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The Books of Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah

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CLT Bible Study

THE BOOKS OF OBADIAH, JONAH, AND MICAH

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SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

Welcome to the Continuing Lay Ministries series of Bible studies. You are engaged in a study venture that will be both helpful and enjoyable. Here are a few suggestions that will make this Bible study the most beneficial to you.

1. Since this is a Bible study, have your Bible near you at all times. This study outline is only designed to help you read the Bible.

2. The Bible version used for this study is the New International Version (NIV). The editor primarily used the language of the NIV to prepare the lessons. You may use other versions of the Bible if you choose. While the language may be different, the meaning will be the same.

3. Before you begin each section, read the entire Scripture passage. This is very important. The study outline will help you understand the particular Bible verses, but it does not tell what they say.

4. IMPORTANT: Note that scriptures from the Books of Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah may not have the book's name in sections dealing with them individually. In sections referring specifically to the Book of Obadiah, if the Bible reference is (1:4-6), you will find these verses (4-6) in the first chapter of Obadiah. Whereas other books of the Bible will include the name in the reference, for example, Psalm 53:1 and John 17:1.

5. Go through the study outline carefully. Take time to look up all the Scripture verses in the outline.

6. You may want to mark your study Bible as you go. Marking your Bible will help the words become more and more your own. It will be well if you have colored pencils at hand to mark the Bible as you go along. A simple system is to mark promises in blue and warnings in red. But, however you do it, mark your Bible and it will become more and more your very own.

7. Finally, read the Bible passage again to better understand its meaning. Perhaps you may benefit from listening to the reading of the Books of Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah.

8. The editor has also included how to pronounce some of the more difficult proper names and other important words. The first time the word is introduced, the pronunciation will follow the word. At the end of each chapter, you will find a list of the words in the order in which they were introduced. Additionally, at the end of the document, all of the words and pronunciations will be listed alphabetically. For pronunciation of additional terms and their definitions, please refer to A Dictionary of the Bible & Christian Doctrine in Everyday English (Eby et al., 2004).

If a family or a few friends decide to take this study together, here are two suggestions:
1. Have one person read the Bible passage and another person read the Continuing Lay Training outline.
2. Then discuss the Scripture and outline. Ask questions of each other to help clarify the meaning of the Scripture.

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THE BOOKS OF OBADIAH, JONAH, AND MICAH

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF OBADIAH, JONAH, AND MICAH

NOTES

Section 1.1 Introduction to Obadiah

Nothing certain is known about the authorship or date of Obadiah. Obadiah is a common Old Testament name, meaning "servant (or worshiper) of Yahweh [YAH-way]." It would seem probable that the book was written in the sixth century B.C. Some scholars would put it shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar [NEB-ukh-ad-nez-ar]. Thus, the prophecy would relate to that context.

Obadiah is the shortest Old Testament book: one chapter with 21 verses. The prophecy of Obadiah has one main theme: the destruction of Edom [EE-duhm]. In fact, Obadiah is unique in this narrow focus. This nation was composed of descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. Therefore, Edom was more closely related to Israel than any other nation. Nevertheless, the enmity between the two is discussed in Genesis 25:30 through Malachi 1:2-5. In addition to Obadiah, several other Old Testament prophets speak of Edom's doom: Isaiah 34:5-8, 63:1-4; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14, 35:1-15; and Amos 1:11-12. There is a remarkable similarity between Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22. (*See Beacon Bible Commentary, vol. 5*, "The Book of Obadiah" by Armor D. Peisker for further introductory information.)

Section 1.2 Introduction to Jonah

The prophet is identified as "Jonah the son of Amittai" [ah-MIT-eye]. He is referred to in 2 Kings 14:25 - "In accordance to the word of the LORD God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah, son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath Hepher." This was in the reign of Jeroboam 2, king of Israel (787-747 B.C.). Gath Hepher was in Galilee, about four miles north of Nazareth.

Although this book is about the prophet Jonah and his mission, it is not stated specifically that Jonah was the author of this book. But that seems to be the implication and is the traditional view. Furthermore, the book does not indicate when the events took place. However, the probable time range would be between the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. and the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

Christ referred to Jonah and said that, as the prophet was three days in the fish, so the Son of Man would be three days in the earth. The Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching, but many Jews refused to repent at Jesus' teaching (Matthew 12:39-41). It seems evident that Jesus accepted the historicity of Jonah.

In addition to the outline suggested below, the four chapters might be labeled thus: (1) Jonah Running from God; (2) Jonah Running to God; (3) Jonah Running with God; and (4) Jonah Running ahead of God. (See *Beacon Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, "The Book of Jonah" by Armor D. Peisker for further introductory information.)

NOTES

Section 1.3 Introduction to Micah

The name Micah is evidently an abbreviated form of the Hebrew mikayahu, meaning "who is like Yahweh." He is called "the Moreshethite" - a native of Moresheth [MOHR-esh-eth] near Gath (1:14), which was about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem.

Micah prophesied, "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." This would place his ministry at about 740-700 B.C. He was thus a contemporary, probably younger, of the great prophet Isaiah. Micah may have even been a disciple of Isaiah. Their messages seem to be in harmony. We note the similarity, especially in Micah 4:1-5 and Isaiah 2:1-4. Both of them prophesied in Judah. But, both of them predicted the fall of Samaria [suh-MAIR-ee-uh] in the northern kingdom, as well as warning Jerusalem of its fate. This is indicated here by the words, "which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." Samaria was captured by the Assyrians in 721 B.C., and Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Nevertheless, Micah and Isaiah were much different as persons. Isaiah seems to be urban and aristocratic, while Micah seems to be one of the common folks from the countryside. One of the main emphases in Micah's book is on social justice. Micah was the champion of the oppressed poor. (See Beacon Bible Commentary, vol. 5, "The Book of Micah" by Armor D. Peisker for further introductory information.)

Yahweh [YAH-way]
Nebuchadnezzar [NEB-ukh-ad-nez-ar]
Edom [EE-duhm]
Amittai [ah-MIT-eye]
Moresheth [MOHR-esh-eth]
Samaria [suh-MAIR-ee-uh]

CHAPTER 2. THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

NOTES

Section 2.1 The Destruction of Edom (1 - 14)

A. FALL PREDICTED (1 - 4)

Edom was a proud nation situated south of the Dead Sea. The prophet declares, "The pride of your heart has deceived you; you live in the clefts of the rocks, you make your home on the heights" (v. 3). This is a graphic description of the capital of Edom. Its name was Petra, which is the Greek word for "rock." It was situated at the end of a long, narrow gorge, and so it was almost impregnable.

George L. Robinson paints the picture in full in the book *The Sarcophagus of an Ancient Civilization.* He notes that it was believed in ancient times that a dozen soldiers could have defended the gorge leading to the mountain fortress. The cliffs rise on either side to a distance of about two hundred feet (61 meters), shutting out direct sunlight. At places, the gorge is only about twelve (3.5 meters) to about twenty feet (6 meters) wide.

After about a mile and a half (2.4 Km) of this narrow, twisting gorge, one suddenly emerges into a tiny valley. In front, one sees the Khazneh, or Temple of Isis, about ninety feet (27.4 meters) high and about sixty (18.3 meters) feet wide, carved in beautiful rose-colored sandstone. This temple comes from Roman times. It is about another quarter of a mile (400 meters) to the ancient Petra. In the cliff walls are carved hundreds of tombs and houses.

Such was the Petra that looked down proudly from its perch. And, so the prophet says: "Though you soar like the eagle, and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD." (v. 4). Proud Edom would fall from her pinnacle.

B. FINAL OVERTHROW (5 - 14)

In verse 5, the prophet uses two figures to show that Edom's destruction would not be partial but complete. If thieves or robbers came by night, they would take only what they wanted. Grape gatherers normally leave some grapes. But Edam's enemies would strip her bare. Even her allies would turn against her (v. 7).

Edom was proud not only of her impregnable capital but also of her wise men (v. 8). The city of Teman [TEH-man] (v. 9) in Edom was counted as one of the leading centers of wisdom in ancient times. One of Job's three false comforters was "Eliphaz the Temanite." But, God's purpose was that "everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter" (v. 9). Destruction would be complete.

NOTES

Now we are told the cause of all this: "Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever" (v. 10). This violence was shown when the Israelites were on their way across the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan. Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom asking permission for "your brother Israel" to pass through Edomite territory. The reply was: "You may not pass here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword" (Numbers 20:18). Edom's armies then forced the Israelites to take a circuitous course around that country. Jeremiah 49:7-22 and Ezekiel 25:12-14 all contain striking predictions of the destruction of Edom. The language of Jeremiah is very similar to that of Obadiah.

By now, the Edomites had become guilty of even worse crimes against the Israelites. The prophet writes: "On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them" (v. 11). Edom's hatred had been shown in gloating over the destruction of Judah (v. 12). Apparently, the reference is to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

But, Edom had done worse: "You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity" (v. 13). This seems to refer to the fact that during the Babylonian captivity (following 586 B.C.) the Edomites moved into the southern part of Judah, occupying it as far north as Hebron, only twenty miles south of Jerusalem. In Jesus' day, this area was called Idumea (a modified form of Edom). Herod the Great, who ruled Palestine at the time of the birth of Christ, was an Idumean [ID-yoo-mee-uhn].

Verse 14 tells how the Edomites apprehended fleeing Israelites and gave them up to their enemies, apparently in 587 B.C.

Section 2.2 The Day of the Lord (15 - 21)

A. JUDGMENT ON ALL NATIONS (15 - 16)

"The day of the Lord" is one of the most significant prophetic phrases. It is found frequently in the minor prophets, and Joel portrays it most graphically. It is primarily a day of judgment but also a day of salvation for God's people.

It is the day of the Lord "for all the nations" (v. 15), and judgment is described as drinking the cup of divine wrath (v. 16).

B. DELIVERANCE IN ZION (17 - 21)

But, for Mount Zion, there will be deliverance and holiness (v. 17). Once more, Israel will possess her promised land. As a fire, she will destroy Edom. So complete would be the destruction that "There will be no survivors from the house of Esau." (v. 18)

NOTES

The word “south” is Negev, in Hebrew, the name now given to the southern part of the new nation of Israel, around Beersheba [beer-SHEE-buh]. The “plain” is the Shephelah, referring to the foothills between the mountains of Judea and the maritime plain. The prophet predicted that the inhabitants of the Negev would possess Edom’s territory and those of the Shephelah, the country of the Philistines [FI-luh-steenz] on the shores of the Mediterranean [MED-uh-tuh-RAY-nee-un]. The returning Israelite captives would take the land as far north as Zarephath in modern Lebanon (ancient Phoenicia).

The last verse (21) of Obadiah gives the crowning prophecy: “Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD’s.” The bringing in of God’s kingdom of righteousness and peace is the final goal of all prophecy.

Teman [TEH-man]
Idumean [ID-yoo-mee-uhn]
Beersheba [beer-SHEE-buh]
Philistines [FI-luh-steenz]
Mediterranean [MED-uh-tuh-RAY-nee-un]

CHAPTER 3. THE BOOK OF JONAH

NOTES

Section 3.1 Jonah Protesting (1:1-17)

The Lord commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against its sins. It is described as "the great city." In 3:3 we find a stronger statement: "Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." This agrees strikingly with the description given by Diodorus [dio-DOH-rus], a Greek historian of the first century before Christ. He says that the circumference was about sixty miles (96.5 Km). Since an average day's walk was about twenty miles (32.2 Km), it would take three days to encircle the city.

Excavations at Nineveh have shown that the ancient city walls were about nine miles in total length. But, the description in both Diodorus and the Book of Jonah refers to the city and its suburbs, what might be called Greater Nineveh. This metropolitan area seems to have included over half a million population (4:11).

Jonah balked at his assignment. Was the long walk to Nineveh too great an undertaking? Was he fearful for his life on that journey of hundreds of miles? The last chapter suggests a different reason for his initial disobedience. Jonah did not want Nineveh to repent and be spared.

So, instead of going east, the prophet went west. At Joppa [JAH-puh], the ancient seaport for Jerusalem, he boarded a ship headed for Tarshish (1:3). This apparently means Tartessus in Spain. He was going as far away from the presence of the Lord as he could.

But, it is impossible to run away from God (Psalm 139:7-10), as Jonah soon discovered. The Lord sent a mighty storm which threatened to sink the ship. Thoroughly frightened, the sailors prayed to their various gods. They threw the cargo overboard so that the ship would not ride so low in the midst of towering waves. Meanwhile, Jonah was sleeping soundly below deck. Finally, the captain woke him and bid the prophet to pray to his God. By now, things were getting desperate.

Poor Jonah was in no condition to pray. He was running away from God, deliberately disobeying the divine command. How could he expect any help? Thus, in this emergency, Jonah was unable to assist.

While Jonah was standing helplessly by, the superstitious sailors decided to cast lots to see who was to blame for the terrible storm. The lot fell on Jonah. When questioned, he confessed all. The sailors were frightened more than ever upon learning that their passenger had offended "the LORD, the God of heaven, which made the sea and the dry land" (1:9).

The storm grew worse. Something must be done. Finally, Jonah made his decision. To the distraught sailors, he said: "Pick me up, and throw me into the sea…and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." (1:12)

NOTES

Though the sailors were heathen, and Jonah was a Hebrew, they did their best to save him. Courageously, they sought to row to land, but it was to no avail.

Before carrying out the prophet's request, the men on board prayed for the true God to forgive them and not hold this man's blood against them. Then they picked up Jonah and threw him overboard. Miraculously, the furious storm subsided. Convinced that Yahweh was the true God, the sailors offered sacrifice to him and made vows—apparently to worship him henceforth.

It seemed that the runaway prophet's doom was sealed. Humanly speaking, he was utterly beyond hope. But God had not forgotten him. We read: "But, the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights." (1:17)

It has often been pointed out that a whale does not have a large enough gullet to swallow a man whole. But, it does not say here that a whale swallowed him. It was "a great fish" (1:17). And a whale is not a fish; it is a mammal. Whereas a fish lays eggs, a whale gives birth to its young. There have been several reports of a giant shark swallowing a man whole. Of course, God could have created a special fish for this occasion. But, the more probable meaning is that he prepared the fish to be there at the right time to take Jonah in.

It is true that the English word "whale" is used in some translations of the New Testament to refer to this incident. Jesus said, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the 'whale's' belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12: 40). But the Greek word translated "whale" is ketos, which means a giant fish or a sea creature.

Jesus used Jonah's experience as a symbol of what would happen to him, in a sense, symbolizing his burial and resurrection.

Some have inferred from this that Jonah actually died while in the whale and was raised from the dead when the fish ejected him after three days. Perhaps it is best to say he was as good as dead. That he was alive for at least part of the time, and probably the whole time, is shown by the fact that he prayed while in the fish's stomach.

Admittedly, his preservation was a miracle. To deny the miraculous in the Bible is to tear out the very basic principles of divine revelation. To put it bluntly, if miracles simply do not happen, then the Bible is not the Word of God. But it has proved itself to be divine Revelation by the way it has transformed the lives of myriads of people who have walked in the light of its truth.

Section 3.2 Jonah Praying (2:1-10)

There is no record that the prophet prayed while on board the ship. But, in his enforced "submarine" situation, he began to pray. He knew his plight was desperate and that only God could intervene and save him.

NOTES

With the exception of the first and last verses, the entire chapter is taken up with Jonah's prayer. The first thing that strikes any reader familiar with the Bible is that the language of this prayer sounds much like that of the Psalms. In fact, the prayer is almost a mosaic of quotations from the Book of Psalms."In my distress, I cried to the LORD" (2:2) is a common expression in the Psalms (for example, Psalm 3:4).

Jonah cried because of his affliction (2:2). This is probably a quotation from Psalm 118:5, and thus might read, "I called upon the Lord in distress." Jonah said that he cried to God "from the depths of the grave" (2:2). In Hebrew, the word for "grave" is Sheol, which is better to transliterate than to translate. In any case, the word is accurately translated as "grave" rather than "hell," as is done in some translations. Clearly, here, the "grave" is meant. Jonah was not in "hell" in any literal sense, but he did seem to be in the place of death which is what Sheol [SHE-ohl] means. The Greek equivalent in the New Testament is Hades [HAY-deez]. This is correctly translated as "grave" in 1 Corinthians 15:55 but is rendered as "hell" in some translations.

There are several occasions where the language indicates the writer drew from the Psalms. The first clause of verse 3 reflects Psalm 88: 6, while the last clause is a more direct quotation from Psalm 42:7. The first part of verse 4 echoes Psalm 31:22; the last part, Psalm 5:7. The first half of verse 5 is from Psalm 69:1. The rest of the verse describes the horror of having seaweed wrapped around his head. Doubtless, Jonah felt that all the alternatives were death - by drowning, decomposition, strangling, or suffocation. It was not a pleasant prospect that faced the disobedient prophet. The price of disobedience is always high.

