



Chapter III

God said to Jonah again, "Go to Nineveh and caution the people that unless they repent and stop piling up sins, their city shall perish in forty days from the moment you enter it."

Jonah did not disobey this time, and hit the road straight to Nineveh.

As I said earlier, according to Book of Jonah, Nineveh was an exceeding city of three days' journey.

It is well to parenthesize here that I do not know any city in the world which takes a walker no less than three days to cross through, except for the old-time Berlin, which had the deadly barrier extending across the city. Modern archeology has determined that the size of Nineveh in Jonah's days was about 12.9 kilometers in circumference, from which the average diameter of the city becomes 4.1 kilometers, and this is not very much longer than my Sunday morning walk. So it is my speculation that the author of the Old Testament meant that if a traveler wanted to cross the city Nineveh, he should normally be prepared for at least three days' journey on account of barriers, rather than the actual span of the city. And if my speculation is correct, Nineveh's number-one barrier must have been its citizens themselves because God said their evil eyes were glaring at him.

Once upon a time in old-time Kyoto, when it was the capital of Japan, a warrior monk posted himself on a bridge and did not allow people to pass unless they gave up a sword voluntarily or otherwise, and it is told that eventually he collected 999 swords. Likewise, probably, the citizens of Nineveh would bar the traveling

strangers at many convenient points such as bridge, narrow passage, tunnel or privately made gate and extorted unlawful private tolls in money or kind. They probably kept watch dogs at such barriers to make it harder for travelers to pass free. Thus equipped, the Ninevites might have raised the tolls higher, or even robbed the travelers, if the latter had, for example, a fine mule with treasure boxes hung on it, or anyway if they were not well equipped with weapons. The citizens might even have demanded sex if the travelers could not pay the lifted tolls. They might have kidnapped children from them for ransom. Now, this is a rough speculation of the present author but if the situation was not as bad as this or worse, God would not ever think of annihilating the total inhabitants of any city.

So it is assumed that such was the city of Nineveh at best when Jonah arrived at one of its gates, where very likely he was squeezed to pay a large sum for admittance, becoming almost penniless. It is also likely that any incoming foreigner without some sort of authorization letter was suspected as a spy, and thus Jonah could have been under surveillance by secret police.

If it took three days to go from one end of the city to the other anyhow, to preach throughout the city would have been an extraordinary task, and it might well take no less than forty days to complete it.

Jonah started prophesying with courage and determination. However, he was traumatically afraid of Ninevites due to his childhood experience, and, in spite of his determination, he would freeze when a Ninevite man would approach him, and could not make an eye contact even with women during the first several days in the city. He kept encouraging himself by saying to himself that he was closely watched by God and would be protected so long as he did His will.

He had composed and learned by heart the following words in Aramaic (a language spoken by Assyrians) and recited them all day long:

"Good citizens of Nineveh, listen;
And hear the Almighty God caution!
Fear Him and drop wrongdoings.
Repent of sins and stop evildoings.
For if you ever continue your sinful ways,
He shall exterminate the city in forty days!"

Of course the number forty was decreased by one each day; so he had also learned how to count down from forty to one in Aramaic. Jonah picked up forty pebbles and put them in his shoulder bag, and threw away a pebble a day so as not to make miscounting. Thus started the countdown for the destruction or survival of Nineveh.

Rain or shine he kept prophesying. However, his voice betrayed his cowardice toward Ninevites. He was despised. Even children mocked him. Curious about the manner in which he pronounced their language, juveniles came and mimicked his speech and gesture. But this helped Jonah, for he could learn from their pronunciation the correct way of saying his prophecy in Ninevite dialect. He also learnt some basic expressions from them, and the young ones loved to hear him speak their dialect much after a fashion, and marveled as he counted from one to forty and then backward too. Gradually he got used to the Ninevites and, as he did so, learnt that they were not much different from Hebrews, and that not every Ninevite was bad.

So, slowly but steadily he became able to speak with authority in voice and gesture, as he used to do when in Israel. However, nobody took him seriously. He was mocked and jeered at as he prophesied. One would shout: "You stink! Go away!" Some would spit on him and some others, including children, even threw things at him. Of course no one invited him to his house, so Jonah always spent night outdoors. Nevertheless, Jonah kept his preaching work unflinchingly as ordered by God. Fortunately his fishy smell confused watch dogs at various barriers to mistake him for a dog's meat man; so he could relatively freely pass the barriers.

