



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Obadiah/Jonah/Micah

LEADERS GUIDE

The prophet Micah looks on as the Holy Spirit, in bodily form as a dove, descends upon the Virgin Mary. “From you,” the Lord declares through the prophet, “shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel” (Micah 5:2). The Flemish master Hubert van Eyck has added Mary’s reply to the angel upside down as though it were written for the heavenly host. “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38), she says, with world-changing humility. So we see what a major contribution these so-called Minor Prophets make to the unfolding wonders of God’s salvation. (*The Prophet Micah and the Virgin Annunciate, detail from the exterior of the left wing of the Ghent Altarpiece, St. Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium.*)



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Cover: The Ghent Altarpiece (1425–32), Hubert van Eyck, detail. Iberfoto / Iberfoto

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 8.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 55.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 55);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and who desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week.

Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another 5 minutes before dismissal.

In some places, some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxx-cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

The Day of the Lord Is Near

Obadiah

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God's power and grace are seen in His reign on behalf of His people. He brings judgment upon those—like the Edomites—who reject Him, and He restores those who are His.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. appreciate God's rule over all the nations;
2. stand in awe of God's judgments upon unrighteousness and unbelief; and
3. humbly trust God's grace toward His people.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Lord God, in Your infinite wisdom and by Your almighty power, You exalt and You make small. Keep us from sinful pride and arrogance that would turn us from You, our only hope and our sure salvation. Forgive us our many sins, and renew us daily through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Like each of the other nine Minor Prophets, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah are distinctly individual in their historical circumstances, messages, and applications. For example, two of these three prophets, Obadiah and Jonah, directed their prophecies toward foreign nations, while Micah's prophetic ministry was focused on the nation of Judah. Yet, like the others, each is divinely inspired and presents God's Law—condemning sin and unbelief—and His Gospel—promising forgiveness and salvation in the coming Messiah, the Christ.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, only one chapter long, a mere twenty-one verses. Its powerful message, however, has proven worthy of much discussion through the centuries and continues to resound to our generation.

The name Obadiah means "servant of the Lord [Yahweh]." It is used of more than a dozen men in the Old Testament. Little is known of the Obadiah who authored the book that bears his name. Some have suggested he is the Obadiah mentioned in 2 Chronicles 17:7, who was among the officials sent out by King Jehoshaphat to revive true worship in the land and instruct the people of Judah in the Law of the Lord. The identification of the person Obadiah immediately brings up the issue of the date of the book. If the Obadiah just mentioned was the author of the book, he would most likely be the earliest of the literary prophets, carrying on his ministry about 850 years before Christ.

Most commentators, including Martin Luther, have opted for a much later date, which would put Obadiah and his prophecy around the time of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 587 BC. Although other commentators would date the book even later—about 400 BC—the dates of 845 and 587 are the two most likely.

The large discrepancy in dating relates to Obadiah's mention of the fall of Jerusalem in verse 11. Most see this as the conquest by the Babylonians. There was, however, an earlier incident in which the Philistines and Arabians plundered Jerusalem, during the reign of King Jehoram (853–841), as recorded in 2 Chronicles 21:16–17 (see also 2 Kings 8:20). In either case, the Lord says to the

Edomites, on that day “you stood aloof” (Obadiah 11). Beyond that, they rejoiced in the despoiling of Jerusalem. Psalm 137:7 relates this to the Babylonian destruction, but given the centuries-old hatred of Edom toward Jerusalem, this does not rule out their doing it at an earlier time as well.

On behalf of the earlier date is the fact that the prophecy of Obadiah is placed among the earlier prophets, and it contains no mention of the total destruction of the temple that took place at the hands of the Babylonians. As we shall see, Jeremiah 49:7–22 strongly parallels the first eleven verses of Obadiah; it is likely that Jeremiah borrowed from the earlier prophecy, just as he did from the prophets Isaiah and Amos who lived before him. Moreover, the book’s brevity seems fitting as the earliest venture into literary prophecy. (While leaning toward this option, this writer is aware of the case made for either side.) The dating changes neither the message nor the people of whom it speaks.

For the most part, Obadiah’s message is directed to and against Edom, a nation located to the southeast of the Dead Sea (also known as the Salt Sea) and to the east of the Great Rift or Wadi Arabah Valley, which extends 100 miles south from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. Protected by desert mountains between 4,000 and 5,000 feet in height and by deep, forbidding gorges, the land was all but impregnable. From lofty heights, the Edomites, like eagles, could destroy and prey upon those who dared to pass below. Through Edom ran the King’s Highway, from Damascus in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south, where caravans could turn west toward Egypt or east toward Arabia and beyond.

When Moses and the Israelites came from Egypt and requested to pass through Edom on their way to the Promised Land, they were refused and instead had to journey about a hundred miles out of their way through harsh, arid lands (Numbers 20:14–21). (Today the impressive ruins of Petra—the city carved into the sandstone cliffs of Edom some time later—remain as one of the most awesome sites in the entire Middle East.)

The hard feelings between Edom and Israel went back into the even more distant past than the time of Moses. The name Edom is a variant from the name Esau, both of which are related to the meaning “red,” as in the red clay or dirt of the land. The people were descendants of Esau, the older twin brother of Jacob, who later became known as Israel. Esau harbored deep feelings of resentment toward Israel, who, instead of Esau, received the blessing from their father, Isaac. Esau had brought this

on himself by his disregard for the blessings that would have been his as the elder of the two brothers.

Although the brothers were eventually reconciled, the subsequent history of their descendants was one of frequent hostility. Because of Edom’s mistreatment of the descendants of Israel, Obadiah predicted doom for the nation of Edom. Eventually, in the first century after Christ, the remnant of Edom was assimilated into the various peoples of the region and lost their national identity.

The history of the relatively small nation of Edom, then, is an account of one nation’s pride bringing about its fall. It is representative of all resentment against God’s plans and against His people, and of God’s eventual judgment against those who oppose His will.

1 Introduction: The Vision of Obadiah (1a)

“The vision of . . .”—or variations thereof—is a common introduction to the books of the Old Testament prophets. We find the same terminology at the beginning of the Book of Isaiah. The prophets Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi use a different word, “oracle.” Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah open their prophetic books with “The word of the LORD that came to Hosea [Joel, Jonah, etc.]”; and Jeremiah and Amos begin with “The words of Jeremiah [Amos].”

Such introductory expressions set the tone for the prophetic books. The prophets spoke words that the Lord inspired them to write. Looking back from the vantage point of the New Testament, the apostle Peter wrote, (2 Peter 1:21) “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

The prophets spoke in the name of the Lord and by His directive. Moreover, guided by the Holy Spirit, what they wrote was inerrant. When we think of prophets, we tend to think immediately in terms of telling the future, and that was certainly the case at times. When they did speak in the Lord’s name of future events, everything they said would come to pass. In the Book of Deuteronomy, God through Moses distinguished true from false prophets: (18:21–22) “And if you [the people] say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.’”

Moreover, much of the prophetic material of the Old Testament Scriptures was not looking to the future but was dealing with issues contemporaneous to their own times. They were the preachers of their days; in fact, the Scriptures mention groups or schools of prophets (see, for example, 1 Samuel 19:18–24), although they must have been quite different than our modern-day seminaries for the training of pastors. In speaking of their own times or of the future, the inspired prophets were always accurate—for they were the spokesmen for God Himself.

2 Edom Will Be Humbled (1b–9)

The text of Obadiah is divided between speeches of the Lord and of the prophet. God's speeches take up verses 2–4, 8–18; Obadiah's speeches cover verses 5–7, 19–21. The sections in which God speaks directly are almost exactly twice the length of the prophet's.

This section opens with "Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom." Expressions such as "thus says the Lord" or "the word of the Lord came" occur more than 2,400 times in the Old Testament, with over half of those occurrences in the writings of the prophets.