Only with the modern surveying of the ocean's bottom can we appreciate the following words of Jonah's prayer: "To the roots of the mountains I sank down" (2:6). There are just as many rugged mountain peaks under the surface as above. As Jonah's unchosen "submarine" dived, the prophet must have had more than one kind of sinking sensation. It seemed now that he was held fast in a subterranean prison: "The earth beneath barred me in forever" (2:6). But God brought back his life "from the pit."

In his extremity - "when my life was ebbing away" (2:7) Jonah remembered the Lord, and his prayer came "to your holy temple" - or heaven. Often, God allows sorrow and suffering to overtake us in order that we may turn to him.

When Jonah promised, "What I have vowed I will make good" (2:9) - that is, obedience as God's prophet - and he acknowledged that "salvation comes from the LORD" - deliverance came. The Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land (2:10). The "submarine" had taken him from ship to shore. The Hebrews were not noted in ancient times as good sailors. Unlike the neighboring Phoenicians, they did not usually venture out to sea. Probably, solid ground had never before seemed so pleasing to the prophet. One can imagine that he was determined never to take another voyage.

NOTES

Section 3.3 Jonah Preaching (3:1-10)

A second time, God spoke to Jonah. The commission was the same as at the first, for God does not change his order. Again came the command: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." (3:2)

Jonah had his fill of the fruits of disobedience. He had no desire to test out any further possibilities of divine punishment. So this time, he obeyed. We read Jonah arose and "went to Nineveh" according to the word of the Lord (3:3). It was a long, tedious trip on foot. It would have taken the prophet five or six weeks to walk the distance of at least seven hundred miles (1127 Km).

Nineveh was "a very important city"—literally, "a city great to God" (3:3). As already noted, the three-day (visit) journey may refer to the circumference of the metropolis, about sixty miles (97 km). But it may also mean that it took the prophet three days to walk through the city proclaiming God's message. The latter interpretation gains some support from the following statement: "On the first day, Jonah started into the city" (3:4). He had no parish nor pulpit, so he preached in the streets.

His message was brief: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (3:4). This prediction was, no doubt, contingent on the people's impenitence.

Forty is the number of probation, and is used that way here. Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights, receiving the law (Exodus 24:18). The children of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years before possessing the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 2:7). Jesus was tempted for forty days in the wilderness of Judea (Matthew 4:2). Here the Ninevites were given forty days in which to repent.

The effect of Jonah's preaching was spectacular: "The Ninevites believed God. They proclaimed a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth." (3:5)

Fasting and the wearing of sackcloth have always been two signs of mourning. When the child of his sin with Bathsheba was dying, David fasted (2 Samuel 12:22). The Israelites' public fast to avert God's wrath is mentioned in 1 Samuel 7:6. The idea of fasting was to afflict one's soul (Psalm 69:10; 35:13). Similarly, the wearing of a rough sackcloth next to the skin would irritate the body and, it was hoped, mortify the soul. This was a common practice in ancient times. When it seemed that Joseph had been killed, "Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days" (Genesis 37:34). When Ahab heard the denunciations of Elijah for his sins, "he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay on sackcloth and went around meekly" (1 Kings 21:27). In view of the wickedness of Judah at a later time, Joel bade the priests: "Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar" (Joel 1:13). So, the Ninevites were conforming to the customs of their day in showing their repentance.

NOTES

Finally, the king of Nineveh heard what was going on. He rose from his throne, laid aside his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth, "and sat in the dust (ashes)" (3:6). This was a third customary sign of grief. Job "sat down among the ashes (dust)" (Job 2:8, 42:6). When Haman prevailed on the king of Persia to order the destruction of all the Jews in his empire, we read: "There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (Esther 4:3). But, for the king of Nineveh to wear sackcloth and sit in dust showed deep humility and genuine repentance.

But, the king went further. He issued a decree that neither man nor beast was to eat or drink (3:7), and both were to be covered with sackcloth. He added: "Let them give up their evil ways and their violence" (3:8).

To outsiders, it may seem utterly incredulous that animals should be required to participate in a public fast. But it is not to Orientals. Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells how the Persians cut the manes and tails of their horses and mules during a time of general mourning.

With regard to a royal edict for a fast, it should be noted that before the later destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C., the king reigning at that time ordered a fast of 100 days and nights to avert disaster. So, long periods of fasting were not uncommon.

The king at this time felt that if the people repented of their sins, God would repent of his predicted wrath (3:9), and he was right. For we read: "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened" (3:10).

That God "had compassion" is better translated as God "changed his mind." When the people in Nineveh changed their attitude, God changed his threat of judgment. It is obvious that Jonah understood the decree for Nineveh's overthrow to be conditional (4:2). It has always been so that as soon as people repent, God is ready to forgive.

This principle is stated very specifically by the Lord in the Book of Jeremiah. There we read: "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned." (Jeremiah 18:7-8). This is precisely what God did in the case of Nineveh.

One could wish that this repentance of the people of Nineveh had been more lasting. Apparently, it gave them about another one hundred fifty years of grace until the final destruction of the city in 612 B.C. This was about the same length of time that elapsed between the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 721 B.C. and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The later fall of Nineveh came about because this city once more became the symbol of cruel conquest and vicious treatment of captives. Later, prophets denounced its sins and announced its overthrow.

NOTES

Section 3.4 Jonah Pouting (4:1-11)

One would expect the prophet to be overjoyed at the miraculous results of his preaching - a mass repentance leading to divine forgiveness. But, this was a strange preacher: "Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry" (4:1).

He complained to God about it. The reason he had tried to flee west to Tarshish was: "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." (4:2) He was afraid God would be kind and forgive Nineveh instead of destroying the city. Now, he was thoroughly angry because it had turned out that way.

In order to understand Jonah's attitude, we have to place ourselves in his shoes. For years, the cruel Assyrians had been a threat to every nation in Western Asia. Ruthlessly, they had destroyed city after city, treating their captives with merciless cruelty.

To get the proper background here, one should read Nahum 2:11-12, written shortly before the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. The capital of Assyria is described as a rapacious old lion: "Where now is the lion's den, the place where they feed their young, where the lion and lioness went, and the cubs with nothing to fear? The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled the prey for his mate, filling his lairs with the kill and his dens with the prey." Assyria was the most cruel nation of ancient times, and Jonah felt it should be destroyed in order to protect the safety of Israel.

But, it seems clear that another factor played its part: an ardent nationalism. Only Israel, God's people, was to be saved. Actually, Jonah did not want the Gentiles to have salvation.

The pouting prophet prayed to die. If Nineveh was to be spared, "it is better for me to die than to live" (4:3).

The Lord asked him a pertinent question: "Have you any right to be angry?" (4:4) Or, as a translation of the Septuagint [SEP-twuh-gunt] has it, "Are you very angry?" God was trying to show Jonah how unreasonable his attitude was.

The prophet was too angry to answer. He went out of the city and, on its east side, made a little booth. There he sat "and waited to see what would happen to the city" (4:5). Apparently, he still hoped that it would be destroyed. If this did not happen at the end of the forty days, he was ready to remind the Lord that he had not kept his word and that he had made his prophet a liar! Jonah was in a bad frame of mind.

In the first chapter of this book, we saw the first of four things God prepared—a great fish. Now, we find the other three. First, a gourd vine grew over the prophet's head to shield him from the hot sun. Jonah was "very happy about the vine" (4:6).

NOTES

But, then God prepared a worm, which cut through the gourd plant, so that it withered and died (4:7). When the sun rose, God prepared "a scorching east wind" (4:8), a searing hot wind right off the hot desert. The sun and wind beat mercilessly on Jonah's head so that "he grew faint. He wanted to die" (4:8). Again, he cried out: "It would be better for me to die than to live." (4:8)

Once more, the Lord spoke to his peevish prophet: "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" (4:9) Sullenly Jonah answered: "I do…I am angry enough to die." By now, it was time to teach this childish-acting prophet a necessary lesson. God said to him: "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and many cattle as well.'' (4:10-11)

Note the contrast in the Hebrew and NIV translations between these last two verses: "be concerned about" in verse 11 is the same word in the original as "have been concerned about" in verse 10. They can both be translated as "spare" or "care for." While God cares for all of his creation, Jonah cared more for an insignificant gourd plant than he does for the hundreds of thousands of people in Nineveh.

