—first Pharaoh and then Abimelech. God was gracious and blessed Abraham with riches instead of punishment. Then Abraham and Sarah laughed when they heard they would have a son in their old age. They appropriately named him "Isaac" which means "laughter." This is how amazing God's salvation and grace is that it is so unbelievable it makes you laugh! What an amazing God of second chances.

SOMEONE WILLING TO OBEY

Jonah 3:1-3a | Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." ³So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.

Jonah had **run from God in disobedience**. Chastening for him had been so good for him. It brought him to **touch the hem of Jesus garment** as it were in the belly of the great fish. When God touches you, when you encounter the living God, his word becomes alive. Faith overwhelms you. And it's like electricity

¹ Timothy J. Keller, "The Secret Siege of Nineveh, Jonah 3" from *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Powell, "Echoes of Jonah," 158.

overcoming the circuits of a lamppost and what was once dark now shines. **The word, now alive, is powerful and unstoppable.** Jonah in his flesh despised the Ninevites, but with his view refocused on the Lord, was one of surrender and obedience.

Now, in this moment of surrender, he was willing to do whatever God had for him, even to go to the notorious capital city of the Assyrians, Nineveh.

Jonah was left on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, perhaps in Joppa near the land of Philistia. He heard God's word, and then he obeyed it. He began a journey of over 550 miles to the city of Nineveh, which today is Mosul, Iraq. It was **a long, long journey.**

There was a pathway of God's call for Jonah. He was to straight to Nineveh and preach judgment. Jonah is finally listening. God says "go" to his children, and they obey. If they refuse, then comes **chastening.** We need a fish or a whale of some kind. We need to be swallowed by some monstrous situation. But **like Jonah, when we come out of the fish, and we want to obey.** The main thing God desires is your obedience. He doesn't need your gift of gab. He doesn't need your mere theological education or your people skills. He wants your heart. Don't be afraid of where he's calling you or what he's calling you to do. Don't let fear take hold of you. **Keep your eyes on him and go!**

You need to obey God's calling and get out of where you are. Go. Your "going" may be **a phone call to encourage someone.** For most of us, the going is **walking across our neighborhood** or even across the church auditorium and asking another family to come over to your home. Be the hands and feet of Jesus. He says, "Bring me your burdens. Bring me your hurts. I will understand." You are to be Jesus to people. That's the point of going.

SOMEONE CALLED TO A DESTINATION

Jonah 3:2-4a "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against 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, three days' journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey.
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The city's renown. Nineveh was a truly "great city" as we read. Nineveh had great **culture** with great schools and centers of **learning.**⁵ The city had many **merchants and shops.** There were city gathering places where people enjoyed live **music** (the only kind they had!) with a variety of instruments like drums, flutes, and harps. They even had **sports** like wrestling and hunting. Aside from the renown of their culture, they were incredible **engineers.** Eighteen different canals have been found that brought water to the Assyrian Empire capital of Nineveh. They invented new forms of irrigation to water crops. The Assyrians were amazing with **mathematics.** They were the first to function on a 60-second minute and a 60-minute hour, which we still use today. They also divided up the circle into 360 degrees. They were among the first to invent **longitude and latitude in geographical navigation.** They're also renowned for the first truly great **invention:** the wheel! While one wants to re-invent the **wheel,** it was likely invented by the Assyrians, first to create pottery, and then to make the first chariots.⁶

The city's location. Jonah's **journey was quite the trek!** Five hundred and fifty miles was the distance, and there were no automobiles or trains to get there. He might have grabbed a donkey as he walked through Israel. You can imagine him traveling for several weeks, stopping to eat and rest at times. Maybe he got some gold coins and a good supply of dried fruit and flasks of water for the journey. We don't know how he got there. The Bible doesn't say.

The city's wealth. When the ancient city of Nineveh was uncovered, among the 22,000 cuneiform tablets was the famous "Black Obelisk" tablet which depicted the incredible luxury of the city with the

⁵ Joshua J. Mark, "The Neo-Assyrian Empire," *World History Encyclopedia* (Surrey, UK: World History Publishing, 2014), https://www.worldhistory.org/Neo-Assyrian_Empire/.

