

THE BEREANS

ACTS 17:11

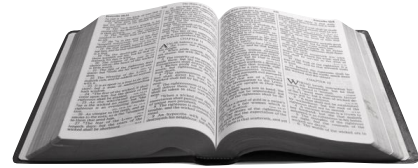
Jonah 3

Lesson #22

Does God change His mind?

06/02/2019

How to read the Old Testament



**Does God ever
change His mind?**

1

Repent

metanoeo

meta - "after"

noeo - "to perceive"

"to renew or change the mind"

3

Jonah

A Study in
Repentance



Jonah 3

"1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to 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 days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and **Nineveh will be overthrown.**"

4

"5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 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. 7 He issued a proclamation and 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.

5

8 But 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. 9 Who knows, **God may turn and relent** and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." 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."

6

In the book of Jonah, everyone repents

The sailors



7

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?

8

How have Christians responded to this question?

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

Numbers 23:19

"God is not a man, that he should lie, **nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.** Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"

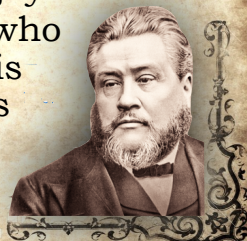


9

"A changeable God would be a terror to the righteous, they would have no sure anchorage,

Our heart leaps for joy as we bow before One who has never broken His word or changed His purpose."

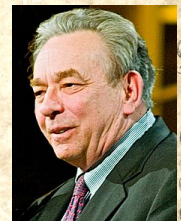
C.H. Spurgeon



10

"If one single molecule in the universe is outside God's sovereign control, nothing can be assured."

R.C. Sproul



11

A rigid deterministic view of God's sovereignty raises some questions.

- What does the image of God mean?
- What kind of God do we worship?
- Was Ecclesiastes the last word?
- What is the purpose of prayer?
- What is the meaning of love?
- Is the Christian God more like the Muslim god?



12

How have Christians responded to this question?

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

God's nature and purposes do not change, but does this include His relational dynamics?



13

How have Christians responded to this question?

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

Jeremiah 18:8

"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."

14

How have Christians responded to this question?

1. Control - Some believe that God does not really repent.
2. Relationship - Some note that God relates to people with respect for their "free" decisions.
 - Genuine human moral responsibility assumes it.
 - Genuine relationships with God assumes it.
 - Separating evil from a holy, loving God assumes it.
 - The spiritual conflict motif in Scripture assumes it.
 - The just judgment of God assumes it.

15

Note the way Jonah words the narrative of God's declaration and later response.

Jonah 3:4

"Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, 'Yet **forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.**'"

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."

16

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. Foreknowledge - Others believe that God knows what will happen but does not decree / control 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."

17

Is God's loving, sovereign, action a function of His FOREKNOWLEDGE?

"I can give my grandson Alex free choices and because I know him, I know what he will choose."



18

How do Christians try to explain God's foreknowledge?

Open or Free will theism view

Nothing is known about the future except God's nature, our nature, and God's general purpose.

Middle-knowledge view

God knows all options and consequences and works through them.

Augustinian – Calvinist view

God decrees everything and therefore foreknows all from eternity.

19

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

20

Areas of agreement:

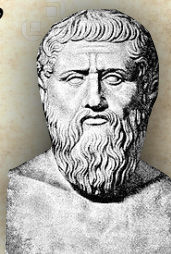
- **God is sovereign Lord of all.** The real question: "What does that mean?"
- **God has fixed some future events.** The real question: "Are **ALL** events in the future fixed?"
- **Many personal choices are restricted by our nature and the context in which we live.** The real question: "Are our actions comprehensively contingent on temporal / material forces?"
- **We have limited understanding.** The real question: "What can we know and believe?"

21

"God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist."



St. Augustine



22

Two mistakes to avoid

1. **Selling God short - God is not just a reflection of our image.**
 - **Convoluting** God's unchanging nature / purpose with the manipulation of every detail of life.
 - Believing that Divine sovereignty **demand**s the decree and control of all human behavior and all circumstances.
2. **"Reading the Bible superficially" - The Bible is not an encyclopedia of "proof texts".**
 - Interpreting Scripture **without** respect for genera or accommodation to limited human horizons.
 - Emphasizing details **without** respect for the bigger picture.

23

God's unchanging nature and purpose may not demand His control of every detail of life.

When the earth warms something has changed.

Has the nature of the earth changed?

Or has the expression of the earth's dynamic nature been revealed?



24

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 in ways that can bring life or loving discipline but never thwart His loving purpose for His creation.



25

So what should this mean for us?

1. **We can embrace God's sovereignty** without connecting Him to a "radical determinism".
(God is not glorified when He is seen as narrow and small.)
2. **We glorify God** when we respect His image within us which authenticates our relationship, and His dynamic interaction with us.
(God is not glorified when the integrity of a "relationship" with Him is mocked.)
3. **We need not make excuses for God** as though He in some way is directly responsible for evil.
(God is not glorified when He is made the author of evil.)

26

God responds to human repentance with His own.

27