

“All the Prophets Testify”: Jonah 3:1-3, 4-10

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 January 07

Rev. Dr. Jayson S. Galler, Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX

<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (*TLSB* p.1479):

- I. Account of Jonah’s Call and His Reaction (1:1-3)
- II. Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4-17)
- III. Inside the Great Fish (2:1-10)
- IV. Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3)**
- V. Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10)**
- VI. Jonah’s Prayer in Nineveh (4:1-3)
- VII. Jonah Sits Outside the City of Nineveh; Yahweh Teaches a Lesson on Mercy (4:4-11)

Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3):

3:1 *Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying:* the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” but seems translated reasonably with “then” (compare 1:1’s “Now”). Last time we ended with Jonah just vomited out upon the dry land. Allen says, “Jonah has been brought back to his point of origin—in place but not experience. He is now ‘a new man, a new creature like the one who has passed through baptism’ (Ellul).” Laetsch refers to God’s assuring Jonah “that his willful disobedience had not made him ineligible for the Lord’s service” (Luther, for example, says the first command had been nullified by Jonah’s disobedience and points to the people of Israel who once on their own presumed to do something they had initially failed to do and suffered defeat because of their presumption). This verse repeats “the word of the Lord came to Jonah” from 1:1, though omitting 1:1’s identification of Jonah as “the son of Amittai”. The repetition perhaps intentionally recalls God’s giving Jonah his assignment a first time in order to contrast it with this second time and its different result after the intervening events. *TLSB* comments, “God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance.” Allen points to Simon Peter’s being given a second “Follow me” (John 21:19 with reference to Mark 1:17).

3:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it:* this part of Jonah’s assignment is repeated in this verse from 1:2, though omitting 1:2’s rationale “for their evil has come up before me”.

the message that I tell you: notably, where 1:2 did not specify what Jonah was to “call out against” Nineveh”, 3:2 specifies “the message that I tell you”. Laetsch refers to the Lord’s not informing Jonah of His purpose and speaks of the prophet’s and preacher’s duty of preaching only whatever the Lord tells him. *TLSB* comments, “God would give Jonah the words to speak against Nineveh, reflecting God’s will rather than Jonah’s”, though we are given no other explicit indication at this point that the otherwise faithful Jonah would have substituted his own will for God’s. Presumably the message that the Lord tells Jonah is the message that Jonah calls out in 3:4.

3:3 *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord:* Again the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” (compare 1:3’s “But”). This verse repeats “Jonah rose” from 1:3, again recalling Jonah’s response to his first assignment, though what follows obviously is different, emphasizing Jonah’s obedience the second time, however reluctant it might have been (see, for example, *CSSB*, with reference to 4:1-5). Allen describes “according to the word of the Lord” as tracing “an artistic arc between the original proclamation of the word and its positive implementation”, adding that “Jonah is now as compliant as those other servants, the wind, the sea, and the fish.”

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth: the earlier characterization of Nineveh as a “great city” (1:2; 3:2) is repeated with, in the Hebrew, a prepositional phrase “to God” (confer *TLSB*’s comment that the expression indicates “God’s concern for the city”, and Laetsch contrasts God’s judgment with Jonah’s [Luther’s editors note that the Latin Vulgate text has “great city” and that “great before God” usually was interpreted as “exceedingly great”]; Allen calls it “God-sized”). Although, the following “three days journey in breadth” (or even the ESV text’s marginal reading “a visit was a three day’s journey”) understandably leads one to think that the preceding clause refers to Nineveh’s size, and the commentators oblige with various details about population (4:11) and why three days might have been necessary (for example, *CSSB* suggests “‘a preaching circuit’ through the city’s gates and plazas” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch and Laetsch and Luther]). Keil-Delitzsch connects God’s regard for the city to its size, but that surely cannot exhaust the idea. The mention of the number of days journey at a minimum transitions to 3:4-10 (if not suggests that 3:3 belongs with the following section).

Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10):

3:4 *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out:* although omitted by the ESV, the Hebrew text at the beginning of the verse again has the conjunction that could be a simple “and”. Jonah’s going a day’s journey certainly qualifies as “beginning” to go into a city that requires a three day’s journey. Presumably Jonah was calling out as he went (confer *TLSB*’s comment, “On the first day of Jonah’s anticipated three-day visit, the people of Nineveh already responded to his message” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch]; note that 3:3 did not say that Jonah was only going to be in Nineveh for three days [compare the forty days that follow in this verse]).

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”: presumably the message Jonah called out was the message Jonah was told by God (3:2). Although, as Roehrs-Franzmann points out, this is “the whole of Jonah’s prophetic utterance”, likely only part of the message is given (for example, Keil-Delitzsch says, “Jonah of course explained by denouncing the sins and vices of the day”, and Luther includes Jonah’s adding “how one should be a godly person, and all that is involved in this”, though later Luther says the people heard nothing from Jonah of God’s mercy); we might reflect on whether what is given is law or Gospel or both. *TLSB* notes that “overthrown” could be “overturned” and understood as “in destruction” (Roehrs-Franzmann gives the example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 1:25 [confer Laetsch]) or “in repentance and faith” (*TLSB* refers to p.1080 and its treatment of the Hebrew word *shub* for “turn” [which Hebrew word is used in 3:10], but used in 3:4 is a different Hebrew word for “turn”, *haphak*; *TLSB* further refers to God’s “overturning His decision”, and the king of Nineveh does use *shub* of God in 3:9, but used in 3:10 is *nacham* [which the king also uses of God in 3:9], which word we will discuss with that verse). *TLSB* notes that nothing more is heard about Jonah until chapter 4 (perhaps after the forty days, which Keil-Delitzsch links to the flood and Allen to Israel’s years and Jesus’s days in the wilderness [it is the number of the earth 4 times a number of completion 10]); the rest of chapter 3 focuses on the people’s response to Jonah’s message and God’s “response” to their response.

3:5 *And the people of Nineveh believed God*: Laetsch notes that from the Hebrew verb translated “believe” we get our word “Amen”. Allen agrees with the Aramaic Targum that paraphrases “God” as “the word of God”. We are not told precisely what the people of Nineveh believed (for example, the brief proclamation of Jonah given in 3:4 does not even mention God, though surely God is the actor behind the passive verb). Did they believe only that destruction was coming in forty days? Maybe they believed also that, by their turning from their evil ways (confer 3:9, 10; see also 1:2) and trusting that God would forgive them, they could be saved? *TLSB* comments, “The Holy Spirit working through the Word convinced the people of Nineveh that God would indeed overthrow their city if they did not repent” (“repent” perhaps understood as contrition/sorrow and faith/trust?), and *TLSB* calls it a “miracle of faith” that was “even greater than Jonah’s rescue by a great fish”. Luther comments, “Neither Christ nor all the apostles and prophets were ever able to bring Jerusalem to that point by means of their words and their miracles, though they ministered to it for a long time and preached from one end of the city to the other.”

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them: *TLSB* refers to the fast and sackcloth as “traditional signs of repentance and mourning” with reference to its note at Leviticus 16:29. *TLSB* quotes Luther’s pointing out the people’s doing things that God had not commanded, though we do not know for sure that Jonah did not mention such outwards signs of the inward change that God valued most. Maybe the people of Nineveh came up with the outward signs on their own? Keil-Delitzsch says, “these outward signs of mourning are for the most part the common human expressions of deep sorrow of heart, and are found in the same or similar forms among all the nations of antiquity”. *TLSB* also contrasts the quick response of every level of society with “Israel’s frequent hardness of heart”, though Allen describes Nineveh’s response as “what Israel would have done in the same circumstances.” The next verse shows just how “the greatest” of them responded in the way described.

3:6 *The word reached the king of Nineveh*: *TLSB* comments, “Messengers probably brought the king news of what the citizens of the city were doing.” *CSSB* identifies the king of Nineveh with the king of Assyria. Allen considers the king a counterpart of the ship’s captain in chapter 1

and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes: presumably the king not only heard what the people were doing but why and he also came to believe? *TLSB* comments, “Even the king vacated the honor of his throne and joined his people in expressions of repentance.”

3:7 *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh*, “By the decree of the king and his nobles”: “published” likely by heralds reading it aloud (confer Keil-Delitzsch). Once maybe in newspapers with salesmen crying “Extra! Extra!” Today would it be an email or text-message blast? Nobles could be “great men” or “ministers”. *TLSB* comments, “King and nobles wanted to ensure that everyone on Nineveh got the message and responded to his decree.” We might reflect on the Old Testament theocracy, Reformation-era prince-dictated religions, and “state” churches in our time.

