

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The scripture does not directly say why Jonah does not want to go to Nineveh. Yet we can surmise that it was because Jonah recognized the evil Ninevites as potential and real instruments in the hand of God to punish and oppress his own land and countrymen. He was fully aware of God's mercy, and correctly guessed that a successful campaign of evangelization would only spare an enemy from destruction and thus expose his own beloved land to future calamities. It is no wonder that we find Jonah with fear and loathing in lost Nineveh.

The Ninevites were an evil, ruthless people who did not know God, and when they responded to Jonah's preaching, how were they to know that the God of heaven and earth was calling to them? God and the prophet make no such appeal. But the Ninevites believed Jonah's word; they cleaned up their act. Not just a few Ninevites here and there, but everyone, even the animals.

In shock, and eventually anger, Jonah watches the inhabitants of the city turn from their evil ways. When the Ninevites repent, it is only with unwarranted desire that they dare hope that God might turn from wrath and spare the city.

At this point, Jonah, who had been stuck in joy at another person's misfortune, is now reduced to sorrow because of Nineveh's good fortune. He is angry that the Ninevites have turned from their evil ways and that God has proved himself once more to be gracious and merciful, "slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing" (4:2). Jonah shows himself again to be out of step with God's agenda. But we can see that God is determined to send Jonah with the divine message to the Ninevites. Jonah might not care about the people of Nineveh, but God does. God's mercy comes to all people.