

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

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

Burning Questions 19

What Is The Relationship Between the Nation of Israel and the Church?

Romans 11:11-27

Part Two

May 21, 2017

Communion: Bill Decker

Care Calling: The Webb's

Host: POTLUCK

Saturday 5/20 Clean Up: Thornton-White

Jennifer Hurn - Bridges/CRU

1 ♪ **How Majestic [DH 2238]**

2 ♪ 428 - In Christ there is no east or west [ALL] 428

3 ♪ 670 - Make me a blessing [ALL] 670

4 ♪ **Doxology [DH 1981]**

5 ♪ 564 - Just a closer walk with thee [ALL] 564

6 ♪ 235 - Take the Name of Jesus with You [v.1,4] 235

7 ♪ **Family of God [DH 2357]**

Romans 11:11-27 (NASB)

11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. **12** Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! **13**

But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, **14** if

somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶ and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." ²⁷ "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

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

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

Your handout for today is the sermon of May 7th.

I hope you take time to study it, especially the fulfilled Scriptures.

Please remember that Israel has a right to be in possession of their occupied land.

That is not in question, because the land was transferred from British possession to Israeli possession by direction of the UN in 1947, and Israel became a political nation in 1948.

And remember 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 city of Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Israel.

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.

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

There is nothing about the year 1948, when a new Israeli state was formed, that has any connection to Bible prophecy.

Nothing in the Bible predicts a literal reconstitution of the biblical land promises, a rebuilt temple, reinstatement of temple sacrifices, or any of the Old Covenant worship practices.

I spent a year in graduate school with a Israeli rabbi that maintained the modern nation of Israel is not even a religious state.

Christian America's political support of Israel **should not be** because of fulfillment of prophecy, but because it is a democracy in the midst of tyrannical states.

And, also, please keep in mind that for 1,813 years the Jews as a nation did not have possession of what is now Israel.

And, you do know why they did not, do you not?
God **gave the land to Abraham conditionally:**

Exodus 19:5-6 (NASB)

5 'Now then, *if* you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; **6** and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

Deuteronomy 31:16-18 (NASB)

16 The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie

down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. ¹⁷ "Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?' ¹⁸ "But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.

Joshua 23:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ "When you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."

The land was given conditionally.

And, God sets forth in shocking detail what would transpire if Israel were disobedient.

Deuteronomy 28:15-26 (NASB)

¹⁵ "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ¹⁶ "Cursed *shall you be* in the city, and cursed *shall you be* in the country. ¹⁷ "Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸ "Cursed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. ¹⁹ "Cursed *shall you be* when you come in, and cursed *shall you be* when you go out. ²⁰ "The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are

destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. ²¹ "The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from the land where you are entering to possess it. ²²

"The LORD will smite you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. ²³ "The heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron. ²⁴

"The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

²⁵ "The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be *an example of terror* to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶ "Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten *them* away.

And, when His disciples, the 12 apostles, queried Him about the beautiful temple:

Matthew 24:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

² And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

And, the Old Covenant ceremonies ended at the death of the Messiah:

Mark 15:37-38 (NASB)

³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. ³⁸

And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

With the veil being ripped away from the Holy of Holies, the Old Covenant came to an end.

And the prophet said that a new covenant would replace the Mosaic covenant:

Jeremiah 31:31-32 (NASB)

31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

And the Apostle Paul reminds us in

Hebrews 13:20 (NASB)

20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord,
of the two key Christological events of the new covenant: the cross ("the blood of the eternal covenant") and the resurrection ("brought up from the dead").

The **eternal covenant** is opposed to the temporary covenant with Israel, which they broke, and the removal of which made room for the better covenant, which can never grow old, having been in the mind of the Godhead from eternity, and shall abide for ever.

Now that we have a New Covenant, does the nation of Israel still have a place in God's plan, or has the church replaced Israel as "God's people?"

Is Bible prophecy being fulfilled by modern-day Israel?

Does God have different plans for the Jews and the Gentiles?

Is the Gospel the salvation for everyone who believes, both Jew and Gentile?

Has the door of salvation been permanently closed to Jews?

What is the olive tree into which Gentiles will be grafted?

