

# Nineveh Repents

Jonah 3:1-10

## MEMORY VERSE

JONAH 3:9

“Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?”

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A “Thank You Letter to Jonah” template copy for each child in your class, markers and stamps (optional).

## ATTENTION GETTER!

### Three-Day Rally

Nineveh was a large city. It may have taken three days just to walk around it. Here’s a three-day rally. Divide the room into two even groups. Have the children all stand in a line. One group should be on each side of the room. Have them stand enough toward the center of the room so that someone could walk between them and the wall.

When you say, “go” the first child in each line will go counter clockwise. They should keep their hand touching the wall at all times and go as fast as they can without running. They need to go around the classroom three times and return to their line and sit down. The next child in line will go and do the same thing. Everyone must have a turn and the first team who has all of their children sitting down wins.

## LESSON TIME!

The Bible says “God so loved *the world...*” (John 3:16). It’s not the mountains, plants, and oceans God cares for, but *all the people* of the world. The reluctant prophet Jonah had much difficulty grasping the fact that God loved even the prideful, wicked, and rebellious people of Nineveh who seemed to show no regard for God or His people, the Israeli nation. But, God in his love called the people of Niveveh to repentance and desired to use Jonah as his messenger. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4.) **God desires all men to be saved.**

### JONAH 3:1-3

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.

God called on Jonah a “second time” to preach His message to the people of Nineveh. Remember what happened the first time God called Jonah to preach? God is gracious and merciful. When we repent and turn from our rebellion, he will “re-commission” us (assign us once more to the task He wanted us to do)—giving us a second chance to be used by Him and see His purposes accomplished.

Remember, Nineveh was a large city, the capital of the Assyrian empire. It was an evil city, filled with crime. It was not safe to live there. The Assyrians were enemies of Israel. The nations hated each other. For Jonah to go into this city could be putting his life in danger; *but* God was with Jonah.

In Mark 16:15, we are all commissioned to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” Whether God calls us to be a missionary or to be those at home base who help provide the prayer and support to those that “go,” we are all called to have a part in missions. And, should God ever call you to go somewhere a little scary, he will be with you just as he was with Jonah.

### JONAH 3:4

And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

As Jonah entered the city, he started to cry out over and over, “Nineveh is going to be conquered in battle in 40 days.” The people knew that they were guilty of sin and listened to Jonah’s message.

Jonah’s message was straightforward. Jonah was now willing to do what God told him to do, but he was still not happy with the nature of his assignment. He still had no love for the people of Nineveh as evidenced by the abrupt message he gave which included no mention of God’s mercy should the people repent.

### Pass It On!

Have the children get in a large circle. This is a game similar to the old game of “telephone.” The object is to whisper into a child’s ear and see if everyone can pass the message on without missing a word.

Think of a phrase or something from today's lesson to pass around. Whisper the message into the child next to you. Have them pass it around by whispering until it returns all the way around. The last child should then shout the message. It will be fun to see how much it changes by going through the circle. Keep playing with new phrases until the class gets it right or they tire of the game.

Jonah had a message from the Lord. It spread around Nineveh like wild fire. How important do you think it was for that message to remain the same wherever it went?

### JONAH 3:5-6

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

Though Jonah's message brought no hope that the people's repentance would make a difference, "the people of Nineveh believed God." Everyone in the city repented from his or her sins. They demonstrated their repentance by proclaiming a fast, going without food, and humbling themselves by putting on old clothing and sitting in the ashes from their campfires. Even the king came down from his throne and took part.

### JONAH 3:7-8

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

The king and his rulers made it a law that no man or animal was to have anything to eat. Everyone was to humble themselves and repent from their evil ways and from the violence that they were responsible for. They were to cry out loudly to God for forgiveness. The whole city was to cry out to God for mercy!

### JONAH 3:9

Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

Even though the king and the rulers were given no idea that repentance on the part of the people would bring God's mercy, they understood they were deserving of judgment and that indeed judgment would come. They knew only God's mercy would save them, so on the slimmest threads of hope they repented fully and completely, for "who can tell?"

### JONAH 3:10

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

God is merciful. For that reason, he sent Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh. When God saw that they were truly sorry and were turning from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring the disaster upon them. In 2 Peter 3:9, we are told that the Lord is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God does not want to punish

sinful man. For this reason, God sent His Son to die for the sins of the whole world that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). **God desires all men to be saved.**

If you have not yet received the mercy and love God is extending, do so today. When God said He so loved the world, that includes you. Jesus took the punishment for our sins on the cross so that those of us who put our trust in Him would no longer experience separation from God. Now, God calls us to be His own dear children and enjoy the riches of fellowship with Him.

