

Jonah, the Lukewarm Prophet

Jonah Chapter Three

The Jonah 3 commentary offers my translation of Jonah 3:1-10 with Hebrew keywords and phrases in bold letters.

Jonah 3:1

The Word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time.

Jonah 1:1 The Word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai.

- Jonah 1:1 mentions Jonah's father, while Jonah 3:1 emphasizes the fact that God has tried to speak to the prophet Jonah about his mission for the **second time**.
- The phrase **the Word of the LORD** begins a new section in Jonah 3.

Jonah 3:2

"RISE! GO to Nineveh the GREAT city CRY OUT to it the proclamation that I am going to tell you."

Jonah 1:2 "RISE. GO to Nineveh the GREAT city. CRY OUT against it for their EVIL has risen before me.

- In Jonah 1:2, the **LORD** commands Jonah to preach **against** Nineveh, but here in Jonah 3:2 the **LORD** commands the prophet to preach **to** the **city**.
- In Jonah 3:2, the **LORD** changes His message & tone of the original **proclamation** (Jonah 1:2).
- Otherwise, why would he include "**the proclamation I'm going to tell you**" (Jonah 3:2). The **LORD** may be teaching Jonah a lesson for his rebellion.

Jonah 3:3

Jonah ROSE. He went to Nineveh according to the Word of the LORD. Nineveh was a GREAT city to God, a walk of three days.

- Up to this point, Jonah has obeyed the **LORD** when he **ROSE** and went to Nineveh.
- The phrase **the Word of the LORD** has appeared twice in Jonah 3. It begins and ends a section of the text, a pericope (Jonah 1:1-3:3b).
- In 3:3c the word "Nineveh" is placed before the verb in the Hebrew text. This is called fronting in linguistics.
- This reiterates the importance of the **GREAT city** to the **LORD**.
- The phrase **a walk of three days** describes its populous size.

Jonah 3:4

Jonah began to go into the city a walk of one day. He CRIED OUT and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be demolished!"

- Jonah did **RISE & CRY OUT** as the **LORD** commanded him. But...
- He didn't preach to the whole **city**. He only **began to go** into the populous **city**. He went into the **city** a **walk of one day**.
- He only preached five Hebrew words to the populous. It doesn't look as though the prophet Jonah preached the **LORD's** revised **proclamation** (Jonah 3:2).
- Jonah didn't confront the king first as did most of the Old Testament prophets, rather his message condemns the Ninevite populous with destruction and judgment.
- He only partially obeys the command of the **LORD**. He's the Lukewarm Prophet!

Jonah 3:5

The people of Nineveh believed in God. They CRIED OUT [for] a fast. They put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.

- Despite Jonah's shadiness, all the Ninevites believe in God. As with the Pagan Sailors (Jonah 1), Jonah doesn't reveal the name of Yahweh (**LORD**) to them.
- The Ninevites believe in an unknown God (Elohim) who threatened to destroy them in Jonah's message.
- They **CRIED OUT** [for] a fast and put on sackcloth, both signs of repentance. From **the least to the greatest**, all of them **REPENTED**.
- The people spread Jonah's reluctantly preached message throughout the rest of the **city**.

Jonah 3:6

When the Word struck the king of Nineveh, He ROSE from his throne. He removed his robe from himself. He covered himself with sackcloth. He sat in ashes.

- When the five **Word** message reached the King, it struck his heart. The King **ROSE** and fully obeyed, whereas Jonah **ROSE** to partially obey.
- The King **ROSE** from the throne, removed his robe, and put on sackcloth. Then he **sat** in ashes. These are signs of deep humility.
- In Jonah 4 the prophet will **sit** outside the **city**, not with a humble heart but rather an **ANGRY** one.

Jonah 3:7

He made a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by decree of the king and his GREAT ones: Do not let humanity, beast, herd, or flock taste anything. Do not let them eat [food] or drink water.

- Unlike Jonah's message preached to one-third of the Ninevites, the King's decree effects the entire population and their animals.
- The **GREAT** ones refer to the King's nobles.
- In Jonah 3:7c the words - **humanity, beast, herd, or flock** - come before the verb "Do not taste" (fronting).
- This stresses that every person and animal are called to participate. No questions asked.

Jonah 3:8

Let humanity and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let humanity CRY OUT with strength to God. Let each person TURN from his/her EVIL [ways] and from the violence in their hands.

- Both human and wild beast must wear sackcloth. The term "humanity" means all the Ninevites.
- The King decrees his people to **CRY OUT** like the Pagan Sailors did on the raging sea (Jonah 1:14).
- The verb **TURN** means to stop living in immorality.
- The keyword **EVIL** has already been a major theme in the Jonah story.
- The Ninevites knew their history of **violence** against Israel, Jonah's people. More than likely, the Ninevites repented of this **violence**.

Jonah 3:9

Who knows? God might TURN and REPENT. He might TURN from his burning anger. We might not PERISH.

- Who knows? God might **TURN** and **REPENT**. The King isn't sure. This reveals that Jonah didn't preach anything about mercy.
- The King just hopes that by **CRYING OUT** for a fast, they will move God's heart to **REPENT**.
- **REPENT** = "be remorseful" (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament).
- Open theists like this verse because they believe God changes His mind.
- Most theologians who don't believe God can change struggle with this verse.
- The Ninevites, like the Pagan Sailors, don't want to **PERISH** (Jonah 1:6).

Jonah 3:10

When God saw their deeds that they TURNED from their EVIL ways, God REPENTED of the EVIL that He spoke of doing to them. He did not do [it].

- The Ninevites **TURNED** from **EVIL (violence)**. God **REPENTED**. He must have felt remorse as the text says.
- **EVIL** can describe a natural disaster like a **GREAT** storm which ushers in God's justice on account of sin (Jonah 1:7).
- Research the Ninevite methods of transporting the Israelite prisoners (**violence**). Nevertheless, the narrator struggles with something God was going to do before He changed His mind.

Summary of Jonah 3

After the **GREAT fish** vomits Jonah inland, the **LORD** speaks to the prophet **a second time** (Jonah 3:1). Originally, the LORD commanded Jonah to speak judgment **against** Nineveh but now God changes the message and tone of His original **proclamation**. Yahweh wants Jonah to **CRY OUT** to that **GREAT city** (Jonah 3:2). When Jonah does arrive at Nineveh, he only partially obeys God. He only **began to go** into the **city one day's walk** to preach five Hebrew words of impending judgment (Jonah 3:4). Despite Jonah's shady methods, all the Ninevites **REPENTED** (Jonah 3:5). The Pagan King dressed in sackcloth, **sat** in ashes and decreed a fast. This foreign ruler fully obeyed **God's Word**, while Jonah only partially and reluctantly responded to God's voice (Jonah 3:6-9). The **GREAT city REPENTED** of its **violence**, and the Ninevites did not **PERISH**. In turn, the **LORD REPENTED** of His plans to destroy them (Jonah 3:10).