

**19 + 20 = 8?!**

Presented by

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After hearing the title of my sermon announced — **19 + 20 = 8?! —** you probably are sitting there thinking that I need to **give up preaching** and concentrate instead on **studying math instead**, right? Well, actually I really **can** add (believe it or not, I make A's in my math classes in school!). But even if you are willing to take my word on that, you're probably still asking yourself, "OK...so what's up with the weird title of this sermon?" Allow me to explain, and I think you not only will learn that I **can** do addition problems correctly, but that there also is more to the title of my sermon than an apparent mathematical mistake.

Some time ago I presented a sermon to you titled, "I Don't Get It!," in which I examined a number of instances of people in the Old Testament who **knew** what God had commanded them to do, and who had **seen** the severity of God's discipline on people who did not obey Him, yet who went right on to disobey Him anyway (which prompted me to say more than once during that sermon, "I don't get it!"). In that lesson, I mentioned by name two of the kings of Israel—Solomon and Jeroboam—who, in spite of God's numerous rich blessings and repeated stern warnings, openly disobeyed His commands, and ended up suffering terribly as a result. At the time I presented that sermon to you, those of us here at Mill Creek who have been participating in a Sunday-afternoon class titled "All about the Bible," were not yet familiar with what happened when God kept His promise to Solomon. But we now know that because of the king's unfaithfulness in his old age, God tore his kingdom in two—thereby creating the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Since we first examined that material, many weeks have passed—and we have studied much more of the Old Testament record that discusses the fallout from Solomon's sins and God's subsequent punitive actions. I think that everyone hearing me present this sermon today would agree that the things we have learned have not made for a very pretty picture—have they? In fact, I have to admit to you that I was sorely tempted to title this sermon, "I Don't Get It—**Part 2!**" or "**I Still** Don't Get It!" The more we have studied books like 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles, the less I have been able to comprehend the actions of so many of the rulers of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. To prove the point I am trying to make, I would like you to listen first to a roll call of the 19 kings of the Northern Kingdom—and the Bible's assessment of them. Here, in chronological order, are those kings:

Jeroboam I  
Nadab  
Baasha  
Elah  
Zimri

Omri  
Ahab  
Ahaziah  
Jehoram  
Jehu  
Jehoahaz  
Jehoash  
Jeroboam II  
Zechariah  
Shallum  
Menahem  
Pekahiah  
Pekah  
Hoshea

How does the Old Testament describe these kings? The following phrases are just some of the ones used throughout the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles to depict these kings and their actions:

- “...who sinned and who made Israel sin....”
- “...his sin, by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger....”
- “...did evil in the sight of the Lord....”
- “...he persisted in sin....”
- “...he did not turn away from sin....”
- “...did evil in the eyes of the Lord....”
- “...the sins that he committed were more than all his fathers had done....”
- Or, as God Himself put it, “You have provoked Me to anger, and made Israel sin; you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord!”

The truth of the matter is that of the 19 kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the Bible has scarcely a good word to say about a single one of them. While kings like Omri and Ahab were practically evil incarnate, the other 17 were not much better! Jeroboam, the Northern Kingdom’s very first king, re-established Egyptian calf worship throughout Israel—“from Dan to Bethel.” Then, as if that was not bad enough, Ahab introduced Baal worship throughout the land as well.

As a result, God sent the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Ahijah, Micaiah, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, and various others whose names are never given, to beg the Israelites to repent and return once more to serving the Lord faithfully. But the prophets’ messages repeatedly and consistently fell on the deaf ears of an Israelite nation that was as indifferent as it was callous. God’s warnings were both **clear** and **frequent**. Those warnings can be summed up in a single sentence: Judgment is certain, and punishment will be swift; repent—or perish!

But the majority of the Israelites could not have cared less. Steeped in sin—and content to worship lifeless, worthless idols fashioned by human hands out of wood, brass, or gold—the Israelites thumbed their collective noses at the God Who had created them, brought them out of captivity in Egypt, and given

them the Promised Land. With each passing day, God’s cup of anger continued to be filled with the wrath of His indignation—until it finally reached the point where it boiled over and brought down upon the Israelites the mighty, powerful vengeance of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As God said to the people of Israel through the faithful prophet Amos, “The eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, **and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; I will sift the house of Israel among all nations**” (Amos 9:8-9).

God kept His promise, as the text of 2 Kings 17:6,18 makes clear when it says, “In the ninth year of Hoshea [king of Israel], **the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria...** Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, **and He removed them from His sight.**” Beginning in 725 B.C., the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V conducted a 3-year-long siege against the royal city of Samaria in Israel. Upon Shalmaneser’s death, Sargon II came to the throne, and in 722 B.C. carried the Israelite people away into Assyrian exile. They were never heard from again.

In the meantime, what was happening in Israel’s neighbor to the south—the Kingdom of Judah? As sad as it makes me to have to tell you this, the truth of the matter is that things there were not much better. Out of the 20 different kings or queens who sat on the treasured throne of David for a collective time span that covered more than 400 years, only 8 can be called “good” in any sense of the word. The 12 evil rulers were:

Rehoboam  
Abijam  
Jehoram  
Ahaziah  
Athaliah  
Ahaz  
Manasseh  
Amon  
Jehoahaz  
Jehoiakim  
Jehoiachin  
Zedekiah

And the 8 good rulers were:

Asa  
Jehoshaphat  
Joash  
Amaziah  
Uzziah  
Jotham  
Hezekiah  
Josiah

With all of this information before you, can you now better understand why I titled my sermon, “**19 + 20 = 8**”? Out of a total of **39** different kings and queens who ruled for 200-plus years in the Northern

Kingdom of Israel, and 400-plus years in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, **only 8—EIGHT!**—were counted by God as being “good.”

As the Lord had done with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, He sent numerous prophets to the Southern Kingdom of Judah—including such faithful men as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Haggi, Zechariah, Jeremiah, and numerous others. Eventually, however, most of the people of Judah ran headlong down the same road that the people of Israel had taken. As the prophet Isaiah put it, “There is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths” (Isaiah 59:8). The prophet Jeremiah worked feverishly to try to warn Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, about the impending tragedy that was about to befall his kingdom at the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. In fact, Jeremiah plainly told Zedekiah,

“Thus says the Lord: ‘He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Babylonians shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.’ Thus says the Lord: ‘This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army, which shall take it’ ” (Jeremiah 38:2-3).

Sure enough, in 586 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar sent his armies victoriously against the royal city of Jerusalem, at which time he sacked and burned the beautiful City of David, destroyed the grand temple of Solomon that had stood as the pride of Israel for 474 years, and carried away into captivity huge numbers of the people of Judah.

As it turns out, however, the fact that Judah’s 8 good kings at least made an effort to try to follow the Lord and keep His commandments, ended up saving Judah from experiencing the type of devastating destructive dissolution that befell the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Through the prophet Amos, God decreed, “I will **not utterly destroy** the house of Jacob..., but **will bring back the captives of My people**” (Amos 9:8,14). Once again, God kept His promise.

In time, the powerful Babylonian Empire fell to the even-more-powerful Medo-Persian Empire. In approximately 538 B.C., Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, sent a small group of Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and repair Jerusalem and its walls. Eventually, around 516 B.C., the temple was completed, and many more Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Just as God had prophesied through Amos, He did indeed “bring back the captives” of His people.

And from that small remnant of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, ultimately came Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and the Savior of the world—all because **8 people** had been found faithful in God’s sight. [Oh, by the way, while you’re pondering that number “8,” do you remember how many people were saved from the Great Flood in Noah’s day as a result of having been on the ark?] The number “8” might not seem very significant to us, but in God’s grand plan, it turns out to have been **very** significant!

Now I would like to ask you a question: Have you figured out the main point of my sermon for those of us who now live in the twenty-first century? Obviously, this sermon is not a lesson in math, since by no stretch of the imagination could  $19 + 20$  **ever** equal **8**! So what point **am** I trying to make? My point is

simply that no matter how few in number we may be, or how insignificant we may seem, in God's sight ***we are important!*** In two separate instances in the Old Testament we have seen exactly **how** significant a mere **8** people turned out to be. In one instance, 8 people saved the world from **physical annihilation**. In another, 8 people saved the world from **spiritual death**. Knowing that, it kind of makes you wonder, doesn't it, what types of amazing things the few of us here at Mill Creek might be able to accomplish if we make up our minds to remain faithful to God and carry out His will.