

## International Sunday School Lesson – Social Teachings of the Church-

### Unit 3: Fulfilling Our Obligations to God and Society

#### Lesson 9 Christian Expectation of Grace May 3, 2026

**Bible Basis:** Jonah 3:1-5 and Jonah 4:6-11

**Memory verse: Jonah 4:10-11a :** <sup>10</sup>Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: <sup>11</sup>And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city,

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#### Opening Summary of Chapter 3

After Jonah's rebellion and rescue, God speaks to him a second time. Jonah reluctantly obeys and preaches a simple message of judgment. Shockingly, the people of Nineveh respond with immediate repentance—from the greatest to the least - revealing God's mercy toward the nations and setting the stage for Jonah's internal struggle in chapter 4.

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#### Lesson Aims

**By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:**

- Recognize God as the God of second chances.
  - Understand Jonah's message and Nineveh's response.
  - Reflect on the power of obedience—even reluctant obedience.
  - Respond by examining their own readiness to repent and obey.
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#### Background Context

Jonah has just been delivered from the fish. Instead of discarding Jonah for his rebellion, God recommissions him. Nineveh, a violent and pagan city, stands under judgment. Yet God desires their repentance, not their destruction.

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## Names that Matter:

**Jonah:** name means "Dove"

**Home:** Gath Hopher (2 Kings 14:25), a city about 15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee, in the territory of Zebulun.

**Family:** son of Amittai

**Occupation:** Prophet in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (c 793-753 B.C)

**Nineveh:** On the eastern bank of the Tigris, modern Mosul, Iraq. A great city with a population of approximately 120,000 people.

### Who were the Ninevites?

The Ninevites did not come from one of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were Assyrians, part of a powerful and often hostile empire centered in Mesopotamia, with Nineveh as its capital.

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## 1. Ethnic and National Identity

- The Ninevites were Assyrians, not Israelites.
- Assyria was a dominant empire in the ancient Near East.
- Their culture, religion, and practices were pagan and violent, often involving idolatry and cruelty.

## 2. Nineveh's Role

- Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, located near modern-day Mosul in Iraq.
  - It was known for its size, wealth, and brutality.
  - The prophet Nahum later called it a "city of bloodshed." (Nahum 3:1)
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## Tribal Lineage

- The Assyrians descended from Shem, one of Noah's sons. (Genesis 10:

- Genesis 10:11–12 mentions Asshur (Shem’s son) and Nimrod (Cush’s son, Ham’s grandson) as founders of Assyrian cities like Nineveh.
  - **So while they had ancient Semitic roots, they were not part of Israel’s covenant family.**
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### Why This Matters in Jonah’s Story

- Jonah was an Israelite prophet, likely from the tribe of Zebulun (based on his hometown, Gath-hepher).
  - Jonah prophesied that Israel would be restored in 2 Kings 14:25.
  - God sent him to preach to foreign enemies, not fellow Israelites.
  - This made Jonah’s mission radical and offensive to his national pride.
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### **The Lesson: The Prophets Message: Jonah 3:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

<sup>2</sup>Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

<sup>3</sup>So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

<sup>4</sup>And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

<sup>5</sup>So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

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### **What’s Happening Here? (vv. 1-5)**

#### 1. God Speaks Again (v. 1)

*"The word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time..."*

- God does not give up on Jonah.
- God’s mission continues despite Jonah’s failure.
- This is grace: God restores the messenger before restoring the city.

**Teaching Point:**

God’s call is persistent, patient, and full of mercy.

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## 2. The Command Repeated (v. 2)

*“Arise, go... and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”*

- God does not change the assignment.
- Jonah must preach God’s message, not his own.
- God’s authority is clear: Jonah is the messenger, not the editor.
- He simply says: “Do what I told you the first time.”

**Teaching Point:**

Obedience means delivering God’s truth, not reshaping it.

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## 3. Jonah Obeys (v. 3)

“So Jonah arose, and went...”

- Jonah is one prophet walking into a massive pagan empire.
- Jonah obeys outwardly, even if his heart is still conflicted.
- Nineveh is described as “exceedingly great”—a massive, influential city.
- The scale of the mission highlights God’s heart for the nations.

**Teaching Point:**

Even reluctant obedience can be used powerfully by God.

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#### 4. Jonah's Message (v. 4)

*"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."*

In scripture, 40 often symbolizes:

- Testing
- Warning
- A period of grace before judgment

God was giving Nineveh time to repent, even though Jonah didn't say that part out loud.

#### 3. "Shall be overthrown"

The Hebrew word can mean:

- destroyed
- overturned
- turned upside down

Interestingly, Nineveh *was* overturned—but not by destruction. It was overturned by repentance.

#### Teaching Point:

God's warnings are invitations to repentance.

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#### 5. Nineveh's Response (v. 5)

*"So the people of Nineveh believed God..."*

- They believe God, not Jonah.
- Their repentance is immediate and citywide.
- Fasting and sackcloth show genuine humility.
- From the greatest to the least—no one is exempt.

**NOTE:** This is one of the most dramatic mass turnings to God in the entire Bible. It also sets up the tension of chapter 4:

### Teaching Point:

When God speaks, humble hearts respond quickly.

### Bottom Line:

Jonah is angry because God acted like God—merciful, compassionate, and forgiving—and Jonah didn't want that mercy extended to people he hated.

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## II The Prophets Anger – Jonah 4:6-11

### Passage Summary

Jonah sits outside Nineveh, angry that God spared the city. God appoints a plant to shade Jonah, then a worm to destroy it, and finally a scorching wind. Through this object lesson, God uses a plant, a worm, and a wind to expose Jonah's heart and teach him about divine compassion.

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### The scripture: The Prophets Anger **Jonah 4:6-11**

<sup>6</sup>And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

<sup>7</sup>But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

<sup>8</sup>And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is* better for me to die than to live.

<sup>9</sup>And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, *even* unto death.

<sup>10</sup>Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

<sup>11</sup>And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?

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### Fill in the missing pieces: vs. (4:1-5)

#### Verses 1–3 – Jonah’s Anger and Complaint

Jonah, instead of rejoicing over Nineveh’s repentance, is “greatly displeased and became furious.” He reminds the LORD that this was why he fled: “I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion, One who relents from sending disaster” (4:2). Preferring death to a forgiven Nineveh, he begs God to take his life.

#### Verses 4–5 – God’s Gentle Question and Jonah’s Vigil

The LORD asks, “Is it right for you to be angry?” Jonah offers no answer. He builds a shelter east of the city and watches, hoping judgment might still fall. His silence and distance expose stubbornness as he waits for fire from heaven that never comes.

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### What’s Happening Here? (vv. 6-11)

#### 1. Jonah’s Shelter and God’s Plant (v. 6)

God *appoints* a plant to grow over Jonah.

- God is not punishing Jonah—He is pursuing him.
- The plant symbolizes comfort, a temporary mercy Jonah did not earn.
- Jonah is “exceedingly glad”—the only time he’s happy in the whole book.

#### Teaching Point:

We often celebrate God’s blessings but ignore His mission.

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#### 2. The Worm and the Wind (vv. 7–8)

God *appoints* a worm to destroy the plant and a scorching wind to discomfort Jonah.

- God is not being cruel; He is revealing Jonah’s heart.
- Jonah mourns the plant more than the people of Nineveh.
- Jonah’s anger exposes a heart that values comfort over compassion.

**Teaching Point:**

God sometimes removes comforts to reveal misplaced priorities.

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3. God's Question (v. 9)

"Do you do well to be angry about the plant?"

- Jonah insists he is right to be angry—even to death.
- That plant meant more to him than the souls of the people.

**Teaching Point:**

Anger can blind us to God's heart and inflate our sense of self-importance.

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4. God's Final Word (vv. 10–11)

God contrasts Jonah's pity for a plant with His pity for a city.

- Jonah cared for something temporary, trivial, and self-serving.
- God cares for people—120,000 who "do not know their right hand from their left."
- You see how you care for that plant, something you didn't even work for. You're even willing to die because it was taken from you. BUT yet you don't cry over the lives of these people whom you also didn't work for.
- God's compassion extends beyond Israel to all nations.

**Teaching Point:**

God's heart is always bigger than ours—and He invites us to share His compassion.

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## Symbolism Box

Symbol	Meaning
Plant	Temporary comfort; God's undeserved mercy
Worm	God removing false securities
Scorching wind	Trials that expose the heart
Jonah's anger	Human resistance to God's compassion
Nineveh	The wideness of God's mercy

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## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think God gave Jonah a second chance instead of choosing another prophet?
  2. What does Jonah's obedience teach us about serving God even after failure?
  3. Why do you think Nineveh responded so quickly to Jonah's message?
  4. How does this passage challenge our assumptions about who is "too far gone" for God?
  5. What does this story teach us about the power of God's word?
  6. Why do you think Jonah was more upset about the plant than the people?
  7. What "plants" (comforts) do we cling to more than God's mission?
  8. How does God use circumstances to reveal our hearts?
  9. What does this passage teach us about God's compassion for all people?
  10. How can we align our hearts with God's heart for the lost?
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### Life Application

- Identify one “plant” in your life—something you value more than God’s mission.
- Ask God to help you see people the way He sees them.
- Look for one opportunity this week to show compassion to someone you normally overlook.