

Jonah 3:1-10

March 07, 2004

This is lesson number Five in our exposition of the Book of Jonah.

**Please open to the Book of Jonah Chapter Three.**

#### INVOCATION FOR THE MESSAGE

Today we will learn about:

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Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the LORD and the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea. The sailors cried out to their false gods and the storm only got worse. Jonah preached to the sailors about the Creator God who made the sea and the dry land. At Jonah’s command the sailors threw him into the raging sea. **“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”**

When the scribes and the Pharisees challenged Jesus as the Christ, Jesus said that Jonah is the only sign an evil and adulterous generation would get [Matthew 12:39] and Jesus also said that Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites [Luke 11:30].

Jonah, in virtual hell, and as a type of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, prays to God using the Scriptures [psalms and prophets]. Did not Jesus quote the psalms when He hung on the cross, condemned as the Substitute for sinners?

Jonah now realizes that God can and will do what He pleases. God can and will save the heathen that were given to Christ before the foundation of the world! Listen up Jonah: God’s mercy is also for the Gentiles!

Jonah fled because he knew that God would grant repentance to the Ninevites because God had said, **“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed”** and then people would jeer and ridicule the sovereignty of God and think that God was a **changeable** God!

Jonah did not believe that those heathen in Nineveh deserved the mercy of God. Now Jonah realizes that he, Jonah, does not deserve the mercy of God!

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If God chooses to show mercy it will be on God’s terms.

**Romans 9:14-16**

**What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.**

Jonah did not believe that those heathen in Nineveh deserved the mercy of God but Jonah believed that he could ask God for mercy. Let me ask you.

**Do you think that you deserve the mercy of God?**

If you think that God owes you any mercy at all then you have denied the **grace of God** and you are trusting in your personal merit!

**Jesus Christ is THE righteousness of God!**

“Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”

**You know that Jonah was sick of the great fish and then the LORD made the fish sick of Jonah!**

Jonah had repented. Repentance is a change. Repentance is a complete turn about, turn from sin and turn toward God.

**Jonah 2:10**

**So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

You can imagine what Jonah looked like. Jonah’s skin may have been bleached by the gastric juices of the great fish and he emerges with the weeds still wrapped around his head.

But that would be extra-biblical speculation.

Jonah could have had no outward signs of his ordeal.

The three men Nebuchadnezzar cast into the fiery furnace came out and they did not smell of smoke nor was their hair burned!

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**Daniel 3:26-27**

**Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here."**

**Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. 27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.**

God will use His word preached and not the spectacle of “poor Jonah!”

So we ought to take the text as the Holy Spirit has given it and not try to “improve” on the Word of God.

**So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

As wonderful as the story of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish and living to tell about it is there is a more wonderful story in chapter three.

**Jonah 3**

**3:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"**

Do you ever thank God that He is longsuffering with you?

Jonah has repented and prayed and he lives. God would be merciful if He simply sent Jonah home. Jonah you may go into “retirement”. Jonah would agree that he had messed up so bad that he didn’t deserve to hear from God “the second time.”

Men may try to quit God but if they belong to God He will not quit them.

God spoke to Abraham after he lied.

God spoke again to Moses after he killed the Egyptian.

God spoke to David again after he had committed adultery and murder.

God put Peter back into the ministry after he denied the Lord three times.

And they all repented of their sin!

How many times has God put up with Jim’s stupid sin and still allows him to preach the Word of God?

Notice that in 1:2 God told Jonah to **“cry out against”** Nineveh.

Here in 3:2 God tells Jonah to **“preach to it the message that I tell you.”**

My brothers who preach and teach learn that we only have one thing to say and that should be the message that God gives to us. Preach the word of God and trust the Holy Spirit to apply the word.

Your preaching may have results that you don’t get to see as it was when Jonah preached to the sailors. Or, God may be pleased, even though Jonah certainly was not pleased, to bring about immediate results and save many souls. But true belief and true repentance will only be through the word of God. **“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”**

We have previously dealt with the wickedness of the Assyrians and the great size of Nineveh.

Why would God show mercy to such wicked and proud people?

