

Jonah Goes to Nineveh

3: 1-3a

DIG: What is the difference between mercy and grace? How did HaShem show Yonah mercy? How did He show him grace? What evidence do you see here that ADONAI is the God of second chances? What are some examples of second chances in the Bible? In response to the LORD's word, what does Yonah do? What does **scene four as a whole say about God?**

REFLECT: When has ADONAI given you "two chances" to be, or do, His will? To witnesses to someone? As best as you can determine, to what divine interruption has God called you to surrender right now? Do you struggle with feeling that you have wasted too much time to have another opportunity with ADONAI? If so, how does this mind-set affect your current actions?

Short description of scene four: Since Yonah has promised to offer sacrifices and fulfill vows (2:9), we might expect the narrative to continue with an account of a visit to the Temple in Jerusalem where those vows are to be carried out. This **scene**, however, brings a surprise. We are suddenly taken back to the beginning of the story. Again, the LORD initiates the action by giving Jonah his original assignment once more. But this time Yonah begins to carry it out. One of the greatest revivals in history occurred because one man responded in obedience.⁷⁶ ADONAI still wanted to use Jonah, and He still wants to use you.

Commentary on scene four: Poor Yonah barely has time to dry himself out before a disturbing word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time (3:1). The words are identical to 1:1 except the editorial comment: for a second time, which takes the place of son of Amittai. This formula introducing a second word from the LORD also occurs in Jeremiah 1:13 and 13:3 in first-person form. Then the word of ADONAI came to me a second time, saying . . . In case of Jeremiah, however, the second time means an entirely new question (Jeremiah 1:13), command (Jeremiah 13:3), or promise (Jeremiah 33:1). The second time here is a repetition of the word that came the first time. Only Jonah among the biblical prophets has to have his assignment given to him twice.

A disobedient prophet like Jonah could meet with immediate calamity, as seen in the account of the prophet who disobeyed ADONAI's word and was killed by a lion (First Kings 13:20-32). But here, in a picture of what Yonah himself will declare (4:2), God's mercy and

grace allows **Jonah** a second chance. Mercy is not getting what we deserve, and **Jonah** could have met the fate of a false prophet; grace is getting what we don't deserve, and **Yonah** got a **second** chance. Although this is a book that teaches, **the LORD** does not use this as a teachable moment, saying, "See **Yonah** you can't run away from Me!" Nor does **God** comment on **Jonah's** foolishness or disobedience. **He** simply repeats the original assignment.⁷⁷

This is not something unusual that **God** did just in **Jonah's** case. **He** is not making an exception with **Yonah**. **Aaron** was known as **Moshe's brother**, serving as his mouthpiece when he went to stand before Pharaoh. After the Passover, **ADONAI** set **Aaron** aside to officiate in the Tabernacle. As **the high priest**, **he** served as the mediator between **God** and **His** chosen people. **Aaron** had the privilege of entering the Most Holy Place and experiencing the delight of **the LORD's** presence in a way that few ever would. But while **Moses** was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments things began to unravel. **All the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf (Exodus 32:3-4).** Can you imagine **Moshe's** disbelief at his **brother's** actions when he came down from the mountain? While **Moses** might have been shocked, **God** wasn't. Even while **HaShem** was giving **Moshe** the tablets of stone, **God** was fully aware of **Aaron's** willful disobedience. Yet **Aaron** was given a second chance and was allowed to continue to serve as **Israel's first high priest**.

Sarah was **Abraham's wife**. **God** gave **her** a promise that **she** would have a son and become **the mother** of an entire nation. But ten years later **she** was still barren. **So Sarai took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife (Genesis 16:3).** **Sarah's** choice and **Abraham's** compliance resulted in a child named **Ishmael**. Both **Abraham** and **God** loved the boy as he grew up, but he was not the son of promise through which the chosen nation would come. While **Abraham** begged **ADONAI** to use **Ishmael**, **the LORD** held **His** ground and told the father of many nations that although **He** would bless **Ishmael** and give him many descendants, **Sarah** would get a second chance. **She** would still bear a child and he would become the son of promise (**Genesis 17:17-21**).

Jacob was a righteous man (see my commentary on **Genesis Gn - Then Jacob Gave Esau Some Lentil Stew and Esau Despised His Birthright**), but because of **Isaac's** disobedience **he** didn't receive the patriarchal blessing in the proper way. Therefore, **he** wanted and needed a second chance. **The LORD** gave **him** that opportunity when **Ya'akov** wrestled with **God** at **Peniel** all night (see my commentary on **Genesis Hw - Jacob Wrestles with God**) and was renamed **Isra'el**.

Joseph's ten brothers appear in the book of **Genesis** as a jealous and conniving brood who were out to seek revenge on **their youngest brother**. **They** were tired of living in the shadow of **the son** born to **their father's** favorite wife Rachel. Being rather full of himself, **Yosef** seemed to enjoy a preferential status highlighted by a brilliant robe of many colors. Envy roared out of control and burst into flames of violence. **They** plotted to kill **their brother**, but **their** plans changed when some passing merchants agreed to buy **Joseph** as a slave, and **they** took the **young man of seventeen** down to Egypt. Can you imagine the despondency and heartache that must have ripped through **his** young heart every night? Yet **the LORD was with Joseph (Genesis 39:2)**, and through the providence of **God** he miraculously rose to become Prime Minister of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. When famine struck, **Yosef** personally administered the grain for Egypt and the whole world. This famine served as the catalyst to bring **his brothers** face to face with **him**. While **he** was completely aware of **their** identity, **they** didn't know **him** until **he** chose to reveal **himself**. **Joseph** could have had **his brothers** killed or imprisoned for the injustice done to **him**. But in an astonishing display of mercy, **he kissed all his brothers and wept over them (Genesis 45:15a)**. **Yosef** refrained from anger, abstained from vengeance, and offered **his brothers** a second chance at a relationship with **him** that they really didn't deserve.

When **Rahab** first appears in the biblical account **she** is one of the most unsavory characters imaginable. In fact, **she** is introduced as a prostitute (**Joshua 2:1**). If you met her before the great turning point in her life, you would have written her off as being completely hopeless. She was an immoral woman living in a pagan culture that was fanatically devoted to everything **God** hates. But **her** whole life and future would be changed by **her** surprise encounter with two Israelite spies. By **God's** sovereign design, **Rahab's** house was perfect for the spies to escape. **Her** knowledge of **YHVH** was meager, but when **she** hid the Jewish spies and then let them down by a single scarlet cord, it demonstrated **her** faith (**Joshua 2:17-18**). Given a second chance, **she** led a completely different kind of life. **Her** name appears in the hall of faith (**Hebrews 11:31**) and in **Matthew's** genealogy.

David was a man after **God's** own heart, but **he** sinned against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah (**Second Samuel 11:1-26**). But after **he** repented (**Psalms 51**) he got a second chance and we see **him** in **the far eschatological future** with the dual titles of king and prince during the millennial Kingdom (see my commentary on **Revelation Fi - The Government of the Messianic Kingdom**).

The Pharisees brought **Yeshua** a woman caught in adultery. They wanted to see if the **Lord** would agree to have **her** stoned. **She** was caught in the very act and **they** intended that

she be punished to the fullest extent that there could be no second chance, no chance for redemption. But **Jesus is the Lord** of the second chances. After **He** pointed out that the Torah said **her** accusers could not be guilty of sin, they all left. Then **He** asked her: **Woman, look up, where are they? Has no one condemned you (John 8:10)?** Maybe she expected **Him** to scold her. Perhaps she expected **Him** to walk away in disgust. I'm not sure, but I know this: What she got, she never could have imagined. She got compassion and a commission. "No one, sir," she said. The compassion was: **Then neither do I condemn you, Jesus declared.** The commission was: **Go, and sin no more (John 8:11 KJV).**

Mary Magdalene had started on the wrong side of the spiritual war. She was an enemy stronghold, providing food and shelter for the devils troops - seven in all, because she was a woman from whom seven demons had come out (Luke 8:2). The Bible gives us no hint as to how **Mary** became demon possessed, how long she lived in that desperate state, or the circumstances surrounding her encounter with **Yeshua** that led to her deliverance. From what we know of other demoniacs in the Scriptures we can safely assume that until she met the **Messiah**, she lived a deranged existence that pushed her to the fringes of society. But **Miryam's** descent into hell ended that day she met the **King of kings**. He brought a sudden end to her savage bondage, restored her to her right mind, and freed her to follow Him. Given a second chance, **Mary** followed her **Master** and had the privilege of being the first person He saw after His resurrection.

Simon Peter also stumbled and fell. He denied **Christ** and ran away from Him. After such a fall it seemed that **Peter's** calling as an **apostle** was over. What employer would ever keep a staff member who was disloyal and untrustworthy - much less offer him a promotion within the organization? Certainly he'd not be allowed to have a close and intimate relationship with the One he'd just so vehemently denied. But after our **Lord** had risen, He went back and gave **Kefa** a second chance (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Mn - Jesus Reinstates Peter**), saying: **Feed My sheep.**

Jonah's story illustrates how **God** treats His repentant children (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Hu - The Parable of the Lost Son and His Jealous Brother**). The prodigal son came home. When he got there he didn't get a beating, he got a banquet. He didn't get kicked around, he got kisses. Instead of being rejected, the father loved him and took him back. What a wonderful heavenly Father we have!

Aaron, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph's brothers, Rahab, David, Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and **Jonah** were all given a gift that is still available to you and me as well. Have you

fallen out of fellowship with ADONAI? Have you made decisions that have taken you further down the path of rebellion than you ever thought possible? Well, you need to know that you can't outrun the grasp of His grace or overstep the boundaries of His mercy. It is still available to you - to me - right here, right now. Thank God for a second chance!⁷⁸

Yonah's second commissioning becomes more specific than the first, in that he is now given the very words to speak: **Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you (3:2)**. The command to **go with two** is expressed in the Hebrew with two verbs (**rising** and **go**). Together they mean "Go now." Or "Go immediately." **Nineveh** - the name is always a powerful symbol of a worldly city. Just as the B'rit Chadashah links Bethlehem and Herod the Great, Golgotha with Pontius Pilate, Paul with Rome, Yeshua and all the kingdoms of the world, so **Jonah** is linked with **Nineveh**. It is once again identified as a **great city**. This time nothing is said about the city's wickedness. **The phrase the great city, is literally great to God; great, not only from mankind's thinking, but to God's**. The Hebrew word **proclaim** occurs only here in the TaNaKh. The parallel is in **Jeremiah 19:2 . . . and proclaim there the words that I tell you**. The Septuagint translates it *kerygma*, the word used for the apostolic preaching in the Renewed Covenant (**Romans 16:25; First Corinthians 1:21, 15:14; Titus 1:3**). **Jonah**, as the author of his book, does not indicate the content of the message until **3:4**.

As one reflects on this short passage the LORD's patience immediately comes to mind. Without exhortations, without carping or harping, **God** reissues the charge that was given to **Jonah** in the first place (**4:2**). But behind this reassignment is **HaShem's** urgent concern for *the goyim*, the Gentile world. In this case the people of **Nineveh**. The repeating of this commission, unique among the prophets, reminded **Yonah** of Israel's bottom line blessing. **I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed by you (Genesis 12:3)**. **ADONAI** cares about the peoples of the earth, be they Ethiopians, Philistines, Egyptians - or **Assyrians** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Mo - The Great Commission**).

So . . . **Yonah** went to **Nineveh**. But *how* did he go? With what *attitude* did he go? Can we outwardly obey **God** with our actions while our heart isn't along for the ride? Centuries later, this was the work of the Pharisees. **Yeshua** said they were like whitewashed tombs. Nice and clean on the outside but full of dead men's bones on the inside (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Jd - Seven Woes on the Torah-Teachers and the Pharisees**)! What kind of a man was **Jonah**? The reluctant prophet knew that **God's** commission included mercy and grace. Nevertheless, he went. His relationship was restored with **ADONAI**, but not the

Assyrians. In short, **Yonah** is in our image. **He** is not perfect. **He** is capable of anger, self-justification and despair. Although **he** is one of the righteous of the TaNaKh, **he** still has a sin nature. So **Jonah** has a half-hearted departure. **He** doesn't know what **he's** going to say until **he** gets there - but he goes. So **Yonah's** feet are moving, but **his** heart isn't in it.

Reflection on what scene four as a whole says about ADONAI: **Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD.** In 1:1-2 **Jonah** rose to run away, but here **he** has been reconciled to **God's** call. The mission to **Nineveh** had begun again because **ADONAI** had called **him** again. **God** is patient and kind, full of mercy and grace **toward His** children. Here was **Jonah** . . . clothes wasting away because of the acid from the whale's stomach . . . seaweed around **his** head . . . smelling like whale barf . . . **and he went to Nineveh (3:3a).**

Yonah's answers to the sailors' question in 1:12 and his subsequent actions give us a foreshadowing of **four significant principles** in the Renewed Covenant for reconciling with **ADONAI.** **The fourth significant principle: We need to act on God's direction by faith.** **The runaway prophet** knew **he** had died, and knew **he** had been resurrected (see **At - Jonah's Prayer**). You would think that dramatic event would change **his** attitude toward the **Ninevites.** But it didn't. **He** didn't feel like going . . . but **he** went anyway because that's what **God** commanded **him** to do. In other words, **His** feelings didn't prevent **him** from agreeing with **God.** **He** finally understood, and we need to understand, that our feelings are not the engine that drives our decisions; our feelings are the caboose. We act in **faith,** and the feelings will come later. **Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.** This is what the ancients were commended for. **And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him (Hebrews 11:1-2 and 6).** By **faith** **Yonah** went to **Nineveh.**