

May 30, 2021

“Preaching To Enemies”  
Lesson 13 of Unit

Jonah 3:1-10

### **Intro**

When we invest our time and energy into a book, we want a satisfying ending. We are naturally disappointed when the book ends differently than what we wanted or were led to expect. That's essentially the story of the book of Jonah. He had one expectation, and the story didn't end the way he expected it to.

Jonah tries to alter the story from the beginning. He tried to run away, unlike other prophets who went where God wanted, even if they would rather not. And from his perspective, with good reason. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which was a powerful empire and known for being both violent and cruel. Israel would certainly be safer if God wiped them out. So if he just could avoid going to preach repentance to these enemies of his nation.....

### **Read Jonah 3:1-10**

1. vs. 1: Once again, the phrasing indicates that the message is from God, not from Jonah  
“The word of the Lord...”  
This also shows that, despite his attempts to avoid it, God still sees Jonah as a prophet of His, and uses him to accomplish His purposes.
2. vs. 2: God repeats His message to Nineveh for Jonah to deliver  
The message from 1:3 gets restated (see 3:4)  
God still wants Jonah to tell the people He is angry at their wickedness  
This gives them a chance to change  
God tells Jonah to proclaim “the message I give you”  
Jonah can't add or alter anything here; God's message, not his own
3. vs. 3: Jonah goes into and through the city  
Archaeology has found the city to be about 1700 acres  
The three days has been suggested as the time it would take to preach to all the parts of the city, not just to cross it.
4. vs. 4: Jonah goes 1/3 of the way (one day's journey)  
He does the bare minimum in meeting what God has asked him to do  
Maybe similar to us at times 😞  
His message is pretty brief—“You've got 40 days, and then—POW!”  
This message could be all he said, or could be a summary of his message  
There is no mention of repentance and forgiveness  
The 40 days is a number used many times in Scripture  
40 days of rain in the days of Noah  
40 years of wandering in the wilderness during the Exodus  
40 days that Jesus fasted before facing Satan's temptations

40 seems to be the number needed to get rid of evil  
Giving Nineveh this amount is consistent with how God deals with facing sin/evil

5. vs. 5: The amazing reaction of the Ninevites

They “believed God”

They worshipped multiple gods, including Asher and Ishtar

Here, they believe what God says rather than their own gods

A fast is begun, including wearing sackcloth and ashes

All of these actions indicate humility, repentance, and spiritual change

These actions are begun by the people, not on the king’s order (see next verse)

6. vs. 6: The king’s reaction

He covers himself in sackcloth (like the people in vs. 5) and sits in the dust

Again, these are actions of humility and repentance

It’s interesting that a pagan king responds more obediently to God than God’s own prophet

This is also a true comparison between the people of Nineveh and Jonah

7. vs. 7: The king intensifies the act of fasting

He includes no water to any of their animals as well

The animal / natural world is also affected by sin, not just the people (see Rom. 8:19-22)

8. vs. 8: The animals have sackcloth put on them as well

This seems to show that the whole city, every part of it, is involved in repentance

God says he cares about all of creation, even the animals, in 4:11

Repentance is shown through additional actions

The king goes beyond sackcloth to the important issue: “give up your evil ways”

They are also called on to give up their violence

Archaeology has found artifacts showing torture

Assyria also sent slaves to work on building things—hard, difficult work

9. vs. 9: The king notes a hope about what all these actions will result in

“God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger”

It isn’t a sure thing that God will not strike them dead; He has said He would

The Ninevites have nothing to lose; the worst that could happen is they die

10. vs. 10: God sees not only what they feel, but more importantly, what they do

Their repentance isn’t just for show; it is real

This verse shows God’s forgiving nature—he doesn’t want any to perish if they will repent

**Application:** God’s grace is at the heart of this passage. The enemies of God’s people were spared when they turned their hearts toward Him and changed their ways. This is how God has always been, and who He is still today. We humans can pick out people or groups that we think are “too far gone” for God to love. But God never shuts off a person from the opportunity to repent, be forgiven, and walk in fellowship with Him. Even those whom we might consider “enemies”. If God can use a grumpy and incredibly reluctant prophet, and a morally

opposite city and people, then He is committed to loving us and wanting what is best for us as well—we can bank on that.

Prayer: Father God, thank You that You don't see anyone as beyond salvation or Your love. Forgive us for the times that we have thought that of someone or some group. Thank You that Your love and mercy are for all who will call on You in repentance; may we also do this from a heart that recognizes how much we need Your love and mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen.