

Relevant Scriptures: Repent, Relent, and Regret

1. God Regrets

God sees the wickedness of humankind and wants to start all over.

Genesis 1:²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Genesis 6:⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD was **sorry** that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I **am sorry** (*translated: repent, regret*) that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

2. God Changes Plans

Three men visit Abraham, one is assumed to be the Lord. The Lord plans to kill the inhabitants of Sodom for their acts of injustice. Abraham begins to bargain with the Lord.

Genesis 18: ²³ Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" ²⁶ And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake."

Abraham continues to bargain. Would you destroy if there were forty-five righteous people? Suppose there are forty righteous, he continues, thirty? Twenty? Suppose ten? (which is the number of Lot's family living in Sodom.)

³² Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." ³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Hebrew: *nâcham* - to be sorry, console oneself, repent, regret, comfort, be comforted
Greek: *metanoéo* - "think differently *after*," "after a change of *mind*"; to *repent* (literally, "think differently *afterwards*").

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3. God Relents

While Moses is getting the "Law" from God on the mountain, the newly freed Israelite are building a golden calf to worship.

Exodus 32 ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰ Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." ¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" ¹⁴ And the LORD **changed his mind** (*translated: repented, relented*) about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

4. God Relents

After Jonah finally goes to Nineveh and delivers the message of God's coming judgement and wrath, the King calls for repentance.

Jonah 3: ⁶ When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸ Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." ¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God **changed his mind** (*translated: repented, relented*) about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

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