



eLesson 017

Text: Jonah 3:1-10

Subject: Running with God

Jonah – Part 3

A second chance. As recorded at the beginning of chapter one, the Lord told Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh. Jonah rose up ... but he went in the opposite direction. He tried to run away from the Lord and from his commission to take God's message to Nineveh. God disciplined Jonah back into obedience. A storm at sea and a whale ride changed Jonah's willingness to obey. In chapter three, God gave a second chance to Jonah. He again told him to arise and go to Nineveh. When given a second chance, Jonah obeyed. Then God did great things through him.

A great city. After three days and nights in the belly of the whale, Jonah was vomited up onto the shore. What a relief that must have been to Jonah and to the whale. What a relief it must have been for Jonah to stand again on dry land ... to feel the drying warmth of the sunlight ... and to smell the fresh air. However, his greatest relief must have been that God gave him a second chance to obey. His sin had not permanently disqualified him. That is not always true ... some sins may permanently disqualify a leader from service. Jonah's mission field was the city of Nineveh. It was an evil city. It was also a great city ... a fact mentioned four times in the book of Jonah. The *"more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand"* 4:11, were probably children, as in Deuteronomy 1:39. Therefore, its total population could have been 500,000 or more. It was a great city in many ways. However, Jonah did not understand that it was great in the heart of God. Jonah 3:3 states that Nineveh was *"a three days' walk."* That could not describe his 500-mile (800-km) journey from the shore of the Mediterranean to Nineveh. That journey would have taken more than three days. New York, London, Warsaw, and Moscow are great cities to visit. However, you cannot adequately tour any one of them in just one day. A three-day walking tour of any one of them would be good. You might say that any one of them is a *three days' walk* ... the time it takes to tour the center of the city. In much the same sense, it could have taken Jonah three days to deliver his message as he walked through the crowded streets of Nineveh.

An impossible task? *"Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown,'"* 3:4. Do you realize how humanly foolish that negative message could have sounded to the Ninevites? Why would any of those Gentiles have listened to that one Jewish prophet? Why would they have believed his message? In the same way, why would anybody listen to you or to me when we speak of Jesus? Why would people believe us when we tell them that they must be born again ... that they can become children of God if they believe in His name ... that if they believe in Jesus, they will live even if they die? Well, why did the Ninevites believe Jonah? Jonah's message was humanly foolish. Likewise, some of our friends and family may think that our message is foolish. *"For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing*

foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe ... we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness" 1 Corinthians 1:18-23. If it seems foolish, then how can our friends and family be saved? What chance do we have of ever bringing them to God? Jesus answered a similar question in Mark 10:26-27. His disciples asked, *"Then who can be saved?"* Jesus answered, *"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."* With God, it is possible for our friends to believe as we deliver God's message. Our task is no more impossible than Jonah's task. He was successful. He brought the whole city to God. What will God do through us if we simply and obediently deliver His message?

Simple obedience. Imagine one of today's popular ministries going back in time to plan and execute an evangelistic outreach in Nineveh. There would be feasibility studies, committees, planning meetings, budgets, fund-raising, colorful posters, newspaper announcements, radio advertisements, busses, security guards, drama teams, special music, testimonies from sports stars, and a popular guest speaker. Hundreds of volunteers would need to be recruited. The executive planning committee would never agree to let one fish-smelly prophet walk down Main Street proclaiming a negative message. His judgmental message would be unacceptable. A positive message would be planned ... one about all the good stuff the Ninevites could get from God. The committee would have chosen a different speaker. Jonah would not have been their first or second choice. However, he was God's choice. Interestingly, God did not choose a committee. He chose one man for the job. After Jonah obediently gave God's message in God's time in God's place, all the people of Nineveh believed, 3:5. Even the king believed, 3:6. All the Ninevites turned to God in just one day of Jonah's ministry. Why was his ministry so successful? Why did 100% of the people turn to God? Imagine some of today's church growth specialists asking questions as they analyzed Jonah's success ... What type of people did he target? ... How did he dress for success? ... What preaching style did he use? How did he target the next generation? ... Was the music new, old, or blended? ... What were his visual aids, illustrations, and humor? ... How can his methods be duplicated? ... How quickly can a training manual be written? ... Who will publish it? ... What will the royalty structure be? ... When can *Be-Like-Jonah* seminars be scheduled? Maybe the only truly relevant question is ... What would happen today if Christians obediently delivered God's message in God's time in God's place? It is good to ask how we can be like Jonah in chapter 3 ... but the simple answer is, *Obedience*. What was the difference between Jonah in chapter three and Jonah in chapter one? Obedience! What is the difference between Jonah in chapter three and many Christians today? Obedience! Which Jonah are you like? Are you the Jonah in chapter one ... or the one in chapter three? Are you obediently giving God's message in God's time in God's place?

Repentance. *"Then the people of Nineveh believed in God"*, 3:5. The king decreed that all men and animals would neither eat nor drink ... and that all should be covered in sackcloth. It was a time for all to mourn over their sins ... a time to repent. They had no guarantees from Jonah or from God. Jonah's message was not *repent or God will destroy you*. His message was, *God will destroy you*. There was no promise that He would set aside their punishment if they repented. They said, *"Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?"* 3:9. The Ninevites had no promises ... no guarantees. However, when they repented, God spared them. *"When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."* 3:10. They repented ... and He relented. It seems that God changed His mind.

