

Daniel Perrin – L6: God's Love of Justice – Wednesday, February 5: A Repenting God?

1. The lesson opens with this question: can God repent?
 - **Numbers 23:19** – *“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? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”*
 - **1 Samuel 15:29** – *“And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent.”*
 - The word for repent in Numbers is naham – same word translated as “relent” in 1 Samuel
 - KJV translates it as repent
 - The Bible, here, says that God DOES NOT do this.
 - **Exodus 32:14** – *“So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.”*
 - Same word here, KJV translates consistently in this case ... repent
 - SO – there is a sense in which God does NOT repent or relent (He is completely unlike us – because we must repent)
 - AND there is a sense in which God does repent or relent (He is like us).
2. When we think of the word repentance, we think of John the Baptist and Jesus saying, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”*
 - This is the Greek word – metanoeo – to change your mind (to turn around and go another way)
 - To CEASE going the WRONG way,
 - Turn around and Go the RIGHT way.
 - This is in the context of sin – to turn away from sin
 - The Hebrew equivalent of this is a word Shuv – Return
 - **Hosea 14:2** – *Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.”*
 - **Ezekiel 14:6** – *‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.”*
 - **Joel 2:12** – *“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”*
 - This concept of turning away from sin and returning to God – can’t apply to God
 - After all, **1 John 3:5** – *And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.*
 - God does NOT repent in this fashion. He doesn’t change from a WRONG direction to a RIGHT direction.
3. So how does God “repent” or “relent”
 - Important concept to understand because people may come to you with this question
 - The explanation of how God can “repent” (not from sin), but to “relent” is in something that can be described as a “Conditional Prophecy”
4. What’s a Conditional Prophecy?
 - There are some things that God has promised that are Unconditional — they INVOLVE humans, but do NOT depend on human involvement for them to happen as God promised
 - The signs of the end / the Second Coming / the resurrection the Millennium
 - The apocalyptic prophecies dealing with nations and salvation
5. On the other hand, God also predicts or describes the future in a way that is Conditional
 - In other words, God describes WHAT COULD BE ... IF the conditions are met
 - These prophecies rely on the involvement of humans for them to be fulfilled.
 - Clear example: Jonah

- 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed – from their experience with Israel’s God, they understood this to be conditional
- We see that God relented of the destruction
- Built into His promise of destruction was a promise of restoration IF there was repentance
- God was ALSO willing to relent with Sodom (Gen. 18)

6. Conditional prophecies sometimes include the word “IF”

- **2 Samuel 2:12-13** – *“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*
 - **1 Kings 9:4-8** – *“⁴ Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments,⁵ then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’⁶ But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them,⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples.⁸ And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’*
- But the IF is not always explicit
 - Sometimes it is understood — BECAUSE of our former relationship and experience with God and His ways
 - God’s Law and His promises are united – can’t have one without the other – God’s promises don’t make you invincible and able to break His Law
- Jeremiah describes Conditional Prophecy
 - **Jeremiah 18:7-10** – *The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,⁸ if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.⁹ And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it,¹⁰ if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.*
 - All this happens in the context of watching a potter reshape a vessel that is not “cooperating”

7. There are many examples of conditional prophecies. I have included many in the notes, but will highlight only one here

- Zedekiah was the last king of Israel before they went into captivity in Babylon.
- In **Jeremiah 34**, we read that when Zedekiah and Israel’s leaders followed God’s instruction in Exodus 21:2 to free the slaves they held in Jerusalem God promised Zedekiah that he would die in peace even though Jerusalem would be destroyed. He just needed to surrender willingly to Babylon (**v.4-5**).
 - **Jeremiah 34:4-5** – *Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you: ‘You shall not die by the sword.⁵ You shall die in peace; as in the ceremonies of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they shall burn incense for you and lament for you, saying, ‘Alas, lord!’ For I have pronounced the word, says the LORD.’ ”*
- Instead, Zedekiah and Israel’s leaders re-enslaved the people and opposed Babylon.
- SO, Jeremiah delivered an UPDATED prophecy from God.
 - **Jeremiah 34:21** – *And I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army which has gone back from you.*

8. What does this mean for you and me?

- God desires for us to experience good and not harm.
- He gives us warning – very ample warning
 - This is an evidence of God's love
 - His warning paints a picture of the future
- Started with Adam & Eve: *The day you eat of this fruit you shall surely die*
 - But this was conditional — They / We / You can turn away from death TO life

