

the Bible did not use words like these it couldn't communicate so plainly to all the kinds of people it wants to reach—frightening the proud, stirring up the lazy, encouraging those who seek, and feeding those who understand. It couldn't do any of this, if it did not first bend down as it were and descend to those who are cast down."

ii. It's a language issue.

Bruckner: "When God is the subject of *naḥam*, it is best translated 'had compassion' or 'relented.' The basic meaning of the Hebrew word is 'have compassion' or 'feel sorrow.' When people feel sorrow, the context of sin often warrants the translation 'repent.' The ordinary word for repent (שׁוּב) is also used in this text, but it carries the implication of 'turning around,' as in changing the way you live. *Naḥam* is 'repentance' in the internal sense of sorrow. When God feels sorrow, however, the word cannot mean "repent" since God does not sin. Rather, it indicates God's sorrow for the consequences people must face as a natural result of their sin and his justice in the world order. This 'sorrow' is expressed in 'compassion.'" (The NIV Application Commentary)

LIVE THE STORY

The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

- What might the significance of Jonah's final line in his psalm ("Salvation belongs to the Lord") have to do with chapter 3?
- Who are the Ninevites in your life? (Could be political enemies, antagonistic enemies, whatever threatens your comforts or safety.)
- How was the faith of the Ninevites expressed in this story?
- What surprised you about the Ninevite repentance?
- Do you think the Ninevite's repentance is model repentance? What about their repentance speaks to us today?
- How does the King's personal repentance foreshadow Christ?
- Why can one seeking forgiveness never demand forgiveness?
- How might we understand the phrase "God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it" (RSV)?
- Discuss the Bruckner quote in the introduction.

Jonah: The Absurdity of God's Compassion (part 5)

Absurd Compassion; Absurd Repentance!

Jerry Cisar — June 19, 2022

Text: Jonah 3

Introduction

James Bruckner: "God's compassion and clemency were not weaknesses in God's justice, but were better justice than human justice."

I. Jonah's Repentance (3:1-4)

- A. A second time the word of the Lord came to Jonah.
 - i. This time he obeys, half-heartedly.
 - ii. We don't know exactly what the Lord said to Jonah.
 - iii. *Salvation belongs to the Lord.*
- B. Who are These Objects of God's Compassion?
 - i. The Ninevites

I am not suggesting that fear of enemies is never warranted, I am suggesting that they do not trump God's mission for His people to the undeserving world, even our enemies.

- ii. God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts.

- C. The Message: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be *overthrown.*"

II. Nineveh's Repentance (3:5-9)

A. After telling us "the Ninevites believed God" (5), it describes for us what faith looks like. Faith, it turns out, looks like repentance.

i. Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement

ii. The components of this repentance:

B. The King's Picture Perfect Repentance

i. Observe the upside-down movement of the 4 parts in his repentance:

a) He gets up from his throne.

b) He unclothes himself, removing his glory.

c) He clothes himself, but this time with the inglorious.

d) He lowers himself, sitting down, not on a throne but in the dust, or more likely ashes.

ii. Then the king issues a decree. 3 things to note:

a) He intensifies and broadens the fast (7).

Philip Cary: "Taste is a basic mode of the wisdom of the body, discerning good things from bad, life from death. To taste nothing is to lay aside this wisdom, making ourselves helpless and undiscerning and thus putting ourselves at the mercy of someone else who must judge for us what promotes our life. It is to give up the taste of good things that sustain us in being, because we seek a more fundamental ground of our being and we are afraid that by our manifold bad judgment we have made ourselves enemies of it. This is the body's participation in the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom..." (Brazos Theological Commentary)

➤ People and livestock (to include herds and flocks) were the economic measure in that day.

➤ Their violence was fueled by greed for people and livestock. If their repentance hadn't involved their economics, it would not have been real.

b) People and animals are to be covered in sackcloth (8a).

c) All the people are to call urgently upon God and give up their evil ways and their violence (8b).

Repentance is never only about our relationship to God. Repentance must include how we treat others.

Their whole economy was propped up by a violent system; everyone benefited from the violence, so all had to participate in the repentance.

iii. Note the king's posture toward God (9).

a) The essence of repentance is the acknowledgement of guilt and a need for mercy.

b) "God may yet relent and with compassion..." (NIV)

c) The King's hope is in God not Jonah or anyone else.

C. The Ninevites' absurd repentance is matched only by God's absurd compassion.

III. God's Repentance (3:10)

A. "God's Repentance" is a bit tongue-in-cheek.

i. KJV "God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not."

ii. RSV "...God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it."

B. God had said he would do evil?

They repented of their רָעָה (evil), so God repented of his רָעָה (severity).

C. But what about **God's Repentance**?

i. Since God knows all things, he never actually intended to destroy them but to forgive them.

Augustine: "The 'anger' of God is not a disturbance of his mind; it is the judgment by which he imposes punishment on sin.... For unlike human beings, God does not regret or repent of anything he does; his view of absolutely everything is fixed, just as his foreknowledge is certain. But if