

GNITN

#1369

The Cup Of Iniquity: How Full Is America's?

Part 4 of 5

The Nineveh Moment: How a Cup Gets Emptied

A Five-Word Sermon

Picture the assignment. God sends a Hebrew prophet into the capital of the most feared empire of his day, and the sermon he delivers is [“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”](#) ([Jonah 3:4](#)) That's eight words in English and only five in Hebrew. No invitation, no altar call, just a verdict with a date attached. The Hebrew word for “overthrown” is [haphak](#), a word that can also mean “turned” or “changed.” Hold on to that.

And the whole city turned. The most powerful people on earth had no covenant, no Torah, and no reason to listen to a foreign prophet, yet they went to their knees. Some scholars think they may have had a nudge from the sky. Assyriologist [Donald Wiseman](#) has speculated that the [solar eclipse](#) recorded over Assyria in 763 BC coincided with Jonah's visit, since [2 Kings 14:25](#) places Jonah in the reign of Jeroboam II and ancient peoples read eclipses as omens. I [explored](#) that possibility in “*The Great American Eclipse - Again,*” and I'll say again what I said then: “*now is the best time to repent.*” We shouldn't need an eclipse to tell us.

Last time we saw that in light and privilege, America most resembles Judah, the people with the most light. This lesson asks the question that makes the whole series worth hearing. Can a cup be emptied? Scripture says yes, and Nineveh shows us exactly how.

A Cup Already Over the Brim

Nineveh wasn't a neutral city that happened to need a sermon. God's reason for sending Jonah was [“their wickedness has come up before Me”](#) ([Jonah 1:2](#)). That's cup language. The level had risen to where God Himself was looking at it, and before He judged, He sent a messenger, the same pattern we saw last time.

Jonah ran the other way, and the reason is one of the most honest confessions in Scripture. He told God in [Jonah 4:2](#) that he knew He was [“a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness”](#) ([Jonah 4:2](#)). In other words, Jonah was afraid it would work. He didn't want his enemies spared. That's worth pausing on, because it means the people most reluctant to see a cup emptied can be God's own.

Six Marks of a Real Nineveh Moment

First, they believed God. Not Jonah's delivery, but God. [“the people of Nineveh believed God”](#) ([Jonah 3:5](#)). The verb is [aman](#), the root behind our word “amen,” meaning to treat something as firm and trustworthy. They didn't just agree that Jonah's God existed. They treated His word as solid ground.

Second, humility reached from the top to the bottom. The same verse says they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, [“from the greatest to the least of them”](#) ([Jonah 3:5](#)). Repentance that stays in one class of people isn't a national movement.

Third, leadership went first. [“he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe”](#) ([Jonah 3:6](#)), and sat in ashes. The king of the strongest empire on earth came down from his throne before anyone told him to.

Fourth, the repentance was specific. The decree named the sin: [“let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands”](#) ([Jonah 3:8](#)). The word for violence is [chamas](#), the same ingredient that filled the earth before Noah's flood in lesson two. And the word for turn is [shuv](#), the word Israel refused to obey in [Amos 4](#). Nineveh did what Israel wouldn't.

Fifth, there was fruit. [“God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way” \(Jonah 3:10\)](#). God responded to what they did, not just what they said. Then [Jonah 3:10](#) says He [nacham](#), which means He relented, changed course, and didn’t send the disaster. The city was overturned after all. It just turned instead of falling.

Sixth, they had humble hope instead of a claim. The king said, [“Who can tell if God will turn and relent” \(Jonah 3:9\)](#). The Hebrew is literally “*who knows*,” the same phrase Joel uses in [Joel 2:14](#). No nation can demand mercy. Joel adds that real repentance isn’t a show: [“rend your heart, and not your garments” \(Joel 2:13\)](#). They threw themselves on God’s character, and His character held.

The Rule Behind the Miracle

Nineveh wasn’t an exception. It was the rule we saw in [Jeremiah 18:7-10](#) at work. Look at Hezekiah. The prophet Micah had announced that [“Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins” \(Micah 3:12\)](#). Years later, elders defending Jeremiah asked, [“Did he not fear the LORD and seek the LORD’s favor? And the LORD relented concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them” \(Jeremiah 26:19\)](#). Hezekiah’s repentance wasn’t vague. [2 Kings 18:4-7](#) says he tore down the idols. I [traced](#) how real revival works in week two of “*The Revival Code*.”

Then there’s Ahab, the unlikeliest candidate in the Bible. [“there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD” \(1 Kings 21:25\)](#). Yet when Elijah announced his doom, Ahab [1 Kings 21:27](#) tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted. And God said, [“See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?” \(1 Kings 21:29\)](#). The result: [“I will not bring the calamity in his days” \(1 Kings 21:29\)](#). It wasn’t a full cancellation, since it fell on his son’s days, but even a wicked king’s humility bought time. As I put it in lesson eight of “*How America Dies*,” turning hearts back to Him is [“how you buy more time.”](#)

What National Repentance Looks Like

God has already given America the blueprint. [2 Chronicles 7:13](#) lists the wake-up calls - drought, locusts, and pestilence - and then [“if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” \(2 Chronicles 7:14\)](#). Notice who He’s addressing. Not the government. Not the culture. His people. That’s why I keep saying the church is the key.

Bible teacher Emery Horvath [argues](#) that “*Revival resets the iniquity gauge*,” and he points to the revivals in American history as the reason the nation has lasted. I traced Whitefield, Finney, and the Welsh revival in [week eight](#) of “*The Revival Code*.” America has even made a national call like Nineveh’s before. Lincoln’s 1863 proclamation set apart “*a day of national humiliation*.” The question is whether we’ll mean it.

And we should be clear about what real repentance isn’t. It isn’t a big-tent event, a hashtag, or a political rally with a prayer attached. In week two I asked whether we’re settling for hype or ready for the kind of revival that brings down idols and changes a nation’s moral climate.

Nineveh didn’t have a conference. They had a decree, a fast, and a turn.

Where the Story Doesn’t End

The book of Jonah ends with a question, not a victory lap. [“should I not pity Nineveh, that great city” \(Jonah 4:11\)](#), God asks. That’s the heart behind every warning in this series. He isn’t looking for a reason to destroy. He’s looking for a reason not to.

But Nineveh’s story doesn’t end in chapter three. As I noted in lesson eight, if the historical dates hold, repentance spared that city for roughly a century and a half, and in the end it fell because it

was too proud to repent a second time. Next time we'll look at what happens when a cup refills, and at who God looks for to stand in the gap.

Your Own Nineveh

Nineveh shows us what a nation's turn looks like, but [A.W. Tozer](#) reminds us where it always begins. In a 1955 sermon, which I [walked](#) through in week nine of "*The Revival Code*," Tozer [argued](#) that a revival reaches a community only through a revived church, and a church is revived only through revived individuals. There's no abstract church for the Spirit to fall on. He falls on people. As I put it at the start of that class, no major revival starts until the personal revival begins first. Look back at Nineveh and you'll see the same order. A king got down from his throne, and then a city followed him.

Tozer's own roadmap fits the Nineveh pattern. "[*I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed*](#)" ([Isaiah 50:7](#)). That's the language he borrowed for his first step: set your face like a flint. Half-hearted experimenters, he warned, are beaten before they begin. Nineveh didn't dabble. They believed God and acted on it the same day.

His second step was to go straight to Jesus, wherever it takes you and whoever tells you to be quiet. He pointed to the blind man in [Mark 10:46-52](#), who cried out all the louder when the crowd told him to hush, and who walked away healed. Revival doesn't wait for the approval of the people around you.

The third step was to expose your whole life to Jesus - in prayer, in Scripture, in confession, and in restitution, which Tozer called a forgotten word. Getting right with the people you've wronged is the same kind of specific turning Nineveh's decree demanded. The fourth was to hold nothing back. If there's anything you own that God can't have, Tozer said, you won't have revival, but once He can have it, it stops being an anchor and becomes a blessing. That's the answer to Babylon's covetousness from lesson two.

And his last step is the one Nineveh teaches best. Don't wait for tragedy to drive you to God. Tozer asked whether we must always come to God with a bleeding back, and Nineveh's answer was no. They responded to a warning, not to the wreckage. Forty days was enough.

Tozer closed that sermon with a question that cuts through every excuse: "*can I hear God speaking to me now?*" That's the question Nineveh answered, and it's the one in front of us. At the end of that class I asked, "*Are we ready to embrace normal Christianity no matter what it brings?*" A nation's cup is emptied one repentant heart at a time, and it starts with whoever hears first.

Here's the challenge. Don't pray in generalities. Name one specific sin you've been tolerating, and ask the [Jonah 3:8](#) question for your own life: what's the violence in my hands? Confess it to God, and make it right with one person you've wronged this week. Then set aside a meal to fast, and pray [2 Chronicles 7:14](#) for this nation by name. The king of Nineveh went first. Someone has to.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV).