

CALVARY CHAPEL OF PHILADELPHIA

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY
KINDERGARTEN
TEACHER'S PACKET

SUNDAY MORNING

Study 50

Jonah



Jonah

The Objective is the key concept for this week's lesson. It should be the main focus of the study.

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verses support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the "reward box" found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

Objective This lesson will teach the kids about God's mercy using the story of Jonah.

Key Verses

Jonah 1-3—Main Teaching Passage
Lamentations 3:22-23

Memory Verse - Psalm 36:5 (August Memory Verse)

"Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens;
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds."

Hook

Have a student come to the front and tell them you are going to play a game. They will name a place in the room, and you have to go there. However, wherever they tell you to go, go in the opposite direction. Ask them if they think you did a good job of obeying.

What you just did is something that will be imitated by one of the characters in today's story. God is going to tell them to go somewhere, but this person will go as far away from that place as possible.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

The book of Jonah begins with the Lord sending the prophet Jonah to Nineveh to warn them that He would destroy the city. Nineveh was a wicked city, filled with men who hated Israel and their God, and so Jonah didn't want to go. Instead of obeying the Lord, he rode a boat sailing as far away from Nineveh as possible. The Lord was displeased with this, so He sent a storm. The boat's sailors tried hard to rescue their ship, but nothing was working. Finally, they discovered that Jonah was the reason for the storm. Jonah admitted that he had disobeyed God and told them that the only way to save themselves was to throw him into the sea. At first the sailors tried to keep rowing, but when that didn't work, they eventually gave up and threw Jonah into the water, praying to the Lord for forgiveness. The storm stopped, and the sailors believed in God.

But that wasn't the end of Jonah's story. God sent a giant fish to swallow Jonah and keep him from dying. Jonah was in the fish's belly for three days and three nights. While he was there, he prayed to God, and the Lord had mercy on Jonah. The fish spit him up onto dry ground. Then Jonah went to Nineveh and preached to the city. When the people of Nineveh heard that God was going to destroy the city, they repented and turned to Him. The King of Nineveh himself told the whole city to ask the Lord for forgiveness, even ordering the people not to eat any food. Because of this, God showed mercy and did not destroy the city.

LOOK

In today's story, we meet one of the most wicked cities in all the Bible, Nineveh. Nineveh was so sinful and disobedient to the Lord that God said He would destroy the whole city. But that's not all. We saw that Jonah really disobeyed the Lord too. God specifically told him to do something, and not only did He disobey, but he tried to run away from God. Even when the storm came and the sailors asked him what to do, he didn't tell them to turn the ship around and go to Nineveh. He asked to be thrown into the sea. Certainly, the people of Nineveh deserved to be destroyed, and Jonah deserved to be in that storm and be thrown into the sea. But then they both got something they didn't deserve: God's mercy.

The reason the Lord sent the great fish to save Jonah wasn't that Jonah was such a good person. Jonah didn't repent until after he was in trouble. He also didn't save Nineveh because He needed Jonah. He could have sent another prophet. The same way, God didn't spare Nineveh because he was impressed by their prayers and fasting. They had done terrible things and deserved to be punished. The Lord spared both of them to teach them (and by extension, us today) about His mercy.

Mercy is when you don't give someone the punishment they deserve. When you disobey your parent or teacher and they just give you

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

LOOK (Continued)

a warning rather than a time-out, that's mercy. Jonah and the people of Nineveh deserved to be punished for their sins, but rather than letting Jonah die and Nineveh be destroyed, God showed them mercy.

Lamentation 3:22-23 says that it is because of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed (destroyed). This was true of Jonah and the people of Nineveh, but it's also true of us. All of us have disobeyed God in one way or another. If you've every lied, taken something that wasn't yours, said an unkind word, or disobeyed your parents, the Bible says that you have sinned, and there is a punishment for sin: being separated from God forever. But just as God showed mercy to Jonah, He didn't want to be separated from us, and so He sent Jesus to die on the cross and rise again to save us from our sins. He didn't do that because we deserve it, but because He is full of mercy and loves us. Do you want to receive God's mercy? All you have to do is ask Him to forgive your sins and be your Lord (King) and Savior. When you do that, you can receive God's mercy and will get to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

TOOK

Review with the class what mercy is. Give the students a chance to receive God's mercy and make Jesus their Lord and Savior.

Pray: Thank God for His mercy. Ask for His help to be obedient to His Word, not disobedient like Jonah.

Parent Question: What does mercy mean?

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Jonah 1 & 3 by David Guzik

JONAH RUNS FROM GOD

A. Jonah's attempted escape.

1. ([Jonah 1:1-2](#)) God's call to Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

a. **The word of the LORD came to Jonah:** God spoke to Jonah in His own unique and powerful way and He told Jonah to do two things. First, **go to Nineveh**; second, **cry out against it** — that is, to rebuke them for their sin and call them to repentance.

b. **Go to Nineveh:** The city of **Nineveh** was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and was a large and prominent city in its day. It was not a city of Israel at all; God called Jonah to go to a pagan, Gentile city and call *them* to repentance.

i. Ancient historians say that Nineveh was the largest city in the world at that time. It was the large, important capital of a dominating empire — surely an intimidating place to go.

c. **For their wickedness has come up before Me:** God wanted Jonah to go because He saw their **wickedness**. None of man's wickedness is hidden before God. He sees it all, and it may come to a point where it demands the specific warning and judgment of God.

2. ([Jonah 1:3](#)) Jonah's attempt to flee from God's call.

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

a. **But Jonah arose to flee:** Jonah was a reluctant prophet. He didn't want to do what God told him to do. Several reasons for this have been suggested.

i. It may have been because he was given a *difficult job to do*. [Nahum 3:1-4](#) gives us a good idea of how wicked the people of Nineveh were. Jonah had every reason to expect that at the very best, he would be mocked and treated as a fool. He might be attacked and killed if he did what the LORD told him to do.

ii. It was also because Jonah didn't *want* the Assyrians in Nineveh to escape God's judgment. Imagine a Jewish man in New York during World War II hearing God say, "I'm going to bring terrible judgment on Germany. I want you to go to Berlin and tell Nazi Germany to repent." Instead of doing it, the man heads for San Francisco and then hops on a boat for Hong Kong.

iii. We may speculate on why Jonah did not want to do what God told him to do, but it is even better to think about why we don't do what God tells *us* to do. God told Jonah to *go* and preach; every Christian has the same command in [Matthew 28:19-20](#). With Jonah's example before us, we have *even less reason than Jonah* for our disobedience.

b. **To flee to Tarshish:** The distant city of **Tarshish** was thought to be towards the end of the earth, and is always associated with ships in the Bible. Jonah wanted to go as far as he could to escape God's presence, but this was a futile attempt.

i. Nineveh was to the east of Israel and **Tarshish** was about as far as you could go west, on the coast of what is today Spain, past the straits of Gibraltar. In heading for **Tarshish**, Jonah intended to get as far away from Nineveh and the calling of God to go there as he possibly could.

c. **Found a ship going to Tarshish:** We don't doubt that Jonah *felt* like going **to Tarshish**. There was an impulse within him driving him there, but it was a dangerous impulse. We may take Jonah as an example of the danger of doing things solely under impulse or feelings.

i. "Now, I very commonly meet with persons who say, 'I felt that I must do so and so. It came upon me that I must do so and so.' I am afraid of these impulses - very greatly afraid of them. People may do right under their power, but they will spoil what they do by doing it out of mere impulse, and not because the action was right in itself." (Spurgeon)

- An impulse may be very brave, yet wrong (Jonah was very brave in embarking on such a long sea-journey).
- An impulse may appear to be self-denying, yet wrong (it cost Jonah much in money and comfort to go on this long sea-journey).
- An impulse may lay claim to freedom, yet be wrong (wasn't Jonah free to go to Tarshish?).
- An impulse may lead someone to do something that they would condemn in others (what would Jonah say to another prophet disobeying God?).
- An impulse can make us do to God or others what we would never want to be done to our self.

ii. Many people take their inner impulses and say, "The LORD told me this or that." This is dangerous even when it doesn't seem so immediately. "What have you to do with the devices and desires of your own hearts? Are these to be a law to you? I pray you, be not among the foolish ones who will be carried about with every wind of fancy and perversity. 'To the law and to the testimony,' should be your cry, and you may not appeal to inward movements and impulses" (Spurgeon).

