

Running From God

A Study in the Book of Jonah

LESSON Five

The People Repent

(Jonah 3:6-10)

Prayerfully read through Jonah 3:6-10.

1. In **verse 5**, we read that **the people** who heard Jonah's message as he went through the city had declared a fast and put on sackcloth. Now, looking at **verse 6**, we read that the news of all that was taking place came into the ears of the king of Nineveh. What does **verse 6** say that the king did when he heard this news?
2. Again, we are struck by the fact that, just like the people of the city in verse 5, the king himself believes God's warning given by Jonah and takes it immediately to heart. He gets up from his throne, and in like manner with the people, he covers himself with sackcloth. **Verse 6** also tells us that he "sat in ashes." Sitting in ashes was a typical sign of mourning. It appears the king was in deep mourning over his sin and the sin of the people and the judgment being placed upon them. **Jeremiah 6:26** gives us an example of mourning in sackcloth and ashes. Write down that verse below.
3. Following his personal grief, we read in **verse 7** that the king goes a step further in declaring a fast even greater than the people had in verse 5. What does the king decree in **verse 7**?

4. The king extends his fast to, not only to the great and small, but also to **every beast, herd, and flock!** But as we look at **verse 8**, the king gets down to **the heart** of true repentance. What does he tell the people to do?
5. The king now declares a fast that includes not only the people but all the animals, commanding both man and beast to wear sackcloth. But all these outward signs mean nothing if the heart is not repentant. What does **Isaiah 58** tell us? Write down the following verses below.

Isaiah 58:6 -

Isaiah 58:7 -

Isaiah 58:8 -

Isaiah 58:9 -

Isaiah 58:10 -

Isaiah 58:11 -

6. The most important part of all the king has decreed in **Jonah 3:8** is the picture of what true **repentance** looks like. It's a turning **to God** and **away from your sin**. **Isaiah 1:16-19** paints this picture beautifully. Look it up and record it below.

David Guzik states, "In the Christian life, repentance does not describe what you must do to turn to God; it describes the very process of turning to God. When we truly turn to Him, we turn away from the things that displease Him."

7. As we look at **Jonah 3:9**, we see the hope that the king is holding onto. Write down the king's words below.

8. The king was placing his hope in God's character, that He would show them compassion and lovingkindness. He did not know God, but he believed Jonah's message and was hoping that God would see their repentance and turn away from His anger toward them. We, on the other hand, **do** know God, and we know that He is a God of compassion and lovingkindness. We have been given promises in His Word that we can count on that declare His mercy on the repentant heart. Even in our sin and failures, God's mercy is there waiting for us to turn back to Him with a repentant heart. Record God's words to Judah, spoken through the prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 36:3** below.

9. What does **Isaiah 55:6-7** tell us about God's compassion and lovingkindness?

10. Record these other Scriptures that speak of God's compassion.

Psalms 130:3-4 -

Isaiah 54:7-8 -

Micah 7:18-19 -

11. Can you share some verses that speak of God's lovingkindness and compassion? Use a concordance to look some up and list a few of your favorites below.

12. Romans 2:4 states that it is God's **goodness** that leads us to repentance. Has God's **goodness** drawn you back to Him after you found yourself in a place of disobedience and rebellion? What has the Lord used in your life to bring you back to Him when you have been distant? Share your thoughts.

13. As we look at **Jonah 3:10**, we see that the king's hope in God's mercy was not disappointed. What does this verse tell us about God's response to Nineveh's repentance?

14. In Lesson 4, one of the Scriptures we looked up was **Jeremiah 18:7-8**. Record again what those verses tell us.

A question is brought up by some Bible critics as to whether God's choice to relent from the disaster He asked Jonah to proclaim against Nineveh makes Jonah a **false prophet**. **David Guzik** comments on this and his answer gives much clarity to the question.

He says, "**Did God's relenting make Jonah a false prophet, when he prophesied *Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown*? Not at all, for two good reasons.**"

First, God acted in total consistency with His Word: *The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it (Jer 18:7-8).* Jonah's preaching was like all warnings of judgment: it was an invitation to repent and avert the promised judgment. His words had an implied 'if you do not repent' in front of them. Remember that we are not told the sum total of Jonah's preaching; though we should assume that the statement in Jon 3:5 is the central theme of what Jonah said, we should not assume it was all that he said.

Second, God did judge Nineveh (as recorded in the book of Nahum). Nevertheless, in light of their repentance He delayed the promised judgment another 150 years."

Yes, God **did fulfill Nahum's prophecy** 150 years after the experience of Jonah, but in God's **great mercy**, this generation of Ninevites we read about in the book of Jonah was spared.

- 15. In Lamentations 3:22** Jeremiah states, *"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."* Reflecting on that, he states later in **verses 40 & 41**: *"Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the LORD; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven."* As you reflect on the Lord's compassion in your life, what thoughts come to your mind? What kind of encouragement does that speak to your soul and what kind of impact has that had on your life? Share your thoughts.

16. In Psalm 143 David lifts up a prayer to the Lord, and in **verse 8** he says, **“Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You.”** Write down your own prayer to the Lord below.

17. What are you taking away from lesson five of our study in Jonah that you want to take deep root in your soul?

This study was written and prepared by Shawn Van Hook, 2026