

In Jonah everyone repents



Why do the sailors repent?
They respond to God's power.

Why does Jonah repent?
He responds to God's grace.

Why does Nineveh repent?
It responds to God's warning.

But why does God repent (in chapter 3)?

How have Christians responded to this question?

1. **Control** - Some believe that God does not really repent.

John 19:11

“Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against me, **except it were given you from above.**’”

Acts 15:18

“Known unto God are all his works **from the beginning of the world.**”

Isaiah 45:7

“The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; **I am the Lord who does all these.**”

But how are we to understand these passages?

Jeremiah 4:28

“For this shall the earth mourn and the heavens above be black because I have spoken. I have purposed and **will not repent**, nor will I turn back from it.”

Jeremiah 15:6

“You have forsaken Me, says the Lord, You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; **I am weary of repenting!**”

Jeremiah 18:7

“The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, **if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will repent** of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.”

How have Christians responded to this question?

1. **Control** - Some believe that God does not really repent.
2. **Relationship** - Some believe that God relates to people with respect for their free decisions.

- Genuine human moral responsibility demands it.
- Genuine relationships with God demand it.
- Separating evil from a holy, loving God demands it.
- The spiritual conflict motif in Scripture demands it.
- A straightforward literal rendering of Scripture demands it.

How have Christians responded to this question?

1. **Control** - Some believe that God does not really repent.
2. **Relationship** - Some believe that God relates to people with respect for their free decisions.
3. **Knowledge** - Others believe that God knows what will happen but does not decree or control all of it.

Matthew 11:21

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For **if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented** long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

Areas of agreement

- a. **God is sovereign Lord of all.** The real question: “What does that mean?”
- b. **God has fixed some future events.** The real question: “Are all events in the future fixed?”
- c. **Many of our personal choices are restricted by the nature of who we are and the context in which we live.** The real question: “Are all of my actions contingent on external forces?”
- d. **We have limited understanding.** The real question: “What should I believe?”

Biblical examples of both determinism and freedom together.

The crucifixion of Jesus. Acts 2:23

“this Man, delivered up by **the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”

The betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Mk.14:21

The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Rom.9:15-18

Mistakes to avoid

1. **Confusing God’s unchanging nature and purpose with the manipulation of every detail of life.**

When the earth warms do we believe the nature of the earth has changed?



2. **Believing that Divine sovereignty demands the decree and control of all human behavior and all circumstances.**

When I freely make a chess move while playing a grandmaster will it change the results?



3. **Emphasizing one teaching at the expense of other Biblical points.**

Texts on side are to be taken literally

Other texts are not to be taken literally

4. **Interpreting Scripture without respect for genera or accommodation to limited human horizons.**

How are we to understand “conflicting” texts?

1. **When we read everything at face value there will be unavoidable and blatant contradictions.** But such readings disrespect the nature of God’s Word and human language.
2. **It is not unreasonable to assume that some of God’s revelation is an accommodation to our limited weakness and perspective.** Matthew 19:8 “because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted . . .”
3. **Not all texts are intended to be read literally.** True respect for the normal meaning of Scripture starts with a sensitivity to the genera, context, culture, and style.
4. **We do not have to understand everything in order to believe anything.** God is big and we see dimly.

God’s promise and our comfort come not from believing that God decrees every detail but rather from knowing that

God is with us in every situation, offering power and wisdom to respond with assurance that the final result is consistent with His purposes.