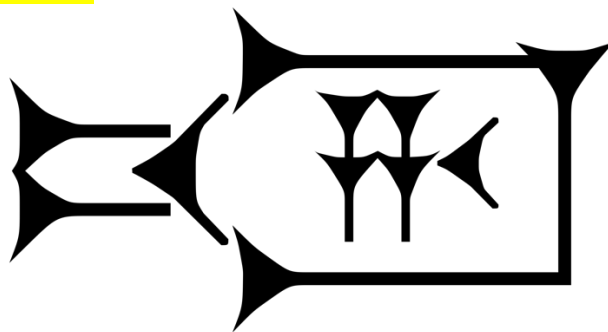
⁶ Jonathan Reich, *Ancient Assyrians: History, Civilization & Culture* (Mountain View, CA: Study.com, 2022), <https://study.com/academy/lesson/ancient-assyrians-history-civilization-culture.html>

import of **exotic animals**, including camels, monkeys, and rhinoceroses. They had an incredible array of various **foods and clothing** from all over the ancient world. Assyria advanced major trade routes and became the **main trade partners of the ancient world**.⁷ Remember Jonah is **a prophet from fancy Samaria** during a time of great prosperity, during the reign of Jeroboam II. Archaeological evidence confirms the biblical account of his reign as the most prosperous that the northern kingdom of Israel had yet known.⁸ Yet Nineveh had even greater riches than Jonah had ever seen in prosperous Israel. Nineveh had luxury with **palaces and buildings of unheard-of splendor**, and **gathering places for amusement**. Certainly, Jonah must have preached against these frivolities.

The city's size. We read that Jonah traveled a day's journey into the city, about twenty miles. Nineveh was the greatest and **largest city the world had yet seen up to that time**. Including the suburbs of Nineveh, we read that in order **to walk through the city, it took three days**. Nineveh had the *diameter* of a three-day journey, where one day equals about 20 miles. This was a city 60 miles in diameter, which is **about the size of Chicago and all the suburbs**, what we call **Chicagoland**. It was an impregnable fortress. This was a city with military might, economic sophistication, and cultural reputation.

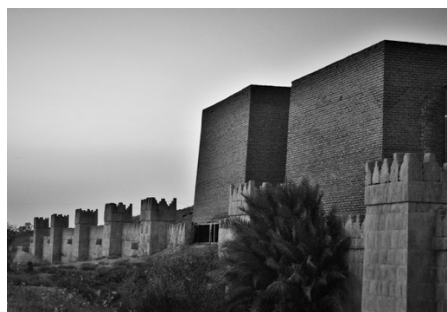
FISH CITY

The city's logo. The city of Nineveh literally means "Fish City." In ancient times, when you wrote out the name "Nineveh," you would use cuneiform for *Ninâ* which means "fish." Nine-veh means "the place of the fish" or literally "Fish City." The **infamous Nimrod was the founder** of Nineveh. They worshipped Dagon, the fish god, like the Philistines. So God sends them a prophet who is vomited out of a fish to preach to Fish City! **He smells like a fish**. Talk about contextualization!



"Nineveh" in neo-Assyrian cuneiform, and then in simplified cuneiform

The city's walls. **Nineveh had walls 100 feet high and 50 feet thick**, and the main one, which had by 15 gates, was over seven and one-half miles long. This was an impenetrable city, yet here comes Jonah with the same power that Moses had when he took on the armies of Pharaoh.



⁷ Salvatore Gaspa, "Textiles in the Neo-Assyrian Empire," January 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501503054>.

⁸ M. Broshi, I. Finkelstein, (1992). "The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II", *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research*, 287: 47-60.

Nineveh's massive walls

The city's army. The Assyrian army had the most **highly advanced military technology** of their time with horses and **chariots** with iron wheels, **spears** and **iron swords, daggers, javelins, and slings**, and devastating fiery arrows from their trained marksmen. The **cavalry** was so large that many units had up to a thousand horsemen. The Assyrians were **notoriously cruel and without mercy**. The prophet Hosea was a younger contemporary of Jonah, and his prophecies had begun to warn Israel that unless they repented, they would be conquered by the Assyrians. **Not only that, but the Assyrians' cruelty was also incomprehensible, killing women, children and innocents along with the cruelest tortures ever devised.**

The city's impassability. In the Lord of the Rings, **Nobody in their right mind would even think of besieging the city**, let alone trying to capture the city, because you couldn't even get an army around it. Who had an army that could stretch around the circumference of this city? But the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men, and God decides, not just to besiege the city, but to sack it with an army of one.

