
History and Prophecy

Part 5

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This is Part 5 in a series that I have been giving on History and Prophecy. We will now continue our series on history and prophecy. In the process of relating the events of history to prophecies let's ask if we can come to deeper understanding of prophecy and prophets? We need to understand more clearly, the historical situation in which the prophets fit, where is he, when was it, what was going on at the time?

We now have an opportunity to put that concept to the test. We come to one of the earliest of the prophets and one that you are very familiar with.

Time Setting

Now first of all let's set the time. We're about 150 years, at this point in time, after the division of the kingdoms between Jeroboam and Rehoboam, when Jeroboam split off the ten northern tribes, changed the Holy Days of God to the 15th day of the eighth month. He also changed the worship, the outward form of worship, and he even changed the priesthood. All of these things are pointed out as Jeroboam's sin which he did which caused all Israel to sin.

The time that we are at is about 150 years after the division of the kingdoms and if you took, let's say, the American revolution in 1776 and moved 150 years forward, just to give the perspective, you would be looking at the year 1926, that would be the length of time that has passed.

A King now comes to the throne, another one named Jeroboam, and we will call him Jeroboam II who will reign for 41 years. That would bring us from 1926 up to the date of 1967. So, you're dealing with a rather lengthy period of time in Israel's history.

During this period of time, there are three significant prophets in this man's lifetime who comes on the scene in the ten northern tribes.

Jeroboam II Reigns

The particular Scripture we are at is II Kings 14th. chapter and verse 23 "In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria and reigned forty-one years. {24} He did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin."

This formula, the sins of Jeroboam, is one that we have heard so many times, it comes up again and again and again as the fundamental problem that existed in the ten northern tribes of Israel.

Verse 25 "Jeroboam restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher."

Jonah

This Jonah is the same Jonah that wrote the book of Jonah who was in the whale. This is the Jonah that we are all familiar with.

It is interesting that Gathhepher, Jonah's town, as far as I can tell from my Biblical maps, is right on the site of Cana of Galilee where Jesus performed His first miracle. From all that we can tell Jonah was not a Jew, he was an Israelite of one of the ten northern tribes who happened to dwell in this particular area. If you look at your maps in the back of your Bible and draw a line straight west from the bottom of the Sea of Galilee, you will come right through Gathhepher or Cana. You shouldn't have any trouble finding Cana on your Biblical maps of the New Testament. It will be right at the head of the little stream that flows down to the Jordan River and on down to the Dead Sea. Gathhepher sits there in that same geographical spot.

During this period of time, Jonah had been given a prophecy having to do with the restoration of Israel, all the way to the seaports of the Mediterranean, which was done during the reign of Jeroboam II.

Jonah was the First Writing Prophet

We are interested in this man, Jonah, who as far as we can tell, is the first writing prophet, for he wrote the book of Jonah and interestingly enough, it is written in the third person. So, it's possible some other person wrote the book of Jonah, but we assume that he wrote it himself and would therefore be the first writing prophet.

Jonah's name in Hebrew means dove. The events of the book of Jonah contain what I think are some strange things and I would like to turn back there, and we will not spend a lot of time in the history portion, but I want to go to the book of Jonah and study this book. I do not want to go verse by verse through this book because it is really quite familiar to all of us. It's been taught to us in Sunday school, Sabbath school classes and sermonettes and sermons. There's a danger in this sort of thing, because the familiarity will build up to the place where you think you know all that there is known about this book.

We are going to look at the book of Jonah and ask the question whether we can learn anything extra from the fact that we have gleaned some knowledge from history. In verse one of Jonah we read "Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, {2} Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. {3} But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to

Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so, he paid the fare thereof, and went into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."

Prophets Not to be Self-Willed

Now this event all by itself to me is astonishing. Perhaps it doesn't hit you the same as it does me, but as I read the Bible and as I made my way through prophecy up to this point, I don't encounter prophets who are so self-willed.

I come across men who realize that when God speaks, they had better listen.

Abraham was a prophet, and when God spoke to him and said to go and sacrifice his son Isaac, Abraham got his things together, got his son, rose up early in the morning put him on an animal and took off to do exactly what God had said.

The idea of a prophet, who knew God, recognized His voice, knew it was God talking to him, being told to go speak and do this and he is picking up and going in the opposite direction and taking a ship and fleeing from before the presence of the Lord is a little hard for me to fathom. And yet sometimes down to this day, the experience of Jonah, finds expression among many of us who say, well perhaps I have a Jonah complex, but I am afraid not to preach the gospel. I have this fear and I will say that at times I feel the same way he did, but if I were to decide to go do something else, I have a feeling that God would send after me and come and get me and grab me by the scruff of the neck and the next thing I would know is that I would be going where he intended for me to go, a little older and a little wiser, a little more worn and torn, perhaps, but sooner or later, if you are a prophet of God, the chances are, you are going to do what God wants you to do.

Why Would Jonah Flee?

Why would Jonah have felt this way? What is the reason behind his decision not to go? The commentaries speculate with some degree of interest. They think, for example, that he looked ahead to the future being a prophet and knowing world affairs and realizing what an enemy to Israel that Assyria was, that he anticipated the fact that Assyria would be the nation that would destroy Israel.

