

Old Testament Survey
Lesson 29 – Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Review of the Prophets

We have studied all of the Major Prophets in relation to their historical context. Last time we looked at Hosea, Joel, and Amos who were primarily prophesying to Israel in the north. They were ministering before 722 BC when Assyria destroyed Israel. Of all the nations who caused havoc for the Jews, Assyria, Chaldee, and Edom were the worst. Three prophets were commissioned to announce their destruction: Nahum predicts the destruction of the Assyrians; Habakkuk foretells the downfall of the Chaldeans; and Obadiah prophesies the doom of the Edomites. Here we see God pronouncing judgment as promised in Gen 12:1-3:

¹Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ²And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³**And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse** And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Gen 12:1-3

ca. 840	Obadiah to Edom	
835-796	<i>Joel to Israel and Judah</i>	
ca. 775	Jonah to Ninevah	
ca. 760	<i>Amos to Israel</i>	
755-710	<i>Hosea to Israel</i>	
740-680	<i>Isaiah</i>	
740-686	Micah to Judah	
722		Israel Falls to Assyria
ca. 650	Nahum to Ninevah	
635-610	Zephaniah to Judah	
627-561	<i>Jeremiah</i>	
ca. 609	Habakkuk to Judah	
605		Exile Stage #1 Daniel and a few taken captive to Babylon
605	<i>Lamentations</i>	
605-536	<i>Daniel</i>	
597		Exile Stage #2 10,000 Jews taken captive to Babylon
593-570	<i>Ezekiel</i>	
586		Exile: Stage #3 Destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem)
539		Babylon falls to the Medo-Persians (Daniel 5)
538		Return: Stage #1 50,000 Jews return under Zerubbabel & Joshua
ca. 520	Zechariah (Post-exile)	
520-518	Haggai (Post-exile)	
516		Completion of 2nd Temple
458		Return: Stage #2 2,000 Jews return under Ezra to restore worship
445		Return: Stage #3 Nehemiah returns to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem
433-424	Malachi (Post-exile)	

The Book of Obadiah

Obadiah was God's messenger to Edom, a hostile kingdom southeast of Judah. The Edomites were descendants of Esau. The struggle between Jacob and Esau began in the womb and continued until the descendants of Esau were destroyed by Titus in AD 70.

²³The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger." Gen 25:23

The descendants of Esau, the Edomites:

1. Rejected Moses request to pass through their land (Num 20:14-20)
2. Opposed King Saul (1 Sam 14:47)
3. Fought against and were subdued by David (1 Kings 11:14-17)
4. Confronted Solomon (1 Kings 11:17-24)
5. Opposed Jehashaphat (2 Chron 20:22)
6. Rebelled against Jehoram (2 Chron 21:8)
7. They seem never to fail in aiding any army that attacked Israel.
8. In the 5th century BC, the Edomites were forced from their land, moved to southern Palestine, and became known as the Idumeans. (from MacArthur Bible Handbook)
9. During the period of the Maccabees they again became bitter enemies of the Jews and even at the time of Jesus they opposed the Jews through their representative, Herod the Great, who became ruler of Judea and massacred the babies in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the Christ.

Edom is settled in Mt. Seir, a mountainous region south of the Dead Sea. Its capital city was Petra (Hebrew, Sela, 2 Kings 14:7). Petra is one of the wonders of the world. It is hewn out of 2000 foot, soft red sandstone cliffs. It can only be reached through a narrow canyon which is a mile long banked by walls 200 to 250 feet high, and is carved into the mountain side like an eagle's nest (v4). This made it an almost impenetrable fortress, and a perfect place for the Edomites to retire after raids against their enemies. If any city of Edom was a symbol of arrogant self-confidence, it was Petra.

³"The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, You who live in the clefts of the rock, In the loftiness of your dwelling place, Who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to earth?' ⁴"Though you build high like the eagle, Though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down," declares the LORD. Oba 1:3-4

Dating Obadiah's prophecy is somewhat difficult. Verses 11-14 describe an attack on Jerusalem in which the Edomites participate. There were four such attacks:

1. by Shishak, king of Egypt in 925 BC during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Chron 12)
2. by the Philistines and Arabians between 848-841 BC during the reign of Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 8:20-2; 2 Chron 21:8-20)
3. by Jehoash, king of Israel in 790 BC (2 Kings 14: 2 Chron 25)
4. by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC

Many believe that this particular attack was made by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. But if this were the invasion mentioned in Obadiah, it seems strange that he does not refer to the catastrophe of that event; namely, the destruction of the walls and the burning of the Temple nor call out the Babylonians by name. More probable is the second attack which took place ~845 BC. At that time Edom had revolted against Judah and the two nations were bitter enemies. Obadiah 1:11-14 is consistent with these events. Also, it appears that Jeremiah borrowed where appropriate from Obadiah (Oba 1:1-9 and Jer 49:7-22) indicating an earlier date for Obadiah. This would make Obadiah a contemporary of the non-writing prophet Elisha.

Obadiah means "servant of Yahweh". The name Obadiah appears twenty times in the Bible, representing thirteen different persons. The only reference to the writing prophet is in verse 1 of his book. His home was in Judah and he lived probably during the reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah and Joash. The message of this prophecy is that Edom would someday be destroyed. Obadiah reminds us that God ultimately settles all accounts.

I. Judgment on Edom (Verses 1-14)

A. Doom Declared (1-9)

1. Certain (1-4)

The prophet heard of an international conspiracy among the nations initiated by the Lord to not only overthrow the powerful and fortified Edom, but to completely devastate them.

2. Complete (5-9)

The thoroughness of the defeat is explained by stating that thieves steal until they "have enough," grape gatherers even "leave some gleanings," but Edom will be totally wasted. Even Edom's allies would take part in the ambush and everyone, "wise man" or "mighty man" will "be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter." (v9)

B. Doom Described (10-14)

1. Reasons (10-14)

Retribution is coming for a pattern of progressive violence against his brother Jacobs decedents and: Verse 11--Standing by while Jerusalem was invaded (Ps 137:7); Verse 12--Rejoicing over their captivity: Verse 13--Taking part in sacking the city; Verse 14--Setting traps to capture escaping Jews

II. Judgment on the Nations (Verses 15-16)

God's present judgment which is recorded in history was just a preview of an ultimate "Day of the Lord" when all nations will meet Christ's judgment, and be forced to bow.

III. Restoration of Israel (Verses 17-21)

The plight of the nations of Israel and Judah is only temporary, while the end of the Edomite reign of terror will be permanent.

A. Condition (17-18)

The reversal of Judah's plight will come when the Messiah steps in to establish His Millennial Kingdom and holiness and justice prevail.

B. Completion (18-21)

When the Messiah sets up His kingdom, the boundaries of His kingdom will expand to include all the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This will include the mountains of Esau in the south, the land of Philistia in the west, and the entire area of Gilead to the east, and much, much more! The vision of Obadiah ends with this great statement: "... *the kingdom shall be the Lords*" Under the great stress of a world gone mad, John, while writing the book of Revelation found great comfort in echoing that though when he wrote, "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.*"

The Book of Jonah

By its very nature, the book of Jonah forces some scholars, Jewish and Christian alike, to look at it as an allegory (a mythical story with typical meaning). These people see Jonah as a type of a disobedient Israel, the sea representing the Gentile nations, and the three days in the fish, the Babylonian Captivity, etc. This is a great way to solve the problems of prophecy and a fish swallowing a person, but the facts do not support that view. The facts are:

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

The book is named after its main character, Jonah, (Hebrew meaning "dove") who was from Gath-hepher near Nazareth, in Galilee, where Jesus spent most of His ministry years. He was the prophet to Israel just prior to Amos and was commissioned to preach to the Gentile people of Nineveh. Many Jewish writers believe he was the son of the widow of Zarephath, whom Elijah raised from the dead (1 Kings 17) and that he became one of Elijah's and Elisha's young students. The timing is right but the documentation is weak.

At this time, Syria and Assyria were weak because of internal political problems, allowing Israel to extend its northern borders, become prosperous and powerful. But, it was also a time of spiritual bankruptcy with Israel's religion being made up of a mix of ritualistic idolatrous worship under the guise of worshipping the Lord. Politically, it was a time of power and influence, but also a time of injustice and oppression, under the wicked King Jeroboam II. *"And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin."* (2 Kings 14:24)

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, and rose up on the east bank of the Tigris River about 400 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. The center stronghold of the city was thirty miles long and ten miles wide and was surrounded by five walls and three moats with the main wall over 100 feet high and 40 feet thick, allowing four chariots to be driven abreast. The city of Nineveh was founded by Nimrod, great-grandson of Noah (Gen10), who was also involved in building the Tower of Babel. It was filled with great palaces and beautiful gardens and was probably the largest city in the ancient world. Fifteen huge gates, guarded by colossal lions and bulls, opened into a planned city including a main palace with seventy alabaster halls full of sculpture and art. The temple was built in the form of a great pyramid and its religion included wicked and perverse rituals. It was eventually destroyed by Babylonian armies at a famous and bloody battle in 612 BC exactly as predicted by the prophet, Nahum. Assyria was responsible for much of the suffering and harassment of Israel and Judah. They were, therefore, an unlikely recipient of God's mercy or His prophet's ministry. The thought that Nineveh could, or would, repent must have been completely foreign to the Jewish mind.

The Ninevite response may, however, have been influenced by two major famines in 765 and 759 BC and a total solar eclipse on June 15, 763 BC. The Assyrian's were a very superstitious people and reacted to natural occurrences as if they were from the gods. In the book of Jonah, Nineveh is presented as a city deserving the message of the Lord, a city capable of repentance, and a people deserving of the Lord's forgiveness. In contrast to the stubborn and rebellious Israelites presented in Hosea and Amos, the evil Ninevites appear almost holy.

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

What makes the book of Jonah unique is the fact that it contains no direct prophecy to Israel. It is included in the prophetic books because it is the accounting of a major event in the life of one prophet, Jonah. The firsthand nature of the accounts leads most evangelical scholars to accept him as the author even though it is written in the third person. In reality, the true prophecy in the book of Jonah is the prediction of something that happened 800 years later. There can be little debate among Christians that the book foreshadows the earth shattering future events; the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because Jesus said it did.

I. Jonah's Disobedience (Chapter 1)

"The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Ammittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me." (v1-2) The Lord, as He often did, called on His prophet to deliver a message of judgment to a city. This is not unusual, even though the city was pagan, He often had His prophets predict disaster to Israel's enemies. We all have Ninevehs - places where we would rather not go and tasks we would rather not do.

A. Reason (1:1-3)

"But Jonah rose up to flee ... from the presence of the Lord" (v3) This is not the first time a prophet was reticent about a task, but it is the first time one ran away from the Lord. There are perhaps three reasons why he ran: one physical, one cultural, and one spiritual.

- 1. Physical** – Nineveh was more than 500 miles away from Jonah's home in Galilee. Many of the miles were through the hot desert and through much enemy territory as well. On foot or by donkey it would take over two weeks of rough and dangerous travel.
- 2. Cultural** – The Ninevites were Assyrians, sworn enemies of Israel, and an evil and barbarous people. They were pagan idolaters who worshiped gods of fertility in rituals of sexual perversion and cruelly tortured many of their captives for their own pleasure. He may be happy to deliver a message of doom, but he wanted no part of warning them or seeing them get off the hook.
- 3. Spiritual** – Jonah obviously did not know or remember his God very well. He ran to Joppa to catch a ship going to Tarshish, a city near Gibraltar, in the South of Spain, more than 2000 miles away, to run *"from the presence of the Lord."* But God had often spoken clearly about attempts to run from Him.

⁷Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. ⁹If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, ¹⁰Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. Psa 139:7-10

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

B. Result (1:4-17)

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

1. God's Methods

"And the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea..." (v4)

How great was this wind? This supernatural storm was so strong that *"the ship was about to break up"* and the seasoned sailors were screaming for their gods to save them and throwing all their profitable cargo into the sea. When they narrowed down the cause to Jonah and his God, *"I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."* (v9)
"Then they became extremely frightened and said to him, "How could you do this to us?"" (v10).

Jonah told them to throw him overboard, since he was the problem, but they tried to save him and the ship. God kept the pressure on causing these pagan men to actually pray to the Lord. Finally they threw Jonah overboard as a sacrifice to this new and powerful God and *"...the sea stopped raging."* (v15).

"And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, " (v17)

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

2. God's Miracles

Why is it that believers attempt to explain miracles in general, and the miracles of Jonah in particular, as happening by natural means? Miracles, by definition, are outside of natural means. The bible records miracles. The bible needs no authenticating. The bumper sticker is wrong when it says, *"God said it, I believe it, that settles it!"* Actually if God says it, that settles it whether someone believes it or not. The Bible doesn't need endorsements. The Bible is God-breathed, and is true, and it tells us there is a supernatural God who occasionally reaches down into the natural world and makes great big waves. That's what happened in Jonah.

II. Jonah Disciplined (Chapter 2)

A. Reliant (2:1-7)

"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish." (v1) Jonah's experience was so terrible he likened it to being in *"the depth of Sheol"* the place of the dead – at the very door of death. Like so many other sufferers, both recorded in Scripture and in other literature, Jonah turned to the Psalms to help express his anguish. And what was the turning point? *"I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple."* (v7)

B. Repentant (2:8-10)

Jonah sees himself in comparison to the seamen who were crying out vows to their gods and offers to return to thankful worship, *"I will sacrifice to You, With a voice of thanksgiving,"* and again become an obedient servant, *"That which I have vowed I will pay."* (v9) Why is he now ready to carry out his vow as a prophet of God even though the job has not changed? Because he has no choice, *"Salvation is from the Lord."* (v9)

III. Jonah Obedient (Chapter 3)

"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."" (v1-2)

A. Response (3:1-4)

Was Jonah truly repentant? YES! How do we know? *"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD."* (v 3) *"and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.""*

B. Repentance (3:5-10)

Was the repentant Jonah effective? YES! *"Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them."* (v5) And just so we know that statement was accurate, we have a detailed account of the king's actions including repentance and public proclamation to all his people. And God eventually responded by keeping His word and sparing the entire city.

IV. Jonah Questions (Chapter 4)

Even after Jonah's supernatural confrontation with God, He was still trying to limit God. He still could not stand to be a part of the salvation of an enemy.

A. Reacted (4:1-5)

"But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry." (v1) He admitted the reason for his initial flight from God was that he was afraid God would be God, *"gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, and one who relents concerning calamity..."* (v2) In fact, he was so upset he would rather die than see Nineveh spared. Even though he received God's grace himself, he could not stand to see it offered to his enemies (v3) [This reminds us of Jesus' teaching about the ungrateful steward who was forgiven a great debt, but would not forgive a fellow servant's small debt – Matt 18:23-35]. So, he went out from the city, made a shelter and waited, hoping the people would blow it before the forty days were up, or that God would change His mind.

B. Rebuked (4:6-11)

God seemingly blessed him by growing a luscious plant over his head to protect him from the heat, but, actually He was about to teach Jonah a stinging lesson. Just as miraculously, God sent a worm to attack it and cause it to wither and die. Then, to rub it in, He sent a scorching east wind from the Arabian desert to turn up the heat on the insensitive Jonah. Jonah was again furious and *"begged with all his soul to die,"* God used this object lesson to teach Jonah an important truth: If Jonah was justified in being so upset over the loss of a plant to whose existence he had contributed nothing, was not God justified in showing loving concern for the people of Nineveh, all of whom He had created? The population was over 600,000 and included 120,000 *"persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand"* [children] (v11).

Questions to Ponder

1. Do I have problems trusting God?
2. Do I rejoice when God shows his grace to others?
3. Do I find comfort in the trivial?
4. Do I really believe God can use imperfect people?
5. Do I realize that believing right isn't the same as behaving right?
6. Do I have dangerous prejudices in my life?

The Book of Nahum

Just as with Obadiah, we know little about the prophet Nahum. He is from Eikosh, but we do not know for sure where that is. It may be Capernaum, which means town of Nahum. His name means "comfort," but his message is anything but comfortable to Nineveh. It is an "oracle," an official message from God, of doom. Or, as the *NKJV* puts it: a "burden" or "heavy message" against that city. Perhaps his name applies better to the inspiring news of deliverance in their time of deepest peril for Jerusalem and the rest of Judah.

Jonah preached to Nineveh and the people repented, from the king down to the lowest citizen. That repentance bought them 150 extra years, but the people did not pass on their attitude to their children and within 100 years they had reverted to their previous arrogance, idolatry, and violence. Assyria also became rich and powerful. They defeated many of their enemies, enslaved Israel, destroyed Samaria in 722 BC, and nearly captured Jerusalem in 701 BC. Its borders extended south and west all the way into Egypt.

Nahum probably wrote ~650 BC. Unlike Jonah, he did not call them to repentance, but proclaimed their impending doom, in which "her name would be utterly cut off," and "God would personally dig her grave." (1:14) There is no doubt Nahum's prophecy came true with the destruction of Nineveh which came as the Medes allied with Babylon under King Nabopolassar in 612 BC.

I. Destruction Declared (Chapter 1)

Nahum is a thrilling book that reveals the other side of God. God is a God of love, but He is holy and righteous, just, and good.

A. God's Attributes (1:1-8)

The entire basis for God's action against Assyria and for Judah is supported by His very nature, His attributes. He is all-knowing (v1), righteous (v2), longsuffering (v3), all-powerful (v3-6), good and loving (v7), and holy (v8). These aspects of His character will govern His acts.

1. Patience (1-3a)

God will punish the wicked, protect and avenge His own, but He is "*slow to anger*" giving more than ample time for repentance. This should not be mistaken for weakness, however, for He will "*by no means leave the guilty unpunished.*"

2. Power (3b-5)

Whirlwinds, storms, clouds, the sea, rivers, mountains, crops, all are part of "*the theater in which his power and majesty are showcased.*"-- MacArthur Study Bible notes

3. Presence (6-8)

"Who can stand... Who can endure... But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site..." This was unique. Normally empires fell, but cities survived. Babylon, for instance, was passed on from the Persians to the Greeks, but Nineveh was reserved for a complete end. When Alexander the Great was marching his armies eastward he stood on this very sight not knowing that the capital of a great world empire lay under his feet. This was true of Napoleon as well.

B. God's Anger (1:9-15)

Nahum based his warning to Nineveh and his message of peace for Judah on the revealed character of God.

1. Purpose (9-14)

Gods' purpose is to eliminate Nineveh as a threat to His people. He will do such a good job, He will never have to do it again (v9). *"He will make a complete end of it"* (v9) *"They are consumed..."* (v10) *"Your name will no longer be perpetuated."* (v14) *"I will prepare your grave."* (v14)

2. Protection (15)

Judah is now under the protection of their God. They may celebrate their feasts and pay their vows (worship again) knowing that Assyria will no longer be a threat.

II. Destruction Described (Chapter 2)

Chapter 2 is a detailed account of the fall of Nineveh. It is fascinating to study it against historical accounts of the battle.

A. Nineveh Attacked (2:1-10)

From the initial warning in verse 1--"Watch your back," through the account of enemy chariots and weapons (v3), the war machines (v5), the flooding (v6), the routing (v7-8), the plundering (v9), to the utter hopelessness in v10, the defeat is complete. Verse 6 was especially fascinating. The city was impenetrable with the mighty walls and wide moats surrounding it and the mighty Tigris river protecting one side. One of the methods the assaulting armies used was to send spies in to open the gates that controlled the river, flooding much of its center, then using that route to enter the city.

B. Nineveh Assailed (2:11-13)

As if to rub it in Nahum asks, *"Where is the den of lions... ?"* From a proud pride of lions with no one to fear, Nineveh has become the prey. And then he closes the chapter with the words nations should fear most. *"Behold, I am against you," declares the Lord of hosts.* (v13)

III. Destruction Deserved (Chapter 3)

The prophet Nahum ends by reviewing the major charges against Nineveh as evidence that its destruction was righteous.

A. Accusation One (3:1-3)

"Woe to the bloody city" The study of history verifies that Assyria was one of the most ruthless, cruel, and bloodthirsty of all nations. They not only waged bloody battles but tortured, killed, and enslaved their enemies.

B. Accusation Two (3:4-7)

"All because of the many harlotries of the harlot." The nation was guilty of spiritual and moral harlotry, worshiping perverse idols themselves and leading many other nations into prostitution.

C. Accusation Three (3:8-19)

They failed to learn from the example of the Egyptian city, No-amon which had the same problems and suffered the same fate for the same reasons. This prophecy is remarkable in that, while it was written to inspire fear of impending doom to the Assyrians, it could also inspire the Jews with the assurance. No matter how alarming their position might seem with Israel in captivity and threats from all sides, yet God had the power and the will to carry out His plan for His people.

Homework:

- Read the books of Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah