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Bible Survey Lessons 53 and 54: The books of Jonah and Micah

Introduction to and Outlines of

THE BOOKS OF JONAH AND MICAH

So far we have outlined the first three books of the Minor Prophets: *Hosea*, *Joel*, and *Amos*.

The next book in the order of your Bible is *Obadiah*, **but we are going to skip just this one time**, in order to keep the books grouped according to their time periods. We will, therefore, include *Obadiah* in our study of the prophets *Naham*, *Habakkuk*, and *Zephaniah*, all of whom were contemporary with the prophet, Jeremiah.

Refer to Chart of Prophets, Lesson 41, Intro. To the Prophets

This lesson will round out the first group of prophets by outlining the books of Jonah and Micah

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

Introduction

By its very nature, the book of Jonah forces some scholars, Jewish and Christian alike, to look at it as an allegory. (A mythical story with typical meaning.) These people see Jonah as a type of a disobedient Israel, the sea representing the Gentile nations, and the three days in the fish, the Babylonian Captivity, etc.

This is a great way to solve the problems of prophecy and a fish swallowing a person, but the facts just don't support that view. The facts are:

1. According to the historical book of II Kings, Jonah was a real man, a prophet who lived and worked during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel (793-753 B. C.). [II Kings 14]
2. During the rule of Assyrian kings, Adad-nirari and Ashurbanipal (810-754 B. C.), there was a swing toward monotheism recorded in their official records. This could reflect the response to Jonah's preaching.
3. There is virtually an unbroken trail of evidence in Hebrew literature in the Jewish community that accepts the book as factual and historical.
4. The book is written in a common, third person, historical style, indicating a factual basis for the "story."
5. Jesus treated Jonah and his experiences as factual (Matt. 12:39-41). Just as Jonah, the real man, was a sign to the Ninevites, Jesus, the real man, was a sign to His generation. He also referred to Jonah in the same context as the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, treating them all as factual, historic figures or "real people."

The book is named after its main character, Jonah, (dove) who was from Gath-hepher near Nazareth, in Galilee, where Jesus spent most of His ministry years. He was the prophet to Israel just prior to Amos and was commissioned to preach to the Gentile people of Nineveh. Many Jewish writers believe he was the son of the widow of Zarephath, whom Elijah raised from the dead (I

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Kings 17) and that he became one of Elijah's and Elisha's young students. The timing is right but the documentation is weak.

At this time, Syria and Assyria were weak because of internal political problems, allowing Israel to extend its northern borders, become prosperous and powerful. But, remember it was also a time of spiritual bankruptcy with Israel's religion being made up of a mix of ritualistic idolatrous worship under the guise of worshiping the Lord.

Politically, it was a time of power and influence, but also a time of injustice and oppression, under the wicked King Jeroboam II. *"And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin."* (II Kings 14:24)

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, and rose up on the east bank of the Tigris River about 400 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. The center stronghold of the city was thirty miles long and ten miles wide and was surrounded by five walls and three moats with the main wall over 100 feet high and 40 feet thick, allowing four chariots to be driven abreast.

The city of Nineveh was founded by Nimrod, great-grandson of Noah (Gen.10), who was also involved in building the Tower of Babel. It was filled with great palaces and beautiful gardens and was probably the largest city in the ancient world.

Fifteen huge gates, guarded by colossal lions and bulls, opened into a planned city including a main palace with seventy alabaster halls full of sculpture and art. The temple was built in the form of a great pyramid and its religion included wicked and perverse rituals.

It was eventually destroyed, by Babylonian armies at a famous and bloody battle in 612 B.C. exactly as predicted by the prophet, Nahum.

Assyria was responsible for much of the suffering and harassment of Israel and Judah. They were, therefore, an unlikely recipient of God's mercy or His prophet's ministry. The thought that Nineveh could, or would, repent must have been completely foreign to the Jewish mind.

The Ninevite response may, however, have been influenced by two major famines in 765 and 759 B. C. and a total solar eclipse on June 15, 763 B. C. The Assyrians were a very superstitious people and reacted to natural occurrences as if they were from the gods.

In the book of Jonah, Nineveh is presented as a city deserving the message of the Lord, a city capable of repentance, and a people deserving of the Lord's forgiveness. In contrast to the stubborn and rebellious Israelites presented in Hosea and Amos, the evil Ninevites appear almost holy.

The message is clear: Repentant sinners are able to come to the Lord whether they are Hebrew or pagan.

