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"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Questions 17 **Biblically, Does the Land of Canaan** **Belong to National Israel **FOREVER?****

Romans 9 - 11

May 7, 2017

Communion: Sheila Cragg

Care Calling: Archie Miller

Host: Julia White

Saturday 5/6 Clean Up: Mike Rylant

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I don't know who raised this question, but it one of the hottest debated topics in the church today.

And to adequately deal with it, I have divided this topic into two sermons.

Part One today deals with "**Biblically, Does the Land of Canaan Belong to National Israel **FOREVER?****"

Next Lord's Day, **Part Two** will answer **Burning Questions 18: What Is The Relationship Between the National Israel and the Church?**

Many Christians in the United States believe that it is their biblical responsibility to support the contemporary Jewish State of Israel for specific theological reasons.

This view holds that the re-gathering of Jewish people to Israel since 1948 is the miraculous fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham to establish Israel as a nation **forever** in Palestine.

Books written by Hal Lindsey, Pat Robertson, and Tim LaHaye's Left Behind novels, which propagate this view, have sold well over 100 million copies.

When asked whether God gave Israel to the Jewish people FOREVER, more Christians (55%) than Jews (40%) say yes.

Obviously those books are swaying Christian's views.

Burgeoning Christian Zionist organizations such as the International Christian Embassy and Christians United for Israel wield immense influence on Capitol Hill, making Christian Zionism the largest single-issue political lobby to come from Western Christianity.

Notice the title of this sermon.

Notice that I use the word **Biblically**, which means I am not focusing on the political, or sociological issues.

It is my contention that the promises of land, like the laws of Moses, were part of the Old Covenant, which was fulfilled in the New Covenant.

These Old Covenant shadows were realized in and through the person of Jesus Christ and His Church.

It is my contention that Christian Zionists' unconditional support of the current State of Israel is a misguided effort to separate Jews and Gentiles again, whom God joined together in the Church, the Body of Christ.

Remember that in 72 A.D. the Romans crushed the independent kingdom of Judea.

In 132 A.D. Simon bar Kokhba led a rebellion to drive out the Romans, and after two and a half years was defeated.

After the failed rebellion of Simon bar Kokhba that ended in 135 A.D., the Roman Emperor Aelius Hadrian determined to wipe out the identity of Israel/Judah/Judea.

Judea and Samaria were renamed by Hadrian to Syria Palaestina, after the Assyrians and Philistines respectively, both as an insult to the Jews and as a means of erasing the land's Jewish identity.

The Romans engaged in mass executions, expulsions, and enslavement, selling off the majority as slaves, destroying large numbers of Judean towns and forbidding Jews from settling in Jerusalem or its environs.

In addition, Hadrian brought in retired Roman military to settle the land.

Although some Jews maintained their presence in Syria-Palestina, they became a disposed and dispersed people.

At the same time, he changed the name of Jerusalem to **Colonia Aelia Capitolina**.

Aelia is derived from the emperor's family name (Aelius), and *Capitolina* refers to the cult of the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva)

A temple dedicated to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva was built on the site of the former Jewish temple, the Temple Mount.

Colonia Aelia Capitolina remained the official name of Jerusalem until 638 AD when the Arabs conquered the city and kept the first part of it as Iliyā'.

So, it was in 135 that the land of Israel-Judah-Judea became known as Palestine.

Thousands of years before the Romans invented "*Palastina*" the land had been known as "Canaan".

The Canaanites had many tiny city-states, each one at times independent and at times a vassal of an Egyptian or Hittite king. The Canaanites never united into a state.

Interestingly, at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967, it was the Jewish population that was known as "*Palestinians*."

But 135 A.D. is not the definitive date which we look at to learn the Biblical concept of FOREVER.

The date we keep in mind is 33 A.D.

Why 33 A.D.?

Because it was on the day of Pentecost in 33 A.D. that God gave birth to His Church.

I. This is not propagating Anti-Semitism.

This is not propagating Anti-Semitism.

By definition,

"Anti-Semitism is the belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews."

You will see today that is not the way God sees the Jews.

My Biblical understanding that I am sharing today is NOT an attack on the race of people known as Jews.

And, this is not an attack on the right of Israel to exist as a nation, because that is not in dispute

Biblically, it is clear that the promises made to Abraham were given in the context of a covenant relationship that was intended to bless all peoples of the world, and not just the nation of Israel.

Because of the Scriptural argument Paul uses, some accuse him of being anti-semitic and a renegade Jew who hates his people. But that is absolutely false.

Listen to the great Apostle's lament:

Romans 9:1-5 (TLB)

1 O Israel, my people! O my Jewish brothers! How I long for you to come to Christ. 2 My heart is heavy within me, and I grieve bitterly day and night because of you. 3 Christ knows and the Holy Spirit knows that it is no mere pretense when I say that I would be willing to be forever damned if that would save you. 4 God has given you so much, but still you will not listen to him. He took you as his own special, chosen people and led you along with a bright cloud of glory and told you how very much he wanted to bless you. He gave you his rules for daily life so you would know what he wanted you to do. He let you worship him and gave you mighty promises. 5 Great men of God were your fathers, and Christ himself was one of you, a Jew so far as his human nature is concerned, he who now rules over all things. Praise God forever!

In verse 3, the Apostle Paul gives us a great picture of his regret that the majority of Jews had not professed belief in Jesus the Christ, for he says in the Greek text they are "**my people, my own flesh and blood!**"

Does that sound like a renegade Jew?

Does that sound like the voice of anti-semitism?

For me, I say NO!

II. The Biblical Background of FOREVER

In Genesis 13:14, God invites Abram to

Genesis 13:14-16 (NASB)

14 ... lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for

all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. 16 "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.

Now, if you take that literally, Abram is looking at 12 square miles, because a 6-ft person can see about 3 miles before the curvature of the earth prevents further observation.

So, God is more explicit:

Genesis 15:18-21 (NASB)

18 LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

And that passage in **Genesis 13:15 I will give it to you and to your descendants forever**, raises the question: Has the Nation of Israel been Divinely given the land they now possess?

Remember the survey mentioned a few minutes ago:

When asked whether God gave Israel to the Jewish people FOREVER, more Christians (55%) than Jews (40%) say yes.

What you and I have to keep in mind is that God gave us both an OLD COVENANT and a NEW COVENANT.

Under the Old Covenant, God gave a promise to Abraham.

"I will give it to you and to your descendants forever"

The Hebrew word that is used to translage "forever" is "'**olam**," and it means no more than "age-lasting" or "untill the end of the age," which means the end of the Old Covenant.

The possession of Canaan was first promised to Abraham in Gen 12:7 and subsequently repeated to him and to the other patriarchs.

And, the Bible makes it clear that this promise of the land was *fulfilled* when Israel crossed the Jordan River and took possession of Canaan.

As the Israelites were about to cross over, Moses said to them,

Deuteronomy 1:6-8 (CEV)

6 People of Israel, when we were in our camp at Mount Sinai, the LORD our God told us: You have stayed here long enough.

7 Leave this place and go into the land that belongs to the Amorites and their neighbors the Canaanites. This land includes the Jordan River valley, the hill country, the western foothills, the Southern Desert, the Mediterranean seacoast, the Lebanon Mountains, and all the territory as far as the Euphrates River. **8** I give you this land, just as I promised your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now you must go and take the land.

So the Israelites moved in and occupied the land.

When the conquest was completed, God's promise was fulfilled.

Fulfilled.

How do we know it was fulfilled?

Joshua 21:43-45 (CEV)

43 The LORD gave the Israelites the land he had promised their ancestors, and they captured it and settled in it. **44** There still were enemies around Israel, but the LORD kept his promise to let his people live in peace. And whenever the Israelites did have to go to war, no enemy could defeat them. The LORD always helped Israel win. **45** The LORD promised to do many good things for Israel, and he kept his promise every time.

Now, remember, the Hebrew word that is used to translate "forever" is "'**olam**," and it means no more than "age-lasting" or "until the end of the age," which means the end of the Old Covenant.

God fulfilled His promise to give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan.

But, God's provisions for the life and religion of Israel were not meant to endure forever.

The following is a list of some other things about Israel that are described with the same Hebrew word ('**olam**) and which obviously were intended to become obsolete when the Old Covenant ended:

1. Circumcision as a covenant sign

Genesis 17:13 (NASB)

13 "A *servant* who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

2. The Passover feast

Exodus 12:24 (NASB)

24 "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. (see 12:14, 17)

3. Sabbath observance

Exodus 31:16-17 (NASB)

16 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' 17 "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed."

4. The Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16:29 (NASB)

29 "*This* shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you;

5. The Aaronic priesthood

Exodus 40:13-15 (NASB)

13 "You shall put the holy garments on Aaron and anoint him

and consecrate him, that he may minister as a priest to Me.

14 "You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them; 15 and you shall anoint them even as you have anointed their father, that they may minister as priests to Me; and their anointing will qualify them for a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations."

6. The priests' clothing

Exodus 28:42-43 (NASB)

42 "You shall make for them linen breeches to cover *their* bare flesh; they shall reach from the loins even to the thighs. 43

"They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It *shall be* a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him. .

7. The priests' portion of the sacrifices

Exodus 29:28 (NASB)

28 "It shall be for Aaron and his sons as *their* portion forever from the sons of Israel, (see Lev. 6:18)

8. The priests' washings

Exodus 30:20-21 (NASB)

20 when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire *sacrifice* to the LORD. 21 "So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations."

9. The bread of the Presence

Leviticus 24:8 (NASB)

8 "Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel.

10. The candlestick

Exodus 27:21 (NASB)

21 ... Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel.

11. Solomon's temple

1 Kings 8:13 (NASB)

13 "I have surely built You a lofty house, A place for Your dwelling forever." (see 9:3).

12. The Levites as custodians of the ark of the covenant

1 Chronicles 15:2 (NASB)

2 Then David said, "No one is to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for the LORD chose them to carry the ark of God and to minister to Him forever." (see 23:13).

Look at the list.

Twelve Old Covenant "forevers" that ended with the introduction of the New Covenant.

There is no reason to think that FOREVER means anything more than this in the promises concerning the land of Canaan.

Thus Israel's right to claim Canaan as her own possession ended along with all these other Old Covenant practices and privileges.

The Old Covenant promises for the most part have all been fulfilled.

This means when we see a OT prophecy about Israel, Jerusalem, the temple, we should look first to see whether it has been fulfilled in OT history.

Please, just keep in mind that prophecies about Israel's return to their homeland and their rebuilding the temple were fulfilled in OT times, and the Old Covenant has been replaced by a new one.

Hebrews 12:21-24 (NASB)

21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." **22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, **23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, **24** and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood of* Abel.

Next Lord's Day

Burning Questions 18: What Is The Relationship Between the Nation of Israel and the Church?

Romans 9-11

Prayer and Invitation

May 7 Lesson 10 Sustaining Love

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:1-12

Background Scripture: Jonah 1

JONAH 1:7-17

7 Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” 9 He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” 10 This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) 11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” 12 “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.” 13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased.” 15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. 17 Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

KEY VERSE

This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?”—Jonah 1:10a

Introduction

A. Fleeing from Righteousness

He was one of three sons in the family, and he seemed to have all the advantages. His dark hair was naturally curly. He had sparkling

blue eyes, and he had an infectious smile that disarmed others. He also brought the most grief to his mother.

His troubles began as a teenager. He was caught stealing, and his smile did not dissuade the arresting officer. He was now more than just a boy who was liked by all the neighbors. He had a criminal record, and he was sentenced to spend time at the expense of the taxpayers.

His parents went to see him in reform school. The mother came with the tears of tender love, but the father came with bewilderment. He was upset that his son had been disobedient to what he had been taught and to what had been modeled for him by family and friends.

The pattern was repeated several times, but the combination of tender love and civil discipline finally changed the young man. His mother's sustaining love persisted through the occasions when he was "testing the system" and God.

This lesson presents God's sustaining love for a disobedient prophet whose experiences toughened and shaped him for his mission.

B. Lesson Background

This lesson and the next three are taken from the book of Jonah. These studies will provide a better understanding of the man, his motivations, the message of the book, and the miracles contained in it.

Jonah's ministry, described in the book that bears his name, is difficult to date. The closest we can get is to recognize that he prophesied about events that occurred during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). That king ruled Israel from 793 to 753 BC. The designation Israel in this context refers to the northern kingdom after the original nation of Israel divided after King Solomon's death in about 930 BC (see 1 Kings 12). The southern nation became Judah.

The book of Jonah is probably the best known of the 12 in the section of the Old Testament designated as the Minor Prophets.

The book of Jonah is different from the other 11 in that most of it is a narrative. It is therefore easier to read and to understand.

The printed text for this lesson begins at Jonah 1:7, but it is important that in the background the first six verses of the book be given. The word of the Lord had come to Jonah, and he was commanded to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against it. The reason is given in Jonah 1:2: its wickedness had come before the Lord.

Jonah decided to disobey the Lord's command, and he went west instead of east. He first traveled to Joppa, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. His plan was to sail in the opposite direction from what God had said. If he began his trip to Joppa from Israel's capital city, Samaria, the overland distance was about 30 miles. Jonah's hometown, however, was Gath Hepher (again, 2 Kings 14:25), which was a few miles north of Nazareth. The overland distance from there to Joppa was almost 60 miles.

Jonah found a ship that was ready to sail, and it was going to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). The location of Tarshish is uncertain. Suggestions include Tartessus (a kingdom in Spain that was over 2,000 miles from Joppa) or Carthage in northern Africa (about 1,400 miles). Evidence in the last few years, however, suggests it was Sardinia, an island just west of Italy.

Jonah was trying to do something that was as impossible then as it is now: hide from God. About 250 years before the time of Jonah, David had declared the impossibility of such (Psalms 139:7-12).

Jonah's trip to Joppa, from either Samaria or Gath Hepher, wearied him. He paid his fare, boarded the ship, went down into the ship, and went to sleep (Jonah 1:5b). The ship set sail from Joppa, and the Lord sent a mighty storm to intercept it. The sailors reacted in the standard ways for such a situation: they lightened the ship by throwing its wares overboard (compare Acts 27:18). This storm was more than ordinary, however, and it also caused each man to pray to his god. The master of the ship awakened Jonah so that he could join them in the prayer meeting.

I. Storm's Cause

(Jonah 1:7-9)

A. Revealed by Lots (vv. 7, 8)

7. Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

The strength of the storm causes the sailors to conclude that someone on the ship has irritated a god. They react according to their customs: they *cast lots* to determine the guilty party. It is naturally assumed that no one will come forward to confess, so the practice of casting lots is used to determine who is guilty. This practice is frequently used in ancient times to determine guilt (compare 1 Samuel 14:41-45).

In such a situation, one marked object is placed in a container with other items that are similar. The marked item may be drawn by the guilty person or by someone who is drawing for the others.

Proverbs 16:33 gives the view that it is the Lord who controls the outcome. In the case at hand, it is especially true that God controls the results. Jonah is correctly identified.

What Do You Think?

What should we do when we realize that a life storm of our own making is affecting others?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

At home

At work or school

At church

Other

B. Affirmed by Jonah (v. 9)

8. So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

The sailors rapidly ask a series of five questions. The first one seems unnecessary in view of the result of casting lots (and see v. 10). But a verbal confession will confirm what the casting of lots has indicated.

The other questions seek more information about Jonah himself. The sailors may believe that the answers will help identify the god involved. The ancients often associate a god with a particular nation (compare 2 Kings 23:13). Therefore the first order of business for escaping the storm is to ask the questions we see here.

9. He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

These are Jonah’s first spoken words in the book, and he tells the truth forthrightly. The word *Hebrew* as an identifier serves to contrast an Israelite from someone of another people group. It is used this way by both Israelites (Jeremiah 34:14) and others (1 Samuel 4:9) as a way of referring to the descendants of Jacob.

Jonah’s affirmation that he serves *the Lord, the God of heaven* is followed with a jab at the fictitious gods of the sailors: Jonah’s God is the one who *made the sea and the dry land*. Logic dictates that the God who has the power to create like this also has the power to cause and calm storms.

Jonah’s answer is also a confession. Although he affirms that he fears the Lord, the storm indicates that he has been disobedient in some way. This is a self-indictment, for Jonah knows that his words and his actions are not in harmony with one another.

What Do You Think?

What evidence of repentance should others see when a Christian confesses personal failings?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In cases of public confessions

In cases of private confession

II. Sailors’ Concerns

(Jonah 1:10, 11)

A. Regarding Jonah's Sin (v. 10)

10. This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

Jonah has said that he fears the Lord, and that prompts an even greater fear on the part of the sailors. They cannot comprehend any type of sin that could provoke the God of Jonah to send a storm of such magnitude. Through the noise of the raging wind, they ask another question.

The last half of the verse is not an answer. Rather, it stresses information that the sailors already know: Jonah has *already told them* that he is *running away from the Lord* (compare Jonah 1:3).

THE STORMS OF LIFE

Heat waves, lengthy drought, violent tornadoes, hurricanes, and “polar express” blizzards seem more common in recent years. Some scientific data in the mid-twentieth century suggested the earth might be moving back into another ice age.

But thinking shifted in the 1980s toward the theory of global warming. Evidence was interpreted in different ways, resulting in significant debate. As a result, the terminology became that of *climate change*, which seemed (at least to some) to be a more neutral description.

Many factors contribute to the ongoing confusion, including the tendency of some scientists to change their minds from time to time, the news media's desire to sensationalize, and public distrust of government. “True believers” on both sides of the debate are so adamant in their views that many in the general public despair of ever knowing the truth.

Not so with the case of Jonah! Any debate about the cause of the violent storm that threatened his ship was settled when he confirmed the results of the cast lots. He was the undisputed cause of the change of weather causing them so much distress. That situation raises the possibility of a parallel: How many of life's storms are indisputably the result of our own actions? Are we as honest as Jonah in admitting as much?—C. R. B.

B. Regarding a Solution (v. 11)

11. The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” The conversation between Jonah and the sailors is coming to an end. This is their final question to Jonah.

The sailors know the following related to their plight: (1) since the intense storm is the fault of Jonah, then (2) something must be done to him. The last thing they want to do is make a move that will anger further the God who made the sea and the dry land! So they hope that Jonah has the answers, for their lives are in jeopardy.

III. Actions’ Consequences

(Jonah 1:12-17)

A. Solution (vv. 12-14)

12. “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

Jonah’s response can be broken into four parts. The first two are what the sailors are to do. To follow Jonah’s instruction *pick me up* would normally be fairly easy. But the tossing of the ship in the midst of *this great storm* makes this much more difficult.

The second part of Jonah’s response is the ultimate answer to the sailors’ first question (Jonah 1:8). But it presents a problem, because *throw me into the sea* involves the deliberate taking of Jonah’s life (see next verse).

The third part is what the sailors really desire, that the sea *become calm*. The final section of Jonah’s response reaffirms that the real cause of the storm is Jonah himself. One thing we can say about Jonah is that at least he’s honest!

13. Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.

This verse provides a very interesting bit of information. The ship seems to be not far from *the land*, for the sailors fervently desire to

bring the ship to shore by rowing. It is customary at this time in history for ships to move along the coast if the captains cannot navigate by other means. This has been called “harbor hopping.”

How to Say It

Gath Hopher Gath *Hee-fer*.

Jeroboam Jair-uh-*boe-um*.

Joppa *Jop-uh*.

Nazareth *Naz-uh-reth*.

Nineveh *Nin-uh-vuh*.

Samaria Suh-*mare-ee-uh*.

Visual for Lesson 10. *Point to this visual as you ask, “How do we avoid sinful fight, flight, or freeze reactions to God’s ministry callings?”*

We may wonder how far the ship is from Joppa, the port of embarkation, when it encounters the storm. Is that the land that is in sight, or have they traveled a considerable distance along the coast? The only answer is that “the text does not say.”

The rowing of a boat demands that oars come in contact with the water for the main stroke. It can be safely assumed that rowing is almost impossible given that the storm is tossing the ship from wave crest to wave trough then back up again.

Ancient sailors do not enjoy a good reputation for noble character and morality. But these men are honorable in their not wanting to hurl Jonah to a watery grave. They do their best to reach land, but they cannot. Their honorable effort is ultimately futile.

14. Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased.” The first prayer in the book is *to the Lord*, but it is not prayed by Jonah. It is by the sailors, men who worship other gods. They are fully aware that *killing an innocent man* can result in great

punishment. They are already experiencing plenty of God's wrath in the form of the storm. They do not want to experience more wrath for what they feel compelled to do: take the life of a man who has not committed any crime against them. Most religions of the ancient world have codes of law that prohibit the taking of human life without due process. The biblical restriction and mandate in this regard is given after the flood in Noah's time (Genesis 9:5, 6), and it was for all humanity in future civilizations (compare Acts 25:11; Romans 13:4).

Yet this is not their own judgment on Jonah, for this is the Lord's decree. Even so, they do not want to risk becoming guilty by expediting it without authorization.

What Do You Think?

What are appropriate ways for a Christian to respond to those who are caught in the effects of another person's sin?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding victims who are adults

Regarding victims who are minors

B. Results (vv. 15-17)

15. Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

The situation is desperate, so the men take the drastic measure that they have been resisting—casting Jonah into the tumultuous waters. It is dangerous to be close to the edge of the deck in such weather, but they have to do it.

The resulting calm leads some to think that a raging sea immediately becomes a tranquil body of water. Others propose that the tossing waves gradually subside, with normal wave action following. Either outcome can be directed easily by the God who made the heavens, the sea, and land (see v. 9). Note that when Jesus stilled the tempest, however, seasoned fishermen were awed that the wind and the waves ceased (Matthew 8:27; Mark 4:41).

