

Lesson 41: Crazy for God, The Minor Prophets, pt. 4

In this lesson, we wrap up our study on the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are probably the least understood and probably the least read in the Bible. Yet their prophecies had a great impact on Christianity as well as the world, and there is much that we can and should learn from the Minor Prophets.

Today, we'll finish up with Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Obadiah, Zechariah and Zephaniah. And let me say that looking at a subject like the minor prophets—you're probably ready to check out right now...but please, hang in there. We have much to learn from guys like Jonah and Zechariah. Their words and writings are meant for today, maybe more than any other time in history. So stay with me. This is not a long lesson, but its very important that you hear the message of the Minor Prophets.

A. Jonah

The Book of Jonah recounts the trials and tribulations of a hot-tempered Israelite prophet living in the 8th century BC. Jonah was somewhat unusual because he was a popular prophet. And the reason why he was popular was because he foretold good things for Israel. At the story's onset, God tells Jonah to go to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh to declare that God will destroy it for its many sins.

Jonah 1:1-6 (GW)

¹ The LORD spoke his word to Jonah, son of Amittai. He said,

² "Leave at once for the important city, Nineveh. Announce to the people that I can no longer overlook the wicked things they have done."

³ Jonah immediately tried to run away from the LORD by going to Tarshish. He went to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid for the trip and went on board. He wanted to go to Tarshish to get away from the LORD.

⁴ The LORD sent a violent wind over the sea. The storm was so powerful that the ship was in danger of breaking up.

⁵ The sailors were afraid, and they cried to their gods for help. They began to throw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship's load. Now, Jonah had gone below deck and was lying there sound asleep.

⁶ The captain of the ship went to him and asked, "How can you sleep? Get up, and pray to your God. Maybe he will notice us, and we won't die."

It was particularly difficult then when Jonah was sent to Nineveh to warn that city of coming judgment. Jonah was unwilling to go and he instead hires a boat and goes west away from Nineveh. On the way, however, God sends a violent storm that threatens to destroy the ship.

Let's continue in Jonah 1:7-16 (GW)

⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Let's throw dice to find out who is responsible for bringing this disaster on us." So they threw dice, and the dice indicated that Jonah was responsible.

⁸ They asked him, "Tell us, why has this disaster happened to us? What do you do for a living? Where do you come from? What country are you from? What nationality are you?"

⁹ Jonah answered them, "I'm a Hebrew. I worship the LORD, the God of heaven. He is the God who made the sea and the land."

¹⁰ Then the men were terrified. They knew that he was running away from the LORD, because he had told them. They asked Jonah, “Why have you done this?”

¹¹ The storm was getting worse. So they asked Jonah, “What should we do with you to calm the sea?”

¹² He told them, “Throw me overboard. Then the sea will become calm. I know that I'm responsible for this violent storm.”

¹³ Instead, the men tried to row harder to get the ship back to shore, but they couldn't do it. The storm was getting worse.

¹⁴ So they cried to the LORD for help: “Please, LORD, don't let us die for taking this man's life. Don't hold us responsible for the death of an innocent man, because you, LORD, do whatever you want.”

¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the sea became calm.

¹⁶ The men were terrified of the LORD. They offered sacrifices and made vows to the LORD.

Eventually, Jonah admits to the sailors that he is to blame for the storm, and that if they want to survive, they must throw him overboard. The sailors, not wanting to harm Jonah, try rowing to shore, but this fails. With no other recourse, the sailors pray to Jonah's God for forgiveness, and then heave-ho.

Jonah, now in the middle of the ocean without a life preserver, begins to drown. In desperation, he cries out to God, who hears his pleas and sends a big fish. Jonah remains in the whale for days, after which God tells the sea creature to vomit Jonah out onto dry land, which it does. Jonah must've smelled pretty awful, and God then repeats His command to go to Nineveh.

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you’” ([Jonah 3:1-2](#)). This time, there is no arguing from Jonah, who, although he may be complying on the outside, is still stubbornly disobeying on the inside. But this time around, Jonah obeys God and heads for Nineveh.

When Jonah enters Nineveh, **he** again mentioned the great size of the **city**, commenting that **it took him three days to go all through it**, that is, through Nineveh and its suburbs. After that, he doesn't waste any time and begins declaring God's message: “In 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed.” Yet, rather than kill Jonah for his threat, the Assyrians repent. And not just a few of them, but everyone, including the king and even the animals. Seeing their repentance, God also “repents,” forgiving the Assyrians for their many sins.

This does not suit our friend Jonah at all and he flies into a fury at God and lets Him have no small piece of his mind. Let's read **Jonah 4:1-3 (GW)**

¹ Jonah was very upset about this, and he became angry.

² So he prayed to the LORD, “LORD, isn't this what I said would happen when I was still in my own country? That's why I tried to run to Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, patient, and always ready to forgive and to reconsider your threats of destruction.

³ So now, LORD, take my life. I'd rather be dead than alive.”

God's answer is to cause a leafy gourd to grow up to help protect Jonah from the blazing sun, for which Jonah is somewhat sullenly grateful. Let's read:

Jonah 4:5-6 (GW)

⁵ Jonah left the city and sat down east of it. He made himself a shelter there. He sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

⁶ The LORD God made a plant grow up beside Jonah to give him shade and make him more comfortable. Jonah was very happy with the plant.

But then, God promptly removes the plant the next day, to which he has to listen to more "woe is me" complaining from Jonah.

Jonah 4:7-8 (GW)

⁷ At dawn the next day, God sent a worm to attack the plant so that it withered.

⁸ When the sun rose, God made a hot east wind blow. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he was about to faint. He wanted to die. So he said, "I'd rather be dead than alive."

Here is God's response to Jonah's bitter complaints:

Jonah 4:9-11 (GW)

⁹ Then God asked Jonah, "What right do you have to be angry over this plant?" Jonah answered, "I have every right to be angry—so angry that I want to die."

¹⁰ The LORD replied, "This plant grew up overnight and died overnight. You didn't plant it or make it grow. Yet, you feel sorry for this plant.

¹¹ Shouldn't I feel sorry for this important city, Nineveh? It has more than 120,000 people in it as well as many animals. These people couldn't tell their right hand from their left."

God's response to Jonah's bitter complaints about the loss of his source of shade is that if Jonah can have so much compassion on himself for his loss of comfort in spite of being aware of what a wretched person he is. If he can care so much for a gourd that grows up overnight and provides him with shade, how much more compassion will Almighty God have on a people who are utterly ignorant of right from wrong?

God's point is that Jonah cares more about seeing people get what's coming to them, than seeing them turn from their wrong ways and receive forgiveness. Even the pagan sailors tried to save Jonah's life, and showed more compassion toward this foreigner than he is willing to show the Ninevites. God, thankfully, is not like Jonah.

The lesson here for all of us is that we are all too often possessed with a short fuse and want those around us to experience God's judgment and punishment, and we ignore the fact our God is a God of grace and mercy and He is longsuffering. His desire is to bring as many to repentance as possible.

B. Micah.

The Bible for Dummies tells us that Micah, like Isaiah, Hosea and Amos, prophesied during the 8th century. And like his contemporary Amos, Micah chastises the urban elite for exploiting the poor. In what is one of the most famous passages in the book Micah asks if he should perform sacrifices to God. The response he receives gets to the heart of the matter:

Micah 6:8 (ESV)

⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

The book of Micah provides one of the most significant prophecies of Jesus Christ's birth in all the Old Testament, pointing some seven hundred years before Christ's birth to His birthplace of Bethlehem and to His eternal nature ([Micah 5:2](#)).

Micah 5:2 (ESV)

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

The chief priests and teachers of the law understood this to be a reference to the birth of the Messiah, which was given over 500 yrs before the birth of Yeshua, Jesus, the Son of David.

Much of Micah's indictment against Israel and Judah involves these nations' injustice toward the lowly—unjust business dealings, robbery, mistreatment of women and children, and a government that lived in luxury off the hard work of its nation's people.

Where does the injustice dwell in your own life? Who are the lowly in your life? Do you need a call toward repentance, like the people of Israel and Judah did?

We need to allow the words of Micah to break us out of our apathy about extending justice and kindness to others and press on toward a world that better resembles the harmonious millennial kingdom to come. Let's determine to live as God desires—"to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God" ([Micah 6:8](#)).

C. Nahum

The Hebrew name "Nahum" means "comfort" or "consolation." The theme of the prophecy is the fate and destruction of Nineveh, the one-time capital city of the mighty Assyrian empire, which had destroyed Israel and taken many inhabitants of the land captive (722 B.C.).

While the book of Jonah records Nineveh's reprieve, Nahum predicts its destruction.

The purpose of Nahum is to pronounce the final warning and judgment upon Nineveh, and he also addresses the rest of the Assyrian empire. They returned to wickedness shortly after they repented back in Jonah's day. They would neglect Nahum and his message.

Within fifty years, Nineveh would be completely decimated and utterly wiped from the face of the Earth.

So, where in the book of Nahum is a message of comfort? In Nahum 3:19, we read this:

Nahum 3:19

There is no relief for your collapse. Your wound is fatal. All who hear the news about you will clap their hands. Who hasn't suffered from your endless evil?

In other words, God's judgment on Nineveh would bring great comfort and joy to all the surrounding nations because they had suffered at the hands of the Assyrians.

After allowing approximately two hundred years of powerful Assyrian kings and rulers, God announced through Nahum His plans to judge the city of Nineveh. While the book as a whole clearly shows God's concern over sin, His willingness to punish those guilty of wickedness, and His power to carry out His desire for judgment, it also contains rays of hope shining through the darkness. Most significant, the people of Judah would have immediately taken hope in the idea that Nineveh, their primary oppressor for generations, would soon come under judgment from God.

Have you ever found your will to do what's right weakening as you became discouraged with what you saw in your life and in the world around you? The prophet Nahum reminds us that God is at work and He's still on His throne, working even in the darkest of times to bring justice and hope throughout the world.

D. Obadiah

This is the shortest book in the OT, only 21 verses. Now you might wonder why Obadiah is so important? Why is it even in the Bible? It's only 21 verses.

The majority of the book pronounces judgment on the foreign nation of Edom, making Obadiah one of only three prophets who pronounced judgment primarily on other nations. Obadiah's name, meaning "worshipper of Yahweh."

Obadiah's singular focus points to a significant truth about humanity's relationship with God: when people remove themselves from or place themselves in opposition to God's people, they can expect judgment, rather than restoration, at the end of life. The message of Obadiah is true for us today. Any nation or people group that sets itself against the Jews, the nation of Israel, is spitting in the face of God and will incur the wrath and judgment of God.

It was no accident that God sent a man named "worshipper of Yahweh" to the people of Edom. Edom had been found guilty of pride before the Lord ([Obadiah 1:3](#)). They had thought themselves greater than they actually were; great enough to mock, steal from, and even harm God's chosen people. But the "Lord GOD," a name Obadiah used to stress God's sovereign power over the nations, will not stand idly by and let His people suffer forever (1:1). Through Obadiah, God reminded Edom of their poor treatment of His people (1:12–14) and promised redemption, not to the Edomites but to the people of Judah.

Obadiah 1:3-4 (GW)

³ Your arrogance has deceived you. You live on rocky cliffs. You make your home up high. You say to yourself, 'No one can bring me down to earth.'

⁴ Even though you fly high like an eagle and build your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there," declares the LORD.

The Edomites lived up in the clefts of the rock carved out of the side of a mountain. The area in Jordan known as Petra was their home. They'll felt like the eagles who found nest up on high in these rocks, and like the eagle, they thought they could soar above their enemies with impunity.

Even though the nation of Edom was descended from Esau and were blood relatives of Israel, God reminded them through the prophet Obadiah, God reminded them that their poor treatment of His people would not go unpunished. The nation of Edom would eventually disappear into history, remains one of the prime examples of the truth found in [Proverbs 16:18](#): "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling."

Obadiah's prophecy focuses on the destructive power of pride. It reminds us of the consequences of living in a self-serving manner, of following through on our own feelings and desires without considering their impact on those around us. Do you struggle to set aside your own wants and desires for those of God and others? Though such pride has been part of the lives of fallen human beings since the tragedy of the fall in Eden, Obadiah offers us a stark reminder to place ourselves under God's authority, to subject our appetites to His purposes, and to find our hope in being His people when the restoration of all things comes.

E. Zechariah

Zechariah was Haggai's contemporary, and like him, admonishes the people to rebuild the Temple. Moreover, Zechariah envisions a day when a Davidic king would once again rule over Israel. He even predicts that the then governor, Zerubbabel, would one day be king, and that the High Priest, Joshua, would also wear a crown of leadership. All of this pointed to a day of future blessing, when God would fully restore Jerusalem.

Zechariah 1:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Cry out again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem."

Zechariah offers several visions, and one vision is a shepherd who is paid 30 pieces of silver for his services. This passage would later be associated with the price Judas receives for betraying Jesus.

For a people newly returned from exile, Zechariah provided specific prophecy about their immediate and distant future—no doubt a great encouragement. Their nation would still be judged for sin (5:1–11), but they would also be cleansed and restored (3:1–10), and God would rebuild His people (1:7–17).

Zechariah concluded his book by looking into the distant future, first at the rejection of the Messiah by Israel (9:1–11:17), and then at His eventual reign when Israel will finally be delivered (12:1–14:21).

In a second vision, Zechariah sees a day when the Messiah would come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. The New Testament writers portray Jesus as fulfilling this prophecy when, during his Triumphal Entry, he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey on what is now celebrated as Palm Sunday.

While the book of Zechariah contains its share of judgments on the people of Judah and beyond, it overflows with hope in the future reign of the Lord over His people. It's easy to get caught up in the oftentimes depressing events of day-to-day life, to lose our perspective and live as people without hope. The book of Zechariah serves as a correction for that tendency in our lives. We have a hope that is sure and in this day in age when nothing is nailed down, that's very refreshing and encouraging!

F. Zephaniah

Zephaniah was active in Judah during the reign of King Josiah, around 640-609 BC.

According to 2 Kings, Judah was involved in unprecedented idolatry and apostasy before Josiah's reforms which helped to explain why the major theme of Zephaniah is the coming of the "day of the Lord," when God would judge the world, including Judah for its wrongdoing. Zephaniah wrote that the day of the Lord was near (1:14), that it would be a time a wrath (1:15), that it would come as judgment on sin (1:17),

Zephaniah 1:17 (GW)

¹⁷ "I will bring such distress on humans that they will walk like they are blind, because they have sinned against the LORD." Their blood will be poured out like dust and their intestines like manure.

And this would ultimately result in the blessing of God's presence among His people (3:17).

Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Yet, through the gloomy clouds of judgment, He will restore the people of Israel and they will be praised among all the peoples of the earth.

The book of Zephaniah follows a pattern of judgment on all people for their sin followed by the restoration of God's chosen people. Zephaniah's primary target for God's message of judgment, the nation of Judah, had fallen into grievous sin under the reign of their king, Manasseh. Zephaniah's prophecy shouted out for godliness and purity in a nation sinful to its core. The people of Judah had long since turned their backs on God, not only in their personal lives but also in their worship. This reflected the depth of their sin and the deep need for God's people to be purged on their path to restoration.

So what is our take-away from all this? As believers in the 21st century, we, too, make a mockery of worship when we live in open sin. Do you come before the Lord with a false face, week in and week out, looking the part without acting it? If so, then allow Zephaniah to remind you how seriously God takes

your life and your relationship with Him. And if you have failed, remember the message of [Zephaniah 3](#)—God is always a God of restoration and hope.

Next Lesson 42: God Foretold the Birth of John and Jesus