He prophesied wherever and whenever he found a person, adult or child. He entered every street he could find and prophesied at every household on the street. The city had many public squares and he visited all and revisited many for the propagation of God's words. The city was surrounded by huge thick walls connected by fifteen gates, and he encircled the city walking along the inside of the walls clockwise, all the way reciting the prophecy. (Where the canal passed across the city boundary line, either the wall there functioned as a bridge or there was a ferry to cross the canal.) He went up the walls where possible and cried repentance. By the time he completed the circuit, his words had a melody, which began to attract some citizens.

Nor did he pass over the famous hanging garden, which was one of the architectures constructed by the inventive Ninevites, resembling pyramid tiered with five terraces, each carrying artfully planted orchards of various leafy trees and flowers of seasons. In all seasons the plants grew so thick that it looked like a real hill when seen from afar, and in fact it was even greener than natural mountains and hills in the area, for rain was rather rare there. So it has been wondered how the hanging garden could remain so thick in green throughout the year. The only clue we have is the king's euphony: The canal water runs from above into my pleasure garden; fragrance in every walkway...Like a squirrel I pick fruit of delights...

Historians and archeologists contemplated how it was done. A most recently proposed theory is that Ninevites had invented the Archimedean helical screw pump far earlier than Archimedes did, and that the pump was used to transport the canal water to the top of the garden. However it may have been done, the hanging garden must no doubt have convinced enemy nations that the city was invincible against sieges.

In the afternoon of a day, when it was open to the citizens, Jonah entered the garden. The day was sunny but the air was cool and nice. He chanted his prophecy as he walked about the garden, wakening many who were taking siesta in the shades. Children were playing – some climbing trees and others on swings. Several young men were running up the slope competing who would reach the summit first. A man was playing the flute, for which Ninevites were famous too.

Jonah sat to rest on the lawn in the shadow of one of the piers of an aqueduct to listen to the music. Although in shadow, the ground was warm, even warmer than the air. He heard from above a sound of water running in the conduit. The aqueduct was made of red bricks. Ivies climbed the piers, even up to the conduit of the aqueduct. The small leaves of the ivies were flickering the sunlight as the winds vibrated them. Water was sprinkling from the conduit. Jonah saw that there were thin vertical slits at intervals between the bricks, which formed the walls of the conduit, and through the slits water was spilling out.

He, with his water bag empty, opened his mouth to drink from the sprinkling water, but a brisk wind fetched and sprayed the water far and wide and a rainbow stood. He stared at it and marveled that however swiftly the spray flew and danced, the thin transparent rainbow stayed fixed in the air.

“Ah, Rainbow!” he sighed. “You come like a phantom and fade out likewise – so faint are you! Yet you never allow anything to budge, vibrate or discolor you! How I wish I were as steadfast as you are!”

Curious to know where the water was coming from, Jonah went up along the aqueduct, which encircled the garden spirally, and he reached the summit terrace. Standing high in the middle was a handsome white statue of the queen for whom the king built the garden.

The queen was a daughter of a king in a country full of natural beauty, and was married to the king of Nineveh for the sake of convenience between the kings. She disliked Nineveh and one day broke wind in the presence of the king, who asked her what she had meant by that. She replied, “I want a favor from you. You have taken me to live in this dry Nineveh. I desire you to give me a pool in a garden where I can swim without being seen by anybody.” Hence the hanging garden was built with a hidden pool.

A path paved with bricks went round the statue, and this path together with the statue formed a sundial. The circular path branched radially into four directions equiangularly, and that path which branched from behind the statue led to a wooden door made in a high brick wall. There were two aqueducts, including the one Jonah had walked along, and they penetrated the wall and were seen no more from the terrace.

As he approached the wooden door, whose edges were overlaid with copper, he could hear a sound of water splashing. Jonah tried to open the door, but it was locked. But immediately he heard dogs barking happily

and scratching the door from the other side. Then the door opened and an officer ushered him in. There were two watch dogs and their keen noses had not failed to catch the appetizing smell from Jonah, and they had thought that a dog's meat man had at last arrived, and thus urged the officer to open the wooden door. Jonah's horrible smell then urged the officer back to his position.