Here, the Lord calls on the nations to rise up against Edom. Often throughout history, God has used nations to punish others for their wickedness. Notable examples are His use of wicked Babylon to bring down Judah for its idolatry, and then, in turn, using mighty Persia to bring down Babylon.

The Lord gets to the heart of Edom's sin that calls for her destruction: "the pride of your heart" (v. 3). Secure in her position "in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling," Edom felt she was invincible. No matter how sure people or nations might feel because of their strategic position, wealth, military might, wisdom, or other resources, the almighty God says to the arrogant, "I will bring you down."

Pride is a sin against which Scripture speaks most forcefully, for this sin sets oneself against God and looks to the self rather than the Creator and Savior. Moreover, from pride come a host of other evils: hatred, murder, thievery, and so on. God challenged Job, (Job 40:12) "Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand." And the Lord does bring them low.

Obadiah uses the name Esau as synonymous with Edom, since as mentioned above, the Edomites were descendants of Esau. The name Edom means "red," and

the red (or rose-colored) sandstone cliffs among which the Edomites lived reflected the name and its meaning. In speaking of Esau's descendants in Genesis 36, the text says that Esau settled in the land that would bear his name. It goes on to mention a grandson by the name of Teman.

One of Edom's two major cities took the name Teman (the other chief city and capital was Bozrah). Through Obadiah, the Lord warns, (v. 9) "Your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman."

Teman was also the hometown of one of Job's three friends, Eliphaz (Job 2:11). It is striking that in arguing with Job, Eliphaz assumed a wisdom that he did not really have, and at the end of the Book of Job, God reproved him: (42:7) "the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.'" In Obadiah, God declares, (v. 8) "Will I not . . . destroy the wise men out of Edom?" Edom's wisdom, like its vaunted sense of security, proved to be empty.

The opening nine verses of Obadiah contain strong parallels with the prophet Jeremiah (ch. 49). A few examples will elucidate this:

Obadiah 1: "We have heard a report from the LORD, and a messenger has been sent among the nations."

Jeremiah 49:14: "I have heard a message from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations." (In the Hebrew original, "report" and "message" are the same word, as are "messenger" and "envoy.")

Obadiah 2: "I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised."

Jeremiah 49:15: "I will make you small among the nations, despised among mankind."

Obadiah 4: "Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD."

Jeremiah 49:16: "Though you make your nest as high as the eagle's, I will bring you down from there, declares the LORD."

Readers may wish to compare the sections more thoroughly.

We will make note of another such similarity in our study of Micah—between Micah 4:15 and Isaiah 2:1–5—and comment more on this phenomenon at that point. Such interconnectedness is but one of many features of Scripture that point to its marvelous unity.

Although comprised of sixty-six separate books, the Bible is one book (the word *Bible* means “book”). Unified in message and purpose, the separate books overlap and reinforce one another, with all of them depicting the themes of sin and grace, judgment and salvation in Christ.

3 Edom’s Violence against Jacob (10–14)

The Lord closely connects Edom with Esau: (Obadiah 10) “Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you.” Esau had wanted to kill his brother Jacob, who had to flee for his life. Throughout subsequent centuries, the animosity continued with the descendants of Esau holding an unending grudge against their relatives, the children of Israel (Jacob). In the world of today, we see a similar phenomenon in the animosity between Arabs and Jews—with both people tracing their origins back to Abraham (the Jewish people through his son Isaac, and the Arab people through his son Ishmael). While this goes beyond the scope of biblical interpretation, it is a reminder that people can be at odds for centuries.

In the case of the Edomites, their anger against their blood relatives, the people of Israel, was ultimately against God. The children of Israel were the chosen people, bearers of the promise of the Messiah, the Christ, who would be the Savior of the human race. The central verse of Obadiah (v. 11) expresses the culmination of this hatred: “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.”

In Hebrew literature, the central verse of a book or portion of a book may be a climatic point. We see this in the Book of Job, where in the center of Job’s discourses with his friends, he makes his monumental statement of faith: “I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25). In the central verses of the Song of Solomon, we find the culmination of the love between the man and woman: She says, “Let my beloved come to his garden,” and he responds, “I came to my garden” (4:16–5:1). And in the center of the second half of the Book of Isaiah, we find the magnificent chapter on the Suffering Servant of the Lord—one of the most detailed prophecies of the Christ (Isaiah 52:12–53:12).

In the Obadiah passage, we see the Edomites standing aloof and then even participating in the pillaging of Jerusalem, where the temple of the Lord God stood

on Mount Moriah. Instead of coming to its aid, the Edomites entered Jerusalem to loot it. The expression “cast lots” refers to the dividing of the spoils, and it reminds us how at Jesus’ crucifixion the soldiers cast lots for His robe (John 19:24, in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18). Exactly what was involved in the casting of lots is not certain. Some have suggested that people would remove marked sticks or pebbles from a container into which they had been cast. Whatever the method, the Edomites were using the practice to take part with the enemies of God’s people in dividing the spoils. The Lord warns them, (v. 12) “Do not gloat . . . do not rejoice . . . do not boast.” The day of reckoning would come for the people of Edom. What a warning to all who proudly mock God, His messengers, and His faithful people!

4 The Day of the Lord Is Near (15–18)

“The day of the LORD is near.” Through His prophet Obadiah, God uses this expression or variants thereof a number of times. It is frequently used in the prophets and refers to that time when God will intervene in history. It often is depicted as a day of terrible judgment upon sin and unbelief, as the prophet Joel says, (2:11) “For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?” It can also be a time of comfort for believers, as Joel says elsewhere, (3:18) “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine.”

The New Testament uses expressions such as “the day of Jesus Christ” or “the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:6, 10). This, of course, refers to the day when Christ will return—that is the ultimate and consummate day of the Lord, a day of dread for unbelievers and a day of rejoicing for those who await His coming.

For Edom and all the nations of the world, there is a day that marks their end. Edom met its end already. All will come to an end on Judgment Day. It is always “near” and can come at any time.

Mount Zion (Obadiah 17) is a hill in Jerusalem, often used to represent the entire city, with the temple of the Lord. Jerusalem in turn has come to represent God’s people. There, says the Lord, is escape from danger, “and it shall be holy.” Edom would eventually be swallowed up by Jacob and his descendants—represented here by Joseph.

In subsequent history, Obadiah’s prophecy concerning Edom unfolded. Edom was overrun by the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar’s son Nabonidus around 553/2 BC. A little more than a century after that, the

Arab tribe of Nabataeans drove the Edomites out and built what are now the ruins of Petra. After the conquest of Alexander the Great spread the Greek language, Edom became known as Idumea (a term later used in the New Testament). The Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus defeated them in 185 BC; some time later, Judaism was forced on them. The most famous of the Idumeans was King Herod the Great, who rose to power under the Romans and is notorious for his slaughter of the babies of Bethlehem shortly after Jesus was born.

When the Jews revolted against Rome in AD 70, the Idumeans sided with the Jews and were put down. What few survivors remained were absorbed into the people around them. As God had said through Obadiah: (v. 18) "There shall be no survivor for the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken."

5 The Kingdom of the Lord (19–21)

The closing words of Obadiah are uplifting for God's people. He says people will come from the Negeb (south of Judah) to "possess" Mount Esau and from the Shephelah (Judean foothills) to "possess" the land of the Philistines, and so on; the word "possess" occurs six times here. In other words, God's people will occupy the land. Some ancient rabbis identified Sepharad (v. 20; which is used only here in all of Scripture) as Spain; the label Sephardic Jew (Spanish Jew) derives from this understanding. More likely, it refers to a site somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean world, possibly in Asia Minor, Greece, or even Assyria.

Although ancient Jewish rabbis tended to see this text as designating Jerusalem as the gathering place for all nations, early Christian interpreters such as St. Augustine (354–430) and subsequent commentators have found its fulfillment in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Martin Luther, for example, pointed out that a literal, physical interpretation would contradict Old Testament law, which did not allow for the re-division of the land. Instead of a physical fulfillment, then, the completion of the prophecy is spiritual and points to heaven.