What makes the book of Jonah unique is the fact that it contains no direct prophecy to Israel. It is included in the prophetic books because it is the accounting of a major event in the life of one prophet, Jonah. The firsthand nature of the accounts leads most evangelical scholars to accept him as the author even though it is written in the third person.

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In reality, the true prophecy in the book of Jonah is the prediction of something that happened 800 years later. There can be little debate among Christians that the book foreshadows the earth shattering future events; the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because Jesus said it did.

I. COMMISSION (Chapter 1)

"The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Ammittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me." (vv. 1 and 2) The Lord, as He often did, called on His prophet to deliver a message of judgment to a city. This is not unusual, even though the city is pagan, He has often had His prophets predict disaster to Israel's enemies, as in the entire first section of Amos.

A. Reason (1:1-3)

"But Jonah rose up to flee . . . from the presence of the Lord" (V 3) This is not the first time a prophet was reticent about a task, but it is the first time one ran away, except perhaps Elijah's flight from Ahab and Jezebel. I see three reasons why he ran: one physical, one cultural, and one spiritual.

1. Physical--Nineveh was more than 500 miles away from Jonah's home in Galilee. It was not just any 500 miles, but many of the miles were through the hot desert and through much enemy territory as well. On foot or by donkey it would take over two weeks of rough and dangerous travel.

2. Cultural--The Ninevites were Assyrians, sworn enemies of Israel, and an evil and barbarous people. They were pagan idolaters who worshiped gods of fertility in rituals of sexual perversion and cruelly tortured many of their captives for their own pleasure. He may be happy to deliver a message of doom, but I don't think he wanted any part of warning them or seeing them get off the hook.

3. Spiritual--Jonah obviously didn't know or remember his God very well. He ran to Joppa to catch a ship going to Tarshish, a city near Gibraltar, in the South of Spain, more than 2000 miles away, to run *"from the presence of the Lord."* But God had often spoken clearly about attempts to run from Him.

Psalm 139:7-10, *"Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me, and thy right hand will lay hold of me."*

As you read the story note the character of Jonah, his disobedience, his instability, his mistrust, his rebellion, his temper, his cowardice, his lack of relationship with his Lord (i.e., He didn't pray!).

B. Result (1:4-17)

The disobedience of God's servant always affects more than just they themselves. When we choose to be rebellious, those around us will suffer. In this case Jonah is about to drag a whole shipload of people down with him.

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1. God's Methods

"And the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea . . . " (v 4)

How great was this wind? This supernatural storm was so strong that *"the ship was about to break up"* and the seasoned sailors were screaming for their gods to save them and throwing all their profitable cargo into the sea.

When they narrowed down the cause to Jonah and his God, *"I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."* (v 9) *"Then they became extremely frightened and said to him, "How could you do this to us?""* (v 10).

Jonah told them to throw him overboard, since he was the problem, but they tried to save him and the ship. God kept the pressure on causing these pagan men to actually pray to the Lord.

Finally they threw Jonah overboard as a sacrifice to this new and powerful God and *". . .the sea stopped raging."* (v 15).

"And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, " (v 17)

What kind of fish was this? Jonah was swallowed by a supernatural fish and was in its stomach for three days and three nights.

2. God's Miracles

Can I take a moment here to discuss miracles in general?

I have no great problem with people who do not believe in miracles. I am able to handle those who do not believe in the supernatural or a supernatural God, and therefore cannot accept miraculous events. And those who believe that all sorts of weird things like UFOs and paranormal events happen but still refuse to believe in a miraculous, supernatural God don't upset me either.

My problem is with evangelical, or even fundamentalist, believers who attempt to explain miracles in general, and the miracles of Jonah in particular, as happening by natural means. They engage the skeptics by trying to prove that a storm of this ferocity can quickly come up on the Mediterranean Sea. A fish has been known to swallow a man whole, and a man can be in a fish's belly for hours with little oxygen and much toxic fluid and live to tell the tale.

Now, it is a kick when some digger in a remote area of the world finds documentation about a fact of Scripture which "proves the Bible is true." **But**, the bumper sticker is wrong when it says,

"God said it, I believe it, that settles it!"

Actually if God says it, that settles it whether I believe it or not.