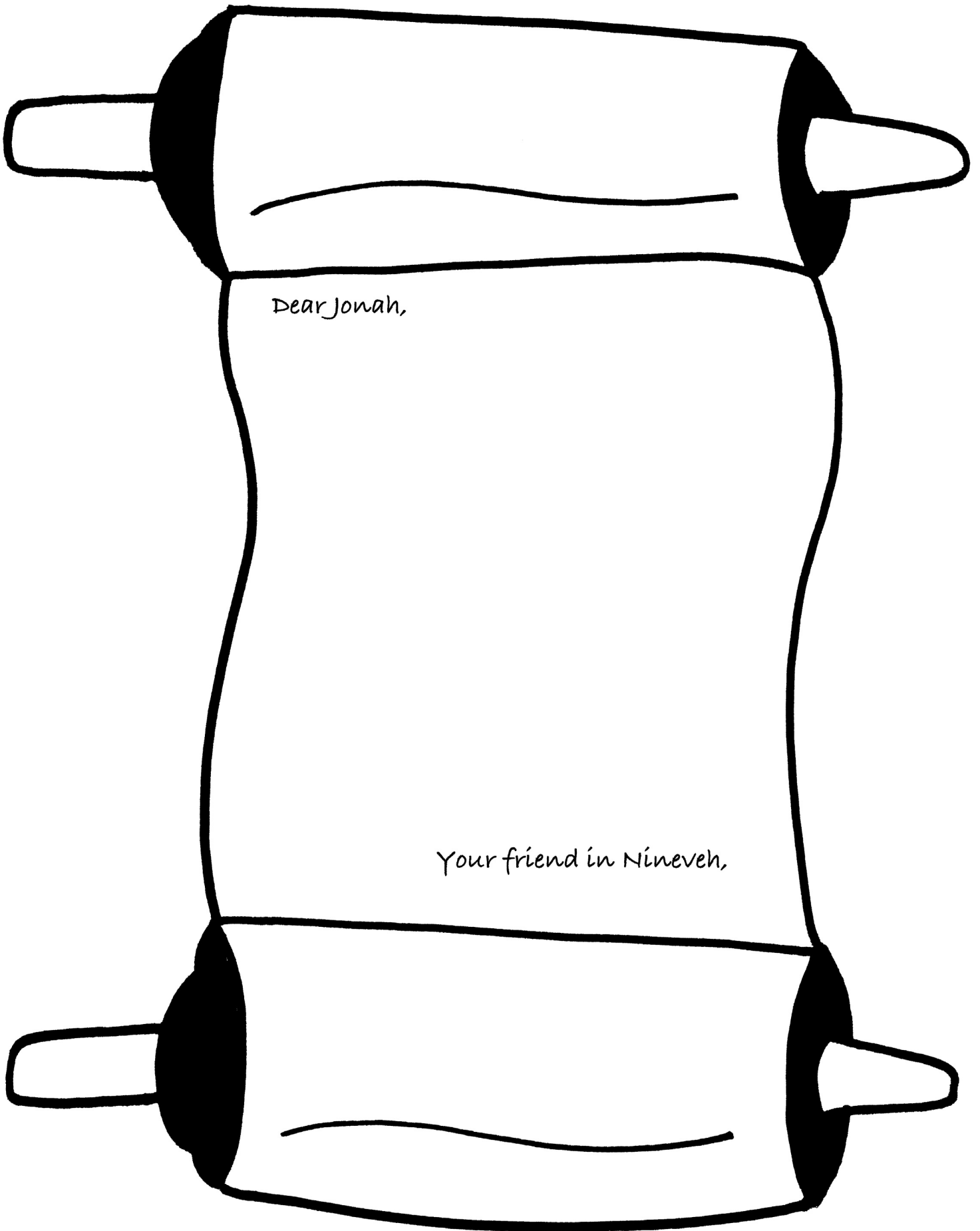
## **Thank You Letter to Jonah**

Imagine that you are a resident of Nineveh. Jonah has come and the whole city has repented and turned to God. What do you suppose were some of the things that may have changed in Nineveh? Take a few moments and write a thank you letter as a resident of Nineveh to Jonah. (Maybe you can imagine such a letter will help change the attitude Jonah had about preaching to Nineveh.) For younger children, perhaps they could draw a picture about what they think the people from Nineveh were thankful for.

Teachers, use this activity to reinforce today’s lesson. Allow the children to color the letters or make envelopes. You could use stickers for stamps.

## **PRAYER**

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s extended mercy and salvation. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.



Dear Jonah,

Your friend in Nineveh,