Although Edom—and all unbelievers—meet their day of judgment, (v. 21) "Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." The word "saviors" can also be translated "deliverers." These are the messengers who bring the good news of salvation—the Gospel—to the nations.

They will "rule" or "judge" (it is the word used of the God-appointed leaders in the Book of Judges). The

kingdom is the Lord's. This is the kingdom that God has established through His Son, Jesus. It is not a kingdom of this world but one that lasts forever. This is the kingdom of which we, by God's grace, are a part.

Conclusion

Obadiah is a short book, and Edom was a relatively minor player among the nations of the ancient world. Yet the book and the message are a microcosm of so much more. Obadiah encapsulates God's dealing with all the nations throughout history. The Book of Proverbs sums it up even more succinctly, in a single verse: (14:34) "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

God brings down the haughty and hardened—whether it be individuals or entire countries. What a warning this is in our own day as we see our great nation so stubbornly turn from even the most basic moral principles that had been such a part of her gloried past. (Proverbs 16:18) "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Like any other, our civilization is not immune to the judgment of God.

Obadiah is also a reminder that amid the most tumultuous and troubled times, God is with His people. He will never leave us nor forsake us. Although the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, God is with His people.

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 2.

Arise, Go to Nineveh

Jonah 1

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God is everywhere. It is foolish to try to flee from Him. Rather than running from the Lord, we can find comfort in knowing that He is always there for His people.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. accept their roles as workers in God's kingdom;
2. follow God's guidance in their lives; and
3. recognize the need for regular study of the Scriptures.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

O Lord, salvation belongs to You, and You alone! You have given us the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to all nations. How often we, like Jonah, have wanted to flee rather than to serve. Forgive us our indifference, cowardice, and prejudice. Embolden us by Your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Jonah stands as one of the earlier of the Minor Prophets, close in time to Elijah and his successor Elisha, two of the greatest Old Testament prophets. Although their actions and words are recorded in the Scriptures, they themselves were not literary prophets. That is, they did not put their prophecies into writing. Coming shortly after their time, Jonah was like them in that the book bearing his name may well have not been written by him. Rather, it is about him. Although tradition has ascribed the book to Jonah himself, it is written in the third-person (he) rather than the first-person voice (I). Because of strong similarities to the histories of Elijah and Elisha, some have suggested that it came from the same line of sources that wrote their accounts. Whether written by Jonah or not, the book stands outside the other literary prophets. One may conclude that, rather than being a book *by* him, Jonah is a book *about* him.

The name Jonah means "dove," and it has been pointed out that Jonah had a passive (dovelike) nature. He did not want to confront the people of Nineveh; on the ship, he invited the others to throw him overboard; he was ready to die when things did not go his way. Yet he also had a willful, stubborn nature, and he was willing to try to escape the call of God Almighty. In the various aspects of his personality, Jonah showed himself to be complex, conflicted, and, yes, very human. Although he was a prophet, Jonah—like other great figures in the Bible, except Jesus Christ—was a sinful human being in need of God's love and forgiveness.

Jonah has been called the unwilling missionary. But he wasn't the first one, nor would he be the last. Centuries earlier, Moses had offered excuses not to return to Egypt to lead the people of Israel from their captivity (Exodus 3). A century and a half after Jonah, in response to God's calling, Jeremiah pleaded, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Jeremiah 1:6). And today, we are often all too ready to explain why we cannot do this or that for the Lord.

Because of the miraculous story of Jonah in the belly of the great fish (contrary to popular notions, the Bible does not say "whale"), many modern readers are skepti-

cal concerning the historicity of the Book of Jonah. Did it really happen? As we'll see in our exposition of the book, Jesus took it as real history. For Christians, that should be enough.

During Jonah's lifetime, the superpower of the ancient world was Assyria, with its capital of Nineveh. Located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in the northern part of what is modern-day Iraq, Nineveh was a spectacular city, with gateways lined by huge statues—weighing thirty or forty tons!—of winged bulls with human heads and lion sphinxes, aqueducts to bring fresh water from the mountains, and a magnificent library, in which archaeologists have found over 25,000 clay tablets attesting to the glory of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire.

But Nineveh was an idolatrous city, given to the worship of many gods and goddesses, thousands of them for every force of nature and every human activity: a moon god, a sun god, a god for the weather, another for carpenters, and even one for brewers. In the temples were statues of the idols, made of wood or stone and covered with precious metals. Magicians served in the temples and palaces, as did astrologers and fortune-tellers.

Today the ruins of Nineveh lie across the river from Mosul, the second largest city of Iraq (Baghdad being the largest) and the capital of the governorate or province of Ninawa (Nineveh).

As we shall see, Jonah despised this empire with its idols and its arrogance. Nevertheless, after he reluctantly preached God's words of warning to Nineveh, the city repented and was spared. Almost two centuries later, Nineveh was beyond repentance and was destroyed by the Babylonians, as foretold by the prophet Nahum.

1 Jonah's Commission (1:1–2)

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai." The father's name means "loyal" or "faithful." In the end, although Jonah did God's bidding, it was, as will become evident, reluctantly and with reservations.

How did God convey His Word to the prophets? Sometimes in a vision, as that of Isaiah in the temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 6); sometimes in words heard in the physical ears, as to Isaiah (Isaiah 22:14); sometimes in a whisper, as to Elijah (1 Kings 19:12); sometimes accompanied by music, as with Elisha (2 Kings 3:15). Often, as with Jonah, we are not told.

He was called to go to Nineveh, the great capital of the Assyrian Empire, located more than 500 miles northeast of Jonah's home. There, he was to preach God's judg-

ment against the sins of the people of Nineveh. Most of the prophets of the Old Testament preached to their own people—the inhabitants of Israel and Judah. Some spoke about the surrounding nations and beyond. Yet Jonah was to go and preach to this foreign city.

2 Jonah Flees from the Presence of the Lord (1:3–6)

In 1 Kings 17:2 and elsewhere, it is written that "the word of the LORD came to" the prophet Elijah, one of the most illustrious characters in the entire Old Testament. Here the same expression is used in regard to the prophet Jonah. Although the initial calling was the same in both cases, the reaction was markedly different.

Of Elijah it is said, "he went" as God directed him. Elijah boldly declared to wicked King Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1; literally, he says "in His [God's] presence"). Of Jonah, we read that he "rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD." While other prophets may have been reluctant (Moses and Jeremiah), and at times became discouraged (Elijah), none of them went so far as to disobey God's calling, as did Jonah.

Instead of heading to Nineveh, which lay to the northeast of the Holy Land, Jonah went to the Mediterranean seaport city of Joppa and boarded a ship that would take him in the opposite direction—to Tarshish. Located thirty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem, Joppa, or Jaffa (modern-day Yafo), in New Testament times witnessed the restoring to life of Tabitha (Dorcas; Acts 9) and Peter's vision that the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Ironically, Jonah tried to use Joppa as a place to run away from preaching to the Gentiles. The location of Tarshish is uncertain. Tarsus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) is one possibility; another is much more distant Spain, which lay at the opposite end of the Great Sea; that is, the Mediterranean.

As will almost immediately become evident, Jonah's attempt to flee from God was foolish. God is omnipresent—everywhere present—and it is not possible to flee from Him. The psalmist David had proclaimed this before Jonah's time: (Psalm 139:7–12)

Where shall I go from Your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from Your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, You are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there!

If I take the wings of the morning

and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

even there Your hand shall lead me,

and Your right hand shall hold me.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to You;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with You.

The impossibility of fleeing from God is a source of terror to all who would defy Him and His will. It is a source of comfort to those who daily call to Him for help and strength. The term Sheol—the place of the dead—that David uses, will also find its way into the psalm prayer that Jonah will later offer (Jonah 2:2).

