

Jonah 3: Who Deserves A Second Chance?

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I. Introduction

It's hard to forgive people. It's easier to hold a grudge, especially if the person did something terrible to you. Why should you give them a second chance, they don't deserve it, right? Would God give them a second chance, even if they did the worst thing you could think of? And if He would, what should we do?.....before you answer, did God give you a second chance?

II. Would You Give Someone Like Hitler a Second Chance?

Jonah gets a second chance, Jonah 3:1-4, having released Jonah from the great fish, God gives him his marching orders for the second time. He's to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that God gives him. Jonah obeys God and heads for Nineveh. The city was so big it took three days to cross. As Jonah sets out on the first day, he cries out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Now, who lives in Nineveh? The Assyrians. And what are they doing, why is God so hell bent on sending someone over there? They were a vicious, vicious people who brutalized those they conquered and their culture was full of idolatry and everything that goes with it, Nahum 3:1-4. But in spite of this, God wants to show them mercy. And how does Jonah feel about them? The last thing Jonah wants is to go to Nineveh because he knows from the prophet Amos that the Assyrians are going to kill his people. So in chapter one, he's not interested in going on a saving mission for the Assyrians. But in chapter two Jonah repents and has such a change of heart that he says, "These Assyrians are in deep trouble; if they keep going like this, they're going to forsake God's mercy," 2:8. This Jonah sees the Assyrians with new eyes.

What's Jonah doing in chapter three? Well look at the message he gives the Assyrians? Is there mercy in it? Is there even a hint that God's giving them a second chance? The "forty days" gives a hint of it, but one hearing it would not think, "Oh, no! I better repent or else God's going to destroy me!" They would probably think, "I better get outta here; this place is going down!" It seems Jonah is reverting to his former attitude about the Assyrians of not wanting to see them saved.

Now, what lesson did God just get done teaching Jonah which He now wants him to apply to the Assyrians? Mercy! Jonah rebelled against God, ran away from Him and instead of killing him and tossing him away, God resurrected him and gave him another chance to get this right. He showed Jonah mercy.¹

Now, if you're God and you want to show some wicked, disobedient people mercy, what prophet would you send? What about a prophet who just went through a vivid lesson on mercy? He was disobedient yet God spared him. God is asking Jonah to do for others what He's just done for him, show the Assyrians mercy. Jonah was completely on board with this in 2:8, but now Jonah thinks the Assyrians deserve to die because they're godless people who disobey God in the worst way.

¹ Jonah knows he deserves to die for running away from God (Romans 6:23). In fact, he likely expected to die at sea: When the hurricane hit, he went to the bottom of the ship and likely said to himself, "Yup, here it comes. God's gonna kill me. Might as well make myself comfortable, maybe I'll get lucky and wake up in paradise."

The Assyrians stop running away from God, Jonah 3:5-9, we saw God chase after Jonah, His prophet, to give him a second chance, would He do the same for someone like the Assyrians? Yes He would and He does. God uses Jonah to chase after them. And what's the response of this brutal and wicked people? They repent! And their repentance is long and wide. Everyone, young, old, rich, and poor (even the king exchanges his kingly robe for sackcloth and ashes), they all repent. In fact, the king made a national decree that everyone, including every animal, must fast and be covered in sackcloth.² They must all cry out to God and repent of their two offences: their violence (brutality) and evil ways (idolatry). And even though Jonah didn't make this message explicit, i.e., "repent or else!" they got the message.

Was this repentance real? Yes! We see the people's actions, including the king. They believed God and exhibited signs of their repentance: they mourn over their guilt and cry out to God to spare them. If their repentance was not real, then God wouldn't have done what He did in 3:10.

God gives the brutal Assyrians a second chance, Jonah 3:10, some might see the actions of the Assyrians as the tears of someone who got caught. Is that the case? No, if that were the case, God would not have forgiven their sins and pardoned them. Instead, God not only saw their tears and other signs of mourning, He saw them actually turn from their evil way. This means they truly repented and ceased their idolatry and violence. Therefore, God did not destroy them.

Does someone like Hitler deserve a second chance? Did Jonah deserve a second chance? No, but God gave him one. Did the Assyrians deserve a second chance? Hekk no! but God gave them one. Why does God give us a second chance, even though we don't deserve it? "For He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9. "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live....'" Ezekiel 33:11.

Have you failed to give someone a second chance? Is there someone in your life right now that you're not giving a second chance? Is there someone you should forgive? You're not obligated to restore fellowship to the person if they don't repent, Luke 17:3. But you are obligated to give them a second, third, fourth ... chance if they do repent, Luke 17:4.

When does someone deserve a second chance, Paul, Barnabas, and Mark? Barnabas' cousin Mark went with him and Paul to do ministry, but he abandoned the mission. So when it came time to go out again, Paul refused to take him. But Barnabas gave Mark a second chance, Acts 12:25; 15:36-41. Because Barnabas gave him a second chance, Mark was later useful to Paul, Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11. In fact, Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," did the same for Paul: When others wouldn't give Paul a second chance because of his past, Barnabas took him under his wing, Acts 9:26-27. And it's not that Paul was wrong in not taking Mark; he was likely basing his decision on what he knew about Mark while Barnabas knew that his cousin had it in him to fulfill his ministry if only someone would give him another shot and challenge and encourage him. So if God calls you to be a Barnabas to others, as He was calling Jonah to be for the Assyrians, obey God and give the person a second chance.

III. Conclusion

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

² Fasting, wearing sackcloth, and sitting on ashes are signs of mourning, Genesis 37:34 (Jacob); 2 Samuel 12:16-17 (David); Job 2:8 (Job).