

Nineveh Repents

A person would have to be living in a cave totally cut off from any source of information to not know that our country is in trouble. I recently mentioned that our country is fractured and there have not been any signs that make me reconsider my assessment. I am not alone in my view of this great country. There are many who will agree. However, the remedy for the fracture is where many take issue. On a small scale, we may know how best to heal our nation but when we try to expand it to a global solution, we fail to find unity. It reminds me of a quote from the movie "Men in Black": *A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals and you know it.*

A person may recognize and be able to address the problems while as a group, we become unruly and dumb. More than once, I have seen various preachers call for us, as a nation, to pray to God. I have seen Bible quotes to suggest our need to call on God.

Perhaps the most quoted scripture is found in 2 Chronicles the 7th chapter.

If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send a plague among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:13-14 NASB)

There is a problem with using this passage when addressing the problems of the United States of America. Americans are not the people called by god's name. This is a promise of God given to Solomon at the dedication of the temple.

Somewhere and somehow, we have become convinced that this country has the same blessings and promises as Israel. This thought cannot be supported from the Bible.

Does this mean that we are doomed and helpless before God? That is not what I am saying.

While the passage from 2 Chronicles does not fit our country, there is a Biblical example of a sinful nation appealing to God for forgiveness.

In the first chapter of Jonah, we are told that the sins of Nineveh had come before God. God is giving them a chance to change.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against it, because their wickedness has come up before Me." (Jonah 1:1-2 NASB)

We usually spend our time looking at Jonah as he runs from God and is swallowed by a large fish for three days. We may remember that he sat on the hill side waiting to see the destruction of Nineveh.

The third chapter tells us about the repentance in Nineveh. Jonah finally takes the message from God to them.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." So, Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown." (Jonah 3:1-4 NASB)

Watch what happens when the people of Nineveh believed that God had numbered their days.

Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he got

up from his throne, removed his robe from himself, covered *himself* with sackcloth, and sat on the dust. And he issued a proclamation, and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: No person, animal, herd, or flock is to taste anything. They are not to eat, or drink water. But *every* person and animal must be covered with sackcloth; and *people* are to call on God vehemently, and they are to turn, each one from his evil way, and from the violence which is in their hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish.” (Jonah 3:5-9 NASB)

Notice that the decree did not call for just the outward displays like fasting, prayers, and sackcloth and ashes, people were **to turn, each one from his evil way, and from the violence which is in their hands.** The very nature of repentance is to change behavior.

Tearing our cloths, fasting, and prayers are meaningless if we continue to follow the sinful behavior as before. The final verse of the third chapter tells us the results of their repentance. Notice, as we read it, that it was their actions that saved them from the wrath of God.

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way, then God relented of the disaster which He had declared He would bring on them. So, He did not do *it*. (Jonah 3:10 NASB)

We, as a nation, once tried to live and govern ourselves based on certain Biblical principles. However, we have drifted into a more secular direction. This has not only moved us away from God, it has led us into outright sinful actions and policies. We have erected gods of money, power, freedom to sin in multiple ways, and even murder with governmental sanctions. In the name of freedom and tolerance, we have allowed every perversion to be not only accepted but protected from any criticism. We are not allowed to freely practice our belief in the Bible because it points out and defines sin.

While we have never had the same blessings from God that were promised to Israel, we can certainly look to their history to learn what happens when they (or any nation) turn from God. In Isaiah the first chapter, we see that God appears to Isaiah and has a message about the sinful state of Israel. God describes them in scathing terms and tells why.

Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him. (Isaiah 1:4 NASB)

God paints a picture of what was to happen to their country as a result of their turning away from Him.

Your land is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your fields—strangers are devouring them in your presence; it is desolation, as overthrown by strangers. (Isaiah 1:7 NASB)

Prayers will not change the outcome. Those who are calling for prayer in this country need to understand that prayer alone is worthless. Listen as we continue to read in Isaiah.

“So, when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:15-17 NASB)

In these few verses, we are told that until we clean up our act-until we remove the evil, cease doing evil, reprove those doing evil, and radically change, our prayers will not be heard.

Ezekiel was a prophet during the Babylonian exile. The elders of Israel came and pleaded with him to go to God for deliverance. God once more calls for repentance. He calls for the nation to turn away from their idols, to turn away from their sins, to renew their heart and spirit in service to God.

“Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.” (Ezekiel 18:30-32 NASB)

Until we (America) cease to embrace sin and seek to glorify that which is an abomination before God, we see how God treated His chosen nation. We cannot expect to be treated any better than they were. The message to them was the same as the message to us. **Therefore, repent and live.** The writer of Proverbs tells us: **Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. (Proverbs 14:34 NASB)** The sins of our country are a disgrace. Many are calling for us to pray for our nations. Prayers are needed. Yet, prayer without repentance and a demonstrative change will not spare this nation from the wrath of God.

Jonah went to warn the city of Nineveh. Nineveh listened to the message. They prayed, fasted, and assumed the posture of contrition. They also changed.

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way, then God relented of the disaster which He had declared He would bring on them. So, He did not do it.

I do not pretend to know what God has in store for this nation. I can see as well as anyone else that changes are coming and some of those changes are likely to alter the nation as we have known it. I do know that God is patient. His patience extends not only to individuals but to nations.

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. (2 Peter 3:9 NASB)

There will come a time when we will either repent and change or we will face the judgement of God. We, like Nineveh, must do the deeds that show our repentance or we face a fate that none of us want to see. We must, to paraphrase the words found in Ezekiel: cast away from us all our transgressions which we have committed and make ourselves a new heart and new spirit.