For the case at hand, it is enough for us to know that when God directs, both water and wind obey. “You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them ... You founded the world and all that is in it” (Psalm 89:9, 11).

LESSER OF TWO EVILS?

Many Iranians publicly protested what they saw as a rigged 2009 presidential election in their country. The government is said to have arrested and tortured opposition leaders. Mohsen Armin was an activist whose friends were arrested and forced to make scripted courtroom “confessions” of their alleged crimes against the government.

Armin assumed he would also be arrested and tortured, so he decided to act preemptively by issuing a retraction of any future televised confession he might make under duress. He said, “If the providence of God requires that I will be jailed as my brethren have been so far, and if, in jail and under pressure, I say something against what I have said, be sure that it is not my true belief and that I recanted under pressure.”

Jonah urged his shipmates to throw him overboard. Prior to doing so, they admitted to God that they were about to kill Jonah and asked for advance forgiveness. They felt they had no other choice. Do we ever say, “God, I know what I am planning to do is a sin, but I’m going to do it anyway. Since there’s no other choice, please forgive me”? Are there any circumstances when this line of thinking is acceptable for Christians? Why, or why not?—C. R. B.

16. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

The calming of the sea yields three reactions on the part of the sailors: they fear, sacrifice, and make vows. It would be interesting to know the rest of the story about these men. Do they abandon other gods? What is the nature of the vows they make? Do they keep those vows? Is the effect of their experience permanent?

God chose not to provide that information. But we can conclude that the three reactions are reasonable, given what the men have just endured and witnessed. They have to do *something* to express

gratitude and thanksgiving for the fact that they are still alive after such a harrowing ordeal!

Jonah's deliberate sin has had powerful consequences for him, the sea, and the sailors. But it even causes good things to happen, as the sailors come to a rudimentary belief in the true God.

What Do You Think?

Which Scriptures are most helpful to you for seeing that God is greater than your failures?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Passages about his love

Passages about his power

Passages about his will

Other

17. Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. It is not mere coincidence that *a huge fish* is in the area at exactly this moment. God has allocated this creature for a special task, arranging for it to be in the right place at the right time. Some have suggested that the fish may be a type of whale (Matthew 12:40) or a shark. This detail is not essential. The important thing is that it does what God has directed it to do: *swallow Jonah*.

The fact that Jonah is in the fish for *three days and three nights* is a key phrase in the book: it is cited by Jesus as the sign of the prophet Jonah that anticipates Jesus' burial for "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39, 40).

Some have wondered about the time factor that is mentioned. How can Jonah know the time involved, since he has no wristwatch and it is dark in the fish? The following possibilities are only conjectures: (1) God revealed the information to Jonah. (2) Jonah met some of the sailors when he was expelled from the fish, and they told him. (3) The given time factor is a figure of speech for one full, 24-hour day and parts of two others.

Several things in the book of Jonah are said to be provided or prepared by God. The lists may vary somewhat, but at this point there have been these two special things: a great storm and a great fish. The fact that a ship was just ready to sail may be more than a coincidence.

One sermon humorously suggested that since the Lord was the one who provided the fish, it could have had hot and cold running water, a luxurious bed, a color television in the corner so that Jonah could watch the news from Jerusalem, and air conditioning. It is more likely that it was dark, hot, smelly, and miserable.

One thing is certain: Jonah's experiences with the storm, the sailors, and the fish persuade him that when God says he should go to Nineveh, it is better to obey God.

What Do You Think?

How can you help your church prepare itself to be God's "great fish" in rescuing those whom he may send your way?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

With regard to spiritual healing

With regard to physical need

With regard to confidentiality

With regard to remediation

Other

Conclusion

A. "Jonah Syndrome"

Slightly over 200 years ago, a certain man sensed a call to become a minister of the gospel. He felt that his first attempts at preaching were failures, so he gave up the idea. A lady heard of his decision and called him "a Jonah."

Her words were just the challenge that he needed to hear. He returned to his original goals, and he became an effective minister who influenced thousands for Christ.

Many today still repeat Jonah's error. Perhaps we can say they suffer from self-inflicted "Jonah Syndrome": they know full well what God expects in one or more areas of life, but they deliberately go in the opposite direction. How much better it is to heed God!

B. Prayer

O God, deliver us from "Jonah Syndrome"! May we be repentant when the storms of life are self-inflicted. Strengthen us to heed your calls. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought for Today

Learn from Jonah, but imitate Jesus.

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