



Class 10 - Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah

Old Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Introduction

Welcome back. Today we'll continue with the next two Minor Prophets. Why are they called "Minor Prophets?" [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] It's not because they are less significant than the "Major Prophets." It's just that they're shorter in length than other prophetic books. Last week we looked at Hosea and Joel. We learned through their symbolism about God's judgment. But also his promise to extend grace, mercy, and hope. Today, we'll move into Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah to see if we can't expand on what we've already learned.

[PRAY]

Amos

In Amos 1:1, Amos tells us he's from the southern kingdom, but his preaching focuses on the north. He also tells us he was preaching during the reign of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel. This puts Amos, and the writing of this book, in roughly the mid 8th century BC. That's just a few decades before the fall of the North and shortly before Isaiah undertook his ministry. This was a time of great economic prosperity, expansion, and security for both kingdoms.

So Amos prophesies after the nation's been divided, but before there's any Assyrian threat in the picture. North and South are both standing – and standing with strength and confidence. Like Joel used a locust plague, Amos also uses an historical event to emphasize his message. He mentions in 1:1 that he prophesied two years before "the earthquake". Well, apparently this was a pretty big earthquake. So big, that a prophet even as late as Zechariah makes mention of it, in Zechariah 14:5. More on that in just a minute.

Theme

Here is a summary sentence for Amos:

Yahweh is angry because His people are getting rich by oppressing their own kinsmen, and despising the righteous and His word.

Just like in the last prophets we looked at, we'll see these recurring themes: Yahweh's anger because of sins, and the call to repentance lest He break out in wrath. In this book, Yahweh is angry about two things. One, *His own* people are acting corruptly by trying to get rich off the oppression of their kinsmen. And two, He is angry because His people despise those who are righteous, and they despise the word of Yahweh. What Amos is saying with the earthquake is that if the people don't repent from their sinful economic practices, Yahweh will come in judgment and shake the earth unlike *any* earthquake they've ever experienced. You can imagine how unpopular this made Amos. And only a generation later, the North was swept away entirely by the Assyrians. It was a swift fall from a very lofty place for Israel.

Let's turn to Amos' message.

I. God Judges the Nations

The first thing we see is that God judges the nations. Though the focus is on Israel in this book, the first chapters of Amos are prophecies against the surrounding nations. You can see in **1:3** attention is on Damascus, in **1:6** Gaza, **1:9** Tyre, **1:11** Edom, **1:13** Ammon, and **2:1** Moab. Those are some of the gentile nations of Amos' day.

Note what God judges them for. He judged Damascus "because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron." That is, because she pillaged and robbed and left Gilead barren. God judges Gaza because "they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom." God judged Edom because "he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity." He judged Ammon because "they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border." These are sins of cruelty, oppression, slavery, and murder. They are big and obvious, war crimes on a grand scale. Even though the gentile nations had not received God's revealed law or been given tablets with the Ten Commandments, they could not plead ignorance of his moral law. The gentile nations cannot escape the judgment of God.

God's judgment of the gentile nations demonstrates his universal kingship. God made Israel to be his special people, but God is the rightful sovereign over all people and all nations under heaven. We see here in his judgment of the nations that he will hold them all to account and make his universal sovereignty known. Whether or not you have heard the gospel you are accountable for your actions and you will answer to God one day for your sins.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

II. God Judges His People

God doesn't stop at judging the nations; he especially judges his people. In chapter 2 there begins a prophecy against Judah. And in 2:6 Amos begins of a long prophecy against Israel. With those first prophecies, the covenant people would have applauded Amos, because those nations have long been the enemies of Israel and Judah. But then Amos says "Not so fast there Israel and Judah. Your sins are not overlooked either." In fact, the prophets are often much more critical and condemning of the covenant people for just that reason. They are in covenant with Yahweh, and they ought to know better than the gentiles. Look at chapter 3, verse 2.

"You only have I known
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities.