The city's people though cultured were **idol worshippers**. To Israel, they were the untouchables. They were utterly pagan. Who are the untouchables today that God wants to save? God has a heart to reach those raised in extremist Muslim nations. Are you afraid of that? God has a heart to reach the mentally ill. Who are the untouchables today?

God saves people with **criminal records** all the time. I think of **John Newton the slave trader**, who today would be a convicted murderer a thousand times over for what he did. He kidnapped thousands of people from what is today the West African nations of Ghana, Congo, the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Angola.

Dear saints, **we are to lay down our lives for sinners**, even notorious ones. God sent Jesus into this world not to serve himself, but to serve others and lay down his life as a sacrifice for many. That has to be our commitment and calling as well.

SOMEONE WITH GOD'S MESSAGE

Jonah's message wasn't "God loves you and has a great plan for your life." His message was "Repent, Yahweh will no longer tolerate your sin."

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!"

A message of warning. God's call to Jonah was to preach judgment to a place he never dreamed of going. He was to **preach exactly what God told him to preach**. God's messengers are never to edit the message. We are to be the mailmen. "**Forty days and judgment will be delivered!**" This wasn't the Roman's Road. This was really a call from God's prophet to warn these brutal people that God's judgment was about to fall. **There were no qualifiers, like if you repent, I will relent**. None of that. It was straight up judgment. Jonah was likely glad to preach that. He didn't want to preach God's unrelenting love to Nineveh. Only judgment. Yet God does love Nineveh. They have heard enough about this awesome God who brought a mixed multitude out of Egypt. "Surely if he loved the Egyptians he will love us too," they must have thought.

SNAKE WARNING

It's not rude to tell the gospel to someone. It's merciful. **When I was a child, I grew up swimming in the swampland of Louisiana**. Our home was right on the **Natalbany River** which eventually leads to Lake Ponchartrain and the Gulf of Mexico. It wasn't very often, but every once in a while, someone would spot these **highly poisonous snakes, water moccasins, slithering on the surface** of the river. Immediately **someone would yell, "Snake!" and all would retreat to the shoreline. Was it rude or ill-mannered** or disrespectful to give that warning to all? No, in fact, to not give it would be unloving. Some saw the snake, but all heard the warning.

That's how Jonah felt. He had just come from being in the belly of another sea creature, and he gave the warning. He couldn't make them see the "snake" of their sin. That's the Holy Spirit's role. The Spirit is the agent of conviction and illumination. Jonah knew what it was like to be "buried" in the consequences of his own sin when he was in the belly of the fish. Now he was calling out with conviction for these Ninevite sinners to find the same deliverance he found.

NOT ABOUT MESSENGER

*A message of salvation. **It's not about the messenger.*** It's the gospel that saves people. Somebody says, "I'm not articulate. I don't know what to say. It's easy for you to say. You're articulate. You're well-trained." Look at Jonah! Jonah had a message of judgment. He wasn't trying to impress anyone. He likely secretly hoped they perished. Yet Jonah changed the city.

They said of **Paul**: "He's not articulate." They said of Paul: "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account" (2 Cor 10:10). **Moses** said, "I can't talk; **I'm slow of speech**" (Exo 4:10). The greatest of God's messengers were not much to listen to. It's not about the power of fancy speech but of the **presence of God falling on the people**. Paul gives us the secret of evangelism. It's not a slick presentation **but a supernatural message**. Paul was clear about the power of the gospel.

Romans 1:16 | For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

God is **not impressed with slick messengers**. If God used a **donkey** to speak to someone (*cf* Num 22:21-39), then God can surely use a reluctant prophet to bring about a great revival with wide-reaching salvation.

Like Jonah, God sent Paul into the city. All of the Roman Empire was changed by a bunch of slaves and street people. How could that have happened? How did Christians actually, literally take over the Roman Empire? It's because **Paul did not trust in eloquence, but in the power of God**.

Did you see what he said? He got up and said, "**Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.**" Do you call that a good message? He didn't even tell them to **repent!** He **didn't even tell them there was possibility of escape**. This seemed like an **impossible message**, but God changed the whole country through him. Lift up your voice. Open your heart. God is ready to save those around you. He's not depending on your great articulation, of your perfect preparedness, or your power of persuasion. God is ready to use you in spite of you. The power of God is in his message of mercy and his agent of salvation, the Holy Spirit who regenerates the stone-cold hearts of sinners and gives the new, living hearts of flesh.

2. THE PEOPLE THE SPIRIT TOUCHES (3:5-9)

Jonah 3:5-6 | 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. ⁶The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

What a statement. The people Nineveh believed God. A great many turned to God in true faith. Every urban planter, every sociologist, every politician, every counselor, and every social worker wants this to happen. "If only the people of the city would turn from their evil ways and their violence, so we'd be done with the oppression, crime, racism, and all of the problems of the city." **How did Jonah have such success?** Jonah's message was so powerful and successful not because of his eloquence, but because God granted repentance. God brought the people to repentance, and he sent a Holy Spirit empowered revival to Nineveh.

How do we engage pagan, idol-filled people? People in the great cities of the world live relentless lives, consumed with our immediate concerns: running a business, raising a family, and enjoying some sport. Jonah walked into the intense activity of a large city and said, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." Authentic gospel preaching always engages people with eternal issues. It lifts our horizons from the immediate interests of our lives to the imminent and overwhelming reality of eternal life or everlasting destruction.⁹

TOUCHED WITH FAITH

Jonah 3:5a | And the people of Nineveh believed God.

What an amazing historical record! This verse reminds me of the great patriarch Abraham.

Romans 4:3 | Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Biblical faith. These pagans had to be taught about the one true and living God, Yahweh. And just as Abraham was made righteous by being illuminated about the living God and by trusting and clinging to him as his Savior, so **the Ninevites came to know the Lord by grace through faith.** Jonah reports that the people came to believe God. They believed God's word that judgment was coming. It was through his word that God opened the eyes of the Ninevites.

Romans 10:17 | Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

People in ancient times were saved the same way we are saved today: by grace through faith. Jonah preached. Of course, we don't know all he said. So much of the narratives are abbreviated. Not much is recorded of what he preached. "Forty days" and then Nineveh is gone (4:4). I'm pretty sure that's Jonah's sermon title. And when God saw that they turned away from their wicked way, God "had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened"

Unexpected faith. **That morning for them began like any other day.** Who knew that the most cruel pagans of history would turn to the living God? **They had no awareness of their spiritual state.** They were **dead in trespasses and sins.** They knew nothing of God's divine cloud of judgment upon them. Suddenly through Jonah's words, they had a flood of light shining in their hearts with alarming power. God's judgment was looming over their heads. They could no longer be comfortable with the state of things. They could not think of this little prophet in front of them in natural terms. Instead, all they could feel was the presence of God with divine justice about to fall in forty days. They were no longer asleep and dead in their sin but crying out to God for mercy. They who had been such notorious sinners were calling out to God with their own version of the sinner's prayer, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk 18:13).

Divine faith. Jesus teaches us that **this faith and illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit** (Jn 16:8-11). Jonah's mission was the same as the apostle Paul's. He was sent to "open the eyes of the Gentiles" (Acts 26:17-18). How did their eyes open? How did the ancient revival of Nineveh occur? God was drawing them. Remember the words of Jesus.

John 6:44 | No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

NATIONAL SUFFERING

God drew them through *massive national suffering*. Historians have pointed out that about the time of Jonah's mission, **Assyria had experienced a series of famines, plagues, revolts, and eclipses,** all of which were seen as **harbingers of far worse things** to come. Some have argued that this was God's way of preparing the ground for Jonah.¹⁰ When things **get dark in our life** and we are **crushed,** it is often the time that God was working. He worked in Jonah. He was now working in Nineveh.

⁹ C. Smith, *Jonah*, 3:4.

¹⁰ Keller, *Jonah*, 85.

NATIONAL MONOTHEISM

God drew them through *national monotheism*. Scholars who have studied Assyrian history have suggested possible reasons for this response. Under King Adad-Nirari III (c. 810–783 B.C.) **the Assyrians had begun a trend toward monotheism**. And just before the probable time of Jonah's arrival, a great plague had marked the reign of **King Assurdan II** (c. 771–754 B.C.). During this time there was a **plaque erected** that said:

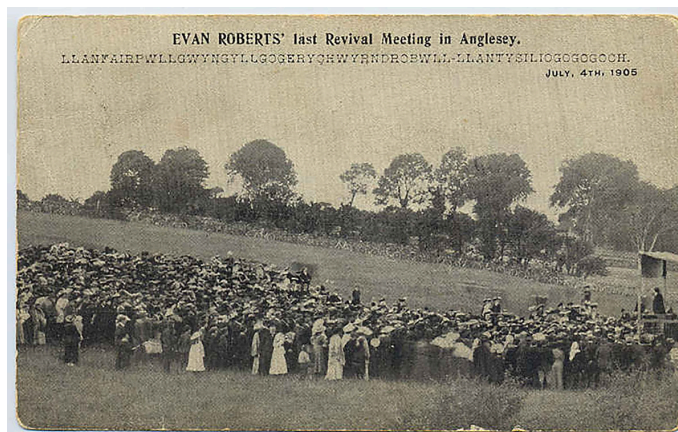
Trust in the one God [Nebo]: do not trust in any other god.¹¹—*Ancient Stone Plaque in Nineveh*

NATIONAL MOURNING

Whatever the contributing factors, the Assyrians did respond to God's messenger. **King, nobles, and slaves fasted, mourned, and prayed, humbling themselves before God**.¹² But what are the contributing factors to real revival and awakening? We can see right here in the glorious revival in Nineveh what those factors are.

With the king's repentance, it looks like God had been drawing him. From historical records, that **King Assurdan II was already seeking the Lord**. Jonah came in and confirmed what God was already doing. This king later, in **his joy of finally knowing God**, makes a decree for all under his authority to worship Yahweh, the one true and living God (3:7-9). **Do you believe that God is drawing unlikely people to himself?** Open your mouth and be bold in evangelism, and you will see! **The Ninevites believed God!**

WELSH REVIVAL



The Welsh revival. When the word of God went sweeping through **Wales** in the early 1900s, God gave a tremendous **revival**, and **approximately 70,000 came to faith in Christ in the first two months** and over **100,000 during the course of the revival**. People would **gather at the churches**, sometimes hundreds at a time, in the **middle of the night**. Time stopped during the revival. People would run into the meetings crying out, **“Is there mercy for me?”** There were tremendous labor union problems that were happening inside the mines. When the revival came, they were wiped away, because **on company time, the managers started to sponsor Bible studies**, and the bosses and the miners were all part of the Bible studies. Revival broke out. The miners **began to bring back all the things they had been stealing**. Do you know how all mines had one shed where the company kept its tools, and you used the tools? **Miners had been stealing them for years**. During the revival, they had to build **five new sheds at most mines** just to put back all the tools the miners started bringing back!¹³

¹¹ Heffron Yağmur et al., *At the Dawn of History Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of J.N. Postgate* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 459.

¹² Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), 472.

¹³ Cf David Matthews, *I Saw the Welsh Revival: An Account of the 1904 Revival in Wales* (Goshen, IN: Pioneer Books, 1992).

Give yourself to the Holy Spirit right now. Don't be afraid. He's taking you to the full joy of holiness. Let his word penetrate your soul and cut your spirit. In a widespread way, and on a massive scale, this took place in Nineveh. It continues to take place through the ministry of God's word today.¹⁴

TOUCHED WITH GOD'S CALLING

Jonah 3:5b | They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

The **king of Nineveh**, who was the greatest among the people, was being called by the living God.

Psalm 110:3a | Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments.

In response to God's call, the king **took off his royal robes**, and he **put on the rough fabric of sackcloth**. He was mourning for his own sin. **The people of Nineveh followed the king's example** and began to mourn for their sins with fasting and sackcloth. In the Bible, sackcloth, and ashes was worn as a sign of repentance for sin. Simply put, **sackcloth and ashes were an external demonstration of an internal condition**. It's like saying, "I deserve hell, and I'm begging you God for mercy." It was a **visible mark** of someone's deep sorrow and mourning. The action itself required a most sincere humility that only the repentant one can possess. It was also a sign that they were seeking God's forgiveness for what they had done. There was hope for mercy and grace. Notice everyone, from the greatest (like the king of Nineveh) to the least of them, **heard and responded** to God's call.

What would it look like in your neighborhood and your city if everyone, from **the least to the greatest responded to God's call**?

TOUCHED WITH REPENTANCE

The Ninevites believed God. They responded to God's call. And now we see that they repented from their heart. Repentance is literally "a change of mind." It means to see things as God sees them. To now love what God loves and hate what God hates. Repentance is a gift of God. God must grant us eyes to see, like Lydia from the Philippian church. God opened the eyes of Lydia (Acts 16:14). That's repentance.

Jonah 3:6-9 | The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.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,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.⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

The king turned from his evil ways and made a proclamation for everyone to follow his orders and example.

