

Jonah Preaches to Nineveh

Key Verse: *“God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”*
—Jonah 3:10

Selected Scripture:
Jonah chapter 3

GOD INSTRUCTED HIS prophet Jonah, saying: “Arise, go unto Nineveh, ... and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” Jonah obeyed and proclaimed the Lord’s message, which was that in forty days the city of Nineveh would be overthrown.—Jonah 3:1-4

The people of Nineveh believed the message God had sent to them, repented of their sinful course, and sought forgiveness. Nineveh’s king proclaimed, “Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.” (vss. 5-8) As stated in our Key Verse, the Lord hearkened to their repentance and permitted their national existence to continue.

An important lesson from this account is the great compassion of our loving Heavenly Father. (Ps. 103:8-14) God was pleased to have the Ninevites turn from their sins to hearty repentance. As a result, he rejoiced in granting them an extension of earthly life, and “repented” of

the destruction he had pronounced to them through Jonah.

How can God repent and change his mind if he knows “the end from the beginning?” The word “repented” in our Key Verse has a wider meaning than is generally appreciated. Mankind uses it most often only in respect to a change of purpose. However, the word repent can mean either a change of action or a change of purpose, or in some cases both. God’s purposes do not change. (Isa. 14:24) He does, however, when appropriate, change his actions.

By way of example, the nation of Israel, God’s favored people for centuries, was cut off and his actions towards them changed as a result of their disobedience. However, God’s eternal purposes never changed toward Israel. He foreknew and foretold their rejection of Jesus and his rejection of them, and how later they would be regathered to their own land, would repent and be forgiven, and ultimately would be blessed by Messiah.

In recognition of another aspect of God’s purposes, Jesus declared that the Gospel was to be preached not just to Jews only, but to “all nations.” This preaching was not intended to convert all, but rather to be “for a witness.” A few individuals, from all nations, have responded to the heavenly call during the present age.—Matt. 24:14; Luke 24:46,47; I Cor. 1:26-30

God’s loving demonstration of forgiveness, even to a pagan people like the Ninevites, is a powerful lesson for the follower of Christ, as to how God views sincere repentance from any of our indiscretions. As imperfect human beings, even spirit-begotten believers realize it is possible to be overtaken by sin, whether unintentional, partially willful, or fully willful with the potential for serious consequences. When acts of sin occur, they need to be quickly acknowledged and repented of if we want to be restored to God’s favor. Prayer and filling our minds with holy thoughts are two effective ways for preventing or reducing the incidence of sin in our lives.—II Pet. 3:9; Ps. 19:12-14 ■