

Jonah and Nineveh

Given a second chance, Jonah preaches to Nineveh. The entire city repents—but Jonah is angry that God shows mercy to his enemies.

Jonah 3:1-10 • Jonah 4:1-11

CHARACTERS: Jonah, God, King of Nineveh, People of Nineveh

THEMES: Second chances, Repentance, God's mercy, Compassion for enemies

THEN THE WORD of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.'

This time Jonah obeyed. He went to Nineveh, a city so large it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.'

The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat down in the dust.

The king issued a proclamation: 'Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.'

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened.

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed, 'Isn't this what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending

calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'

'Is it right for you to be angry?' the Lord asked.

Jonah went out and sat down east of the city, waiting to see what would happen. The Lord provided a plant to grow up and give Jonah shade. Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm that chewed the plant so it withered. When the sun blazed, God provided a scorching wind, and Jonah grew faint and wanted to die.

'Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?'

'It is,' Jonah said. 'And I'm angry enough to die.'

The Lord said, 'You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?'

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