

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO JONAH 3

This chapter gives an account of the renewal of Jonah's message to Nineveh, and of his faithful execution of it, (^{<318>}Jonah 3:1-4); and of the fruit and effect of it, the conversion of the Ninevites, their faith in God, repentance of their sins, and reformation from them, (^{<318>}Jonah 3:5-9); and of God's approbation thereof, by revoking the sentence he had pronounced upon them, (^{<318>}Jonah 3:10).

Ver. 1. *And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time*, etc.] Jonah having been scourged by the Lord for his stubbornness and disobedience, and being humbled under the mighty hand of God, is tried a second time, whether he would go on the Lord's errand, and do his business; and his commission is renewed, as it was necessary it should; for it would have been unsafe and dangerous for him to have proceeded upon the former without a fresh warrant; as the Israelites, when they refused entering into the land of Canaan to possess it, upon the report of the spies, and afterwards reflecting upon their sin, would go up without the word of the Lord, and contrary to the advice of Moses, many of them perished in the attempt, being cut off by the Amalekites, (^{<418>}Numbers 14:1,3,40-45); and this renewal of Jonah's commission shows that he was still continued in his office as a prophet, notwithstanding his failings; as the apostles were in theirs, though they all forsook Christ, and Peter denied him, (^{<418>}Matthew 26:56,75 28:19 ^{<4215>}John 21:15-17); and that the Lord had heard his prayer, and graciously received him, and took away his iniquity from him, employing him again in his service, being more fitted for it:

saying; as follows:

Ver. 2. *Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city*, etc.] So it is called; (see Gill on "Jon 1:2"). The order runs in the same words as before; and the same discouragements are presented to Jonah, taken from the greatness of the city, the number of its inhabitants, its being the metropolis of the Assyrian empire, and the seat of the greatest monarch on earth, to try his faith; but these had not the like effect as before; for he had now another

spirit given him, not of fear, but of a sound mind; he considered he was sent by a greater King, and that more were they that were on his side than the inhabitants of this place, who might possibly be against him:

and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee; that he had bid him before, declaring and exposing their wickedness, and telling them that in a short time their city would be destroyed. Jonah must not be gratified with any alteration in the message; but he must go with it as it had before been given, or what he now bid, or should bid him; the word of the Lord must be spoken just as it is delivered; nothing must be added to it, or taken from it; the whole counsel of God must be declared; prophets and ministers must preach, not as men bid them, but as God bids them. The Targum is,

“prophesy against it the prophecy which I speak with thee.”

Ver. 3. *So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord*, etc.] He was no longer disobedient to the heavenly vision; being taught by the rod, he acts according to the word; he is now made willing to go on the Lord’s errand, and do his business, under the influence of his power and grace; he stands not consulting with the flesh, but immediately arises and sets forward on his journey, as directed and commanded, being rid of that timorous spirit, and those fears, he was before possessed of; his afflictions had been greatly sanctified to him, to restore his straying soul, and cause him to keep and observe the word of the Lord; and his going to Nineveh, and preaching to a Heathen people, after his deliverance out of the fish’s belly, was a type of the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles by the apostles, according to the commission of Christ renewed unto them, after his resurrection from the dead, (⁴⁰²³Acts 26:23); and after many failings of theirs;

now Nineveh was an exceeding great city: or “a city great to God”^{f60}; not dear to him, for it was full of wickedness; not great in his esteem, with whom the whole earth is as nothing; but known by him to be what it was; and the name of God is often used of things, to express the superlative nature and greatness of them, as trees of God, mountains of God, the flame of God, etc. (¹⁹⁰⁷Psalm 36:7 80:10 ²¹⁸⁶Song of Solomon 8:6); it was a greater city than Babylon, of which (see Gill on “Jon 1:2”);

of three days’ journey; in compass, being sixty miles, as Diodorus Siculus^{f61} relates; and allowing twenty miles for a day’s journey on foot, as this was, and which is as much as a man can ordinarily do to hold it, was

just three days journey; and so Herodotus^{f62} reckons a day's journey at an hundred fifty furlongs, which make about nineteen miles; but, according to the Jewish writers, a middling day's journey is ten "parsas"^{f63}, and every "parsa" makes four miles, so that with them it is forty miles: or else it was three days' journey in the length of it, as Kimchi thinks, from end to end. This is observed to show the greatness of the city, which was the greatest in the whole world, as well as to lead on to the following account.

