

## PARAPHRASE

And the Lord commanded the fish to spit up Jonah on the beach and the fish obeyed the command of the Lord.

## SUMMARY

Jonah is delivered with a second opportunity to carry out his commission from the Lord.

## COMMENT

v. 10 . . . JEHOVAH SPAKE UNTO THE FISH, AND IT VOMITED OUT JONAH . . . God has set the whole creation, except man, to function through orderly laws and instincts imposed upon it by His will. Man He created in His own spiritual image with a will free to make moral choice. But God, impells by a certain divine and secret power, as Cyril says, animal and inanimate creation to do His will in a miraculous way when it serves His purpose to do so, (cf. Balaam's ass, Num. 22:21-30; the star of Bethlehem, Matt. 2:2, 9). The land upon which Jonah was "spewed out" is not known for certain but we assume it to be the coast of Palestine or Syria (K & D think it was near Joppa where he boarded the ship to run away).

## QUIZ

1. Cite other incidents where God has imposed His will on animals to use them miraculously.
2. How long was Jonah's life preserved by God in the belly of this fish?

## GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING WITH GOD— THE COMMISSION RENEWED

TEXT: 3:1-3

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

## QUERIES

- a. Why was Jonah now ready to go to Nineveh?
- b. What is the meaning of a ". . . city of three days' journey"?

JONAH  
PARAPHRASE

And God's word came to Jonah a second time. God commanded Jonah, Arise and go to Nineveh. I warn you as I did before, Nineveh is a great metropolis, and you are to preach to its inhabitants the message that I alone shall give you to preach. So the converted Jonah arose and journeyed to Nineveh just as the Lord had commanded him. Now Nineveh was such a large metropolis that it would take a man three days to walk all the way across it.

SUMMARY

God gives Jonah another chance to surrender to His will for the prophet's life. Jonah obeys.

COMMENT

v. 1 . . . THE WORD OF JEHOVAH CAME UNTO JONAH THE SECOND TIME . . . Jonah has had a conversion experience! He has been raised to a new life. Physically he had come to the point of no return—except by the power of God he had returned! Spiritually he had died to himself and was raised a new spiritual man. John Noble, the American who spent over ten years in Russian prison camps relates a similar conversion experience in his book, *"I Found God In Soviet Russia."*

Mr. Noble, when first imprisoned, was forced to go nine days without even the slightest morsel of food. Here is what he says: "With my last strength, I struggled onto my knees and earnestly asked the Lord simply to close my eyes this night and release me from my mortal suffering. I said, in effect, 'Dear Lord, I give up; I can't go on any longer. I have no way out but through Thee. Lord, close my eyes and take me to Thee, or if it be Thy will that I must go on, give me the strength to do so, and lend me Thy hand to guide me. My will is broken, Thy will be done. Amen.' I committed my soul entirely to the hands of the Lord. Unworthy of His grace though I was, I felt prepared to die. This time, I had not prayed that my will be done but that the Lord's will be done. I was completely submissive to that will . . . By committing my life to Christ without reservation, I had the amazing experience of being born again of the Spirit . . . It was the most wonderful, miraculous sensation I have ever experienced."

This is somewhat the same experience Jonah describes himself feeling in the belly of the great fish when he had no other place to turn than God. After his experience in the sea, he probably preached like one raised from the dead. Macaulay characterized Demosthenes' oratory as "reason made red hot by passion." Jonah's was "the Word of God

made red hot by conversion of the orator." The prophet had died, as it were, and been brought back to life again. It always requires an experience like Jonah's to make a good preacher!

So God called Jonah again to go to Nineveh. God would not suspend His concern for the souls of that great city just because one of His prophets disobeyed. Furthermore God's mercy and love is long-suffering toward the wayward prophet. God is rich in mercy—the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering . . . leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4) if we will but respond.

V. 2 . . . PREACH UNTO IT THE PREACHING THAT I BID THEE . . . What was the preaching that God bade Jonah preach? At the first command God told the prophet to "preach against" that wicked city. His task was to preach *against wickedness*. Then we learn from 3:4 that he cried, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." All this, of course, was to the end that the people would repent. This message of repentance still needs to be preached today. Jesus referred to Jonah's preaching comparing it to His message, for His message was, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." Peter on the day of Pentecost preached, "Repent and be immersed, everyone of you . . ." Paul, to the philosophers of Athens preached, ". . . now he commandeth all men everywhere to repent . . ." The reason these men preached repentance was they "preached . . . the preaching" that God bade them preach. This is still good advice for all preachers: preach only that which God commands. Preach His Word, from His Book. We live in an age in which society tends to dictate to the preacher, and social pressures and modern theological trends seek to obscure the propositional revelation of God, His Word, the Bible. Peter wrote, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Pet. 4:11). Men who do not declare from the pulpit, "Thus saith the Lord," are not fit to stand in that sacred spot.

V. 3 SO JONAH . . . WENT UNTO NINEVEH . . . AN EXCEEDING GREAT CITY, OF THREE DAYS' JOURNEY . . . This time Jonah went "according to the word of the Lord." There is no running away this time. There is not even any reluctance. He has learned his lesson . . . he has a new heart in the matter . . . he is a new man for God.

Because archeologists have not yet found evidence that Nineveh is as extensive a city as three days journey would seem to indicate, some scholars have accused this book of being historically inaccurate. But must we assume that we know all there is to know about the metropolis of Nineveh and pronounce the book of Jonah irrevocably inaccurate?! There are a number of possible answers to this alleged problem; (a) the statement could refer to the circumference of the city; (b) the

statement could mean that journeying leisurely, stopping to preach at likely spots, it would take three days to journey the length or breadth of the city; (c) or, more likely, it could mean that a journey across "greater" Nineveh, including its "suburbs" (of which we spoke on 1:2), would take three days. The city was "great," not because it impressed God by its size or fame, but because God was concerned with the "many" souls in it which were lost and because it would be an almost overwhelming task, in the eyes of Jonah, to preach against it.

### QUIZ

1. How had Jonah changed? What experience had he undergone?
2. Why did God not cast Jonah off after one disobedience?
3. What did God bid Jonah preach? Is there a lesson for us in that?
4. Is the note about a city of "three day's journey" inaccurate?

## GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING WITH GOD— THE CRY FOR REPENTANCE

TEXT: 3:4

- 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.

### QUERIES

- a. How far did Jonah go into the city in a day?
- b. Why did Jonah give a time limit of forty days?

### PARAPHRASE

When Jonah began his day's journey into the city, he found a suitable place and a fitting opportunity for beginning his preaching, so he began to preach, saying, Forty days from now and this great city of Nineveh will be destroyed by Jehovah God!

### SUMMARY

Jonah begins his "doom song" to Nineveh.

v. 4 . . . HE CRIED . . . YET FORTY DAYS, AND NINEVEH SHALL BE OVERTHROWN. Jonah did not go into the city one full days' journey and then begin to preach. The text definitely indicates that he started on his first days' journey and then sometime during that beginning of the journey he began to preach. The word "overthrown" is from the

Hebrew word which means literally, "destroyed from the very foundations," and is the same word used in speaking of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Lange says of the forty days: "Forty days are here a round number, meaning after a short time, whose term Jonah measures by the period of the deluge." K & D say: "The respite granted is fixed at forty days, according to the number which, even as early as the flood, was taken as the measure for determining the delaying of visitation of God." What purpose God had in assigning exactly 40 days to Nineveh's period of probation it is idle to speculate. He most certainly would extend His grace long enough for all to hear the message and make response, but His grace would not be extended forever. Furthermore, Nineveh's cup of sin was running over—God's cup of wrath was filled to the brim and about to overflow. Nineveh had had many opportunities to know and repent and now their judgment was fixed and announced—if repentance did not come with haste, the sentence would be executed.

### QUIZ

1. How far did Jonah go into the city before he began to preach?
2. Why did God assign the time of 40 days for repentance?

## GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING WITH GOD— THE CONSEQUENCE OF REPENTANCE

TEXT: 3:5-10

- 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.
- 6 And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
- 7 And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing; let them not feed, nor drink water;
- 8 but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from the violence that is in his hands.
- 9 Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

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

### QUERIES

- a. How would the Ninevites know "God" and "to fast?"
- b. Why have the animals fast also?
- c. Does God change His mind (repent)?

### PARAPHRASE

When Jonah preached what God said He was going to do to Nineveh, the people of Nineveh believed God. Then they decreed a certain period of abstinence from eating or drinking called a fast. At this time, as a sign of mourning over their sins, they dressed themselves in harsh, irritating garments of haircloth. Even men of luxury, ease and importance did these things, as well as the people of low estate. News of Jonah's preaching and the penitence of the people reached the king of Assyria and he was moved to repentance. He stepped down from his throne, took off his royal robes and dressed in haircloth and sat in ashes, a further act of humiliation to atone for his sins. And the king made an official proclamation, saying, Let no one, not even the animals, eat or drink any thing during this time of fasting. Let this be a time of national penitence. Let everyone, even the animals, be dressed in robes of haircloth manifesting our repentance, and let everyone cry mighty prayers of supplication for forgiveness unto Jehovah God. Let every man and woman stop doing the violent and wicked things they are doing and turn to doing good. Then it may be that Jehovah God will fulfill His promise to be merciful to those who repent and will withhold His fierce wrath—we do not wish to perish. And God took account of their works of repentance as they stopped their wickedness and turned to doing good and He was pleased. Just as He had already decreed from the beginning, God withheld the wrath He said He was going to visit upon Nineveh. Because they repented, God spared them.

### SUMMARY

Nineveh's repentance is nationwide, in high and low places, and is manifest in cessation of wickedness as well as in religious acts.

### COMMENT

v. 5 . . . AND THE PEOPLE OF NINEVEH BELIEVED GOD; AND THEY PROCLAIMED A FAST . . . It is interesting to note that *belief came before repentance* in this case. In fact, it is a scriptural principle taught through-

out the Bible that belief must always precede repentance. How can a man be motivated to perform works of repentance if he does not believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (cf. Heb. 11:6). Too much of the time preachers are guilty of expecting nominal Christians to lead lives of repentance when their belief is only nominal! Conviction must come before conversion! Persuasion precedes penitence!

After assent comes action. Jonah uses the same word for "believed" that is used to describe Abraham's faith (Gen. 15:6; cp. Ex. 14:31; II Chron. 20:20). It is a word that signifies saying "yea and amen" to God's Word as it is revealed. A fast was declared by all the people of Nineveh. It was a national penitence. Men of fame and importance and wealth mourned their sins, as well as the poor and unknown. The sackcloth was a prickly, coarse garment woven of goats' hair. It was usually worn over other garments but sometimes next to the skin. It was designed to be irritating and afflicting to the flesh.

v. 6 . . . THE KING OF NINEVEH . . . COVERED HIM WITH SACKCLOTH . . . That the mighty king of the mightiest nation on earth would humble himself so is evidence of the tremendous impact of Jonah's work. Fasting is abstinence from food and drink. It is a form of afflicting or chastening the flesh and in this way chastening the soul. The second external sign of repentance was wearing sackcloth. The third sign was the use of ashes. All of these religious acts go back to the time of the patriarchs (cf. Gen. 37:34; Job. 16:15; II Sam. 13:19). Ashes upon the head signified man's recognition of his own insignificance (cf. Gen. 18:27) and was a sign of self-abasement.

It would be well to discuss here the question, in what respect was Jonah a sign to the Ninevites (Luke 11:30)? Jesus said there, "For even as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." The words in the original Greek are somewhat more expressive than the English version. The Lord and Jonah were not merely equally signs to the people among whom respectively they delivered the message of God, but they were "signs of the same kind (*kathos egeneto Ionas*), according as, or in the same manner as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be . . ."

In what respect, then, was Jonah a sign to the Ninevites? We are inclined to agree with Fairbairn, that "Jonah was not simply as the Lord's prophet to the Ninevites, but as himself a wonder in the earth; being one who had, in a manner, tasted of death, and yet had not seen corruption—who had been sent into Sheol because of sin, and now again returned to witness for righteousness among the living, and show them

the way of salvation." We believe that some way or another the people of Nineveh must have had evidence by eyewitnesses (other than Jonah himself) of Jonah's miraculous experience. Fairbairn, again, "Unquestionably if Jonah, in respect to that portion of his history, was appointed to be a sign to the Ninevites (of God's merciful dealing with him after his repentance); then as such, the thing wrought (the miracle) must have been open at least to their inquiries, and capable of being ascertained, so as to produce its due effect upon their minds." We cannot imagine the people of Nineveh (including the king himself) to be motivated to fasting and cessation of violence and wickedness on the mere cry of impending ruin by a stranger, of whom they were totally ignorant! By all the experiences we have had with motivating human belief and conduct we are compelled to suppose that before these Ninevites would make such a thorough-going response they would have investigated the credibility of Jonah's authoritativeness.

Jonah's being a sign of God's punishment of sin on the one hand and God's forgiveness of the sinner on the other hand peculiarly fitted him to be also a type, symbol, sign to a future generation of his own countrymen in respect to the history of the Messiah's work and kingdom. The Lord refers especially to Jonah's humiliation or punishment (being in Sheol for three days and nights) as being the sign like unto which He Himself would be a sign. Jonah, whom they justly revered as a true prophet, had been sent to the depths of Sheol, but the Ninevites did not stumble at his humiliating experience—they listened and obeyed his message. I will suffer a like humiliating experience. I am going in precisely the opposite direction you desire of the Messiah, Jesus tells the Jews of His generation, and you do not receive Me. This is why the Ninevites would stand up and condemn the Jews of Jesus' generation—they repented at Jonah's preaching. Jesus meant to tell them that they were looking in the wrong direction for an undoubted seal of his divine commission—the circumstances and nature of His Messianic work required that he should bear upon him the signs, not of heavenly splendor and power, but of profound humiliation, even to going down into Hades (death).

But there is another aspect to the sign of Jonah—that of his resurrection. And this is intended to be included in the similarity Jesus makes of Himself and Jonah. He was to become to the world the sign that Jonah was to Nineveh only when He exhibited the power of God at the resurrection.

There is manifestly a great difference between Christ and Jonah, as well as a similarity. Christ did what Jonah could not be said to do—

bore, in His humiliation and death, the burden of all men's guilt and condemnation, and by His resurrection justified all who will believe.

So the miracle of Jonah became a sign to his contemporaries of the wrath of God and the power of God and the love of God. He also typified the ultimate sign of God in Jesus Christ of the wrath of God upon all sin; the power of God over death; the love of God for penitent believers.

v. 7-8 AND HE MADE PROCLAMATION . . . LET NEITHER MAN NOR BEAST . . . TASTE ANY THING . . . LET THEM BE COVERED WITH SACKCLOTH . . . AND . . . CRY MIGHTILY UNTO GOD . . . TURN EVERY ONE FROM THE VIOLENCE THAT IS IN HIS HANDS. Why were animals involved? To show total repentance. The beasts were property and, as such, were considered a part of the person who owned them. Furthermore, animals live with men and are affected by the deeds of men (cf. our comments on Joel 1:18-20). Causing the animals to participate in the time of mourning and repentance is an ancient Asiatic custom. Herodotus relates that the Persians, when mourning for their general, Masistios, who had fallen in the battle at Platea, shaved off the hair from their horses, and adds, "Thus did the barbarians, in their way, mourn for the deceased Masistios." K & D say, "This custom originated in the idea that there is "a biotic rapport" between man and the larger domestic animals . . . the thought is that just as the animals which live with man are drawn into fellowship with his sin (Rom. 8:19-23), so their sufferings might also help to appease the wrath of God." It is evident that withholding food and water from the animals would cause them to groan and cry out to God. This "biotic rapport" is expressed in Joel 1:18ff. The king's order to put sackcloth on the animals shows how intense his desire for total repentance was. One of the most interesting things about the king's decree is that of everyone "turning from the violence that is in his hands." Their repentance was to be made manifest in ceasing to do evil and learning to do good (cf. Isa. 1:16-17; and our comments on Joel 2:12-13). Repentance means a change of life and a change of attitude.

v. 9-10 WHO KNOWETH WHETHER GOD WILL NOT TURN AND REPENT . . . AND GOD REPENTED. We come now to one of the most perplexing problems of the Bible. Does God repent? The words "who knoweth" are not so much a question as they are an expression of hope. The very fact that Jonah, a prophet of Jehovah God, had come to warn Nineveh was an indication there would be hope if they should repent. God *does not* repent or change His mind! His will is immutable (Heb. 6:17; 12:8; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Psa. 33:11, Prov.

19:21; Isa. 14:24; 46:9-10; I Sam. 5:29; Psa. 110:4; Ezek. 24:14; Zech. 8:14, etc.). On the other hand, many scriptures may be cited which speak of God repenting (cf. Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:14; II Sam. 24:16; Judg. 2:18; I Sam. 15:11, etc.).

In the first place, often in the O.T. we find human characteristics attributed to God. This is called anthropomorphism which means to describe God after the manner of men. For example, we see with our eyes, and since we know that God sees all things, therefore we say God has eyes. This manner of describing God is a condescension or accommodation to our finite incapability of understanding and describing the infinite. This holds true with regard to God *repenting*. God is not ignorant, weak, fallible. He does not make mistakes which He regrets. He does not change His mind. He knows all things and sees all things from the beginning to the end. But events may take place which appear, from man's viewpoint, to be changes in God's mind. When in Genesis 6:6-7 God is represented as repenting that He had made man, does this mean God suddenly decided He had made a mistake in creating man and now regrets it and wishes He had never done so? No! Whatever God does is right and good. When He made man He saw that it was good. But, being a God of love, He made man with a freedom of choice. What pained the heart of God was that man had made the wrong choice.

Man's freedom of choice brings us to the second point in this consideration. God's moral law is immutable and unchangeable. When man abides within the revealed will of God it is God's immutable decree that whatever happens to him will turn out for his blessing. When man, of his own free choice, insists upon rebelling against the will of God it is God's immutable decree that whatever happens to him shall turn out to his condemnation and judgment. The repentance is up to man—it is man's responsibility, yes, PRIVILEGE, to change, so long as God shall grant him life and opportunity to do so! Man may change, but God does not for He is perfect in all His ways. To say that God does not change is not to say that God does not act!

Fairbairn, in pointing out the pronouncement of God upon sin and then His compassion upon repentance, says, ". . . this manifests Him to be unalterably the same. Conducting his administration in righteousness, he must change his procedure toward men when their relation toward Him becomes changed . . . Abraham knew this principle of the Divine government when he said, "That be far from thee to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that righteous should be as the wicked; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25) Ezekiel also, "Hear now, O Israel! Is not my way equal? are not your

ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquities and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." So when Nineveh repented and changed their minds and deeds, for God to have gone ahead and punish them would have displayed Him as a God indifferent to the very basic distinction between right and wrong.

It is in connection with this and other eternal principles of the Righteous, Holy, Just, Compassionate, Longsuffering God that the Bible says God changes not.

Someone will say, "If God does not change, why pray? Prayer is not to tell God what we need—He already knows that! Prayer is not to change the mind of God—He is unchangeable! Then what is prayer for? Prayer is both an inward and an outward manifestation of a dependent love for God. Prayer is an expression of relationship. That relationship is one of faith, trust, surrender, dependence, adoration, gratitude—of abiding in the will of one's Heavenly Father. This is why prayer is of the utmost necessity! Man, being free to choose which relationship he will have toward God, must choose the relationship of abiding in His will in order to receive the blessings God has already determined to give him (cf. I Jn. 5:14-15). God has anticipated our prayers before the foundation of the world. He has built the answer to our prayers into the very providential government and structure of the universe. He knows that we will pray and that we will pray in a spontaneous manner as a helpless child cries to his mother or father. God has put the universe together on a principle of personal relationships in which He answers prayer. Parents know how to answer petitions of children in anticipation. Even with their limited knowledge parents are able to anticipate the future to a certain degree. For example a mother, caring for the fevered little body of a sick child, provides the medicine, the drink of water and other comforts, before the night comes on, knowing that there will be a cry in the night. When the little one cries out in helpless dependence, the mother has planned the answer.

It is interesting to note in verse 10 that "God saw their works." It was not until the repentance of the Ninevites was manifested through works that their salvation was effected by God! Works are both necessary for salvation and a result of salvation. This is a very plain doctrine of both the Old and New Testaments. Even belief is said to be a "work" by the Lord Himself (cf. Jn. 6:29 and see comments in *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, pg. 238, by Paul T. Butler—College Press).

## QUIZ

1. What personal response of the Ninevites toward God preceded their repentance?
2. How did the Ninevites manifest their penitent attitude?
3. How was Jonah a sign to the Ninevites?
4. How was Jonah a sign to the Jews of Jesus' day?
5. Why did the king of Nineveh decree that the animals should wear sackcloth?
6. Does God repent? Explain!
7. Why pray?

## GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING AHEAD OF GOD—THE DISPLEASURE OF JONAH

TEXT: 4:1-3

- 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.
- 2 And he prayed unto Jehovah, and said, I pray thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hastened to flee unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repentest thee of the evil.
- 3 Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

### QUERIES

- a. Why would Jonah be displeased that thousands of people were saved?
- b. Why would the graciousness of God lead him to flee to Tarshish?
- c. Why did he think it better to die than to live?

### PARAPHRASE

But God's withholding of His wrath against Nineveh was very displeasing to Jonah. Jonah was grieved and vexed and prayed, saying, Lord! isn't this what I said back in Palestine before I ever came to Nineveh? This is exactly why I ran off toward Tarshish—I knew that You are gracious, merciful, longsuffering, overflowing in Your loving-kindness and that you would forgive and withhold Your punishment. On account of this, O Lord, I beg You, take my life. Because my mission is a failure, I would rather be dead than alive.