



Why did George Washington add prayer to his Presidential swearing-in ceremony when no prayer was required by the 35-word Constitutional regulation? Why did Harry S. Truman, being sworn in January 20, 1949, spread out five fingers over the pages of the White House Bible's Sermon on the Mount and five fingers from his other hand on a Gutenberg Bible's Ten Commandments? Why do the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and Nebraska Unicameral legislatures all officially begin their session days with prayer inside their lawmaking chambers? Why did Governor Pete Ricketts officially proclaim that the first Thursday in May was to be Nebraska's National Day of Prayer? Why did several state senators make time in their packed schedules to attend that same National Day of Prayer six days ago at noon in the Warner Chamber in our statehouse? It is because godliness is to be observed and modeled publicly by leaders within God's institution of government. It is because He is the One Who has ordained them to office. It is because His will is to "be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Last week, the Preaching Prophet publicly threatened Nineveh's mammoth metropolis with an impending 40-day doom since God's will was not being done in their part of earth as it was in heaven. Jonah afflicted them with his message of holiness. The entire city responded in an "Amen" of faith that bore the public fruit of self-loathing for their world-famous wickedness. Jonah 3:5 summarized that capital-wide, God-fearing revival. It was the greatest revival in world history as recorded in the Bible.

1. REPENTANCE BY LISTENING ROYALTY

Jonah 3:5 said the whole city, from A to Z so to speak, believed in God and called a city-wide fast of humiliation. Many Bible passages employ a "headlining" style of summary overview. Newspapers offer headline summaries and intro paragraphs to summarize *the scoop*. Stylistically, they then go later in the story's copy to give details of what happened earlier in the event. A famous Bible example is Genesis 1:26's report that God had made Adam and Eve, but you must read later in the story (Gen. 2 and 3) to find out the earlier occurring details about dust, ribs, nakedness, a serpent, an "apple," and fig leaves.

So too here: Jonah 3:5 headlines that the whole capital was saved. Let us look at critical details of *how* that reviving repentance occurred.

➤ **Jonah 3:6** *"When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes."*

Verse 5's headline city-wide repentance followed verse 6's critical detail of an individual—a listening leader. Repentance in Nebraska and its capital could begin when its leaders listen to the Lord—government leaders, even public servants.

Jonah's message made it to the throne room where a mighty monarch listened to the word of God with both ears. Eyes like saucers, the king contemplated a God Who might throw a lightning bolt at his forehead for his evil life on the throne and the wickedness of his kingdom. His repentance included actions of humility. At the Jordan, John the Baptizer called this bearing "fruits in keeping with repentance."^a The king's humble movements were: **"Up, Off, On, Down."**

All in the Capitol Community Are Welcome to be a Part of Regular Bible Study and Fellowship

SENATORS' WEDNESDAY STUDY: 6:45-8:05 AM, ROOM 2010 CAPITOL MINISTRIES, NEBRASKA WWW.CAPMIN.ORG

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UP from his high, mighty, gold throne of power.
OFF with his rich, royal robes of costly purple.
ON with a dark, dingy, meager, mourning mantle.
DOWN to poof onto a pitiful pile of dirty ashes.

Leaders that listen to godly rebukes, afflicted by a knowledge that they have been comfortable in sin, can be models of repentance in public service. Before he could *lead his subjects*—his constituents—in humility before God, this king decided to *lead himself*: up, off, on, then down!

➤ Theologically, those doubting the capability of rich, powerful, arrogant, successful political leaders to repent forget the “King of kings” who is now ruling from heaven, ignoring this maxim:

**THE HEART OF THE KING IS
 IN THE HAND OF THE LORD
 WHO MOVES IT AS HE WILLS.^b**

➤ Historically, archaeological scrolls from early 8th century BC are sparse but record common beliefs and fears of Assyrian kings in Jonah’s day. One such king was the weary Asshur Dan III who may have been the king in our passage. He was harassed by a four-fold agonizing confluence of serious signs of doom—four omens from “the gods” of disaster for any king in Assyria.

Floods bringing disease, ruining precious water.

Invasions of foreign enemies, killing and looting.

Famines threatening starvation to man and beast.

Solar eclipses—bringing dark forebodings of judgment. A total solar eclipse is recorded on June 15, 763 BC, well within the range of feasible dates of Jonah’s Ninevite preaching tour.

➤ Was not Jonah’s God the King of the whales and winds and waves? Did He, perhaps here, providentially move Assyria’s foreign enemies, famine, and floods to bring their arrogant, evil, violent, powerful, sinful king to repentance?

**“MEN DON’T CHANGE UNTIL
 THEY HURT ENOUGH THAT
 THEY HAVE TO.”**

Repentance begins when leaders listen. Political leaders can take comfort in a merciful God after they have been afflicted by a struggle with a God of holiness. What happened in Nineveh can happen in DC with the POTUS and his Cabinet as well as in our Capitol. It can and it needs to.

2. REPENTANCE & LEGISLATED MORALITY

What the king now felt deeply, ethically, and morally, he grafted into the culture through law. That only makes sense. Why wouldn’t people want the ethics they hold dear and true to be the informing ethics of the laws of their land? Lawmakers must legislate morality. See how Nineveh’s repentant ash-heap king did that here:

Jonah 3:7-8 “[The king of Nineveh] issued a proclamation. It said, ‘In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.’”

➤ The humbled king, dirty and debased on a throne of ashes, legislated the morality of repentance. He also modeled it publicly like Washington, Truman, Ricketts, and the publicly praying Nebraska State Senators in the Warner Chamber last week. Similarly, on March 30, 1863, after Senate initiation, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a National Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer. He publicly stated our national need for repentant prayer.



“The awful calamity of civil war...may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins....We have forgotten God....We have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become...too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins.”^c

God’s holiness is offended when nations and people sin against Him, intoxicated by pride and comfortable in sin. In life and law, government leaders must model morality as God defines it.

**OF COURSE, ONE CAN
LEGISLATE MORALITY, BUT
WHO HOLDS MORE DEARLY
AND FIGHTS MORE FIERCELY
FOR THEIR MORAL CODE?**

➤ Biblical (Judeo-Christian) morality historically changed culture by law for the better as follows:

1. Polygamy—disallowing Utah to join the Union unless they changed their polygamy morals/laws.
2. Suttee—in India banned Immolation: self-imposed burning of widows at their husbands’ death.
3. Anti-sodomy laws in all 50 U.S. states until 1960.
4. Female genital mutilation banned which legislates against Sharia Constitution and Islamic “morality.”
5. A host of others include deterring or totally ending sex slavery, gladiatorial combat, death games, bribery, slavery (first in Great Britain, then the U.S.), child labor, Jim Crow laws, selling children as a means of debt reduction, temple prostitution, Roman infanticide, and the Chinese practice of the forced feet binding of women.

U.S. Sen. Mark O. Hatfield (R-Oregon) rightly posited, “Now, we *always legislate morality* in any legislative action...”^d All laws are moral. The only question is “*Whose morality* forms the basis for the laws where *you* live?”

➤ In Nineveh’s throne room, the king and his advisors or “grandees” (Hebrew: gedolim= גדולים) morally led the society by legislating fasting,

mourning, and prayer. This would be like the POTUS issuing an EO (Executive Order) but adding public unanimous approval of the House and Senate to it—miraculous indeed! Their decree commanded all the citizens to turn in unity together, as if they were all one, from both immorality (*from his wicked way*) and also public criminal ferocity (*the violence which is in his hand*). Thank God that the government leaders spoke up and spoke morality into the culture using law. Too often, preachers like Jonah refuse to preach on the civil, moral, and social evils of the day. Ecclesiastes 8:4 shows another reason why government authorities, whom God ordained to office, should use law to bolster culture’s morals:

**“SINCE THE WORD OF THE
KING IS AUTHORITATIVE,
WHO WILL SAY TO HIM,
‘WHAT ARE YOU DOING?’”**

➤ Dear Senator—Since God has ordained you to authoritative office, will you dare to influence Nebraska culture, morally, for good as God defines it? How can the Bible help you do this?

