

JONAH

ACT 3 - THE SCENE IN THE CITY

OVERVIEW

- Act 1 - The Scene on the Ship (1)
- Act 2 - The Scene in the Fish (2)
- Act 3 - The Scene in the City (3)
- Act 4 - The Scene on the Hill (4)

In chapter 1, we saw Jonah trying to run from God. But instead, in chapter 2, we saw Jonah running into God. Today, in Jonah 3, we are going to see Jonah running with God.

INTRODUCTION

I think we often romanticize the Christian life thus, we believe our relationship with God is always “feeling in love with Him.” We make our relationship with Him sensual; as if it is the same kind of feeling we strive after or hope for in marriage or when riding a roller coaster or engaging in some kind of extreme sport. But our relationship with God operates in the routine and the mundane. I know, this isn’t what you want to hear, but it is the truth. We make obedience to God something that is hard, difficult, or unwanted instead of seeing it as a fruit or constant. To be sure there might be those moments when we slam up against “it.” But overall it is really quite simple. The following paragraph encapsulates the language of most evangelicals. I disagree. Read along and see what perhaps the problem with this viewpoint is.

“There is an incredibly important lesson in verse 1. As Christians, **God frequently asks us to do things that we don’t really want to do.** And so, like Jonah, we head the other direction. Storms of life may come, but more often than not, God allows us just to continue down the path away from obedience. **As a pastor, I talked with so many Christians who wanted to be used by God. They wanted to hear from God. They wanted God to give them direction in life.** But they were not doing the plain and simple things God had already revealed to them and asked them to do. They were not reading their Bibles. They were not praying. They were not attending church. It was different for every person, but obedience with God is like running hurdles in track. **You have to get over each hurdle in order, or else you are disqualified in the race.”¹**

Again, there might be those moments when you hit critical mass like wanting to leave a spouse or engage in some form of addiction, but overall life is not lived in crisis. What we do not like about life is that it is often vanilla ice cream [or no ice cream at all] when we want moose tracks with hot fudge poured over the top doused in crumbled Oreo cookies.

Yet, with our story, Jonah is pretty normal and he finds himself emotionally/spiritually drained and pretty depressed and in his depression he is pushing against God. This is not uncommon. Despite all of Jonah’s short comings, God relentlessly pursues him. This experience with Jonah and God and Nineveh is not

abnormal. This is what people do as does God. People fail and God picks them up. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God could bypass Jonah. He did not need him. But God wanted Jonah's joy. That is what God designed him for and us for. God is just as and more so determined for our joy as we are.

Let us read and see if we cannot hear God's compassion and desire for us, His people.

THE TEXT

IN A NUTSHELL

I cannot help but feel a certain sense of aversion for the mishandling of this text. This book is not about a rebellious prophet or a heaven sent, Holy Ghost revival. **It is about a God who is on Mission.** He loves people regardless of their culture or ethnicity **AND** He loves His people. He loves us where we are, not for what we will become. His Vision for creating is global and encompassing.

AUTHOR'S EMPHASIS:

OUTLINE

When the fish hurled Jonah back on shore, he was still 550 miles from Nineveh. I do not think Jonah came out of the fish in the same manner he went into the fish. I have no problem with Jonah cleaning himself up or staying as he was. Either way, he was significantly impacted by his stay in the great fish. I think Jonah's "fame" became known as he journeyed to Nineveh. I think as Jonah traveled he drew large crowds and as he went he preached. I believe Jonah had a significant entourage of people trailing along with him. This is what arrived at the gates of Nineveh. Thus, I do not think Jonah was a single, solitary individual who arrived alone when he came to Nineveh. Likewise, I think he spoke often of God's judgment, repentance, and compassion.

I believe there are four primary thoughts inside of our passage as we consider Act 3.

I. God Persisting (vv. 1, 2)

- ¹Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."

God is persistent in chapter one when He hurls [appoints] a storm and He is persistent when He appoints a great fish.

"Thankfully, we serve the God [who persists]. Adam sinned in the garden and God covered him. Moses murdered a man and God called him. Elijah quit and complained then God re-commissioned him. Peter denied the Lord and then God used him at Pentecost. John Mark deserted the mission team at Pamphylia

yet God moved upon him to write the second Gospel. And that has been the story of the church through the ages. We have all received a multitude of opportunities [because God persists].”²

What if your relationship with God depended on you and your energy or passions? What if life’s trajectory was based solely on your ability and gumption?

Friend, there is a God who hurls storms (1:4), appoints fish (1:17), gourds (4:6), worms (4:7), and winds (4:8). Although each of these events are sensational, God as persistent is normal. This is what God does. There is never a moment when He leaves you alone.

There is no gap between what God wills and what He shall do. Often, we will ask ourselves a simple question as to what this is all about. Friend, read Revelation 21 and 22. I know sometimes in the immediate it does not make any sense. But, right now in you and through you to those around you God is reclaiming what is rightfully His as Creator and Redeemer and that setting straight looks like tribulation.

Let us thank Him that He is persistent.

II. Jonah Preaching (vv. 3, 4)

- 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' journey in breadth.^[b] ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

At this point in the story, we have no idea where Jonah is emotionally. The text tells us that Jonah’s message was a mere eight words. I have to believe he repeated that simple message over and over and over. Before we get our hopes up, it is probably safe to assume he said more than this but this is what he said in a “nutshell.”

If God has prepared the heart, then this is all that has to be said. It is apparent from the response that he said more than what is recorded.

III. People Repenting (vv. 5-9)

- ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. ⁶ The word reached^[c] the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸ 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. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

Their belief in God caused the repenting. When you read this story, it has some of that CONSTANTINE baptizing his army in the river mystic.

Four things to consider.

First, the notion of REVIVAL. I cut my theological teeth on this whole idea of revival and I believe God can convert the unbelieving, but I am no fan of the man-centered, human effort ginned up, experiential, and sensational idea that is often paraded about as revival. There could have been significance cultural community based thus widespread movements of God, but such are exceptional based on where they are historically. I fully recognize that such a statement makes it sound like I do not believe God can or would have done such a thing. I believe God can do whatever He wants and such can happen. It is not the power of God I call into question. It is the man-centered, works based approach to the notion of Revival that I call out. See further the article on REVIVAL IN NINEVEH.

Second, the sensationalizing of mass conversion communicates the thought of the proverbial “mile wide and inch deep.” There have been many such stories. This does not call into question their authenticity, but such “movements” are not normative and are always suspect. I do believe in “point in time conversion,” but I also believe that faith without works is dead.

Third, Nineveh’s repenting caused God to withhold judgment for a season. The empire will fall at around @615BCE (cf. Nahum). This, however, is several generations after this “mass” conversion in the days of Jonah.

Finally, the intent of this text is to show 1) God’s Vision for humanity at large, 2) the pattern for faith works [i.e. believe / repentance], and 3) His compassionate pastoral pursuit of His people.

IV. God Relenting (v. 10)

- ¹⁰ 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.

This is what the relenting God does. He extends mercy and grace to those who repent of their sins and turn to Jesus for their salvation.

Shepherding the Sheep: (What’s NEXT?)

- 1) God’s Vision for humanity at large, [What is the church’s response to the mass migration from the south?]
- 2) The pattern for faith works [i.e. believe / repentance], and
- 3) His compassionate pastoral pursuit of His people.

¹ https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/jonah/jonah_3/

² <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-returning-to-god-second-chance-jonah-3>

CONSTANTINE

THE BATTLE OF MILVIAN BRIDGE

Oct. 28 is the 1,700th anniversary of a truly pivotal moment in the story of Western civilization and in the story of Christ's Church — an event so decisive, in fact, that it led to the convergence of these two previously colliding cultures. On that autumn day in 312, two would-be emperors, Constantine and Maxentius, clashed outside the gates of Rome. They were vying for the throne once occupied by their fathers.

Constantine's army overwhelmed Maxentius and his legions, pushing them back onto their makeshift bridge over the Tiber River and, after its collapse, into the waters below. To one Christian chronicler of the time, Eusebius of Caesarea, it was a defeat akin to Pharaoh and his troops drowning in the Red Sea.

We begin to see the momentous nature of this battle and the reason for Eusebius' analogy when we note what did not take place in its immediate aftermath. Upon triumphantly entering Rome, Constantine refused to perform the customary sacrifices to the god Jupiter. Why? Because he did not attribute his victory to the chief deity of the Roman state. Shockingly, he credited a man executed for treason against Rome and worshipped as God incarnate by an illegal religion. Constantine believed that he had secured imperial power through the assistance of Jesus Christ.

A divine presence

The day before the battle, Constantine experienced something that he believed to be a divine communiqué assuring him of success if he fought under the patronage of the Christian God. The historical accounts about his experience are somewhat conflicting: He had a dream or saw a vision in the sky or perhaps both took place. Whatever its precise form, this message from God compelled Constantine to emblazon his shields and military standards with the overlapping Greek letters Chi and Rho — the first two letters of the title "Christ."

The authenticity of Constantine's commitment to Christianity has been much debated by modern scholars. What remains clear is that after 312, Constantine saw himself both as a Christian and as a divinely appointed protector of the Church.

This self-understanding is evident in his own words and especially in his political deeds: Constantine built scores of extravagant churches throughout his vast domain, assisted bishops in their efforts to resolve doctrinal conflicts, granted clergy exemptions from certain taxes and public duties, and promoted Christians within his administration and the military.

Contrary to widespread belief, Constantine did not, however, persecute pagans or compel any of his subjects to convert to Christianity. That's right, he never marched his army down to the river to baptize them like so many of us have been told, nor did he make Christianity the official religion of the Empire, as we've all been told. He was pro-Christian without being anti-pagan.

Reconsidering the tale

Many Christians at the time enthusiastically welcomed Constantine's policies. They had, after all, endured nearly 300 years of perpetual social disdain together with sporadic but violent persecution at the hands of civil authorities. Shortly after Constantine's ascension to power, these same Christians found themselves under the patronage of the very highest of all civil authorities. No wonder Eusebius compared Constantine to Moses and his victory to the Exodus!

Other Christians at the time observed that the social-political recognition of Christianity that followed Constantine's victory came with a cost all its own. It may have increased the Church's growth rate, but to some it also decreased her collective purity. Indeed, catechumens were less likely to receive the intensive baptismal preparation of previous centuries, and they were more likely than before to convert for reasons other than devotion to Christ.

This apparent trade-off between quantity and quality or popularity and piety is nevertheless a far cry from the "fall of the Church" catastrophe imagined by some of our Protestant brethren. In fact, many Catholic beliefs and practices repudiated by these appropriately named Restorationist denominations had taken root in the Church centuries before Constantine, and thus would appear to have been planted by the Apostles and their spiritual successors rather than Constantine and his political heirs. Even a casual reading of the earliest Christian writings will confirm this.

Perhaps we would all do well to reconsider the historical record on Constantine and on the early Church as we mark the 1,700th anniversary of that autumn day when their respective stories first intersected.

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CHAPTER III: THE STORY OF CONSTANTINE AND ELENE

The Greatness of Constantine Provokes Attack

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/hml/hml07.htm>

IN the year 312, the sixth year after Constantine had become emperor, the Roman Empire had increased on every hand, for Constantine was a mighty leader in war, a gracious and friendly lord in peace; he was a true king and ruler, a protector of all men. So mightily did he prosper that his enemies assembled great armies against him, and a confederation to overthrow him was made by the terrible Huns, the famous Goths, the brave Franks, and the warlike Huns. This powerful confederation sent against Constantine an overwhelming army of Huns, whose numbers seemed to be countless, and yet the Hunnish leaders feared, when they knew that the emperor himself led the small Roman host.

The Eve of the Battle

The night before the battle Constantine lay sadly in the midst of his army, watching the stars, and dreading the result of the next day's conflict; for his warriors were few compared with the Hunnish multitude, and even Roman discipline and devotion might not win the day against the mad fury of the barbarous Huns. At last, wearied out, the emperor slept, and a vision came to him in his sleep. He seemed to see, standing by him, a beautiful shining form, a man more glorious than the sons of men, who, as Constantine sprang up ready helmed for war, addressed him by name. The darkness of night fled before the heavenly light that shone from the angel, and the messenger said:

"O Constantinus, the Ruler of Angels,
The Lord of all glory, the Master of heaven's hosts,
Claims from thee homage. Be not thou affrighted,
Though armies of aliens array them for battle,
Though terrible warriors threaten fierce conflict.
Look thou to the sky, to the throne of His glory;
There seest thou surely the symbol of conquest."

Elene.

Vision of the Cross

Constantine looked up as the angel bade him, and saw, hovering in the air, a cross, splendid, glorious, adorned with gems and shining with heavenly light. On its wood letters were engraved, gleaming with unearthly radiance:

"With this shalt thou conquer the foe in the conflict,
And with it shalt hurl back the host of the heathen."

Elene.

Constantine is Cheered

Constantine read these words with awe and gladness, for indeed he knew not what deity had thus favoured him, but he would not reject the help of the Unknown God; so he bowed his head in reverence, and when he looked again the cross and the angel had disappeared, and around him as he woke was the greyness of the rising dawn. The emperor summoned to his tent two soldiers from the troops, and bade them make a cross of wood to bear before the army. This they did, greatly marvelling, and Constantine called a standard-bearer, to whom he gave charge to bear forward the Standard of the Cross where the danger was greatest and the battle most fierce.

The Morning of Battle

When the day broke, and the two armies could see each other, both hosts arrayed themselves for battle, in serried ranks of armed warriors, shouting their war-cries.

"Loud sang the trumpets to stern-minded foemen:
The dewy-winged eagle watched them march onward,
The horny-billed raven rejoiced in the battle-play,
The sly wolf, the forest-thief, soon saw his heart's desire
As the fierce warriors rushed at each other.
Great was the shield-breaking, loud was the clamour,
Hard were the hand-blows, and dire was the downfall,
When first the heroes felt the keen arrow-shower.
Soon did the Roman host fall on the death-doomed Huns,
Thrust forth their deadly spears over the yellow shields,
Broke with their battle-glaives breasts of the foemen."

Elene.

The Cross is Raised

Then, when the battle was at its height, and the Romans knew not whether they would conquer or die fighting to the last, the standard-bearer raised the Cross, the token of promised victory, before all the host, and sang the chant of triumph. Onward he marched, and the Roman host followed him, pressing on resistless as the surging waves. The Huns, bewildered by the strange rally, and dreading the mysterious sign of some mighty god, rolled back, at first slowly, and then more and more quickly, till sullen retreat became panic rout, and they broke and fled. Multitudes were cut down as they fled, other multitudes were swept away by the devouring Danube as they tried to cross its current; some, half dead, reached the other side, and saved their lives in fortresses, guarding the steep cliffs beyond the Danube. Few, very few they were who ever saw their native land again.

There was great rejoicing in the Roman army and in the Roman camp when Constantine returned in triumph with the wondrous Cross borne before him.

“REVIVAL” IN NINEVEH


The Greatest Revival in History

<http://thecripplegate.com/the-greatest-revival-in-history/>

Revival: “a period of renewed religious interest; an often highly emotional evangelistic meeting or series of meetings.”

There have been many genuine ones throughout history. Pentecost, the Reformation, and the First Great Awakening, to name a few. And there have been more that are questionable. Revival timelines list the greatest revivals in history surrounding events and people such as Azusa Street, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Charles Finney. An honest historical and theological examination of these would call into question the genuineness of these revivals.


Revival attempts became somewhat of a fad in the last century. Individuals offer “how-to” instructions for inciting them. Huge events are organized in order to schedule revivals. But, from what we know, the greatest revival event in history happened about 2800 years ago in one of the most wicked cities in the world. And it was quite different from many supposed revivals in recent times.

“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. ⁶ The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸ 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. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” ¹⁰ 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 3:3-10 ).

This passage records the repentance of the great city, Nineveh sometime during the mid-eighth century B.C. It was a glorious event, unmatched in history.

Here are a few **observations from the greatest revival event in history.**

1. The conversions numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

From Jonah 4:11 , it seems that there were likely 120,000 children in Nineveh. That easily puts the total population over 500,000.

