

# JONAH

## *Extending Our Reach*

Lesson 3:

Before Jonah took the first step toward the great city, God was at work. “*Not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:10), God was preparing the Ninevites’ unbelieving hearts to receive His message.

When Jonah cried out against them, they cried out *more* mightily to the One who promised disaster if they refused to turn from their evil ways. It was an unprecedented reaction—unexpected and unexplainable to the one who prophesized their undoing.

Who knows God’s thoughts and His ways (Isaiah 55:8-9)? Who alone knows the hearts of all the sons of men (1 Kings 8:39)? “*Who [knows] if God will turn and relent?*” (Jonah 3:9). No one. Our job, like Jonah’s, is simply to go at God’s bidding, speak the message He gives, and leave the consequences to Him.

*Read Jonah 3:1-4.*

1. How is Jonah’s experience a testimony to those who have run away from God and fallen into sin?
2. It is thought by some that Jonah returned home before “*the word of the Lord came to [him a] second time*” (v.1). If this is so, how might he have felt upon his return? As he waited?
3. Jonah has been deemed The Prodigal Prophet.<sup>1</sup> How is Jonah like the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24?
4. How did the Father in both accounts treat their sin? Did Jonah’s actions disqualify him from ministry? Was the prodigal no longer a son? Why is this concept imperative to one’s understanding of God?

5. Return to the book of Jonah. In verses 2 and 3, what evidences are found that support that Jonah sincerely repented? Why might these things have been difficult for Jonah?
  
6. How is Nineveh described in verse 4?

The city of Nineveh was founded by Noah's great-grandson, Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10). Situated in what is now northern Iraq, Nineveh is represented by two mounds—Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus. Based on modern excavations it is believed that the book's description of the great city included its suburbs: a circumference of approximately 60-80 miles. Its population would have been in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>ii iii</sup>

7. What was the content of Jonah's message? (v.4)
  
8. If you were to share the Gospel what would you say? (Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.)

Are sin and judgment an important part of that message? Explain.

9. How might the hearers respond to such an idea? Consider Acts 2:37-41, 7:54, 57-58, and 17:30-34.

*Keep reading: Jonah 3:5-10.*

10. How did the people respond to Jonah's cry? Do you think he was surprised?

11. Can you predetermine how an individual will respond to the Gospel? Does this prevent you from sharing the Good News?

12. What remains hidden to your eyes? Read 1 Corinthians 2:11.

13. Jonah was thought to have preached to the Ninevites in 759 B.C. Not long before his arrival, two plagues erupted (765 and 759 B.C.) amid internal revolts (763-759, 746 B.C.). Famines followed. In addition, a total eclipse occurred on June 15, 763 B.C. These signs were believed to be indicators of impending divine wrath.<sup>iv</sup> <sup>v</sup> Clearly, God was at work before Jonah arrived.

How can/does God use such events to prepare the hearts of the hearers?

How will He use such events in the latter days? (Consider Matthew 24:3-14, 29-35.)

14. Return to Jonah. How did the Ninevites demonstrate that they believed God's message? (v.5)

15. What was the purpose of covering oneself in sackcloth and ashes?

Sackcloth was a rough cloth made of animal hair, usually that of a goat or camel. Worn as a garment, its construction *did not allow* one to be in a state of physical or mental comfort. “Very simply, sackcloth and ashes were used as an outward sign of one’s inward condition. Such a symbol made one’s change of heart visible and demonstrated the sincerity of one’s grief and/or repentance. It was not the act of putting on sackcloth and ashes itself that moved God to intervene, but the humility that such an action demonstrated.”<sup>vi</sup>

16. Would one’s class, or appointment in life or work have spared him from the coming destruction? How does mankind convince himself otherwise?

17. How did the king react to the news of impending judgment? (vv.6-9)

18. According to verse 9, did the Ninevites know what was wrong in their lives when they were called to turn from their ways? Does every man? (Think on Romans 1:18-21.)

19. Commentators are divided about whether the Ninevites truly repented because eventually they returned to their violence and later destroyed the Northern Kingdom (ca. 37 years later, in 722 B.C.; a generation later<sup>vii</sup>).

Based on your understanding, what is the difference between true and false repentance? Contrast the individuals in Psalm 51:1-17 and 32:1-5 with Judges 2:11-19 and Hebrews 12:16-17.

What are the fruits of repentance according to 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 and 1 John 1:8-9?

20. Which of these characteristics did the Ninevites exhibit?

21. Per Jonah 3:10, why did God relent from destroying the Ninevites? Review Ezekiel 18:21-23; also read Jeremiah 18:7-10.

The Ninevites' reform clearly satisfied God's requisites for mercy. Warren Wiersbe adds, "The fact that Jesus used the Ninevites to shame the unbelieving Jews of His day is further evidence that their response to Jonah's ministry was sincere" (Matthew 12:38-40).<sup>viii</sup>

22. Was the Ninevites' response to God's message Jonah's responsibility? What then is our duty?

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<sup>i</sup> Keller, Tim.

<sup>ii</sup> If Jonah 4:11 is a reference to innocent children, it is believed that the population of greater Nineveh was around 600,000.

<sup>iii</sup> 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. (Hannah, J. D. (1985). Jonah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Vol. 1, p. 1468). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.)

<sup>iv</sup> Hannah, J. D. (1985). *Jonah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pg. 1462). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>v</sup> en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fast\_of\_Nineveh

<sup>vi</sup> (<https://www.gotquestions.org/sackcloth-and-ashes.html>)

<sup>vii</sup> Hannah, J. D. (pg. 1469).

<sup>viii</sup> Wiersbe, Warren. (2002). *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament: The Prophets*. (pg.385). Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications.