

Jonah: The Grumpiest Missionary

God's Prophetic Message to the People

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for providing your people with your Word. Thank you also for those who proclaim it here and in every reach of the globe. Bless us as we study your Word today. Let it work in our hearts as your law convicts us of sin and your gospel soothes our aching souls. In the name of Jesus, in whom all your promises are fulfilled. **Amen.**

Introduction: Imagine you are taking a world history class on the 20th century. When you get to the 1920s, 1930s, or 1960s, what events, people, or movements would you expect to hear and learn about?

- 1920s –

- 1930s –

- 1960s –

For what reasons is it important to know about these events and figures?

The same is true for the history surrounding the Old Testament prophets. When you can visualize what is happening at the points of time during which these men spoke and wrote, you can better understand why the prophets say what they say. Just like knowing the events of the '20s, '30s, and '60s gives you a better idea of America as a whole, you will have a better grasp of the entire biblical narrative by learning more about the prophets and the times of their service.

Way back in our first lesson, we learned that Jonah served during the reign of King Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel. In the southern kingdom of Judah, Azariah (or Uzziah) reigned. Both of these kings enjoyed long, stable, and outwardly prosperous reigns (Jeroboam 793-752 BC; Uzziah 792-740 BC). Ninevah was the capital city of Assyria which, as we talked about in past classes, was a ruthless and dominant world power. However, during this time, Assyria experienced internal divisions, which left the country's leaders too preoccupied to threaten Israel and Judah.

Jonah lived and served during the same time as the prophets Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. Today, we will begin to read through those prophets to better understand the culture of Israel and Judah in those days. We will also find that many of these same messages can be applied to us today as God's prophetic message to the people addresses:

- A disobedient lifestyle
- A long-delayed judgment
- A glorious, long-range future

A Disobedient Lifestyle (in order to give ample time for discussion, most of the verses are printed here)

Amos 4:1-2 – Listen to this, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, you women who are oppressing the poor, who are crushing the needy, who say to your husbands, “Bring us more drinks!”
² The Lord God swears by his holiness: “The days are surely coming against you, when they will drag you away with hooks, every last one of you with fishhooks.”

1. According to these verses, how did through who were rich in Israel treat the poor?
 - a. How did God respond to that behavior?
2. Agree or disagree and discuss: Even though the Lord only gave his church the commission to preach the gospel, caring for the poor will inevitably become part of the church’s task.

Isaiah 3:16-24 - The Lord also says this. Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and they walk with their heads held high, flirting with their eyes, walking seductively with quick little steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles, ¹⁷ the Lord will crown the heads of the daughters of Zion with scabs. The Lord will make their scalps bald. ¹⁸ In that day the Lord will take away the beautiful anklets, the headbands, the crescent ornaments, ¹⁹ the earrings, the bracelets, the veils, ²⁰ the headdresses, the ankle chains, the sashes, the perfume bottles, the magic charms, ²¹ the signet rings, the nose rings, ²² the elegant dresses, the capes, the shawls, the purses, ²³ the hand mirrors, the fine linen wraps, the tiaras, and the gowns. ²⁴ This is what will take place: Instead of fragrant perfumes, there will be a stench, instead of styled hair, baldness, instead of a robe, a garment made of sackcloth, and there will be branding instead of beauty.

3. What was one of the main sins Israel’s women committed?
 - a. Agree or disagree and discuss: These verses mean that any jewelry, makeup, or fancy clothing is sinful.
4. Turn to **Proverbs 31:25-30** and **1 Peter 3:4**. What kinds of things does God value more than physical beauty?

Hosea 4:6-10 - ⁶ My people have been destroyed because of lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from serving as a priest for me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. ⁷ The more they increased, the more they sinned against

me. I changed their glory into shame. ⁸They feed on the sin of my people. They set their desire on things that make them guilty. ⁹So it will be the same for people as for priests. I will punish them for their ways. I will repay them for their deeds. ¹⁰They will eat, but not be satisfied. They will engage in sexual immorality, but not increase. This will take place because they have abandoned the Lord to devote themselves to ¹¹sexual sin. Wine and new wine take away their understanding.

5. According to Hosea, in what ways did the religious leaders of Israel fail God and people?

Amos 5:21-23 – ²¹I hate, I reject, your festivals! I do not delight in the aroma of the sacrifices at your sacred convocations. ²²Even if you offer up to me your whole burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. I will not pay any attention to your fellowship offerings of fattened calves. ²³Get the noise of your songs away from me! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

6. In these verses, we see what God means by “I will punish them for their ways” in Hosea 4:9. These are the festivals and sacrifices that God gave to his people so that they could worship him. For what reasons did God say that he hated their assemblies and rejected their offerings?

a. Pastoral comment: There is a real danger in willful, unrepentant sin. This is not to say that we need to identify all our sins in order to be forgiven: Martin Luther famously spent hours trying to account for every last sin in a confessional booth only to immediately go back in because he had forgotten some things. But it's too easy to think of ways that the world does this, while forgetting that we have “blind spot” or cultural sins we commit and willfully stay in—anger, drunkenness, bitterness, selfishness, etc. We cannot willfully thumb our noses at God and hope to balance the scales later by making sure we go to church or read our Bible later. Otherwise, we risk becoming just like the Israelites to whom Amos wrote.

7. The prosperity of both Israel and Judah led to some becoming increasingly wealthy and living self-indulgent lifestyles. To what extent do you think America's (and, in general, Western civilization's) declining spiritual condition has been caused by an increase in outward prosperity?

8. Agree or disagree and discuss: When churches invest in impressive buildings and conduct elaborate services, it is a clear sign of the religious commitment of the people.

As we read these prophets (now and in the future), the backdrop of disobedience and willful sins against the law of God is important to remember. It is also vital to keep in mind how seriously God takes this kind of unrepentant sin as a warning to us and others. That leads well into the next section.

A Long-Delayed Judgment

Amos 8:8-11 - Because of this, the land will shake, and everyone living in it will mourn.

The whole land will rise up like the Nile. It will surge and sink down again like the Nile of Egypt.

⁹ Here is what will happen on that day, declares the Lord God:

I will make the sun set at noon, and I will bring darkness on the earth when it should be light.

¹⁰ I will turn your festivals into mourning and all of your songs into a lamentation.

I will put sackcloth on all your waists and baldness on every head.

I will make that day like the mourning for an only son, and it will end like a bitter day.

¹¹ Look, the days are coming, declares the Lord God, when I will send a famine into the land— not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but rather a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

9. If God wants all people to be saved and people can only come to faith if they hear the Word of God, how can God send the famine that he promises here?

Hosea 11:1-7 - When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

² The more I called to them, the more they went away from me.

They kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols.

³ Yet I was the one who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them in my arms,

but they did not realize that it was I who healed them.

⁴ I drew them with cords suitable for a man, with ropes of love.

For them I became like someone who lifts a yoke off their neck, and I bent down to feed them.

⁵ They will not return into the land of Egypt.

Instead, an Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to repent.

⁶ The sword will slash against their cities.

It will destroy the bars of their gates, and it will devour them because of their plans.

⁷ My people are determined to turn away from me.

Though they call him the Most High, he certainly will not exalt them.

10. Based on these verses, was God unconcerned about Israel's future downfall? Explain.

- a. What familial relationship does Hosea use in these verses to show that?

- b. Agree or disagree: God does not want to punish anyone, but sometimes he has to.

Micah 6:12-16 - The city's rich men are full of violence, and its inhabitants speak falsehood.

Their tongues are treachery inside their mouths.

¹³ So I will wound you, striking you down and making you desolate because of your sins.

¹⁴ You will eat, but you will not be satisfied. Your emptiness will remain inside you.

You will try to store things up, but you will not save anything. What you save, I will give to the sword.

¹⁵ You will sow, but you will not reap. You will press olives, but you will not anoint yourself with oil.

You will trample grapes for juice, but you will not drink the wine.

¹⁶ You have observed the statutes of Omri, and all the practices of the house of Ahab.

You have walked in their way of life, so I will make you a hideous sight.

Your inhabitants will be subjected to contempt. You will bear the shame of my people.

11. What judgments would God soon bring on his people?

As if these punishments were not bad enough on their own, God had actually warned his people about this way back in Deuteronomy 28, specifically in the second half of the chapter. We won't read them today, but many of the things promised there as a result of blatant disobedience are the same things that God promises here in Micah. In other words, had Israel paid attention to the Word of God, they would have known better.

12. That said, remember that these were relatively prosperous times in Israel. As Micah made this prophecy, how do you think people would react, given the prosperity they were enjoying?

- a. Have you found that prosperous times bring you closer to God (in prayer and worship)? Or do the difficult times draw you closer to God and strengthen your faith?

Isaiah 6:8-12 - ⁸ Then I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!" ⁹ He said: Go! You are to tell this people, "Keep listening, but you will never understand. Keep looking, but you will never get it." ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused. Make their ears deaf and blind their eyes, so that they do not see with their eyes, or hear with their ears, or understand with their hearts, and turn again and be healed. ¹¹ Then I said, "Lord, how long?" He answered: Until the cities are a wasteland without a single inhabitant, until the houses are totally deserted, and the farmland is completely devastated, ¹² until the Lord has removed the people far away, and the abandoned places within the land are many.

13. You might recognize the first verse as the beautiful throne room scene when God calls Isaiah into ministry, to which Isaiah responds, "Here I am!" It's very exciting. But then the Lord gives Isaiah his message. How does the Lord describe the people's reception of Isaiah's message?

- a. Given that response, one could easily think that Isaiah's ministry (and the ministry of his contemporaries) were big wastes of time. How could you respond to that thought?

14. Later in Isaiah, God promises that his Word will not return to him empty but will accomplish the purposes for which he sends it. Does that mean sharing the Word faithfully will always lead to congregational growth, improvement in personal relationships, or financial success?

After being patient for centuries with his people, God would raise up Assyria to bring judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel. He would scatter the people and bring about harsh consequences on the people he loved as his own children, as his beloved wife. This message of judgment made prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah unpopular. And you would think that Jonah would be unpopular because of his message, too. But we'll see how that shakes out when we get to chapter 3.

A Glorious Long-Range Future

Hosea 14:4-8 - I will cure them of their unfaithfulness.

I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.

⁵ I will be refreshing like dew to Israel. It will blossom like a lily. It will take root like a cedar of Lebanon.

⁶ Its young shoots will sprout. Its beauty will be like an olive tree. Its fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.

⁷ Those who live in Israel's shade will once again grow grain.

They will blossom like a grape vine. Its fame will be like the wine of Lebanon.

⁸ Ephraim, how much more do I have to put up with from idols?

I am the one who has answered, and I look after him. I am like a fresh fir tree. Your fruit comes from me.

15. What did the Lord promise to do for his people in spite of their behavior?

16. Similar pictures and Bible passages abound when it comes to how the Lord treats us in his grace. Despite the overwhelming evidence God gives of his grace (giving us what we don't deserve), for what reasons is it sometimes hard to a) believe that we are forgiven and b) live in God's grace?

Micah 4:1-6 - In the last days, the mountain of the House of the Lord will be established as the highest among the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it like a river. ² Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ³ He will render judgment between many peoples. He will settle disputes between mighty nations from far away. They will pound their swords into plowshares and their spears into blades for trimming vines. Nation will not raise the sword against nation, and they will not learn how to wage war any longer. ⁴ Each man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree. There will be no one to make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of Armies has spoken. ⁵ For all the other peoples walk in the names of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

17. In the "last days," what will things be like?

a. To what "last days" is Micah referring?

b. Are any of these things fulfilled right now?

18. How do we square Jesus' prediction of there being "wars, rumors of wars, and...an increase of wickedness" in the last days before the end of the world?

19. Ultimately, God has forgiven us of every sin through Jesus and his sacrifice—that is when the last days of Micah's prophecy began. If people seem indifferent to that message or perhaps members seem indifferent to the work of the church, should they be hearing more threats about God's punishment or more assurances of God's forgiveness? Explain.

God's prophets, including Jonah, spoke about how God would restore his relationship with the people of this world. Even though they did not know all of the details of how Christ would perfectly fulfill all these things, they still trusted and proclaimed that God would forgive sins and bring his people to live with him in a place and time much better than the one we live in now.

Closing Prayer 575 By Grace I'm Saved v. 1

By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless; my soul, believe and doubt it not.

Why waver at this word of promise? Has Scripture ever falsehood taught?

So then this word must true remain: by grace you, too, shall heaven obtain. Amen.