



WEEK SIX HANDOUT – **The Ninevites vs. The Israelites**

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God may turn and relent ..., so that we may not perish – Jonah 3:9 ESV

- **Ninevites Repent**

- After being vomited out by the great fish, Jonah is told a second time to go to Nineveh
- Jonah had learned his lesson (or so we thought) and goes to Nineveh to preach repentance
- Similar to the pagan Gentiles on the ship the Ninevites swiftly respond to the call of the Lord
 - This is seen in their actions
 - Calling for a fast
 - Putting on sackcloth from the greatest to the least
 - Common response to calls of repentance
 - Elijah denounces King Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 21:27)
 - Joel demanded his hearer's wear sackcloth and fast as a sign of their repentance (Joel 1:13-14)
 - Daniel seeking the Lord in prayer (Daniel 9:3-4)
 - Even the King repents

"The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." – Jonah 3:6 ESV

- **Nineveh vs. Israel**

- This is the 2nd time in the book that Gentiles have responded in repentance to God
 - The Gentiles on the boat (1:16)
 - The Gentiles of Nineveh (3:5-6)
- This is a role reversal of what should be happening
- The Ninevites are doing what Israel should have been doing all along
- Even Jonah's contemporaries had been calling on the nation of Israel to repent and turn back to the Lord

"Seek me and live..." – Amos 5:4 ESV

"Seek good, and not evil, the you may live..." – Amos 5:14 ESV

"Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." – Amos 5:15 ESV

- These warnings were not listened to
- The same mistakes were repeated
- This brings upon Israel a warning

"For behold, I will raise up against you a notion, O house of Israel, declares the LORD, the God of hosts..." – Amos 6:14 ESV

- What does this have to do with Jonah and Nineveh?
 - In chapter one God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh because "their evil has come up before" God
 - But was this evil really any worse than what Jonah and Israel had done?

- **Israel Indicted**

- By sending Jonah to Nineveh and having the Ninevites repent, God was indicting his own chosen people
 - Nineveh was a godless and horrible place
 - But with their amazing repentance, God was revealing through the Ninevites just how faithless and far from the Lord the nation of Israel actually was
 - For centuries God had sent warnings and calls to repentance through the prophets to no avail
 - Yet, **through five Hebrew words**, God causes an entirely Godless city to repent

עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְיָיִוָּה נִהְפָּכֶת
(Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown)

- The nation of Israel and the Jewish people were hypocrites

"I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." – Jonah 1:9 ESV

- The prophet Hosea (another contemporary of Jonah) saw the same hollow claims of belief from the nation of Israel

"To me they cry, 'My God, we—Israel—know you.'" – Hosea 8:2 ESV

“They do not cry to me from the heart...” – Hosea 7:14 ESV

- Israel had made a habit of turning their backs on God and refusing to worship Yahweh
- In fact, Hosea records their not-so-wise words

“We have no king, for we do not fear the LORD; and a king—what could he do for us?” – Hosea 10:3 ESV

- Compare that to the response of the Ninevites
 - Upon hearing the cry for repentance from Jonah, the King issues a decree

And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh. “By decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not eat or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.” – Jonah 3:7-8 ESV

- This is the complete opposite reaction we see from Israel
 - The king of Nineveh included every single living thing within the walls of the city
 - They even withheld food and water from their animals
- The Ninevites realized something the Israelites never did
 - Their sin nature
 - As a result, they wanted to repent of their sin by whatever means necessary
 - They understood what it meant for God to destroy them if they did not repent
 - Knowing this, the king made sure that all repented from the highest of the high to the lowest of the low
 - He set the example by shedding his kingly robes and putting on sackcloth
 - He willfully and humbly submitted himself before the Elohim in hopes that he might show mercy and grace

*“Who knows? God may turn and **relent** and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” – Jonah 3:9 ESV*

- Like the sea captain and the sailors, the Ninevites realize that it is only trusting and believing in Elohim that they can be saved
 - Their response was reminiscent of Joel 2

*“So rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion. And He relents from sending disaster. **Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him...**” – Joel 2:13-14 ESV*

- The Ninevites are seeking the compassion and mercy of God
- They are banking on God’s patience without knowing it even exists

- This is what Israel could not understand
- The godless Ninevites repent and seek God's mercy, but the Israelites keep turning their backs on God

*"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, **God relented of the disaster** that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it." – Jonah 3:10 ESV*

- God relents, but notice the similarities between this verse and Exodus 32:14

*"And **the Lord relented from the disaster** that he had spoken of bringing on his people." – Exodus 32:14 ESV*

- Verse 10 of chapter 3 could better be translated
...he turned the heat of his wrath from them and he did not destroy them. – Aramaic Bible in Plain English
- Remember who the original audience of this book was
 - The Israelites who are living as captives in Assyria
 - They would have recognized the similarities to Exodus 32:14
- But we have to remember the overarching theme here
 - The undeserved compassion of God
repented – *nāḥam* (naw-kham') – to comfort, to have compassion
 - In Exodus 32 and Jonah 3, God is showing compassion
 - Exodus 32: undeserved and after **intercession**
 - Jonah 3: undeserved and after **repentance**
 - The same is still true today
 - God shows us undeserved compassion and mercy every single day
- **Israel's Continued Defiance**
 - Unfortunately, Israel had continued down this path of defiance and the Lord brought judgement upon them
 - Both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel end up in captivity
 - Because they refused to do what they were supposed to do
 - Look back on the prayer of Solomon when he dedicated the temple to God

*"If they (Israel) sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away **captive** to a land far or near, yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried **captive**, and repent and plead with you in the land of their **captivity**, saying, 'We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,' if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their **captivity** to which they were carried **captive**, and pray toward*

their land, which you have to their fathers, the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for you name, then hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you.” – 2 Chronicles 6:36-39 ESV

- Solomon uses the words “captive” and “captivity” 5x in five
- You would think Israel would pick up on this, but they don’t
 - So, Israel is judged for their sins and taken into captivity
- The Ninevites (Gentiles) are actually responding the way the Israelites should
 - In this story, the Ninevites represent what Israel should have been doing all along
 - This is a scathing indictment on Israel
 - Yet it reveals how God yearns to show his compassion

*“...if my people who are called by my name **humble** themselves, and **pray** and **seek my face** and **turn from their wicked ways**, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” – 2 Chronicles 7:14 ESV*

- God is telling Israel that if they will only repent, He will still forgive them
 - This entire story is about the compassion of God
 - To Jonah
 - To Nineveh
 - By extension, the Israelites
 - The exiled Israelites were being read the book of Jonah so they could see the example of the repentant Ninevites
 - The author is virtually screaming REPENT! REPENT! REPENT!
- **God’s unprejudiced compassion for all mankind**
 - Centuries later, the Israelites will continue to reject God and His offer of repentance
 - Jesus will show up in Israel preaching a message of repentance to the Jews

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” – Matthew 4:17 ESV

- But they will refuse His offer
- And He will condemn them

“The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold something greater than Jonah is here.” – Matthew 12:41 ESV

- Yet, the Gentiles would respond to His pleas of repentance and forgiveness
 - The Roman Centurion

“Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith...” – Matthew 8:10 ESV

- The Canaanite Woman

“O woman, great is your faith!” – Matthew 15:28 ESV

- The Samaritan Woman

*Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of **the woman's testimony**... They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” – John 4:39, 42 ESV*

- All throughout Jesus’ ministry we see the Gentiles exhibiting more faith
- They are proving the loving-kindness, grace, mercy, patience, and compassion of our God

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

In what ways do we reject the compassion of God? Do you tend to see God as an angry judge?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. What do these verses teach us about sharing this compassion with those around us?

Are you willing to take this gift of compassion that you have received from God and share it with others? What is keeping you from doing this?