

## Jonah 3

Written by K B Napier  
Monday, 15 June 2009 14:32

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It is an ever-recurring question – “How do I know if God is calling me to do something? How can I tell if it is not just psychological?”

My answer remains the same – “You will know!” How? Because the calling will be definite, powerful and overwhelming, whether the task is small or great. When it happens, you will know for sure. It is far greater than a psychological suggestion, or a whim, or a thought, and cannot be mistaken for one.

Let me give a negative parallel example. Everyone has colds... sneezes, mild headache and temperature, etc. Yes? So we all know what a cold feels like, whether it is mild or a bit worse. We can still function and know it will pass. (I must say that as a man I am often embarrassed by other men who stay in bed when they have a cold!).

Now, have you ever had influenza? Many people say they have ‘flu, when, in fact, they only have a bad cold. Real influenza is unmistakable! It literally knocks you off your feet. I remember having Hong Kong ‘flu when I was a boy. It began with the room spinning and my eyes going out of focus. I was violently sick and could not stand up. Then it got really bad and I was stuck in my bed, feeling utterly wretched for weeks. It took me months to really get over it. I had another bout of a different ‘flu as an adult, but the symptoms were even worse – I was fully incapacitated and could not move even if I wanted to. Many people die from real ‘flu, because it is so virulent.

Get the idea? If you have to ask what real ‘flu is like, then you have never had it and cannot imagine what it is like. Same goes for a real call from God. It cannot be mistaken for mere psychological suggestion, such is its power and general influence on the senses and mind. You are either called by God to something, or you are not. And when you are called you will be moved along His path until you accomplish what He has given you to do. This is what happened to Jonah! He tried his best to escape God’s calling to his task, but near-death at sea and a huge fish got in the way!

When Jonah did as he was told, amazing things happened. A whole city obeyed God, though it was in a bad social and spiritual state. This tells us that if we, today, are oppressed by evil on a large scale, there is only one answer – prayer and obedience.

## Verses 1 & 2

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1.

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2.

Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

Jonah is now on dry land, safe, but probably not knowing where he is. Now God had Jonah's attention, He again commands him to go to Nineveh. The structure of this verse suggests that Jonah would be given the substance of his preaching message when he reached the "great city". This corresponds with the testimony of Jesus, who tells His followers to just open their mouths when they are confronted by hostile listeners. God will then fill their mouths with the words to be used.

I have known this phenomenon myself in a number of situations. For example, in a 'tight spot' in employment when faced with hostility, fearing the worst, I have just spoken honestly and openly, and what I thought would be a nasty incident became ordinary and well received. Or, when a word of prophecy was required I spoke and the words I uttered were not known to me previously. (Not to be confused with charismatic error).

(Do not be suspicious of *real* prophecy... it continues today, but is never outside of scripture. Prophecy is a part of the role of pastors and teachers). Or, when I had to speak with occultists, God gave me the exact words to speak and those who were not of God acknowledged the words were true. Even in such things as this study – the substance must come from God, or it is of no worth at all. And so on. Genuine believers who trust God will be given what is needed at the proper time.

### Verses 3 & 4

1.

So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

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2.

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

This time, Jonah walked the path set for him by God! He got up and started walking to Nineveh, about 400 miles to the east. As we will see, even though he had suffered a traumatic event as a punishment from God, one designed to turn him back to what he should do, Jonah still did not have the right attitude.

This is of interest, because few Christians do what is commanded with a good heart! How many of us resent what we must do for God? Or, wish it were not our responsibility? Or, try to avoid it, as Jonah did, maybe not so dramatically, but avoid it nevertheless? Or, pretend it was not a real call after all? I can assure you that ministers often come across this in others - and in themselves, though they dare not say so! Shamefully, I have done it myself, so I know it happens.

Yet, when we act on what we must do, when commanded to do so by God, our lives are turned around. I have known times when I have feared, or had anxiety about situations, and God has gently given me hope and success, just because I had faith and did as commanded. As I have said before 'faith' is not always 100%; sometimes it is only as much as a mustard seed, yet God uses us. I have also found that when I go forward in fear, I am helped by the mere fact that I have obeyed. A single step begins the journey.

When we hide because of fear, we develop a very bad outlook on our Christian lives and lose many benefits of God. In a great battle, when we fight on through our fear, we stand firm and know the strength of the Lord. If we try and hide or pull back, we will become victim to the enemy and to our own fears. This is the basis for all neuroses.

