

# The Minor Prophets: Past, Present & Future

Obadiah & Jonah - Small Books, Big Message

## Obadiah: A vision from the Lord.

Key verse - :12 *"You should not look down upon your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble."*

Obadiah does not list his father or hometown. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah. The only event to date this prophecy is the mention of the ransacking of Jerusalem, most likely the event when the Babylonians did so in 586 bc.

It is a message to Edom, a nation of the descendants of Esau (:6), who's capital was Seir, in the eastern mountains overlooking the Jordan valley. A family feud based on a grudge (Ge. 28:41), had been going on for generations between the tribes of the 12 sons of Jacob, and the sons of his twin brother, Esau. Esau sold his birthright for a meal to Jacob (Ge. 25:33), and then Jacob deceitfully stole Esau's blessing from their father Jacob (Ge. 27:35).

They lived in the "mountains of Esau" above the land of Israel (:8), and the admonition to not "look down" is a play on words. The play on words had both a physical and spiritual meaning. Unfortunately, "bad blood" can last for generations.

It is a reminder that we are not to look down upon the misfortunes of others, even if they bring it upon themselves. Judgmental, unmerciful, and unsympathetic treatment of people is not just, nor endearing to people, as illustrated in multiple NT passages.

Lk. 10:25-37 Parable of the Good Samaritan; Jn. 8:1-11 Spurious passage on a woman caught in adultery; Mt. 25:40,45 Sheep and Goats Judgment based on treatment of the "least of these"; Acts 6:1-7 Caring for widows of Grecian Jews; 11:1-18 Vision to Peter about Gentiles; James 2:1-12 Favoritism of rich over poor denounced.

:1-3 There is a call for war against Edom as punishment for her actions based upon her pride and aloofness. :3 *"The pride of your heart has deceived you,"* :11 *"you stood aloof"*. Prov. 8:13b says of God, *"I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech."*

:4-11 :4 There is no hiding from the Lord. As we heard in Amos 9:3, there will be no hiding in the mountain heights from God's judgment. There will be no hiding of treasures or escaping the violence. :11b *"you were like one of them."* Not doing anything to help their brothers in the day of their misfortune made them complicit, and as if an accomplice with those who attacked Judah.

What does our inaction or silence say about us? As James Dobson says, in today's culture wars, "When it comes to public policy, it's no longer an option to sit on the sidelines. Together we can shape the future of our culture and the policies that define it." Inaction is not to be our choice, nor is running from the Lord as Jonah tried.

:12-21 Judgment will be followed by the reign of the Lord. Judgment is not capricious, but is based on 15: *"The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done; it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your head."* To avert this judgment Jesus commissioned

his disciples to go to the nations with the gospel Mt. 28:19-20. Will the nations listen? Many will not and will be deceived by Satan, becoming part of his forces against Christ. Rev. 20:8-12 tells of their ultimate defeat as *"fire came down from heaven."* After the nations defeat and Satan is cast into hell along with the anti-Christ and the beast, in the next verse we find Christ reigning upon "the great white throne judging every person based upon what "they had done."

The book of the Word of God reveals God's plan of salvation that comes from His desire to see people saved from their sin through faith in Christ Jesus. Jn. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9. He wants no one to "perish" because of sin.

Revelation speaks of books of justice that record our actions, but the ultimate judgment will be determined by whether your name is in the book of life, Rev: 20:15.

The prophets declare the sovereignty of God, yet He is the God of mercy that calls us to faith in Jesus for eternal life. Romans 10:9-13 Calls for confession of Jesus Christ as the resurrected Lord and says there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, "All who call upon the Lord shall be saved."

We are not to look down, around or beyond any person. We are to look beyond hurts, or grudges, within, minister to, and declare the gospel to all people. Heb: 12:13 We are to be a people of grace who do not let hurts become bitter roots = grudges, that keep us from being the ministers of the gospel we are called to be. Heb. 13:1-2 reminds us to love one another and be hospitable to strangers... We would not want to ignore, spurn or be ugly to angels, would we?

## **Jonah: The Running & Reluctant Prophet**

Key verse - 3:10 *When God saw what they did and how they had turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.*

From Obadiah we step back in time to 800-750 bc and ministry of Jonah during the reign of the Assyrians over the Middle East. Their capital was Nineveh and it was ultimately destroyed in 612 bc, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. They were a brutal and violent people. The brutality of the Assyrian descendants can be seen in the likes of the extremist Islamic terrorists backed by Iran (home of Assyria) all over the world. Whether it be in the Middle East, Indonesia or Africa, intimidation, physical cruelty, and death are part of their calling cards, in the name of their god.

In comparison, Jonah who was called by Yahweh was not perfect, but did have some good traits. Even if reluctant, when it came to saving others, he did what was right. He told the truth when necessary, was willing to sacrifice his life to save a ship full of people, and ultimately did the will of God. He moved from 1:3 Running from God to 3:3 Running to do the will of God. Will we run from God or run to God to do His will?

Some would call this story mythical, but Jesus confirmed its reality, in that he said his time in the tomb would be like the days of Jonah in the belly of a great fish. Matthew 12:40. Jesus went on in Mt. 12:41 to say that the Ninevites would judge the generation who rejected Him.

2 Kings 9:45 mentions Jonah as a Hebrew prophet from Gath Hepher who positively influenced Jeroboam II, King of Israel (793-753 bc).

The central character of the book is not Jonah nor the fish, but God, who is mentioned 37 times. The book is one of 14 that begins with the word "And." It is the ongoing story of the mercy of God toward repentant people. The book begins with "And," concludes with an open-ended question from God about His mercy. Mercy is the key theme. Cf. 2:6; 3:10; 4:2,11

The Great Commission, based upon the mercy and love of God toward all people sent the Apostles on a mission to all nations. Just as Paul was sent to the Gentiles in the NT, Jonah was sent as a "missionary prophet" to the Assyrians with a message from God.

Jonah's attitude was wrong in many ways. First, because of a patriotism that took precedence over his theology (4:2). A wrong attitude toward the word of God made him think he could take it or leave it (1:3). *Jesus addressed a similar attitude in Lk 6:46 "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do the things I say?"* A wrong attitude toward circumstances can be seen as you contrast what Jonah provided for himself to get away. It may have looked good at first, a ticket on a boat. Contrast what God "prepared." Jonah also had a bad attitude toward the Assyrians. He did not want them to hear of God's call to repentance. Cf. Eph. 2:4-5 "But God". It took a storm and a fish to change Jonah's attitude.

God knew what was going to happen and was "prepared." In fact, we are told that God prepared a great fish 2:17. Could it have been a basking shark, whale shark, megalodon, or maybe even a super grouper? Later he "prepared" a plant, a worm, and an east wind (4:6,7,8) to illustrate his mercy. Do we see His hand of mercy?

### Ch. 1 The Call and the Storm

Key questions. Who is at fault? (1:7-8,12? Will God save us from perishing? (1:6,14) In the midst of the storm Jonah is found asleep and is asked to call upon his God, "so we will not perish." In the NT we have a somewhat similar reference. In Mark 4:38 we find Jesus asleep on a pillow during a storm. The disciples awaken him and said, "*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*" From Jn. 3:16 & 2 Pet. 3:9 we do know that God cares, loves us, and sent Jesus to save us. The Jesus who spent three days and three nights, not in a fish, but in a grave, before being resurrected.

### Ch. 2 The "Inside" Prayer

Out of Sheol Jonah cried out, as one who was if dead. See 2:6 **"Yet"** Eph. 2:1 "And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins," 2:4-5 **But God**, *who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses; made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved.)* *Jonah came to the conclusion 2:9 Salvation is of the LORD.* And he was vomited on the land. Jesus end of his three days was definitely more glorified. Jonah after disobedience, Jesus after obedience.

### Ch. 3 Preaching, Belief and Revival

Many have surmised what Jonah must have looked like. As he spoke God's message 3:5 of coming judgment, he was a physical sign to the Assyrians. The "sign of Jonah" was the only sign Jesus would give to the Jews Lk. 11:29. They would see that fulfillment of Is. 52:14 on the cross, Jesus having been beaten, crowned, pierced and left to die. But the 3<sup>rd</sup> day was coming.

The response of the Ninevites was exactly what every preacher would dream of happening. They all said, "YES." They repented and turned to God in fasting and prayer. 3:10 is what God would do again for sinners who repent. *"God relented from the disaster they He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."* 2 Chron. 7:14 came true for the Assyrians.

Assyria was founded by Nimrod, the son of Cush and grandson of Ham, great grandson of Noah (Gen. 10). Ham's brother Japheth was the father of the Gentiles and Shem the father of the Semites or Israelites. To these distant cousins God sent Jonah, to call them back to Him. Their repentance was for a time, but it did not last. Yet, they were given opportunity.

God's love and compassion is beyond measure Ps. 103:6-14; Eph. 3:18-19. So should our heart be toward all people. Run from God or run to do God's will as His witness.

#### Ch. 4 Remorse or Rejoice

Jonah was not happy that God had been merciful. He was angry and even wanted to die. God taught him a simple lesson about his anger. In 4:6,7,8 God prepared a plant to shade, a worm to destroy, and an east wind to shake Jonah and all believers out of an unmerciful attitude toward people. Compare Philipians 1:21.

For Peter it was a dream of animals let down in a sheet that taught him: Acts 10:43 *"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name **whoever believes** in Him will receive the remission of sins."* Also, **Romans 10:13** *"For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved!"*

Hebrews 12:1-3 tells us how to run to do God's will. We are to: *look to Jesus, who for the joy of what was set before Him endured the cross... We should rejoice over the salvation the cross gives to sinners and as we give a faithful witness rejoice over the salvation Jesus can give as we take up our cross daily and follow him.*

God is merciful and ready to act!

Will we be obedient or reluctant?

God prepared a fish, a plant, a worm and an east wind to teach a lesson. He also made ready a people for a prophet's message, to hear, believe and repent of their sin.

What audience has God prepared to hear a witness from you?

Jesus was constantly doing the unexpected, whether it be in whom he called to be his disciples, touching a leper, forgiving an adulterer, raising the dead, saving a tax collector, or a thief on a cross. Jesus was the "Good Shepherd" who came to save the lost. He is the "Good Samaritan" who mercifully cared for a man left as dead by robbers and gave life, even providing for all his needs as he healed. Jesus is the giver of grace to save from sin, regardless of a person's heritage or ethnicity. He has commissioned you as His church to declare this good news of God's mercy to the world! Judgment is coming, but before it comes, we are to tell of salvation that can be had through faith in Christ!

Both prophets end up teaching us about the mercy of God in contrast to unmerciful attitudes. Don't be reluctant, run, or have an attitude that you would rather shoot them with a pistol. 2 Cor. 3:3 tells us instead you are *an epistle of Christ*. As a person of grace, be merciful!