



Second chances are powerful. We all know what it feels like to fail, to disappoint someone, or to stray from the right path. And we also know the relief of being given another opportunity! Jonah experienced that when God sent him once again to Nineveh.

But even more remarkable was the second chance God gave the people of Nineveh, a city marked by violence and wickedness.

With a simple eight-word sermon, they believed God, humbled themselves, and turned from their evil ways. In response, God showed mercy. This passage reminds us that no one is beyond God's reach, that repentance opens the way to forgiveness, and that God delights to show compassion.

ICEBREAKER

Have you ever experienced a revival? Have you ever seen a group of people repent and turn to the Lord in an incredible way?

READ IT

Read Jonah 3:4-10

GET IT

1. What message did Jonah proclaim to the people of Nineveh?
2. How did the people respond to Jonah's message?
3. What outward signs of repentance did the Ninevites display?
4. What inward signs of repentance did the Ninevites experience?
5. How did God respond when he saw their repentance?

LIVE IT

Jonah preached an eight-word sermon: "Yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." No fog machines. No merch table. Just truth. And what happened? The entire city repented. The king took off his royal robes, people put on sackcloth, even the cows got involved (read it, it's in there). It was the greatest revival in recorded history.⁵

6. **Jonah's message was blunt and to the point, but God used even those simple words to pierce hearts and stir repentance. What does this teach us about the power of God's word even when delivered imperfectly?**

⁵ Greg Laurie, Facebook

7. Describe a time when you saw God use a small or simple word of truth to make a big impact.

8. The people of Nineveh participated in evil behavior. Another prophet, Nahum, spoke against the evil taking place (Nahum 1:1; 3:1). What evil is happening in our world today? Where do you think God is asking you to speak against evil?

Jonah's message was far more than a fish story. It was a threat: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" ([Jonah 3:4](#)). What happened next was a far more extreme and amazing miracle than the supernatural storm and the prophet-swallowing fish had been. The text declares the miracle in a seriously understated way: "The people of Nineveh believed in God" ([Jonah 3:5](#)). Those few words describe the largest revival recorded in the Old Testament, as the entire population of Nineveh, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, repented and turned to the Lord.

What made the Ninevites so receptive to Jonah's message? Some scholars have suggested that military defeats or civil unrest or natural phenomena (like earthquakes and eclipses) may have preconditioned the people so that they were ready to receive the prophet's warning. In reality, there is no natural explanation for such a massive conversion. There is, however, a supernatural explanation: The Lord went before Jonah and prepared the hearts of the Ninevites. To accomplish His sovereign saving purpose, He used a rebellious prophet to bring rebellious people to faith in Himself.

The full extent of their repentance is explained in [Jonah 3:5–9](#). Everyone in the city, including the king himself, responded with heartfelt sorrow:

Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

The king, likely identified as either Adad-nirari III (ca. 810–783 BC) or Assurdan III (ca. 772–755 BC), exchanged his royal robes for sackcloth and ashes. In a public display of personal mourning and to symbolize national repentance, the Assyrian monarch pleaded to the true God for mercy and forgiveness. Just as He had done for Jonah, the Lord answered the king's prayer.

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. (Jonah 3:10)

Such an astounding impact on an entire nation by a deeply flawed prophet who repented is a classic example of God's grace in making heroes out of unlikely people.⁶

9. The King of Nineveh leads the nation in a time of repentance (read Jonah 3:6-9).

Share a time where you realized the depth of your sin and your repentance affected the people around you. How have you seen your life of faith affect the people God has placed in your life?

10. At the end of v. 8, we see other expressions of repentance, beyond sackcloth and ashes. What are they? What signs of repentance would be appropriate in our time and place? Would they be the same as "let them give up their evil ways and their violence?" Why or why not?

11. A personal commitment to repentance of sin is a regular part of following Jesus. Take the time to read through Psalm 51. Talk about the aspects of repentance and how you can have a clean heart before God.

⁶ <https://www.gty.org/blogs/B150316/jonah-two-stories-of-miraculous-repentance>

JESUS IS THE GREATER JONAH (MATTHEW 12:38-41 NLT)

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.”

But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

“The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent.”

12. How is the message of Jesus similar to the message of Jonah?
13. How is Jesus different from the prophet Jonah? Was His message different? Was His tone different? Was His promise different? Please explain.
14. Jesus' resurrection as the greater "sign of Jonah" (Matthew 12:39-41) shows his power over sin and death, unlike Jonah's temporary mission to Nineveh. What's one specific area in your life such as a habit, fear, or relationship where you can actively trust Jesus' greater power this week, and how will you take a practical step to surrender it to him, and possibly repent of sin that stands in the way?