Jonah, then, was still reluctant, but he obeyed. In everyday life, as a pastor, I tell those who fear to carry on anyway. Once we give in to fear, we begin a pattern of despair that builds up negatively for life. Such a pattern must be broken, because if it continues we will always feel regret and anxiety. We need the spiritual adrenalin of God's strength and power! Without it we are nothing. This is why Paul demanded to see the power in our lives, and not just hear the

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claim that we are Christians.

The phrase “according to the word of the Lord” does NOT refer to Biblical texts. In this case it means the uttered word of God, the commands given specifically to Jonah. In general terms, such a phrase for us usually means to read God’s word and to obey it. It also means the commands He gives to us as individuals (often through scripture, but sometimes through our minds and thoughts, or through others).

At that time Nineveh was a huge city. It took three days to walk from end to end, or around it. The text is not clear as to which measurement is spoken of, but we know the city was very big.

In any modern big city, we know that the center is usually filled with vagabonds, thieves, hoodlums and thugs. They are ready to do whatever it takes to get your money or your life. Then there are unbelievers galore! They range from disinterested people to those who loathe God and His people and savagely attack them. There are also occultists, people who have never worshipped any god, let alone the only God. There are wealthy and poor, all striving to either get more money or scrape in the dirt to make ends meet. So many characters and all very frightening to strangers. What I have just said of our modern cities also goes for ancient Nineveh!

It is often thought that ancient places were somehow better, or not as bad as today. This is a delusion. Nineveh, like all ancient cities, was great because of its boundless wealth and power. It had temples to false gods, people who hated anything to do with religion, killers, thieves... you name it, and they had it. Maybe moreso. So, if Jonah feared the people, I can understand it, though with God, who can be against us?

As I have said before, we do not know why Jonah was reluctant to go to Nineveh the first time. It might have been fear of the unknown, or of the people’s wrath. It might have been the natural avoidance of foreigners by the Hebrews, who were warned by God not to mix themselves with unbelieving strangers, who were called ‘dogs’. It might even have been something simple, like a preference not to travel at that time. We just do not know. We only know that Jonah foolishly tried to avoid God’s command. None of us can do that. If God wants us to do something, then we will do it, whether or not we wish to.

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Jonah entered the city walls and continued walking for a whole day. The text says he “began to enter... a day’s journey”. This suggests that Jonah started to preach as soon as he walked through the gates and kept on preaching all day to dusk. He repeated the same words, over and over: ‘In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!’

In my ministry I have occasions when God has burdened me with specific warnings or messages. Many of these are delivered through our Sunday studies. I know that every study is meant for someone in the meeting, or someone who reads the notes on the internet. This is *always* the case, without exception. Sometimes the message has a remarkable effect on people, with dramatic results. This is because I will not speak unless God is the author of what I say.

On rare occasions I must deliver exact words that were unknown to me previously. However, like most pastors/teachers/preachers, the message is in the generality of words spoken. Either way, the words are from God. Any minister who does not understand this or believe it, is not a true minister! The reason why all the words must be from God is that only God’s word bears fruit; only He can say what needs to be said. As I have said before, though not every Christian is a pastor, etc., every Christian is a ‘minister’, with his or her own ministry to perform, whether big or small, public or secret. Therefore, we must all learn to speak only from God, “according to His word”.

### Verses 5 - 9

1.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

2.

For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

3.

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

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4.

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

5.

Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

Jonah's words (that is, the words of God) were very basic and simple. Even so, they had a remarkable effect on everyone in the city. Imagine this happening in, say, London, or New York! (It could, if men of God had faith). We are told that the people of Nineveh "believed God". That is, they trusted that what they were told would indeed happen.

We do not know if Jonah told them anything else, but it is unlikely that they had time to listen to a full Hebraic discourse. He might have warned them of their idolatry, and certainly warned them to repent. The main fact is, they believed their city would be destroyed and they would lose their lives if they did not repent. The fact that all the city believed is proof of God's mighty intervention. He spoke to each and every soul, though none were of His favoured people, and they believed!

Do we not think, in our pride, that many are beyond help? Do we not think certain groups are outside God's sight? We should not – God will help and save whom He will, whether we like them or not! It is true, though, that certain people must be warned and rebuked, or even opposed. Even so, this does not prevent us seeking God's intervention to stop their evil, or from preaching the truth to them.

As they repented, the people called for a public fast. As was common in the Middle East, they threw ashes upon their heads and changed their clothing for sackcloth – all signs of mourning and repentance. Everyone did this, for all were afraid of God. Many may not have known who this God of Jonah's was, but they were convinced deep in their hearts that they would be destroyed.

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It has been said that hell never features in today's sermons. I believe it! It is a failure on the part of all preachers, and it must be rectified. Hell is the abode of most people who have ever lived. Should we not tell them? One strong feature of modern society is lack of fear – of God, of law, of anything. We must bring it back, for the good of us all. The true Gospel message *must* include talk of hell.

This mass movement of the people was led by the king of Nineveh himself. Nineveh was just 250 miles north of Babylon. Abraham left Babylon to start his wandering, to begin a new people loved of God. Now, God had returned to the same country, to graciously give a warning of doom if the people did not repent and change their ways. God was gracious to a people who were outside of His choice, yet He saved them! This is a lesson for us all to do whatever God requires, and not just what we wish to do.

The king, with great humility, listened to the warning and God told him in his heart that the warning was true. The man took off his royal robes and joined the people in sackcloth and ashes. Then he sat in a pile of ashes to further show his deference to Almighty God, repentant. Today, many say they 'repent' but show no sign of it in their lives. If there is no sign of it, how can we tell if any man has repented and changed? There **MUST** be proof!

The king was determined to obey God and show proof of their repentance. The king and his chief courtiers ordered the whole kingdom to refrain from food and drink until they were assured by God of His mercy. And that included the animals. Every citizen was to remain in sackcloth and ashes until God made his acceptance plain. How easily we repent today – we just mutter a quick 'sorry' and carry on. In the past, those who truly felt the hand of God would not just repent, but would make amends.

The king evidently knew the word of God in himself, for he commanded everyone to cry out for mercy until their hearts burst with anguish. They were all to turn away from the evils they had previously lived by, and from the violence that tore the city apart. This was no quick-fix. This was full-scale repentance of an entire city and kingdom. The king said that if they repented in truth, God may turn aside His wrath and not put them to death.

We must all, today, act in this depth of sorrow for our sins, to make sure God will not reward us for our sins. If you sin right now, then repent truly and change your ways. Nothing else will do.

### Verse 10

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1.

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

“And God saw their works”. He saw that they repented and changed their ways. And so “God repented of the evil, that he had said he would do unto them; and he did (it) not.”

How do you read that verse? Most say that God changed His mind – He said He would do something but then He did not, because the people’s actions changed His mind. Is this what really happened? Be very careful how you answer, for it shows your doctrinal understanding (or not).

The text means that God knew what would happen in eternity. He knew that the people would respond as they did. Thus, God did not change His mind; He already had His answer, waiting. What does it mean, when we are told God ‘repented’? it does not mean what you think it means! For human beings, repentance is to turn away from their sin and go in the opposite godly direction. Now, God cannot sin, and so cannot ‘repent’ in this way. He cannot say ‘sorry’, because nothing He ever does warrants an apology!

‘Repent’ is nacham. Yes, it *can* mean to be sorry for something. It *can* mean to regret one’s thoughts, words or actions. But, God can never be sorry for his actions, for if He regretted what He did, it would mean He did not know He was wrong in the first place, or, that He changed His mind. Neither of these can be applied to God. Nacham can also mean to have compassion or to be consoled by what others do.

So, this verse can only mean what is conducive to God’s character. We may, then, paraphrase the verse to mean something like this: ‘God saw that the people repented and changed, so He did not cause them to suffer.’ A very simple interpretation but fair. Christians are told, too, that they must fear the Lord, because it is wisdom to do so. We must fear what He can do to us if we fail to obey and be honest with Him. This was the basis of the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira.

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God warns us that we may be visited by His wrath if we disobey consistently. But, if we obey, He will pour blessings and benefits upon us and will not destroy our earthly lives with His wrath. None of this means He changes His mind, or is sorry for His warnings.

Most Christians today live sickly spiritual lives, devoid of truth and any godly aim. They live to please the unsaved. They preach half-truths or lies, so that the unsaved do not think badly of them. Especially, they never mention God's wrath, or hell. They live just like their neighbours. They pretend to be 'balanced' by offering the wicked their say, and then accept their evils as socially good. They never stand firmly and publicly for God's word and truth. They devise social events rather than preach the truth of God. They cower at the feet of scientists, rather than tell them what God says, for fear of being thought 'unintellectual'. That is why the world is now in turmoil and why Christians are now thought to be useless and without influence.

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