

3:6 – 4:4

In the last study, we started the 3rd chapter of Jonah. Jonah had just reached the splendor and extravagance of the ancient great city of Nineveh. Much to his surprise, the Ninevites accept his message, and repent of their sins. Even the Assyrian king, when he heard of Jonah's condemnation on Nineveh, repented and sought God's clemency.

⁶ *When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered [himself] with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. ⁷ He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water."*

Jonah 3:6-7 NASB95

The king first calls for a country wide fast! When I try to categorize the nature of a fast, I come up with nothing useful, except perhaps a "faith ritual."

The purpose of this "faith ritual" is articulated in Deuteronomy:

³ *"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.*

Deuteronomy 8:3 NASB95

Fasting is of great importance to the people of God. It's purpose seems to be to remind us that the physical world is secondary to the power of God's spiritual sustenance. In fact, the Deuteronomy verse is what Christ quoted to the tempter, when he was at the end of his forty-day fast.

² *And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." ⁴ But He answered and said, "**It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'**"*

Matthew 4:2-4 NASB95

Somehow, the king of Nineveh (Assyria) realized the importance of a fast. He goes on to also call for another act of contrition:

⁸ *"But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.*

Jonah 3:8 NASB95



Sackcloth is burlap. It's coarse, abrasive and the furthest thing from being anyone's preferred material for clothing.

Ashes come in various consistency, from powder to grit, all in the same pile. Being covered in ashes, while wearing sackcloth is probably the most uncomfortable a human being can be without drawing blood.

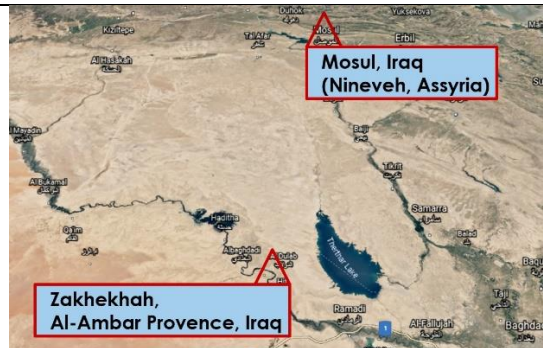


This is a current satellite (Google Earth) picture of Mosul, Iraq. It's the location of the ruins of Nineveh.

Map references:

36°21'34"N 43° 09'10"E
36.359444 43.152778
38S LF 3426 2540

Mosul is situated on the Tigris River. Approximately 200 miles South, on the Euphrates River, is a speck of an Iraqi village called Zakhekhah (Al-Ambar Province, Iraq.)



This picture was taken in Zakhekhah, Iraq, in August, 2007. That is a real picture of a real temperature reading. That thermometer was in the shade. It was NOT the hottest day of that summer!
IT GETS VERY WARM IN THAT REGION.

Why would the king of Assyria subject his people to a fast, wearing sackcloth and ashes, in a place where three-digit temperature are a normal and common occurrence?

⁹ "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

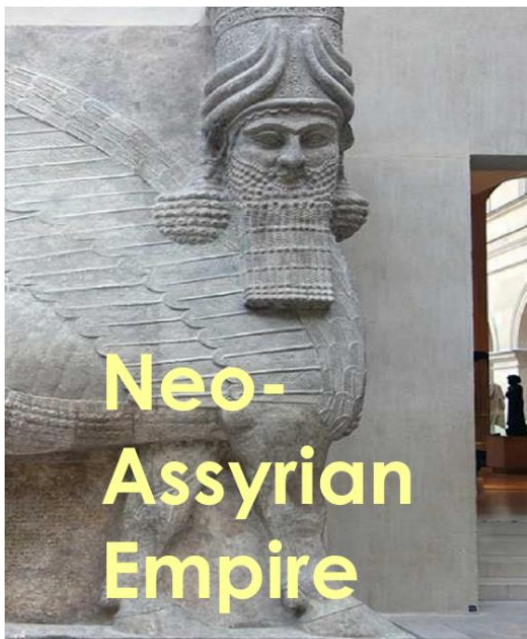
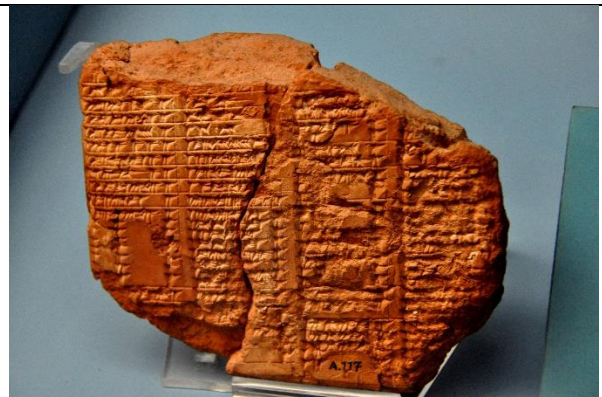
Jonah 3:9 NASB95

