

Nineveh Repents

Jonah finally obeys and preaches to Nineveh. The entire city—from the king to the common people—repents in sackcloth and ashes, and God relents from judgment.

Jonah 3:1-10

CHARACTERS: Jonah, God, The King of Nineveh, People of Nineveh

THEMES: Obedience, Repentance, God's mercy to all nations, Power of preaching, Evangelism

THE WORD OF the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.'

This time Jonah obeyed. He went to Nineveh, and it was indeed a great city—so vast it took three days to walk through it. Jonah began by going one day's journey into the city, proclaiming: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown!'

It was a simple message. No elaborate theology. No rhetorical flourishes. Just a plain warning of impending judgment. Jonah may have delivered it reluctantly, perhaps even hoping these pagans would reject it so God's judgment would fall.

But something unexpected happened. The Ninevites believed God.

A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth—the traditional garment of mourning and repentance. When word reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat down in the dust.

The king issued a decree: 'Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be

covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.'

Here was genuine repentance. They didn't presume on God's mercy, yet they hoped in it. They didn't know if He would spare them, but they turned from their wickedness anyway.

God saw what they did—how they turned from their evil ways. And God relented. He had compassion on them and did not bring the destruction He had threatened.

This was the gospel before the gospel: that God's mercy extends beyond Israel to all nations who turn to Him. Nineveh's repentance foreshadowed a day when people from every tribe and tongue would be called into God's kingdom. The missionary heart of God was beating even in the Old Testament, reaching out to brutal pagans through a reluctant Hebrew prophet.