They were supposed to be lights to the gentiles, displaying the glories of the only true God, Yahweh. But instead, they behaved just as corruptly and immorally as the gentiles, and sometimes even worse. There are two broad categories of sins Israel is judged for. First, there are sins of social and political injustice. Second, there are religious sins, sins of idolatry, neglect of God's word, and faithlessness to his covenant.

First, Israel was experiencing a brief period of luxury and peace. In their plenty, they were full of social and political injustice. God says in 2:6-7, "they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals — those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted." In 4:1 he announces his word to you women "who oppress the poor, who crush the needy." In 5:10 and 5:12 he says "they hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth... you... afflict the righteous [and] take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate."

Israel was guilty of slavery, corruption, bribery, favoritism towards the rich, and exploitation of the poor. Precisely contrary to God's will for them. God had shown specific concern for the poor in his law. He told Israel, "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit," in Exodus 23:6. He said "there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'" (Deuteronomy 15:11). Israel in the time of Amos mocked God's concern for the poor.

I hope the same is not true for us. God is clear that he will hold his people accountable for how they act and treat others in this life. Remember Jesus' own words in **Matthew 25** that when He returns to judge the world, that judgment will be based on how we treated other people, particularly those trodden down by the world. James echoes the same point when he says "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." (1:27).

And so we should ask ourselves: How is our heart's attitude towards money? Do we crave it for ourselves, or welcome it as a tool God has lent us for life and ministry? How is our attitude towards tithing? Are we resentful, or cheerful? How do we care for the poor? At Immanuel, our benevolence fund helps out those in need. Do we find ourselves inwardly thinking the benevolence fund is a waste of hard-earned tithe dollars, or desiring to see it grow during hard economic times? Have we reached out to our unemployed brothers and sisters to learn of their needs, or do we unconsciously gravitate towards the prosperous because they don't need as much and can help us? Are you tempted to pride or arrogance?

Second, God's people are judged for religious sins. And here is where they're judged differently than their gentile neighbors. Judah is condemned because "they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray," (2:4). Israel "commanded the prophets" not to prophesy (2:12). They were apparently practicing cult prostitution, which Amos alludes to when he says "a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined" (2:7-8). And they belittled God and people's vows to him, for example by making Nazirites drink wine, something a Nazirite had vowed not to do (2:12).

What we learn here is that **God's election** is not a blank check to irresponsibility, loose moral standards, and presumption. Rather, God's election actually *heightens* one's responsibility to live uprightly before the Lord. Some people reject the doctrine of election because they say it undermines the Christian's responsibility to live a holy life. Well, the prophets don't think so. They see election as something that should weigh heavily on the people's minds, as though to continually say to them "Hey! You've been called out. You've been separated. You've been set apart for a special purpose: to live holy lives in the fear of Yahweh, demonstrating His holiness to all onlookers. Fulfill your high and privileged calling! Be who you are specially called to be!" Election never leads to presumption, but rather great responsibility. God's people have been given his revealed will and so are capable of a greater sin: neglecting God's word. Again, 3:2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your

iniquities.”

In fact, this is the same thing we see in the New Testament. Peter says the same thing to us in **1 Peter 1:15**, “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.” And in **1 Peter 2:9** he says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Paul too tells us that the intended end of predestination is holiness in **Ephesians 1**, “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him (vv.3f).”

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

III. God’s Judges With Justice and With Certainty

God will judge the nations and he will judge his people. Amos also talks about the character and the cause of God’s judgment. In Amos 7-9 we see that God will judge with *certainty* and with *justice*. God gives Amos a series of visions about his judgment. Let’s look at one of them, from Amos 7:7-9.

This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said,

“Behold, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass by them;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

A plumb line is a cord with a weight on the end. A craftsman or an engineer holds one end of the cord; the weight ensures the cord hangs straight up and down. It’s a tool to determine true verticality, used to measure how well built a wall is. In other words, a plumb line is a perfect standard. In this vision, God is measuring Israel against his perfect standard, and finds them wanting. The focus is on the perfection and precision of his judgment.

As Jesus would say in the sermon on the mount, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Because God’s standard is perfection, God justly finds

us wanting and judges us accordingly. In a later passage (Matthew 19) Jesus' disciples rightly despaired about the possibility of salvation, understanding that because God's standard is perfection, salvation is simply impossible for sinful people. How then can we be saved?

IV. God Judges with Mercy

Because, finally, we see that God judges with mercy. Do you remember last week how we talked about the common pattern of accusation, judgment, the call to repentance, and then mercy that the prophets often use? Just as we saw last week, the prophets always end on grace and mercy. No matter how long the accusations and the pronouncements of judgment are, no matter how long the list of offending nations, the prophets always end their message with the promise of salvation.

Amos foreshadows his conclusion earlier in the book. He tells the people how they can escape the coming judgment. And that way is through repentance. Look at 5:14-15.

Seek good, and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,
as you have said.
Hate evil, and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

God even displays his mercy in action. In chapter 7 God gives Amos two visions of judgment — fire and a plague of locusts. Both times Amos cries out and asks God for forgiveness. And both times, the Lord relents. Amos returns to the promise of mercy and salvation at the book's conclusion. He prophesies about the coming day of judgment, the Day of the Lord. God says in 9:11 "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old." This Day is a day of judgment, but this "Day" will also see the restoration of "David's fallen tent," (the division of the kingdom and the exile). Yahweh *will* remember His promises of old, and the people will again taste Yahweh's covenant love. He continues in v14-15,

"I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;

they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
I will plant them on their land,
and they shall never again be uprooted
out of the land that I have given them,”
says the Lord your God.

This is a picture of the new creation after God’s final judgment and Christ’s return, a return to the paradise God always intended for us to enjoy.

Note how these last verses are a reversal of an earlier judgment in 5:11. There, God said:

Therefore because you trample on the poor
and you exact taxes of grain from him,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not dwell in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.

Amos is here saying that those who desire to be rich should seek justice, do righteousness, and put their hope in Christ for the reward to be had in the *coming* world, *not this one*. That’s a theme Jesus later picks up when he tells his followers to store up treasure in heaven and give to the poor on earth.

Finally, we see that God’s mercy extends to all of God’s people, including gentiles. In 9:12 God invites the nations to join his blessing. He promises that restored Israel will “possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by name,” (an echo of Numbers 24:18, in which Balaam makes a similar prophecy). Now, is that “possess” a good thing for the nations? Meaning, they get to share in Israel’s blessing? Or it is the possess of conquer? Well, in **Acts 15** James is speaking to the Council of Jerusalem that is trying to figure out what to make of all the gentiles turning in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remarkably, James quotes this passage from Amos. James is saying that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, David’s house is rebuilt and can be a home for Jew and gentile alike. And now all who repent (just as Amos was preaching) and put their faith in Jesus are included this eschatological salvation.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Obadiah

We saw how Amos 9:12 prophesies that Israel will exercise sovereignty over Edom. Well, the entire book of Obadiah is an extension of that verse. Obadiah is unique in that he is the only prophet we've studied so far to address neither the Northern nor the Southern Kingdoms. Instead, Obadiah's prophesy is directed *entirely* toward the gentile nation of Edom. Edom is significant because their relationship with the covenant people goes a long way back. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, who was Jacob's brother. Edom, is Israel and Judah's national cousin. But what's more important is that Edom has been an *oppressive* cousin and neighbor.¹ So this book is about Yahweh's covenant commitment to defend and vindicate His people's enemies. We could simply summarize Obadiah's message like this:

Yahweh will judge those who arrogantly mistreat His people.

Edom had a long history of arrogantly mistreating the covenant people. You can read about it in Genesis 27:40f, Numbers 20:14-21, 1 Samuel 14, and 2 Samuel 8. And now, Yahweh's longsuffering with them has come to an end. Further, (and this is where we'll get our application), the Day of the Lord, which is a day of reckoning for all nations, is also in view here (v. 15). This makes Edom a type pointing to all the nations of the last days, especially those who would arrogantly mistreat God's people.

Obadiah 1-9. The Sentence: Coming Destruction

God promises to judge Edom repeatedly throughout the first nine verses. "I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised," (v2). "I will bring you down," (v4). "How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out" (v6). "Will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau?" (v8). For their sins, God will judge the nations on the Day of the Lord. "For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head." (v15). Obadiah echoes the message Amos had for all the nations surrounding Israel in Amos 1. All nations and peoples are accountable to God for their actions.

This is especially relevant today. Obadiah was announcing judgment against people that did not know God, did not acknowledge him, and had not place for him in their lives. In other words,

¹Canonically speaking, it's also interesting to point out that Amos ends with the salvation of the remnant of Edom, and Obadiah is a prophesy against Edom. That may explain why Obadiah follows Amos in the Hebrew canon.

people very much like our non-Christian neighbors and co-workers. While we may not want to start sharing the gospel by reading from Obadiah, this warning should ring in our ears and spur some zeal in our evangelism. This is the judgment that awaits our friends who do not know the living God.

Obadiah 10-14: The Charge: Oppressing God's People

Why was God judging Edom? What were their sins? Early in the book God indicts the Edomites specifically for their pride. Verse 3 specifically mentions their pride, and then also their living “in the clefts of the rock,” in a “lofty dwelling.” They lived in the mountains and their capital, Petra, was virtually impregnable. Thus they believed they were unconquerable. So they taunted, “Who can bring me down to the ground?” Well, in verse 4, Yahweh says that He will bring them down, exactly because of how highly they regard themselves.²

But God promises judgment *primarily* because Edom oppressed God's people. This is an interesting addition to the prophets' messages. We saw in Amos that the pagan nations were judged for general cruelty and God's people are judged for apostasy. Now we have one entire book of the Bible especially and specifically written to announce judgment on a pagan nation for how it treated God's people. The message is that God cares for his own. Look at **verses 10-11**. “Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.” And he goes on for another few verses about how Edom either stood by passively while others oppressed God's people, or actively took part in the oppression. As I just mentioned, there are a number of examples of Edom's violence against the covenant people, so it's hard to say which exactly is being referred to here.³ But it doesn't really matter. What matters is that God cares for his people. He will protect them. He will come to their aid and vindicate them. For the oppressor, the day of reckoning is coming. They cannot forever mistreat Yahweh's people.

Have you ever been persecuted? Discouraged? Mocked for your faith? Have you lived in a country where preaching the word of God was illegal? Did your family shun you when you converted and put your trust in Christ? God knows, and cares—and he will vindicate you in the end. He is your protector.

²The use of the word “despised” in verse 2 is an example of ironic justice in light Genesis 25:34. There Esau “despised” his birthright, and in so doing despised the covenant. He “despised” Yahweh, and so Yahweh will make his descendants “despised.”

³For a few possibilities, see footnote 4.

Obadiah 17-21: The Result: The Establishment of God's Kingdom

We see this more clearly as the book ends. It's a day of salvation and vindication for the once persecuted people of God. Obadiah prophesies that the land of Edom will be peopled by God's people and the land will become part of God's kingdom. "Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau," (v19), "Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's" (v21). In the end, God's people are vindicated; God triumphs; and his salvation of his people is completed.

I'm reminded again about the New Testament's teachings about Christ's return, the final Day of the Lord. The book of Revelation, for example, is a sustained vision of Christ's universal kingship and God's ultimate victory over sin, death, and hell. Or in **2 Thessalonians 1:6-9** we read "God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."

Until that day though, Jesus also gives us direction about how to handle our persecutors and enemies. In **Matthew 5:44** we read, "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Next we'll look at Jonah and Micah. One is a popular story – in fact so popular and so well known that the main theological point is often overlooked. The other is a little known prophet – but one who preaches a powerful message that adds considerably to our understanding of Old Testament hope.

Even though Jonah comes before Micah in your Bibles, we're actually going to look at Micah first. Why? Because in so many ways Jonah is a foil to Micah. The things the Israelites are doing that Micah rails against are exactly the things that Jonah does – and that the pagan, non-Israelites in Jonah repent of. Looking at the themes of Micah and then applying them to Jonah should help us get beyond the familiarity of Jonah's story into his message of judgment and mercy. That is, judgment to Israel and mercy to her enemies.

One key theme in both of these books is that God's salvation is for *all peoples*. Not just the Jews.

Micah

That said, let's jump right to Micah. In the historical timeline, Micah is the latest of the Minor Prophets we've seen so far. Incidentally, if you haven't done so already, open up Micah and follow along. Even if I'm not quoting verses directly, keeping your finger roughly in the same place in the book I'm speaking from will help you piece it together. In chapter 1, verse 1, you see the names of kings who reigned during Micah's ministry. Even though those are all Judean kings, Micah's prophecy concerns both kingdoms. And a lot goes on during Micah's time, there at the end of the 8th century. As the book opens, Assyria is about to invade Israel. By the end, this invasion is complete with the Northern Kingdom conquered, scattered, and completely annihilated. The South will remain, but for a time it looked like the Assyrians would do the same to them. Just to give you some bearings, this is also the time of the prophet Isaiah.

This invasion and dispersion of the northern tribes is of course a major theological conundrum. Those are Yahweh's people. Is He casting them off? Is He not fulfilling His end of the covenant? Well of course the answer to those questions is "no." This isn't Yahweh's fault. Micah's message is that this judgment wouldn't have happened if Israel had kept her end of the covenant. And there's still hope if she'll repent. But since she won't, Micah's message flashes to the future. He predicts a day when a remnant of Israel will be saved through a future King in the line of David.

We can summarize the main point of Micah like this:

God will judge all people; yet he will save a remnant through a future King.

Even though Israel is lost, hope is not lost. You can hear in that theme sentence that Yahweh is still committed to saving His people. But not every single individual of Israel will be saved. Only "the remnant" will. Now, as we've gone through the minor prophets, the so-called "book of twelve," we've pointed out where new themes emerge. The theme of divorce that emerges first in Hosea, of the Day of the Lord starts in Joel. Though the idea of a remnant has been mentioned once already — in Amos — it's in Micah that it really comes into its own as a major theme. And it will continue as a major theme through the rest of these prophets. Basically, the remnant is those who will still be saved even after the fall of the North and the South. And that remnant is defined as those who repent. It's really as simple as that. The two nations are cast off, but those who repent will make up the returning, saved, remnant. And this salvation will be accomplished by the great and final coming King. So it's important to see that right here, in Micah, we're seeing another significant piece of foundation being laid for the New Testament. As Paul will later write, "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." And, as will be foreshadowed in Jonah, the remnant will eventually be expanded to include even those not ethnically descended

from Israel. So when, suddenly, promises made to the ethnic people of Israel are fulfilled in the New Testament through the church, do we cry foul? Charge God with “replacement theology?” No! The prophets have been preparing us, starting with Micah, for this very idea.

Style

One quick note about Micah before we move into the text itself. He’s a masterful writer. He’s got great rhetorical skills, using word play, powerful images, and a sharp wit. But much of his style and sophistication is lost in translation. For example, there’s a passage at the end of chapter 1 where Micah proclaims a series of woes on towns throughout Judah that appears fairly dull in English. But Micah is doing two things there. First, the towns Micah mentions trace the route Sennacherib would take as his army marched towards Jerusalem in 701 BC. Second, each woe he proclaims is, in Hebrew, a word-play or a pun on the name of the town. We might get a similar flavor if someone said “You cannot *wash* the corruption out of *Washington*,” or “Sin is nothing *new* in *New York*.” In other words, sin is intrinsic to these people. To get the full sense of Micah’s writing, you might read this book with the help of a good commentary or introduction, like the one in the ESV Study Bible or Dillard and Longman’s Introduction to the Old Testament.

So what is Micah about?