The idea that the nation of Assyria was to be destroyed was good in Jonah's eyes. He would have preferred to have seen Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, destroyed. Think about it, as a prophet, realizing that these people were to be the rod of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5), the rod in His hand to punish Israel, that they would be responsible for destroying the city of Jerusalem. They would be responsible for besieging Israel to the point that where women would eat their own children in the streets of Samaria and realizing that these people would carry them all the way into captivity in their own lands and take their freedom away from them. You can see why Jonah would not mind the idea of Nineveh being destroyed.

But what does that have to do with him fleeing and going the other way? Jonah understood that the office of a prophet involved the preaching of repentance, that whenever you go in and preach

to people, and they repent, they turn around and begin to go the other way, then God will repent and turn around and go the other way of the evil that He intended to do to them. In other words, if I would go to Nineveh and I would say "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown," now if Nineveh repents then Nineveh will not be destroyed. Nineveh will stay on the scene as an adversary of Israel. Now there is a great deal of sense in that. It's not anything particularly unusual, and you will probably find it in both Adam Clarke's commentary and the Critical Experimental Commentary which will speculate to some extent about that particular line of reasoning, about Jonah's reluctance to go and what it was that God commanded him to do. It is interesting in a way and in fact, anyone who has studied the book is going to pause immediately and say this is a strange and unusual thing to see a prophet of God that picks up and runs away.

I think I can ascribe to that theory as far as it goes but somehow or other, it doesn't seem to me to go far enough.

Let's continue on and take a look at the events of the book of Jonah. He went into a ship fleeing from the presence of God and the (Verse 4) "LORD sent a mighty wind after him."

Throw Jonah Overboard

It is rather interesting to see the response of the seamen and Jonah's honesty, when they actually come down, and he realizes what was going on, and his final command to them to pick him up and cast him in the sea and then the sea would be calm.

In Jonah 1:12 Jonah said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

To me this verse hearkens to the phrase, "it is expedient for one man should die for the people" and make no mistake about it, Jonah is in a sense, a type of Christ. Nevertheless, the men rode hard to bring the ship to the land, but they were unable to do so. Even after Jonah told them they still tried to make it without taking Jonah's life but there was no chance that they can make it.

Verse 14, "They finally cried to the LORD, and said, We beseech O LORD, we beseech you, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you. {15} So they took up Jonah and cast him into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging."

It is interesting that Jonah didn't cast himself in the sea. He said, "Throw me into the sea." Why didn't he get up on the bulwark of the ship and jump? One wonders if perhaps there is some concept of the sacrifice and the decision that the men of the ship had to make to sacrifice Jonah and making his life a sacrifice for them. Some of these parallels, that you find as you read through here, are interesting enough themselves and might be worthy of examination and study.

Verse 15: "As soon as they threw him into the sea the sea ceased from its raging {16} and the men feared the eternal God, that is Yahweh, exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows." They were not confused in their minds at all about who God was and who it was that pursued Jonah down into the sea and pursued them out to sea with a storm. It was not Baal.

It wasn't Molech. It wasn't some other god, it wasn't the Lord of the flies, it was the eternal God, Yahweh.

Jonah Swallowed by a Great Fish

Jonah 1:17 "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

This is a familiar part of the story. There has been a great deal of argument that has taken place about whether it was a whale or a big fish, whether it was possible or impossible. And frankly, I feel that in the process of spending all that time chasing around a subject like that, a lot of people have missed the point of what this whole thing is all about. There're some very significant things that should be understood about the book of Jonah, but I will leave those things for another time.

Jonah 2:1 "Jonah prayed to the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, {2} And said, I cried by reason of my affliction to the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of the grave I cried, and you heard my voice. {3} For you have cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all your billows and your waves passed over me."

There's nothing really that's remarkable about this prayer. Some have speculated that Jonah died and was resurrected. I don't really feel that this is justified by the Hebrew or any translation that I have read of this passage.

When Jonah's repentance was heard before God, we're told in verse 10, that God spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon dry land. So here he is on the beach still a long way from Nineveh.

Jonah Now Willing to Preach

Jonah 3:1 "The word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, {2} Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid you."

Now this is rather fascinating, because here are precisely the same words spoken to a man on the beach who at this time seems to be quite prepared to listen to God and to do precisely what he was told to do. I think I would too, wouldn't you?

The word of Lord came to him and said go, {3} So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey."

What this means is that Nineveh was three days journey in circumference, in other words, if you stayed outside the walls of Nineveh and you started walking, it would take you three days journey to make it all the way around the city. Today, a good hiker could go about 20 miles in one day. At that rate, three days journey would be around 60 miles in circumference. This was a big city.

Verse 4 "Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.""

It's kind of interesting that what takes place here, as he steps inside the gate of the city and he begins to walk, and he says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

I don't know at what particular point in time he makes his initial cry. Does he cry out every ten yards? It seems unlikely that he would walk all day and then at the end of the day of walking, he would find a pedestal and then say: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

I expect he was like a town crier, wandering through the city with news of what was going on in the outside world. As someone might wonder through the streets of Nineveh and say, "Babylon the great has fallen, Babylon the great has fallen", or whatever the news would be. His message was "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Was this all that he said? We're not told. We have no way of knowing if there was more of a message than that.