To even ask that question is to say that some people are better than other people and that some people ought to be saved and that some people are beyond God’s mercy.

Do we really know that **grace is grace?**

Men like Jonah and Peter and Paul and John Newton and Jim know that “salvation is of the Lord” and that by grace!

Now Jonah is prepared to go and preach.

Hugh Martin says in his commentary that Jonah now has another spirit.

- 1) As a **sinful man** that has been forgiven,
- 2) As a **prayerful man** whose prayers have been answered,
- and 3) As an **afflicted man** whose affliction has been blessed.

I want to briefly mention how Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites and how the Ninevites will condemn all those who die in unbelief as to the person of Jesus Christ.

**Luke 11:29-32**

**And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.**

Now look at what happened in Nineveh.

**5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,**

**Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?**

The repentance of Nineveh is a **singular event** in history. Over the centuries there have been millions of souls who have heard the Gospel and God the Holy Spirit has quickened millions of souls who were “dead in trespasses and sins” and brought them to see their guilt and condemnation and by grace to see the beauty of the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

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But never before or since has God been pleased to grant repentance on such a scale as this. By all estimates there were between 600 thousand to a million people in Nineveh, and allowing for the generalities that sometimes occur in Scripture, all of them repent.

They believe the threat from God and they see hope in escaping that threat.

Has God been speaking to you? Are you aware that there is something in your life that is against the revealed will of God?

Do you have the firm assurance that if God took your soul today that you would be with Christ in paradise?

It is not “will you” repent, it is “can you” repent?

While grading a prisoner’s Bible Study I came across the question: “How long does repentance last?” The prisoner’s answer, “Until we sin again.”

Is there anything in your life that is more important to you than Jesus Christ?

If there is it is an idol to you, some besetting sin, you better get rid of it and trust Jesus Christ! Repent!

Well the people of Nineveh, from the worst barbaric thug to the king on his throne, repented.

They actually did something. They wanted everyone else to know that they were ashamed of their sin and that they put their hope in the sovereign mercy of God.

John the Baptist insisted on “fruits suitable for repentance.”

It is true that faith is a gift of God and so is repentance. But true faith and true repentance cannot be kept a secret!

Quit your evil ways and get right with God. That’s what the king and all those who believed God did.

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This was not the “easy-believism” that has deceived so many Baptists. This is all or nothing, heaven or hell, turn or burn, death or life, repentance from sin and trust in God.

The scribes and Pharisees ask for a sign. The Ninevites did not ask for a sign. The word preached to them by Jonah was all they needed. They would not have been convicted of sin by the **spectacle** of Jonah when the great fish vomited him on the land!

In the judgment the Ninevites and all those who believe without so-called proof will judge the skeptics and blasphemers who despise the plain truth of the word of God.

If a person won't believe the written word of God no amount of signs and wonders and spectacles and dramas will make any difference. They might have the “warm-fuzzies” for a while but it won't be true repentance.

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

We have seen in earlier messages that the reason that Jonah disobeyed God and tried to flee from the presence of the LORD is because Jonah knew that God was merciful and that he would grant repentance to the Ninevites **AFTER** Jonah had preached, “**Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!**”

Jonah was afraid that the scoffers and heretics would think that Jehovah was a changeable God.

And you know what? Jonah was right. Those scoffers and heretics are with us in the Year 2004, over 2700 years after Nineveh repented.

Verses such as this do **seem to say** that God changed His mind.

**No, it actually says God relented or changed His mind!**

Unless you believe that God the Holy Spirit can contradict Himself and you deny the full {plenary} inspiration of the Scriptures, then you must be able to understand passages of Scripture that seemingly contradict one another in a way in which they both can be true.

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A few years ago at the Beeson Pastors School, I heard one of the speakers make what I believe to be an **intellectually dishonest** explanation of Exodus 32: 7-14. Ninety-nine percent of what he had to say was very good.

But he apparently wanted to prove “Openness Theology.” Basically “Openness Theology or Process Theology” says that God cannot know something until it happens. In other words, God, they say, does not know the end from the beginning, which is itself a denial of the Scripture.

