

THE BOOK OF JONAH

Lesson 6, Chapter 3

We have discussed on a few occasions now, that Jonah isn't really about who Jonah really is but rather is about who God *really* is. In the Book of Jonah, perhaps the primary theme is about how God thinks about gentiles; a subject that Jonah is not onboard with because Yehoveh's perspective is utterly hateful to Jonah's. Secondly, Jonah speaks about the nature of redemption in a way that is largely unknown...and often antithetical...to the modern Church.

If God's view on gentile humanity and on redemption could be best summed up, it might be in the 18th chapter of the Prophet Jeremiah. Clearly in the 9th century B.C. a new understanding of the place of gentiles in God's plan of redemption, and what the key factor to redemption was (which is repentance) was forming. We find these new understandings in Amos, Jonah, and Jeremiah especially because these Prophets lived and prophesied in the same era.

CJB Jeremiah 18:1-11 *This word came to Yirmeyahu from ADONAI: ² "Get up, and go down to the potter's house; there I will tell you more." ³ So I went down to the house of the potter; and there he was, working at the wheels. ⁴ Whenever a pot he made came out imperfect, the potter took the clay and made another pot with it, in whatever shape suited him. ⁵ Then the word of ADONAI came to me: ⁶ "House of Isra'el, can't I deal with you as the potter deals with his clay?— says ADONAI. Look! You, house of Isra'el, are the same in my hand as the clay in the potter's hand. ⁷ At one time, I may speak about uprooting, breaking down and destroying a nation or kingdom; ⁸ but if that nation turns from their evil, which prompted me to speak against it, then I relent concerning the disaster I had planned to inflict on it. ⁹ Similarly, at another time, I may speak about building and planting a nation or kingdom; ¹⁰ but if it behaves wickedly from my perspective and doesn't listen to what I say, then I change my mind and don't do the good I said I would do that would have helped it. ¹¹ "So now, tell the people of Y'hudah and those living in Yerushalayim that this is what ADONAI says: 'I am designing disaster for you, working out my plan against you. Turn, each of you, from his evil ways; improve your conduct and actions.'*

In this passage from Jeremiah, Yehoveh is explaining by illustration that He is like a master potter working with a lump of clay. If the work of His hands responds to His will, then one thing happens... the clay vessel is allowed to continue and to serve its purpose. But, if that same lump of clay doesn't respond properly to the Master Potter's hands another thing happens...He will take it back to its original formless lump and remake it. Remembering that the Hebrew word for nation is **goyim**, which inherently means gentile nation, then we learn from Jeremiah that for God as the metaphorical potter, how He views that created vessel and how He acts for or against it, is the same for His chosen and set-apart Israel as it is for the nations. The principle is: as it is for the Hebrews, it is also for gentiles.

Let's read Jonah chapter 3.

READ JONAH CHAPTER 3 all

What we immediately find is a new beginning...a second beginning. The first beginning was when Yehoveh instructed Jonah to go to Nineveh with a message of doom, but Jonah refused and instead attempted to escape to somewhere that he wouldn't have to be under Yehoveh's influence. The second beginning is here in chapter 3, when God gives Jonah the nearly identical instruction in nearly identical words, offering Jonah a second chance to do the right thing and be obedient (which he does).

I think it sometimes goes unnoticed that God not only creates, He also re-creates as the means to offer humans a second beginning...a second chance. How we all long for second chances when we fail miserably. Jeremiah 18 touched on that and we find that this happens from both a spiritual AND a physical perspective. We learn in the New Testament that followers of Yeshua are but spiritual lumps of clay that have been returned to the Master Potter for re-creation.

CJB 2 Corinthians 5:16-18 ***16 So from now on, we do not look at anyone from a worldly viewpoint. Even if we once regarded the Messiah from a worldly viewpoint, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation- the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new!***

18 And it is all from God, who through the Messiah has reconciled us to himself and has given us the work of that reconciliation...

Clearly, what is said in 2 Corinthians is from a spiritual perspective. Yet, we also find that God physically re-creates. What God is offering Jonah in this, his second chance, is to translate his new spiritual understanding to new physical behavior. From knowing the truth to doing the truth. We also know that just as all mankind's first beginning will end in physical death (without exception), there will be a second beginning for some. That first beginning takes the hopelessly corrupted (because we are all born corrupted), and delivers it (us) from our just desserts...eternal death... through the sacrificial life and death of another (Yeshua). The second physical beginning (a re-creation) is only for God worshippers who trust in Messiah Yeshua for their salvation (all others will be condemned and their souls and bodies lost forever...no second chance). Sometime after our physical death and the return of Christ from Heaven to rule and reign on Earth, we who wait eagerly for Him will be given glorified bodies that are incorruptible. We retain the same souls...we remain "us"...but our bodies will be re-nued to even better than before when we had been susceptible to pain, injury, disease, and death. Yehoveh's nature is one of offering second chances and second beginnings, and that opportunity (while prioritized to go **first** to Israel) is also offered to the gentile world at large, under the same conditions. Even to wicked Nineveh.

Verse 1 begins:

CJB Jonah 3:1 *The word of ADONAI came to Yonah a second time...*

Compare this to the first beginning that is the opening words of Jonah chapter 1:

CJB Jonah 1:1 *The word of ADONAI came to Yonah the son of Amitai.*

Let's recall that the word "Word" ought to be capitalized because The Word is a proper noun; it is the name of a living manifestation of God just as is the Holy Spirit. It is interesting that in very early Rabbinical writings when they were speaking of this passage, they would interpret it as though it said: **The *Shekinah* of Adonai came to Yonah.** That is, in the Rabbinic Hebrew thinking the ***Shekinah***

is a named living manifestation of God just as is the Holy Spirit, and it was this divine entity that came to speak to Jonah. So, what came to Jonah was not words...not speech... sort of falling out of the sky into his ears or mind, but rather God came to him in the form of The Word. Please also recall that in the Hebrew, the word *adonai* (meaning lord) is also not there; rather, it is the word Yehoveh ...God's formal name.

The difference in the opening verse of chapter 3 versus chapter 1 is that since chapter 1 established which of the probably hundreds if not a few thousands of Jonah's this was (the son of Amitai), chapter 3 assumes we already know that. Chapter 3 also, of course, adds the words "for a second time", to indicate that God was approaching Jonah over the same matter after Jonah had severely botched it the first time.

It is at this point that many Bible scholars start to wonder about the timing of all this. That is, WHEN did Jonah get his second chance? Some say it was immediately after the big fish vomited him out on the beach; others say that it was some indefinite period of time later. Perhaps the best indicator of the time is that in the famed Murabba'at scroll of Jonah we find that, curiously, there is a substantial space between the final sentence of chapter 2 and the first of verse of chapter 3. Scholars of the more ancient style of biblical Hebrew literature say that when this space is inserted, it is for the purpose of meaning that a period of time took place between the 2 verses. Otherwise, without that indication of a space of time, it would imply that virtually on the same day that Jonah was spit-out onto a beach God came to Him to offer Him a do-over. Therefore, it seems probable that some amount of time passed before Jonah would again be told to set out for Nineveh; and equally probable that Jonah had returned to the Holy Land where he received this second command to go.

In verse 2, Jonah is told (again) to set out for Nineveh. However, there is a difference between the nature of what he is told to do the first time, versus the second time. One of the premier experts in ancient biblical Hebrew and idiom is Jack. M. Sasson. He explains that in chapter 1, the essence of what Jonah is told he is to take to Nineveh is a death warrant. However, in chapter 3, he is told to take Nineveh a message. And, he continues that the message is not characterized in any particular way. The word for the oracle he is to take (on both

occasions) is *qeri'a*. What changes between the two instances where that word is used is that in chapter 1, the preposition that is attached to *qeri'a* is *'el*; while in the second instance it is *'al*. Without going into all the detail he offers to explain the subtle difference, the difference between the two is as I've already explained. It changes the meaning of the first command to take to Nineveh a message of condemnation, to (in the second command) take God's utterance (a very neutral term) to Nineveh. Any reader of this story... ancient or modern... is then left in suspense as to this second message's contents. It seems to me that the point that ought not to be lost is that Jonah is NOT at first told this 2nd message's contents; but later when it is revealed to him he is to proclaim it precisely as the Lord tells him... he's not to ad lib. The first time Jonah is given the duty, the message is clearly ominous, the second time it may have had a different tone. One would have thought that Jonah would have been far happier to take a message of doom to Nineveh, than to take them something less harsh. But as we are learning, Jonah doesn't really want to take *any* message at all to them because He KNOWS Yehoveh's character is to be merciful and he doesn't want there to be any possibility of mercy towards these Ninevite gentiles. Even so, he goes and he says what he's supposed to say because he learned that to resist God's direct instruction is to invite incredible suffering.

Verse 3 confirms that Jonah indeed went to Nineveh. The last half of the verse speaks of the city being so large that it takes 3 days just to cross it. This is another point at which biblical scholars wince and suggest that this cannot be true, and so they doubt the book's historical authenticity. Let's talk about this 3-days issue.

Various scholars have tried to reconcile this with reality in order to keep the historical nature of the Book of Jonah intact rather than reducing it to a fictional moral story. One thought is that the kind of customary hospitality in Assyria required 3 days of traditional actions on the part of the host and the guest. On the first and third days, some kind of displays of personal hospitality along with gratefulness from the visitor occur, leaving only the 2nd day for the visitor to do any business that he came there to do. Thus, 3 days was the required minimum stay and that is what the 3 days are about.

An offshoot of this theory is that Jonah was perhaps seen as a diplomat of sorts and that a similar routine, but of royal hospitality, along with a series of diplomatic meetings and greetings and feasts was required, and this took 2 of the 3 days. What both of these theories do, however, is to try to get around the plain reading (the *P'shat* reading) of the Scripture passage that leaves little way out of understanding that this must be speaking about the scale...the size... of this important city. And, the idea that it would be a 3 days journey to get from one end of the city to the other is ludicrous so a solution must be found.

Therefore, yet another theory is that this is NOT talking about the direct linear distance from one side of the city to the other, but rather it is about the perimeter of the city walls. Even so, if that perimeter wall was that long, it meant that it was probably 40 miles or more. So, yet another offshoot of that theory is that this included what we might call the suburbs of the walled city of Nineveh. It is true that in ancient times a walled city was to provide protection for more people than only those who resided inside its walls. We see this with Jerusalem, which had large suburbs that still called themselves Jerusalem. It was typical that should an invader come, the people who lived nearby but outside the city walls saw themselves, and were accepted as, members of the city. So, they were expected to come inside those walls when protection was needed. Customarily, it was usually the elites, the government officials, and the well-to-do merchants that had the privilege (read: the money!) to live inside those walls.

But, as hard as it might be to believe, there is some evidence to support what is said in Jonah. R.D. Barnett and L.C. Allen both refer to archaeological and ancient cuneiform sources that indicate that Nineveh was about 3 miles across at its widest point, and about 8 miles in circumference. While that hardly seems like it would take 3 days to walk, there is yet another piece of evidence that dates to the 1200's A.D. that is fascinating. What I'm about to read to you unaltered and verbatim is taken from a Crusader copy of a widely reproduced and known history of the world that was prepared in 1210 A.D. called *Histoire* that was produced for the Crusaders that bivouacked at the ancient city of Akko that today is the northernmost point of Israel on the Mediterranean.

“My lords, it is appropriate for me to tell you of the nobility of this city that was founded and built in the land of Assyria. One of the rivers of Paradise, the Euphrates, full of all sorts of creatures, ran along the walls at one side. The city

was set on the river and it therefore took three long, full days to traverse it. It did not have less size on all the remaining sides, were one to go and make the turn around it,; exactly as the prophet Jonas says and testifies. On the side of the river, whose flow is great and broad, were founded the sumptuous palace and the tall halls. On another section were the tall and broad wall and the large towers, high and square, that rested upon it. There were one hundred gates, of bronze and copper, which shut and opened whenever one wished, four to the east, and four to the west, that we more imposing. On these were elaborate towers, thick and great, extending upwards towards the sky. A large vineyard and beautiful garden with fruits of all sorts were within the walls of the city and the fortress. The city was proud and rich in possessions, sustained by noble men”.

While none of this can be proved today (or disproved for that matter), yet I have always found it wise to leave alone something in the Bible that might stretch our ability to believe it, but on the other hand there is no hard evidence against it. More often than not, archaeological digs find astounding feats of engineering that no modern person thought possible using whatever the primitive tools and machines of that era might have afforded them. And, they find ancient writings that validate what read in our Bibles. And yet, undeniably, the structures and construction works exist. The gigantic and imposing Egyptian Pyramids still remain an unsolved mystery, yet millions of people have seen them with their own eyes and climbed all over them (your present speaker included), unable to fathom how they could have been built so long ago. The mind-boggling reality of the pyramids even causes some otherwise reputable archaeologists to suggest that perhaps it was aliens from another planet that played a role in their construction. Nineveh was known as a most wonderous place in Jonah’s era and long afterward, and however precisely one wants to understand the several mentions of Nineveh as a great or important or (in some translations) enormous city, it seemed to be one of kind that sat unmatched in the ancient world. I’ll take Jonah at his word even if, as Jack Sasson thinks, Jonah was using the term 3-days walk as only an idiom of his day that meant that something was unusually big or it was a substantial distance away. That is, it is like us saying something is “a couple of miles away” or “it’ll take a couple of hours to get there”. It is more a general characterization of time or distance without being specific.

