

Repent and Believe!

This is the message with which **Jesus** begins His public ministry for the salvation of souls after His Baptism in the Jordan!

Repent and Believe, is that something I should do regularly in my life? What if I truly repent and believe in the Eternal God, how would that benefit me, my family, my society or even my country?

The **answers** to these pertinent questions regarding the **Gospel message of Jesus of repentance and belief** are found in today's story of **Jonah** and **his call to preach at Nineveh**.

A little background is needed regarding **Nineveh** and **Jonah**, the reluctant prophet.

Nineveh was a large pagan city that symbolized enmity with **God**.

Nineveh was the capital of the **Assyrian empire**—**Assyrians** being the most hated and feared **enemies** of **Israel** in the eighth century B.C.

Nineveh was known as the largest urban center in the world, ornamented by **gardens, statuary, parks, and a zoo** and was regarded as a **great cultural center**.

Nineveh was also known as a place associated with **sin and vice**.

God called a **prophet** by the name of **Jonah to go to Nineveh** to deliver a message which reflected the soul of this great city. But **Jonah** was a **narrow minded, nationalistic prophet**, who wanted nothing to do with such foreigners who hated **God and Israel**. **Jonah** first refused to go to preach to **Ninevites**, however, he **obeys God's second call**. **Jonah** reluctantly arrived in the city by way of a fish, and **cheerfully** began to spread his messages of **gloom and doom** that **God** in "**Forty days more will destroy Nineveh!**" **Jonah** said this **cheerfully** because he wanted to see them destroyed!

The **Ninevites** did believe in **God** and in the **preaching message of Jonah** **resulting** in a fast from the greatest to the least, and they put on sackcloth!

*Even the supreme king was moved, who rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, and covered himself with sackcloth—a symbol of grief or despair, and sat in ashes. The great conversion led the King and all his subjects to abandon violence by turning away from their evil and wicked ways, and together they repented and confessed their sins to **God** promising not to sin any longer or to resist **God**.*

Such profound humble actions and a sincere contrite heart was not only astounding but also pleasing to Almighty God. As a result, the city and its people were saved, and that day spared from total destruction!

The reading from the Book of Jonah today ends with these beautiful words: “When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil that God had threatened to do them; God did not carry it out.”

While they appear to be beautiful words reflecting **God’s love** and **mercy** towards **His people**, but they are also perplexing and disconcerting. **Why?**

Because in **Jonah 3:10** we read that “**God repented of the evil that He had threatened to do to the city of Nineveh and all the inhabitants.**” What?

Isn't God incapable of evil because He is all good and holy?

Why was God planning to do evil in that country to begin with?

Is this a misprint? No, but it is a matter of a translation.

Some translations use the word **evil** while others use **destruction, punishment, sentence, disaster, calamity, etc.**

The Scriptures were written at a particular period of history and, while they do speak to all ages, they had their first audience at the time of their composition.

For example, in the ancient world it was widely believed that there were *gods for good things and gods for bad things*.

Though **Judaism** believed in a celestial realm with angels, it always sought to emphasize **its monotheism—the belief that there is only one God and God is absolute sovereign**. However, some **prophets** would often use phrases that seem theologically awkward today. For example, the prophet **Isaiah** preached:

I am the LORD, there is no other God besides me. . . I make weal and create woe, that is wealth and misfortune...I, the LORD, do all these things. (Is. 45:5,7)

Therefore, the word **“evil”** in the **Book of Jonah** is a **figure of speech**.

It is like getting caught doing something wrong by our parents and being punished. From the perspective of the child the **punishment** is **“evil.”**

In the story of **Jonah**, the people of the city were about to experience some kind of **destruction, punishment, sentence, disaster, and calamity**.

Experiencing such things would certainly be considered an **evil** by those who are experiencing it. However, in a philosophical and theological sense it is **justice** (Ez. 18:26) and a **natural consequence** of certain actions (Deut. 30:15). The important lesson we learn from **Scriptures** today is profound but simple:

Cursing words, sinful actions and a constant resistance towards **God** and **His Commandments** will always bring destruction, misfortune or disaster or calamity in our life/in our world.

Whereas **repentance and belief** in **God's Word** will bring **protection, trust, and security** from a **Merciful God!**

Obedience to God brings us three special gifts: **healing, closeness, and love.** But in John's gospel we are reminded, **"But if anyone obeys His Word, God's love is truly made complete in him/her."**