Wherever revival comes there is a radical awakening to the presence of God is felt and responding to his presence is vastly more important than food, water, or comfort. The soul cries out for a taste of the divine mercy and comforting presence.

One of the beautiful events we witness is the repentance of the king of Nineveh. Who is this king? It seems he's different from the king of Assyria. While it is true that **the king of Assyria had his home at times at Nineveh** (2 Kgs 19:36; Isa 37:37) the ruler that the prophet Jonah is referring to is likely a

¹⁴ Ferguson, *Man Overboard*, 71.

provincial governor. And that governor issued an incredible proclamation. His motive was that God would “turn and relent” from his judgment “so that we might not perish.” **The king is really the key to the entire revival.** Here is the **greatest revival in the Old Testament in a pagan nation.** It's absolutely incredible. When Jonah preached, **the king was ready and he led the way.** He made a citywide decree: “Worship the Lord with fasting and repentance. Turn from your violence and turn to the Lord. He may in mercy save us.” And that's exactly what God did.

TREY HARRIS

God sent me to Louisiana recently. I was there for the Mecca to Christ International conference in Alexandria. But while I was there, I met a childhood friend named **Trey Harris.** He has been a believer for only eight months. The first thing he did was **gather 75 men** to help these hurting men with the love of Christ. He gathered three pastors from three different churches to minister to these men. Trey is a man of influence in a smaller community who people follow. He is using that influence for Christ. How am I using my influence for Christ? How are you using your influence.

3. THE PATIENCE GOD DEMONSTRATES (3:10)

Jonah 3:10 | 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.

The same God who saved the Ninevites extends his mercy to us today. They didn't deserve it.

DIVINE JUDGMENT

Jonah 3:10a | God saw what they did.

All people on the earth deserve divine judgment. He sees our **rebellion** and our **repentance.** He sees all. The God who saw their repentance had **also seen their wicked sin.** It says that it ascended to him in heaven. Their sins were so great, God had to do something about it. He would either destroy them through judgment or redeem them through mercy. They had to choose, and they chose repentance.

DIVINE MERCY

Jonah 3:10 | 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.

The Ninevites repented. What a way to **overthrow the city** of Nineveh! They turned with their whole hearts to God. God responded. God overthrew Egypt in judgment by destroying Pharaoh's army with the Red Sea. **With Nineveh, he overthrows the city in mercy.**

Whoever comes to Jesus will never be cast out. Come without money and without price. Come and drink of the wells of salvation. Kings and mighty men, come. Poor and broken, come. Come in humility and drink deeply of the well of salvation. All who are weary and heavy laden with sin, come! And if you come, you will not be disappointed. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for anyone and everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). Jesus is mighty to save.

Whoever comes in faith, trusting in the Lord will not be disappointed. God relented of the disaster he had for the Ninevites. Why? They demonstrated repentant faith by turning from their evil way with humility.

Come to Jesus while you can. For those who will not repent at the preaching of Jesus' death and resurrection, there **is greater judgment,** for God will call the Ninevites as witnesses on the day of judgment against anyone who rejects the gospel.

Matthew 12:41 | The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Tremble at what God can do for wicked sinners. Realize he could condemn you, but he chooses to love you. What will you do with that love? Will you repent, if you haven't already, at the preaching of the gospel? Jesus died and rose again for you. Repent and trust him for you

Conclusion

How do you overthrow a world power? No human being can, but God can. This kind of manifest power of God in revival happens individually and **it can happen nationally**. The Spirit can and has fallen on whole towns and cities and nations even in the recent past. And he falls regularly, suddenly, and shockingly at times in the lives of individuals. **We can shout with Jonah, "Salvation is of the Lord!"** Jonah is the most unlikely candidate for a preacher of revival. God uses unlikely candidates.

How do you overthrow the human heart? You start with your own personal revival. Start reaching out to the lost in your own sphere of influence. **The lost cannot hear without a preacher**. We must go with the word of God. The greatest place of weakness is that we won't go. We are like Jonah, comfortable. We like preaching to ourselves. We must see people like Jesus did. He left his comfort zone and came to this earth and died on a lonely cross.

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

You may see the spiritual decay around you, and say, "What can one person do?" History is full with stories of what one solitary person can do to change his or her world. Ask **Moses** what one person can do; after hearing God speak from a burning bush, he went **back to Egypt** and became the **emancipator of his people**. Ask **Nehemiah** what one man can do; after having heard the report of the broken-down walls of Jerusalem, he **left his civil service job and went back to lead the rebuilding** of the broken walls of the holy city. What can one man do? Ask **William Wilberforce** of Great Britain; virtually singlehandedly he brought an end to slavery in that nation a century ago.

What can one person do? Ask Jeremiah Lamphier. He lived in the 1850s when America was in a sad and sickened state. There was a great luxury on the part of a few and great poverty on the part of many. The crime rate soared. Violence was common. City streets were unsafe. Free love was espoused by some and home and family seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Economic instability haunted the nation and unemployment raged out of control. Corruption and injustice shamelessly walked hand in hand in high places. The slavery question and racial divisions separated family and friends. Many wondered if the "land of the free and the home of the brave" was not writing the last chapter of its history.

NEW YORK BUSINESSMAN'S REVIVAL

In 1857, a **businessman named Jeremiah Lamphier** had a tremendous burden to see revival in America. He called on a handful of faithful Christians to meet with him in a location on Fulton Street in New York City for a **prayer meeting for revival**. He arrived at the appointed place on September 23, 1857 and was later joined by five others.

That **unimpressive meeting** was the beginning of **a mighty movement of prayer** from which dozens like it were launched across the country. It wasn't long before **many businessmen were closing their businesses** and joining in prayer meetings to beseech God on behalf of their beloved country. **Saved, and even many lost joined the meetings**. The lost were converted and the saved revived.

Throughout the area a divine fire broke out and people of all ages were coming to Christ: **white-haired sinners came to Jesus as well as little children**. **Whole families of Jews** were converted to their true Messiah. Those **long hardened by sin were melted**, some being led to Christ by the testimonies of the little children.

The revival's blessing was not confined to land; the Spirit literally moved on the face of the waters. **Vessel after vessel arriving in New York harbor** would come under the **same irresistible power**

of a Holy Spirit. Deep conviction broke out among the crewmen. **Entire crews would find Christ at sea as they entered the atmosphere of the harbor.**

Day after day the prayer meetings continued. It is estimated during the months of the revival's greatest intensity, **no less than 50,000 people a week** were swept into the kingdom of God. Conservative estimates claim that more than **a million people met Jesus Christ as Savior in less than a year** as revival spread.¹⁵ What can one person do? It all began when Jeremiah Lamphier corrected his ways and set out to change the world through.

My cry today is: "Lord do it again! As you did in the days of old, do it again!" May the Lord do it again among us!

RECEIVE MEMBERS

Lilla Toelcke
Pat Ferguson
Simon Lopez
Norma Slimmer

STATEMENT FOR MIKE TIBERI

Dear Living Hope Church family, Our associate Pastor Mike Tiberi is planning to serve the Lord in another ministry in church planting. He and his family are looking to complete their service here at Living Hope by January 15 when Mike will begin training for this new ministry in Bloomington, Indiana. God willing, he will give his farewell sermon on January 8th. This was not an easy decision for Mike. Even though Mike has always had the desire to church plant, he told me he was so comfortable at Living Hope he would have stayed here many more years. Part of his decision came recently through a friendship with a Presbyterian church there. After serious study, he found himself more likeminded with their mode of baptism, similar to R.C. Sproul. He realized he could not serve as an elder here since these views are not in line with our doctrinal statement. Pastor Mike told the elders this past Tuesday, and we wanted to let you know right away. We love Pastor Mike. His ministry has deeply blessed our church. His humility has helped us grow into Christ's image. He has personally inspired me and the elders to walk more closely and humbly with God. His departure will not be easy because we love Pastor Mike and Emily and their dear children. He will be loved and highly regarded for the rest of our days on this earth. We want to show him love and send him and his family off from our church with heartfelt gratitude for the time God has given us with this dearly beloved pastor. We will not forget what God has done through our dear pastor for our little church. Please pray for Pastor Mike and Emily as they follow God by faith. God is already opening doors for them. Feel free to talk to Pastor Mike and let him know you are praying for him. We also encourage you to talk to your pastors and elders as we say goodbye to the Tiberi family and seek the next man that God will bring as associate pastor of Living Hope. At this time the elders would like to pray for Pastor Mike.

¹⁵ O. S. Hawkins, *When Revival Comes* (Nashville TN: Broadman Press, 1980), 32.