The remarkable thing is that the people of Nineveh believed God, not Jonah! Somehow, we're not told how, they knew that this was a message from God and they believed it. I have heard it speculated that when Jonah was in the fish's belly that the acids bleached his skin completely white, and when he got on the beach and he walked into Nineveh with his skin bleached white, he was a very unusual and startling sight, and this somehow had something to do with people believing him. If you believe that I have some real estate down in Florida that is sort of wet and swampy and you can buy it sight unseen.

I have heard a lot of explanations as to why people might have heard Jonah. I even advanced myself on this that Jonah was a prophet and a well-known figure in the world and they knew who he was, it would be like Billy Graham showing up and preaching. The problem is, in almost all of the explanations that people offer for this are essentially humanistic in nature, and they have to do with some human explanation, some human reason, some human aspect of why it is that a city that would take you three days to walk around it, a city of 120,000 people who didn't know the difference from their right hand or their left hand, an enormous population, and that one stranger walking down the street, saying "Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown" and they all repented. I want you to think about that.

People of Nineveh Repented

There is no rational explanation by human standards as to why Nineveh should have repented. There isn't one.

Their repentance was granted to them by God. They repented. It was a miracle. When you come right down to it, the repentance of any human being is, in a sense, a miracle.

The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast, they put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. Word came from the king of Nineveh and he got up from

his throne and he laid his robes from him and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. That one movement, by one man, was the only miracle necessary He was the leader. When the king got up off his throne and he laid aside his garments and clothed himself with sackcloth and cast ashes upon his head (Verse 6) and sat down to mourn. When the king did these things, everyone around him did the same all through the city.

Jonah 3:7 "The king caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: {8} But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God."

I imagine the cry was an incredible thing to hear. This was a Gentile city. Not only were the people crying, but the animals were crying too.

If you box up your animals and you don't let them eat anything or drink anything past the time they normally eat, you're going to start hearing from them.

"Let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. {9} Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? {10} And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

Irony

What a beautiful thing to see take place. It is astonishing, beautiful and miraculous when you look at it on the face. Is there any irony that has come to your mind as a result of all that we have studied leading up to this message that are reading right now?

Does it strike you ironic at all, that two of the greatest and the most powerful prophets ever known to man, Elijah and Elisha, spent their entire lives preaching and Israel never repented. They were performing miracles, raising the dead, calling down fire from heaven, stopping the heavens from rain for three and half years, year after year after year, and the dead bones of Elisha raised the dead and yet Israel never repented. Perhaps for just a moment, a scattering of people with one here and one there, 7000 but scattered, even unknown to one another did not bow their knee to Baal.

An Obscure Prophet

An obscure unheard-of, reluctant prophet spends one day in Nineveh and the whole city turns around and repents. Now what is the message in all that? Is there one? How could such a dramatic thing be presented to us? How could such a dramatic thing be presented to Israel? Israel was going about their merry business while all of this was going on.

During the reign of Jeroboam II Israel was in a time of unparalleled prosperity. The economy was going on like gang busters, wealth from all over the world was being brought to Israel. There was no end to their chariots (Isaiah 2:7), as one of the prophets tells us.

And they hear that God sent a prophet right from under their own nose, out of their own midst, to a Gentile city and they repented.

The Rod of God's Anger

I am led to wonder if the worship of the eternal God was established in Assyria for some period of time? You hear 60 to 70 years later about them in Isaiah the 10th chapter where they are called the rod of God's anger and they are used by God to chastise Israel and take Israel into captivity and then some 185 years later, Zephaniah will write about the Assyrians, and Nineveh their capital, that great oppressing city as he calls it. Then at this point in time, after 185 years, finally foretelling the fall of Nineveh, when their demise had been at one point in their history 40 days away.

The wording of Zephaniah almost leads me to feel that there was Yahweh worship established in Assyria during this period of time in their history, but you even see hints of it much later in Zephaniah's work that there is some connection between the worship and religion in Israel and that in Nineveh.

Jonah Was Angry

Jonah 4:1 "Its displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. {2} And he prayed to the LORD, and said, I pray you, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore, I fled to Tarshish: for I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and you repent of the evil. {3} Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

I don't understand it. I really do not understand his reaction, not humanly speaking, I don't. From my perspective, had I been sent to the city to preach God's Word in this way and have a whole city repent in sackcloth and ashes and turn to God's way, I can't see how I would be anything but exalted in my own heart, exalting in the praise of God, glorifying what He had done, His mercy and compassion, and perhaps sit down and write a song like David did about God's mercy endures forever. But Jonah didn't.

Why Did Jonah Feel the Way He Did?

Now that is significant enough that it deserves some attention on our part as to why this man would've felt that way? In the first place, I think we need to realize that this may well be the first time in history ever that God sent a prophet deliberately to a Gentile nation or city with a message in the way He did.

Abraham was a prophet and he went into the Gentile nation of Egypt. But in the traditional sense of a prophet, and as we understand that a prophet is a preacher of righteousness, and that is his sole job, Jonah is the first one to preach to the Gentiles.

Yahweh Is Only Israel's God

Do you realize up until this time, the worship of the eternal, Yahweh worship, Jehovah worship, was the sole prerogative of Israel. It was their procession. It was their inheritance. God was the God of Israel not the God of the Assyrians. Now it is interesting, as time had gone on, and you can see it reflected almost down to the present day, in the history of the Jews in the first century and round about that time and their attitudes toward the Gentile people that Israel has always looked upon the worship of the eternal God as their own religion.

He is their God, He is a God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and not the God of Nebuchnezzar. It may have been very disquieting to a prophet of God to see God perhaps in the process of turning away from Israel to another nation. Think about it. How would we feel as a church, if we one day woke up and realized that with all of our messing around, and with all of our petty problems that we have with one another, and with all of our failure to get on with the work of God that we're supposed to do, that we suddenly realized that God was turning away from us and choosing another people to work with? Would it hit you? Would it get down inside of you and eat at you?

Do you suppose it is possible that Jonah feared that God would leave Israel as a result of all that he had seen? Jonah knew about Jeroboam and about Jeroboam the first and all of his sins and their rejection of God. He knew all the things that Elijah and Elisha had done and how Israel still hadn't repented. Do you think it might've crossed his mind that God was ready to leave Israel alone and accept the Assyrians instead?

You bet it crossed his mind! It would be small of me to call him a racist, but somehow or other that little element entered into Jonah's thinking, that in fact this is the religion of Israel, and he was very concerned and very disturbed and didn't know how to cope with the idea that God might turn to the Gentiles. This incident here, I think is very significant in the going forth of God's plan that God will eventually turn away from Israel as his exclusive people and turn to the world as a whole. The first move in the response was astonishing. Why did God do it this way? What is the significance?

Jonah Did Not Want To Live

Our prophet, Jonah said (Verses 2-3) "Take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah didn't want to live anymore; his world had been destroyed from this event that had taken place here.

It's possible that he was so mortified simply because of the fact that his whole reputation had been shot, after all he had said "Forty days and Nineveh shall be over thrown" and perhaps he also thought "Here I am sitting up here on this mountaintop counting off the days, day 39, 40, 41, oops. Nothing has happened. Now nobody will believe me." You know, oddly enough, maybe he was ashamed to walk back down into Nineveh for the people might've said "We thought you said 40 days and here it is 41days. What happened?" I don't suppose it occurred to him to realize, maybe he didn't know, maybe he didn't grasp the meaning of it all. But the citizens of Nineveh said "I believed you, and we repented. How glorious is God. How merciful is God. How patient He is."

It seems to me that is not an adequate explanation of Jonah's reaction of embarrassment or mortification.

Is it Right for You to be Angry?

Jonah 4:4 "The LORD said, Is it right for you to be angry? {5} So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. {6} And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. {7} But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. {8} And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wishing himself to die, and he said, It is better for me to die than to live. {9} And God said to Jonah, Do you well to be angry for the gourd? He said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. {10} Then the LORD said, You would have spared the gourd, for the which you had not labored, you didn't make it grow; it came up in a night, and perished in a night: {11} And should I not have spared Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Interestingly enough that God even mentions cattle as to why He should spare the city with all of the children and cattle there. Well as it turned out the cattle had fasted hadn't, they? God heard their voice as it came up to Him and so God's compassion even toward animals is indicated here.

The Book of Jonah Ends

The book of Jonah ends with a question from God "Should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, that turns to Me in repentance?"

And then the book at Jonah just ends. There's no tying up of the loose ends. No explanation of whether Jonah saw what God was driving at and Jonah got his life together. There's nothing more, it's cut off and ends.

Ezekiel

I think there's something more to be gained from the book of Jonah than most of our Bible teachers in time past have pointed out to us.

I want you to turn back with me to the prophet Ezekiel for a moment. In Ezekiel the third chapter there is an interesting statement made at this point in time.

Ezekiel 3:1 God spoke to Ezekiel and said ""Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."" The house of Israel was 10 northern tribes.

Verse 2 "So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat the scroll. {3} He said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you." So, I ate, and it was

in my mouth like honey in sweetness. {4} Then He said to me: "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak My words to them. {5} "For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech" (like the Assyrians) "and of hard language" (like the people of Nineveh), "but to the house of Israel, {6} "not too many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you."

How do we know that? Could Ezekiel say, "Well that sounds good but how could I possibly know that?" He did know it because it had been done. The proof, the evidence, was there, for Jonah had long before Ezekiel had come on the scene, gone to Nineveh and preached God's word and they repented in one day.

Israel had gone through two or three generations of powerful preaching by the prophets and they completely ignored everything that they were told

I think it's rather fascinating, frankly, to read these things and to understand the context in which it fits, but I think there is a little bit more here than meets the eye.

Sign of the Prophet Jonah

Turn back with me to Matthew, where Jesus will refer to Jonah and it is again a rather familiar scripture.

Matthew 12:38 "Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." {39} But Jesus answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. {40} "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. {41} "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed, a greater than Jonah is here."

Now, we have looked at this Scripture many times in the past and have talked about it at great length. The three days and three nights has always been a great matter of importance to us. We have tried to explain how you cannot get three days and three nights from Friday night to a Sunday morning resurrection. We have given a great deal of attention to it, but I was just noticing something rather interesting in Luke's account of this. Let's turn back to Luke 11:29 "And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. {30} "For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation."