Jonah saw a large copper basin steadied on a raised mound, and the ends of the two aqueducts were below two lips of the basin respectively, which were diametrically opposed to each other and from which water was continuously overflowing into the aqueducts. Four male slaves on the mound were busy pouring water from wooden buckets into the basin; they were receiving laden buckets from the ends of four rows of male slaves, who were standing sideways and passing the buckets up the slope. The emptied buckets were passed backward through another four rows, which consisted of women, old men, and children. They were all sweating heavily. Somehow the area was even hotter than other areas of the garden. Several overseers, including the one Jonah had already met, with a whip were watching the slaves lest they neglect the work.

Jonah, followed by the dogs, walked up the steps formed integrally to the wall and stood on top of the wall. He found that the rows of the slaves extended down into a slanted tunnel with steps. Occasionally steam vapor puffed out from the gape of the tunnel. He also sensed a smell of burnt coal. It was now apparent that huge amount of water was being boiled at the bottom of the garden, from which the steam was coming. "No wonder," he thought, "the earth is warm everywhere. The garden must be quite hollow inside with tunnels, and the earth is being watered with the steam from inside!"

He moved to a position from which he could see deeper into the tunnel. Then he saw, through the vapor, a round water pool into which water was gathering from all directions, down from an unseen ceiling and from the walls around. Four slaves standing in the pool, which was entirely lined with white tiles, were scooping the distilled water with buckets and passing them upward through the four rows of the slaves to the two-lipped basin for irrigation of the surface of the garden. It was apparent that the tunnel was unbearably hot inside, for overseers came out occasionally, wiping their face and necks with cloth. Then, an old man was carried out and laid on the ground.

Jonah went down the wall and stood by him so that his shadow shaded his pale face from the sun. To his surprise, he knew him: he was a dove-raiser who lived in his hometown. Jonah loved to see the birds released from the cages and an aviary to form a flock and circle the sky of his town. One day young Jonah was showed in his yard and was taught about the difference between turtle-dove and pigeon. The dove-raiser was taken prisoner by the Ninevites on that same day his parents were murdered by them. He called his name, but he was unconscious.

Then, Jonah heard a sound of a wooden bucket crash and clatter in the tunnel followed by a crack of a sharp

whipping; and a high-pitched scream of a girl echoed in the tunnel. Jonah ran and wanted to go into the tunnel but was stopped by the overseers. The prophet shouted angrily his prophecy into the tunnel, and his voice echoed and quieted the whipping and the girl's cry.

Expelled from the backyard, Jonah went down the hanging garden along the aqueduct which was not the one he had followed up previously. As he descended the hill, he forgot to prophesy but was absorbed in a thought about the slaves. He wondered, "Is slavery not a sin? If it is, is it one of the sins of Ninevites that God required me to help them repent and drop? If not... would it not be better rather for the miserable hopeless slaves if the entire Nineveh is demolished including themselves than that all the Ninevites are saved and continue maltreating them with renewed confidence? For what does it profit the slaves if they are preserved alive but tormented until the day of their death?"

The aqueduct led him down to an artificial waterway, which was not very wide and was barely holding two boats abreast. One boat was full of coal, and the other was empty. A row of slaves were passing buckets full of cinder, which was thrown into the empty boat; a man started sprinkling water over it and vapor rose. The emptied buckets were then filled with the coal from the other boat and were put on the bank.

Jonah walked alongside the waterway, which extended straight in a forest. Soon he came across a row of several female slaves carrying a jar on their heads, which smelled coal tar.

Coming out of the forest, he found the waterway branched from a huge canal, in which many people were bathing and/or washing clothes. He reached the bank. From there he could see dark gray smoke puffing from a thick chimney of red bricks rising high from the forest at the foot of the hanging garden.

Jonah started prophesying to the people there; however, they were busy washing and bathing and did not give attention to him. Some washerwomen were talking to each other loudly and they were complaining the smoke and the soot of the burnt coal, which came occasionally toward the canal bringing with it the smell of sulfur, and made them feel sick and stained the laundry. He learnt from their talk that the coal was burnt only on the days the garden was open to the public, and that on the other days the round pool (which he had seen) was used by the royal family and their guests for bathing.