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water: Keil-Delitzsch seems to distinguish herds of oxen from flocks of sheep. *TLSB* comments, “Including animals underscores urgency of repentance”, and it quotes the Church Father Tertullian that the leadership was “starving out even the cattle with which God was not angry”. *TLSB* further remarks on “the completeness of the fast” and “suggests it was of short duration”.

3:8 *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth*: covering the animals in sackcloth might seem surprising (Keil-Delitzsch gives precedents for it and discusses “a biotic *rapport*” [confer Laetsch at least on the precedents even among the Jews]), except maybe for animals that otherwise might have been covered with things such as royal trappings (which Keil-Delitzsch rules out). Allen comments, “The community was threatened with the destruction of all animate life; it was fitting that animals who were to share the fate of their human masters should join in the appeal.” Arguably reflecting the first part of repentance, sorrow over sin.

and let them call out mightily to God: *TLSB* contrasts the sailors of 1:14’s calling out to “the Lord” with the king’s use of the general term “God”, but the ESV’s capitalization at least would seem to suggest no difference in understanding (Laetsch, for example, refers to the use of the article to denote the one, true God. Keil-Delitzsch suggest that even the animals are calling out to God (confer Allen, who refers to Joel 1:20). Arguably reflecting the second part of repentance, faith that trusts God to forgive sin for the sake of the coming Messiah.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands: *TLSB* comments, “Acknowledgment of Nineveh’s sin and truth of God’s judgment (1:2; 3:2)” (confer also *TLSB* on 3:9), but perhaps also the “third” part of repentance, at least a desire to do better and stop sinning.

3:9 *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish*”: We discussed “Who knows” previously in regards to Joel 2:14, for example, not as uncertainty but as a humble trust that does not want to presume on God (Luther suggests the heart wrestles with fear and doubt and has not yet gained a full victory”). *TLSB* refers to the king and pagan sailors’ “hope”, but we might say only if that “hope” is the sure and certain hope of faith, which Luther as quoted by *TLSB* seems to understand from the Biblical text that they had. The king uses *shub* twice, translated “turn”, and *nacham* once, translated “relent” (both are mentioned above in connection with 3:4 and again below in connection with 3:10). Arguably implicit is some sort of expiation or propitiation of God’s wrath, substitutionary atonement, which can only be the Messiah (confer John 3:16).

3:10 *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way*: of course, God knows what is in the Ninevites’ hearts without seeing anything, but outward actions, such as visible signs of sorrow, prayers of faith asking for forgiveness, and a change of behavior are fruits/evidence of repentance/faith, so much so that they can be the basis for judgment in some passages. (Keil-Delitzsch at least does not think that the Ninevites’ conversion to God was thorough or long-lasting, including pointing to their later destruction [compare Laetsch specifically opposed to Keil], but Keil-Delitzsch thinks that the effect of God’s work through Jonah’s preaching was sufficient to show Israel that God was also the God of the heathen and could prepare for Himself from them a people of His possession, as we at least might say, God does with the Gentiles in the New Testament Church.)

God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it: Luther comments, “It is superfluous to enter on the subtle question here how God can repent, turn from and regret His anger, since He is unchangeable. Some people are deeply concerned about this; they complicate the matter for themselves unnecessarily.” As we discussed in connection with Joel 2:14, God does not “repent” or “regret” decisions that He makes. We can say that God does not change but that we change in relationship to God. When, by the enabling call of the Holy Spirit, we go from not repenting and deserving His consequent will of damnation, then God the Father forgives us for Jesus’s sake, in keeping with His antecedent will to save all people. *TLSB* comments, “If the Ninevites had not repented, God would have destroyed them” (not that repentance is a work that saves but a necessary condition), and *TLSB* quotes from Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:166 regarding “the whole process” of repentance—“contrition, faith, and good fruits”—bringing about “the mitigation of public and private punishments and calamities” (Ap XII:164).

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-5 says, "God is concerned for all people, even those we might write off. The people of Nineveh hard seem like 'good prospects.' However, the message they hear is from God, and God makes sure that it bears the fruit of repentance. [?] Do you assume some people are unable or unwilling to respond to the Gospel? Leave conversion in God's hands and faithfully fulfill your role as His witness. He has promised that His Word will bear fruit, and He is concerned that all people have the opportunity to be saved. Thank God, His Word bore the fruit of repentance in Nineveh and also in your life."

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:6-10 says, "Jesus declared that 'the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment . . . and condemn' His own generation of hearers who failed to repent (Mt 12:41). God continues to call us to repentance for our sins of thought, word, and deed. The men of Nineveh furnish us with an example to follow. May they not condemn us on the Day of Judgment! May the Holy Spirit rather lead us daily to repent of our sins and trust Christ for pardon and peace."

Next time, January 21, Jonah 4:1-3, 4-11

Closing Prayer & Benediction

“All the Prophets Testify”: Jonah 3:1-3, 4-10

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 January 07

Rev. Dr. Jayson S. Galler, Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX

<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (*TLSB* p.1479):

- I. Account of Jonah’s Call and His Reaction (1:1-3)
- II. Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4-17)
- III. Inside the Great Fish (2:1-10)
- IV. Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3)**
- V. Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10)**
- VI. Jonah’s Prayer in Nineveh (4:1-3)
- VII. Jonah Sits Outside the City of Nineveh; Yahweh Teaches a Lesson on Mercy (4:4-11)

Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3):

3:1 *Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying:* the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” but seems translated reasonably with “then” (compare 1:1’s “Now”). Last time we ended with Jonah just vomited out upon the dry land. Allen says, “Jonah has been brought back to his point of origin—in place but not experience. He is now ‘a new man, a new creature like the one who has passed through baptism’ (Ellul).” Laetsch refers to God’s assuring Jonah “that his willful disobedience had not made him ineligible for the Lord’s service” (Luther, for example, says the first command had been nullified by Jonah’s disobedience and points to the people of Israel who once on their own presumed to do something they had initially failed to do and suffered defeat because of their presumption). This verse repeats “the word of the Lord came to Jonah” from 1:1, though omitting 1:1’s identification of Jonah as “the son of Amittai”. The repetition perhaps intentionally recalls God’s giving Jonah his assignment a first time in order to contrast it with this second time and its different result after the intervening events. *TLSB* comments, “God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance.” Allen points to Simon Peter’s being given a second “Follow me” (John 21:19 with reference to Mark 1:17).

3:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it:* this part of Jonah’s assignment is repeated in this verse from 1:2, though omitting 1:2’s rationale “for their evil has come up before me”.

the message that I tell you: notably, where 1:2 did not specify what Jonah was to “call out against” Nineveh”, 3:2 specifies “the message that I tell you”. Laetsch refers to the Lord’s not informing Jonah of His purpose and speaks of the prophet’s and preacher’s duty of preaching only whatever the Lord tells him. *TLSB* comments, “God would give Jonah the words to speak against Nineveh, reflecting God’s will rather than Jonah’s”, though we are given no other explicit indication at this point that the otherwise faithful Jonah would have substituted his own will for God’s. Presumably the message that the Lord tells Jonah is the message that Jonah calls out in 3:4.

3:3 *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord:* Again the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” (compare 1:3’s “But”). This verse repeats “Jonah rose” from 1:3, again recalling Jonah’s response to his first assignment, though what follows obviously is different, emphasizing Jonah’s obedience the second time, however reluctant it might have been (see, for example, *CSSB*, with reference to 4:1-5). Allen describes “according to the word of the Lord” as tracing “an artistic arc between the original proclamation of the word and its positive implementation”, adding that “Jonah is now as compliant as those other servants, the wind, the sea, and the fish.”

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth: the earlier characterization of Nineveh as a “great city” (1:2; 3:2) is repeated with, in the Hebrew, a prepositional phrase “to God” (confer *TLSB*’s comment that the expression indicates “God’s concern for the city”, and Laetsch contrasts God’s judgment with Jonah’s [Luther’s editors note that the Latin Vulgate text has “great city” and that “great before God” usually was interpreted as “exceedingly great”]; Allen calls it “God-sized”). Although, the following “three days journey in breadth” (or even the ESV text’s marginal reading “a visit was a three day’s journey”) understandably leads one to think that the preceding clause refers to Nineveh’s size, and the commentators oblige with various details about population (4:11) and why three days might have been necessary (for example, *CSSB* suggests “‘a preaching circuit’ through the city’s gates and plazas” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch and Laetsch and Luther]). Keil-Delitzsch connects God’s regard for the city to its size, but that surely cannot exhaust the idea. The mention of the number of days journey at a minimum transitions to 3:4-10 (if not suggests that 3:3 belongs with the following section).

Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10):

3:4 *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out:* although omitted by the ESV, the Hebrew text at the beginning of the verse again has the conjunction that could be a simple “and”. Jonah’s going a day’s journey certainly qualifies as “beginning” to go into a city that requires a three day’s journey. Presumably Jonah was calling out as he went (confer *TLSB*’s comment, “On the first day of Jonah’s anticipated three-day visit, the people of Nineveh already responded to his message” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch]; note that 3:3 did not say that Jonah was only going to be in Nineveh for three days [compare the forty days that follow in this verse]).

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”: presumably the message Jonah called out was the message Jonah was told by God (3:2). Although, as Roehrs-Franzmann points out, this is “the whole of Jonah’s prophetic utterance”, likely only part of the message is given (for example, Keil-Delitzsch says, “Jonah of course explained by denouncing the sins and vices of the day”, and Luther includes Jonah’s adding “how one should be a godly person, and all that is involved in this”, though later Luther says the people heard nothing from Jonah of God’s mercy); we might reflect on whether what is given is law or Gospel or both. *TLSB* notes that “overthrown” could be “overturned” and understood as “in destruction” (Roehrs-Franzmann gives the example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorroah in Genesis 1:25 [confer Laetsch]) or “in repentance and faith” (*TLSB* refers to p.1080 and its treatment of the Hebrew word *shub* for “turn” [which Hebrew word is used in 3:10], but used in 3:4 is a different Hebrew word for “turn”, *haphak*; *TLSB* further refers to God’s “overturning His decision”, and the king of Nineveh does use *shub* of God in 3:9, but used in 3:10 is *nacham* [which the king also uses of God in 3:9], which word we will discuss with that verse). *TLSB* notes that nothing more is heard about Jonah until chapter 4 (perhaps after the forty days, which Keil-Delitzsch links to the flood and Allen to Israel’s years and Jesus’s days in the wilderness [it is the number of the earth 4 times a number of completion 10]); the rest of chapter 3 focuses on the people’s response to Jonah’s message and God’s “response” to their response.

3:5 *And the people of Nineveh believed God*: Laetsch notes that from the Hebrew verb translated “believe” we get our word “Amen”. Allen agrees with the Aramaic Targum that paraphrases “God” as “the word of God”. We are not told precisely what the people of Nineveh believed (for example, the brief proclamation of Jonah given in 3:4 does not even mention God, though surely God is the actor behind the passive verb). Did they believe only that destruction was coming in forty days? Maybe they believed also that, by their turning from their evil ways (confer 3:9, 10; see also 1:2) and trusting that God would forgive them, they could be saved? *TLSB* comments, “The Holy Spirit working through the Word convinced the people of Nineveh that God would indeed overthrow their city if they did not repent” (“repent” perhaps understood as contrition/sorrow and faith/trust?), and *TLSB* calls it a “miracle of faith” that was “even greater than Jonah’s rescue by a great fish”. Luther comments, “Neither Christ nor all the apostles and prophets were ever able to bring Jerusalem to that point by means of their words and their miracles, though they ministered to it for a long time and preached from one end of the city to the other.”

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them: *TLSB* refers to the fast and sackcloth as “traditional signs of repentance and mourning” with reference to its note at Leviticus 16:29. *TLSB* quotes Luther’s pointing out the people’s doing things that God had not commanded, though we do not know for sure that Jonah did not mention such outwards signs of the inward change that God valued most. Maybe the people of Nineveh came up with the outward signs on their own? Keil-Delitzsch says, “these outward signs of mourning are for the most part the common human expressions of deep sorrow of heart, and are found in the same or similar forms among all the nations of antiquity”. *TLSB* also contrasts the quick response of every level of society with “Israel’s frequent hardness of heart”, though Allen describes Nineveh’s response as “what Israel would have done in the same circumstances.” The next verse shows just how “the greatest” of them responded in the way described.

3:6 *The word reached the king of Nineveh*: *TLSB* comments, “Messengers probably brought the king news of what the citizens of the city were doing.” *CSSB* identifies the king of Nineveh with the king of Assyria. Allen considers the king a counterpart of the ship’s captain in chapter 1

and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes: presumably the king not only heard what the people were doing but why and he also came to believe? *TLSB* comments, “Even the king vacated the honor of his throne and joined his people in expressions of repentance.”

3:7 *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh*, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: “published” likely by heralds reading it aloud (confer Keil-Delitzsch). Once maybe in newspapers with salesmen crying “Extra! Extra!” Today would it be an email or text-message blast? Nobles could be “great men” or “ministers”. *TLSB* comments, “King and nobles wanted to ensure that everyone on Nineveh got the message and responded to his decree.” We might reflect on the Old Testament theocracy, Reformation-era prince-dictated religions, and “state” churches in our time.

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water: Keil-Delitzsch seems to distinguish herds of oxen from flocks of sheep. *TLSB* comments, “Including animals underscores urgency of repentance”, and it quotes the Church Father Tertullian that the leadership was “starving out even the cattle with which God was not angry”. *TLSB* further remarks on “the completeness of the fast” and “suggests it was of short duration”.

3:8 *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth*: covering the animals in sackcloth might seem surprising (Keil-Delitzsch gives precedents for it and discusses “a biotic *rapport*” [confer Laetsch at least on the precedents even among the Jews]), except maybe for animals that otherwise might have been covered with things such as royal trappings (which Keil-Delitzsch rules out). Allen comments, “The community was threatened with the destruction of all animate life; it was fitting that animals who were to share the fate of their human masters should join in the appeal.” Arguably reflecting the first part of repentance, sorrow over sin.

and let them call out mightily to God: *TLSB* contrasts the sailors of 1:14’s calling out to “the Lord” with the king’s use of the general term “God”, but the ESV’s capitalization at least would seem to suggest no difference in understanding (Laetsch, for example, refers to the use of the article to denote the one, true God. Keil-Delitzsch suggest that even the animals are calling out to God (confer Allen, who refers to Joel 1:20). Arguably reflecting the second part of repentance, faith that trusts God to forgive sin for the sake of the coming Messiah.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands: *TLSB* comments, “Acknowledgment of Nineveh’s sin and truth of God’s judgment (1:2; 3:2)” (confer also *TLSB* on 3:9), but perhaps also the “third” part of repentance, at least a desire to do better and stop sinning.

3:9 *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish*”: We discussed “Who knows” previously in regards to Joel 2:14, for example, not as uncertainty but as a humble trust that does not want to presume on God (Luther suggests the heart wrestles with fear and doubt and has not yet gained a full victory”). *TLSB* refers to the king and pagan sailors’ “hope”, but we might say only if that “hope” is the sure and certain hope of faith, which Luther as quoted by *TLSB* seems to understand from the Biblical text that they had. The king uses *shub* twice, translated “turn”, and *nacham* once, translated “relent” (both are mentioned above in connection with 3:4 and again below in connection with 3:10). Arguably implicit is some sort of expiation or propitiation of God’s wrath, substitutionary atonement, which can only be the Messiah (confer John 3:16).

3:10 *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way*: of course, God knows what is in the Ninevites’ hearts without seeing anything, but outward actions, such as visible signs of sorrow, prayers of faith asking for forgiveness, and a change of behavior are fruits/evidence of repentance/faith, so much so that they can be the basis for judgment in some passages. (Keil-Delitzsch at least does not think that the Ninevites’ conversion to God was thorough or long-lasting, including pointing to their later destruction [compare Laetsch specifically opposed to Keil], but Keil-Delitzsch thinks that the effect of God’s work through Jonah’s preaching was sufficient to show Israel that God was also the God of the heathen and could prepare for Himself from them a people of His possession, as we at least might say, God does with the Gentiles in the New Testament Church.)

God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it: Luther comments, “It is superfluous to enter on the subtle question here how God can repent, turn from and regret His anger, since He is unchangeable. Some people are deeply concerned about this; they complicate the matter for themselves unnecessarily.” As we discussed in connection with Joel 2:14, God does not “repent” or “regret” decisions that He makes. We can say that God does not change but that we change in relationship to God. When, by the enabling call of the Holy Spirit, we go from not repenting and deserving His consequent will of damnation, then God the Father forgives us for Jesus’s sake, in keeping with His antecedent will to save all people. *TLSB* comments, “If the Ninevites had not repented, God would have destroyed them” (not that repentance is a work that saves but a necessary condition), and *TLSB* quotes from Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:166 regarding “the whole process” of repentance—“contrition, faith, and good fruits”—bringing about “the mitigation of public and private punishments and calamities” (Ap XII:164).

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-5 says, "God is concerned for all people, even those we might write off. The people of Nineveh hard seem like 'good prospects.' However, the message they hear is from God, and God makes sure that it bears the fruit of repentance. [?] Do you assume some people are unable or unwilling to respond to the Gospel? Leave conversion in God's hands and faithfully fulfill your role as His witness. He has promised that His Word will bear fruit, and He is concerned that all people have the opportunity to be saved. Thank God, His Word bore the fruit of repentance in Nineveh and also in your life."

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:6-10 says, "Jesus declared that 'the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment . . . and condemn' His own generation of hearers who failed to repent (Mt 12:41). God continues to call us to repentance for our sins of thought, word, and deed. The men of Nineveh furnish us with an example to follow. May they not condemn us on the Day of Judgment! May the Holy Spirit rather lead us daily to repent of our sins and trust Christ for pardon and peace."

Next time, January 21, Jonah 4:1-3, 4-11

Closing Prayer & Benediction

“All the Prophets Testify”: Jonah 3:1-3, 4-10

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 January 07

Rev. Dr. Jayson S. Galler, Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX

<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (*TLSB* p.1479):

- I. Account of Jonah’s Call and His Reaction (1:1-3)
- II. Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4-17)
- III. Inside the Great Fish (2:1-10)
- IV. Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3)**
- V. Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10)**
- VI. Jonah’s Prayer in Nineveh (4:1-3)
- VII. Jonah Sits Outside the City of Nineveh; Yahweh Teaches a Lesson on Mercy (4:4-11)

Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3):

3:1 *Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying:* the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” but seems translated reasonably with “then” (compare 1:1’s “Now”). Last time we ended with Jonah just vomited out upon the dry land. Allen says, “Jonah has been brought back to his point of origin—in place but not experience. He is now ‘a new man, a new creature like the one who has passed through baptism’ (Ellul).” Laetsch refers to God’s assuring Jonah “that his willful disobedience had not made him ineligible for the Lord’s service” (Luther, for example, says the first command had been nullified by Jonah’s disobedience and points to the people of Israel who once on their own presumed to do something they had initially failed to do and suffered defeat because of their presumption). This verse repeats “the word of the Lord came to Jonah” from 1:1, though omitting 1:1’s identification of Jonah as “the son of Amittai”. The repetition perhaps intentionally recalls God’s giving Jonah his assignment a first time in order to contrast it with this second time and its different result after the intervening events. *TLSB* comments, “God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance.” Allen points to Simon Peter’s being given a second “Follow me” (John 21:19 with reference to Mark 1:17).

3:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it:* this part of Jonah’s assignment is repeated in this verse from 1:2, though omitting 1:2’s rationale “for their evil has come up before me”.

the message that I tell you: notably, where 1:2 did not specify what Jonah was to “call out against” Nineveh”, 3:2 specifies “the message that I tell you”. Laetsch refers to the Lord’s not informing Jonah of His purpose and speaks of the prophet’s and preacher’s duty of preaching only whatever the Lord tells him. *TLSB* comments, “God would give Jonah the words to speak against Nineveh, reflecting God’s will rather than Jonah’s”, though we are given no other explicit indication at this point that the otherwise faithful Jonah would have substituted his own will for God’s. Presumably the message that the Lord tells Jonah is the message that Jonah calls out in 3:4.

3:3 *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord:* Again the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” (compare 1:3’s “But”). This verse repeats “Jonah rose” from 1:3, again recalling Jonah’s response to his first assignment, though what follows obviously is different, emphasizing Jonah’s obedience the second time, however reluctant it might have been (see, for example, *CSSB*, with reference to 4:1-5). Allen describes “according to the word of the Lord” as tracing “an artistic arc between the original proclamation of the word and its positive implementation”, adding that “Jonah is now as compliant as those other servants, the wind, the sea, and the fish.”

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth: the earlier characterization of Nineveh as a “great city” (1:2; 3:2) is repeated with, in the Hebrew, a prepositional phrase “to God” (confer *TLSB*’s comment that the expression indicates “God’s concern for the city”, and Laetsch contrasts God’s judgment with Jonah’s [Luther’s editors note that the Latin Vulgate text has “great city” and that “great before God” usually was interpreted as “exceedingly great”]; Allen calls it “God-sized”). Although, the following “three days journey in breadth” (or even the ESV text’s marginal reading “a visit was a three day’s journey”) understandably leads one to think that the preceding clause refers to Nineveh’s size, and the commentators oblige with various details about population (4:11) and why three days might have been necessary (for example, *CSSB* suggests “‘a preaching circuit’ through the city’s gates and plazas” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch and Laetsch and Luther]). Keil-Delitzsch connects God’s regard for the city to its size, but that surely cannot exhaust the idea. The mention of the number of days journey at a minimum transitions to 3:4-10 (if not suggests that 3:3 belongs with the following section).

Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10):

3:4 *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out:* although omitted by the ESV, the Hebrew text at the beginning of the verse again has the conjunction that could be a simple “and”. Jonah’s going a day’s journey certainly qualifies as “beginning” to go into a city that requires a three day’s journey. Presumably Jonah was calling out as he went (confer *TLSB*’s comment, “On the first day of Jonah’s anticipated three-day visit, the people of Nineveh already responded to his message” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch]; note that 3:3 did not say that Jonah was only going to be in Nineveh for three days [compare the forty days that follow in this verse]).

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”: presumably the message Jonah called out was the message Jonah was told by God (3:2). Although, as Roehrs-Franzmann points out, this is “the whole of Jonah’s prophetic utterance”, likely only part of the message is given (for example, Keil-Delitzsch says, “Jonah of course explained by denouncing the sins and vices of the day”, and Luther includes Jonah’s adding “how one should be a godly person, and all that is involved in this”, though later Luther says the people heard nothing from Jonah of God’s mercy); we might reflect on whether what is given is law or Gospel or both. *TLSB* notes that “overthrown” could be “overturned” and understood as “in destruction” (Roehrs-Franzmann gives the example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorroah in Genesis 1:25 [confer Laetsch]) or “in repentance and faith” (*TLSB* refers to p.1080 and its treatment of the Hebrew word *shub* for “turn” [which Hebrew word is used in 3:10], but used in 3:4 is a different Hebrew word for “turn”, *haphak*; *TLSB* further refers to God’s “overturning His decision”, and the king of Nineveh does use *shub* of God in 3:9, but used in 3:10 is *nacham* [which the king also uses of God in 3:9], which word we will discuss with that verse). *TLSB* notes that nothing more is heard about Jonah until chapter 4 (perhaps after the forty days, which Keil-Delitzsch links to the flood and Allen to Israel’s years and Jesus’s days in the wilderness [it is the number of the earth 4 times a number of completion 10]); the rest of chapter 3 focuses on the people’s response to Jonah’s message and God’s “response” to their response.

3:5 *And the people of Nineveh believed God*: Laetsch notes that from the Hebrew verb translated “believe” we get our word “Amen”. Allen agrees with the Aramaic Targum that paraphrases “God” as “the word of God”. We are not told precisely what the people of Nineveh believed (for example, the brief proclamation of Jonah given in 3:4 does not even mention God, though surely God is the actor behind the passive verb). Did they believe only that destruction was coming in forty days? Maybe they believed also that, by their turning from their evil ways (confer 3:9, 10; see also 1:2) and trusting that God would forgive them, they could be saved? *TLSB* comments, “The Holy Spirit working through the Word convinced the people of Nineveh that God would indeed overthrow their city if they did not repent” (“repent” perhaps understood as contrition/sorrow and faith/trust?), and *TLSB* calls it a “miracle of faith” that was “even greater than Jonah’s rescue by a great fish”. Luther comments, “Neither Christ nor all the apostles and prophets were ever able to bring Jerusalem to that point by means of their words and their miracles, though they ministered to it for a long time and preached from one end of the city to the other.”

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them: *TLSB* refers to the fast and sackcloth as “traditional signs of repentance and mourning” with reference to its note at Leviticus 16:29. *TLSB* quotes Luther’s pointing out the people’s doing things that God had not commanded, though we do not know for sure that Jonah did not mention such outwards signs of the inward change that God valued most. Maybe the people of Nineveh came up with the outward signs on their own? Keil-Delitzsch says, “these outward signs of mourning are for the most part the common human expressions of deep sorrow of heart, and are found in the same or similar forms among all the nations of antiquity”. *TLSB* also contrasts the quick response of every level of society with “Israel’s frequent hardness of heart”, though Allen describes Nineveh’s response as “what Israel would have done in the same circumstances.” The next verse shows just how “the greatest” of them responded in the way described.

3:6 *The word reached the king of Nineveh*: *TLSB* comments, “Messengers probably brought the king news of what the citizens of the city were doing.” *CSSB* identifies the king of Nineveh with the king of Assyria. Allen considers the king a counterpart of the ship’s captain in chapter 1

and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes: presumably the king not only heard what the people were doing but why and he also came to believe? *TLSB* comments, “Even the king vacated the honor of his throne and joined his people in expressions of repentance.”

3:7 *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh*, “By the decree of the king and his nobles”: “published” likely by heralds reading it aloud (confer Keil-Delitzsch). Once maybe in newspapers with salesmen crying “Extra! Extra!” Today would it be an email or text-message blast? Nobles could be “great men” or “ministers”. *TLSB* comments, “King and nobles wanted to ensure that everyone on Nineveh got the message and responded to his decree.” We might reflect on the Old Testament theocracy, Reformation-era prince-dictated religions, and “state” churches in our time.

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water: Keil-Delitzsch seems to distinguish herds of oxen from flocks of sheep. *TLSB* comments, “Including animals underscores urgency of repentance”, and it quotes the Church Father Tertullian that the leadership was “starving out even the cattle with which God was not angry”. *TLSB* further remarks on “the completeness of the fast” and “suggests it was of short duration”.

3:8 *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth*: covering the animals in sackcloth might seem surprising (Keil-Delitzsch gives precedents for it and discusses “a biotic *rapport*” [confer Laetsch at least on the precedents even among the Jews]), except maybe for animals that otherwise might have been covered with things such as royal trappings (which Keil-Delitzsch rules out). Allen comments, “The community was threatened with the destruction of all animate life; it was fitting that animals who were to share the fate of their human masters should join in the appeal.” Arguably reflecting the first part of repentance, sorrow over sin.

and let them call out mightily to God: *TLSB* contrasts the sailors of 1:14’s calling out to “the Lord” with the king’s use of the general term “God”, but the ESV’s capitalization at least would seem to suggest no difference in understanding (Laetsch, for example, refers to the use of the article to denote the one, true God. Keil-Delitzsch suggest that even the animals are calling out to God (confer Allen, who refers to Joel 1:20). Arguably reflecting the second part of repentance, faith that trusts God to forgive sin for the sake of the coming Messiah.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands: *TLSB* comments, “Acknowledgment of Nineveh’s sin and truth of God’s judgment (1:2; 3:2)” (confer also *TLSB* on 3:9), but perhaps also the “third” part of repentance, at least a desire to do better and stop sinning.

3:9 *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish*”: We discussed “Who knows” previously in regards to Joel 2:14, for example, not as uncertainty but as a humble trust that does not want to presume on God (Luther suggests the heart wrestles with fear and doubt and has not yet gained a full victory”). *TLSB* refers to the king and pagan sailors’ “hope”, but we might say only if that “hope” is the sure and certain hope of faith, which Luther as quoted by *TLSB* seems to understand from the Biblical text that they had. The king uses *shub* twice, translated “turn”, and *nacham* once, translated “relent” (both are mentioned above in connection with 3:4 and again below in connection with 3:10). Arguably implicit is some sort of expiation or propitiation of God’s wrath, substitutionary atonement, which can only be the Messiah (confer John 3:16).

3:10 *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way*: of course, God knows what is in the Ninevites’ hearts without seeing anything, but outward actions, such as visible signs of sorrow, prayers of faith asking for forgiveness, and a change of behavior are fruits/evidence of repentance/faith, so much so that they can be the basis for judgment in some passages. (Keil-Delitzsch at least does not think that the Ninevites’ conversion to God was thorough or long-lasting, including pointing to their later destruction [compare Laetsch specifically opposed to Keil], but Keil-Delitzsch thinks that the effect of God’s work through Jonah’s preaching was sufficient to show Israel that God was also the God of the heathen and could prepare for Himself from them a people of His possession, as we at least might say, God does with the Gentiles in the New Testament Church.)

God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it: Luther comments, “It is superfluous to enter on the subtle question here how God can repent, turn from and regret His anger, since He is unchangeable. Some people are deeply concerned about this; they complicate the matter for themselves unnecessarily.” As we discussed in connection with Joel 2:14, God does not “repent” or “regret” decisions that He makes. We can say that God does not change but that we change in relationship to God. When, by the enabling call of the Holy Spirit, we go from not repenting and deserving His consequent will of damnation, then God the Father forgives us for Jesus’s sake, in keeping with His antecedent will to save all people. *TLSB* comments, “If the Ninevites had not repented, God would have destroyed them” (not that repentance is a work that saves but a necessary condition), and *TLSB* quotes from Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:166 regarding “the whole process” of repentance—“contrition, faith, and good fruits”—bringing about “the mitigation of public and private punishments and calamities” (Ap XII:164).

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-5 says, "God is concerned for all people, even those we might write off. The people of Nineveh hard seem like 'good prospects.' However, the message they hear is from God, and God makes sure that it bears the fruit of repentance. [?] Do you assume some people are unable or unwilling to respond to the Gospel? Leave conversion in God's hands and faithfully fulfill your role as His witness. He has promised that His Word will bear fruit, and He is concerned that all people have the opportunity to be saved. Thank God, His Word bore the fruit of repentance in Nineveh and also in your life."

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:6-10 says, "Jesus declared that 'the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment . . . and condemn' His own generation of hearers who failed to repent (Mt 12:41). God continues to call us to repentance for our sins of thought, word, and deed. The men of Nineveh furnish us with an example to follow. May they not condemn us on the Day of Judgment! May the Holy Spirit rather lead us daily to repent of our sins and trust Christ for pardon and peace."

Next time, January 21, Jonah 4:1-3, 4-11

Closing Prayer & Benediction

“All the Prophets Testify”: Jonah 3:1-3, 4-10

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 January 07

Rev. Dr. Jayson S. Galler, Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX

<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (*TLSB* p.1479):

- I. Account of Jonah’s Call and His Reaction (1:1-3)
- II. Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4-17)
- III. Inside the Great Fish (2:1-10)
- IV. Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3)**
- V. Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10)**
- VI. Jonah’s Prayer in Nineveh (4:1-3)
- VII. Jonah Sits Outside the City of Nineveh; Yahweh Teaches a Lesson on Mercy (4:4-11)

Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3):

3:1 *Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying:* the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” but seems translated reasonably with “then” (compare 1:1’s “Now”). Last time we ended with Jonah just vomited out upon the dry land. Allen says, “Jonah has been brought back to his point of origin—in place but not experience. He is now ‘a new man, a new creature like the one who has passed through baptism’ (Ellul).” Laetsch refers to God’s assuring Jonah “that his willful disobedience had not made him ineligible for the Lord’s service” (Luther, for example, says the first command had been nullified by Jonah’s disobedience and points to the people of Israel who once on their own presumed to do something they had initially failed to do and suffered defeat because of their presumption). This verse repeats “the word of the Lord came to Jonah” from 1:1, though omitting 1:1’s identification of Jonah as “the son of Amittai”. The repetition perhaps intentionally recalls God’s giving Jonah his assignment a first time in order to contrast it with this second time and its different result after the intervening events. *TLSB* comments, “God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance.” Allen points to Simon Peter’s being given a second “Follow me” (John 21:19 with reference to Mark 1:17).

3:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it:* this part of Jonah’s assignment is repeated in this verse from 1:2, though omitting 1:2’s rationale “for their evil has come up before me”.

the message that I tell you: notably, where 1:2 did not specify what Jonah was to “call out against” Nineveh”, 3:2 specifies “the message that I tell you”. Laetsch refers to the Lord’s not informing Jonah of His purpose and speaks of the prophet’s and preacher’s duty of preaching only whatever the Lord tells him. *TLSB* comments, “God would give Jonah the words to speak against Nineveh, reflecting God’s will rather than Jonah’s”, though we are given no other explicit indication at this point that the otherwise faithful Jonah would have substituted his own will for God’s. Presumably the message that the Lord tells Jonah is the message that Jonah calls out in 3:4.

3:3 *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord:* Again the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” (compare 1:3’s “But”). This verse repeats “Jonah rose” from 1:3, again recalling Jonah’s response to his first assignment, though what follows obviously is different, emphasizing Jonah’s obedience the second time, however reluctant it might have been (see, for example, *CSSB*, with reference to 4:1-5). Allen describes “according to the word of the Lord” as tracing “an artistic arc between the original proclamation of the word and its positive implementation”, adding that “Jonah is now as compliant as those other servants, the wind, the sea, and the fish.”

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth: the earlier characterization of Nineveh as a “great city” (1:2; 3:2) is repeated with, in the Hebrew, a prepositional phrase “to God” (confer *TLSB*’s comment that the expression indicates “God’s concern for the city”, and Laetsch contrasts God’s judgment with Jonah’s [Luther’s editors note that the Latin Vulgate text has “great city” and that “great before God” usually was interpreted as “exceedingly great”]; Allen calls it “God-sized”). Although, the following “three days journey in breadth” (or even the ESV text’s marginal reading “a visit was a three day’s journey”) understandably leads one to think that the preceding clause refers to Nineveh’s size, and the commentators oblige with various details about population (4:11) and why three days might have been necessary (for example, *CSSB* suggests “‘a preaching circuit’ through the city’s gates and plazas” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch and Laetsch and Luther]). Keil-Delitzsch connects God’s regard for the city to its size, but that surely cannot exhaust the idea. The mention of the number of days journey at a minimum transitions to 3:4-10 (if not suggests that 3:3 belongs with the following section).

Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10):

3:4 *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out:* although omitted by the ESV, the Hebrew text at the beginning of the verse again has the conjunction that could be a simple “and”. Jonah’s going a day’s journey certainly qualifies as “beginning” to go into a city that requires a three day’s journey. Presumably Jonah was calling out as he went (confer *TLSB*’s comment, “On the first day of Jonah’s anticipated three-day visit, the people of Nineveh already responded to his message” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch]; note that 3:3 did not say that Jonah was only going to be in Nineveh for three days [compare the forty days that follow in this verse]).

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”: presumably the message Jonah called out was the message Jonah was told by God (3:2). Although, as Roehrs-Franzmann points out, this is “the whole of Jonah’s prophetic utterance”, likely only part of the message is given (for example, Keil-Delitzsch says, “Jonah of course explained by denouncing the sins and vices of the day”, and Luther includes Jonah’s adding “how one should be a godly person, and all that is involved in this”, though later Luther says the people heard nothing from Jonah of God’s mercy); we might reflect on whether what is given is law or Gospel or both. *TLSB* notes that “overthrown” could be “overturned” and understood as “in destruction” (Roehrs-Franzmann gives the example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 1:25 [confer Laetsch]) or “in repentance and faith” (*TLSB* refers to p.1080 and its treatment of the Hebrew word *shub* for “turn” [which Hebrew word is used in 3:10], but used in 3:4 is a different Hebrew word for “turn”, *haphak*; *TLSB* further refers to God’s “overturning His decision”, and the king of Nineveh does use *shub* of God in 3:9, but used in 3:10 is *nacham* [which the king also uses of God in 3:9], which word we will discuss with that verse). *TLSB* notes that nothing more is heard about Jonah until chapter 4 (perhaps after the forty days, which Keil-Delitzsch links to the flood and Allen to Israel’s years and Jesus’s days in the wilderness [it is the number of the earth 4 times a number of completion 10]); the rest of chapter 3 focuses on the people’s response to Jonah’s message and God’s “response” to their response.

3:5 *And the people of Nineveh believed God*: Laetsch notes that from the Hebrew verb translated “believe” we get our word “Amen”. Allen agrees with the Aramaic Targum that paraphrases “God” as “the word of God”. We are not told precisely what the people of Nineveh believed (for example, the brief proclamation of Jonah given in 3:4 does not even mention God, though surely God is the actor behind the passive verb). Did they believe only that destruction was coming in forty days? Maybe they believed also that, by their turning from their evil ways (confer 3:9, 10; see also 1:2) and trusting that God would forgive them, they could be saved? *TLSB* comments, “The Holy Spirit working through the Word convinced the people of Nineveh that God would indeed overthrow their city if they did not repent” (“repent” perhaps understood as contrition/sorrow and faith/trust?), and *TLSB* calls it a “miracle of faith” that was “even greater than Jonah’s rescue by a great fish”. Luther comments, “Neither Christ nor all the apostles and prophets were ever able to bring Jerusalem to that point by means of their words and their miracles, though they ministered to it for a long time and preached from one end of the city to the other.”

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them: *TLSB* refers to the fast and sackcloth as “traditional signs of repentance and mourning” with reference to its note at Leviticus 16:29. *TLSB* quotes Luther’s pointing out the people’s doing things that God had not commanded, though we do not know for sure that Jonah did not mention such outwards signs of the inward change that God valued most. Maybe the people of Nineveh came up with the outward signs on their own? Keil-Delitzsch says, “these outward signs of mourning are for the most part the common human expressions of deep sorrow of heart, and are found in the same or similar forms among all the nations of antiquity”. *TLSB* also contrasts the quick response of every level of society with “Israel’s frequent hardness of heart”, though Allen describes Nineveh’s response as “what Israel would have done in the same circumstances.” The next verse shows just how “the greatest” of them responded in the way described.

3:6 *The word reached the king of Nineveh*: *TLSB* comments, “Messengers probably brought the king news of what the citizens of the city were doing.” *CSSB* identifies the king of Nineveh with the king of Assyria. Allen considers the king a counterpart of the ship’s captain in chapter 1

and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes: presumably the king not only heard what the people were doing but why and he also came to believe? *TLSB* comments, “Even the king vacated the honor of his throne and joined his people in expressions of repentance.”

3:7 *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh*, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: “published” likely by heralds reading it aloud (confer Keil-Delitzsch). Once maybe in newspapers with salesmen crying “Extra! Extra!” Today would it be an email or text-message blast? Nobles could be “great men” or “ministers”. *TLSB* comments, “King and nobles wanted to ensure that everyone on Nineveh got the message and responded to his decree.” We might reflect on the Old Testament theocracy, Reformation-era prince-dictated religions, and “state” churches in our time.

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water: Keil-Delitzsch seems to distinguish herds of oxen from flocks of sheep. *TLSB* comments, “Including animals underscores urgency of repentance”, and it quotes the Church Father Tertullian that the leadership was “starving out even the cattle with which God was not angry”. *TLSB* further remarks on “the completeness of the fast” and “suggests it was of short duration”.

3:8 *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth*: covering the animals in sackcloth might seem surprising (Keil-Delitzsch gives precedents for it and discusses “a biotic *rapport*” [confer Laetsch at least on the precedents even among the Jews]), except maybe for animals that otherwise might have been covered with things such as royal trappings (which Keil-Delitzsch rules out). Allen comments, “The community was threatened with the destruction of all animate life; it was fitting that animals who were to share the fate of their human masters should join in the appeal.” Arguably reflecting the first part of repentance, sorrow over sin.

and let them call out mightily to God: *TLSB* contrasts the sailors of 1:14’s calling out to “the Lord” with the king’s use of the general term “God”, but the ESV’s capitalization at least would seem to suggest no difference in understanding (Laetsch, for example, refers to the use of the article to denote the one, true God. Keil-Delitzsch suggest that even the animals are calling out to God (confer Allen, who refers to Joel 1:20). Arguably reflecting the second part of repentance, faith that trusts God to forgive sin for the sake of the coming Messiah.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands: *TLSB* comments, “Acknowledgment of Nineveh’s sin and truth of God’s judgment (1:2; 3:2)” (confer also *TLSB* on 3:9), but perhaps also the “third” part of repentance, at least a desire to do better and stop sinning.

3:9 *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish*”: We discussed “Who knows” previously in regards to Joel 2:14, for example, not as uncertainty but as a humble trust that does not want to presume on God (Luther suggests the heart wrestles with fear and doubt and has not yet gained a full victory”). *TLSB* refers to the king and pagan sailors’ “hope”, but we might say only if that “hope” is the sure and certain hope of faith, which Luther as quoted by *TLSB* seems to understand from the Biblical text that they had. The king uses *shub* twice, translated “turn”, and *nacham* once, translated “relent” (both are mentioned above in connection with 3:4 and again below in connection with 3:10). Arguably implicit is some sort of expiation or propitiation of God’s wrath, substitutionary atonement, which can only be the Messiah (confer John 3:16).

3:10 *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way*: of course, God knows what is in the Ninevites’ hearts without seeing anything, but outward actions, such as visible signs of sorrow, prayers of faith asking for forgiveness, and a change of behavior are fruits/evidence of repentance/faith, so much so that they can be the basis for judgment in some passages. (Keil-Delitzsch at least does not think that the Ninevites’ conversion to God was thorough or long-lasting, including pointing to their later destruction [compare Laetsch specifically opposed to Keil], but Keil-Delitzsch thinks that the effect of God’s work through Jonah’s preaching was sufficient to show Israel that God was also the God of the heathen and could prepare for Himself from them a people of His possession, as we at least might say, God does with the Gentiles in the New Testament Church.)

God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it: Luther comments, “It is superfluous to enter on the subtle question here how God can repent, turn from and regret His anger, since He is unchangeable. Some people are deeply concerned about this; they complicate the matter for themselves unnecessarily.” As we discussed in connection with Joel 2:14, God does not “repent” or “regret” decisions that He makes. We can say that God does not change but that we change in relationship to God. When, by the enabling call of the Holy Spirit, we go from not repenting and deserving His consequent will of damnation, then God the Father forgives us for Jesus’s sake, in keeping with His antecedent will to save all people. *TLSB* comments, “If the Ninevites had not repented, God would have destroyed them” (not that repentance is a work that saves but a necessary condition), and *TLSB* quotes from Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:166 regarding “the whole process” of repentance—“contrition, faith, and good fruits”—bringing about “the mitigation of public and private punishments and calamities” (Ap XII:164).

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-5 says, "God is concerned for all people, even those we might write off. The people of Nineveh hard seem like 'good prospects.' However, the message they hear is from God, and God makes sure that it bears the fruit of repentance. [?] Do you assume some people are unable or unwilling to respond to the Gospel? Leave conversion in God's hands and faithfully fulfill your role as His witness. He has promised that His Word will bear fruit, and He is concerned that all people have the opportunity to be saved. Thank God, His Word bore the fruit of repentance in Nineveh and also in your life."

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:6-10 says, "Jesus declared that 'the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment . . . and condemn' His own generation of hearers who failed to repent (Mt 12:41). God continues to call us to repentance for our sins of thought, word, and deed. The men of Nineveh furnish us with an example to follow. May they not condemn us on the Day of Judgment! May the Holy Spirit rather lead us daily to repent of our sins and trust Christ for pardon and peace."

Next time, January 21, Jonah 4:1-3, 4-11

Closing Prayer & Benediction

“All the Prophets Testify”: Jonah 3:1-3, 4-10

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 January 07

Rev. Dr. Jayson S. Galler, Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX

<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (*TLSB* p.1479):

- I. Account of Jonah’s Call and His Reaction (1:1-3)
- II. Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4-17)
- III. Inside the Great Fish (2:1-10)
- IV. Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3)**
- V. Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10)**
- VI. Jonah’s Prayer in Nineveh (4:1-3)
- VII. Jonah Sits Outside the City of Nineveh; Yahweh Teaches a Lesson on Mercy (4:4-11)

Yahweh gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1-3):

3:1 *Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying:* the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” but seems translated reasonably with “then” (compare 1:1’s “Now”). Last time we ended with Jonah just vomited out upon the dry land. Allen says, “Jonah has been brought back to his point of origin—in place but not experience. He is now ‘a new man, a new creature like the one who has passed through baptism’ (Ellul).” Laetsch refers to God’s assuring Jonah “that his willful disobedience had not made him ineligible for the Lord’s service” (Luther, for example, says the first command had been nullified by Jonah’s disobedience and points to the people of Israel who once on their own presumed to do something they had initially failed to do and suffered defeat because of their presumption). This verse repeats “the word of the Lord came to Jonah” from 1:1, though omitting 1:1’s identification of Jonah as “the son of Amittai”. The repetition perhaps intentionally recalls God’s giving Jonah his assignment a first time in order to contrast it with this second time and its different result after the intervening events. *TLSB* comments, “God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance.” Allen points to Simon Peter’s being given a second “Follow me” (John 21:19 with reference to Mark 1:17).

3:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it:* this part of Jonah’s assignment is repeated in this verse from 1:2, though omitting 1:2’s rationale “for their evil has come up before me”.

the message that I tell you: notably, where 1:2 did not specify what Jonah was to “call out against” Nineveh”, 3:2 specifies “the message that I tell you”. Laetsch refers to the Lord’s not informing Jonah of His purpose and speaks of the prophet’s and preacher’s duty of preaching only whatever the Lord tells him. *TLSB* comments, “God would give Jonah the words to speak against Nineveh, reflecting God’s will rather than Jonah’s”, though we are given no other explicit indication at this point that the otherwise faithful Jonah would have substituted his own will for God’s. Presumably the message that the Lord tells Jonah is the message that Jonah calls out in 3:4.

3:3 *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord:* Again the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and” (compare 1:3’s “But”). This verse repeats “Jonah rose” from 1:3, again recalling Jonah’s response to his first assignment, though what follows obviously is different, emphasizing Jonah’s obedience the second time, however reluctant it might have been (see, for example, *CSSB*, with reference to 4:1-5). Allen describes “according to the word of the Lord” as tracing “an artistic arc between the original proclamation of the word and its positive implementation”, adding that “Jonah is now as compliant as those other servants, the wind, the sea, and the fish.”

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth: the earlier characterization of Nineveh as a “great city” (1:2; 3:2) is repeated with, in the Hebrew, a prepositional phrase “to God” (confer *TLSB*’s comment that the expression indicates “God’s concern for the city”, and Laetsch contrasts God’s judgment with Jonah’s [Luther’s editors note that the Latin Vulgate text has “great city” and that “great before God” usually was interpreted as “exceedingly great”]; Allen calls it “God-sized”). Although, the following “three days journey in breadth” (or even the ESV text’s marginal reading “a visit was a three day’s journey”) understandably leads one to think that the preceding clause refers to Nineveh’s size, and the commentators oblige with various details about population (4:11) and why three days might have been necessary (for example, *CSSB* suggests “‘a preaching circuit’ through the city’s gates and plazas” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch and Laetsch and Luther]). Keil-Delitzsch connects God’s regard for the city to its size, but that surely cannot exhaust the idea. The mention of the number of days journey at a minimum transitions to 3:4-10 (if not suggests that 3:3 belongs with the following section).

Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh’s Response (3:4-10):

3:4 *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out:* although omitted by the ESV, the Hebrew text at the beginning of the verse again has the conjunction that could be a simple “and”. Jonah’s going a day’s journey certainly qualifies as “beginning” to go into a city that requires a three day’s journey. Presumably Jonah was calling out as he went (confer *TLSB*’s comment, “On the first day of Jonah’s anticipated three-day visit, the people of Nineveh already responded to his message” [confer also Keil-Delitzsch]; note that 3:3 did not say that Jonah was only going to be in Nineveh for three days [compare the forty days that follow in this verse]).

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”: presumably the message Jonah called out was the message Jonah was told by God (3:2). Although, as Roehrs-Franzmann points out, this is “the whole of Jonah’s prophetic utterance”, likely only part of the message is given (for example, Keil-Delitzsch says, “Jonah of course explained by denouncing the sins and vices of the day”, and Luther includes Jonah’s adding “how one should be a godly person, and all that is involved in this”, though later Luther says the people heard nothing from Jonah of God’s mercy); we might reflect on whether what is given is law or Gospel or both. *TLSB* notes that “overthrown” could be “overturned” and understood as “in destruction” (Roehrs-Franzmann gives the example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 1:25 [confer Laetsch]) or “in repentance and faith” (*TLSB* refers to p.1080 and its treatment of the Hebrew word *shub* for “turn” [which Hebrew word is used in 3:10], but used in 3:4 is a different Hebrew word for “turn”, *haphak*; *TLSB* further refers to God’s “overturning His decision”, and the king of Nineveh does use *shub* of God in 3:9, but used in 3:10 is *nacham* [which the king also uses of God in 3:9], which word we will discuss with that verse). *TLSB* notes that nothing more is heard about Jonah until chapter 4 (perhaps after the forty days, which Keil-Delitzsch links to the flood and Allen to Israel’s years and Jesus’s days in the wilderness [it is the number of the earth 4 times a number of completion 10]); the rest of chapter 3 focuses on the people’s response to Jonah’s message and God’s “response” to their response.

3:5 *And the people of Nineveh believed God*: Laetsch notes that from the Hebrew verb translated “believe” we get our word “Amen”. Allen agrees with the Aramaic Targum that paraphrases “God” as “the word of God”. We are not told precisely what the people of Nineveh believed (for example, the brief proclamation of Jonah given in 3:4 does not even mention God, though surely God is the actor behind the passive verb). Did they believe only that destruction was coming in forty days? Maybe they believed also that, by their turning from their evil ways (confer 3:9, 10; see also 1:2) and trusting that God would forgive them, they could be saved? *TLSB* comments, “The Holy Spirit working through the Word convinced the people of Nineveh that God would indeed overthrow their city if they did not repent” (“repent” perhaps understood as contrition/sorrow and faith/trust?), and *TLSB* calls it a “miracle of faith” that was “even greater than Jonah’s rescue by a great fish”. Luther comments, “Neither Christ nor all the apostles and prophets were ever able to bring Jerusalem to that point by means of their words and their miracles, though they ministered to it for a long time and preached from one end of the city to the other.”

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them: *TLSB* refers to the fast and sackcloth as “traditional signs of repentance and mourning” with reference to its note at Leviticus 16:29. *TLSB* quotes Luther’s pointing out the people’s doing things that God had not commanded, though we do not know for sure that Jonah did not mention such outwards signs of the inward change that God valued most. Maybe the people of Nineveh came up with the outward signs on their own? Keil-Delitzsch says, “these outward signs of mourning are for the most part the common human expressions of deep sorrow of heart, and are found in the same or similar forms among all the nations of antiquity”. *TLSB* also contrasts the quick response of every level of society with “Israel’s frequent hardness of heart”, though Allen describes Nineveh’s response as “what Israel would have done in the same circumstances.” The next verse shows just how “the greatest” of them responded in the way described.

3:6 *The word reached the king of Nineveh*: *TLSB* comments, “Messengers probably brought the king news of what the citizens of the city were doing.” *CSSB* identifies the king of Nineveh with the king of Assyria. Allen considers the king a counterpart of the ship’s captain in chapter 1

and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes: presumably the king not only heard what the people were doing but why and he also came to believe? *TLSB* comments, “Even the king vacated the honor of his throne and joined his people in expressions of repentance.”

3:7 *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh*, “By the decree of the king and his nobles”: “published” likely by heralds reading it aloud (confer Keil-Delitzsch). Once maybe in newspapers with salesmen crying “Extra! Extra!” Today would it be an email or text-message blast? Nobles could be “great men” or “ministers”. *TLSB* comments, “King and nobles wanted to ensure that everyone on Nineveh got the message and responded to his decree.” We might reflect on the Old Testament theocracy, Reformation-era prince-dictated religions, and “state” churches in our time.

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water: Keil-Delitzsch seems to distinguish herds of oxen from flocks of sheep. *TLSB* comments, “Including animals underscores urgency of repentance”, and it quotes the Church Father Tertullian that the leadership was “starving out even the cattle with which God was not angry”. *TLSB* further remarks on “the completeness of the fast” and “suggests it was of short duration”.

3:8 *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth*: covering the animals in sackcloth might seem surprising (Keil-Delitzsch gives precedents for it and discusses “a biotic *rapport*” [confer Laetsch at least on the precedents even among the Jews]), except maybe for animals that otherwise might have been covered with things such as royal trappings (which Keil-Delitzsch rules out). Allen comments, “The community was threatened with the destruction of all animate life; it was fitting that animals who were to share the fate of their human masters should join in the appeal.” Arguably reflecting the first part of repentance, sorrow over sin.

and let them call out mightily to God: *TLSB* contrasts the sailors of 1:14’s calling out to “the Lord” with the king’s use of the general term “God”, but the ESV’s capitalization at least would seem to suggest no difference in understanding (Laetsch, for example, refers to the use of the article to denote the one, true God. Keil-Delitzsch suggest that even the animals are calling out to God (confer Allen, who refers to Joel 1:20). Arguably reflecting the second part of repentance, faith that trusts God to forgive sin for the sake of the coming Messiah.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands: *TLSB* comments, “Acknowledgment of Nineveh’s sin and truth of God’s judgment (1:2; 3:2)” (confer also *TLSB* on 3:9), but perhaps also the “third” part of repentance, at least a desire to do better and stop sinning.

3:9 *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish*”: We discussed “Who knows” previously in regards to Joel 2:14, for example, not as uncertainty but as a humble trust that does not want to presume on God (Luther suggests the heart wrestles with fear and doubt and has not yet gained a full victory”). *TLSB* refers to the king and pagan sailors’ “hope”, but we might say only if that “hope” is the sure and certain hope of faith, which Luther as quoted by *TLSB* seems to understand from the Biblical text that they had. The king uses *shub* twice, translated “turn”, and *nacham* once, translated “relent” (both are mentioned above in connection with 3:4 and again below in connection with 3:10). Arguably implicit is some sort of expiation or propitiation of God’s wrath, substitutionary atonement, which can only be the Messiah (confer John 3:16).

3:10 *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way*: of course, God knows what is in the Ninevites’ hearts without seeing anything, but outward actions, such as visible signs of sorrow, prayers of faith asking for forgiveness, and a change of behavior are fruits/evidence of repentance/faith, so much so that they can be the basis for judgment in some passages. (Keil-Delitzsch at least does not think that the Ninevites’ conversion to God was thorough or long-lasting, including pointing to their later destruction [compare Laetsch specifically opposed to Keil], but Keil-Delitzsch thinks that the effect of God’s work through Jonah’s preaching was sufficient to show Israel that God was also the God of the heathen and could prepare for Himself from them a people of His possession, as we at least might say, God does with the Gentiles in the New Testament Church.)

God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it: Luther comments, “It is superfluous to enter on the subtle question here how God can repent, turn from and regret His anger, since He is unchangeable. Some people are deeply concerned about this; they complicate the matter for themselves unnecessarily.” As we discussed in connection with Joel 2:14, God does not “repent” or “regret” decisions that He makes. We can say that God does not change but that we change in relationship to God. When, by the enabling call of the Holy Spirit, we go from not repenting and deserving His consequent will of damnation, then God the Father forgives us for Jesus’s sake, in keeping with His antecedent will to save all people. *TLSB* comments, “If the Ninevites had not repented, God would have destroyed them” (not that repentance is a work that saves but a necessary condition), and *TLSB* quotes from Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII:166 regarding “the whole process” of repentance—“contrition, faith, and good fruits”—bringing about “the mitigation of public and private punishments and calamities” (Ap XII:164).

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-5 says, "God is concerned for all people, even those we might write off. The people of Nineveh hard seem like 'good prospects.' However, the message they hear is from God, and God makes sure that it bears the fruit of repentance. [?] Do you assume some people are unable or unwilling to respond to the Gospel? Leave conversion in God's hands and faithfully fulfill your role as His witness. He has promised that His Word will bear fruit, and He is concerned that all people have the opportunity to be saved. Thank God, His Word bore the fruit of repentance in Nineveh and also in your life."

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:6-10 says, "Jesus declared that 'the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment . . . and condemn' His own generation of hearers who failed to repent (Mt 12:41). God continues to call us to repentance for our sins of thought, word, and deed. The men of Nineveh furnish us with an example to follow. May they not condemn us on the Day of Judgment! May the Holy Spirit rather lead us daily to repent of our sins and trust Christ for pardon and peace."

Next time, January 21, Jonah 4:1-3, 4-11

Closing Prayer & Benediction