

YET FORTY DAYS

Dispensationalists are very religious. They have a keen interest in the prophecies of the Bible. They believe that they are living in the Last Days, and they hope to be ‘raptured,’ taken body and soul into heaven before the Great Tribulation, God’s great judgment on mankind for their sins. Five years ago, Bob Wilkin, Founder and Executive Director of the Grace Evangelical Society, wrote, “Biblically the current time is the last days. We are living in the last days before Jesus returns. It is 11:59 PM. The new day is about to begin.” (Bob Wilkin, “Do You Know What Time It Is?,” Grace Evangelical Society, August 30, 2019) Wilkin said that he hopes to be ‘raptured’ in his lifetime. Dispensationalists also have a keen interest in the doctrine of salvation. Some Dispensationalists, like Wilkin, believe that “repentance is not a condition for eternal life.” (Bob Wilkin, “Does Your Mind Need Changing? Repentance Reconsidered,” Grace Evangelical Society, March 1, 1998) On the Day of Pentecost, Saint Peter condemned the Jews for rejecting Christ. The Jews were sorry for it, and asked the apostle what they should do. He told them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” (Acts 2:37) Dispensationalists are unmoved. Concerning this verse, one Dispensationalist, in an attempt to reduce the Christian view to absurdity, wrote, “Repentance is not required for eternal life. If we use this passage to say it is a requirement, we would also have to add baptism to the list.” (Leilani Matlack, “Is Repentance Required for Eternal Life?,” Grace Evangelical Society, January 24, 2017) The Dispensationalist’s axiom that salvation is by faith alone leads them to deny the clear teaching of Scripture. Some Dispensationalists fail rightly to interpret the signs of the times, and they fail rightly to interpret Scripture. Repentance is a condition of forgiveness, and so of salvation, not only from temporal punishment, but also of eternal.

In the days of Jeroboam II, King of Israel, Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, was a great city. It was great in area, and great in population. Concerning its area, the Scriptures say, “Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.” (Jonah 3:3) Concerning its population, the Scriptures say there were in it “more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand.” (Jonah 4:11) This means that there were more than one-hundred and twenty-thousand children under the age of four years. (compare Deuteronomy 1:39) If a man walks at a pace of twenty miles in a day, and if it would take him three days to walk from one end of the city to the other, then the size of Nineveh was around two-thousand eight-hundred square miles. If the children were one-fifth of the population, then the total population was around six-hundred thousand people. Nineveh was also a city great in wickedness. It was full of violence, a particularly heinous sin because it is an attack on the image of God. (Jonah 3:4) Nahum the prophet prophesied concerning it:

Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not; The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses: Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. (Nahum 3:1–4)

God is longsuffering, but His suffering has a limit, and He reached His limit with Nineveh. He told Jonah the prophet, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up

before me.” (Jonah 1:2) God told Jonah to go to the people of the city of Nineveh, and to proclaim to them that God would judge them for their sins. Jonah knew both the cruelty of the Ninevites, and He desired their destruction. When the Lord revealed His glory to Moses, He said to him:

The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

Jonah knew that God is severe, but he also knew that God is merciful, and that, if the Ninevites repented of their sins, then God would not destroy them, but rather forgive them. So, Jonah ran away from his calling, and journeyed west, away from Nineveh, which was east of him.

When Jonah was traveling by sea, the Lord hurled a great wind into the sea so that there was a great tempest. The sailors feared that the ship would sink, and so they cried out to their gods, and cast overboard the ship's cargo. Jonah did not call upon God, but went into the lower parts of the ship, and slept. So, the captain of the ship woke him, and told him to call upon God. The sailors cast lots to determine who was the cause of their distress, and the lot fell to Jonah. The sailors interrogated Jonah, and he confessed that he was a Hebrew who served the God who created the world, including both land and sea, but that he was fleeing God's call. The sailors asked Jonah how they could appease God, and Jonah told them to cast him into the sea. Jonah refused to repent of his sin, or to call upon God for help. He so hated the Ninevites that he would rather die than God spare them. The sailors were reluctant to cast the prophet overboard, but, as they could not make it to shore, they concluded that they had no choice. Believing they were doing the will of God, they cast Jonah into the sea, and the sea became calm.

When Jonah was in the water, the Lord sent a great fish to swallow him, and he was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. In that time, Jonah died, and went to the place of the dead. There he finally repented of his sins, and called upon God to save him, and the Lord answered his cry. The Lord raised Jonah from the dead, and caused the fish to vomit Jonah out onto dry land.

A second time, God told Jonah to preach to Nineveh, and the second time, Jonah obeyed God's command. He entered the city and, as he walked from one end of the city to the other, he proclaimed, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” (Jonah 3:4) With this warning, God offered mercy to a wicked people. God takes no pleasure in anyone's death. (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11) He could have, at any time, destroyed Nineveh, but he did not. He sent a prophet to warn them that in forty days He would destroy them. So, God gave the people of Nineveh forty days to repent of their sins, and by good works to prove their repentance.

The prophet's proclamation was brought to the king of Nineveh, and the king responded with repentance. As a sign of his repentance, he got up from his throne, removed his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He issued a royal decree which stated:

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 3:7-9)

The king commanded the people to repent, and to fast and wear sackcloth as signs of their repentance, and to end their evil ways, in hope that God would spare them. The people did as the king commanded. The Scriptures

say, “And 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) When the people turned from their sins, God turned away from punishing them for their sins.

Jonah believed that, if God showed mercy to the people of Nineveh, then it would be a great injustice, and he was so angry with God that he wished to die. God told him that he was wrong to be angry, and he would show Jonah his hypocrisy. Jonah prayed to God:

I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. (Jonah 4:2, 3)

Jonah knew that God would show mercy to the Ninevites if they repented, so, because Jonah wished for God to destroy them, he refused to deliver God’s message.

Just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so he was three days and three nights in the city of Nineveh. When Jonah went out of the city, he made a booth, and sat in its shade, and waited for thirty seven days to see what would become of the city. In that time, God caused a gourd to grow on the booth, and it proved shade for Jonah, and that pleased Jonah. Then God caused a worm to eat the gourd, so that the shade was gone. Then He caused a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah so that he grew faint, and wished to die. God said to Jonah:

Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? (Jonah 4:9–11)

Jonah was selfish, unmerciful, and hypocritical. Jonah cared about being shielded from the heat of the sun, but he did not care about the Ninevites’ being shielded from the fire of God’s wrath. Jonah did not cultivate the gourd, and cause it to grow; yet he pitied it when it died. A person has a value far greater than that of a plant. God had created all the living things in Nineveh, and had providentially ordered their lives. He did not wish for them to perish, and, when they repented of their sins, he spared them. God spared Jonah when he cried out to God, but Jonah did not wish for God to spare the Ninevites when they cried out to God.

When Jesus cast out demons, some said he did it by the authority of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons; others demanded that He show them some miraculous sign of His authority. Saint Luke recorded the following in the his gospel:

And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this

generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. (Luke 11:29–32)

Many of the Israelites in Jesus' time, especially the rulers, were very wicked, and refused to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, as He claimed to be. They should have believed in Jesus on the basis of His own authoritative testimony, but they would not. Jesus said that only a wicked generation of people would not believe His testimony, and demand a miraculous sign. Nevertheless, there would be a sign, the sign of Jonah: just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40) This is to say, just as Jonah rose from the dead after three days, so would Jesus. This great miracle would be definitive proof of Jesus's claim. Yet, the people, although they were God's covenant people, were too hard of heart to believe. The great Queen of Sheba, although a heathen, traveled a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon; yet the Jews of Jesus's time would not listen to Jesus, although He is a far greater king than Solomon. The men of the city of Nineveh, although heathens, repented at the preaching of Jonah; yet the Jews of Jesus's time would not repent at His preaching, although He is a far greater prophet than Jonah was. In the Final Judgement, the Queen of Sheba and the men of Nineveh would condemn the Jews of Jesus's time, because the Jews would not repent and believe in Jesus.

Jonah was a type of Christ; yet, in one important respect, Jonah and Jesus differed from each other. Jonah so hated the Ninevites that he would give his life so that the Ninevites might die. Jesus so loved the world that He gave His life so that the world might live. When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

Let us be like the Ninevites, who repented of their sins, and not like the Jews, who did not. Let us believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and Savior of the world. Let us not hate our enemies, as Jonah hated his, but rather preach to them the good news of Jesus Christ, so that they might be saved.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.