

God's Prophecy on Judgments

One of the important contributions of Jonah has to do with the interpretation of prophecies concerning judgment. God did *not* do to Nineveh what He announced through His spokesman. Does this mean that Jonah was a false prophet, because what he announced did not come to pass? Dt 18:21-22 Does it mean that God changed His mind about the destruction of the city?

It seems clear from the Book of Jonah that prophecies concerning judgment *as they relate to a given generation* are intrinsically conditional; they depend on the response or lack of response to the message.

Perhaps it is best to think of prophecies of judgment in terms of “intercept points.” As shown in the figure, judgment comes when a person or nation passes through the warning zone and reaches a point at which judgment *must be imposed*. If those approaching judgment turn back, they do not experience the judgment they surely would have known had they continued in their sinful ways. God did not “change His mind” at all. The people changed direction!

Prophecy, like all revelation, strips away the illusions that cloud men's minds and demonstrates reality. We live in a moral universe, governed by a moral Being. The moral principles on which this universe operates are very similar to the physical laws which govern matter—the principles that give our universe stability. Drop a rock, and according to the physical law of gravity, it will fall—not rise. If we sin or seek by fraud to gain security, anxiety will come. If we choose to ignore such warnings, as individuals and nations have, we inevitably come to the edge of divine judgment.

Prophetic warnings announce what will happen when that edge is passed. Sometimes the announcement comes too late; impending judgment is upon us. Sometimes the Word comes before we reach the brink, and warns us away. If we respond, then we avoid the fall. God has not changed His mind; we have changed our ways.

Jonah, a short and simple book, continues to be rich in meaning for you and me, just as it was significant for the people of the prophet's time.¹

It was an act of compassion for the Lord to provide the covering protection for Jonah, but when his heart went after it, it was an even greater act of kindness for the Lord to remove it. In kindness the Lord may allow us our toys, but he can remove them at a stroke to teach us that our joy should be in him alone.²

¹ Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher's commentary* (475). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

² Mackrell, P. (2007). *Opening up Jonah* (96). Leominster: Day One Publications.