

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Jonah 3**
“The Greatest Revival in History”

Don't you wish we would have another sweeping revival in our country? That would be so exciting. There have been incredible true stories, even in somewhat recent times, of sweeping revival taking place, such as the Welsh revival; and others have caused saloons to go out of business. God is able to do that again if we really want it. Let's look at three steps of revival as seen in what may be the greatest example in all of history: the revival of the wicked city of Nineveh.

1: Obedience (v1-4). The **word of the LORD** is necessary for revival (Romans 10:17); sadly, many churches are pushing the Bible aside, marginalizing it, or watering it down. Any revival not rooted in God's Word will be superficial. We should consider it an *honor* that God's Word should **come unto** us as it did unto Jonah. Not everyone has it in their language yet. And God is a God of **second** chances (John 6:37).

(v2) The command here hasn't changed; but now Jonah is obeying it. I think God is waiting for us to obey His great commission, and I know I can do better at that—but we should pray for opportunities to share the gospel. Yes, it's scary; we're not sure what we're going to say, but neither was Jonah! God just said he was to preach “**the preaching that I bid thee**”, so apparently he would receive instructions when he got there (see Matthew 10:19). If you don't know what to say, sometimes you just need to open your mouth (Acts 8:35; 10:34).

(v3) I wonder if Jonah had taken some time to recover before God's word came to him again. Getting orders like this when you're relaxing in your “easy chair” can be difficult. But he apparently gets up and obeys, no matter how he feels. He's not about to run away from God again!

When he **went to Nineveh**, it was likely about a 500 mile trip, or about a month of

walking, unless he rented a camel. And this was an **exceeding great city**; in our day, think New York or Beijing or San Francisco. It was a major hub, a “happening place” of that day. I think it took **three days** to walk through it. You could probably just hit the highlights in three days; and perhaps Jonah had to wind through alleyways and streets to get from one end to the other, perhaps through throngs and great crowds. His walk would take as long as his whale ride took. And can you imagine as he approached this big city, as people became more and more numerous, as he walked through the intimidating entrance gate? He must have been nervous, especially knowing what he was about to do.

(v4) I wonder if, as Jonah **began to enter**, others looked at him sideways; maybe he still had effects of the whale acid on him; maybe his beard hadn't grown back much, or maybe his skin was discolored. And maybe Jonah hears the sounds of unusual music and the Assyrian language and feels even more out of place. Since he went **a day's journey** (or about a third-way) into the city before preaching, he couldn't bolt for the exit if they got really mad with him. He was committed. I wonder if he had lunch or dinner at a local restaurant before giving his sermon, or whether he was hungry at all. I can imagine Jonah then picks some random street corner, closes his eyes, clears his throat, takes a big breath, then preaches.

Interestingly, God gives this city the opportunity to read the “meter” on the time bomb of their judgment—**yet forty days**. Not everyone is given that opportunity; we could die at any moment. If you're not saved, please don't put it off—you have no idea how long you have left. (Revelation 2:21, II Corinthians 6:2). And what a gutsy sermon: **Nineveh shall be overthrown**. There are times for the “God has a wonderful plan for your life” sermons, but there are other times for hell-fire and brimstone sermons. A mother yells “Stop!” to her child reaching for the stove out of love, not hate. The fire and brimstone of hell is pounding against the dam of God's mercy, and it's important that people know that.

2: Repentance (v5-9). What a surprising turn of events! You'd expect Jonah to be

laughed out of town, killed, or have food and rocks hurled at him by a jeering crowd. But instead, they **believed God!** And it's almost worded as an "of course" thing—God knew that this city was ready for revival. Faith in God has always been what saves, even back then. And theirs was a genuine faith; they **proclaimed a fast** (I think that was a grass-roots idea started by the common people), and they wore uncomfortable **sackcloth**, or cloth used to make sacks. Sometimes, fancy and expensive clothes can get in the way of worshiping God. The gospel call applies **from the greatest of us to the least of us**—you're not too big to need God, but you're not too little to be overlooked either. And notice that their faith, as is the case with all genuine faith, produced action (James 2:18). If you say you believe God but haven't experienced any change in your life, then yours was a dead faith.

(v6) How incredible that the **king of Nineveh** gets on board with this revival! Leadership makes a big difference. And what this king does is a great example of salvation. He **arose from his throne**, giving domain of his life to Jesus Christ. No longer was *he* on the throne: God was. He **laid his robe from him**, willing to put aside the pleasures of this world for the kingdom of God. Many people refuse to get saved because they are afraid of losing their wealth or popularity or sin. He **covered him with sackcloth**, the opposite of a fashion statement; this was humiliating. No one struts haughtily to the cross of Christ; those who come must humble themselves. And he **sat in ashes**, recognizing his deserved punishment in hell. Do you recognize that hell is the place you deserve? Or do you think you're a pretty good person on your own?

(v7) I think this king is reinforcing this grassroots proclamation. He **proclaimed and published it**; that is, he used all forms of media at his disposal, print and oral. If he had been living today, I think he would have bought up radio, television, newspaper, and website adds to get the word out. And he wasn't afraid to use his influence or power for good; he made this official business **by the decree of the king**. I'm frankly a bit surprised his nobles stood with him; but God must have been

working a lot behind the scenes before this point. They all fasted; they didn't even feed their pets or dogs or cats (if they had dogs and cats); this fast lasted probably only 2-3 days max.

(v8) During this fast, they weren't dressing up their pets in holiday suits; they put ugly sackcloth even on their animals. And the beasts probably **cried** for hunger and thirst during this fast, as did the people. In this verse, I think we see from the wording that they repented humbly (**sackcloth**), passionately (**mightily**), increasingly (**yea**), personally (**every one**), and specifically (**violence**). Do we repent that way? Let's not have the generic "I'm sorry if..." type of repentance. Let's not have the "roll-your-eyes" type of fake repentance at the altar, and let's certainly not make repentance a joke. If you are sincere, it will be from your heart.

(v9) They weren't presumptuous, and they didn't know theology too well, but they did have faith in God. The Bible never records that Jonah ever said the city would be spared if they repented; but they knew that the mercy of God was their only hope, and they staked everything on the possibility of God's mercy.

3: Mercy (v10). Earlier, God smelled the "stench" of Nineveh, so to speak; but now, He **sees their works**; their repentance was real. It resulted in a lifestyle change, since they **turned from their evil way**. They didn't proclaim a fast just for show or use empty, insincere words. Some "conversions" have a lot of emotion but fizzle out in a couple of weeks, but not this one. If you sincerely turn to God, He sees it! And He is delighted to show you mercy.

If you **repent**, God will **repent** of sending judgment. The jail cell in hell may be ready for you, the fire hot, and the judgment sure—but if you turn to Jesus Christ, He will still save you.

Let's pray for God to send another revival. And let's be willing to change our lives where it hurts. Let's get rid of any evil ways we may be holding on to, whether in our media choices, our music, what we read, what we think about, what we drink, how we talk, and how we spend our time. Let's get back to the Word of God and to godly repentance.