Ver. 4. *And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey*, etc.] As soon as he came to it, he did not go into an inn, to refresh himself after his wearisome journey; or spend his time in gazing upon the city, and to observe its structure, and the curiosities of it; but immediately sets about his work, and proclaims what he was bid to do; and before he could finish one day's journey, he had no need to proceed any further, the whole city was alarmed with his preaching, was terrified with it, and brought to repentance by it:

and he cried; as he went along; he lifted up his voice like a trumpet, that everyone might hear; he did not mutter it out, as if afraid to deliver his message, but cried aloud in the hearing of all; and very probably now and then made a stop in the streets, where there was a concourse of people, or where more streets met, and there, as a herald, proclaimed what he had to say:

and said, yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown; not by a foreign army besieging and taking it, which was not probable to be done in such a space of time, but by the immediate power of God; either by fire from heaven, as he overthrow Sodom and Gomorrah, their works being like theirs, as Kimchi and Ben Melech observe, or by an earthquake; that is, within forty days, or at the end of forty days, as the Targum; not exceeding such a space, which was granted for their repentance, which is implied, though not expressed; and must be understood with this proviso, except it repented, for otherwise why is any time fixed? and why have they warning given them, or the prophet sent to them? and why were they not destroyed at once, as Sodom and Gomorrah, without any notice? doubtless, so it would have been, had not this been the case. The Septuagint version very wrongly reads, "yet three days", etc. and as wrongly does Josephus^{f64} make Jonah to say, that in a short time they would lose the empire of Asia, when only the destruction of Nineveh is threatened; though, indeed, that loss followed upon it.

Ver. 5. *So the people of Nineveh believed God,* etc.] Or “in God”^{f65}: in the word of the Lord, as the Targum; they believed there was a God, and that he, in whose name Jonah came, was the true God; they believed the word the prophet spake was not the word of man, but, the word of God; faith came by hearing the word, which is the spring of true repentance, and the root of all good works. Kimchi and R. Jeshuah, in Aben Ezra, suppose that the men of the ship, in which Jonah had been, were at Nineveh; and these testified that they had cast him into the sea, and declared the whole affair concerning him; and this served greatly to engage their attention to him, and believe what he said: but this is not certain; and, besides, their faith was the effect of the divine power that went along with the preaching of Jonah, and not owing to the persuasion of men;

and proclaimed a fast; not of themselves, but by the order of their king, as follows; though Kimchi thinks this was before that:

and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them; both, with respect to rank and age, so universal were their fasting and mourning; in token of which they stripped themselves of their common and rich apparel, and clothed themselves with sackcloth; as was usual in extraordinary cases of mourning, not only with the Jews, but other nations.

(Jonah would be a quite a sight to behold. The digestive juices of the fish would have turned his skin to a most unnatural colour and his hair was most like all gone. Indeed, anyone looking like that would attract your attention and give his message more credence, especially after he told you what had happened to him. A God who creates storms, prepares large fish to swallow a man and preserves him in the fish, would not likely have too much trouble destroying your city. Editor)

Ver. 6. *For word came unto the king of Nineveh,* etc.] Who was not Sardanapalus, a very dissolute prince, and abandoned to his lusts; but rather Pul, the same that came against Menahem king of Israel, (¹²⁵⁹2 Kings 15:19), as Bishop Usher^{f66} thinks; to him news were brought that there was such a prophet come into the city, and published such and such things, which met with credit among the people; and that these, of all ranks and degrees, age and sex, were afflicted with it, and thrown into the utmost concern about it; so very swiftly did the ministry of Jonah spread in the city; and what he delivered was so quickly carried from one to another, that in one day’s time it reached the palace, and the royal ear:

and he arose from his throne; where he sat in great majesty and splendour, encircled by his nobles, receiving their caresses and compliments; or, it may be, giving audience to foreign ambassadors, sent to court his friendship and alliance; or hearing causes, and redressing the grievances of his subjects; for he appears to be one that did not indulge himself in hunting, and such like exercises, or in his lusts and pleasures:

and he laid his robe from him; his royal apparel, his imperial robe, and garments of his glory, as the Targum; or his glorious garments, with which he was richly and most magnificently arrayed; he put off these, and left his throne, in token of his concern at hearing such dismal tidings as the overthrow of his capital city, and of his humiliation and abasement:

and covered [him] with sackcloth; which was very rough and coarse, and must be very disagreeable to a person so tender and delicate, and was what the meanest of his subjects wore on this occasion:

and sat in ashes; or “in the” or “that ashes”^{f67}; used in such times of mourning, which were either strewed under him, or put upon his head; and this, with the other, were done to afflict the body, and affect the mind with a sense of sin, and the misery threatened for sin, and to shew deep humiliation for it.

Ver. 7. *And he caused [it] to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh*, etc.] By a herald or heralds, sent into the several parts of the city:

by the decree of the king and his nobles; with whom he consulted, and whose advice he took; and who were equally concerned at this news, and very probably were present when word was brought to the king concerning it:

saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; a very strict and general fast this: abstinence from all food was enjoined; not only men of every rank and age, but the cattle likewise, horses and camels, they used either for their pleasure or business; their oxen, cows, and calves, of their herd; their sheep, goats, lambs, and kids, of their flocks:

let them not feed, nor drink water; no food were to be put into their mangers or folds: nor were they to be suffered to graze in their pastures, or to be allowed the least quantity of food or drink; this was ordered, to make the mourning the greater; thus Virgil^{f68} describes the mourning for the death of Caesar by the oxen not coming to the rivers to drink, nor touching the

grass of the field; and to afflict their minds the more, and for their greater mortification, since these creatures were for their use and pleasure, Fasting was used by the Heathens; as well as the Jews, in some cases; particularly the Egyptians, as Herodotus^{f69} observes, from whom the Assyrians might take it.