These questions can be answered by looking at what Paul says about **GOD'S TREE** in ...

Romans 11:11-27 (NASB)

11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. **12** Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! **13**

But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, **14** if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. **15** For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead? **16** If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. **17** But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, **18** do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. **19** You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." **20** Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; **21** for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. **22** Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. **23** And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. **24** For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? **25** For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come

in; ²⁶ and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." ²⁷ "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Around 4,000 years ago, God planted a tree that is still growing today.

That tree actually started with ONE MAN, whose physical descendants became the root system and a gigantic trunk that sprouted twelve huge branches and millions and millions of smaller branches.

These smaller branches were individual Jewish believers.

After about 2,000 years this tree underwent a radical mutation, not by natural causes but by divine design and divine intervention.

What changed was the population of smaller branches.

The Gentiles were grafted-in.

It is now in effect a hybrid.

Its native branches have been radically pruned, and for the last 2,000 years millions of compatible branches from wild-growing trees have been grafted onto that original tree, which is still going strong.

The one man, of course, was Abraham.

The root-and-trunk system was the nation of Israel, and the original branches were individual Israelites.

The mutation was sparked by the appearance of the Messiah, Jesus.

The branches that were broken off were the Israelites who rejected Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The wild branches grafted in were and are Gentiles who turn to Jesus for their salvation.

This gigantic tree, now composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, is called **the CHURCH**.

Let's think about this gigantic TREE.

Please look at your sermon notes, and Romans 11.

First, the ROOT of this tree (vv. 16-18) is OT (physical) Israel, the Jewish nation between Abraham and Christ.

Through nearly 2,000 years of OT history, God nurtured and tended this tree.

But why?

Remember: a tree's root is not an end in itself, but is a MEANS to an end.

The root serves a particular purpose.

So, we raise the question, what was Israel's purpose?

I. The Jews Task was Preparing For The Messiah

In the case of Israel, what was God's one purpose for its existence? God Gave Israel The task of Preparing For The Messiah.

That one purpose was to prepare for the first coming of Jesus the Messiah.

The reason for Israel's election and existence as a special nation may be summed up in this one word:

PREPARATION, i.e., preparation for Christ's first coming.

Remember the beautiful lyrics of God Spell:

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord?

Acts 13:32-33 (NASB)

32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'

Once Christ had come, there was therefore no more reason for Israel to exist in a special role in God's plan.

Thus God brought to an end Israel's special role.

This “setting aside” of Israel was equivalent to an “honorable discharge” from military service, or to the retiring after years of service with your employer.

It was marked dramatically by the tearing of the temple veil at the time of Christ’s death.

Before eternity the God Head planed that the first coming of Jesus changed its whole character of God’s Tree.

Jesus’ coming did not do away with the tree, but transformed it.

How so?

First of all, now that Christ has come, God has done away with the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, as was his plan from the beginning.

This the BIG IDEA to remember.

Remember God's promise to Abraham?

Genesis 12:3 (NASB)

3

And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

That Promise has been fulfilled:

Galatians 3:28-29 (NASB)

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

The key to being God’s special people now is faith in Jesus Christ. Whoever puts faith in Jesus as the Messiah is a part of God’s tree, whether they be Jew or Gentile.

Paul explains in **Romans 11:17-21** how this transforms the tree.

Here the broken-off branches are individual Jews, and the “wild” branches are individual Gentiles.

Did not our Lord say:

John 15:5-6 (NASB)

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

The first stage of the transformation of the tree is the breaking off of some of the natural branches, specifically, all Jews who rejected Jesus.

II. The Transformation of the Tree

The second stage is the grafting in of wild branches, that is, those Gentiles who accept Jesus through faith.

Jesus Christ, and faith in Jesus Christ, have transformed the tree, which started out as the Jewish nation, into the CHURCH.

And in the CHURCH there is no distinction between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

The present form of god's tree thus is the CHURCH.

In a real sense the Church (believing Jews plus believing Gentiles in one body) is God's NEW Israel.

Old, physical, national, Israel is just the root of this tree. And as the root of the tree is still a glorious one.

The church is a NEW Israel, formed on the spiritual basis of faith in Jesus and a new spiritual birth.