In his own words, the king of Assyria was willing to take a chance, any chance to avert the wrath of God on his people. It is apparent that Jonah was NOT preaching repentance, only God's judgment and forthcoming calamity. It's also evident that the Assyrians did not know of the gracious and merciful Spirit of God. Jonah did, as we will see in a few verses, but he certainly didn't tell the Assyrians.

Nevertheless, the Assyrians and their king, not only believe Jonah's message, but they also submit to God's judgment. They chose to show sincere contrition, in the hopes that there might be a chance of forgiveness. The questions are plain; why would these most cruel and brutal people simply humble themselves to the preaching of one man? Who is this king who would so readily take the word of a Hebrew man, and lay aside his royal robes for sackcloth and ashes, with the remotest chance of clemency?

To hope to answer these questions, we need some background on Assyrian royalty. Luckily, the Assyrians were meticulous record keepers.

This is a picture of a fragment of a tablet called "The Kings' List." The Assyrian civilization started circa 24th century BC; that's well over four-thousand years ago. Almost since the beginning, they've had kings whose names have been recorded, in succession with great fidelity, on tablets just like this one.



Some of the notable kings of the Neo-Assyrian empire:

(NOTE: The Assyrian civilization lasted around 1,800 years, often growing in power and influence to form empires. The Neo-Assyrian empire is the 4th and last iteration.)

Adad-nirair II, 911 – 891 BC

- Widely considered the first king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

Ashur-dan III, 773 – 755 BC

- An INSIGNIFICANT king of the Assyrians.
- Ruled at the same time as Jeroboam II (793 – 753 BC), of Israel, to whom Jonah ministered.
- During his era, the Assyrian empire was in decline. Thus, its neighbors, such as Israel could expand their borders and grow in influence.

Tiglath-Pileser III, 745 - 727 BC

- Powerful king who brought Assyria out of its decline.
- Mentioned in the Bible. (2 Kings 15:29, 16:7, 16:10)

Shalmaneser V, 727 - 722 BC

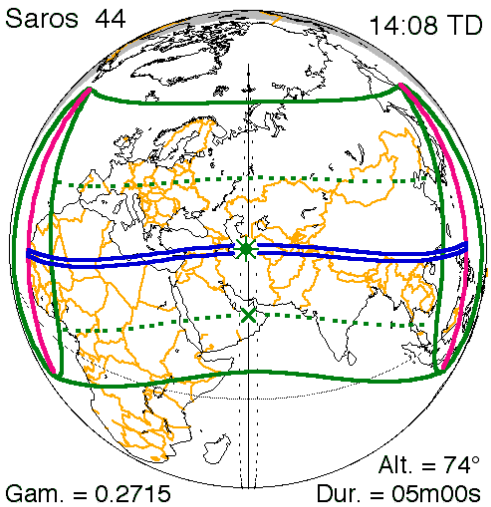
- Responsible for the conquest of Samaria and the destruction of Israel.
- Mentioned in the Bible. (2 Kings 18:9-12)

Sargon II, 722 - 705 BC

- Completed the destruction and deportation (resettling) of Israel, after the death of his father, Shalmaneser V.