Examples of Conditional Prophecies

- 1. God promised David that peace would continue during his reign, but following his sin with Bathsheba, there was a time of conflict, rebellion, and wars.**
 - a. 2 Samuel 7:10-11** – *Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, ¹¹ since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies.*
 - b. 2 Samuel 12:7-8** – *Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!’*
 - c. 2 Samuel 12:10** – *Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.*
- 2. God’s promise about the future of Solomon’s kingdom was conditional on his obedience**
 - a. 2 Samuel 2:12-13** – *“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*
 - While this promise applied to Solomon, its ultimate fulfillment was through Jesus.
 - b. 1 Kings 11:11** – *Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, “Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.*
 - c. See more of the conditional nature of God’s promise to Solomon:**
 - **1 Kings 3:14** – *So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”*
 - **1 Kings 6:12** – *“Concerning this temple which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David.*
 - **1 Kings 9:3-8** – *And the LORD said to him: “I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. ⁴ Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, ⁵ then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’ ⁶ But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, ⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples. ⁸ And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’*

3. **God promises Rehoboam that he will be conquered by Egypt, but Israel understood the conditional nature of prophecy. When they repented, Rehoboam was delivered from Egypt.**
 - a. **2 Chronicles 12:1, 5-7** – *Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel along with him. ...⁵ Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah, who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says the LORD: ‘You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak.’”⁶ So the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, “The LORD is righteous.”⁷ Now when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, “They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak.*
4. **Ahab was promised that he would be judged and his house (descendants) would suffer the penalty as well. Ahab understood that prophecy was conditional. When he repented, he was told that judgment would not come in his day, but at a later time.**
 - a. **1 Kings 21:21-22, 27-29** – *‘Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free.²² I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and made Israel sin.’*
 - b. **1 Kings 21:27-29** – *So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.²⁸ And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,²⁹ “See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”*
5. **Hezekiah was told that he would die and should set his house in order. He understood that he had the opportunity to plead with God.**
 - a. **2 Kings 20:1** – *In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.’”*
 - b. **2 Kings 20:5** – *“Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.*
6. **Nineveh is spared destruction when the city repents.**
 - a. **Jonah 3:4-10** – *And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.⁶ Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?¹⁰ 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.*
7. **Josiah was promised a peaceful death, but he rebelled against God’s command and died in battle. God’s promise did not overrule his future behavior and make him invincible.**

- a. **2 Kings 22:20** – *“Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.”* ¹ So they brought back word to the king.
- b. **2 Chronicles 35:20-24** – *After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him.* ²¹ But he sent messengers to him, saying, *“What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you.”* ²² Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo. ²³ And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, *“Take me away, for I am severely wounded.”* ²⁴ His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

8. The promise to Zedekiah that he would die in peace was unfulfilled because of his rebellion. Instead he was given a new prophecy that took the place of what God had previously promised. He could have had the first option, but chose the second

- a. **Jeremiah 34:4-5** – *Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you: ‘You shall not die by the sword.* ⁵ *You shall die in peace; as in the ceremonies of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they shall burn incense for you and lament for you, saying, “Alas, lord!” For I have pronounced the word, says the LORD.’* ”
- b. **Jeremiah 34:17-21** – *“Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and every one to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim liberty to you,’ says the LORD— ‘to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine! And I will deliver you to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth.* ¹⁸ *And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it—* ¹⁹ *the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—* ²⁰ *I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth.* ²¹ *And I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army which has gone back from you.* ”
- c. **Jeremiah 52:10-11** – *Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. And he killed all the princes of Judah in Riblah.* ¹¹ *He also put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in bronze fetters, took him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.*

9. Clearly conditional prophecies that contain the word IF

- a. **Deuteronomy 15:4-6** – *...except when there may be no poor among you; for the LORD will greatly bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance—* ⁵ *only if you carefully obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today.* ⁶ *For the LORD your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you.*
- b. **Deuteronomy 28:1-14** – *“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.* ² *And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: ...* ⁹ *“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.* ¹⁰ *Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you.* ”

- c. **1 Samuel 7:3** – *Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”*
- d. **1 Samuel 12:24-25** – *Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. ²⁵ But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”*
- e. **1 Kings 11:37-38** (Promise to Jeroboam) – *So I will take you, and you shall reign over all your heart desires, and you shall be king over Israel. ³⁸ Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you.*
- f. **Isaiah 1:18-20** – *“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; ²⁰ But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword”; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*
- g. **Jeremiah 12:14-17** – *Thus says the LORD: “Against all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit—behold, I will pluck them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. ¹⁵ Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land. ¹⁶ And it shall be, if they will learn carefully the ways of My people, to swear by My name, ‘As the LORD lives,’ as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people. ¹⁷ But if they do not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation,” says the LORD.*

Just because God allows the outcome of some conditional prophecies to change does not mean that ALL will change when we think they should:

- 10. The promise that David’s son through Bathsheba would die was fulfilled despite David’s prayers.** David understood the conditional nature of prophecy opened the door that the promise may be fulfilled in a different way so that the consequence may be changed. In this situation, the prophecy was fulfilled without being altered.
- a. **2 Samuel 12:14** – *However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.”*
 - b. **2 Samuel 12:22-23** – *And he said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ ²³ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”*