

## Minor Prophets: Jonah, Micah

The 39 books of the Old Testament are recognized by Judaism. Combined with the 27 books of the New Testament, the entire Bible is accepted and used by Christians. Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Islam and other religions have their sacred writings. However, the Bible is unique for at least four reasons:

- The Bible is *the* revelation of God. It says so from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation. And its flawless track record of meticulous accuracy and exquisitely fulfilled prophecies bear witness.
- The Bible is *inspired* by God (the Greek word is *theopneustos* which means “God-breathed”) (See II Timothy 3:16.), meaning that, unlike any other literature, God’s words were originally recorded by 35-40 authors over some 1,600 years under the supervision of God the Holy Spirit (who with God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ, are The Trinity).
- The Bible reveals all that God wants us to know at this time about who He is and His plans and purposes for time and eternity.
- The Bible focuses on the second person of The Trinity, God the Son who came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to become the only Savior of all mankind. (Hebrews 1:1-2) This is the God/Man, God’s *only* Son, who is superior to any other spiritual power because, echoing the words of the ancient prophets, He taught while here on earth 2,000 years ago that He was the Creator and Sustainer of this world (Colossians 1:16-17) and was, in fact, equal with God the Father (John 1:1).

As we’ve covered in the first 31 books of the Bible, its clear, overriding purpose is to present God’s faithful pursuit of and love for man, the pinnacle of His creation. That first man Adam and his first love Eve soon blow it for all of us by committing history’s first sin. From then on, their offspring, right down to you and me, struggle with wanting to be our own god rather than letting God be God.

Through the Jewish people, whose history is traced back to Abraham, God preserves a lineage ultimately leading over some 20 centuries to the birth of a Baby in Bethlehem who comes to deal with mankind’s sin problem once and for all.

The Old Testament logs the Jews’ struggle to become an independent nation dependent on God. They have trouble accomplishing either, i.e., being free of outsider-induced oppression -- and being totally reliant on God, an apt metaphor for the human condition.

Under Moses, the Jewish nomads flee the abusive tyranny of the Pharaohs in Egypt by crossing the Red Sea, then roam the Arabian desert for four decades before fording the Jordan River and arriving in Canaan, their Promised Land. After being ruled for years by a system of judges, they anoint their first king, Saul, who’s succeeded by his son David, then by David’s son Solomon.

After Solomon’s death the nation comes apart at the seams. Ten tribes form the Northern Kingdom (Israel) whose capital is Samaria. The other two tribes become the Southern Kingdom (Judah) whose seat of government is Jerusalem.

It was the prophets' usually unpopular lot to announce to the sitting sovereign and his subjects that God demanded their allegiance to the exclusion of any other gods made of stone or wood or Wall Street or Detroit or ESPN. God is a jealous God.

As valuable as they are, the moral teachings of Christ are not the basis of Christianity. The basis is simply Christ Himself. If He isn't who He said He was (John 8:23-24), then Christianity is a crock -- just another man-made religion.

If He is who He said He was -- and is, then you and I must each decide what to do about that. To prevent cop-outs, "no decision" *is* a decision. Jesus once asked His own disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Good question. It's one which each of us will answer, now or later.

Because of their waywardness, the ancient Israelites in both kingdoms were warned by these prophets that unless they abolished their idols, turned from their sins and worshipped only God, they'd experience His wrath in very palpable ways.

Hard of hearing -- or just hard of heart, they refused to heed God's pleading through His prophets. Ultimately their borders were overrun, and they were carried off by two ravenous world monster-powers -- by Assyria in 722 B.C. and by Babylon from 605-586 B.C. Some of the Jewish prophets were on duty during their countrymen's exile. Others prophesied after the Jews were released by their captors to return to their homeland.

## JONAH

Hero, goat and author of this book, Jonah was a statesman who, from 785-775 B.C., was also a prophet. Some call this "the test book of the Bible" since many flip it off as a fanciful fish tale. Others, including Jesus Himself, vouch for its veracity. When asked to perform a miracle to authenticate His own claims, Jesus responded by referring to and endorsing Jonah. Let's read that in Matthew 12:38-40.