Revival preacher George Whitefield was once asked after a large event, “How many were converted?” He responded, “We’ll see in six months.”

It’s probably best for us to be careful about numbering conversions. We simply do not know. But, when God numbers them as with Nineveh, we can be sure. This was the greatest revival in history.

2. Except for conversion, there were no signs and wonders.

No one claimed to slay, heal, or raise others by the Spirit. By appearances’ sake, it was a very plain, ordinary event: there was a guy preaching and walking. For many revival-goers in our day, it would have been foolish and boring. But the results were incredible: a few hundred thousand saw, loathed, and turned from their sin, and saw, loved, and turned to the God of the Bible. And that is the single greatest sign and wonder of them all.

3. The preaching was not that great.

There were no riveting stories; no gripping illustrations; no tear-jerking urban legends; no promises of blessings raining down from heaven that week. Far better sermons have been preached by far godlier men, with nobody getting saved. It was simply a true word from the true God. And that was enough.

4. The preacher was no one special.

Jonah was not the greatest example of godliness. He battled with stubbornness, anger, discouragement, and even suicide. No one would’ve contracted him to write a book or speak at a conference. But God still used him. This is no excuse for ungodliness in the pastorate. Scripture makes the character requirements clear for pastors (1 Tim. 3:1-7^L, Titus 1:6-9^L, 1 Pet. 5:2-3^L). However, spiritual imperfection did not hinder this revival.

5. The content of the preaching was wrath and judgment.

Supposed revivals today often feature smooth-speaking orators styled to sway the masses. But the greatest revival in history was a broken, unimpressive man whose only message was the imminent wrath of God.

6. The event did not feature a building, music, or impressive show.

A mediocre guy simply walked through a city of colossal wickedness and preached a short message of God’s judgment. Jonah had no lights or props; he had no moving background music synchronized to the manipulative suave of a motivational speaker. It was just a guy speaking God’s word to a city dripping with evil.

7. The event was not a scheduled revival.

Man can schedule a ball game; he can schedule a movie, theater, and a circus, but he cannot schedule true revival. Why? Because true revival is the event where God uses an ordinary man through the ordinary means of grace to bring about genuine and extraordinary conversions.

Man cannot schedule revival because man is not God. God does not submit to man's theatrical musings and self-centered calendar. To presume to schedule revival is to usurp the place of God and manipulate the emotions of man.

8. There was no revival prayer meeting.

To preach without prayer is to presume upon God and boast in oneself. However, though prayer is essential to accompany preaching, it is not the magic key which unlocks revival. God simply decided to act by and for himself.

9. Evidence of revival was brokenness over sin.


If you type in "revival," the internet brings up hundreds of pictures of people standing with their hands raised. But if you were there in Nineveh that day, no one was standing. Revival looked like sinners facedown, shattered over their offenses against God. It was similar at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:37).

There is simply no natural explanation behind the great revival of Nineveh. It is impossible. A city full of violent, skin-filleting, idol-worshipping, self-exalting, wicked, eighth-century Assyrians; enter a mediocre, bitter Hebrew who belts out fire and brimstone, and a few hundred thousand collapse to their knees in repentance before God. "Maybe God will be merciful towards us?!" Indeed. What a glorious miracle. I can't wait to meet my Assyrian brothers and sisters in heaven. They are convinced Calvinists, no doubt: "Yeah, one day I was displaying conquered peoples' heads on stakes for fun and worshipping Ashur, the next, falling before Yahweh at his utter mercy."

Glory to God. We are simply delusional if we suppose that salvation can be explained by anything other than the sovereign hand of God electing, drawing, illuminating, regenerating, and converting. There is no one like this God.

We can no more engineer a revival with our tactics than we can make a star with a bucket of hydrogen and helium. The only explanation for the conversion of the Ninevehites is the sovereign grace of God.

Preaching, preachers, prayer, buildings, and more; as important as they are, they can accomplish nothing unless the God of the Bible decides to act. There is not one thing that a human can do to incite revival. Certainly God commands and uses biblical preaching through biblically qualified men, but even then, we are utterly dependent upon him to act. If it's true that sinners are dead in sin, then it follows that true revival is a calvinistic event, just as it was with Nineveh.

"Salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9 ).

GOD REPENTING

There are two primary doctrinal thoughts asked by the prophets Amos and Jonah. DOES GOD REPENT or CAN GOD CHANGE HIS MIND? Amos 7:3, 6 states that the LORD repented. This same idea is echoed in Jonah 3:10.

3 The LORD changed His mind about this. "It shall not be," said the LORD. 6 The LORD changed His mind about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

- 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.

Amos 7:3, 6 states that the LORD repented. There are two sets of Scripture needing address. First, God does not, nor can He, change or repent.

- Numbers 23:19

¹⁹ "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

- 1 Sam. 15:29

²⁹ Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind."

- Malachi 3:6

⁶ "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

- Romans 11:29

²⁹ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

- Hebrews 13:8

⁸ Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever.

- James 1:17

¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

In all of these verses, it is apparent that God does not change in His essence or basic nature. God never alters or adjusts who He is. In addition, God in His plans or decrees never wavers. The plan of God is sure. We can be confident that what He has spoken and willed happens. We are assured of this because of whom God is.

However, there is also another side to the discussion. Second, God does repent or change His mind.

- Genesis 6:6, 7
⁶ The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."
- 1 Sam. 15:11, 35
¹¹ "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night. . . . ³⁵ Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.
- Jere. 18:8, 10; 26:3; 42:10
⁸ if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. . . . ¹⁰ if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.

³ Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.'

¹⁰ 'If you will indeed stay in this land, then I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not uproot you; for I will relent concerning the calamity that I have inflicted on you.
- Amos 7:3, 6
³ The LORD changed His mind about this. "It shall not be," said the LORD. . . . ⁶ The LORD changed His mind about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD.
- Jonah 3:9
⁹ Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."
- Zechariah 8:14
¹⁴ "For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Just as I purposed to do harm to you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and I have not relented,

How do we harmonize these two Scriptural truths? First, to repent simply means, "to change one's mind." I believe the NIV translates the thought in this way. Does changing one's mind presuppose or constitute evil? Typically, we think of repentance as being from evil. However, to repent simply means, "to change one's mind." In the area of salvation, it means, "to change one's mind about sin and God." However, context determines meaning. In addition, there is nothing within the context of these verses to suggest that God is turning from MORAL EVIL.

Second, although all truth is true as it reflects the character and purpose of God, not all truth operates on the same level. I call this “**the pyramid of truth.**” All that Scripture says is true, but not all Scripture exists on the same level and thus carries the same weight of priority or importance. For example, the truth of man’s dominion over all things created and God’s dominion over all things created are both truths, but they do not carry the same priority or importance. One of those two ideas has more weight than the other. The idea of God repenting when certain actions are taken in a cause and effect sequence reflects a certain truth (i.e. causation or causality), but the idea of God changing His mind as it relates to His character and purpose has greater priority or importance than the other. The one, causation, fits inside of or under the other, God’s immutability or unchanging character and purpose.

The question we might ask ourselves is, "Is it evil to alter one's course of action?" Perhaps a issue is that of decrees versus dealings. God never changes in His ultimate plan or goal. Yet may alter the process whereby He achieves that goal based on the actions of individuals. God "repenting" has everything to do with methods and nothing to do with ultimate design. God’s repentance is based on what is foreknown.

“HOW DOES GOD'S IMMUTABLE DECREE/PLAN DIFFER FROM FATALISM?” Consider the following chart as a means of explaining this apparent dilemma.

DIVINE DETERMINISM	FATALISM
Has meaning and purpose (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:1-12)	Has no ultimate meaning or purpose
Supremely personal and reasonable (Ps. 139)	Impersonal and groundless
Active (Dan. 4:35; Jere. 18:1-4)	Passive (Que sera, sera!)
Fills the future with hope (1 Thess. 5:24)	Makes the future risky and uncertain

Therefore, we see how God's plan and character are inseparable. He cannot change. He might change the method or in His dealings with us, but the ultimate goal, that which He is striving after will never ever change. Our future is as sure as the character of God.

