

## GOD IS MERCIFUL TO ALL

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### GOD IS MERCIFUL TO ALL

*by Dr. Henderson Ward*



Jonah and the whale

Mighty men often do not understand simple concepts, simple instructions or even simple things of nature, preferring to ignore and misconstrue the simple in their intellectual quest for complexity, disorder and hidden meaning. Remember Naaman who thought that simply dipping seven times in the Jordan river on the instructions of the prophet too simplistic for healing? Amongst this number you can safely add the prophet Jonah, for he just did not understand the concept, simple though it undoubtedly is that 'God is merciful to all' and not just to the covenant people, Israel. In this contemplation, based on [Jonah 1:1](#) [3:10](#) the prophet Jonah is commanded by God to go and preach a simple but important message to Nineveh, eight words in total to be exact, and from that point on this entire book deals with Jonah's attitude and response to that command.

It is worthwhile, at this juncture, to mention certain salient facts, which perhaps will throw some light on our meditation:

Little is known about Jonah apart from this book and a reference to Jonah in [2 Kings 14:25](#). Jonah might possibly have known someone who had fallen foul of these Ninevites.

Nineveh was an extremely wicked city, with its leaders carrying out acts of inhuman depravity and savagery on a massive scale.

Although Nineveh was spared on this occasion, she nevertheless was later overrun and conquered by the marauding Babylonians.

In spite of Jonah's appalling attitude to his mission and his deep-seated racism, he was still symbolic of Jesus in reaching out to those beyond the covenant people, "And other sheep I

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have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" ( [John 10:16](#) )

Nevertheless, in and through it all, we see clearly the workings of Almighty God; his love and boundless compassion; his fervour in trying to rescue the lost and his mercy to all people. With these thoughts in mind we examine God is merciful to all under the following headings:

### **GOD TAKES THE INITIATIVE**

God chooses a messenger

God calls Jonah for this important mission, "Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying " ( [Jonah 1: 1](#) )

His name means "Dove"

He prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II, 784 -753BC. ( [2 Kings 14:25](#) )

He was from Gath-hepher in Zebulun and his father's name was Amittai.

Some think that Jonah was one of the "sons of the prophet" trained by Elisha ( [2 Kings 6:1-7](#) ).

#### **God gives precise directions: Nineveh**

God did not tell Jonah just to go and prophesy but gave him specific instructions where he was to go, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city..." ( [Jonah 1: 2a](#) )

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a very powerful country who would later demolish the northern tribes of Israel and devastate Samaria.

Nineveh was located 280 miles north of Babylon, on the eastern bank of the Tigris (present day Iraq)

An extremely wicked city and so described by Nahum, "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not." ( [Nahum 3:1](#) )

Nineveh was finally destroyed in 612 BC by Babylonians and Medes.

#### **God gives a clear message**

Not only did God told Jonah where to prophesy but also why, "and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" ( [Jonah 1: 2b](#) )

God is concerned with the evil of all nations and everything we do is seen by him.

God's judgment is nearly always preceded by a warning so we should be most careful.

A timely reminder here that we should always take heed to God's word, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" ( [Hebrews 2:1](#) )

### **GOD TAKES THE HELM**

Jonah flees in the opposite direction

Instead of compliance, Jonah flees away from Nineveh, "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa" ( [Jonah 1: 3a](#) )

He boards a ship bound for Tarshish (S.W.Spain), "...and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD." ( [Jonah 1: 3b](#) )

Going away from God is always disastrous and this trip is no different, the voyage is

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disastrous, a huge storm occurs, "But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken." ( [Jonah 1:4](#) )

The sailors eventually throw Jonah overboard and he is swallowed by a large fish but Jonah prays fervently and is deposited 3 days later on dry land, "And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." ( [Jonah 2: 10](#) )

### **Jonah funnelled towards Nineveh**

Having learnt who is boss, Jonah now accepts his commission, "And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. 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." ( [Jonah 3: 1-3](#) )

A chastised and changed man, no doubt.

Who would not be after probably being resurrected from death?

Sometimes we need to learn the hard way that God is in control. "Be still and know that I am God" ( [Psalm 46: 10a](#) )

Leaving nothing to chance, God again gives Jonah the exact words to preach.

### **Jonah finally faces the Ninevites**

Jonah preaches the message given to him by God, "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." ( [Jonah 3: 4](#) )

A long time coming but delivered at last

Only 8 words but exactly as God instructed

A reminder to all that it is not philosophy or theology but the pure, undiluted gospel of Christ which is needed.

## **GOD TAKES THEIR CONFESSIONS**

The Ninevites fulfilled God's requirements

Their repentance was both in word and deed, "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. 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: 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. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" ( [Jonah 3: 6-9](#) )

How often we witness the most profuse verbal confessions and yet the essential, concomitant actions fail to appear. We are reminded that effective compliance comes when word and deed are combined, and we are warned "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" ( [James 1: 22](#) )

### **They fully turned to God**

No half measures here, they determined to wholly follow God "And God saw their works, that

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they turned from their evil way;" ( [Jonah 3: 10a](#) )

This must have been one of the greatest of all evangelical campaigns, when approximately 120,000 people, from the king down to the vagrant in the street, surrendered their lives to God. Note that it was God who affirmed and gave testimony to what had taken place in the lives of these Ninevites. It was not Jonah highlighting his missionary achievement but God declaring and demonstrating his mighty compassion.

### **They received full compassion**

God in his love spared the Ninevites their due punishment "and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not." ( [Jonah 3: 10b](#) )

God showed why he is God, in not only forgiving the Ninevites but showering them with divine compassion and cancelling forever their deserved punishment.

This affirms and consolidates the impartiality of Almighty God, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" ( [Proverbs 28:13](#) )

The subsequent punishment, falling on the Ninevites in 612 BC, were exacted on not this but the following, wicked generation for although God is merciful and full of compassion, each generation, regardless of antecedents, need to encounter God for itself.

The story of the prophet Jonah and his involvement with Nineveh is a story with a happy ending as it relates to the Ninevites. Jonah, alas, showed his very human and carnal, secular side to a mighty, moving work of God. A work that had symbolic overtones. In this contemplation we concentrated on the positives over the negatives and we saw:

That God transcends all human and natural barriers in reaching out to save those who are lost.

That God is merciful and all those who call upon his name shall be saved.

That God is a God of compassion and Jesus affirmed this when again and again he was moved with compassion towards needy people in his earthly ministry.

My fervent hope is that God will help us to appreciate and value his great compassion toward us and to fully realize that our God is indeed a merciful God not just to some but to all of us.

Enough said.

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