Is there anything that strikes you odd about that? There's no mention of the three days and three nights in the belly of the fish.

Now let's go back to Matthew again. What's he talking about here?

What we often times tended to do is to focus in on the three days and three nights and say the sign of Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, and we were partly right. But only partly right, because the sign of Jonah was the fact that he went in and preached to the men of Nineveh and they repented and included in that sign is the fact that he was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. I think we've overlooked this in the past. We have gone up to the point of the 3 days and three nights and have been so fascinated by that, so involved in the big fish, whether it was a whale or a big fish, that we have overlooked the historical context in which this took place and the powerful message that was being given to an evil and adulterous generation, that the Gentiles would repent when Israel wouldn't.

It is a powerful witness against them and that is what Jesus is saying to these people. He is saying, "Look all you people, here you stand around and listen to all of this preaching, and you harden your heart, you won't listen, and you won't respond, you won't accept. I'm not giving you a sign. You are going to get the same sign that ancient Israel got. I'm going to go to the Gentiles, and they will repent and that essentially is the message that Jesus is saying. Don't overlook the three days and three nights, it is definitely a part of the sign of Jonah, but it is not all of the sign of Jonah.

One Greater Than Jonah

The object, I think, is a little more interesting than that. Look at the context of this in Matthew 12:39: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. {40} 'For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish.'... {41} 'The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed, a greater than Jonah is here.'"

Jesus is saying "I am no less than Jonah preaching to you here, and you're not listening to me."

Matthew 12:42 "'The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.'"

This is very fascinating, both from the study of the judgment and the study of prophecy.

This Wicked Generation

I have heard all kind of messages regarding this next segment of scripture.

Matthew 12:43 "'When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. {44} 'Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. {45} 'Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So, shall it also be with this wicked generation.'"

Now, all that is fine, from the standpoint of studying on getting sin out of your life and getting away from Satan and filling your life with the Holy Spirit, so that if Satan comes back to you, he will not find you empty, so that he can come in and your last state is worse than your first. All of that make's good sermonette material.

Jesus went on to say, "Even so it shall be to this wicked generation", those people sitting in front of Him at this point in time were already in the category of people whose end were worse than it had been before. There was a time when they were God's people and they had turned away from God, and when Satan had come back to them, he had found them empty and swept and garnished and he walked right in and took possession, and they were the servants of Satan the devil, the father of liars.

Jesus's whole approach and attitude to this group of people is really interesting because He calls them hypocrites and an evil and adulterous generation. He had nothing good to say to these Pharisees, Sadducees and the scribes, these very religious people, as He sat and looked them in the eyes.

Bear in mind that when He calls them an adulterous generation, He's talking in the spiritual sense of a people who had turned away from Him. The prophets almost inevitably, not always, but for the most part, unless you can see clearly the opposite, when they speak about adultery they're talking about spiritual adultery, the breaking of the first commandment, the turning away from the covenant with the eternal God and making a covenant with some other god. The acceptance of a different god, maybe even calling him by God's name, but something totally different, having a different custom, a different way, a different pattern of worship, this is what He means by an adulterous generation of people who had corrupted the worship of God.

Reaching Out to the Gentiles

Now turn back with me to the book of Acts. One of the most fundamental elements in the book of Acts is to chronicle the shift that took place in the worship and the religion of God, the true religion from being a purely national religion of the Jews to be an international worldwide religion that reached out to the Gentiles. You tend to think, why wouldn't this be obvious, but you forget we're living in the 21st century, and we are not Jews for the most part, even though there may be some who will read this who are Jews. Most of us are either Israelites or some mixture of Gentiles. But in any case, we're not really Jews ourselves. We weren't living at that time, where we could really appreciate the basically racist attitude that existed among some Jewish people and to where they would have nothing to do with the Gentiles. I don't know whether they went so far as to consider them less than human, but they in many cases treated them less than human.

We are told in this tenth chapter of Acts that there is something that has to happen in the church. The church started in Jerusalem and it was still in Jerusalem. They got run out of it by some persecution and they had to preach the gospel elsewhere. But every one of them in all of their orientation were essentially Jewish and even Paul when he went out to preach the Gospel went first to the synagogue and preached the gospel there and only after the Jews had rejected it, he turned to the Gentiles.

You have this entire concept that was in their minds. This is the religion of the Jews. The eternal Yahweh is the God of the Jews. Peter still believed this and had to get his mind changed and not only Peter, but the evidence is that all of the apostles still believed this. The entirety of the Jerusalem Church still believed this. So, God reached down in the middle of them and found himself a racist among the apostles and his name was Peter. He said, "This is the man that I'm going to use to explain to everybody that I want this work to go beyond the boundaries of the Jewish people and Israel."

Cornelius

Acts 10:1 "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, {2} a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. {3} About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" {4} And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So, he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. {5} "Now send men to Joppa and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. {6} "He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

God didn't stop there for a pretty good reason, for had He stopped there, then Peter might not have talked to them because they were Gentiles. He might have refused to have anything to do with them. For a long time after this we find Paul rebuking Peter (Galatians 2:11-14) publicly for separating himself from the Gentiles in the church and before people who came down to Antioch from Jerusalem. So, years later Peter still didn't have it out of his system

Verse 7 "When the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. {8} So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa. {9} The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. {10} Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance {11} and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. {12} In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. {13} And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." {14} But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." {15} And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." {16} This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again."