Romans 9:6 (NASB)

6 But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they

are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel;

Many OT prophecies about ISRAEL have been and are being fulfilled in the new Israel:

The new Jerusalem

Galatians 4:26 (NASB)

26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

The new temple

This spiritual house of God is described by the Apostle Peter...

1 Peter 2:5 (NASB)

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

What about ethnic Jews today?

Modern-day physical Israel—individually, collectively, and/or geographically—is NOT God’s tree today.

Individual Jews who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are part of the transformed tree, the Church.

Unbelieving ethnic Jews are in no sense a special people of God; they are part of the broken-off branches Paul describes in Romans 11.

Does God have a place and a purpose, then, for physical Israel today, or in the future?

I answer both NO and YES.

NO, not as a nation, not as a separate “tree.”

Israel’s role in God’s plan was completed when Christ first came into the world.

God’s covenant with Israel was thus fulfilled.

YES, as individual branches.

God desires all Jews to “rejoin” their original tree, to be “grafted in again”

How does this happen?

By their not continuing in their unbelief in Jesus, by their acceptance of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Please look at Romans 11:26.

You have it both in the NASB and in the TEV, and the TEV is more accurate a translation.

The key word is **houtōs** in v. 26: “**thus, so, in this way.**”

Romans 11:26 (TEV)

26 And this is how all Israel will be saved. As the scripture says, "The Savior will come from Zion and remove all wickedness from the descendants of Jacob.

Here it should not be translated “so,” as if this is now just a general conclusion.

The meaning here is THIS is the WAY all true Israelites will be saved: by becoming a part of God’s One Tree, the Church.

There is no other way.

God does have a special interest in the Jews because of their unique role in OT times!

But he has no special role for them now.

He wants them to be saved, to believe in Christ, to be back in their own transformed tree, which is now the church.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

There is just ONE HOPE.

Ephesians 4:4 (TEV)

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you.

That one hope, whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, is to be a part of the ONE TREE, the CHURCH.

III. The Church's Task Is Proclaiming the Messiah

The task of the Jewish nation is summed up in the word preparation.

But the task of the Church is summed up in the word *proclamation*.

That is, the church exists to proclaim that the Messiah has already come.

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Our task is to invite the world to participate in all the blessings of salvation He has provided.

This change in covenant administration was announced even in OT times

Jeremiah 31:31 (NASB)

³¹ "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

The discontinuity between Israel and the church was natural and expected

Hebrews 8:13 (NASB)

¹³ When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is

ready to disappear.

Remember the purpose of the nation of Israel was to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, and the purpose of the church was to proclaim the Messiah.

Whereas OT Israel was basically a physical entity, the church or the new Israel is a spiritual entity.

Though God's dealings with OT Israel certainly involved spiritual blessings and spiritual purposes, the people with whom the covenant was made was a physical nation; and God's interactions with them were mainly on the level of the physical.

I know you remember the fact that membership in the covenant people was a matter of physical birth and lineage, regardless of one's spiritual character.

Also, the Old Covenant bestowed many material blessings upon the nation of Israel, including the geographical land of Canaan.

Worship was centralized in a material temple located in the earthly city of Jerusalem.

The enemies whom God used against Israel or from whom he delivered them were physical nations such as the Philistines and the Babylonians.

The New Israel, on the other hand, is a spiritually defined people with whom God deals on a spiritual level.

One enters it not by physical birth but by spiritual rebirth.

John 3:3 (NASB)

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Worship is not limited to nor dependent upon any specific physical location

John 4:21 (NASB)

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you

worship the Father.

The church is a spiritual temple, and its sacrifices are spiritual

1 Peter 2:5 (NASB)

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As Paul sums this up,

Philippians 3:3 (NASB)

3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

The bottom line is that OT Israel and the NT church are not one continuous people of God.

The church is the new Israel, but it is different in many ways from the Israelite nation of old.

The new Israel is under a new covenant

The new Israelis entered a new way (spiritually, not physically)

The new Israel worships in new ways

The new Israel has a new understanding of God as being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The new Israel has a new hope (Christ's *second* coming, not his first).

And, the new Israel has a clear beginning point: the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, when a new Jerusalem and a new Zion were born in the midst of the old.