Exodus 32:

7 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' "

9 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

11 Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' " 14 So the LORD **relented** from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

The speaker then said, “You are going to have to deal with that. **God changed His mind!**”

Well, if you take that phrase, “So the LORD **relented ...**” out of context with the entire Bible, it does say that God changed His mind. God intended to destroy those people and after Moses interceded He relented, He decided not to destroy them. **God changed His mind!**

What this speaker neglected to say, and this is where I say he was being intellectually dishonest, is that there are many other Scriptures that clearly say that God **cannot** change His mind.



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**Numbers 23:19**

**"God is not a man, that He should lie,  
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.  
Has He said, and will He not do?  
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"**

That's one quote from Exodus 32 that says God changed His mind and one quote from Numbers 23 where Balaam being controlled by God, says that **"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent."**

Now the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write Exodus **and** Numbers.

Did the Holy Spirit forget what He gave to Moses in Exodus and then contradict Himself in Numbers?

That's what this speaker would have you believe,  
**“God changed His mind!” he said,**

The same argument can be made about Nineveh. God said he would destroy Nineveh in forty days. But in Jonah 3:10

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

But then Malachi 3:6 **"For I am the LORD, I do not change...."**

How can we understand these passages of Scripture, which appear to contradict so that they are all true and are not in contradiction?

We must understand that God uses **accommodating language** and often the narrative is given to us from the way that men perceive it.

The Scripture employs anthropomorphisms [assigns physical parts to God such as eyes and hands, etc.] so that we can understand something about God who is incomprehensible.

So, from Moses' perspective God did relent. But God knew **before** He spoke to Moses that Moses **would intercede** for the people. God knew the end from the beginning. Moses did not!

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And God knew that Nineveh would repent before He spoke to Jonah the first time and the second time!

Either that is the way to understand these passages that seemingly say opposite things, or God is indeed frivolous with the truth and He cannot be trusted.

I prefer to accept the interpretation that preserves the integrity of God.

Now if this verse in Jonah 1:10, and other verses that indicate that God says He will do a thing and then it doesn't happen were the only verses in the Bible that says anything about God changing then we would have no other choice but to say that God can change.

But the overwhelming message in the Scriptures is that God is **immutable!** That means that God not only **does not** change but that He **cannot** change. If God could and did change then He would cease from being God!

Change would have to be for the better or for the worse. If God changed for the better it would mean that He was not God to begin with, if God changed for the worse it would mean that He is no longer God!

So how do we interpret verse 10? This verse says,

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

We must use the Analogy of Scripture, compare Scripture with Scripture, and come to an understanding that allows an interpretation that does not result in a contradiction. Many times I have taught that if you think you have found a contradiction in two passages of Scripture that you have misunderstood one or both of the passages.

The Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture. When God the Holy Spirit inspired the account of creation through Moses in Genesis He already knew what He would reveal to the apostle John in Revelation the last book of the Bible.

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There are large volumes written on the knowledge of God and the immutability of God. My purpose this morning is not to go on and on multiplying Scriptures but simply to assure you that there is **nothing that God does not know** and that **God cannot change** either His mind or His eternal purpose.

J. P. Boice’s commentary on Jonah offers a slightly different slant on God’s relenting to destroy Nineveh. God threatened to destroy a city known for its “wickedness” but now Nineveh will be known for its repentance and God no longer needed to destroy it. The wicked city that God threatened to destroy no longer existed.

**That brings up a principle.**

God has promised to condemn and punish the guilty in hell for all eternity

Numbers 14:18

“The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; **but He by no means clears the guilty**”

Romans 3:19

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world may become guilty** before God.

James 2:8-12

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, **he is guilty of all.** 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

**But God justifies {declares not guilty} the ungodly.**

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

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Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,

This is the God of the Bible!

This is the God that Jonah preached to Nineveh!

And this is the God that I preach to you!

God cannot change!

But God changes people!

**Hebrews 13:8**

**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.**

Jesus Christ the only name!

Acts 4:12

**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."**

The guilty are declared not guilty!

The sinner repents!

Jesus Christ the Savior of sinners.

1 Timothy 1:15

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

**Has God saved you?**

A better question is are you in a state of repentance?

**The message is the invitation.**