In verse 4, Jonah arrives at Nineveh. We have no idea of timeframe. But, one need only look at a map to see the substantial distance Nineveh is from the Holy Land or even from Joppa. It is highly unlikely that Jonah would have taken a ship to get him up the coast because it wouldn't have helped much to hurry his journey along. Besides: if you were Jonah, how anxious would you have been to ever get back onto a boat again? Unlike many of the world's great rivers that terminates at an ocean whereby an ocean-going vessel can then turn and sail inland, up that river, the Euphrates doesn't ever meet with the Mediterranean Sea. Whatever his route, it took some time for Jonah to get to Nineveh.

The verse goes on to say that after one day he proclaimed the message that Nineveh would be overthrown, or maybe that after only one day's journey into the city he proclaimed the message he was sent to give. We are again faced with what it is that the mention of "one-day" is referring to. Some Jewish scholars think the one-day needs to be understood as meaning 1/3rd of the distance into the city that the previously mentioned 3-days journey gave as being the size across the city. Therefore, we are to deduce that it also means that about 1/3rd of Nineveh's population had heard God's message to them. Another meaning some Bible scholars prefer is that Jonah barely got started on preaching the message before the people responded to it. That is, they repented before he had the chance to spread the message to the entire city. Can this be true? A pagan city is immediately accepting of a foreigner's oracle warning of a disaster due to their bad behavior...and this disaster would be caused by a god they had not previously known? God says something interesting about this through His Prophet Isaiah.

CJB Isaiah 65: 1-5 *"I made myself accessible to those who didn't ask for me, I let myself be found by those who didn't seek me. I said, 'Here I am! Here I am!' to a nation not called by my name. ² I spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people who live in a way that is not good, who follow their own inclinations; ³ a people who provoke me to my face all the time, sacrificing in gardens and burning incense on bricks. ⁴ They sit among the graves and spend the night in caverns; they eat pig meat and their pots hold soup made from disgusting things. ⁵ They say, 'Keep your distance, don't come near me, because I am holier than you.' These are smoke in my nose, a fire that burns all day!*

God continues to reveal His nature to us; and here in Isaiah God says that He makes Himself accessible to people who don't know Him. In that day "to know" a god meant to worship or obey him or her. He even calls to people who don't seek Him. Those that don't obey His morals and directives are an irritation to Him. Might it be that the Ninevites weren't quite as unprepared to hear from Jonah's god as we might think? How do people who have never known Yeshua suddenly...in a flash...come to know Him and it changes them immediately and profoundly?! Because we know this experience is not uncommon among those who have become the body of Believers in Yeshua, why would we think it unlikely for the Assyrians of times past that Yehoveh could become known and real to them nearly immediately after hearing from Him ?

Then there is the matter of the warning that God gives the Ninevites that it there is only 40 more days before the city is overthrown. 40 is a symbolic number in the Bible that indicates a great change or a great purge is coming. It is also connected with the idea of a period of testing or trial, and thus also loosely connected with the concept of repentance. The 40-days concept was not confined to Israel alone; its symbolic meaning was rather widespread in the Middle East. So, it is probable that when Jonah preached the message that in 40-days Nineveh would be overthrown, the people knew that the idea of repentance was associated with it. That said, we get no more information about exactly what it was that Jonah said to the people, or even that their repentance might stay God's wrath upon them. But, clearly, that is how the people took it to mean.

Verse 5 tells us something that really is quite astounding: the people **immediately** responded not just with words and promises or even prayer, but with concrete actions. They believed God, we're told, and so the citizens of Nineveh began to fast and they put on garments of sackcloth; both being rituals of expressing regret and mourning. It is also an expression of contrition and admission of guilt. Even more astounding, as the word of Jonah's message and of the citizens' spontaneous reaction to it reached the king, he, too, believed God. He believed the message and he believed that this god had the power to bring about what he warned would happen. While Isaiah's teaching that God reveals Himself even to people who don't acknowledge Him certainly played a large role in everyone from the least to the greatest in Nineveh taking Jonah's message to

heart, we must also look to their current circumstances for reasons that would make them fearful enough to be open to such a possibility.

I have mentioned in earlier lessons that in Jonah's era Assyria was not doing well. They had a couple of weak (meaning incompetent) kings in a row; they had suffered military defeats, and some recent famines. Famines were not just events to these people; they were also omens...bad omens...as were such things as solar eclipses. Thus, some combination of these disastrous events along with bad omens made the people and the king sensitive to hearing that yet another calamity was in the offing. Let's also remember that Nineveh (and by that, meaning Assyria in general) had a reputation as being quite blood thirsty and barbarian in their behavior. This, of course, was reflected not just in treatment of their neighbors, but also within their own society. Exactly what wickedness was occurring among the people of Nineveh is not stated; but whatever it was, it was serious enough to have drawn The Creator's special attention.

I also think that when Jonah gave them God's message, that they instinctively knew of their immoral state and wrong behavior, but had put the consciousness of it on the shelf for many years. This is just how we humans operate. We can get into a trend and wicked mindset without fully realizing what we have done. In time, it just becomes the new norm. I must say that I see this exact thing happening at least in the Western world, including my own nation of the USA. I have been blessed with many years of life that allows me to compare our society of 70 + years ago to today through actual experience. I lived my childhood in days of peace, of neighbors caring about one another, of parents actually parenting, of schools actually teaching and not indoctrinating, of a general societal attitude of a community well-being, and a shared sense of morality that was biblically based. Of course, our society was far from perfect with the shame of systematic racism going unchecked in many parts of my nation. Yet, when that racism was confronted, many millions of Americans realized our moral wrong and responded with a changed behavior and attitude. Our government also responded...however imperfectly. Naturally, that response was uneven and not all Americans accepted our corporate sin of racism and so did **not** repent of it and change.

Now in the 21st century, there is no shared sense of much of anything in our society; rather there is extreme polarization of thought, value and virtue. We have not only become a society in which the definition of morality is up for grabs, but rather in which the priority or even the existence of the **concept** of such a thing as morality is disappearing rapidly. This trend has led not only to an increasingly lawless, mindless and violent society that in many instances feels so chaotic and helpless against its onslaught that we think all we can do is to accept all behaviors as OK and to decriminalize crime. What seems to go unnoticed is that this rapidly increasing civil lawlessness is accompanied with our spiritual lawlessness as defined by God's laws and commandments. I would argue that it is the spiritual lawlessness that came first, and was the cause of our civil lawlessness. And yet...I have no doubt that despite the wrong and evil that is being celebrated as good and normal today, deep down all humans know that what is happening is wicked and that a day of reckoning is coming. Right now, today, many Americans are starting to realize this and responding with earnest repentance and seeking God for answers, and for His direction and mercy. But, at least as many are choosing to double-down on their wickedness and defying the God of the Universe, even denying His existence as kind of a rationalization for their newfound freedom to do evil. Bottom line: do you want to understand the people of Nineveh? Then just look around you; we are Nineveh.

So, when Jonah took his message of doom to the people of Nineveh, no doubt there wasn't a unanimous, universal reaction of all the people. There would have been two different ...opposing... reactions of the citizens. This is reflected in the king issuing a royal decree for every citizen to do what those who stood convicted and contrite had already begun on their own. If everyone had taken on that attitude of guilt and accountability for their behavior then no royal command would have been necessary. We don't make laws and rules on matters that don't ever come up. On the one hand (apparently to the majority of Ninevites) what had become their accepted societal behavior that they saw as normal and customary, when brought into the light of day by Yehoveh's oracle to them, they instantly knew it had been wrong and also knew exactly what they had to change. How could they know this? Because the concept of morality and what we could call The Natural Law as issued by God is literally built into our human DNA and cannot be removed. Yet, we do have the free will and a sufficient built-in evil inclination (the Hebrews called this evil inclination of our minds the **yetzer ha-rah**)

whereby we can choose to shun that Natural Law, and therefore to disobey God, and become lawless.

The king, himself, did more than decree what his subjects were to do; he also humbled himself. He took off his royal robes and donned sackcloth. We are told that he got down from his throne and sat in the dirt; a sign of humility and mourning before God on high. He, of course, also ordered his governmental officials and the elite of society to do the same. So, from top to bottom of Assyrian society sorrow and repentance was the order of the day. It was sincere, and as we learn, effective. I want to note yet again, that what separates sorrow from repentance is changed behavior. I can be sorrowful and regretful of my sins (usually because something bad has happened as a result); but repenting from my sins is another matter entirely. The Hebrew word that we translate as repent is **suw**. Unfortunately, the way we tend to define repent makes it mostly a spiritual matter and one of the mind (or as we like to say, of the heart). **Suw** literally means to turn. It is an action word; it involves actual behavior and not just thought. I suppose if one were to diagram the sequence of repentance it would begin with a warning of some sort about our behavior, then our mental acceptance of the rightness of that warning and our accountability for our wrong behavior, and then a change in our physical behavior because that always necessarily comes from a mental determination to do one thing or the other.

In Matthew chapter 5 Yeshua talks about how our sinful actions always begin with our sinful thoughts. Anger (a mental thought) is the beginning of murder (a physical action). Lust (a mental thought) is always the beginning of adultery (a physical action). In the same way, sincere repentance begins with a mental thought, but the evidence of it **MUST** become our physical action. And since biblical repentance means to actively turn from doing evil to doing good, then our bad behavior must cease and be replaced by good behavior. Otherwise, our repentance is incomplete and therefore is not accepted by God as repentance no matter how much we wish to argue for our sincerity. The real value of the Book of Jonah, and what Nineveh did, is **NOT** in how Jonah or in how humans behave; it is in how God really is...in how He operates. Here we learn (yet again) the true nature of repentance and how God defines it. It does no good to debate with me the nature of repentance; I have no power to make or change the divine rules. If God doesn't accept our sense of repentance as actual repentance, then it isn't.

And His rules are, unequivocally, that a change of our behavior for the good is required: period. Or to use Yeshua's way to explain it, if there is not any good fruit from our supposed salvation, then there was and is no actual salvation.

There is no better example of this than Nineveh. For one thing, how, exactly, did God judge that gentile Nineveh's behavior was terribly wrong if there was no **objective** standard for it? The typical Christian argument that God's Laws were only for the Hebrews, and not for gentiles... whether in the ancient past or still today...doesn't hold biblical water. Until the Law of Moses so extensively created a wide and deep written moral code for humanity, there was the basic Natural Law that is within us all to follow. In the time of Jonah around 5 centuries had passed since the Law of Moses was given; therefore, I have no doubt whatsoever that it was that standard by which Nineveh's behavior was being judged. Not by the precise letter of the 600 or so laws necessarily; but probably by the spirit and essence of each law.

Verse 7 explains that the decree the king made to the citizens of Nineveh was pretty extreme. They had to fast so fervently that they couldn't even drink water! Not only that, even the livestock was to participate. Whether cattle, sheep, or goats, even they were to have sackcloth placed upon them. I can think of no greater contrition by a nation than to have their people and their economy (which is what those animals represented) bend to the God of Heaven and Earth. It is interesting that many of the ancient Rabbis pronounced this decree to include animals as a grave misdeed. They held the animals as innocent, and therefore as being unjustly caused pain in the king's hopes of obtaining divine mercy to stop God's plan of devastating Nineveh. And yet, according to the simple reading of the Holy Scriptures (the **P'shat**) we know that in the Great Flood all but a select lucky few of the animals on earth drowned along with their human counterparts due the wickedness of mankind. The unpleasant reality is that the fates of animals and humans have always been intertwined. The operation of the Levitical sacrificial system highlights that fact since innocent animals lost their lives in place of guilty humans.

CJB Psalm 36:6-7 ***⁶ ADONAI, in the heavens is your grace; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. ⁷ Your righteousness is like the mountains of God, your judgments are like the great deep. You save man and beast, ADONAI.***

The king of Nineveh knew enough to surmise that when Nineveh was overturned by God, man and beast would perish together. Therefore, it made sense to include animals in the attempt to show sufficient grief and repentance to God that perhaps He would relent from what He was planning to do. The very act of wearing sackcloth (and of fasting) represented self-denial...sometimes called affliction... in order to show the depth of sincerity. But, no doubt, the length of time of fasting would be as short as it was intense. Humans and animals can live for days and weeks without food; but not without water.

We'll stop here for today and continue in Jonah chapter 3 next time.