The Lord was not about to let Jonah run away. (1:4) "The LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest." In spite of the storm that was threatening to destroy the ship, Jonah was inside, "fast asleep." The captain came and said to the prophet, "Arise, call out to your god!" The storm, the slumber, and the calling for divine deliverance are striking as they parallel an event that would transpire centuries later. The Gospels record how a storm arose on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus and His disciples were in a boat: (Mark 4:37–38)

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

3 Jonah Is Thrown into the Sea (1:7–16)

As the storm raged, the sailors "cast lots" to discover "on whose account this evil" had come upon them. As we have noted in our study of Obadiah, the casting of lots was a common custom among the ancients. In this case, the lots pointed to Jonah as the one responsible for the disaster that had descended upon them.

Despite Jonah's reluctance to carry out God's call, he knew that the Lord was behind this storm. He told the crew, (v. 9) "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." The term "Hebrew" goes back to the name Eber (Genesis 10:24), who was one of the ancestors of Abraham from whom the people of Israel had descended. Jonah then told the men that because he had brought about this disaster, if they threw him overboard, the sea would "quiet down." No sooner had the men throw Jonah into the sea than "the sea ceased from its raging." Overawed by what had just transpired, "the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD."

How ironic that even when he had tried to run away from his mission, Jonah turned out to be a missionary!

To return to the strikingly parallel account in the Gospels: (Mark 4:39–41)

And [Jesus] awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

The ruler of wind and wave, who calmed the sea at Jonah's time, later experienced a storm from Jonah's point of view. And once again He showed His power over His own creation. Another even more remarkable parallel between the prophet Jonah and Christ is soon to unfold—that of their deliverance from death.

The Bible also records another storm on the Mediterranean. Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts, gives a vivid description of that tempest involving himself, the apostle Paul, and a total of 276 on board: (Acts 27:13–20)

Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. . . . Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. . . . When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Although the storm ended in shipwreck, all onboard were brought safely to land on the island of Malta.

In each of these storms on the water, God was in charge of the forces of nature, and each case ended in safety for those involved. When storms come into our lives—whether at sea or figuratively—the Lord will see us through them. God is the all-powerful ruler of wind and wave; as Psalm 89:9 puts it, "You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You calm them."

It is ironic that even though Jonah tried to run from his commission, he ended up preaching to the sailors. God used Jonah's few words to turn their hearts so that they "feared the LORD" (this can also be translated "worshiped" or "trusted"), offered a sacrifice, and made vows. In other words, they were brought to faith.

Meanwhile, as the storm was breaking up and the sun was breaking through the clouds, Jonah was sinking down into the depths of the Mediterranean Sea. Perhaps he was able to observe a bubbly glimmer of light above his head as he descended into the watery darkness below.

4 A Great Fish Swallows Jonah (1:17)

In the original text of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament Scriptures, there were no chapter and verse designations. Stephen Langton (1150–1228), a professor at the University of Paris and later the Archbishop of Canterbury, is credited with dividing the Bible into the chapter divisions we use today. Later, a Parisian printer, Robert Stephanus (1503–50), further divided the chapters into verse designations. Such divisions are very helpful for locating passages in the Bible, for readings in church services, for cross referencing, and for many other uses.

Occasionally, the placement of a chapter break is of interest in discussing the actual content of the various passages. For example, the break from the six days of creation and God resting on the seventh day actually occurs after Genesis 2:3, not at the end of Genesis 1. In regard to Jonah, Hebrew editions of the Bible include Jonah 1:17 with the following chapter. In that scenario, chapter 2 opens with Jonah being swallowed by the fish and ends with him being vomited out of the fish, with those two verses serving like bookends for his prayer from within the fish for deliverance.

This point helps us better understand the structure of the book. Until Jonah is swallowed by the fish, the Book of Jonah is all about the prophet's fleeing from his God-given commission. After he is delivered from the great fish, the book is all about his fulfilling the commission, be it ever so grudgingly.

