

## JONAH: DO THE RIGHT THING

Bible Background – JONAH 3

Printed Text – JONAH 3

**3** Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time:

**2** “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh and deliver the message I have given you.”

**3** This time Jonah obeyed the LORD’s command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all.

**4** On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: “Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!”

**5** The people of Nineveh believed God’s message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow.

**6** When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne

and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes.

**7** Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: “No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all.

**8** People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence.

**9** Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.”

**10** When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.

-----New Living Translation

### Lesson Introduction

Nineveh was a great ancient city and the capital of the nation of Assyria. This nation was a great power and an enemy to the Israelites, but God called His prophet Jonah to take the Ninevites a message. In this lesson we will examine how the people of Nineveh responded to God’s message and resolve to respond with repentance and corrected behavior when we hear God’s warning to us.

**Background:** God called His prophet Jonah to cry out against a neighboring nation, the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Jonah disobeyed God and attempted to run away from His service. In spite of all this, when Jonah’s situation appeared hopeless, God prepared a great fish to rescue him. Jonah was saved from death by grace. God not only saved his life but also restored Jonah to his position as a prophet. Jonah failed God, but God did not give up on Jonah. God had a job that He wanted Jonah to do, and Jonah’s failure did not disqualify him for the mission. God’s ultimate purpose was to rid Nineveh of evil.

He sent Jonah to warn the Ninevites of their impending destruction. God would end the evil of Nineveh through divine judgment or, if they repented, through divine mercy.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 458

### God's Forgiveness

**Jonah 3:1-5:** Now Jonah had gone through quite an ordeal because of his initial disobedience to God's calling to take a message of warning to Nineveh. After the experience in the boat and in the belly of the great fish, he was ready to obey and carry out God's mission. God gives Jonah a second chance and he prepares to deliver the message that God commands him to give. The journey to Nineveh from the sea is around 500 miles and to preach the message throughout the city would be an additional 3-day journey. Jonah was obedient, however, still reluctant.

The message to the people was simple: "Within forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed." Jonah entered the city and preached the message. Although it sounds emphatic and that the die was cast, the people understood the message to be conditional. For, if God had intended to destroy the city at that time regardless of the people's response, it would have not been necessary to send a warning. Neither would repentance have been possible without the warning. Upon hearing the message, the people believed God, mourned, and proclaimed a fast to receive mercy from God.

◆ *When has God given you a second chance: How did you use it?*

### Prayers to God

**Jonah 3:6-9:** The people understood that the purpose of the preached message was to offer the opportunity for repentance. And as the word reached the king, he too removed his royal robes and put on sackcloth. This outward gesture was indicative of the remorse and humility the people felt when confronted with their own wickedness. Sackcloth was rough, cheap, and very uncomfortable and to don such clothing represented their willingness to debase and humiliate themselves to demonstrate their sorrowful attitude. The king proclaimed a national fast for everyone—himself, the nobles, everyone great and small, even the animals—would fast, turn from their evil, and cry to God to mercifully deliver them from the doom that awaited.

Remember, that the Ninevites do not know God as the Jews do. They are a pagan and wicked nation with no cultural history of a relationship with Him. They only know what Jonah has told them about the destruction they will experience at God's hand. They may not know all the Law of Moses, but they know enough to recognize the violence and evil they have committed, and that God is ready to destroy them for it. They hope that by true repentance and turning from their wickedness, that God will change his mind. They know that the Sovereign God has the power to destroy, or to deliver and heal. God is their Judge and only source of salvation.

◆ *How do show you are truly sorry when you mess up?*

## God Relents

**Jonah 3:10:** God is a merciful God and upon seeing the repentant attitude of the Ninevites, He repented (Heb. *nakham*) from carrying out the judgment against the people. The Hebrew word used here for God's repentance is better translated as "relented." God is not a man and does not commit error therefore there is never any need for Him to repent of His plans or deeds. However, He does forgive and change His mind when people make sincerely positive change that pleases Him, and it pleased God to see the sincerity in their repentance. God was going to bring an end to their evil doings one way or another. But since the people of Nineveh repented (Heb. *shub*-meaning to turn from evil) of the evil they had committed in the past, God chose to forgive.

Of course, the reluctant prophet, Jonah had hoped that things would have turned out differently. After all, Assyria (capital city, Nineveh), was a powerful empire in the Near East and no friend of Israel. The Empire would actually destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel and carry the survivors away in exile in the same century that Jonah ministered to them (8<sup>th</sup> Century BC). But this pagan people listened to Jonah, and for a while, heeded God's warning, which Jonah feared they would. And God, in His abundant mercy forgave them, which Jonah knew He would [Jonah 4:1-2].

## Conclusion

There are a few important tenets that we should gain from this passage of the book of Jonah: (1) That we should be obedient to God and witness where He sends us to witness. (2) God will extend His mercy to whomever He chooses to extend His mercy. (3) When we receive a warning from God, or a conviction to turn from our sinful behavior, the only response that pleases God is one of sincere repentance with all of the inward and outward signs that accompany true and sincere change.

## Sources:

- Ogbonnaya, A. O. (Ed.). (2019). Practice Justice. *Precepts for Living*, 22(Spring Quarter), The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021. 454-462.
- Parson, E. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002.
- Rigsby, R. O. (Ed.). (1979). Introduction to the Book of Jeremiah. *The Open Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 845-847.
- Sproul, R. C., (2021). The Prophet to Assyria. *Ligonier Ministries*. Retrieved May 2021 from <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/prophet-assyria/>

**Lesson for Next Week – June 6, 2021**

**Why Do You Worry?**

Bible Background ♦ MATTHEW 6:19-34

Printed Text ♦ MATTHEW 6:25-34

Devotional Reading ♦ EZEKIEL 34:11-16

**Monday**

Worried? Seek God's Counsel

(1 Samuel 9:5-10)

**TUESDAY**

God Cares for His People

(Ezekiel 34:11-16)

**WEDNESDAY**

Rich? Set Your Hope on God

(1 Timothy 6:17-19)

**THURSDAY**

Enlarge Your Faith Practices

(Matthew 17:14-20)

**FRIDAY**

Overcome Worry Through Faith

(Luke 12:22-34)

**SATURDAY**

Serve God with Your Whole Heart

(Matthew 6:19-24)

**SUNDAY**

Live Worry-Free Every Day

(Matthew 6:25-34)