A group of men and women were praying to the westering sun standing in the water of the canal knee-deep. When Jonah was nearby, one of the men overheard his prophecy and asked him who the Almighty God was. He replied that he was the god who created the earth, heaven and the sea. "Did he create the sun too?" the man asked. "Yes, everything in the sky, day or night. Everything on earth and everything in the sea too." "Where can we go to see him?" "You cannot see him. He lives and is omnipresent, that is, he is everywhere at the same time; so you cannot capture his busy body in any particular substance, not in a statue or in a

picture, nor in the sun – not even in universe, for universe was created by him. ...It might even be possible that you cannot capture the Almighty in any particular religion.” “If he is everywhere at the same time, he is in Nineveh too. How is it then that he will destroy himself by destroying Nineveh?” “That, my friend, is why he sent me here to rescue Nineveh. He created every person in his likeness, and thus every person is his physical part. So, every punishment he inflicts upon a man he feels it upon himself, too. As the old saying goes, ‘if your tongue sins, pull it off,’ but the pain is yours too.”

By now several men and women and children had gathered and formed a crowd listening to Jonah, some in the water and others on the bank. “Each one of you is an important part of Him. So treat each other as you would treat the Most High God.”

Then the crowd began to move on the bank or in the water so as to make space for a row of half a dozen male slaves and a long boat, that were approaching. The slaves were walking on the bank pulling upstream the boat laden with coal and a man, who held the handle of the stem rudder. The boat was sunk almost to its gunwale. The bodies of the slaves, tied to the boat with long tensed ropes, were aslant forward and sweating profusely. The thick ropes ground into their callous skin. An overseer with a whip followed the slaves on the bank.

Jonah did not make way for them but chanted his prophecy and shouted, “God Almighty forbids all slavery! It’s a sin!” The overseer came and gave Jonah a whipping and threatened to give another. But two of the slaves passed between the overseer and the prophet so that their tight ropes pushed the two away from each other. Then the prophet continued, “All men are created by God equally in the likeness of him; so, disgracing any man or woman is an act of disgrace to God!” The overseer called out for help to another overseer who was in charge of the boat following this one.

Jonah, now capable of swimming after his brine experiences, crossed the canal by wading and with some swimming, and rested on the opposite bank. The overseers did not pursue him. He continued to prophesy there in wet clothing.

When his clothes were only half dry, loud sounds of cymbals and drums began to echo all round, and people began hurrying to public squares and temples for the afternoon prayers. Jonah stayed on the bank, but two temple policemen came and whipped him to a temple. He chanted his song in the temple, and alarmed the priests and laymen by overturning the tables of corruption.

Thus he chanted God’s words wherever he went. He visited a hamlet inhabited by people with skin diseases, where he prophesied and left a pebble. He spent a cold night in straws in a stable, and early in the following morning he went out to the farms and chanted to the slaves, who were reaping to harvest, as well as to animal

herders, who were on their way to pastures with the animals. Tax collectors were busy visiting the houses of the villagers'. No one stopped to give ear to Jonah. Then he joined the poor who came to glean the fallen ears on the harvested farms.

He came across an area where were houses of prostitutes, and he chanted the warning news to them as well as their customers, male and female. Many bandits lived there and threatened him to leave the place.

Then, he came to a graveyard, where he met an outcast man suffering from a mental disease , and they prophesied to each other. In response to Jonah's chanting the man cried, "Alas, what do you want with me?! I know who you are - a man of god, for I felt all the skeletons lying underground shake in response to your preaching. As such, what choice have I got but to repent and drop wrongdoings? But, alas, for all my eagerness to repent and drop wrongdoings, I cannot do so, for I am only one of many in my body. I am merely one of us, of whom some are good and others are not. I cannot control us and sooner or later some other self of us will show up to replace me and may start doing evil. So, do not torture me with your preaching!" At this Jonah held the man's hands and said, "I know God would never punish you so long as you *yourself* repent and drop wrongdoings." A gravedigger came and took the man to let him help digging for a burial of a wealthy person. Joining the funeral ceremony, Jonah chanted the prophecy.

Then, he arrived at a marketplace where many street performers were at work, and, joining them, he sang his warning song. By and by people gathered to listen. He earned some money and with that he bought a new pair of sandals.

He would chant the prophecy whenever he found a listener, and when none, he would even preach to animals, birds, insects and fish. And he stopped eating meat.

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