This does not say that God had cleansed any of the animals. He said what I have cleansed, I don't want you calling it common.

Acts 10:17 "Now while Peter doubted and wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen should mean."

This is very interesting, isn't it? Peter did not conclude from what he had seen and what had taken place, that the purpose of the vision was to reveal to him something about food or meats.

Would anyone has thought this is what this is about? Surely no one would conclude that God would go to all this trouble to reveal something very important to Peter as to what kind of flesh that he could eat. Peter still doubted as to what it meant and when all was said and done consistently kept saying, "No I've never eaten anything common or unclean, and I'm not starting now." Then the sheet went back up. This happened three times.

Now while Peter was wondering what the vision should mean, {17} "Behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. {18} And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. {19} While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. {20} "Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." {21} Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" {22} And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." {23} Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him."

Peter would not have lodged them as Gentiles prior to this time.

Peter Baptizes Cornelius

It is fascinating to see this because of Peter's statement, that while he was preaching, he gets all these external manifestations that the Holy Spirit had descended upon Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44). Just like that, Peter stops, and he says ""Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?""(Acts 10:47).

Why would he say that? Well frankly, he was the one most likely to forbid water to baptize these people. But when he saw this, he said to himself, I can't do this. Now Peter says, "God has shown me that I should call no man common." He came to see what the whole vision was about.

If it was Christ's intent to change the dietary laws, all He would have had to do was to just simply explain it and make a statement, and no one could've argued with Him about it. It wasn't necessary for Him to give a special vision to demonstrate that to Peter. What was important was not meat, what was important was that human beings who should have been receiving the Gospel up to this particular time had not received the Gospel.

Paul Preaches to the Gentiles

Turn with me to Acts 13 and we will begin with a speech of Paul's in the synagogue.

Acts 13:38 ""Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man (Jesus) is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; {39} "and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. {40} "Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: {41} "Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no

means believe, Though one were to declare it to you." {42} When the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. {43} Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. {44} On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. {45} But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. {46} Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. {47} "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" {48} Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

Now, you've read this in the past that the Jews were moved with envy. What did you think it's talking about? Do you think it's talking about them being jealous of the success of the apostle Paul in persuading people and being effective in preaching the gospel? Perhaps?

The Gospel is Not the Property of the Jews

It's also possible that the Jews were envious of the fact that the Gospel was being preached to the public at large and it was no longer being the exclusive province of the Jews. The Jews took Gentiles into their congregation, but the object was to circumcise them and make them a proselyte, a Jew as it were. They were not allowed to have any part in the worship service without being circumcised and many of the early members of the New Testament Church believed that it was necessary for a new disciple to be circumcised in order to be a Christian.

All of this had to be broken through so that we could realize that Christianity is not the sole exclusive property of the Jews or Israel. It is to go to the Gentiles and it was not easy getting through this barrier. It was no simple matter, and as the Jews saw this taking place, their anger, their vehemence, their violence in fact was as much directed at Paul for taking the Gospel to the Gentiles as it was for him being effective in preaching and changing people's lives and in teaching the truth. If all Paul were doing was bringing about a resurgence of loyalty to God, a deeper life and a conversion of the Jews themselves, I would doubt if he would have really seen any opposition from these people.

But you have to understand the attitude of the Jews toward the Gentiles, to really understand that the vehemence that they had toward Paul when he began to be successful in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, and it is there that lies a great deal of the truth in why Jonah felt the way he did when he went to Nineveh. Why he responded the way he did when Nineveh responded to God and repented and was spared being overthrown.

It is this whole concept of God being our personal property, that God is the God of us, and not of somebody else, that I can see a very real danger to us, even as Christians, in getting into that kind of exclusive posture, where God is God only of us, the Church of God and nobody else.

The Gentiles, we are told, were glad when they heard this. This expression itself needs to be understood. The Gentiles that they were talking to, for the most part were Gentiles who had been in some way associated with the worship of God before. They knew about God. They knew about the synagogue. They knew about the Jews and their attitude and approach. They were delighted when they heard that they could worship whom they had come to already know was the true God. They didn't have any question about Jehovah, about Yahweh, being the true God. Now at long last they came to a place where they could say, we can serve this God and we do not have to go through the Jewish channel to get to him. We may go another way.

Sure, the Gentiles were glad, they did not have to be circumcised, among other things, which is a rather daunting process for most men.

Let's continue in Acts 13:48 He said "They were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. {49} And the word of the Lord was published being spread throughout all the region. {50} But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. {51} But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and came to Iconium. {52} And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

It is rather interesting how often you encounter this, that the Jews listened about Jesus up to certain point in the New Testament times, but often times the point where they got excited was when the question of the conversion of the Gentiles came on the scene.

Think about that for a while as you do some more of your own study of the Bible.

God Opens More Doors to the Gentiles

Now let's turn over to Acts 14 and verse 23. Paul and Barnabas went through this area and "they had ordained elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. {24} And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. {25} Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. {26} From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. {27} Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

This was a remarkable thing and needed to be included in the report, not that they had just gone out and preached the gospel in the land and a lot of people were converted. It was significant and relatively unexpected to the people that God would have opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, and this was a very striking thing to realize.

Israel Past

I want you to turn back to a passage of Scripture and hopefully we can see this in a little bit of new light. Let's go to the book of Romans 9:1 and see if we can grasp a little bit more clearly

some of the things that the apostle Paul was saying. "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, {2} that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. {3} For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, {4} who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; {5} of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. {6} Now it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel."

Basically, Paul stops for a moment and proceeds to explain, that the true Israel are those who are begotten of the Holy Spirit, that they are the ones that God recognizes as a seed of the promise of the children of Abraham, the one to whom God is going to give his promise. He is going to some pains to explain this. He uses the term Israel in two senses. He uses it in the sense of the Church, those begotten of God, who are believers. He also uses it in the sense of physical Israelites. He goes back-and-forth with it in this passage of Scripture, but there is not any real doubt as to which one he is talking about.

First of all, Paul is saying, just because Israel seems to be falling away, it doesn't make the promise of God of no effect. Paul was deeply and profoundly troubled as you read here with the fact that no matter where he went, it seems if he preached in a synagogue, everything went fine up to a point, but then the Jews rejected the truth. He had difficulty with that. It was a struggle for him to really understand why that should be. He was trying and grasping at his understanding and finally this particular passage in Romans, I think begins to explain how Paul saw all this.

In verse 14, Paul says "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! {15} For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." {16} So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."

Paul then uses Pharaoh as an illustration of one whom God had hardened his heart. And he says in verse 22 "What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, {23} and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, {24} even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? {25} As He says also in Hosea."

By the way, Hosea was written about the same time, in the same time span in which the book of Jonah was written.

Paul said "He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? {25} As He says also in Hosea, I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved."

You have to understand this in the historical context that this turning to the Gentiles came about as result of Israel, the northern tribes of Israel, turning away from God and that turning of the Gentiles is first exemplified in Jonah and his trip to Nineveh.

Verse 26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." {27} Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, Only a remnant shall be saved."

What a tragedy, but Paul goes on to say in verse 28 "For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." {29} And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah. {30} What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; {31} but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. {32} Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. {33} As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.""

Paul is talking about his own generation and the Jews in that time. When he speaks of Israel, he is primarily speaking of the Jewish nation in Israel at that time. What is interesting is that the whole pattern that exists in the preaching and the powerful witness and the miracles to Israel during Jonah's day, when an obscure second-rate prophet wanders one day deep into Nineveh preaching "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" and Nineveh repented in one day, perhaps it took a few days for the decree to get out. They repented within the forty days and God turned away His wrath from them. Why did He do it? Because they believed God. That is what we are told, Jonah tells us, that the people of Nineveh believed God. They received forgiveness, they avoided the penalty, they avoided destruction, by faith, by believing God.

And Paul says, they attained pure righteousness, not by works. They didn't kill any animals, they didn't do any animal sacrifices, they didn't go up to the temple nor keep the feast or anything of that sort. They believed God and put on sack cloth and fasted and humbled themselves and said, "God forgive us, please don't do this to us" and God said, "Okay I won't."

Israel Present

Romans 10 "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayed to God for Israel is that they may be saved. {2} For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. {3} For they are being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. {4} For Christ is the object of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Paul goes on talking about Moses and others, and then he says in verse 12 and makes an astonishing statement in a historical context in which it was written {12} "There is no distinction between the Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. {13} For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. {14} How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? {15} And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,

Who bring glad tidings of good things!" {16} But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" {17} So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. {18} But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world."

This is an elliptical quotation and his readers knew what he was talking about. It was a psalm that is basically talking about the sun and the moon and stars the creation and it says their sound, which is the preaching of the gospel of God has gone everywhere and there is no place where that hasn't gone.

Verse 19 "But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation."

Do you think this would have anything to do with Jonah? Paul is going to talk quite a bit about this provoking to jealousy and there's something I've read many times in the past and never really quite understood why that should be a problem. Why should it be difficult and why would a Jew be made jealous by the fact that a Gentile suddenly came to God?

Maybe even in Jesus's parable (Matthew 20:1-16) of the landowner and his vineyard, when he went out in the morning and hired a worker for a penny, and the worker worked all day long in the heat of the day and in the 11th hour, the landowner goes out and hires another man to come in and work, and he works one hour, and landowner gives him exactly the same amount of money as he did to the man who worked all day long. The man who worked all day long, was jealous. Who was he in the parable? The Jews. Who was the man who came at the 11th hour? The Gentiles. Could be. I'm not giving that as the interpretation of the parable, but it fits, doesn't it?

The jealousy of the man who worked all day is kind of understandable in a way. The Jews and Israelites have been through all these things, and they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. They built the tabernacle. They worshiped God all these years. They had been faithful to God. (We will discuss this at another time as God might say.) and here God is calling all of these Gentiles. It seems strange to us, but the idea of jealousy was not strange to the Jews.

Verse 20: "But Isaiah is very bold and says, "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me. {21} But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."" We have seen that haven't we?

We see how God sent prophet after prophet. We have seen how the most powerful prophet who has ever walked on the face of the earth and a man who had a double portion of Elijah's Spirit could not turn the basic course of that nation around.

And yet one man, Jonah, goes to the Gentiles, they repent, and suddenly everything is different.

Israel Future

Romans 11:1 "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. {2} God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, {3} "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? {4} But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." {5} Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

Even at a time when God rejected Israel, there were some people that He had elected and reserved for himself and notice no criticism of these individuals.

Now Paul goes on to say {6} By grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. {7} What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. {8} Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day."

Here we come down to perhaps one of those difficult aspects of this thing that we have to understand and that is that it is God who blinded Israel, and he actually did it deliberately. Not with malice of forethought, and because He has no malice, but it was deliberate forethought.

Why did he do that? Why was it to work this way. There may be a clue in all this if you look very carefully.

Romans 11:11 "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles."

Now at this point, I want to pause, and let's speculate just a minute about what we are talking about here. How is it possible that the fall of Israel should mean salvation to the Gentiles?

I think we have to get ourselves out of our 21st-century mentality and away from our world of looking at things and try to transport ourselves back to that time, to that moment in time, when every Christian that existed on the face of the earth was a Jew or an Israelite, or Israelite descent. The chances are, with our prevailing mentality, the attitude that existed since the Jews had returned from captivity was an attitude that prevailed down through all their history from every generation, an attitude that is preached against, in many minor ways, by prophets down through all generations, and it shows that the attitude was there. The attitude that God is the God of Israel, and He is not the God of the Assyria, He is not the God of Babylon, He is not the God of the Asiatics, He is not the God of the Africans. He is the God of Israel and this attitude pervaded the early church.

Had the truth of God been allowed to stay right there in Jerusalem and grow and grow and grow, and wherever the apostles had gone, in the synagogues and if all of the Jews were converted, and if all of them had responded, all of them had accepted God, it may very well have been that Christianity would have been purely a religion of the Jews, a Jewish sect, a body of Jewish people. It would've been looked on that way by everybody else in the world. They would have

said, "Those Christians are nice people, they are one of the best Jewish sects that there is. As far as the Jews go, I would much rather have dealings with the Jewish Christians than I would with the Essenes or the Pharisees or the Sadducees or any other of the Jewish sects. They are a fine bunch of people." But they would have been Jewish.

It's almost as though the Jews rejection of Christianity made it possible for it to be a worldwide religion and to reach out to the Gentiles and it made it possible for Paul to give his time and his efforts to the Gentiles. It indeed provoked the Jews to jealousy, those who thought that God was their own private property.

And boy what a message there is for Christians in the 21st century, to allow themselves to get anywhere near the mentality that God is their own private property. One could see God coming to the place where he might reject a body of people who are in that frame of mind and provoke them to jealousy by a group that at one time were not His people but now would be His people.

Now if you think that warning is a little bit far-fetched, let's go on with what Paul had to say to these people.

Paul said in verse 12 "Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! {13} For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, {14} if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. {15} For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? {16} For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. {17} And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, {18} do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."

Do you realize that the roots of our religion are not quite Jewish, but our Savior is a Jew (Hebrews 7:14)? We don't bear the root; the root bears us. You might say the branches were broken off so that it might be grafted in, well because of unbelief they were broken off. You stand by faith. Don't be high-minded, you'd better fear, so when he says to the Christian church in Jerusalem, you'd better fear yourself, for you also can be broken off, if a natural branch can be broken off, how much easier is it to break off a graft. So, don't get high-minded about all this. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed that He may not spare you.

Romans 11:22 "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. {23} And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. {24} For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? {25} For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."

Apparently, this blindness to Israel was necessary in order for the fullness of the Gentiles to come in and this is something that wouldn't have happened if Israel had not been partially blinded, otherwise what Paul is saying in this chapter makes no sense at all.

Paul goes on to say {26} "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

Verse 31 "Even so these also have now believed, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. {32} For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy on all. {33} Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"

It's kind of interesting isn't it when you really think about it and put it in a historical context. There is some meaning in Jonah being sent to Nineveh that you might overlook. The contrast is astonishing. Elijah and Elisha, all their lives, had no effect on Israel. Then an obscure nobody prophet comes along and in one day the whole city repented. There's a profound lesson in all this. I hope as time goes on that God will grant us a deeper understanding of this.

Maybe we will get a little more understanding from two other prophets that operated at about this same time as Jonah. One of them is named Amos and the other one is named Hosea, but that will have to wait for another day.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever realized that the Jonah mentioned in II Kings 14:25, is the same Jonah that wrote the Book of Jonah?
2. What are your thoughts about Jonah?
3. How do you think Jonah got his message to the people of Nineveh?
4. Why do you think they listened to him and repented?
5. Can you see anything like this happening today?
6. Do you find it ironic that Nineveh was willing to repent, but Israel was not?
7. What are your thoughts about the Gentile connection between Jonah and Jesus?

8. Do you think Jonah ever accepted God's decision to save Nineveh?
9. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's idea of what if in the parable of the landowner the man who comes at the 11th hour represents the Gentiles?
10. Do you agree with Mr. Dart's idea that "the Jews rejection of Christianity made it possible for it to be a worldwide religion and to reach out to the Gentiles"?