

Brad Harbaugh • North Carolina • 2600 Fairview Rd • Raleigh, NC • 27612 • 919-649-5208 • brad.harbaugh@capitolcom.org

The main character in the book of Jonah is the awesome, true God that is revealed as God the Creator, but most importantly the caring and loving God everyone should know personally. The true God is far from a "ruler maker" and far from a task master! The Names Adonai and Yahweh are used to describe this Triune God who is Creator and the Great I AM. There are some mysteries in the text. Let's try to unravel them!

Jonah 3:10 (ESV)

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. **Those that used the Sword to Terrorize met the Greatest Sword of All.**

The Word of the Lord proclaimed by the Prophet Jonah, cut to the very heart of the people of Nineveh. 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 spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Mystery: Nineveh responded out of character. The warrior city of Nineveh, did not build up defenses nor scoff at the message but rather realized in their hearts there was no defense against God. The Word of the Lord cut to their very hearts, and they feared God.

Nineveh was one of the wicked cities of the ancient world, Nineveh was feared for the cruelty with which its soldiers treated captives of neighboring nations. The Ninevites were infamous for sacrificing their children to pagan deities and were shameless in their disregard for human life. No wonder it was known as "the bloody city" (Nahum 3:1). Modern archaeology has documented the vile brutality of the Assyrians as a barbaric people, especially in their treatment of prisoners of war. They nailed their defeated foes to the city walls, leaving them to die agonizing deaths.¹

In light of this, how powerful is the Word of God? It sobered the wicked people of Nineveh so much that the King of Nineveh acknowledged a supreme God creator who had the right to hold each person of Nineveh accountable for their sin. They feared God and recognized that He had power and ability to carry out justice.

The Bible impacts for life blessing. James 1: 25

Mystery: This wicked pagan city was able to identify their evil. What moral code did Nineveh have to evaluate what was right and wrong? The 1754 BC Babylonian Law Code of Hammurabi was probably taught. Consider also that most people of Nineveh fasted and prayed to the Lord for at least 37 days. Proverbs 8:13 states: "The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate." There is no mention of additional revelation from God pointing out specific sin. What is clear- they feared God!

There arises in all people and in every culture a universal feeling of right and wrong. Where do people get this sense of right and wrong? It is one of the proofs that there is an ultimate source of good, the Bible states God created each human being with His law written in our DNA. Romans 2:14-15.

Are you seeking clarity for what is right or what is wrong? Spending time reading God's Word and in prayer brings right and wrong to clarity.

¹ Lawson, S. J. (2001). The Power of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of Jonah 3:1-10. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 158, 334.

2. **The Word of God brought Hope**

Who was this King of Nineveh? Nineveh did not become the capital of Assyria till 705 BC, but the monarchs^{2 3} of Assyria had residence in Nineveh before that time. Old Testament scholars regard Adad-nirari III or Ashur-dan III as the most likely possibilities.⁴ The time and writing of Jonah fits “Assur-dan III, during whose reign an agonizing confluence of omens and disasters (eclipse, earthquake, famine, rioting) had occurred, ... and who was beset by international problems including continuing military failures against Urartu,...” (Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 492).⁵

God’s warning gave them time, “Yet forty days” (Jonah 3:4). This time gave the King hope!

The king of Nineveh told the people to “call mightily to God.” (Jonah 3:7-9) What did they pray? The text does not give us a scripted prayer, but it does give us the King’s instruction that they were to turn from violence and their evil ways.

From what is known in the text the people of Nineveh called mightily a pray like this: “Dear God, We believe you. We turn from our evil ways, and our violence. Have mercy on us! We fear your Word! We are not eating or drinking because we take your word seriously. Have mercy upon us! We will follow your word! In the Name of the God of Jonah we pray!

*Outside this text, the gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us that true repentance and belief to become followers of the Lord did occur in Nineveh. Matthew 12:41 (ESV) [Luke 11:32] **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.***

[Jesus speaking to the Pharisees] compares those rejecting him with those Gentiles who actually repented

and heeded God’s Word favorably—the Ninevites (see Jonah 3) and the Queen of Sheba (see 1 Kgs 10:1–10). Such Gentiles will join with believers of every time and place on Judgment Day to condemn all who reject Jesus.⁶

3. **God relented and did not do it!**

Jesus Christ, God the Son is the greater than Jonah, (Matthew 12:41 above). God relented and gave grace and mercy to Nineveh because God the Son was going to die on the cross and pay the debt of their sin by dying on the cross. (Ephesians 2:13-20)

Jonah preached “Yet forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned!” I believe the phrase “did not do it” points directly to day 41.

Imagine it is day 41! Think of your response! Do you think the Ninevites had a party celebrating God’s mercy? I think they did but the text of Jonah does not tell us anything more. * Why? Because God wants us to see He is still working on Jonah! Jonah is angry and depressed because God showed mercy to Nineveh. We will look at Jonah 4 next week, but think how wonderful it is to know a God who is not just focused on obedience, not just focused on our keeping the rules, but who is a God who cares about our growth and well being!!! Is God awesome or what? He is a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Know God = know peace; no God = no peace

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MONDAY AT NOON IN THE LEGISLATIVE CHAPEL**

Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995). *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Vol. 19B, pp. 264–265). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Ibid. “The title “king of Nineveh” is not the normal nomenclature used by the Assyrians but a Hebrew expression for the ruling Monarch.”

⁴ Freeman, Archer (A survey of Old Testament)311 and Merrill Unger (Introduction to the Old Testament)346

⁶ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 207). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