From 900-607 B.C. Assyria was a world-class empire. Situated where northern Iraq is today -- between the Mediterranean and Caspian Seas, it rose to prominence near the end of King Solomon's life. Ruthlessly powerful, it wasted the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Until sixty years ago we knew little of Assyria and less of its opulent capital Nineveh of which nothing remained and whose exact location was a mystery.

Midway through this 20th century, after being lost for 2,600 years, excavations exhumed its palaces and artifacts including a king's library of 10,000 tablets, "the oldest extant documents in the world, dating as far back as probably about the time of Abraham" (c 2,000 B.C.). They record the history, laws and religions of Assyria and "confirm the Old Testament history of the kings of Israel." They also prove that Nineveh was destroyed by both flood and fire, as foretold by Old Testament prophets.

Nineveh, "greatest of all ancient cities" in its day, was located between the Mediterranean and the India Ocean, linking East and West. It was founded shortly after the famous flood in Noah's time (Genesis 10:11-12). From its beginning it was a bitter rival of the city of Babylon, 300 miles south.

The Nineveh Metroplex was 10 miles wide and lay some 30 miles along the eastern bank of the Tigris River. This huge tract, sixty miles around, now lies in total ruin. Thousands of foreign slaves built five walls and three moats to protect its one million inhabitants. The downtown core was surrounded by 100 feet high walls, wide enough at the top for four chariots to drive abreast some eight miles around The Loop.

This city had it all: wealth, power, fame, the arts. But the Bible and other historical writings describe Nineveh as wicked, openly rebellious against God. Even harder to swallow than the “Jonah and the whale” yarn is the notion that such a teeming, heathen metropolis could be brought to its knees in repentance in mere days by a wimpy Jewish missionary like Jonah.

In chapter 1 God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn its citizens that, despite their airtight defenses and junkyard dog reputation, they were facing doom because God had it up to here with their wickedness. Rather than obey God and face public ridicule, Jonah does a 180 and sails for Spain, to the western edge of the then-known world.

But Jonah would soon discover that you can run from God, but you can’t hid.. Now, as he’s running *to* God, he gets a second call from heaven to go to Nineveh and warn his nation’s feared enemy that in forty days their beautiful city would be erased. This time Jonah reels in his courage and just does it, now running *with* God. When he begins to preach, telling his amazing story endorsed by witnesses, ordinary blokes welcome his words and begin to confess their sins to God. Next, typically, the upper class followed suit. And revival broke out in this mega-city. Imagine Reno or L.A. or San Francisco or New York City turning to God en masse! Yet, this is the miracle Jonah witnessed, proving to him that God loves *all* people, not just Israel.

#### **Let’s read this *Believe It Or Not* saga in Jonah 1 through 4.**

Assyria’s bloody, 600 year-history came to an end suddenly, strangely and tragically in 625 B.C. Because of Nineveh’s wholesale remorse over their sins, their return to God and because God refused to have the city’s 120,000 or so babies slaughtered, history records that Jonah’s promise of their destruction was delayed about a century, as we’ll see later in the book of Nahum. Because the Ninevites had repented for, among other sins, their lust for power, they waited about 50 years before attacking Israel -- further proof that obeying God has a direct impact on society and on that cry of Rodney King’s heart, “Can’t we all just get along?”

We see Jonah as a symbol of the Messiah, born 800 years later, in that he faced death, burial (at sea), then resurrection. He’s also a symbol of the Jewish nation which was disobedient to God, scarfed up by both Assyria and Babylon, then the nations of the world -- and will, in the future, be reunited and resurrected, as it were, when Christ returns to earth to establish His kingdom headquartered in Jerusalem.

### **MICAH**

Unlike some prophets who were palace officers, Micah was a country preacher. He predicted the dismantling of the disobedient northern kingdom of Judah, it’s future judgment and its return to glory when Messiah returned to earth to reign there. His predictions dealt with both Jewish nations but primarily with Judah whose capital was Jerusalem.

In Micah's day times were mean. How mean was it? Inside the borders of his country the rich beset the poor unmercifully. Corruption was rampant from the palace to the pits. Pulling no punches, Micah informed his people that to be cruel to their fellow man was an insult to God who was equally offended by the antics of both governors and governed.

Yet the people faked a religious lifestyle, offering their sacrifices and carrying on with their holy days. Micah said, "Nah, God's not impressed with your hollow piety" (Micah 6:6-8). And nothing's changed; man's always tried to suck up to God by acting religious or buying his way into heaven. But in one awesome sentence (verse 8) Micah reminds the people of God's definition of "what is good" and "what God requires of mankind."

The *only* way to get into God's good graces is to accept the free Gift of His Grace, and that is TOTAL FORGIVENESS for our sins. That's available to each of us because Christ died on a Roman cross to pay the ETERNAL PENALTY for the sins of every man. By simply *believing* that and making it the cornerstone of our lives, we're assured of being individually, unconditionally and eternally accepted by God. Without that step of faith, the Bible says each man is doomed to live throughout eternity out of God's presence in a place it calls hell. By merely believing in God's provision of personal forgiveness, the Bible promises that we'll spend eternity in His presence in heaven. The Bon may *claim* to be "where the choices are," but the Bible broke that campaign first.

During Micah's lifetime the Northern Kingdom, which ignored the warning of the prophets, fell to Assyria. But Judah paid attention to these men of God, temporarily, and was given an additional 150 years before being carted off to Babylon.

In chapter one Micah warns that Samaria will be crushed -- and that Judah was in for more of the same. He denounces the spread of idolatry, the oppression of the poor, the driving of women and children from their homes, bribery among the leaders, widespread cheating and all abuses of power. Where God is *not* worshipped, men are inhuman to each other.

Brokenhearted about God's coming judgment on Judah for their sins, Micah warns that Jerusalem and its Temple will be toast and the people taken captive by Babylonian invaders. Yet, amid all the gloom and doom, he speaks of a future hope, beyond the day when God would return His people from captivity. He foresaw a day, still in the future for us today, when Christ Himself, the Jews' coming Messiah, will reign and bring peace to the entire earth.

Micah is the only Old Testament prophet to name the very town where Christ would be born (Micah 5:2). Not a small feat since Micah lived seven centuries *before* Christ!

Word of this prophecy spread to the scholars of Micah's day. The famous "wise men," or magi, who came from the East to sign a lifetime contract with Hallmark Cards and to seek the Christchild (Matthew 2:5-6), were aware of this 700-year old prophecy.

No other religious book has the crystal clear fingerprints of God on it as witnessed by the many, intimately precise foretellings that have been fulfilled to a T.

**Lets' read Micah 1:1-5:5; 6:1-8; 7:7-20.**

Discussion questions re Jonah

- Jonah's sprint to hide from God put himself and a boatload of other people in peril. Has that happened to you before?
- Nineveh responded favorably to Jonah's preaching, averting their date with disaster. But instead of celebrating, Jonah was steaming! He wanted to see the city wiped out. Jonah seemed to have a habit of fighting God. Why do people do that?
- We learn a lot about God from this small book, says my friend Ron Blanc:
  - (a) While He's a God of grace and compassion, God hates sin. Whether we're as violent and disgusting as the Ninevites were is not the issue. Sin is sin. Yours, mine and theirs all sent Christ to the cross to purchase our forgiveness.
  - (b) God is slow to anger, but when He runs out of patience, look out.
  - (c) God will allow no one to thwart His plans and purposes.
  - (d) God will go to any length to do what He intends to do. Don't fool around with Him and assume He'll give you another chance. His intentions are not open for discussion. Just do it His way.
  - (e) God has a great love for sinners, and He goes to great lengths to woo them to Himself.

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