I. God wants wrongs to be rebuked

First, Micah wants us to know that God wants wrongs to be rebuked. Israel and Judah were marked by sin. Micah condemns a host of social and economic sins, including covetousness, theft, fraud (2:2), dishonest scales (6:11), bribery (3:11), deceit (6:12), violence and bloodshed (6:12 and 3:10). He also condemns religious sins, including witchcraft (5:12), idolatry (1:5-7), an unwillingness to heed the Lord, and a desire to listen to false teachers (2:6, 11). At root, this sin is a matter of the heart. “you... hate the good and love the evil” (3:2). Israel violated her covenant with God by deliberate apostasy and in the way she lived out that apostasy. Socially, economically, politically. She treated God’s word with disdain. Chapter 2, verse 11: “If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, ‘I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,’ he would be the preacher for this people!” Picking prophets based on how optimistic their outlook was. That’s where things had gone.

So God will judge. Publicly and severely. Chapter 1, verse 3:

For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place,
and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth.
And the mountains will melt under him,
and the valleys will split open,
like wax before the fire,
like waters poured down a steep place.
All this is for the transgression of Jacob
and for the sins of the house of Israel...
Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country,
a place for planting vineyards,
and I will pour down her stones into the valley
and uncover her foundations.

When God comes, he doesn't skip lightly; the earth is crushed beneath him. His judgment is powerful. And it is personal. This wrath isn't some unfortunate consequence of his justice that he's kind of embarrassed about. He delights in showing wrong to be wrong and himself to be right.

So if you're one who puzzles over God's wrath and the idea of hell, let me assure you on the testimony of passages like this: God's wrath is real. He has a capacity for wrath and is committed to responding to our sin in wrath. How much does God hate sin? Jesus' death shows the extent to which God was willing to go in order to deal with it.

As a result, we should take the warnings in the Bible *very* seriously. This was a *real* judgment Israel endured, and so will ours. No one should be complacent in their religion. The stern warnings in the Bible are one of God's gracious means to preserve our faith. Read Micah as a warning not to play fast and loose with sin. It will enslave us. And it is deadly.

[Take Questions]

II. God wants his people to be restored

God wants sin rebuked and punished, but he also wants his people restored. That's the second major theme in Micah. Micah concludes each passage of judgment with a passage of hope for salvation and mercy. For example, in 4:6-8 he says,

In that day, declares the Lord,
I will assemble the lame

and gather those who have been driven away
and those whom I have afflicted;
and the lame I will make the remnant,
and those who were cast off, a strong nation;
and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion
from this time forth and forevermore.
And you, O tower of the flock,
hill of the daughter of Zion,
to you shall it come,
the former dominion shall come,
kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.

Judgment ends with perfect judgment of sin. But in that judgment, God graciously elects to save a remnant, a small portion of people set apart to be his own. For these people he promises justice but also mercy. He promises salvation. He promises to restore them to their land. God fulfilled this prophesy in part by bringing Judah back from their exile in Babylon.

But God promises an even more profound salvation. Micah points forward to a more final and lasting salvation in the central passage of the book. In Micah 5:1-5 God promises a “ruler in Israel” who will come from Bethlehem and “stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.” Who is this king? None other than God himself become man.

III. God wants his character to be known

Finally, a third theme in Micah: God wants to be known. He judges sin and shows mercy *in order* to display his character and be glorified and acknowledged by all. We see this in three ways.

First, God wants his character to be known through the acknowledgment of his supremacy. Micah says in 4:1-3,

It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;
and peoples shall flow to it,

and many nations shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”

Both Jew and Gentile come to God’s mountain seek to walk in his paths. And so God’s redemptive plan ends with people from all nations acknowledging and rejoicing in his supremacy.

Second, God wants his character known through the remembrance of his righteousness. In chapter 6 God recounts his many acts of blessing and salvation towards Israel, starting with their deliverance from Egypt and slavery, the provision of leadership in Moses and Aaron, their triumph over enemies and entrance into the promised land. This is why we talk about redemptive history. There is a long story of God redeeming his people, and we can glorify God and show forth his character by retelling the story. This is one of the ways in which God makes himself known.

Last, God wants his character known through the demonstration of his mercy. We saw in the previous section how God wants his people restored; God’s restoration goes so far that he even promises to forgive sin. Micah says in 7:18-20 “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.”

If you think about it, those are perhaps the three big themes that underlie the Christian gospel. A just God who claims to forgive sin, that he might be glorified. If you’re looking for a different perspective on the gospel that holds those great truths high, Micah is a great place to start.

Conclusion

So how do we take hold of these promises? How do we become part of this remnant? We repent of our sins. As Micah says, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

But, of course, the danger for God’s people is always that they *presume* their inclusion in God’s family instead of doing the hard work of repenting. And with that problem in mind, let’s turn back to Jonah.

[Take Questions]

Jonah

Context

With a reference to Jonah in 2 Kings 14:25, we're able to place his ministry during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel in the early to mid-8th century BC. That timing is significant because Jonah is called to preach to the Assyrians. And the mid-8th century BC is just before Israel is invaded by Assyria. So at this point in time, Assyria has been Israel's perpetual enemy for some time. And that's the dynamic that sits under this book. Assyria is Israel's enemy. Jonah doesn't like the Assyrians. But Jonah's called to preach to them (incidentally tying Jonah, Nahum, and part of Micah together in their focus on the Assyrians). To make matters worse, it seems Jonah may have been accustomed to a very different type of prophecy. The reference in 2 Kings 14 has Jonah prophesying expanding its borders at the expense of its enemies. How humiliating to now turn and preach to the benefit of those very enemies.

Redemptive-Historically, Jonah is similar to the other Minor Prophets we've looked at so far. But what Jonah adds to the story is the emphasis that Yahweh is God over all the nations, not just the covenant people, and that He saves both Jew and Gentile. Now, these things are taught in other books too. But in Jonah it's really emphasized. What this helps us see is that in all this talk about God's wrath on the Day of the LORD, Yahweh's desire is primarily to save. And even to save from among the Gentile nations. He is a God of grace and mercy. The book of Jonah shows how positively active He is in saving people, pursuing them with grace even when they don't know it.

The story of Jonah and the whale is so well known that we often miss the theological point. We make that exciting story the focal point, rather than seeing that that story is but the vehicle to convey a very important message. And that message is that God's mercy is profound and extends to all his people from every tribe and language and people on earth.

Historicity

One quick note on the historicity of the book. Is Jonah a true story? The story is often dismissed as a parable or a fable because of how fantastic it sounds. But it's nothing like the parables Jesus tells in the Gospels, or like the fables of Aesop. It's long — an entire book of the Bible. It's detailed, populated with life-like characters, and set in an identifiable, historical place and time (8th Century BC Nineveh). And, more importantly, Jesus treated it as an historical happening.

Let's now step through the book chapter by chapter and look for the theme of God's mercy, even mercy to the gentiles.

Jonah 1

In chapter 1 God calls Jonah to preach to Ninevah. Instead, Jonah flees, boarding a vessel headed to Tarshish. God sends a storm. We should note the contrast between the pagan sailors and Jonah. The pagans fear the wind and storm and begin praying, while Jonah sleeps. Conscience-stricken, the sailors resist throwing Jonah into the sea, while Jonah, volunteering to jump into the raging ocean, is most likely suicidal. The sailors ask God for mercy as they throw Jonah overboard. Then the sailors "feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows." (1:16) In stark contrast to Jonah who at the beginning of chapter 1 ran away from the Lord (1:3). So who's following the Lord? The Israelite Jonah? Or the pagan sailors? Irony abounds, and it's a theme that will come to full maturity in the New Testament book of Acts. The book of Jonah is already telling us that God deals with the Gentiles, that in his mercy he enables some to fear Him, presumably to come to know him, and even show some traits of godliness.

The chapter ends as the sailors throw Jonah overboard and God provided "a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." (1:17).

Jonah 2

From inside the fish Jonah repents and prays to God. Note that he praises God for saving him from drowning, even while he is still in the belly of the fish. Jonah knows that even if he is going to die in the fish, he must still acknowledge God's goodness and mercy. He has been well and truly humbled. "I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple." he says in 2:4. Jonah knows he's been punished, yet he humbly seeks God's forgiveness. "with the voice of thanksgiving [I] will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" Jonah prays (2:9). Here, and here alone in the book, Jonah recognizes with gladness that God is a God of mercy.

Jonah 3

In chapter 3 Jonah fulfills God's command and preaches to Nineveh. It's interesting that Jonah only preaches about God's impending judgment. He doesn't explicitly command the Assyrians to repent of their sin, nor does he offer the possibility that judgment could be averted. Yet again the pagan nations outshine God's prophet and the Assyrians respond immediately with repentance. "And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them." (3:5) In fact, the King of Assyria, who only heard the message secondhand, did the same thing himself, verse 6 tells us. He issued a proclamation calling on the people to fast and "call out mightily to God" and "turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." "Who knows?" he says, "God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." Note the contrast to Jonah — he only repented of his sin after God sent a raging storm and caused a fish to swallow him for three days. Yet the Gentiles of Assyria repent after an unknown foreigner preaches a single sermon. The King of Assyria understands God's mercy better than Jonah himself, and is a better example of repentance and humility.

Jonah 4

Chapter 4 is the climax of the book, and drives home the book's theological message. Let's look at the **first few verses** together.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Isn't that amazing? Jonah originally fled because *he knew* that if he went and preached, and they repented that Yahweh would spare them! We often think that he fled because he was scared of what the Assyrians would do to him if he approached them. Not true. What he was afraid of was *Yahweh's mercy*! He didn't want the Assyrians to benefit from it! He knew Exodus 34:6 which he quotes here. "for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." In chapter 2 he rightly humbled himself and accepted God's judgment and his mercy. Now he's reverting and arrogantly trying to decide to whom God should be merciful to whom he should judge. And God's response is much of the point of the book. No matter

how corrupt the Ninevites are, no matter how disobedient Jonah is, no matter any situation with winds, waves, and fish, if Yahweh has set His grace upon someone *nothing* can stop it! He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

God's response is in the form of a living parable: a plant grows up to give Jonah shade as he sits on the mountain side, and then God kills it. God's explanation? verses **9-11**.

But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

And with that, the book abruptly ends. The story is meant to show Jonah how he too ought to be as zealous as God for the salvation of other peoples. To be God's people is to care for the nations the way He does.

Conclusion and Application

Jonah reminds us that God cares about all people. There isn't any nation that's outside the pale or beyond God's salvation. Jonah assumed God's covenant was exclusively for one people; his story and his book are great testaments to the universality of God's message. This is the great message of Jonah 3: God intends his word to spread globally, and he will bring people to himself from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

And if God cares about all peoples, Christians should too. This is the single most important application point from the book of Jonah. As Mark Dever has said, "God has always been more committed to reaching the world than his own people have been." We should care about seeing God's word spread throughout the nations, and that care and concern should translate into evangelism and missions. Jesus commanded his disciples — and that includes you, Christian — to "go and make disciples of all nations," (Matthew 28:19). It should be normal for Christians to pray for the growth of the church in other nations; to give money to support missions in other nations; to go and help plant churches in other nations. Our work spreading the gospel should be international and global to reflect the universality of God's dominion. And our fellowship with believers from other countries will be a powerful, visible, counter-cultural testimony of God's work in our lives.

Of course, we should not miss the humbling message of this book. Who are we? The humble Assyrian king? No — we are the reluctant prophet Jonah. We are God's people, we are called to take a message of mercy to those who haven't heard, we are those who are so slow to go. And we are those who too often seem more occupied with our own comfort than God's great plans to show his mercy to the nations. Read Jonah with this in mind and walk his humbling road.

This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/old-testament-overview/>