

Jonah 3:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And 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.

Analysis

Nineveh's repentance produces divine response: "And 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." The Hebrew *vayyar ha'Elohim et-ma'aseihem ki-shavu middarekam hara'ah vayyinachem ha'Elohim al-hara'ah asher-dibber la'asot-lahem velo asah* (וַיַּרְא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶכָם הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם וַיַּיַּנֹּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה) raises theological questions about God's immutability.

"God saw their works" (*vayyar ha'Elohim et-ma'aseihem*) indicates God observed genuine repentance. "That they turned from their evil way" (*ki-shavu middarekam hara'ah*) uses *shuv* (שׁוּב), the primary Hebrew word for repentance—turning around, changing direction. Their repentance wasn't mere words but demonstrated by actions (fasting, sackcloth, crying mightily to God, turning from violence—3:5-8).

"God repented" (*vayyinachem ha'Elohim*) uses *nacham* (נָחַם), meaning to relent, change course, or have compassion. This doesn't contradict God's immutability (Malachi 3:6, James 1:17). Rather, it's anthropomorphic language describing how God's unchanging character responds to changing human conditions. God's character is: "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jeremiah 18:8). God doesn't change arbitrarily; He responds consistently to repentance or rebellion.

"He did it not" (velo asah)—God didn't destroy Nineveh. This demonstrates that prophecies of judgment are often conditional warnings, not inevitable fate. God delights in mercy, not judgment (Ezekiel 33:11). This infuriates Jonah (4:1-2), exposing his hard heart, but reveals God's gracious character.

Historical Context

Jonah son of Amittai prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kings 14:25), around 780-760 BC. God commanded him to preach repentance to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria—the brutal empire that would later destroy Israel (722 BC). Assyrian kings were notorious for extreme cruelty, boasting in their inscriptions about impalement, flaying, and mass deportations. For an Israelite prophet, preaching salvation to Assyria was like asking a Holocaust survivor to evangelize Nazi Germany. Jonah's flight to Tarshish (opposite direction) reveals both ethnic prejudice and theological confusion about God's mercy extending to pagan nations. When Nineveh repented and God relented, Jonah became angry, preferring their destruction. The book concludes with God's gentle rebuke, revealing His compassion for all people.

The book of Jonah stands as a rebuke to narrow nationalism and an anticipation of the gospel's universal scope. Jesus referenced Jonah's three days in the fish as a sign of His death and resurrection, while condemning His generation for not repenting like Nineveh did (Matthew 12:39-41). The early church struggled with the same prejudice Jonah displayed when Gentiles began believing in Christ.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Jonah 3:10 deepen your understanding of God's character, particularly His holiness, justice, and mercy?
2. What specific attitudes, thought patterns, or behaviors does this verse call you to examine and change in light of the gospel?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and His redemptive work, and how should that shape your worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא
saw	And God	H853	their works	H3588	that they turned	way
H7200	H430		H4639		H7725	H1870
מִדֶּרֶךְ	מִדֶּרֶךְ	מִדֶּרֶךְ	מִדֶּרֶךְ	מִדֶּרֶךְ	מִדֶּרֶךְ	מִדֶּרֶךְ
from their evil	repented	And God	H5921	from their evil	H834	
H7451	H5162	H430		H7451		
וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא
that he had said	that he would do	H1992	H3808	that he would do		
H1696	H6213			H6213		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 18:8 (Repentance): If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

Luke 15:20 (Parallel theme): And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

Amos 7:6 (Repentance): The LORD repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord GOD.

Exodus 32:14 (Repentance): And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Luke 11:32 (Repentance): The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Amos 7:3 (Repentance): The LORD repented for this: It shall not be, saith the LORD.

Joel 2:13 (Repentance): And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

Jonah 4:2 (Repentance): And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

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