Prayer and Invitation

May 21 Lesson 12 **Forgiving Love**

Devotional Reading: [Acts 11:11-18](#)

Background Scripture: [Jonah 3](#); [Nahum 1-3](#)

JONAH 3

1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. 4 Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 6 When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Key Verse

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.—[Jonah 3:10](#)

Introduction

A. Limited-Time Offer

Some matters are easy to forgive. But occasionally a news report will tell of a person who forgives a killer who took the life of a family member. Most, however, find it impossible to forgive when a person kidnaps, tortures, or takes the life of a loved one.

Even so, there are examples of people who befriend the criminal in prison. Upon release, he or she is invited to share a meal or even live in the same house until a job and permanent housing are obtained. The emotions go from hatred to compassion to forgiveness.

Even given the absence of criminal behavior, people find it very difficult to request, offer, and/or receive forgiveness. When someone is offended, months or years may pass with no contact between parties. Eventually, one may extend an olive branch. Communication grows over a period of time, forgiveness is extended and accepted, and the parties eventually interact as if nothing ever happened. To seek forgiveness requires maturity. So does offering it.

Think about that from God's perspective as you imagine yourself sitting on a hillside overlooking a modern city at dusk. The sun goes down and lights appear. The city bustles in the darkness as hundreds or thousands engage in sin. When the accumulated impact of thousands of sinful acts is considered, you may wonder why God does not act to rid the world of all sin!

But God *has* acted: he sent his Son to redeem humanity from sin. This act is described in these well-known words: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" ([John 3:16](#)). God wants to forgive, and he does. But on a day known only to God, it will be too late either to seek or accept forgiveness because it will no longer be offered (see [Acts 17:30, 31](#)). The residents of Nineveh knew their time would be up in 40 days, and they repented. Since we do not know when Jesus will return, repentance is all the more imperative!

B. Lesson Background

The city of Nineveh is the place for the events considered in today's lesson. This city is first mentioned in the Bible when a descendant of Noah's son Ham built it ([Genesis 10:11](#)). It was a major city in the Assyrian Empire and became its capital about 700 BC. This is often misunderstood, for many think it was the capital in Jonah's day, but it was not. Jonah's time period was more than 50 years prior to the city's becoming the capital.

King Sennacherib was the Assyrian ruler who selected Nineveh as his capital. He is the one who greatly enlarged it and built a very large palace. He is also the one who lost 185,000 troops in a single night (see [2 Kings 19:35](#); [Isaiah 37:36](#)). The city was sited on the eastern side of the Tigris River; its ruins are across the river from the modern city of Mosul in Iraq.

Major cities often seem to be cesspools of sin. This was certainly true of Nineveh. The reason given for Jonah's mission to Nineveh was that the wickedness of the city had got God's attention ([Jonah 1:2](#)).

Sin and wickedness often produce feelings of guilt. When a city experiences a tragedy, conscientious people may wonder whether their sin is the cause. The nation of Assyria was in a period of temporary decline during Jonah's day. Provincial leaders acted as kings in their respective regions. This is normal in and of itself, but there were conflicts among them. These were exacerbated by famines. The area also experienced devastating plagues in 765 and 759 BC. The ancients considered eclipses to be bad omens, and a solar eclipse occurred on June 15, 763 BC, visible over much of Assyria. Jonah's message of impending doom may have had a greater impact because of some or all of these astronomical, economic, and political events.

I. Repeating the Commission

([Jonah 3:1-4](#))

A. Mission Stated ([vv. 1, 2](#))

1, 2. Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

The command is very similar to the commission given in [Jonah 1:2](#) (see the Lesson Background). That previous instruction was for Jonah to "preach against" the city; here Jonah is informed that he must *proclaim* what God tells him to preach. Jonah is not to come up with his own set of sermons, but is to use those provided by God.

Jonah's location at the time of his second call is not revealed. We know the fish vomited him on "dry land" ([Jonah 2:10](#), last week's

lesson), perhaps on a beach in Samaria. Or time may have passed so that Jonah has already been walking toward Nineveh now for several days. Some propose that he has returned to his ancestral home in Gath Hopher ([2 Kings 14:25](#)). The possibilities are endless and speculative. A minority view is that the fish took Jonah on a wild ride of over 1,500 miles, traveling first west, then north around Asia Minor, then east into the Black Sea to be vomited on a beach north of Nineveh. But that would still leave 350 miles to travel.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to a fellow Christian who says, "God is calling me to be a missionary to the great city of _____"?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

If he or she asks for your counsel

If he or she does not ask for your counsel

B. Mission Begins ([vv. 3, 4](#))

3. Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

The distance from Samaria (the capital of Israel) to Nineveh is about 550 miles. Some believe Jonah to be an official prophet for King Jeroboam II ([2 Kings 14:23-25](#)). This would enable him to carry official credentials.

It will take Jonah about six weeks for this overland trip. This is calculated by assuming that he can average at least 15 miles per day over varying terrain, with no travel on the Sabbath. The evidence suggests that he does not look forward to arriving at the destination, so he may travel at a slower pace.

The record of Nineveh's size as needing *three days to go through* has been criticized on the supposition that there is no city in antiquity so large as to require three days to traverse. This skepticism has drawn various responses. One response is that the three days include the time required for Jonah to stop and preach. Archaeological excavation reveals Nineveh to be at least 1,730 acres in size. Ancient cities have between 160 and 200 residents

per acre; therefore the city's total population computes to between 276,800 and 346,000 (compare [Jonah 4:11](#)). That's huge for this era! For Jonah to preach neighborhood by neighborhood will easily require three days.

A second proposal is that the three days include the villages in the immediate vicinity of Nineveh. In such a case, Nineveh-plus-suburbs is an area with a 60-mile circumference. A third possibility is that a journey of three days is a figure of speech to describe an official visit to a major city. The first day is for exchange of greetings and getting settled. The purpose of the visit is carried out on the second day, and the guests depart on the third. These are all reasonable ways to interpret the language.

4. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

The first half of this verse tends to confirm the first option given above. The message Jonah proclaims after passing through a huge city gate is very brief—just five words in Hebrew. He does not offer any hope—just words of doom.

Recent disasters (see the Lesson Background) probably have a significant effect on the superstitious audience. Jonah's prediction makes those disasters seem as mere previews of the major event that will come in *forty more days*. Such precision enhances the effectiveness of Jonah's preaching.

What Do You Think?

How do we respond to the charge of "being judgmental" when we try to communicate the difficult message of God's judgment?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

To fellow Christians

To unbelievers

II. Reactions to the Message

([Jonah 3:5-9](#))

A. By the People ([v. 5](#))

5. The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Several startling events are recorded in the book of Jonah, but one of the greatest is the tremendous response to Jonah's pointed message. Jonah ends up being one of the most successful preachers of all time, as repentance is demonstrated at all levels of Ninevite society, from *the greatest to the least*.

The astonishing scope of the repentance is underlined when contrasted with the skepticism toward Jesus and his message. Jesus preached to fellow Israelites, and his ministry was accompanied by miracles; the resulting unbelief drew the divine denouncement of [Matthew 11:20-24](#).

On the other hand, Jonah's preaching to foreigners was well received, and there is no record that he performed any miracles in Nineveh. Jesus himself drew the contrast: "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here" ([Matthew 12:41](#)).

Jonah's proclamation is followed by a proclamation by *the Ninevites* themselves. Fasting can indicate deep sorrow (example: [Judges 20:26](#)) as can the donning of *sackcloth*—a coarse, rough fabric (example: [2 Kings 19:1](#)). Putting both together adds intensity to the picture (compare [Psalm 35:13](#)). The Ninevites have no assurance that their demonstration of repentance will result in the prophesied disaster's being averted. But they desperately want to do whatever it takes to preserve themselves.

B. By the King ([vv. 6-9](#))

6. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

Usually people do as the king decrees or does. But here we have the reverse—another surprise!—as *the king of Nineveh* exchanges his royal clothing for sackcloth. But since leaders lead, he takes the additional step of sitting *in the dust*. Dust is associated with ashes ([Genesis 18:27](#); [1 Samuel 2:8](#); [Job 30:19](#); [42:6](#); [Psalm 113:7](#); [Ezekiel 27:30](#)), leading some to think that the king's use of

dust/ashes connects with a conqueror's practice of burning enemy cities. Thus dust/ashes associate with death and destruction (compare [Jeremiah 31:40](#)).

