

# God's Love for the Lost

Jonah 3:1-10

SS Lesson for 05/21/2017

**Devotional Scripture:** Matt 18:10-14

## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

*Key Verse: Jonah 3:10*

*Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

*Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

PROCLAMATION FOR REPENTANCE (JONAH 3:1-4)

*A second chance (1-2)*

A second chance to do good to people (Gal 6:10)

A second chance to live wisely (Eph 5:15-16)

A second chance to make the most of (Col 4:5)

A second chance to act with wisdom (Ps 90:12)

A second chance to work (John 9:4)

*Plea for urgency (3-4)*

Urgent because the end of all things is near (1 Peter 4:7)

Urgent because Jesus' coming is nearer than we think (Rom 13:11-12)

Urgent because no one knows when Jesus will return (Matt 24:36)

PEOPLE'S RESPONSE (JONAH 3:5-9)

*Repentant belief (5-8)*

Belief overcomes condemnation (Mark 16:16)

Belief because it is the way of salvation (Rom 10:9-10)

Belief because it is commanded (1 John 3:23)

Belief without doubt (Mark 11:22-23)

Belief in the living God (1 Tim 4:10)

*Seeking God's mercy (9)*

God's mercy comes out of His love for us (Eph 2:4)

God promises His mercy when we pray and repent (2 Chron 7:14)

God's mercy keeps Him from putting an end to the wicked (Neh 9:29-31)

God's mercy sometimes causes Him to relent (Ps 106:45)

God's mercy empowers perseverance (James 5:11)

God's mercy makes Christians a people of God (1 Peter 2:10)

GOD'S RELENTING (JONAH 3:10)

*God's sees and has compassion (10)*

God is compassionate because men are helpless and need a shepherd (Matt 9:36)

God is compassionate because man needs healing (Matt 14:14)

God is compassionate because man is weak and hungry (Matt 15:32)

God is compassionate because He is always willing to help (Mark 1:41)

God is compassionate because man needs teaching (Mark 6:34)

God is compassionate because God longs to be man's refuge (Matt 23:37)

*God's compassion moves Him to be forgiving*

Meaning of God repented (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

God is forgiving because of man's repentance (Jer 18:7-8)

God is forgiving because He is gracious (Joel 2:13)

God is forgiving because He hears the prayers of His children (Isa 38:1-6)

God is forgiving because He forgives those who turn to Him (Isa 55:7)

God is forgiving because God grieves over punishing man (Jer 42:10)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

*Jonah's Preaching and Nineveh's Repentance (3:1-9)*

## Introduction

### Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines the promise that **God's Love for the Lost** extends even to the most sinful of people. The **study's aim** is to develop a greater burden for lost people, considering their eternal destiny. The **study's application** is to start praying for and seeking to witness to those who are lost.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

### Key Verse: Jonah 3:10

*Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it*

### Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

**3:1-2.** After turning **Jonah** from willful disobedience **the LORD** again commanded the prophet to fulfill his appointed task (cf. 1:2). Three times Nineveh is described as a **great city** (1:2; 3:2; 4:11; cf. "very large city,"

**3:3.** As noted in the *Introduction* the city was surrounded by an inner wall and an outer wall. The huge inner wall (50 feet wide and 100 feet high) was about eight miles in circumference while the outer wall encompassed fields and smaller towns (viz., Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen; cf. Gen. 10:11-12). The words "great city" probably included the city of Nineveh proper and its administrative environs. His instructions were simply to travel those 550 miles to **Nineveh** and preach **the message** the Lord would provide at the appropriate time (cf. Jonah 3:4). Interestingly in His recommissioning the prophet, God did not repeat the reason for the proclamation (cf. 1:2b).

**3:3.** The prophet's response here differs from his response in chapter 1. Here he **obeyed the... LORD and** made his way northeast **to Nineveh**. Earlier (1:3) he disobeyed the Lord and went west. **Jonah** again mentioned the great size of the **city**, commenting that **it took three days to go all through it**, that is, through Nineveh and its suburbs (see comments under "Authenticity and Historicity" in the *Introduction* and comments on 3:2).

**3:4. Going a day's journey** does not mean that Jonah traveled into the city for a whole day before preaching. Instead it means on the first day he entered the city he began preaching. The message God gave the prophet was the threat of complete destruction of **Nineveh** within **40... days**. Perhaps this was a period of grace, giving the people an opportunity to repent before the judgment fell. Jonah continued this proclamation for three days before going "east of the city" (4:5).

**3:5.** The words of Jonah spread rapidly through every quarter of greater Nineveh. **The Ninevites** accepted Jonah's message and **believed God**. As the prophet preached doom, the people—ironically—changed. Earlier Jonah had repented, and now these Gentiles repented. As outward symbols of inward contrition and humiliation they fasted (cf. 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 1:12; Neh. 1:4; Zech. 7:5) and **put on sackcloth** (coarse cloth; cf. Gen. 37:34; 1 Kings 21:27; Neh. 9:1; Es. 4:1-4; Lam. 2:10; Dan. 9:3; Joel 1:8). People in every social strata, **from the greatest to the least**, hoped that God might turn from His anger and spare them. As previously noted, some scholars find such an extensive turning to God incredible. True, Assyrian records make no mention of this city-wide penitence, but official historical records often delete events, especially those that might embarrass them (e.g., Egyptian records do not refer to the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea or did the Assyrians record the loss of 185,000 soldiers in Jerusalem, 2 Kings 19:35). Another question about the Ninevites is whether their conversion was genuine. Was their religious response superficial as in the case of Ahab? (1 Kings 21:27-29) If the Ninevites' conversion was genuine, it may be difficult to explain why the Assyrians continued their violence and why they soon destroyed Israel (ca. 37 years later, in 722 B.C., the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom). Perhaps the next generation reverted to the Assyrians' typical violence. Also Jonah's message concerned repentance from evil to avoid judgment;

perhaps many believed Jonah's words without becoming genuinely converted. They could have believed the fact of God's threat of judgment without trusting in Yahweh as the *only* true God. C.F. Keil wrote, "But however deep the penitential mourning of Nineveh might be, and however sincere the repentance of the people... they acted according to the king's command; the repentance was not a lasting one, or permanent in its effects" ("Jonah," in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, 10:409). Apparently the Ninevites responded from fear (cf. Jonah 3:8-9) under the power of Jonah's proclamation. Though the people were outwardly contrite (fasting and wearing sackcloth) there may have been no enduring spiritual change. At any rate, the preaching of Jonah occasioned extensive and intensive, if not durative, religious effects.

**3:6.** Word of the religious humiliation of the people **reached the king of Nineveh** (probably Ashur-dan III). Though Nineveh did not become capital of the Assyrian Empire until some time in the reign of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), some of her kings did reside there. Such news of pending, almost immediate doom caused the king to respond in the way his people did (cf. v. 5). Wearing **sackcloth**, a coarse garment, and sitting in **dust** (cf. Isa. 47:1) showed he was contrite and believed the prophet's message.

**3:7-8.** The king's remorse led him **and his nobles** to issue a royal **decree**. The decree instructed the people to fast (this decree may have been the reason for the fast referred to in v. 5), to wear **sackcloth** (cf. comments on v. 5), to **call urgently on God**, and to relinquish **their** wickedness (**evil ways**; cf. v. 10). Even the animals were not allowed to **eat**, and were draped with sackcloth. This practice was not strange in the Near East; it was another sign of the people's remorse.

**3:9. Who knows?** (cf. 2 Sam. 12:22; Joel 2:14) hints at the possibility of God's withdrawing His threat. By their contrition the king hoped that Jonah's **God** would **relent** of His judgment and **turn from His... anger**, thereby sparing the city. (Cf. **we will not perish**, in Jonah 1:6.) This fear of judgment from God is startling because the Assyrians were a cruel, violent nation (cf. Nahum 3:1, 3-4) fearing no one (cf. 2 Kings 18:33-35).

**3:10.** The prophet's message may have included conditions whereby the threats of God could be rescinded. As an evidence of His mercy to the Ninevites God sent Jonah to them, told him what to proclaim to them, and opened the hearts of a vast population. Also, seeing their repentant actions, **God** relented of His threat of **destruction**. He had spared Jonah (chap. 2); now He spared Nineveh. God's mercies are always unmerited; His grace is never earned. Repentance is never a work to be rewarded. But this is not to say that God does not act in response to such repentance. Nineveh's repentance delayed God's destruction of the city for about 150 years. The people evidently fell into sin again, so that later the city was destroyed, in 612 B.C. (see the Book of Nahum). **When God threatened** punishment He provided a dark backdrop on which to etch most vividly His forgiving mercies. This emphasized His grace most forcefully to the sinners' hearts. God's readiness to have **compassion** on a wicked but repentant people and to withhold threatened destruction showed Israel that *her* coming judgment at God's hand was not because of His unwillingness to forgive but because of her impenitence.

#### **Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

Take a good look at Jonah 3:10. This verse comes directly after Jonah had given Nineveh the sobering message that God was going to utterly destroy it. So it seems as if God had changed His mind. Does He do that? Let us remember what transpired previously in Jonah. The prophet was sent to proclaim a message, in its basic thrust much like the prophecy given to a later generation by Nahum (Nah. 2:10-13). God threatened to destroy Nineveh, a wicked city of the bloodthirsty Assyrian Empire. Worse yet, Nineveh was a nation opposed to God. They scorned the Israelites and treated the Creator of the universe with contempt. Assyria had oppressed people and plotted against Him long enough. We read in Jonah 3, however, that God had seemingly changed His mind. After promising disaster upon the Ninevites, He decided not to bring it upon them. Instead, He said that He would turn away His anger. So what is going on here? The answer has everything to do with Nineveh's response to the warning. The Assyrians could have chosen to ignore it. Instead, they showed deep remorse for their sins. Even the king humbled himself. The repentance they expressed was sincere. That is why God relented. The Ninevites were a pagan people, lost in their idolatry. They did not know God as Lord of their lives. However, when the message was given, they received it with willing hearts, which was exactly what God was seeking. God did not wish to visit devastation upon these people. Had He wanted to do that, He would not have given them a warning. He could have just let the disaster go forward. God wanted to give Nineveh every opportunity possible to repent and turn to Him.

That is why God chose to extend grace to them. God's heart is for sinners. It does not matter how hardened the sinner or how deep in sin he is, God still loves that person. His love for those who are lost is such that He takes no pleasure in the perishing of anyone (2 Pet. 3:9). God is always eager to forgive and embrace everyone who is genuinely penitent. Christ said that He had "come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Look now at Jonah's reaction. Being a prophet, you might think he would be rejoicing. After all, the message he had proclaimed had saved a pagan people. However, Jonah wanted disaster for Nineveh, not grace. There are times when we behave this way. We turn away from spreading the gospel and fail to recognize the depth of our Father's love for the lost. We treat the gospel too lightly, taking for granted our salvation and its attendant joy, we let our passion for sharing the good news grow cold and become overshadowed by our own prejudices. How is your flame? Have you been tending it? Does it still burn for those around you who need God's deliverance? Are you reaching out to those lost and hurting around you?

## ***Lesson Introduction and Background***

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Some matters are easy to forgive. But occasionally a news report will tell of a person who forgives a killer who took the life of a family member. Most, however, find it impossible to forgive when a person kidnaps, tortures, or takes the life of a loved one. Even so, there are examples of people who befriend the criminal in prison. Upon release, he or she is invited to share a meal or even live in the same house until a job and permanent housing are obtained. The emotions go from hatred to compassion to forgiveness. Even given the absence of criminal behavior, people find it very difficult to request, offer, and/or receive forgiveness. When someone is offended, months or years may pass with no contact between parties. Eventually, one may extend an olive branch. Communication grows over a period of time, forgiveness is extended and accepted, and the parties eventually interact as if nothing ever happened. To seek forgiveness requires maturity. So does offering it. Think about that from God's perspective as you imagine yourself sitting on a hillside overlooking a modern city at dusk. The sun goes down and lights appear. The city bustles in the darkness as hundreds or thousands engage in sin. When the accumulated impact of thousands of sinful acts is considered, you may wonder why God does not act to rid the world of all sin! But God has acted: he sent his Son to redeem humanity from sin. This act is described in these well-known words: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God wants to forgive, and he does. But on a day known only to God, it will be too late either to seek or accept forgiveness because it will no longer be offered (see Acts 17:30, 31). The residents of Nineveh knew their time would be up in 40 days, and they repented. Since we do not know when Jesus will return, repentance is all the more imperative!

The city of Nineveh is the place for the events considered in today's lesson. This city is first mentioned in the Bible when a descendant of Noah's son Ham built it (Genesis 10:11). It was a major city in the Assyrian Empire and became its capital about 700 BC. This is often misunderstood, for many think it was the capital in Jonah's day, but it was not. Jonah's time period was more than 50 years prior to the city's becoming the capital. King Sennacherib was the Assyrian ruler who selected Nineveh as his capital. He is the one who greatly enlarged it and built a very large palace. He is also the one who lost 185,000 troops in a single night (see 2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36). The city was sited on the eastern side of the Tigris River; its ruins are across the river from the modern city of Mosul in Iraq. Major cities often seem to be cesspools of sin. This was certainly true of Nineveh. The reason given for Jonah's mission to Nineveh was that the wickedness of the city had got God's attention (Jonah 1:2). Sin and wickedness often produce feelings of guilt. When a city experiences a tragedy, conscientious people may wonder whether their sin is the cause. The nation of Assyria was in a period of temporary decline during Jonah's day. Provincial leaders acted as kings in their respective regions. This is normal in and of itself, but there were conflicts among them. These were exacerbated by famines. The area also experienced devastating plagues in 765 and 759 BC. The ancients considered eclipses to be bad omens, and a solar eclipse occurred on June 15, 763 BC, visible over much of Assyria. Jonah's message of impending doom may have had a greater impact because of some or all of these astronomical, economic, and political events.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Proclamation for Repentance (Jonah 3:1-4)**

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,

2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.

4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

### **A second chance (1-2)**

*A second chance to do good to people (Gal 6:10)*

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

*A second chance to live wisely (Eph 5:15-16)*

15 Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

*A second chance to make the most of (Col 4:5)*

5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

*A second chance to act with wisdom (Ps 90:12)*

12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

*A second chance to work (John 9:4)*

4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

### **Plea for urgency (3-4)**

*Urgent because the end of all things is near (1 Peter 4:7)*

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

*Urgent because Jesus' coming is nearer than we think (Rom 13:11-12)*

11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

*Urgent because no one knows when Jesus will return (Matt 24:36)*

36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

## **People's Response (Jonah 3:5-9)**

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

## **Repentant belief (5-8)**

*Belief overcomes condemnation (Mark 16:16)*

16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

*Belief because it is the way of salvation (Rom 10:9-10)*

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

*Belief because it is commanded (1 John 3:23)*

23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

*Belief without doubt (Mark 11:22-23)*

22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.

*Belief in the living God (1 Tim 4:10)*

10 (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

## **Seeking God's mercy (9)**

*God's mercy comes out of His love for us (Eph 2:4)*

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

*God promises His mercy when we pray and repent (2 Chron 7:14)*

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

*God's mercy keeps Him from putting an end to the wicked (Neh 9:29-31)*

29 "You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. 30 For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples. 31 But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

*God's mercy sometimes causes Him to relent (Ps 106:45)*

45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.

*God's mercy empowers perseverance (James 5:11)*

11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

*God's mercy makes Christians a people of God (1 Peter 2:10)*

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **God's Relenting (Jonah 3:10)**

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

### **God's sees and has compassion (10)**

*God is compassionate because men are helpless and need a shepherd (Matt 9:36)*

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

*God is compassionate because man needs healing (Matt 14:14)*

14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

*God is compassionate because man is weak and hungry (Matt 15:32)*

32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

*God is compassionate because He is always willing to help (Mark 1:41)*

41 Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

*God is compassionate because man needs teaching (Mark 6:34)*

34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

*God is compassionate because God longs to be man's refuge (Matt 23:37)*

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

### **God's compassion moves Him to be forgiving**

*Meaning of God repented (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

As a result of the people's repentance, God had compassion on them. When the *King James Version* says that God "repented of the evil" that He had promised to bring upon Nineveh, it does not mean that God had committed a sin of which He needed to repent. "Repented" in this case simply means "changed." Because the people "turned from their evil," God withheld His hand of judgment. It is still true that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (Ezekiel 18:32). He is not willing that anyone should perish, but wants all to repent (2 Peter 3:9)

*God is forgiving because of man's repentance (Jer 18:7-8)*

7 If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, 8 and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.

*God is forgiving because He is gracious (Joel 2:13)*

13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

*God is forgiving because He hears the prayers of His children (Isa 38:1-6)*

38:1 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." 2 Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: 5 "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.

*God is forgiving because He forgives those who turn to Him (Isa 55:7)*

7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

*God is forgiving because God grieves over punishing man (Jer 42:10)*

10 If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you, for I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you.

## **Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

### ***Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh***

#### **Jonah's Preaching and Nineveh's Repentance (3:1-9)**

For the second time, the "word of the Lord" came to Jonah: "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you" (vs. 2). It is not a new command that Jonah is given, but almost a repetition of the command given to him in chapter 1. This time Jonah obeyed, not joyfully or with a proper attitude, as we shall soon see, but at least Jonah went to Nineveh.

The population of the city of Nineveh, perhaps including its "suburbs," was exceedingly large (cf. 1:2; 3:2; 4:11). We also know that the city was great in size. The city was described as being a "three days' walk" (3:3). Secular history has a great deal more background information concerning this city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

Jonah's message was simple, to the point, and frightening: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (3:4).

Just like the seamen of chapter 1, the people of Nineveh took these words of imminent divine judgment seriously. We are told, "They believed in God" (3:5), which focuses on the faith of these Gentiles in the God of Israel, and not just their fear of judgment. It suggests to me that there was a real revival resulting from Jonah's proclamation. This revival seems to have begun from "the bottom up," rather than being imposed from "the top down." The people, we are told, believed in God. They called a fast and put on sackcloth (3:5). The response was unanimous, from the lower to the upper classes.

By the time word reached the king, the city's repentance was already well under way, but because the king also believed Jonah's warning, he made every effort to assure total compliance to the city-wide repentance. He began by personally repenting (3:6). The king then made a proclamation which required all of Nineveh to fast, and to abstain from drinking water (3:7). Both men and animals were to be covered with sackcloth, and all the people were to call upon God and to abstain from their wicked ways and their violence (3:8).

It is particularly interesting to note that there was apparently no need for the people to be told what their wicked ways were. Of course, Jonah could have filled in the details for the people, but it seems as though no one needed any such clarification. The issue, then, was not one of having inadequate knowledge of what God

considered sin, but lacking the desire to abstain from it. The issue was not that of **information**, but that of **motivation**. I have the distinct impression that if our nation received word of God's impending judgment, we would have little difficulty determining what it is we are doing which is offensive to God, which is, in short, sin.

If the Ninevites had but 40 days left, why would they cease sinning? One would think that they might be inclined to act in accordance with the expression, "Eat, drink, and make merry, for tomorrow (or 40 days) we may die." Nineveh's motivation for putting off the wickedness of the city is described in verse 9: "Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?" (3:9).

Some people find it very troubling that God would "relent," that is, change His mind, regarding the destruction of Nineveh. Let me simply point out that Jonah expected God to do so (4:2), and the Ninevites at least hoped He would do so (3:9). If God intended to destroy Nineveh, why would He announce to them that He was going to do so? The proclamation against Nineveh which God instructed Jonah to deliver was not simply a promise of things to come, but a warning. The Ninevites were absolutely correct in understanding Jonah's words as they did, as the occasion for repentance. This is entirely in keeping with what God has said in the book of Jeremiah:

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it, **if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.** Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it, if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it. So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds"' (Jeremiah 18:5-11, emphasis mine).

God's promises of blessing are contingent upon man's obedience, and God's judgment may be averted by repentance. The Ninevites hoped for and Jonah expected God's "relenting," based on the principle expressed above.

#### *Jonah's Anger With God*

Had Jonah been any other prophet in the history of Israel, he would have been overjoyed with the results of his ministry, the repentance of the great city of Nineveh. Throughout Israel's history, her prophets had failed to turn the nation to God, and were rejected and even killed by the people. As Stephen put the matter, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" (Acts 7:52a).

In spite of joy at the repentance and salvation of so many, something for which his colleagues would have been overjoyed, Jonah was angry with God: "But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry" (4:1). Why would Jonah have been so angry with God? Jonah is not hesitant to explain, and so he prays this prayer of protest:

"Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life" (Jon. 4:2-3).

Jonah's anger is incredible. Let us take note of what his anger was all about.

**(1) Jonah was angry with God.** In the final analysis Jonah was not angry with himself, or with men, but with the holy, righteous, perfect God. Jonah's anger was so intense that he would rather die than live. Having prayed in chapter two that he might live, Jonah prays now that he might die (4:3).

**(2) Jonah was angry with God because He acted consistently with His character, and for doing exactly what Jonah expected Him to do.**

**(3) Jonah was angry with God, protesting those very attributes of God for which the psalmists praised Him.** The psalmists of the book of Psalms praise Him for His lovingkindness, His grace, and His mercy (cf. Ps. 86:5, 15), but for Jonah this is grounds for protest rather than praise.

**(4) Jonah was angry with God because He showed grace toward the Ninevites.** God's question to Jonah should have served to instruct this prodigal prophet. It should have called Jonah's attention to the utter sinfulness of being angry with God in the first place. Who can sustain a holy anger against a holy and perfect God? Furthermore, the gentleness of God's rebuke should have reminded Jonah that He was not only gracious to the Ninevites, but also to Jonah. Indeed, more so, for while the Ninevites had repented, Jonah had not. Jonah persisted in his rebellion.

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/3-nineveh-s-repentance-and-jonah-s-wrath-jonah-3-4>)*

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

Fred had just become a Christian, and he was fully aware of God's forgiving love. Fred had a great memory, and he could recall things he had done that were wrong. His conscience would not let him brush them aside. With thoughts of restitution, Fred decided to visit an acquaintance in the same town. After being invited in, Fred took some currency from his billfold, pushed it toward the other man, and said, "I owe you this." The offer was resisted with the protest, "Freddie, you don't owe me anything." Fred then confessed to a time he had stolen a pig and sold it when he was running low on cash. He was sure that there were so many pigs in the herd that one would not be missed. He was right; it was not. Even so, Fred insisted on restitution, and the money was accepted. Fred also asked for forgiveness for taking advantage of a friend. The forgiveness was granted, and the forgiveness in love strengthened a friendship in Christ. Repentance is demonstrated in its fruits. This was just as true of the ancient Ninevites as it was for Fred. Where's your fruit?

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary***

1. Because God is gracious, our past does not disqualify us from serving Him in the future (Jonah 3:1)
2. Obey God, do not compromise His message under pressure, and trust His power to protect you from all enemies (vss. 2-4)
3. Speak the gospel plainly and simply, trusting God to move men's hearts (vs. 5)
4. God's Word is for everyone (vs. 6)
5. Our compassionate God desires that every sinner repent and turn to Him (vss. 7-9)
6. Share the gospel freely, knowing that God responds in love to any heart turned toward Him (vs. 10)