

# Jonah 3:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

## Analysis

**But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.** The decree moves beyond external ritual to internal transformation. The Hebrew *veyitkassu saqqim ha'adam vehabehemah veyiqre'u el-'Elohim behazaqah veyashuvu ish middarko hara'ah umin-hechamas asher bekappeihem* (וַיִּתְכַּסּוּ שָׂקִים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָה וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדַּרְכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן־הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם) combines outward symbols with inward change.

"Cry mightily unto God" (*veyiqre'u el-'Elohim behazaqah*) uses *hazaqah* (חִזְקָה), meaning strength, force, or intensity—crying out with all one's might, desperate pleading. This isn't quiet, polite prayer but urgent, passionate intercession acknowledging life-or-death crisis.

"Let them turn every one from his evil way" (*veyashuvu ish middarko hara'ah*) uses *shuv* (שׁוּב), the primary Hebrew word for repentance meaning to turn back, return, or change direction. Genuine repentance requires turning from sin, not merely feeling sorry. The phrase "every one" (*ish*) individualizes responsibility—corporate repentance requires personal transformation.

"From the violence that is in their hands" (*umin-hechamas asher bekappeihem*) specifically identifies Nineveh's characteristic sin. The word *chamas* (חֲמָס) means violence, cruelty, or injustice—precisely what Assyria was notorious for. Their

empire was built on brutal conquest, systematic terror, and calculated cruelty. Archaeological evidence confirms Assyrian boasts of impalement, flaying, mass executions, and deportations. True repentance for Nineveh meant renouncing the violence that defined their national identity. This demonstrates that authentic repentance addresses specific, known sins, not vague generalities.

## Historical Context

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Assyrian military campaigns were characterized by extreme brutality designed to terrorize enemies into submission. Royal inscriptions proudly detail atrocities: 'I built a pillar over against the city gate and I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted and I covered the pillar with their skins... I cut off the limbs of the officers who had rebelled' (Ashurnasirpal II). Reliefs from Assyrian palaces graphically depict impalement, decapitation, and mass deportations. Jonah 1:2 states Nineveh's 'wickedness is come up before me'—God sees and judges violence. Nineveh's repentance required confronting this core sin. Centuries later, Nahum prophesied Nineveh's destruction (fulfilled 612 BC), indicating this repentance didn't permanently transform Assyrian character. Genuine for that generation, it didn't institutionalize lasting change.

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does the emphasis on turning 'from the violence that is in their hands' demonstrate that repentance must address specific sins?
2. What does crying 'mightily unto God' teach about the intensity and urgency appropriate to genuine repentance?

3. In what ways does God hold nations and cultures accountable for characteristic sins like Assyria's violence?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיִּתְכַסּוּ <b>be covered</b> H3680	שָׁק יִם <b>with sackcloth</b> H8242	בְּאִדָּם <b>But let man</b> H120	וְהַבְהֵמָה הַ <b>and beast</b> H929	וַיִּקְרָא וְ <b>and cry</b> H7121	אֶל H413	אֵלֶּה יָם <b>unto God</b> H430
בְּחִזְקָה הַ <b>mightily</b> H2394	וַיִּשְׁבוּ <b>yea let them turn</b> H7725	אֵשׁ <b>every one</b> H376	מִדֶּרֶךְ וְ <b>way</b> H1870	הַרְעָה הַ <b>from his evil</b> H7451	וּמִן H4480	
וּמִן הַחֲמָס <b>and from the violence</b> H2555	אֲשֶׁר H834	בְּכַפֵּיהֶם: <b>that is in their hands</b> H3709				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Jonah 1:6** (References God): So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

**Isaiah 59:6** (Parallel theme): Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands.

**Acts 3:19** (Parallel theme): Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

**Jonah 1:14** (Parallel theme): Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.