This additional step by the king reinforces the actions of the people. A king with more pride may be tempted to execute the messenger in order to squash a disturbing message. Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes are mentioned together in [Esther 4:3](#); [Isaiah 58:5](#); and [Daniel 9:3](#). "Dust" is also used in [Nehemiah 9:1-3](#).

Repentance "in dust and ashes" is seen in [Job 42:6](#).

Critics have questioned the accuracy of this account by charging that a king would not have lived in Nineveh during Jonah's day because the city did not become Assyria's capital until later. But Nineveh was a major city in the nation, and kings did reside there occasionally. Further, the hectic conditions in Assyria at the time may have caused some provincial leaders to assume titles of royalty. Earlier in the history of the Israelites, Joshua's forces defeated 31 kings ([Joshua 12:7-24](#)). Each was a king over what is called a city-state (compare "king of Jerusalem" in [Joshua 10:1, 3; 12:10](#)).

PREACHER TO KING AND COMMONER

Billy Graham was an unknown farm boy from North Carolina who eventually became a Christian evangelist known worldwide. His first evangelistic crusade, in 1947, was the initial step to national recognition. His 1949 crusade, held in circus tents on a vacant lot in Los Angeles, was planned to last three weeks. But it went five more! One result was invitations to preach the gospel in many of the great cities of the world, including (eventually) Moscow.

Graham went on to become a spiritual adviser to American presidents, beginning with Harry S. Truman. For a time, Graham was considered America's conscience. His name has appeared dozens of times in the annual top-10 listings of most admired people—more than anyone else—as published by Gallup. If anyone could be considered to have been preacher to both king and commoner in the twentieth century, it was Billy Graham.

But Graham was not the first preacher able to reach all strata of society. Jonah found himself in that position some 28 centuries before Graham. If Jonah could be persuasive to king and

commoner despite his own unwillingness, how effective might modern preachers be, were they to embrace God’s calling with greater enthusiasm? How can we help them do so?—C. R. B.

How to Say It

Assyria Uh-sear-ee-uh.

Assyrian Uh-sear-e-un.

Damascus Duh-mass-kus.

Gath Hopher Gath Hee-fer.

Jeroboam Jair-uh-boe-um.

Jonah Jo-nuh.

Nineveh Nin-uh-vuh.

Ninevites Nin-uh-vites.

Samaria Suh-mare-ee-uh.

Sennacherib Sen-nack-er-ib.

7. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.

Kings don’t always have the full support of those who serve in their courts (example: [Jeremiah 38:24-27](#)). But this one apparently does, and *the decree of the king* has extra weight, given that it is supported by *his nobles*. The Hebrew behind that designation is also translated “great men” in [Nahum 3:10](#) in a prediction of Ninevites to be “put in chains” when the city falls to enemies in 612 BC.

The actions of fasting decreed are unusual in that they apply also to livestock! Many households of the era include livestock of various kinds. Merchants in Nineveh have livestock for sale. Staples such as milk, meat, and eggs require nearby sources since there is no refrigeration. Therefore the fasting requirement will have a greater impact than what we may first think.

Noise! The fast prohibits both eating and drinking. This means that there will be great noise—from the crying of hungry children to the bellowing and complaining of the livestock. The noise will increase as expectations for food and water at customary times continue to go unmet.

What Do You Think?

What are some specific ways that leaders can encourage others to repent?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding what to say

Regarding personal transparency

Regarding personal example

Other

8. “But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

For the decree to include a mandate that *animals be covered with sackcloth* seems strange! But adherence to this provision will further show that the repentance is genuine.

This requirement is sometimes cited to confirm that Jonah’s preaching begins in the outer suburbs, where the larger flocks are pastured. But this supposition is unnecessary since it is customary to have animals in the towns.

The king strengthens the impact of the fast by further requiring that the people turn to God and away from wickedness. By this the people will show that their repentance is more than fasting and wearing sackcloth. There must also be the actions that are the fruit of repentance.

What Do You Think?

What are some godly ways to respond after suffering violence at the hands of another?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning requirements for forgiveness

In how we desire the judicial system to treat the perpetrator

In how we pray

Other

9. “Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

The king seriously reflects on whether all this will get God's attention. He certainly hopes so!

The word translated *relent* involves emotion. In this case, it carries the idea that God will look *with compassion* on those turning to him. As they do, perhaps God will *turn from his fierce anger*. Self-preservation is basic for everyone. Each person wants to live at least another day. In this situation, the king reviews all that they have done and wonders whether it is enough. The ultimate purpose in all the self-depriving actions is *that we will not perish*. The primary motivation is obviously fear.

III. Response by God

[\(Jonah 3:10\)](#)

10. When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

An important lesson about prophecies is illustrated here. Some prophecies are absolute; they will be fulfilled, no matter what (example: [2 Kings 24:1-4](#)). Other prophecies are conditional; Jonah's prophecy falls into this category. When the various actions of the king, his nobles, and the people of Nineveh combine to demonstrate sincerity, God cancels his plan to visit judgment destruction on the city. But although the desired result is achieved, the king and people of Nineveh won't know it for sure until the 40 days elapse. (We don't know whether God reveals his decision to Jonah before the 40 days are up; opinions have been expressed both ways.) Showing sincere repentance for 40 days is much more difficult than showing it for 40 hours!

As we look back on our lives and the lives of biblical characters, we know that repentance even for 40 days doesn't guarantee repentance for a lifetime. That fact is demonstrated by the subsequent history of the nation of Assyria, with Nineveh as its capital, which becomes infamous for its atrocities on captured peoples.

In 655 BC, the prophet Nahum pronounces doom on Nineveh. This time there is no reprieve. Its demise becomes reality in 612 BC when a coalition totally destroys the city.

BURN ... OR TURN?

The Great Fire of London started in the bakery of Thomas Farriner just after midnight on September 2, 1666. The flames were soon out of control, and the fire raged through the city for four days. It consumed thousands of homes, dozens of church buildings, and a cathedral.

An eyewitness to the fire was Puritan preacher Thomas Vincent. It inspired him to write a book titled *Fire and Brimstone in Hell, to Burn the Wicked*, published in 1670. Some think the book became the touchstone for the “hellfire and brimstone” style of preaching that was to come in the decades ahead.

We would hope that practitioners of this style of preaching sincerely desired repentance on the part of those listening (compare [Matthew 3:1, 2](#))! That is more than can be said for Jonah. He resisted and resented being called to warn Nineveh. [Jonah 4:1, 2](#) (next week’s lesson) reveals that he wanted his audience to ignore his warning. Often pointed out is that Jonah is perhaps the only preacher in history who was upset because people heeded his message! Now think of the most ungodly, murderous group of people currently being reported in the news. Do you want those people to “get theirs,” or do you want them to repent?—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

When was a time God granted you another chance? How did you grow spiritually from that experience?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning a family situation

Concerning a work/school situation

Concerning a sin known only to you and God

Other

Conclusion

A. The Need to Be Forgiven

Fred had just become a Christian, and he was fully aware of God’s forgiving love. Fred had a great memory, and he could recall things he had done that were wrong. His conscience would not let him brush them aside.

With thoughts of restitution, Fred decided to visit an acquaintance in the same town. After being invited in, Fred took some currency

from his billfold, pushed it toward the other man, and said, “I owe you this.” The offer was resisted with the protest, “Freddie, you don’t owe me anything.”

Fred then confessed to a time he had stolen a pig and sold it when he was running low on cash. He was sure that there were so many pigs in the herd that one would not be missed. He was right; it was not. Even so, Fred insisted on restitution, and the money was accepted. Fred also asked for forgiveness for taking advantage of a friend. The forgiveness was granted, and the forgiveness in love strengthened a friendship in Christ.

Repentance is demonstrated in its fruits. This was just as true of the ancient Ninevites as it was for Fred. Where’s your fruit?

B. Prayer

Father, your love and desire to forgive are more than we can understand. Help us to model your example to forgive in love. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Repent for a lifetime to receive God’s forgiving love for an eternity.

Standard Lesson Commentary 2016-2017 (NIV)