The Bible doesn't need endorsements. The Bible doesn't need a human apologetic. The Bible is God-breathed, and is true, and it tells us there is a supernatural God who occasionally reaches down into the natural world and makes great big waves. That's what happened in Jonah. **Miracles happen!**

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II. COMMITMENT (Chapter 2)

It has often been said, *"It is possible to get so far down there is no way to look but up."* This represents a state of hopelessness so intense that one can only turn to God. That is exactly where Jonah was.

A. Reliant (2:1-7)

"Then Jonah prayed to God from the stomach of the fish." (v 1) Jonah's experience was so terrible he likened it to being in *"the depth of Sheol"* the place of the dead--at the very door of death. Like so many other sufferers, both recorded in Scripture and in other literature, Jonah turned to the Psalms to help express his anguish. And what was the turning point? *"I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to Thee, Into Thy holy temple."*

B. Repentant (2:8-10)

Jonah sees himself in comparison to the seamen who were crying out vows to their gods and offers to return to thankful worship, *"I will sacrifice to Thee, with a voice of thanksgiving,"* and again become an obedient servant, *"That which I vowed I will pay."* (v 9)

Why is he now ready to carry out his vow as a prophet of God even though the job has not changed? Because he has no choice, *"Salvation is from the Lord."* (v 10) And he was saved.

III. CONSEQUENCE (Chapter 3)

"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.'" (vv. 1 and 2) Did the message change one iota?

Actually it did, the first was a message *against* Nineveh (doom), but this is a message *to* Nineveh (hope). **Knowing this, . . .**

A. Response (3:1-4)

Was Jonah truly repentant? YES! How do we know?

"Then Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord." (v 3) *"and He cried out and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.'"*

B. Repentance (3:5-10)

Was the repentant Jonah effective? YES!

"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." (v. 5)

And just so we know that statement was accurate, we have a detailed account of the king's actions including repentance and public proclamation to all his people. And God eventually responded by keeping His word and sparing the entire city.

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IV. COMPLAINT (Chapter 4)

Even after Jonah's supernatural confrontation with God, He was still trying to limit God. He still could not stand to be a part of the salvation of an enemy. In fact, one writer called Jonah, *"The Pouting Prophet."*

A. Reacted (4:1-5)

"But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry." (v 1)

He admitted the reason for his initial flight from God was that he was afraid God would be God, *"gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, . . ."* (v. 2)

In fact, he was so upset he would rather die than see Nineveh spared.

Even though he received God's grace himself, he couldn't stand to see it offered to his enemies (v 3) [This reminds me of Jesus' teaching about the ungrateful steward who was forgiven a great debt, but would not forgive a fellow servant's small debt].

So, he went out from the city, made a shelter and waited, hoping the people would blow it before the forty days were up, or that God would change His mind.

B. Rebuked (4:6-11)

God seemingly blessed him by growing a luscious plant over his head to protect him from the heat, but, actually He was about to teach Jonah a stinging lesson. Just as miraculously, God sent a worm to attack it and cause it to wither and die.

Then, to rub it in, He sent a scorching east wind from the Arabian desert to turn up the heat on he insensitive Jonah. Jonah was again furious and *"begged with all his soul to die,"* God used this object lesson to teach Jonah an important truth:

If Jonah was justified in being so upset over the loss of a plant to whose existence he had contributed nothing, was not God justified in showing loving concern for the people of Nineveh, all of whom He had created? The population was over 600,000 and included 120,000 *"persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand"* [children] (v 11).

Lesson

Acknowledging that there is much to be said and studied in relation to Jonah as a type of Christ, since Jesus, himself, has pointed to that truth, I still wanted to apply some practical lessons to my life from the book of Jonah.

I have chosen to ask myself several questions that I will share:

1. Do I have problems trusting God?

Do I let God be God? Do I make up my mind as to what God ought to do, and then get upset when what He doesn't fit my idea of what is best?

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2. Do I rejoice when God shows his grace to others?

Do I rejoice in the success of others? Am I truly happy when others, believers or not, are blessed by God?

3. Do I find comfort in the trivial?

Is my comfort zone physical or spiritual? Do I enjoy my creature comforts while I ignore serious needs of others?

4. Do I really believe God can use imperfect people?

Again, do I let God be God? Am I waiting around to be better, or have a better attitude, before I serve the Lord?

5. Do I realize that believing right isn't the same as behaving right?

Do I agree with James that "Faith without works is dead?" Am I living out my position as a "chosen one" in my life and witness?

6. Do I have dangerous prejudices in my life?

Are there groups of people I tend not to reach out to? Am I truly able to see people in only two categories, righteous or unrighteous?

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE TO THE BOOK OF MICAH

Introduction

When I opened my Bible to begin reading the book of Micah, I immediately thought of the Dickens' novel, "*A Tale of Two Cities*." Remember, that book was about the capital cities of Paris and London and the life struggles that occurred during the French Revolution. Micah's prophecies were directed toward the two capital cities of the Hebrew people, Samaria in Israel, and Jerusalem, in Judah, and he lived to see many of his predictions come to pass.

Micah's writing style makes him a favorite among the minor-prophets. He writes much like a tough but sensitive war correspondent who reports about the horror and hope of the current crisis. Through the impending judgment, Micah saw the clear and coming glory of a permanent redemption in Israel.

Micah is a fairly common name in Scripture and derives from the same root word as Michael, which means "Who is like YHWH?" This particular Micah is identified as a Moresthitte (v 1) who came from Moresheth-gath (v 14) about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, near the border of Philistia.

A great description of him comes from his own pen, "*...I am filled with power--with the Spirit of the Lord--and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin.*" (3:8).

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Micah (736-700 B. C.) was a younger contemporary with Isaiah and prophesied, "*in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, . . .*" (v 1) [750-686 B. C.]. King Jotham, basically a good king, did not remove the "high places" from the kingdom, setting it up for the very evil King Ahaz to ally with Assyria, while watching them take the northern tribes captive.

After Ahaz, Hezekiah, one of Judah's best kings, was anti-Assyrian and witnessed the siege of Jerusalem which Sennacherib led in 701 B. C. and God's angel thwarted (II Kings 18-19).

The affect of Isaiah on Micah's ministry is obvious, and his prophecy has been called "a miniature Isaiah" by several writers. His writing served to warn Israel of the impending fall of Samaria, but he also helped bring hope, and spiritual awakening in the south during the days of Hezekiah (Jer.26).

When Samaria fell, thousands of refugees fled to Judah, bringing their mixed religion, including the worship of Baal. This situation reached its zenith under King Ahaz. Micah addressed this problem, but primarily attacked the personal and social sins of the nation.

Assyria became so dominant, as it captured Israel and ran raids into Judah, that Micah's predictions that Babylon, a mere vassal state of Assyria, would conquer Judah seemed ludicrous. Micah, in Judah, was much like Amos, in Israel--a voice crying a warning into ears that were largely deaf.

The major difference between Micah and Isaiah was their audience. Isaiah, you remember, was a scholar among the upper class in Jerusalem, with access to King Hezekiah. Micah, on the other hand, was a man of the fields and spoke directly to the general populous.

For the peasants and villagers, this was a time of harassment from Assyrian armies, exploitation by the wealthy land owners and false prophets, and oppression by their own rulers. His indictments of social injustice and religious corruption echo the messages of Amos and Hosea in the north, and Isaiah in the south.

Micah is one of the most quoted prophets, including references in Isaiah 2:2-4 and 41:15, Ezekiel 22:27, Zephaniah 3:19, Matthew 2:5, Matthew 10:35 and 36, and John 7:42.

It looks like he died in peace according to Jeremiah 26.

In a sense, the book of Micah is the fulcrum of the twelve prophetic books. It contains virtually all the themes of the other books, before and after, and provides a perfect transition from the eighth century prophets to the seventh to fifth century prophets following.

The book has three parts, each beginning with a call to hear and containing a message to both Samaria, Israel and Jerusalem, Judah. They are a portent of immanent judgment and prediction of future blessing, both of which are part of God's plan for His "chosen people."

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I. RETRIBUTION (Chapters 1-2)

The first three chapters echo the judgment themes of Amos. These punishments are justified because of the sins of Israel and Judah

(vv. 5-6) There are three messages directed to three specific groups:

A. Message to Cities (1)

First, Micah uses references to prostitution to describe the idol worship, much as Hosea did (v 7). He continued by describing a devastating end for Samaria (v 6), but also spoke of the calamity "coming to the gate of Jerusalem."

B. Message to People (2)

The second prophecy sounds more like Amos, as Micah details the sins of the people and their refusal to listen to God's prophets. The people preferred to listen to false prophets under the influence of alcohol rather than Micah, who was under the influence of the Holy Spirit (v. 11)

The ultimate solution will only be seen when the Lord. Himself acts, sending the Messiah to remove all obstacles and deliver His remnant into the kingdom (vv 12-13).

