

### The Lord Recommissions Jonah to Go to Nineveh

#### Jonah 3:1-4

Jonah 3:1-4 - *“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup> So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. <sup>4</sup> And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”*

#### Background Notes

The buried ruins of ancient Nineveh have been excavated; they’re located in the country of Iraq today. I’d love to see those excavations, but I haven’t had the chance to get to Nineveh yet. (We were planning a Bible Lands study tour to both Nineveh and Babylon a few years ago, but “Operation Desert Storm” forced us to change our plans!)

Ancient Nineveh was a great city, as God said when He officially called Jonah to go to Nineveh. *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2).* In chapter 3, when Jonah was re-commissioned, once again God mentioned that Nineveh was a great city: *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you” (v2).* And then the huge size and splendor of the city was emphasized again in verse 3: *“Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.”*

Notice – Jonah wasn’t the one who called Nineveh a great city - **God** called Nineveh a great city – an exceedingly great city! Why did God call Nineveh a great city? Was it because of the magnificent buildings and sculptures that have been found in the ruins of Nineveh? No. Was it because of the power that Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire wielded over the ancient world? No. Ancient historians recorded that two walls surrounded the city. The huge inner wall was one hundred feet high and fifty feet wide, broad enough for three chariots to ride abreast! Did God call Nineveh a great city because of the massive walls that surrounded it? No!

God called Nineveh great because of the **great number of people** who lived there! It’s been estimated that at least six thousand people lived inside the city, and at least a million people lived in the immediate area. In God’s eyes, people are what make a city great! Not the grandeur or power of the city - but how many people need to be saved.

*“Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent” (v3).* While Nineveh was definitely a large city, it doesn’t take three days to walk across the ruins of ancient Nineveh. So is this verse an inaccuracy or contradiction in the Bible? No! The point is that so many people lived in this great city, it would take Jonah a three-day’s journey throughout the city to preach to all these people.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God graciously re-commissions His erring servants.

*“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you” (v1-2).* At the end of Jonah 2, Jonah was restored to fellowship with the Lord, and he was deposited back on dry land, but he was not yet re-commissioned. In fact, from Jonah’s perspective, he didn’t know whether the Lord would still want use him as a prophet or not. And I wouldn’t be surprised if Jonah was hoping that God would choose to send someone else to Nineveh!

Nineveh needed the grace of God to be saved; Jonah needed the grace of God to serve. Jonah would still rather have served the Lord in ways other than going to Nineveh (and we’ll certainly pick that up when we get to chapter 4). Jonah may have thought that even though he had been restored to fellowship with the Lord, he was “on the shelf” as far as future service for the Lord was concerned.

Let me ask you - would **you** have re-commissioned Jonah? After all, he walked away before he even started the job. We would probably have fired him. But God loves to hire the people we would fire! What an encouragement for us! When God restores us, He loves to graciously re-commission His erring servants.

Then God’s call came to Jonah once again. Maybe Jonah heard that call on the beach, right where he was thrown up onto the dry land. Or maybe Jonah went back home, and that’s where the call came. We don’t know. But the Lord’s call was: *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you” (v2).* The call was coming the second time.

And so **Jonah arose!** Isn’t that wonderful? *“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord” (v3).* What a change in attitude from chapter 1! Jonah didn’t really want to go to Nineveh, but he was obedient – and that’s the point.

Let me ask you a question: What direction are you traveling in your life as a believer? Are you traveling in obedience - to Nineveh? Or are you traveling in disobedience - to Tarshish? If you’re heading to Tarshish, here’s the good news: God is willing to restore you to fellowship with Him if you repent of your disobedience. Furthermore, God is willing to re-commission you in service for Him. God graciously re-commissions His erring servants.

### 2. God graciously re-engages His erring creatures.

The Bible teaches that God created mankind to be in a relationship with Him. In the beginning, there was communion between God and man. But then sin came into God’s perfect creation, and sin broke man’s relationship with God. From

that moment on, the human race has been alienated from God. There is no longer communion between the Creator and the creatures that He made in His own image,

But God still loves people! 2 Peter 3:9 says that God is longsuffering and patient. He's not willing for anyone to perish. So God reaches out and seeks to re-engage His creatures.

Ever since the Fall, God has been doing this. Think of the message that went out at the time of Noah. For 120 years God sought to re-engage the lost and sinful people through the preaching of Noah. In Abraham's time, God had Abraham rescue the people of Sodom and Gomorrah from captivity in the hands of the kings of the east (Genesis 14). Certainly those people had the chance to repent and follow the Lord before He sent the disastrous judgment on their cities (Genesis 19).

This was also true of the Canaanite nations at the time of Israel's conquest of Canaan. For many years before God judged them, He sought to re-engage them. God told Abraham that His descendants would be in Egypt four hundred years "because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15). All during those 400 years, God was seeking to re-engage the lost and sinful people of Canaan.

At the time of Jonah, in His grace, God was seeking to reach out and re-engage lost people - even the cruel Assyrians. God graciously re-engages His erring creatures.

*"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (v4).* When you look at Jonah's message, you might conclude, "That's not a message of grace! That's a message of judgment! Where's the grace in that message?" Clearly, it's in the forty days! The people of Nineveh had forty days in which to repent. In the Bible, the number "forty" is often associated with "testing." God graciously tested the people of Nineveh for forty days.

And they passed the test! In fact, the repentance of the people of Nineveh was probably the greatest spiritual awakening in history!

Notice, by the way, that sermons do not have to be long to be effective. Jonah's evangelistic services in Nineveh were very short. No music. No drama. Just a few words – straight from the Lord.

And notice that Jonah preached exactly the message that God gave him: *"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."* Jonah didn't give his own views – he only preached the Word of the Lord.

That's another great lesson for preachers. Teach the Bible - the word of the Lord - not the ideas of men! The Great Commission from our Lord was: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel, and make disciples of all nations." God wants to re-engage His lost and sinful creatures.

If you do not know the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior, then you are lost. You are alienated from God because of your sin. But God loves you! And because He loves you, He is graciously seeking to reach out and heal that broken relationship. He wants to forgive your sin and give you peace.

You must trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ, as your Savior, by an act of your will. Your “good works” will not save you. Ephesians 2:8-9 says that it is “...*by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

Your alienation from God can end right now. Your broken relationship with your Creator can be put back together - because God graciously re-engages His erring creatures.

## Practical Application

**You can know the Lord as “the God of the second chance.”**

I’ve been primarily speaking to unbelievers in the last few minutes. But maybe you’re a believer who has failed the Lord in some way. The Lord called you. He wanted to give you a chance to serve Him - but you failed. Maybe you even deliberately disobeyed and ran away from the Lord. If so, listen: ***Our God is “the God of the second chance”!*** He’s “the God of second-time grace.”

Think of Peter, who failed the Lord, and even denied that he knew Him - but Peter came to know the Lord as the God of the second chance! Think of John Mark, who failed the Lord when he quit the Paul and Barnabas mission team - but John Mark came to know the Lord as the God of the second chance. God even used John Mark to write a book of Scripture - the Gospel of Mark! God’s gracious restoration is clearly seen in the lives of Peter, and John Mark, and Jonah.

Think of Jonah and how he deliberately disobeyed. He even ran away from the Lord. But God graciously restored and re-commissioned Jonah. Jonah came to know the Lord as the God of the second chance - and you can, too!

Are you a “Jonah”? You know you have failed the Lord – maybe even to the point of direct disobedience. Repent and return to the Lord, because He’s the God of the second chance. Or perhaps you know a “Jonah.” Maybe they failed the Lord in some way. Don’t just write them off. Share this word of encouragement with them.

God didn’t write Jonah off, and God has not written you off.

You can know the Lord as “the God of the second chance.”