But what of this "great fish"? Although commonly referred to as a whale, that is not specifically stated in the Bible's original Hebrew text, which simply uses the generic word for fish (*dag*). There are stories of sailors who were swallowed by fish and lived to tell about it, one as recently as 1987 (see R. Reed Lessing, *Jonah*, Concordia Commentary Series [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007], 187). This was of course, no mere lucky occurrence for Jonah. God was working a miracle that would both save His prophet and foreshadow His Son's resurrection from the dead.

5 Jonah and Christ

Centuries after Jonah's time, Jesus likened Himself to Jonah: (Matthew 12:40)

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The three days and three nights are at first glance perplexing. After all, Jesus wasn't in the tomb for three nights. According to the Jewish manner of speaking, any part of a day was considered part of a complete day. This is evident from the Book of Esther, when Queen Esther said, (4:16) "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. . . . Then I will go to the king." Later we are told, (5:1) "On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne." Although three complete days and nights had not yet passed, Esther had kept her word.

We will return to our discussion of the connection between Jonah's time in the fish and Jesus' time in the tomb in the next section. For now, however, we will spend a moment on the idea of Jonah as a "type" of Christ. An Old Testament type is different from a direct prophecy, which overtly states some feature of the coming Messiah or messianic age. For example, Isaiah foretold the coming of the God-man: (9:6) "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; . . . and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God."

Rather than setting forth such direct proclamations, a type paints a picture, the image of which corresponds to a feature of Christ. For example, Jesus Himself alluded to the bronze serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4–9) as a type of Himself: (John 3:14–16) "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Another type of Christ was the Passover lamb. As the lamb's blood was shed to deliver the people from death, Christ is the "Lamb of God," whose blood washes away the sins of the world. Of course, people would not have known that any given historical event would prefigure Christ, but the pattern or image was there and the mind was attuned to God's working out of His plan of salvation.

The other aspect of typology is the anti-type. Scripture contrasts the first man, the first Adam, with Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). Just as the first man brought sin and death into the world, the second Adam has brought forgiveness and life: (Romans 5:19) "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." As Jonah could be said to be a type of Christ in some ways, in other ways he, like Adam, was an anti-type—presenting an opposite image. Jonah fled from God's commission; Jesus said, "Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Jonah was helpless in the storm; Jesus calmed the storm.

As we read the Bible, we need to be careful not to see these types where they are not warranted but let the New Testament guide us in identifying them. That being said, and without reading too much into Old Testament texts, we also need to remember that all the Scriptures testify to Jesus, as He Himself asserts. Speaking to His contemporaries about the Old Testament Scriptures, He said, (John 5:39) "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me." Jonah, then, in some ways was a type of Christ, prefiguring the coming Messiah.

Conclusion

Jonah was undeniably the reluctant missionary. Yet if we take a look at ourselves, we can see much of Jonah in our lives as well. How often we would rather go in the opposite direction—doing anything but taking the opportunities that God places before us!

In our study of Jonah, we have noted a number of parallels between Jonah and Christ—some shedding light on Jonah as a type of Christ, others as an anti-type or contrast. It is also of value to compare and contrast Jonah with Obadiah. In common, both were called to proclaim God's Word to foreign nations outside the chosen nation of Israel. From what we know, Obadiah willingly accepted that call; Jonah balked at it and tried to run away. The outcome of their preaching also was in stark contrast. Edom was recalcitrant in its opposition to God and His chosen people. In its hardness of heart, Edom called down upon itself destruction. Nineveh, on the other hand, repented, and God spared the city. Its hardening of heart and destruction would wait until another, later generation.

God's Word, then, meets with one of two responses. People either believe it or reject it. There is no in-between. Jesus states, (Matthew 12:30) "Whoever is not with Me is against Me." That remains the case today. The preaching—as well as the preachers—of God's Word is, as St. Paul put it, a scent of life and death: (2 Corinthians 2:15–16) "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 3.