

The Book of Jonah: The Truth behind the Legend (3)

**It May Not Be Expected, but God
Can Change the Wicked**

Structure

	Ch 1-2 God Saved a Disobedient Hebrew Servant	Ch 3-4 God Saved a Depraved Gentile Nation
Sin & Punishment	Jonah Was Disobedient (1:1-3) Gentiles Obeyed God (1:4-16) Jonah Brought the Trouble (1:4-5) Gentile Prayed Wrongly (1:6-8) Jonah Was the Trouble (1:9-12) Gentiles Prayed Rightly (1:13-16)	Jonah Was Obedient (3:1-4) Gentile Repented (3:5-9) They Believed in God (3:5a) They Humbled Themselves (3:5b-8a) They Hoped on God (3:8b-9)
Grace & Understanding	Jonah Was Saved (1:17 –2:10) God Gave Grace (1:17) Jonah Praised (2:1-9) God Commissioned (2:10)	Jonah Was Rebuked (3:10–4:11) God Gave Grace (3:10) Jonah Complained (4:1-3) God Explained (4:4-11)

Background

- It Goes Down, When the Right People Are Wrong (Ch 1)
 - Jonah Disobeyed God's Command to Preach to Nineveh, and Boarded a Ship to Tarshish.
 - God Sent a Storm, and Jonah Was Thrown into the Sea and Almost Drowned.
- It Serves Him Right, but God Is Short of Spite (Ch 2)
 - God Gracefully Sent a Fish to Save Jonah from Drowning.
 - Jonah Responded by Praying for Further Delivery and Promising Future Worship.
 - God Gave Jonah the Second Chance of Obedience.

The Grace of Second Chance

- God Gave Jonah a Second Chance
 - For Life (2:10);
 - For Work (3:1-2).
- The Second Chance Is Not Granted for All
 - Moses Was Forbidden to Enter the Promised Land for Getting Angry and Striking the Rock Once (Deut 32:51; Num 20:6-12; cf. Exod 17:7).
 - The Disobedient Unnamed Prophet Was Mauled by a Lion for Eating with a Compromised Prophet Once (1 King 13, esp. vv. 16-25).

The Difficulty of the Mission

- Nineveh Was a “God-sized” (He: *ka-Elohim*, Like God) Great City (3:2):
 - Assyria Descended from Asshur, a Son of Shem (Gen10:22).
 - Nineveh Was Founded by Nimrod, a Son of Ham before the Tower of Babel (c.2000 BC; Gen 10:6, 8-12).
 - There Was a Group of Sister Cities: Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen (Gen 10:11-12).
 - Sennacherib (705-681 BC) Made Nineveh the Capital of the Assyrian Empire, and Greatly Expanded It.

The Difficulty of the Mission

- Nineveh Was a God-sized Great City:
 - Nineveh Proper Was Expanded by Sennacherib from 3 mi to 7.5 mi in Circumference, and Had 120,000 Residents (3:11).
 - The Greater Nineveh (with Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen) Was c.55 mi in Circumference.
 - Nineveh Was So Completely Destroyed in 612 BC That Xenophon (401 BC) Did Not See It; but Diodorus Siculus (c.50 BC) Received the Size of 55 mi Circumference.
 - It Was a 3-day March according to Herodotus (17 mi/day).
- It Seemed Impossible to Convert This Many Pagans!

The Imperfect Obedience

- Jonah Walked One Day into the City (Radial): Not Quite Downtown (3:4a)
 - He Was a Small Man in a Great City, Feeling like a Needle in a Haystack.
 - He Did/Could Not Go on, and Simple Shouted Out the Entrusted Message.
- He Preached a Message of Doom (3:4b)
 - Jonah Knew God Was Merciful (4:2).
 - Jonah Seemed to Have Withheld the Call to Repent so as to Receive Mercy.

The Imperfect Obedience

- The Message of Doom Implied Mercy (3:4b)
 - The Days of Nineveh Were Numbered.
 - 40 Days Were Given , a Time of Waiting & Testing
 - Jacob Was Mourned for 40 Days (Gen 50:3).
 - Moses Stayed on Mt Sinai for 40 Days (Exod 24:18).
 - Israel Stayed 40 Years in the Wilderness (Exod 16:35).
 - Jesus Was Tested & Tempted for 40 Days (Matt 4:2).
 - For Sodom & Gomorrah There Was a Possibility for Mercy due to the Reaction of the Righteous, but Only a Few Hours Were Given.

The Unexpected Response

- The People Believed & Humbled Themselves by Fasting and Putting on Sack Cloth (3:5)
 - Bottom-up Reforms Are More Likely from God, Effective, and Lasting, Than Top-Down Reforms.
 - God Prepared for the Reform by
 - Religious Reform: Adad-nirari III (810-783 B.C.) Narrowed Their Pantheon to One god Nebo, Turning from Polytheism to Monolatry.
 - Reduced Pride: Assur-Dan III (772-754 BC) Experienced Military Defeat under the Urartians.
 - Real Disasters: Two Plagues (765, 759 BC), and a Solar Eclipse (763 B.C.).

The Unexpected Response

- The King (+ His Court) also Humbled Himself (3:6)
 - The King Was either Asshur-Dan III (773-755 BC) or Asshur-nirari V (755-745 BC).
 - The Visit of Jonah Was Likely during 759-753 BC (He Lived under Jeroboam II, 782-753 BC).
- A Royal Edict Was Given (3:7-9)
 - It Required People, Even Animals, to Join in Full Fast (w/o Food or Water), and Put on Sack Cloths (3:7).
 - It Asked People to Pray Sincerely to God (Nebo or Yahweh?), and Repent Their Sins, esp. Cruelty (3:8).
 - It Hoped That God Might Forgive Them, Show Mercy, and Relent from His Anger and Judgment (3:9).

The Grace of Greater Forgiveness

- God Saw the Change of Behavior Evidenced during the 40 Days of Testing (3:10a).
- There Was Genuine Change of Heart and Life (3:10b) away from Wickedness (Heb: *ra'ah*).
- God Relented (Not "Repented") and Withdrew His Edict of Judgment (Heb: *ra'ah*).
- God Can Change His Mind, but Not His Character.

Lessons and Applications

- Second Chance Is a Grace, and Cannot Be Presumed.
- Mission Impossible Is Only for Men, Not God.
- Imperfect Obedience Does Not Prevent God's Will Being Done.
- God's Messages of Judgment Always Implies Potential Mercy.
- True Revival Is Prepared by God, and Goes Bottom Up from the People.