



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## Jonah 3:1-10 New International Version May 21, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 21, 2017**, is from **Jonah 3:1-10**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Jonah 3:1) Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:**

Jonah may have felt unworthy to even try to serve God again after God punished him. Perhaps he felt he had forfeited the right to call himself a prophet. One remembers how Jesus restored Peter to service as an apostle after he had denied Him by telling him to feed His sheep (John 21:17). Probably the moment Jonah landed on shore, God spoke to him again – such was the urgency of him going to Nineveh to warn the people of coming destruction. After Jonah disobeyed the LORD, and the LORD told Jonah a second time what to do, Jonah obeyed immediately. God did not need to command him more than twice.

**(Jonah 3:2) “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”**

A true prophet of God will proclaim the message God gives him to preach. God considered, and the rest of the world considered, Nineveh a great city, the capital city of the great Assyrian Empire. God's insistence that Jonah preach to the Ninevites illustrates God's concern for the salvation of all people: Jews and Gentiles, believers and unbelievers.

**(Jonah 3:3) Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.**

After he experienced God's redeeming discipline, Jonah obeyed God. He had to travel about 500 miles to Nineveh. Imagine Jonah's flesh and hair and smell and how he must have felt and looked in the city of Nineveh after his time in the fish and long travels. He might not have wanted to obey God, and he probably preached to do God's will lest he suffer God's discipline or something even worse again.

**(Jonah 3:4) Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."**

As Jonah preached he probably explained why he was there, that he did not want to come, that he did not want to preach to the Ninevites, and how the LORD had punished him for his disobedience and unwillingness to warn the Ninevites, the enemies of Israel, of coming destruction. His appearance and attitude would have confirmed his story. His message was definite, but implied the condition (if not stated) that if they repented God might forgive them even as God had forgiven Jonah and vomited him onto dry land.

**(Jonah 3:5) The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.**

Unlike those who heard Jesus preach in His day, the Ninevites throughout the city believed Jonah's preaching and God. News of the prophet's experience and message traveled as fast as a wildfire throughout the city. The Ninevites demonstrated true repentance by their actions and not just by their words. Sackcloth would have been extremely uncomfortable as they showed their deep sorrow at having acted wickedly.

**(Jonah 3:6) When Jonah's warning 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.**

Finally, the warning of Jonah reached the king and he too repented of his sins and did as the people had done before him. Great fear motivated everyone to show their grief for their sins by stopping all their normal activities in daily life. They did not eat, drink or work but sat in the dust and turned their thoughts to God with heartfelt confession. God approved of their repentance and return to righteous behavior, which manifested God's grace and their faith in God by believing the news Jonah brought and acting accordingly.

**(Jonah 3:7) This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.**

In consultation with his advisers and in unison with them the king issued an official edict showing he approved of the repentant actions of his people, and he extended their actions to include their herds, flocks, and other animals. He himself did as he commanded them, rather than think he could take a royal prerogative and do nothing himself. The king showed concern not only for his people, but also for all their animals. The king did not want anyone or any animal to be destroyed. Everyone and every animal was to discipline themselves or be disciplined with this temporary suffering of not eating or drinking anything in the hope that they would not be destroyed. God's warning gave them the hope that God was warning them through Jonah because He was compassionate; therefore, He might forgive them if they repented and called out to Him.

**(Jonah 3:8) 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.**

Evil deeds and violence led to the great flood in Noah's day and to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's day. Noah had preached righteousness to the people, but none had repented and only his family were saved. By word and example, Lot had told the people of Sodom and Gomorrah about God's righteous requirements, but none repented and only his family were saved from destruction. The king probably knew or had the opportunity to know about these destructive events in the history of the world, but he had ignored the evil ways and violence of his subjects. After Jonah's warnings, he commanded everyone not just to demonstrate their repentance with these ceremonies, but to actually reform their behavior. They also urgently prayed to God, who would see their hearts and know of their sincerity.

**(Jonah 3:9) Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."**

Everyone in Nineveh certainly knew about Jonah's experience in the great fish and that God had relented and saved him from death. More than this, they knew that God was so serious about their deserved punishment, and perhaps also saving them from what they deserved, that He insisted that Jonah, an Israelite prophet, immediately travel 500 miles to preach to them. From looking at and listening to Jonah, they knew that God was compassionate and forgiving and they hoped that God would turn from His divine anger and save them from perishing. They knew that God was certainly just, and that God was powerful enough to bring just punishment upon them.

**(Jonah 3:10) When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.**

Similar to the case of others who have repented sincerely and returned to obedience, God acted according to His divine nature. He was compassionate and merciful and forgave the Ninevites. If the Ninevites had not quit doing evil, God would have justly destroyed them as He warned. Though Jonah may not have stated this to the Ninevites, he knew that if the people sincerely turned to the LORD that because of His compassion the LORD would not destroy his enemies and the enemies of Israel (and he wanted them destroyed). The repentance of the Ninevites should have served as a warning and good news to the Israelites (they could now become friends with the repentant Assyrians). But the Israelites continued in their idolatrous ways and refused to repent at the preaching of the prophets; therefore, God later used the Assyrians to destroy the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. All of these events should serve as a warning to all who choose to continue in their evil ways and refuse to repent and turn to our compassionate God. No wonder Jesus said that those who heard Him preach and refused to repent would come under greater condemnation. What about those today who have heard the gospel many times over and have refused to repent and come to Jesus that they might be saved?

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Give three reasons why someone might think that Jonah might have needed the LORD to speak to him a second time.
2. What evidence did Jonah give that God's discipline had been effective and his repentance was real?
3. What more might Jonah have said to the Ninevites as he declared God's word to them?
4. What evidence did the Ninevites give that Jonah's warning had been effective and their was repentance real?
5. From reading chapter three of the Book of Jonah, what evidence should believers give that they are true followers of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

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Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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