C. Message to Leaders (3)

"Hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice?" (v 1)

Thus begins a series of stinging rebukes aimed at the corrupt political leaders, and money-loving prophets of Israel and Judah (expanded in v 11). He ends with a description of the destruction of Jerusalem, *"Zion will be a plowed field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the temple will become high places of a forest."* (v 12).

II. RESTORATION (Chapters 4-5)

Chapters 4 and 5 present God's plan for Israel and Judah that look beyond the current disasters to a day of reconciliation.

A. Coming Kingdom (4)

Micah 4:1-4 presents a beautiful picture (parallel to Isaiah 2:1-4) of the restored temple on Zion to which people of many nations would come to hear God's word and learn His ways in a time of peace. We know, by its description in verses 1-8, that this is not referring to the rebuilding of the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah, but in the Millennial Kingdom.

Verses 9 and 10 refer to the Babylonian captivity and the return to Judah by decree of Persian King Cyrus which, seeing the historical situation, was an amazing prophecy. Note, there is no king, since they will never be a true monarchy again until the Messiah reigns.

Then Micah switched again to the end times, Armageddon and the final defeat of Israel's enemies, *leading to the . . .*

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B. Coming King (5)

He will come, first, from Bethlehem, the birth place of King David, born to the virgin (Isa 7:14), but his people will still be scattered (vv. 2-3).

All this fury and opposition will end with the coming of the ultimate Shepherd, *"In the strength of the Lord, and in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God."* (v 4).

Then Micah describes, again, the glories of the Millennial Kingdom, with King Jesus, who is greater than the Shepherd, King David, on the throne and shepherding His people. Israel will be safe from their enemies (vv 5-6), strong as a lion (vv 7-9) and purified from idolatry forever (vv. 10-15).

III. REPENTANCE (Chapters 6-7)

The third part of Micah begins as the others did, with the command, *"Hear!"* and presents a courtroom drama with God as the plaintiff, Israel the defendant, and Micah as His prosecuting attorney. God's witnesses are the same mountains and hills that witnessed the placing of the law into the Arc of the Covenant as a permanent exhibit (Deut 31:26).

A. Pleading (6)

The prosecutor states God's case: (vv. 3-5)

1. He rescued Israel from Egypt
2. He gave them capable leaders, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam
3. He reversed the intended curse of Balaam (Num. 23-24)
4. He brought them to the promised land

And still they disobeyed Him and broke the covenant

Israel proposes a settlement: (v 6) [A plea bargain]

Payment for their sin by sacrifices.

The prosecutor responds to their offer: (vv. 7-8)

God's position was clearly stated in Deut. 10:12 and is twofold:

1. He prefers obedience (spiritual heart commitment) above sacrifice (worship).
2. He requires them to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.

Strike one!

The prosecutor brings God's second indictment: (vv. 9-16):

1. They have been criminals in business (vv 10-11)

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2. They were full of violence and deceit (v 12)
3. They were vile (v 14)
4. They were as evil as those in the days of Omri and Ahab, wicked idolaters and apostates (v 16)

Strike two!

And I think God had a three-strike law!

B. Pardoning (7)

Israel throws herself on the mercy of the court (v 1-10)

She confessed her sin, acknowledged God's justice (vv 8-10)

The prosecutor presents God's final verdict:

He will restore their kingdom (Millennium) (11-13)

He will bless her (14-15)

He will exalt her over other nations (16-17)

He will forgive her (18-19)

None of this based on her merit--all based on His covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 12 and 15).

Verse 20, "*Thou wilt give truth to Jacob (Israel) and unchanging love to Abraham, which Thou didst swear to our forefathers from the days of old.*"

Micah, chapters 4 and 5 are the key, not only to the book of Micah, but to the entire twelve minor prophets, and to God's strategy for Israel. God was changing everything for Israel and Judah except His love for them and His choice of them to be His "chosen people.:

He scrapped the theocracy (4:9).

He threw out the might of fortified cities and strong armies (5:10-14)

He eliminated sorcery, idol worship and other "common practices."

He allowed the temple to be destroyed and the people dispersed.

He even put them aside and developed another love relationship.

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All this to prepare them to accept their promised Kingdom and their promised King. All this to fulfil a promise made thousands of years ago.

God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. Has he said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" -- Numbers 23:19

Lesson:

Perhaps it is a simple lesson this time. God is keeping all of His promises to Israel. **He will keep his promises to us!**