3. REPENTANCE & DIVINE POSSIBILITIES

Does Nebraska have a bright future? Can it hope to attract and keep many in this great state? Rich, powerful cultures can thrive and survive if they receive God’s blessings and avoid His judgments and hot displeasure at their sins.

Jonah 3:9 “*Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.*”

The king and his legislators had not presumed on the God who threatened to obliterate them in 40 days. The ash-pile king asked the sober question, “*Who knows if God will spare us?*” If God is God, His hand cannot be forced. Who knows if He will unleash His waiting grace or impending wrath? We have wondered since Jonah 1:2.



Only God knows the perfect time to offer mercy and when to act in holy judgment. It is His prerogative to deal with His own righteous anger. Divine Jesus chose to fashion a whip (*a weapon*, as one preacher said, *because He was out of striking distance*) to use to properly act upon His righteous indignation in Jerusalem's Temple courts against lewd cheaters—the money changers.

Would Jehovah judge and jurisprudentially “overturn” Nineveh? He “overturned” Sodom and Gomorrah (the same Hebrew verb is used in Genesis 19) for a host of sins, *especially* the sin, forever since, known as sodomy. God knew. God's “burning anger” could turn the ancient Ninevite metro (near modern Mosul in Iraq) into a grease spot to be buried by sirocco sand storms and swept into history's dustbin as unwanted.

➤ God, ready to judge, could not be “made” to be merciful. Mercy is a gift given not on merit but by the grace of God by His free-will choice. Sin is a reproach to any nation, but righteousness exalts a nation (Proverbs 14:34). Know that revival and societal salvation can happen when leaders humble themselves and seek His mercy.

**WE CAN ALL HUMBLY HOPE
FOR GOD'S “MAYBE MERCY.”**

4. REPENTANCE & CIVIL SAFETY'S REALITY

Our final verse is a coda—a summary of the story of Jonah thus far. If this book's theme was “Successful Evangelism,” the story would be over. A truth that will be driven home in Chapter 4 is that the book's theme is, instead, “*God is God, and I Am Not.*” Nineveh repented! God relented!

Jonah 3:10 “*When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.*”

Nineveh had been saved by faith. Its converts proved by extreme fasting that they believed they had done evil and really hoped for God's grace.

➤ God is all-knowing, eternal, and non-temporal. He knew what those evil Assyrians did not know about themselves—they would repent of their violence and immorality within 40 days. God did not “change his mind” as if He had ordained and unconditionally promised to destroy Nineveh no matter what. Jonah's prophecy was a divine conditional threat. The *locus classicus* of all such Biblical conditional prophecies is here:

Jeremiah 18:8 “*If a nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.*”

So, society is safest when its citizens obey God. Horizontally, government's chief duty (with its sword) is to protect its people from enemies foreign and domestic. Vertically, government has a Heavenly duty to lead society by legislating morality the way God defines it. It must be a high priority then for government leaders, like it became for the king of Nineveh and his cabinet, to listen to the Word of the Lord, walk humbly in disciplined obedience before Him, and model repentance from the Capitol for the good of all.

GODLY GOVERNMENT ROLE MODELS

Dear Senator:

Did you ever think a pagan king from ancient Iraq would teach you your duty of living and legislating morality in Nebraska? That includes publicly role modeling repentance as you listen to God's Word and leading citizens to do the same.

Like Jonah in a great capital, for Christ,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier V.D.M. (cell/text: 402-770-6270)

^a Matthew 3:8—“Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;” NASB.

^b Proverbs 21:1—“The king's heart (*lev melech*) is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.” NASB (*Hebrew*).

^c http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/history_of_prayer_in_america

^d As interviewed by Cal Thomas, *Blinded by Might (Can the Religious Right Save America?)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), p. 211. Printing compliments of Mr. Larry Moon at www.stardigitalprint.com.