

“When We Repent, God Relents!”

STBC Gather & Grow Bible Study / March 18, 2026/ Dr. Chris Williamson

Opening Thought: Have you ever been pulled over by the police for speeding and received a warning? Why did they give you a warning? Sometimes, judgment can be relented when we repent. In Jonah chapter 3, we’ll see how God relented because the Ninevites repented.

The events in the book of Jonah took place during the reign of Jeroboam II between 793 – 753 B.C. In **Jonah 1:1 – 2**, God gave Jonah a mission to arise, go to Ninevah, the capital of Assyria, and cry out against its wickedness. Once he got there, Jonah’s message was simple, “*Yet forty days, and Ninevah shall be overthrown!*” (**Jonah 3:4**)

1) The People of Ninevah (Jonah 3:5)

- **Their wickedness (Jonah 1:2)**
 - Ninevah was the capital of Assyria, which was one of the cruelest, deadliest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in the then known world.
 - The prophet Nahum said of Assyria, “*For upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?*” (**Nahum 3:19**).
- **Their violence (Jonah 3:8)**
 - Their generals would cut the heads off of opposing soldiers, and form them into pyramids or pillars. It was said that their blood dyed the mountains red.
 - They would take the skin off of people and hang them on the walls of the city.
 - No wonder the prophet Nahum called Ninevah, “*the bloody city*” (**Nahum 3:1**).
- **Their belief in God (Jonah 3:5)**
 - To believe God is to believe in God. To believe God is to fear Him and know that He is holy and just, punishing people and nations for their iniquities.
 - Assyria’s belief in God would not be long lasting because they would later attack Israel in 722 B.C.
- **Their repentance (Jonah 3:5)**
 - They turned from their evil ways (**Jonah 3:10**) and fasted (**Jonah 3:5**).
 - Why were they so ripe to repent? The Bible Knowledge Commentary of the OT says, “Before Jonah arrived at the seemingly impregnable fortress city, two plagues had erupted there (in 765 and 759 B.C.) and a total eclipse of the sun occurred on June 15, 763. These were considered signs of divine anger and may help explain why the Ninevites responded so rapidly to Jonah’s message, around 759.” (p. 1462)

2) The King of Ninevah (Jonah 3:6 – 9)

- **His repentance (Jonah 3:6)**

- **His decree, i.e., His Executive Order (Jonah 3:7 – 9)**
 - He ordered humans and beasts to fast from food and water, and to wear sackcloth. Sackcloth was a type of clothing that mourners wore.
 - He told everyone to cry out to God.
 - He ordered everyone to turn from their evil ways and from their violence.

Break Out Question: What would national repentance look like if it happened in America?

3) The God of Mercy (Jonah 3:10)

- **He saw (Jonah 3:10)**
 - God saw their wickedness and He also saw their repentance.
- **He relented (3:10)**
 - To relent is when God stops or abandons a harsh intention, a severe outcome, or a necessary punishment. God relents because He is merciful (“rachem” or “hesed” in Hebrew).
 - Why did God relent so quickly? **Ezekiel 33:11**, “*Say to them, ‘As I live’ says the LORD God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’*”
 - Remember, a holy God can hate wickedness (**Jonah 1:2**), but also have pity on the wicked (**Jonah 4:11**).
 - Remember, God had pity on you by placing the penalty of your sins onto Jesus Christ when He died on the cross.

Closing Thoughts: When the gospel goes forth and is received, sinful people repent and a holy God relents. In Jonah 3, we saw how the nation of Ninevah repented and God relented. A happy ending came about because a merciful God used the foolishness of preaching from a foolish preacher to share His love. Never let anyone tell you that God hates wicked people. On the contrary, He is able to love wicked people while hating their wickedness.

- **Acts 17:30 – 31**, “*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.*”

- **What is one thing you can take away from this study?**