Ver. 8. *But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth,* etc.] As the king was, and the people also were; and this order enjoined the same to the beasts, horses, and camels, whose rich trappings were to be taken off, and sackcloth put upon them, for the greater solemnity, of the mourning; as at this day, at the funerals of great persons, not only the horses which draw the hearse and mourning, coaches are covered with black velvet, to make the solemnity more awful: but others are led, clothed in like manner:

and cry mightily unto God; which clause stands so closely connected with the former, as if it respected beasts as well as men, who sometimes are said to cry for food in times of drought and distress, (^{<200>}Joel 1:20); and who here might purposely be kept from food and drink, that they might cry, and so the more affect the minds of the Ninevites, in their humiliation and abasement; but men are principally meant, at least who were to cry unto God intensely and earnestly, with great ardour, fervency, and importunity; not only aloud, and with a strong voice, but with their whole heart, as Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret it; heartily, sincerely, and devoutly, for the averting divine wrath, and the pardon of their sins, and the sparing of their city:

yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way; as well knowing that fasting and prayer would be of no avail, without leaving everyone their sinful courses, and reforming their life and manners:

and from the violence that [is] in their hands: their rapine and oppression, their thefts and robberies, and preying upon the substance of others; which seem to be the reigning vices of this city, in doing which many murders were committed also; (see Na 3:1); the Jewish writers interpret this of making restitution for rapine and violence, which is a genuine fruit of repentance; (see ^{<200>}Luke 19:8). The Septuagint version understands this, not as a direction from the king to the men of Nineveh what they should do, but as a narrative of what they did; and no doubt but they did these things, put on sackcloth, fast, pray, and turn from their evil ways; yet they are the instructions of the king unto them and the orders he gave them.

Ver. 9. *Who can tell*, etc.] The Septuagint and Arabic versions prefix to this the word “saying”, and take them to be, not the words of the king, but of the Ninevites; though very wrongly: or “who is he that knows”; which some connect with the next word, “he will return”: that is, that knows the ways of repentance, he will return, as Kimchi and Ben Melech; or that knows that he has sinned, as Aben Ezra: or that knows the transgressions he is guilty of, will return, as Jarchi; and so the Targum,

“whosoever knows that sins are in his hands, he will return, or let him return, from them:”

but they are the words of the king, with respect to God, encouraging his subjects to the above things, from the consideration of the probability, or at least possibility, of God’s being merciful to them:

[if] God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce wrath, that we perish not? he speaks here not as nor as absolutely doubting, but as between hope and fear: for, by the light of nature, it is not certain that God will pardon men upon repentance; it is only probable or possible he may; neither the light of nature nor the law of Moses connect repentance and remission of sins, it is the Gospel does this; and it is only by the Gospel revelation that any can be assured that God will forgive, even penitent sinners; however, this Heathen prince encourages his subjects not to despair of, but to hope for, the mercy of God, though they could not be sure of it; and it may be observed, that he does not put their hope of not perishing, or of salvation, upon their fasting, praying, and reformation, but upon the will, mercy, and goodness of God.

Ver. 10. *And God saw their words, that they turned from their evil way*, etc.] Not their outward works, in putting on sackcloth and ashes, and fasting; but their inward works, their faith in him, and repentance towards him; and which were attended with fruits and works meet for repentance, in that they forsook their former course of life, and refrained from it; and these he saw not barely with his eye of omniscience, as he sees all persons and things, good and bad, but so as to like them, approve of them, and accept them, in which sense the word is used, (~~0000~~Genesis 1:4,31 4:4); and so the repentance of these men is spoken of with commendation by Christ, and as what would rise up in judgment, and condemn the men of that generation, (~~0124~~Matthew 12:41);

and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did [it] not; this is spoken after the manner of men, as Aben Ezra observes; and is to be understood, not of any such affection in God as repentance; but of an effect done by him, which carries in it a show of repentance, or resembles what is done by men when they repent; then they change their course and conduct; so, the Lord, though he never changes his will, nor repents of or revokes his decrees, or alters his purposes; yet he sometimes wills a change, and makes an alteration in the dispensations of his providence, according to his unchangeable will. God, in this case, did not repent of his decrees concerning the Ninevites, but of what he had said or threatened respecting the overthrow of Nineveh, in case of their impenitence; it was his will that they should be told of their sin and danger, and by this means be brought to repentance, and the wrath threatened them be averted; so that here was a change, not of his mind and will concerning them, but of his outward dispensations towards them; (see ~~24817~~ Jeremiah 18:7-10).