God changed His mind? Since God knows everything, didn't He know ahead of time that the Ninevites would repent and that He would spare them? Be careful here. It is overly simplistic to conclude that God cannot change His mind. Do not try to squeeze the infinite God into a finite box. Is His being deity so restrictive that He is a slave to His eternal

character? Do His attributes dictate that He functions like a self-programmed robot? Is He a slave to the pre-written script of His all-knowingness? If so, when did He write that script? He is certainly all-knowing. Does that mean that all of His decisions have already been made? When did He make those decisions? Wasn't He all-knowing before He made those decisions? If He were, then weren't all of His decisions already made by Him before He made them? When ... and how? Are you confused yet? To say that God cannot change His mind is to say that God could never, even in eternity past, make a decision because that decision must have been preceded by His eternal all-knowingness. To say that God knew He would change His mind before He changed it, is to say that He really never did change His mind. But He did know ... and He did change His mind. Read Exodus 32:14 and the several verses before it. Don't you think that He must be able to change His mind? But how can He be all-knowing if He really changes His mind? Which came first ... His omniscience or His immutability? Do not limit His all-knowingness in any way. He is not growing in His knowledge. He has always known everything past, present, and future. Are you sitting there shaking your head in confusion? I hope so. Not understanding everything about God is a good thing. I hope you understand that you cannot understand the infinite, eternal, all-knowing, immutable God. He is immeasurably beyond human comprehension. We must not try to redefine God down to our finite level of understanding. How would you feel if everything about God were understandable by our finite minds? Wouldn't that mean that He was finite like us ... and wouldn't that be terrifying? Thankfully, we cannot discover the depths of God ... cannot find the limits of the Almighty. That should give us great hope and a peace that passes all human understanding.

A wrong heart. In chapter one, the sailors repented and got a second chance. In chapter two, Jonah repented and got a second chance. In chapter three, the Ninevites repented and got a second chance. Do you think there is a pattern here? In one day, all the Ninevites turned to God. What a joyous day that must have been for the Ninevites. It should have been a great day for Jonah too. Can you imagine how you would feel if thousands and thousands came to faith in one day after you delivered God's message? The joy should be overwhelming. At the same time, it would be humbling to be used of God in such a way. I could imagine Jonah rejoicing, weeping, and glorifying God at the end of chapter three. However, he did not react that way. Therefore, he again came under God's hand of discipline. Jonah had been obedient ... but *reluctantly* obedient. His feet and his mouth had been obedient ... but His heart was wrong. God was not finished with Jonah. God had done a great work through him ... but He still had work to do in him. Read ahead through chapter four ... and then reread all four chapters. Try to understand what was wrong with Jonah's heart. Why did he have no joy? Why was he so angry? Why did he want to die again? In addition, what popular New Testament verse comes to mind as you read the concluding chapter of the book of Jonah?

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Study Questions Answers at end of lesson.

1. Who made Jonah willing to obey?
2. What made Jonah willing to obey?

3. Describe Jonah's mission field.

4. What was the population of Nineveh?

5. What does "*a three days walk*" mean?

6. Describe Jonah's message.

7. What promises of mercy did God offer to the Ninevites through Jonah?

8. What things are possible with God?

9. What was the secret of the success of Jonah's ministry?

10. What do Jonah 3:10 and Exodus 32:14 say that God did?



Personal Reflection

No answers provided for these questions.

1. Has God given you a second chance? What is it?

2. What will you do with your second chance?

3. What is your mission field?

4. Who are the humanly impossible people in your mission field?

5. Are they impossible to God?

6. Are you obediently proclaiming the Gospel in you mission field?

7. Do you believe that God can change His mind without compromising His all-knowingness?

8. Jonah 3:10 and Exodus 32:14 are completely true. Read Amos 7:3&6 and 1 Samuel 15:29 ... also completely true. Are you content that your finite mind cannot understand these verses describe the infinite God?

9. How would your eternity change if God were finite?

10. How could someone be displeased that evil people came to faith in God?

11. Would you be displeased if Hitler or a serial killer came to Christ just before they died?

12. How does Matthew 20:1-16 apply to your answer to #11?

13. Do you need help in becoming a better witness in your mission field?

14. Note: if your answer to #13 was "Yes", then you should study the Disciplemaking 2 course in Level 2 training on www.MyDisciplemaker.org.



Answers to Study Questions

1. Who made Jonah willing to obey? **God.**
2. What made Jonah willing to obey? **God's discipline through a storm at sea and a whale ride.**
3. Describe Jonah's mission field. **The great and evil city of Nineveh.**
4. What was the population of Nineveh? **Maybe 500,000.**
5. What does "*a three days walk*" mean? **Maybe it is the time it takes to walk through the main part of a big city like Nineveh.**
6. Describe Jonah's message. **It was negative and judgmental.**
7. What promises of mercy did God offer to the Ninevites through Jonah? **None.**
8. What things are possible with God? **All things.**
9. What was the secret of the success of Jonah's ministry? **Obedience.**
10. What do Jonah 3:10 and Exodus 32:14 say that God did? **He relented ... He changed His mind.**

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