Although Ashur-dan III (773 – 755 BC) is not a significant king in the annals of Assyrian history, he might be the king of Nineveh during Jonah's mission. He might be the king who was so willing to accept the word of God and humble himself and his nation to avert destruction. Here is why I came to this proposition:

- Ashur-dan III came to power while Assyria was in a period of decline which had been going on for a few decades.
- Of the 18 years of his reign, Ashur-dan III spent 5 years putting down rebellions in his empire.
- During his time, there were 2 major outbreaks of plague in Assyria.
- The Assyrians, much like most people of their day, attributed special significance to astronomical event. On the 15th of June, 763 BC, such an even occurred: a total eclipse!

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bur-Sagale Solar Eclipse. • NASA Eclipse Catalog #02937 	<p style="text-align: center;">Total -0762 Jun 15 Saros 44 14:08 TD</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Five Millennium Canon of Solar Eclipses (Espenak & Meeus)</p>
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With all the decay and instability Ashur-dan III is faced; then a total solar eclipse, which was a bad omen to the Assyrians; then a man walks into Nineveh proclaiming its downfall and destruction as the judgment of God. This is nothing more than my conjecture, but it seems like these are the events which lead the Ninevites and their king to take Jonah at his word, and repent with radical shows of contrition.

If this is the case, then God must have prepared the Assyrians to receive Jonah's message in sincere remorse. Thus...

¹⁰ *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.]*

Jonah 3:10 NASB95

This should not be a surprise to any of us, if we study Scripture. God shows mercy, time and time again, to those who humble themselves and repent of their wickedness.

¹⁴ *...My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

2 Chronicles 7:14 NASB95

Although the children of Israel are commanded to keep themselves separate from their neighbors culturally and religiously, they were still supposed to be an example to them, showing the light and blessing of God to the world at large.

²⁵ *"It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.'* ²⁶ *"For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one [of you] from your wicked ways."*

Acts 3:25-26 NASB95

¹ "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one [in whom] My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."

Isaiah 42:1 NASB95

This is the actual miracle of the book of Jonah. These gentile people, who are extreme in their wicked ways, repent and seek God at Jonah's preaching. Jonah, as a prophet of God, should be celebrating at Nineveh's rehabilitation! He should be overjoyed that the blessing of God and the knowledge of God has been extended to Israel's age-old enemy. Instead:

¹ But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my [own] country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity."

Jonah 4:1-2 NASB95

In verse 2, Jonah reveals his motives for fleeing in chapter 1. He KNEW the merciful nature of God. He KNEW that if the Assyrian would repent, as small of a possibility that was, God would forgive them and relent from His judgment!



Jonah was an Israeli patriot. He loved Israel to the point of idolatry. Jonah knew that that Assyria was going to destroy Israel for Israel's sin. Ironically, Israel's sin is idolatry, among other wickedness.

Jonah seems to have forgotten (more likely ignored) a few precepts of God:

⁶ "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,"

Isaiah 42:6 NASB95

⁶ For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6 NKJV



Jonah idolized Israel. He knew that Assyria would, by the prophesies of God, destroy Israel someday. He was willing to defy God, even to his own death, to keep that from happening. Indeed that's his request to God, after the Assyrians are forgiven.

³ "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." ⁴ The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"

Jonah 4:3-4 NASB95

When questioned by the Pharisees, Christ quotes Hosea 6:6:

¹¹ When the Pharisees saw [this,] they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when Jesus heard [this,] He said, "[It is] not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick." ¹³ "But go and learn what this means: 'DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 9:11-13 NASB95

Why is your Teacher sending Jonah to godless, brutal Assyrians? God desires MERCY and COMMPASSION over sacrifice, over burnt offering, i.e., the outward displays of piety; or some form of misplaced patriotism.

The word Hosea uses for mercy, and the Jesus used for compassion is the same:

חֶסֶד

HESED

GOODNESS
KINDNESS
COMPASSION
MERCY

Strong's H2617

⁶ But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

Psalm 86:15 NASB95

God's mercy caused Jonah to be brought back to life from inside a fish. God's mercy, despite its wickedness and cruelty, stayed the hand of destruction on a suffering Assyria, when its people repented, fasted, and showed contrition to Almighty God

God's mercy held Christ on His terrible cross, unto death, that we may be saved!

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God;

Ephesians 2:4-8 NASB95

