The Book of Jonah

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Chapter 3**

* **3:1-4– Jonah’s Commission and Acknowledgment**
* Jonah is called by God a second time to go to Nineveh and proclaim His words against it (contrast 1:1-3 vs. 3:1-3)
* “By paralleling here the book’s opening remarks, almost word for word, the author skillfully conveys the idea that Jonah is being offered a new beginning.” (Alexander)
* Jonah acknowledges God’s commission and does according to His Word (v. 3)
* *“An exceedingly great city...three days’ journey”* (v. 3) What are we to make of this phrase? It may refer to: (1) Circumference of the city (2) If Jonah stopped to preach at certain points in the city it may have taken three days to preach to its entirety (3) Such a large population of people it has been said to be greater than Babylon
* Jonah starts to proclaim a statement of great fear as he journeys into Nineveh (v. 4)
* The idea behind 40 days has been speculated about quite often. Some have suggested it has ties to the 40 days and 40 nights of rain that destroyed the world in Gen. 7. Type of new creation may be the idea behind the number (See also: Ex. 24:18, 34:28; Num. 13:25, 14). It may just mean God is giving the people time to repent but this is a limited time period. (See. Rev. 9:5-6; 20-21)
* If they don’t repent they will be ***“overthrown.”*** The Hebrew word literally means to turn over or to uproot. The idea here is clear that if Nineveh doesn’t repent God will destroy them and uproot them as one uproots a plant/tree and it’s no more.
* *“Overthrow”* is often identified with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (See: Gen. 19:21, 25; Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11)
* **3:5-9– The wicked city repents and turns to God**
* It is interesting that the text denotes that the people believed in God. That is, they believed the message Jonah proclaimed came from God (v. 5). To *“believe in God”* is to suggest they trusted God completely. They trusted in Him. The same phrase is used of Abraham in Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Jam. 2:23. Abraham believed according to faith, even so the people of Nineveh believed according to faith.
* This belief expressed by the Assyrians was not common in Israel’s history (Num. 14:11; Psa. 106:24; Heb. 3:19)
* The faith expressed by the people of Nineveh is promptly followed by works of repentance. They don sackcloth and called a fast. No one was exempted from this (v. 5b). Sackcloth was a coarse material usually made of black goat’s hair, making it quite uncomfortable to wear.
* The wearing of sackcloth, calling a fast and/or sitting in ashes is closely associated with: (1) Mourning– **Job 2:8, 12-13; 16:15** (2) National disaster/repenting from sin– **Esth. 4:1-3; Jon. 3:5-9**
* Having heard about the matter, the King rises from the throne (a lofty seat, one of power and pride) and covers himself with sackcloth and sits in the ashes (picture of humility and debasement). Notice the haste with which he acts (v. 6). This proclamation of Jonah has been one of great fear and it has moved even the greatest of the people to repent.
* In vv. 7-8 the King issues a decree that all the people and beasts must fast, be covered with sackcloth, call on God (Elohim) earnestly (1:6) and turn from their violence and wicked ways (2 Chron. 7:14). Decree emphasizes the need for all to repent.
* Fasting connected with mourning over sin (1 Kings 21:27-29; Jer. 36:9; Joel 1:14, 2:12)
* *“Who knows…”* Statement in v. 9 by the King shows faith, hope and trust in God. They are doing all they can and now it all rests in God’s hands. *“God may relent…”* (Joel 2:14; Amos 5:15; Psa. 106:45). Where there is life, there is hope with such a loving, compassionate and merciful God!
* Nation repenting is not common is Israel’s history.
* **3:10–4:2– God relents concerning the calamity according to His lovingkindess**
* God observes the repentance of the Assyrians (v. 10) and decides that He will not destroy them (2 Chron. 7:14).
* Are we to understand this verse in light of Deut. 18:22-23 as saying Jonah is a false prophet? (See: Jer. 18:7-11)