It seems clear that the main lesson that the Book of Jonah was intended to teach was that God wishes to save the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The prophet was guilty of a narrow, selfish nationalism, and since Israel was God's chosen people, only she should be saved!

The Book of Jonah has some affinities with the Book of Ruth. Both were written to oppose a narrow nationalistic spirit. In Ruth, we find a heathen girl brought within the Israelite Covenant who is becoming an ancestress of David and so of the greater "Son of David," the Messiah. In Jonah, a Gentile city attends to the prophet's preaching and is saved when it repents. The main thrust, then, is on the universal provision of salvation. It is for all people who will accept it.

The Book of Jonah is a rebuke to all our narrow, selfish prejudices - whether of class, color, or culture. Certainly, since Calvary, there is no excuse for racial and religious pride. Christ died for all people. If we are true followers of Christ, we shall desire the salvation of all. Everyone, everywhere, is equal in God's sight and should also be so in ours. The fact that we have been blessed with greater privileges than some others should not be a cause for pride and condescension. Rather, it should foster in us a genuine humility and a deep sense of responsibility. We have received much love we must give much love.

NOTES

The Book of Jonah has a message that is fresh and pertinent to our day. We must love even our enemies and pray for their salvation. We must be willing to go where God desires to send us and proclaim his Good News of salvation.

Diodorus [dio-DOH-rus]
Joppa [JAH-puh]
Sheol [SHE-ohl]
Hades [HAY-deez]
Septuagint [SEP-twuh-gunt]

CHAPTER 4. THE BOOK OF MICAH

NOTES

Section 4.1 Judgment (1:1 - 3:12)

A. JUDGMENT ON SAMARIA (1:1-8)

The first verse of Micah is the title of the book. All the rest of Micah is in poetical form in Hebrew. The fact that it is poetry becomes readily apparent when it is lined off as in the New International Version:

Hear, you peoples, all of you;
listen, O earth, and all who are in it;
that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you,
the Lord from his holy temple (1:2).

Hebrew poetry does not have rhyme, though it does have rhythm. But, its main feature is parallelism. In the first two lines just quoted, we find an excellent example of what is called synonymous parallelism: the second line repeats in different words what is said in the first line. It is thus a parallelism of sense rather than sound.

Frequently, the prophets call on the people to "hear" or "listen". These spokesmen for God have a message from heaven. The people's responsibility is to listen and obey.

God is depicted as coming out of His holy temple, heaven, and treading on the high places of the earth. The mountains melt at his presence. For he comes in conquest and judgment.

1:5 shows that the prophet is addressing his warning to both Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem). The people of both kingdoms had forsaken the Lord and gone after their own wicked ways.

It is evident that this prophecy was delivered before the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. For God declares through his messenger: "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble... I will pour her stones into the valley" (1:6). This highlights the fact that the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was built on top of a high hill. This made it almost impregnable. But though it successfully withstood many an attack, it finally capitulated to the Assyrian hosts. Today one gets a striking view from the ruins of Samaria.

The crowning sin of Samaria was idolatry: "All her idols will be broken to pieces" (1:7). Jeroboam, the first king of northern Israel, had led the nation into the worship of golden calves to keep the people from going to the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem. After this, idolatry became dominant in the northern kingdom.

NOTES

B. JUDGMENT ON JUDAH (1:9-16)

This profound "wound" in Israel's moral and spiritual life was "incurable" (1:9). The people had become so set in their sinful ways that there was no longer any hope of revival. The inevitable consequence was captivity.

Unfortunately, this idolatry had influenced nearby Judah, reaching even Jerusalem. Despite a brief reform under Josiah a century later (621 B.C.), Judah refused to give up her idols and went into captivity.

In 1:10-14, there is a striking play on words that does not readily show up in our English Bibles. Every proper name in Hebrew has a definite meaning. Moffatt brings out the force of this in a vivid way in his translation of this passage:

Weep tears at Teartown (Bochim),
grovel in the dust at Dustown (Beth-ophrah),
fare forth stripped, O Fairtown (Saphir)!
Stirtown (Zaanan) dare not stir...
To horse and drive away, O Horsetown (Lakhish),
O source of Sian's sin,
where the crimes of Israel center!
O maiden Sion, you must part with
Moresheth of Gath;
and Israel's kings are ever balked
at Balkton (Achzib).

From verse 13, it appears that Lachish [LAKH-ish] led the way in introducing idolatry into Judah during this period. It is a fact that this was one of the important cities of Judah to be captured by the invading Babylonians (see Jeremiah 34:7). Archaeological evidence suggests that Lachish was twice destroyed by fire by Nebuchadnezzar's armies, in 598 and 588 B.C. In the ashes of the 588 B.C. fire there were found eighteen ostraca (pieces of pottery) inscribed with messages in Hebrew. These so-called Lachish Letters give a vivid picture of the Babylonian invasion of Judah.

Ravaged Judah would be like a man whose head has been shaved bald (1:16). This was considered one of the greatest disgraces that could befall a man. But, this was to be the condition of a nation that forsook God. Its leading people would be taken into captivity. Only the poorest would be left to till the land.

C. JUDGMENT ON OPPRESSORS (2:1-13)

One of the keynotes of Micah's prophecy is a strong condemnation of the rich who oppress the poor. They even lie awake at night devising further mischief (2:1). As soon as daylight comes, they hurry to carry out their sinister designs.

NOTES

In Oriental lands, even today, one of the great curses is that a few wealthy men own most of the land. It is not uncommon for 5 percent of the population to own 95 percent of the property. In many countries, there is practically no middle class. In very few countries, as in America, the vast majority belong to a prosperous middle class. Throughout much of the world, one finds the masses of poor people working the soil, which belongs to a few wealthy landowners.

The law God gave through Moses carefully provided against the possibility of this happening to the Israelites. Each family was assigned a portion of land in the original partition under Joshua. This plot was to be kept in the family from generation to generation. In case a man became poor and felt compelled to sell some of his land, it was returned to the family possession in the year of jubilee. This would ensure that every family should forever have its own possession. No fairer plan was ever devised.

But, by Micah's time this regulation in the law was being ignored. A few men were amassing extensive holdings. The prophet writes of them: "They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance." (2:2). Micah's great contemporary, Isaiah, wrote in a similar vein: "Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field, till no space is left and you live alone in the land." (Isaiah 5:8) One is reminded of this when he sees large, beautiful estates only a few miles from crowded slums where there are filthy, rat-infested dwellings. Sometimes, these deplorable dwelling places are owned by men who live with their families in the more luxuriant surroundings a few miles away. Fortunately, there is developing around the world an increasing sense of social justice. But, much remains yet to be done in this vital area.

Against this "family" (nation), God is devising evil (2:3). Punishment must come for Judah's sin. Though judgment tarried for another century and a half, it finally came. And, it was an evil time.

"In that day" (2:4) evidently refers to the coming Babylonian captivity. The invading conquerors would take up a parable or taunting song to "ridicule" Judah. The people would hear a "a mournful song" - literally "a lamentation of lamentations". It might also be translated: "Wail a wail of woe." The conquered people of Judah would cry, "We will be utterly ruined." Their captors would divide their land, which they had greedily acquired. The selfish oppressors of the poor would now be oppressed by foreigners. Thus, divine justice would finally win.

At the close of the conquest of Canaan, Joshua divided the land by lot to the various tribes (Joshua 14:2). But now, because of the people's sin, it is declared: "Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD" (2:5). The rebellious people would lose the land given them by God.

The false prophets (see Amos 7:10-16) and the greedy oppressors were saying: "Do not prophesy" (2:6). The last half of the verse should perhaps be translated: "They shall not prophesy of these things; reproaches never cease." The sinners would like to stop the mouth of the preacher who continually reproaches them for their evil.

NOTES

The prophet replies to the "house of Jacob" (2:7) with penetrating questions. He asks: "Is the Spirit of the LORD angry?" - that is, "impatient." Again, he inquires: "Does he do such things?" - Is this the way God delights to work? - Or have you brought these judgments ("doings") on yourselves? The crowning question is: "Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?" (2:7) God blesses everyone who will let him. Judgment is his "strange work" (Isaiah 28:21). He much prefers to act in mercy. The wealthy had "risen up as an enemy" of the poor (2:8). The prophet declares: "You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care" (2:8). Such robes were also used as blankets by the poor. Sometimes, a man would give it in a pledge of payment. But, the creditor was not allowed to keep it overnight, lest the poor debtor have no covering from the cold (Exodus 22:26-27). In defiance of the law, the greedy oppressors of Micah's day would violently strip the robe of a victim, leaving him only his light undergarment to wear.

One of the most heinous crimes of the wealthy was that of seizing the property of helpless widows (2:9). In those days, it was almost impossible for women to find any profitable employment. A widow left with small children would have to mortgage her home to support her family. With selfish cruelty, the wealthy moneylenders would foreclose these mortgages and eject the widows from their "pleasant houses." This horrible denial of love has been perpetrated in all generations.

From the children of these displaced widows, the oppressors had "taken away my blessing forever" (2:9). They robbed these victims of their rightful enjoyment of God's heritage.

Because of this, the people would "go away" (2:10) - that is, be led into captivity. Canaan should no longer be for them the land of rest, as God intended. For now, it was polluted by the sins of its inhabitants. It would destroy them by spewing them out.

What the sinners of Micah's day and every age wanted were prophets (preachers) who would condone their sins. They wanted those who would prophesy "of wine and beer" (2:11); that is, promise them prosperity. People like to be told that they can continue in their sinful, selfish ways and yet be safe. But preachers who satisfy this desire are guilty of a spirit of falsehood.

The interpretation of 2:12-13 is uncertain. Some have taken the words as a further description of judgment. But, they seem instead to predict the restoration of the Jews after the Babylonian captivity. They will be gathered back into their own land again. In its ultimate outreach, the passage is Messianic. It is thus an anticipation of chapter 4.

NOTES

D. JUDGMENT ON LEADERS (3:1-12)

1. Sin of the Princes (3:1-4)

The prophet denounces the leaders of the people, who, instead of leading in righteousness, have led in sin. The princes were especially guilty. They were acting like cannibals who skin their human victims, cut off the flesh from their bones, and put it into a kettle to cook and eat. The language here is very vivid: "Who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot" (3:2-3). Flaying and devouring their victims - this is what greedy oppressors do. But, when this was practiced by the leaders, the people were in a sorry plight. In the Old Testament, the figure often refers to rulers being shepherds over the flock (see Ezekiel 34:2-4). Someone has said that these princes were not shepherds but butchers.

When these oppressors would, in turn, be oppressed in the coming captivity, they would "cry out to the LORD" (3:4). But God warns them that he will not listen to them. Instead, he will hide his face from them because of their sins.

2. Sin of the Prophets (3:5-8)

The iniquity of the prophets was of another nature. Though they were supposed to be the religious guides of the nation, they "lead my people astray" (3:4). They "If one feeds them, they proclaim peace."

This is generally taken to mean that if well fed, they will "predict" peace and prosperity. But, if anyone does not put food into their mouths, "they prepare to wage war against him." That is, they announce that war and destruction will overtake those who do not pay them well (3:5).

These were the false prophets who were often denounced in the Old Testament. They preached for hire. Their concern was not to get a message from the Lord for the people but to get for themselves a meal from their listeners. They were what Jesus called hirelings (John 10:12).

These deceitful rebels will find themselves caught in the darkness of their disobedience (3:6). "Therefore night will overcome" them "without visions." They will be in the night, which sheds no light. They will be in the dark "without divination." The prophets will experience an eclipse of the sun so that even "the day will go dark for them."

"Seers" (3:7) is another name for prophets. They were given this designation because they were supposed to see what others did not see, to look into the unseen spiritual realm, and to foresee future events. But, now, these seers, caught in the dark, would be unable to see. They would be ashamed of themselves. They would "cover their faces" - literally, their "upper lip." This seems to refer to the custom of covering the face up to the nose as a sign of mourning and shame. All this would be because "there is no answer from God."

NOTES

Sin separates people from God and closes the door of heaven against the sinner. If we refuse to listen to God's voice, we cannot see his face.

In contrast to the false prophets, Micah declares: "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin." (3:8). "Spirit" is capitalized since it refers to the Holy Spirit. Because Micah was filled with the Spirit of the Lord, he was full of power. He was also filled with justice - the righteous justice of God in dealing with his people. In addition to power and justice, the Spirit of the Lord filled him with "might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." That is, he had a holy courage or boldness to proclaim God's truth, regardless of the consequences. In all these ways, he differed from the false prophets. He was filled with the Spirit of the Lord, but they were filled with the spirit of self.

The last two clauses give another good example of synonymous parallelism. "Jacob" is parallel to "Israel"—two names for the same man and his descendants—and "transgression" to "sin." Both the Old and New Testaments have many different words for "sin" since sin manifests in many ways.

3. Sin of the Priests (3:9-12)

There were three groups of leaders of the nation. The princes were the political rulers. The prophets were the professional preachers. The priests ministered in the Temple in Jerusalem, offering prayers and sacrifices for the people. Today's pastors combine the dual functions of priest and prophet. As a priest, one leads the people in their worship of God. As a prophet, one proclaims God's message to the people. The hallmark of a true prophet has always been when one's message is, "Thus saith the Lord."

There are two sets of parallelism 3:9: You leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right.

To look for these parallelisms in the poetic and prophetic books adds interest to the study of the Bible. The Revised Standard Version (1952) put many of the prophets in poetic form. Recent English versions have maintained some of the poetic form of the books of poetry (Job and Song of Solomon) and other portions of the Old Testament that contain the poetic form. This is an excellent aid to intelligent Bible study.

The general charge made against the leaders in 3:9 is sharpened in 3:10: "Who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness." Whenever a building project has been conducted with slave labor or with people who were paid less than a living wage, the structures have, in a sense, been built with blood money. The most impressive ancient ruins to be seen anywhere today are those at Baalbek. It is claimed that in building the immense temples to Jupiter, Venus, and Bacchus, two hundred thousand slaves were used, and about a hundred thousand died in the process. This is building with blood money. To some extent this was probably true in the case of the pyramids.

NOTES

In 3:11, the prophet indicates that the priests are offenders. They "teach for a price" while the prophets "tell fortunes for money." The false prophets deceived the people with divinations or supposed disclosures of divine guidance. At the same time, they "lean upon the LORD, and say, 'Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us." What they failed to realize was that their sins had driven God's presence from their midst. They still had the ark overarched by the cherubim in the holy of holies as the symbol of the Divine Presence. But, the Shechaniah [shek-en-EYE-uh] was gone. Today, a beautiful church sanctuary does not guarantee that God will be present. Too many people still put their trust in the symbols of our religion without seeking the presence and power of God's Spirit. Herein is the sin of presumption.

Jeremiah expresses this truth in an even more vivid fashion. He writes: "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!'" (Jeremiah 7:4). The people were trusting in the Temple to protect them from the destruction of their city, rather than turning in repentance to God and putting their complete trust in him.

Now comes the threat of final, full judgment: "Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets." (3:12). This prediction was fulfilled with terrible literalness when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The "temple hill" was the current designation for the Temple in Jerusalem. As the area returned to its primitive wild condition, its ruins would be covered with thickets.

Section 4.2 Comfort (4:1 - 5:15)

A. THE RESTORATION (4:1-13)

1. Righteousness (4:1-2)

This is a beautiful Messianic passage. The expression "the last days" has twofold application. Essentially, it means "the times of the Messiah." This era began with the coming of Christ. Peter's use of Joel 2:28 in Acts 2:17 shows this clearly. But the phrase is also used in 2 Timothy 3:1 for the closing days of this age. Both usages are, therefore, biblical.

The wonderful promises of these two verses have a spiritual fulfillment in the spread of the Gospel in the Church age. People of all nations are turning to the Lord and walking in his ways.

But, we look forward to a more complete and striking fulfillment at the close of this age. Just how literally the references to the Temple ("mountain of the LORD's temple") and Jerusalem will be fulfilled is a matter of speculation. No person has a right to be dogmatic in asserting or denying such a possibility. But, we can speak with certainty about the spread of Christianity throughout the world.

NOTES

2. Peace (4:3-7)

Righteousness always precedes peace, for it is the only true foundation for peace. These are the two main factors that are stressed in Old Testament descriptions of the kingdom of God. It will be a Kingdom of righteousness and peace. The clear and simple reason why we do not have peace in the world is that we do not have righteousness.

Peace will never come until Christ is recognized as the Arbitrator between nations (4:3). Then, the prophecy that appeals to every peace-loving person will be fulfilled: "They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." This coveted condition will not be brought about by the United Nations or any number of peace conferences but only through the reign of Christ.

The result will be that "Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid: for the LORD Almighty has spoken." (4:4). The central clause "no one will make them afraid," takes on added significance in our day, when it is not safe to walk at night on the streets of the large cities of the world. We live in a time of violence. Someday it will end.

In 4:5, the secret of Israel's superior strength is revealed - when she is true to God. It is "walk in the name of the LORD our God" that is our only safety. "In that day" (4:6) evidently refers to the end of this age. Then God will assemble his afflicted people, make them a strong nation, and rule over them forever (4:7).

3. Deliverance (4:8-13)

4:8 describes the revival of David's kingdom. The prophet uses two parallel terms that may refer to David: "As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the daughter of Zion."

David was the shepherd king of Israel. "Stronghold" refers to Jerusalem's "hill". The Hebrew is Ophel, the name given to the southeastern hill of Jerusalem, where the city of David was located. The thought of this verse seems to be that after a period of extinction, the kingdom would be restored to the house of David.

But, first, there would be the anguish of the Babylonian captivity, when there would be neither king nor counselor (4:9). Again, we have parallelism: "Have you no king?" Has your counselor perished?" It has been pointed out that the root of "Melech" (king) in Aramaic means "to counsel." So "king" and "counselor" are parallel terms. Also, the first and last clauses of this verse are parallel. The sorrow of the captives would be like the birth pangs of a woman in labor.

This figure is carried over into the tenth verse. The sorrows of the Babylonian captivity would be the birth pangs for bringing forth a new day for Judah. From the land of Chaldea, the Lord would redeem his people and restore them to their land. This happened in 536 B.C.

NOTES

However, their troubles would not be over even then. Many nations would still threaten the safety of Judah. They would desire to ravish her: "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion" (4:11). But, they reckoned without God, he had some plans of his own. The prophet says (4:12): "But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plans."

God will gather the enemy armies as grain is gathered on a threshing floor. There, the "Daughter of Zion" (4:13) will thresh them with iron horns and brass hoofs as oxen tread out the sheaves on a threshing floor. The gain and wealth of the enemy would be devoted to the Lord. God's people will finally triumph.

B. THE REDEEMER (5:1-15)

1. His Birth (5:1-3)

The first verse of chapter 5 is a continuation of the closing part of chapter 4 and is connected with it in Hebrew. Jerusalem is addressed as a "city of troops" because of the many soldiers gathered within her walls in the coming siege. The enemy armies would "strike Israel's ruler," probably meaning the king of Israel, "on the cheek with a rod." This was considered the greatest insult that one man could offer to another. Thus, the reference is primarily to the treatment rendered to the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. He was captured when he tried to escape from Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Brought before Nebuchadnezzar, his sons were slain before his eyes. Then, as if to fix that horrible scene on his mind, his own eyes were gouged out (2 Kings 25:2-7). Those were rough, brutal days. It was thus that the kingdom of Judah came to an ignominious end.

In 5:2, we come to one of the most unique Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. It names specifically the place where the Messiah would be born. Matthew's Gospel indicates that the Jews of Jesus' day interpreted it thus. When Herod wanted to locate the place of Jesus' birth, he sought the help of the chief priests and scribes. Basing their answer on Micah 5:2, they told Herod that Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Matthew 2:5).

Bethlehem is from the Hebrew beth, "house," and lehem, "bread." It means "house of bread". The village was also known as Ephratah [EF-rath-ah], which has a similar meaning, "fruitfulness".

At that time, Bethlehem was "little among the thousands [of towns] of Judah." It is not even listed in Joshua 15 or Nehemiah 11. Today, because Christ was born there, it is a thriving town—though heavily dependent on the tourist trade for its income.

But, out of this tiny village would come the One who was to be "ruler over Israel" - the Messiah. Of him, it is said: "whose origins are from old, from ancient times" (even eternity). Isaiah speaks of him as "Everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6). These expressions should be interpreted in the light of John 1 and Colossians 1:17. Christ is the eternal Son of God, forever one in essence with the Father.

NOTES

2. His Reign (5:4-9)

The Messiah shall stand and "shepherd his flock" with divine strength and majesty. "They will live securely" may mean that the restored people will rest safely in their own land. But, the prophecy reaches farther out:

The Messiah's "greatness will reach to the ends of the earth." His kingdom will be worldwide as indeed it is today. The spiritual fulfillment of this prediction has already taken place. The final fulfillment awaits the Second Coming.

This Messiah "will be their peace" (5:5). Not only is he the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), but he is also "our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). Christ is peace personified. When he comes into our hearts, peace becomes our possession. His presence is peace.

In 5:5, there should be a period after the word "peace," as in the NIV. Then, the rest of the verse should be read together. When Micah was prophesying, Assyria was the greatest threat to Judah's security. But, when the Assyrian armies invaded the land and entered the palaces of Jerusalem, a successful resistance would be raised against the enemy. "Shepherds" means "princes," and "leaders of men" is literally "princes of men." Probably, "seven" suggests sufficiency, and "eight" superabundance.

Warfare would become offensive instead of defensive (5:6). The Defender invaded Assyria (see 2 Chronicles 32:20-22 and Isaiah 37:36-38). Judah did not invade Assyria, but the Babylonians defeated Assyria a century after Micah's day. The Messiah would bring final deliverance.

The "remnant of Jacob" (5:7) would be among the nations as "dew from the LORD." Typically, there is no substantial rainfall in Palestine throughout the entire summer. The only moisture is the dew each morning. Israel was to be like a dew or refreshing shower to the peoples of earth. This prophecy received significant fulfillment in the coming of Christ.

The term "remnant" occurred in 5:3 and appears again in 5:8. It is especially prominent in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Paul picks it up in Romans 11:5. God always has his remnant, the faithful few who are true to him.

It would seem that 5:7 refers particularly to Christ's first coming, with his salvation being like dew and showers to all the world. Thus, 5:8 would refer to the Second Coming, when the remnant of Jacob would be as a lion among the Gentiles, destroying all opposition. It is not for us to speculate on the details of all of this. All we need to know is that the Messiah and his followers will triumph over all the earth. Our responsibility is to be sure that we are on Christ's side. Then we are safe (5:9).

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3. His Reform (5:10-15)

Even more than outward protection, God's people needed inward purification, which is the topic of this paragraph. When the Messiah's kingdom is set up "in that day" (5:10), He will cut off the horses and chariots, ending all war. The cities, symbols of pride and luxury, will also be cut off (5:11). There will be no need for strongholds of defense.

Israel's greatest need was a purging from witchcraft and idolatry. The prevalence of these is underscored in verses 5:12-14. The records in Kings and Chronicles document this.

The message in 5:15 speaks of the Messiah's judgment on the heathen, those who refuse to accept his rule. This is described vividly in the Book of Revelation.

Section 4.3 Reproof and Promise (6:1 - 7:20)

A. THE LORD'S CONTROVERSY (6:1-5)

The heading of this paragraph is found in 6:2. "The LORD has a case against his people" is paralleled in Hosea 12:2 - "The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah." The Lord calls on the mountains to hear and bear witness to what he says to his rebellious people.

Almost plaintively, God asks, "O my people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me" (6:3). This suggests a court scene: "a case" and "a charge" are judicial terms. God invites his people to tell what he has done to cause them to turn away from him.

The Lord reminds them of important chapters in their history to show how much he had done for them. It was he who had delivered them from Egyptian bondage. He had given them Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as capable leaders. When Balak [BA-luhk] hired Balaam [BAY-luhm] to curse Israel, he had compelled the soothsayer to bless them instead (6:5). They are also asked to recall their journey "from Shittim to Gilgal." The people are called upon to remember how God had blessed them under Joshua "from Shittim unto Gilgal." Shittim and Gilgal were places inside the land of Canaan, whereas the contact with Balaam was before they entered the land. All these recollections should cause them to "know the righteousness of the Lord." He had been both fair and faithful to his people. What case, then, did they have against him?

B. RITUALISM VERSUS RIGHTEOUSNESS (6:6-8)

This is one of the keynotes of the great eighth-century prophets—Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Religion always tends to degenerate into formal ritualism. It can become an empty shell with no kernel of reality in it. When the power and presence of God are gone, all that is left is empty form. This tragedy has too often overtaken both Judaism and Christianity.

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Who the speaker is in 6:6-7 is uncertain. Is it the prophet, or is it the people? And, if it is the latter, is their attitude cynical or sincere? These questions are difficult to answer. It may well be that the people were answering God's challenge to them with a counter challenge to him. Perhaps they were saying, "Well, what are we to do then? Does God want thousands of rams or tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Does he demand my firstborn child as a sacrifice for my sins?"

