

God's Love for Nineveh

Key Verse: “*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.*”
—**Jonah 3:10**

Selected Scripture:
Jonah 3:1-10

EVEN THOUGH JONAH deliberately fled from God by traveling originally towards Tarshish, the prophet was given a second opportunity to carry out his commission and deliver the Lord's message to Nineveh.—Jon. 3:1,2

This time Jonah obeyed the Lord. The account states: “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. 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.”—vss. 3,4

We note the number forty in the preceding passage and acknowledge its use in the Bible as a period of testing or judgment, not only for the people of Nineveh, but also as it relates in general to various features of God's plan. Some illustrations of such usage include Moses' being in the mount forty days and nights during which the Israelites, failing to wait for his return, “corrupted themselves” by erecting a golden calf to worship; and the forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness

as punishment for their failure to go in and possess the promised land by faith after the return of the twelve spies. (Exod. 24:18; 32:1-7,26-28; Num. 14:33,34) In the New Testament, we note that Jesus, following his baptism in the Jordan River, spent forty days in the wilderness during which time he was tempted by the devil.—Luke 4:1,2

Jonah preached only one message to the Ninevites, and the Scriptures do not indicate whether he gave them any signs or wonders that this prophecy would be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the people of Nineveh accepted the word of the prophet and believed in God. They proclaimed a fast and “put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them,” giving credit to the words which Jonah spoke to them in the name of God. Even the King of Nineveh accepted Jonah’s message and repented. He took off his royal robes and sent forth a decree that no one was to eat or drink in the land, not even the animals of their herds. He considered the possibility that through repentance, God might relent and the people would not perish.—Jon. 3:5-9

Our Key Verse suggests the changes in Nineveh happened with great speed and thus its destruction by the Lord was averted. God withheld his judgment and decided not to punish the Ninevites for their sins because they repented. His loving demonstration of forgiveness, even to a pagan people, is a powerful lesson for believers in Christ as to how God views sincere repentance from any of our indiscretions.

As imperfect specimens of humanity, even spirit begotten believers realize it is possible to be overtaken by sin, whether unintentional, partially willful, or fully willful with the potential for the direst of consequences. When acts of sin occur, they need to be quickly acknowledged and repented of if we are to be restored to God’s favor. Prayer and filling our minds with holy thoughts are two effective tools for preventing or reducing the incidence of sin in our lives.—Ps. 19:12-14 ■