

PART 5

# JONAH

*The Scandal  
of Grace*

**FOX VALLEY**

Seventh-day Adventist  
Community Church





## Introduction

On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow.

When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes. Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city:

"No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all. People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us."

When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.



### Day One

No one is really certain what it means that Nineveh was a three-day journey. Archaeology shows that Nineveh was not that big, so perhaps it meant more than just the city and the entire outlying areas too.

Yet the text says that on the first day Jonah arrived he started preaching his message. There is a clear indication that Jonah is doing the bare minimum. He is reluctant and is not obeying God willingly.

### Questions

**Jonah is still reluctant about his mission but God still uses him! Does God care about our reluctance?**

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**How does this both challenge and encourage you as you seek to serve Jesus?**

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## Day Two

Jonah's arrival in Nineveh was probably dramatic. His clothing was no doubt different from the norm, his bearing gave evidence of a different lifestyle, and a possibly bleached skin colour provided for much attention. And as soon as he arrives he starts shouting judgement on the Ninevites. It does not seem that he offered the Ninevites a way out of the punishment, but they instead hoped for God's mercy in response to their repentance.

"In forty days, Nineveh shall be overthrown!" That was what Jonah enthusiastically wanted and predicted. He enjoyed preaching wrath. He did it with glee, not tears, because he couldn't wait for God's hammer to fall on them.

### Questions

**Why do you think Jonah gave his message like he did?**

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**Have you ever obeyed God reluctantly?**

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**How did God react to Jonah's reluctance and to your reluctance?**

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## Day Three

To Jonah's shock, the people neither laughed nor laid hands on him. Instead, the entire city responded. The Hebrew word for "repent" (shub—to turn) occurs four times in verses 8–10, and that is the striking, central message of this passage. Against all expectations, the powerful, violent city of Nineveh put on sackcloth—a sign of mass repentance.

Yet from verse 5 onwards Jonah is missing from the Narrative. All the attention goes to the people and to eventually the king of Nineveh. The message here is that the desire and need for repentance that the Ninevites experience came directly from God. Jonah having played his reluctant roll is now out of the picture.

### Questions

**What is God calling you to repent from?**

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**Is repentance something that comes naturally to you? Why?**

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**Jonah was able to deliver his message because of supernatural courage from God. Is there something for which you are requiring supernatural strength?**

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### Day Four

Some have claimed that Jonah's experience in Nineveh and the response to his message is the single greatest revival in history. Yet by all accounts the Ninevites remained the same polytheistic violent people that they always were. History has confirmed that if genuine change happened in Nineveh it lasted only for a moment.

Jesus' words in Luke 11:32, however, sometimes are used to argue that a genuine conversion must have taken place. Jesus' own testimony is that "they repented at the preaching of Jonah" with the result that they will be present at the judgment condemning those who rejected Jesus' preaching. It is hard, then, to deny that at least some of the Ninevites were genuinely converted.

Furthermore, God would not have lifted his hand of judgment if the Ninevites had been acting out of hypocrisy. There can be no question that the change was relatively short-lived, but it seems that at least a few experienced a repentance that led to eternal life

### Questions

**Is God paying non-believers back for good works? How is this reconciled with Hebrews 11:6?**

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**In what situations would you consider fasting and/or giving up physical com-fort, like the Ninevites, in order to seek God?**

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### Day Five

The Ninevites' "turning" from "evil" led to God's "turning" from "evil." It is interesting to note that of all the "deeds" of the Ninevites, the fasting, wearing of sackcloth, calling on God, and turning from evil, only the last is mentioned as explicitly leading to God's relenting. This is perhaps because it was Nineveh's evil that led to Jonah's mission in the first place

Here one finds irrefutable evidence that God wishes not for the destruction of the sinner but for the redemption and reconciliation of all his creation. Even if their repentance was not thorough, God's hand of judgment was removed at least temporarily.

God loves us and desires that we freely choose to respond to his love. His loving grace gives us free will and with free will we are given the ability to reject his love. Just like God left it open for the Ninevites to respond to his grace so too it is open to us. God wills everyone to be saved by speaking truth and love. He does not force us.

### Questions

**If God is unchanging (Num 23:19), then why does he change his mind here?**

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**Can we change God's mind?**

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Reflect on what you have learnt about Jonah this week? What have you learnt about repentance? How does the ability we have to reject God's grace change your picture of God? Spend time in prayer asking God for guidance and strength.