The answer is clear: God does not want more ritualism but more righteousness. God is not unreasonable. He does not ask us a single thing we cannot give. Rich or poor, educated or ignorant, cultured or crude, everyone can meet the divine requirements.

6:8 lays out these very simply: "He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." This is one of the most remarkable passages in the Old Testament.

The first requirement is: "Act justly." Righteousness is the most important thing. It is the foundation of all true religion. Mere ceremonialism is a sorry substitute. Paul uttered this truth when he declared: "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking [ceremonialism, observing ritual regulations regarding eating and drinking]; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17). Righteousness means doing right, thinking right, being right. There is no substitute for this. In the context of Micah's day, it meant especially social justice, no oppression of the poor and unprotected.

The second requirement is: "Love mercy." Justice must be tempered by mercy. To do justly may be human, but to love mercy is divine. Since all of us need mercy, we should give it to others. None of us would wish to be dealt with in terms of strict justice for our faults and failings.

The third requirement is: "Walk humbly with your God." Too often, proponents of a social gospel emphasize the first two points and then stop. Religion is more than social justice or even mercy to our fellowmen. It must take God into account. We are not truly religious unless we walk humbly with him.

It should be noted that these three requirements sum up Old Testament religion. They do not reach the height of New Testament Christianity. They give the responsibility of the Jew under the law. Today, we must repent of our sins and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. However, it could be said that the third requirement given here involves this for us, for no one can walk with God without first meeting Christ at the Cross.

C. CORRUPTION IN ISRAEL (6:9-16)

God now makes a public plea to "the city" (6:9), where most of the corruption prevailed. Doing justly, first of all, required getting rid of the "scant measure" (6:10) used in selling. By shortchanging customers, the merchants made a crooked profit so that there were "treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked." They also used "dishonest scales" and a "bag of false weights" (6:11).

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Thus, they were dishonest in both measuring and weighing what they bought and sold. The rich men even used violence to further their selfish ends (6:12). God threatens severe judgment on such dishonesty. He will make them sick (6:13). They will not be able to escape the enemy invasion (6:14). They would sow crops but not reap (6:15). All this was because they had followed the ways of Omri and Ahab (6:16), who led the nation into idolatry and wickedness.

D. THE OUTLOOK (7:1-6)

As the prophet looks around, the outlook is dark and discouraging. He cries, "What misery is mine!" He feels like one who is gathering grapes but finds none to eat. The country's condition is described vividly in 7:2: "The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net." Murder and violence were rampant in the land.

It was the ruler, the judge, and the "powerful" (rich) man (7:3) who especially failed to do justly. The ruler asked a favor of the judge; the judge would do anything for a "bribe," and the rich man gained his desire through the power of money. So "they all conspire together" or weave it together into a conspiracy against the poor righteous person. Perhaps the worst example of such a miscarriage of justice is how Ahab possessed Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16).

The situation was so bad that the prophet cried out: "The best of them is like a brier: the upright worse than a thorn hedge" (7:4). But, judgment in the form of enemy invasion was imminent: "The day of you watchmen come."

Morals were so low that one could not trust his closest friends, not even his wife (7:5). Sons and daughters rose up against their parents, and "a man's enemies are members of his household." Under pressure of persecution, the best and the worst in men came to the surface.

E. THE UPWARD LOOK (7:7-20)

While the outlook is often depressing, the up look is always inspiring. Our only security lies in looking away from the world with its wickedness and woe and toward heaven with its help and hope.

The prophet cries out in confidence: "But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD. I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me." (7:7). No matter what others did, the prophet was going to look to the Lord. He knew that God would hear his cry.

Having experienced the up look, he now could face the outlook with courage. His enemies were still there. But, to them, he says: "Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light." (7:8). Around him, it was as dark as ever. But, a light shone on him from above. That made the difference.

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It would seem that the prophet is speaking vicariously for the people. He says: "Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and he establishes my right." (7:9). God would plead the cause of his people and bring them into the light. The enemy would be ashamed and destroyed (7:10). The nation would be restored from captivity and its walls rebuilt (7:11). People of all nations would come to restore Israel, even from Assyria (7:12). But, those who disobey would be desolate in their land (see also Isaiah 60:12).

The familiar figure of the Lord as the Shepherd of his flock appears again in 7:14. God will show marvelous things, as he did when he delivered the Israelites out of Egypt (7:15). The nations will all see this and be confounded (7:16) and fear the Lord (7:17).

Like most prophetic books, Micah ends with hope and joy. Among the most beautiful portions in this prophecy is 7:18-19. God is unique in his love and mercy, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of a repentant remnant. Forgiven sinners have always been thrilled with the statement that God: "will hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

Lachish [LAKH-ish]
Shechaniah [shek-en-EYE-uh]
Ephratah [EF-rath-ah]
Balak [BA-luhk]
Balaam [BAY-luhm]

NOTES

The Books of Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah Study Questions

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF OBADIAH, JONAH, AND MICAH

Section 1.1 Introduction to Obadiah

1. What do we know about the authorship of the Book of Obadiah?
A. Nothing certain is known about the authorship.
B. Obadiah is a common Old Testament name.
C. Nothing certain is known about the date the writer prophesied.
D. all of these

2. How long is the Book of Obadiah?
A. 1 chapter, 21 verses
B. 20 chapters, 242 verses
C. 30 chapters, 363 verses
D. 40 chapters, 484 verses

3. Obadiah is the longest Old Testament book.
A. true
B. false

4. The central theme of the Book of Obadiah is the destruction of Assyria.
A. true
B. false

5. There is a remarkable similarity between Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22.
A. true
B. false

Section 1.2 Introduction to Jonah

6. What do we know about the prophet Jonah?
A. The prophet is identified as Jonah, the son of Amittai.
B. The prophet is also referred to in 2 Kings 14:25.
C. The prophet was of Gath Hepher.
D. all of these

7. Although this book is about the prophet Jonah and his mission, it is not explicitly stated that Jonah was the author of this book.
A. true
B. false

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8. Christ referred to Jonah and said that, as the prophet was three days in the fish, the Son of Man would be three days in a fish.
A. true
B. false

9. As the Ninevites refused to repent at Jonah's preaching, many Jews refused to repent at Jesus' teaching.
A. true
B. false

10. What is the probable time range for the events of the Book of Jonah?
A. between 521 B.C. and 512 B.C.
B. between 621 B.C. and 512 B.C.
C. between 721 B.C. and 612 B.C.
D. between 821 B.C. and 712 B.C.

Section 1.3 Introduction to Micah

11. What do we know about the prophet Micah?
A. The name Micah is an abbreviated form of the Hebrew mikayahu.
B. Micah's name means "who is like Yahweh."
C. Micah was a native of Moresheth.
D. all of these

12. When did the prophet Micah prophesy?
A. in the days of Jotham
B. in the days of Ahaz
C. in the days of Hezekiah
D. all of these

13. Of what great prophet was Micah a contemporary?
A. Ezekiel
B. Daniel
C. Isaiah
D. Samuel

14. Micah was probably a disciple of Ezekiel.
A. true
B. false

15. Is the teaching of Micah mostly in harmony with Ezekiel?
A. true
B. false

NOTES

Chapter 2. THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

Section 2.1 The Destruction of Edom (1 - 14)

16. Which nation did Obadiah predict the fall of?
A. Egypt
B. Greece
C. Edom
D. Babylon

17. What is true about the nation of Edom?
A. Edom was a proud nation.
B. Edom was situated to the south of the Dead Sea.
C. The capital of Edom was situated at the end of a long, narrow gorge.
D. all of these

18. Edom's destruction would be partial.
A. true
B. false

19. Edom was proud only of her impregnable capital.
A. true
B. false

20. Edom was also known for its wise men.
A. true
B. false

21. What is known about the city of Teman?
A. It was in Edom.
B. It was a leading center of wisdom.
C. One of Job's three false comforters was "Eliphaz the Temanite."
D. all of these

22. What would Edom be put to shame for?
A. Violence against Esau
B. Assisting the Egyptians to enslave Jacob's family
C. Violence against its brother Jacob
D. Falsely comforting Job

23. During the Babylonian captivity, the Edomites moved into the southern part of Judah.
A. true
B. false

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24. The Edomites apprehended fleeing Israelites and gave them up to their enemies, apparently in 587 B.C.
A. true
B. false

Section 2.2 The Day of the Lord (15 - 21)

25. What is true about the phrase "The Day of the Lord"?
A. It is one of the most significant prophetic phrases.
B. It is found frequently in the minor prophets.
C. It is primarily a day of judgment.
D. all of these

26. Which prophet portrays "The Day of the Lord" most graphically?
A. Micah
B. Jonah
C. Obadiah
D. Ezekiel

27. The Day of the Lord would not be a day of salvation for God's people.
A. true
B. false

28. Obadiah predicted that the inhabitants of Negev would one day possess Edom's territory.
A. true
B. false

29. Obadiah predicted that the returning Israelite captives would take the land as far north as Zarephath in modern Lebanon.
A. true
B. false

30. The final goal of all prophecy is the establishment of God's kingdom of righteousness and peace.
A. true
B. false

NOTES

Chapter 3. THE BOOK OF JONAH

Section 3.1 Jonah Protesting (1:1-17)

31. Which prophet was commissioned by the Lord to go to Nineveh and preach against its sins?
A. Micah
B. Jonah
C. Obadiah
D. Ezekiel

32. What is true about the city of Nineveh?
A. It was a small town.
B. It was a large town in southern Judah.
C. It was an exceedingly great city.
D. It was a large town near Gath.

33. Why did Jonah initially bulk about his assignment in chapter 1?
A. It was a long walk to Nineveh.
B. It was too great an undertaking.
C. He did not want Nineveh to repent and be spared.
D. He was fearful for his life on that journey of hundreds of miles.

34. Instead of going west to his assignment, the prophet went east.
A. true
B. false

35. Initially, Jonah decided to go as far away from the presence of the Lord as he could.
A. true
B. false

36. The Lord sent a mighty tempest, threatening to sink Jonah's ship.
A. true
B. false

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37. When the superstitious sailors decided to cast lots to see who was to blame for the terrible storm, they accused the ship's captain.
A. true
B. false

38. Jonah jumped overboard to help save the ship.
A. true
B. false

39. The LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah.
A. true
B. false

40. Who used the experience of Jonah as a type of what would happen to him?
A. Matthew
B. Mark
C. Jesus
D. John

Section 3.2 Jonah Praying (2:1-10)

41. With the exception of the first and last verses, all of chapter 2 is taken up with Jonah's ____?
A. sermon preparation
B. complaints of his failures
C. prayer
D. praise for the sailors

42. There are several occasions in chapter 2 where the language indicates the writer drew from ____.
A. past experiences
B. past sermons
C. Psalms
D. Genesis

43. Modern surveying the ocean's bottom helps one appreciate Jonah's reference to sinking to "the roots of the mountains."
A. true
B. false

NOTES

44. Often, God allows sorrow and suffering to overtake us so that we may turn to him.
A. true
B. false

45. Jonah never acknowledged that "salvation comes from the LORD."
A. true
B. false

Section 3.3 Jonah Preaching (3:1-10)

46. When God spoke the second time to Jonah, his commission was the same as at the first.
A. true
B. false
D. He was ready for another voyage.

47. Why did Jonah agree to his second commission?
A. He had his fill of the fruits of obedience.
B. He had no desire to test out any further possibilities of divine punishment.
C. He looked forward to the short trip.

48. What is true about Jonah's message at Nineveh?
A. It was long.
B. The theme was "50 more days, and Nineveh will be overturned."
C. The prediction was undoubtedly contingent on the people's impenitence.
D. He only preached in the city center.

49. What is true of the effect of Jonah's preaching?
A. It was spectacular.
B. The Ninevites believed God.
C. The Ninevites proclaimed a fast.
D. all of these are true

50. Fasting and wearing sackcloth have always been two signs of mourning.
A. true
B. false

51. What is true of the king of Nineveh's response to Jonah's preaching?
A. He rose from his throne and laid aside his royal robes.
B. He covered himself with sackcloth.
C. He sat in the dust (ashes).
D. all of these are true

NOTES

52. When the people in Nineveh changed their attitude, God changed his threat of judgment.
A. True
B. False

53. the Ninevites' repentance gave them another five hundred years of grace.
A. true
B. false

54. Nineveh's later fall occurred because this city once more became a symbol of cruel conquest and vicious treatment of captives.
A. True
B. False

Section 3.4 Jonah Pouting (4:1-11)

55. What is true of Jonah's response to the Ninevites' repentance?
A. He complained to God about it.
B. He was thoroughly angry because God forgave them.
C. Jonah did not want the Gentiles to have salvation.
D. all of these are true

56. The pouting prophet prayed to die.
A. True
B. False

57. What pertinent question did the Lord ask Jonah in chapter 4?
A. Can you also forgive the Ninevites?
B. Are the Ninevites worthy of peace?
C. Have you any right to be angry?

D. Would you rather be back in the fish?

58. What did God use to confront Jonah's anger?
A. a message from the king of Nineveh
B. a Psalm
C. a vine
D. a coin

NOTES

59. One message the Book of Jonah has for our day is that we must love even our enemies and pray for their salvation.
A. True
B. False

Chapter 4. THE BOOK OF MICAH

Section 4.1 Judgment (1: 1-3: 12)

60. While the first verse of Micah is the title of the book, all the rest of Micah is ____?
A. his sermon
B. his apology
C. poetical
D. problem-ridden

61. What is true of Hebrew poetry?
A. It does not have rhyme.
B. It has rhythm.
C. Its main feature is parallelism.
D. all of these are true

62. Who is Micah warning about God's judgment in chapter 1?
A. Samaria
B. Jerusalem
C. Israel
D. all of these

63. What was the crowing sin of Samaria?
A. adultery
B. murder
C. idolatry
D. theft

NOTES

Section 4.2 Comfort (4:1 - 5:15)

64. What is true of the expression “the last days” in 4:1?
A. It has a twofold application.
B. Essentially, it means “the times of the Messiah.”
C. This era began with the coming of Christ.
D. all of these are true

65. Righteousness always precedes peace, for it is the only true foundation for peace.
A. true
B. false

66. Sin and repentance are the two main factors stressed in Old Testament descriptions of the kingdom of God.
A. true
B. false

67. Peace will never come until Christ is recognized as the Arbitrator between nations.
A. true
B. false

68. The sorrows of the Babylonian captivity would be the birth pangs for bringing forth a new day for Judah.
A. True
B. False

69. Obadiah 5:1 names specifically the place where the Messiah would be born.
A. True
B. False

70. When Christ comes into our hearts, peace is our personal possession.
A. True
B. False

Section 4.3 Reproof and Promise (6:1 - 7:20)

71. “The LORD has a case against his people” is paralleled in Hosea 12:2.
A. true
B. false

NOTES

72. What is true of ritualism versus righteousness in 6:6-8?
A. Religion always tends to degenerate into formal ritualism.
B. Religion can become an empty shell with no kernel of reality in it.
C. It is one of the keynotes of the great eighth-century prophets.
D. all of these are true

73. What is true of Micah's outlook in 7:1-6?
A. It is full of optimism.
B. It is full of questions.
C. It is dark and discouraging.
D. It is encouraging.

74. Our only security lies in turning away from the world, with its wickedness and woe, and toward heaven, with its help and hope.
A. true
B. false

75. Micah ends, like most of the prophetic books, on a note of hope and joy.
A. true
B. false

Methods of Study

Have you enjoyed this study of the Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos? Do you wish to study further? If so, here are a few more suggestions.

1. Examine the authorship of the Book of Obadiah.

2. Examine the authorship of the Book of Jonah.

3. Examine the authorship of the Book of Micah.

4. Examine the kings referred to in the Books of Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah with those in the Books of Kings and Chronicles.

5. Examine the use of symbolism and parallelisms in the Books of Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah.

6. Contrast Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah with the major professional prophets.

Allow God to examine your concept of prophecy as you study the Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos!

NOTES

Pronunciation Guide

Amittai [ah-MIT-eye]
Balaam [BAY-luhm]
Balak [BA-luhk]
Beersheba [beer-SHEE-buh]
Diodorus [dio-DOH-rus]
Edom [EE-duhm]
Ephratah [EF-rath-ah]
Hades [HAY-deez]
Idumean [ID-yoo-mee-uhn]
Joppa [JAH-puh]
Lachish [LAKH-ish]
Mediterranean [MED-uh-tuh-RAY-nee-un]
Moresheth [MOHR-esh-eth]
Nebuchadnezzar [NEB-ukh-ad-nez-ar]
Philistines [FI-luh-steenz]
Samaria [suh-MAIR-ee-uh]
Septuagint [SEP-twuh-gunt]
Shechaniah [shek-en-EYE-uh]
Sheol [SHE-ohl]
Teman [TEH-man]
Yahweh [YAH-way]