d. **So he paid the fare:** It seemed *easy* enough. Perhaps even Jonah felt that the LORD provided the money for **the fare**! This shows the danger of being guided by *circumstances*.

i. "Providence or no providence, the Word of the Lord is to be our guide, and we must not depart from it under pretext of necessity or circumstances. *It is very easy to make up a providence when you want to do so.* If you sit down and try to find in the ways of God to you an excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart together will soon conjure up a plea for providence." (Spurgeon)

ii. Nevertheless, when you run away from the LORD, you never get to where you are going and you always pay your own fare. When you go the LORD's way, you not only get to where you are going, but He provides the fare.

e. **From the presence of the LORD:** Jonah should have read [Psalm 139:7-10](#): *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.* You can't escape the presence of God.

i. "All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were." (Spurgeon)

B. God prevents Jonah's escape.

1. [\(Jonah 1:4\)](#) God sends a storm.

But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

a. **The LORD sent out a great wind:** It was the LORD who stirred up the storm. We often think of Jesus calm-

ing the waters, and He can do that. But God can also stir up the storm.

b. **So that the ship was about to be broken up:** The ship and the sailors were in a dangerous place. This was all due to Jonah being on the ship. There was nothing wrong with the sailors being on the ship, but Jonah had no business there — though on other circumstances it might have been fine for him to go to Tarshish.

i. Jonah might have wondered: “I can go to Tarshish if I want to. I paid the fare. I’m not a stowaway.” Yet, “Apologies for disobedience are mere refuges of lies. If you do a wrong thing in the rightest way in which it can be done, it does not make it right. If you go contrary to the Lord’s will, even though you do it in the most decent, and, perhaps, in the most devout manner, it is, nevertheless, sinful, and it will bring you under condemnation” (Spurgeon).

2. ([Jonah 1:5-6](#)) The sailors of the ship seek their superstitious gods.

Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

a. **Every man cried out to his god:** When in trouble, man does his best to fix the problem. In this case, they threw the cargo overboard. When that isn’t enough, man also instinctively turns to **his god**. If we don’t know the true God — the God of the Bible — *before* we are in trouble, we may sincerely turn to a false and imaginary god, one of our own making.

i. Many people assume that they can put off doing their business with God until they choose a “better” time to do it. Nevertheless, it is presumptuous to think that in the moment of crisis we will be able to call upon the true God if we have not dealt with Him before.

b. **Was fast asleep:** While the storm raged, Jonah slept. Perhaps because the storm *outside* seemed insignificant to him in comparison to the storm *inside*, the storm that came from his resistance against God.

i. What a curious and tragic scene! All the sailors were religious men, devout in their prayers to their gods. Yet their gods were really *nothing*, and could do *nothing*. There was one man on board who had a relationship with the true God, who knew His Word, and who worshipped Him — *yet he was asleep!*

ii. “Jonah was asleep amid all that confusion and noise; and, O Christian man, for you to be indifferent to all that is going on in such a world as this, for you to be negligent of God’s work in such a time as this is just as strange. The devil alone is making noise enough to wake all the Jonahs if they only want to awake... All around us there is tumult and storm, yet some professing Christians are able, like Jonah, to go to sleep in the sides of the ship.” (Spurgeon)

iii. The nature of Jonah’s sleep is also instructive, and too much like the sleep of the careless Christian:

- Jonah slept in a place where he hoped no one would see him or disturb him. “Sleeping Christians” like to “hide out” among the church.

- Jonah slept in a place where he could not help with the work that needed to be done. “Sleeping Christians” stay away from the work of the Lord.

- Jonah slept while there was a prayer meeting up on the deck. “Sleeping Christians” don’t like prayer meetings!

- Jonah slept and had no idea of the problems around him. “Sleeping Christians” don’t know what is really going on.

- Jonah slept when he was in great danger. “Sleeping Christians” are in danger, but don’t know it.

- Jonah slept while the heathen needed him. “Sleeping Christians” snooze on while the world needs their message and testimony.

iv. Some sleeping Christians protest that they are not asleep at all.

- “We talk about Jesus” — but you can *talk* in your sleep.
- “We have a walk for Jesus” — but you can *walk* in your sleep.
- “We have passion for Jesus — I just wept in worship the other day” - but you can *cry* in your sleep.
- “We have joy and rejoice in Jesus” — but you can *laugh* in your sleep.
- “We think about Jesus all the time” — but you can *think* while you are asleep; we call it *dreaming*.

v. Charles Spurgeon described how the believer might know that he is *not* asleep. “What do you mean by a man’s being really awake? I mean two or three things. I mean, first, his having a thorough consciousness of the reality of spiritual things. When I speak of a wakeful man, I mean one who does not take the soul to be a fancy, nor heaven to be a fiction, nor hell to be a tale, but who acts among the sons of men as though these were the only substances, and all other things the shadows. I want men of stern resolution, for no Christian is awake unless he steadfastly determines to serve his God, come fair, come foul.”

c. **What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God:** The captain knew that his crew cried to their gods, but it did nothing. Perhaps Jonah’s God could do something in the crisis.

i. It must have seemed ironic to Jonah that the sailors demanded that he call on his God. His only reason for being on that ship was to *escape* his God.

3. ([Jonah 1:7-8](#)) The sailors discover that Jonah is the source of the trouble.

And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”

a. **That we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us:** It is hard to know what motivated the sailors to think that the storm was sent because one of them had wronged their God. Perhaps it was because of some spiritual insight, and they sensed a *spiritual* power in the storm. Or, perhaps it was just an accidentally correct superstition.

b. **The lot fell on Jonah:** Once the lot fell on Jonah, the sailors wanted to know as much as they could from Jonah, so they could solve the problem and save their lives.

c. **What is your occupation:** [2 Kings 14:25](#) says that Jonah was a recognized prophet. When he was asked, “**What is your occupation?**” and he answered, “prophet” then the sailors must have been even more terrified.

4. ([Jonah 1:9-10](#)) Jonah tells them about who he is and what he has done.

So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, “Why have you done this?” For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

a. **The God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land:** Jonah knew the truth about God, even though his claim to **fear the LORD** was only partly true because he was running from the LORD.

i. Even a believer who is in a state of rebellion can give glory to God if he will only tell the truth about God. Although, it is tragic that Jonah’s *life* contradicted his knowledge of God.

ii. However, at the moment when Jonah said, “**I fear the LORD,**” he may have already repented of running away, turning back to God because of the present circumstances.

c. **Why have you done this?** Even an unbeliever who knows *some* truth about God can rightly rebuke a Christian who is resisting God. “**Why have you done this?**” is the most logical question in the world, even for an

unbeliever to ask a believer.

5. ([Jonah 1:11-16](#)) Jonah, at his own request, asks to be thrown into the sea, and the sailors reluctantly agree.

Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?” — for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest *is* because of me.” Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, “We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.” So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

a. **What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?** The more the sailors hear, the worse the situation gets - **the sea was growing *more* tempestuous.**

b. **Pick me up and throw me into the sea:** Jonah was willing to sacrifice his life to save everyone else on the ship. We may consider what his motive might have been.

- Perhaps it was compassion for the sailors.
- Perhaps it was a desire to be forced into complete dependence upon God alone. After all, There is no safer place than casting yourself totally upon God.
- Perhaps it was a feeling that *anything* was better than his continual resistance against and running from God.
- Perhaps because he had already truly repented. If this is the case, it illustrates that repentance is not only a matter of heart and mind, but also a matter of *action*.

i. In all this, Jonah is a wonderful picture of the Messiah that would come after him, Jesus Christ. Jesus threw Himself into the fury of God’s storm to rescue those far from God. However, here are many differences between Jonah and Jesus, and one of the greatest was that Jonah was disobedient and guilty, and Jesus was completely obedient and innocent.

c. **Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land:** The sailors did not want to throw Jonah into the sea, because they believed his God was for real and they feared the consequences of throwing a prophet, even a disobedient prophet into the sea. Still, when all hope seemed to be lost they took precautions (“**We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood**”) and threw Jonah into the sea.

d. **The sea ceased from its raging:** The immediate end of the storm proved that Jonah’s God was for real, and that Jonah’s resistance to that God was the real problem. In a logical response the sailors **feared the LORD exceedingly**, sacrificed to God and made promises to serve Him.

i. The sailors moved from fearing the storm to fearing the LORD, just the disciples in the boat did when Jesus calmed the storm ([Mark 4:35-41](#)).

ii. “Brethren, I wish I had meet words with which I could fitly describe the peace which comes to a human heart when we learn to see Jesus cast into the sea of divine wrath on our account. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment now decides for the sinner instead of against him. Memory can look back upon past sins, with sorrow for the sin it is true, but yet with no dread of any penalty to come. It is a blessed thing for a man to know that he cannot be punished, that heaven and earth may shake, but he cannot be punished for his sin.” (Spurgeon)

e. **And took vows:** Notice that the vows of the sailors came *after* they were delivered. Based on this, many commentators believe that the sailors came to a true faith in God.

i. Spurgeon preached a sermon with four wonderful points based on the actions of the crew in this chapter.

- Sinners, when they are tossed upon the sea of conviction, make desperate efforts to save themselves.
- The fleshly efforts of awakened sinners must inevitably fail.
- The soul's sorrow will continue to increase as long as it relies on its own efforts.

The way of safety for sinners is to be found in the sacrifice of another on their behalf.

JONAH 3

JONAH PREACHES REPENTANCE IN NINEVEH, THE CITY REPENTS

A. Jonah's ministry in Nineveh.

1. [\(Jonah 3:1-2\)](#) The second call to Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

a. **Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time:** This shows the amazing love of God to His wayward people. Though Jonah did everything he could to resist the first call of God, after Jonah repented God called him again — though God was under no obligation to do it. He did it out of mercy and grace.

i. "By paralleling here the book's opening remarks, almost word for word, the author skillfully conveys the idea that Jonah is being offered a new beginning." (Alexander)

ii. "How many of us who have been called to deliver the word of Jehovah, would still be doing it, if it were not for this patient and perfecting grace of God? Surely not many! How have we failed Him, and broken down in our ministry; and often not on ground so high as that of Jonah's failure." (Morgan)

iii. God was determined to do the work through Jonah, so He did not give up on the reluctant prophet. God is often just this committed to doing His work through a man. "Suppose that the problem had been given to us to solve - how shall this city be moved to repentance? How shall its vice be forsaken and the God of Israel worshipped by all its inhabitants from the highest to the lowest? If we had not been paralyzed with despair, which is the most probable, we should, nevertheless, have sat down carefully to consider our plans. We should have parcelled it out into missionary districts; we should have needed at least several hundreds, if not thousands, of able ministers; at once, expenses would have to be incurred, and we should have considered ourselves bound to contemplate the erection of innumerable structures in which the Word of God might be preached. Our machinery would necessarily become cumbrous; we should find that we, unless we had the full resources of an empire, could not even begin the work. But what saith the Lord concerning this? Putting aside the judgments of reason, and all the plans and schemes which flesh and blood so naturally do follow, he raises up one man. By a singular providence he qualifies that one man for his mission." (Spurgeon)

b. **Preach to it the message that I tell you:** Instead of telling Jonah to *cry out against* Nineveh, this time God simply tells Jonah to go there and wait for further instructions. God often works this way, and our flesh often finds it irritating that He does.

i. The story of Jonah demonstrates *why* God so often leads us one step at a time without telling us more. When God told Jonah what he would say in Nineveh, Jonah rejected the call. God often only tells us what we can handle at the time.

2. [\(Jonah 3:3-4\)](#) Jonah preaches in Nineveh.

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*. 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. **Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD:** Having learned the lesson that

resisting the will of God is both futile and counter-productive, Jonah now obeys the call and goes to Nineveh.

b. **Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent:** The idea behind this statement probably refers to how long it would take to walk around the city of “Greater Nineveh” — the metropolitan area around the city.

c. **Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!** Jonah emphasized to the people of Nineveh what would happen if they did not repent — the city would be **overthrown** in judgment. Undoubtedly, this was not Jonah’s *whole* message to the people of Nineveh; but clearly it was his emphasis.

i. “**Overthrown**” is a word applied to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah ([Genesis 19:25](#), [Lamentations 4:6](#), and [Amos 4:11](#)).

ii. We see that Jonah preached this message with earnestness. “And such earnestness becomes a ministry that has to do with immortal souls, asleep and dead in sin, hanging on the brink of perdition, and insensible of their state. The soft-speaking, gentle-intoned, unmoved preacher, is never likely to awaken souls ... But this earnestness is widely different from that noisy, blustering, screaming rant, that manifests more of the turbulence of disorderly passions, than of the real inspired influence of the Spirit of God” (Clarke).

B. The response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah’s message.

1. ([Jonah 3:5-9](#)) The response of the people: repentance.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 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. 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. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

a. **So the people of Nineveh:** The word “repentance” isn’t in this passage; but repentance isn’t really a word, it is something you *do* — and these people *did* repentance. One can have repentance without the word itself being spoken, and one can say the word “repentance” and never truly repent.

b. **The people of Nineveh believed God:** Repentance begins with believing God. As we believe Him and His Word, we have the power to transform our lives as He wills. You can do many other things associated with repentance, but if they do not begin with believing on and trusting God, they are all useless works of the flesh.

i. You can’t *believe God* apart from the Word of God. Therefore, any real revival or repentance will begin with faithful preaching and faithful hearing of God’s Word, just as it was in Nineveh.

c. **The people of Nineveh... proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth:** Repentance means *doing* something. The people of Nineveh fasted, mourned as if for the dead, and they did it from the highest to the lowest (**from the greatest to the least of them**).

i. If repentance is anything, it is *not* business as usual. When repentance comes, something has to change and something has to be *different*. In their case, the people of Nineveh took off their normal clothes and put on **sackcloth** — a thick coarse cloth, normally made from goat’s hair. Wearing it displayed the rejection of earthly comforts and pleasures.

ii. **Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth:** They even repented on behalf of their animals, dressing them as if the animals were in mourning for the dead.

d. **But let man and beast... cry mightily to God:** Repentance means crying **mightily to God**. It means coming to God with passion and seriousness about your sin and your need for His mercy and forgiveness.

i. Many modern expressions of repentance, making excuses and justifying reasons for the sin, are really not repentance at all. Often they are only attempts to justify and excuse sin. Nevertheless, you sinned or you didn't; if you did, *there is no excuse*, and if you haven't, *there is no need to repent*. Repentance and excuses simply don't belong together.

e. **Yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands:** Repentance means turning from your **evil way and from the violence that is in your hands**. Repentance means to change your mind and turn from your previous sinful actions.

i. In the Christian life, repentance does not describe what you must do to turn to God; it describes the very process of turning to God. When we truly turn to Him, we turn away from the things that displease Him.

f. **Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger:** Repentance has hope in the mercy and love of God. It hopes that God will **relent** and that the repentant people will **not perish**.

g. Jonah could more effectively preach the message of repentance because he knew his own need to repent and was himself a model of repentance ([Jonah 2:8-9](#)). Being a repentant sinner didn't disqualify Jonah from preaching repentance; it made his preaching all the more effective.

2. ([Jonah 3:10](#)) God's response to the people's repentance.

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.

a. **God saw their works... and God relented:** God honored Nineveh's repentance, even though their *past* sin was just reason enough for an outpouring of judgment. The state would never forgive a cold-blooded murderer who vowed to never do it again, but God mercifully relented from judgment against the people of Nineveh.

i. We do not *obligate* God to forgive us when we repent. Instead, repentance appeals to God's mercy, not His justice.

b. **God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it:** Did God's relenting make Jonah a false prophet, when he prophesied *Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown*? Not at all, for two good reasons.

i. First, God acted in total consistency with His Word: *The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it* ([Jeremiah 18:7-8](#)). Jonah's preaching was like all warnings of judgment: it was an invitation to repent and avert the promised judgment. His words had an implied "if you do not repent" in front of them. Remember that we are not told the sum total of Jonah's preaching; though we should assume that the statement in [Jonah 3:5](#) is the central theme of what Jonah said, we should not assume it was *all* that he said.

ii. Second, God did judge Nineveh (as recorded in the book of Nahum). Nevertheless, in light of their repentance He delayed the promised judgment another 150 years.