

3. Here are some of the ways I will prepare oil:

b. Prepare a heart to serve God faithfully (read Mt 25:14-20)

1. List some of the talents that God has given you.
2. What will you do with the talents God has given you to prepare for His coming?

c. Prepare a heart of love for others (read Mt 25:31-46)

The ways I can:

Feed the hungry and quench the thirsty _____

Take in strangers _____

Clothe the naked _____

Visit the sick _____

Go to those in prison _____

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



As we see the prophecies of the Bible being realized, let us pray the Lord will grant us a heart of wisdom to number our days and to effectively seize every moment to prepare ourselves for His return, so that each of us can welcome the Lord with a clear conscience on that glorious Day.

Lesson 5

Jonah, Hosea, Micah

Listed Scriptures

Jonah 1-3; Hos 1,6; Mic 4

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn about God's unceasing love.
- 2) To learn that God desires all men to be saved.
- 3) Students will reflect upon their own levels of love.

Memory Verse

"He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Mic 6:8)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Jonah 1-3; Hos 1,6; Mic 4

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



Canaanite religion

By the time of Hosea, many of the practices of Canaanite worship were actually integrated with the worship of the Lord. The religion of Canaan was essentially a fertility faith that linked the land's fruitfulness to the supposed sexual activity of gods and goddesses. When the male lord or owner god (Baal) and his consort (Astarte, or Asherah) had sexual intercourse, the land was stimulated to produce crops. The fertility of animals and people were assumed to be linked to the sexual activity of these nature gods. As an expression of this belief, the worship of the pagan gods and goddesses at local shrines and high places was typically marked by drunkenness and orgies. Male and female prostitutes engaged in sexual activity to stimulate the gods to make the land fertile. Idolatry and sexual looseness became very much linked.



Homeless Man?

It was a cold winter's day. The parking lot to the church was filling up quickly. I noticed as I got out of my car that fellow church members were whispering among themselves as they walked to the church. As I got closer I saw a man leaned up against a wall outside the church. He was almost lying down as if he were asleep. He had on a long trench coat that was almost in shreds and a hat topped his head, pulled down so that you could not see his face. He wore shoes that looked thirty years old, too small for his feet, with holes all over them, and his toes stuck out. I assumed this man was homeless, and asleep, so I walked on by through the doors of the church.

We all fellowshiped for a few minutes and someone brought up the man lying outside. People snickered and gossiped, although no one bothered to ask him to come in, including me. A few moments later church began. We all waited for the preacher to take his place up front, when the doors to the church opened. In came the homeless man walking down the aisle with his head down. People gasped and whispered and made faces. He made his way down the aisle and up to the pulpit where he took off his hat and coat. My heart sank. There stood our preacher... he was the "homeless man." No one said a word. The preacher took his Bible and laid it on the stand. "Folks, I don't think I have to tell you what I am preaching about today..."

What message was the pastor making that day? (Allow students to respond)

Today we will look at how God reminded the Israelites what the true essence of love is.



Part 1

The Book of Jonah



A. Author

The book of Jonah has no stated author, though tradition ascribes it to Jonah, a prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the eighth century B.C. Jonah, whose name means "a dove," was the son of Amittai (1:1) and a native of Gath Hepher in Zebulun, a town about two miles north of Nazareth. Jonah ministered under Jeroboam II, Israel's most powerful king (793-753 B.C., see 2 Kgs 14:23-25). He worked after the time of Elisha and just before Amos and Hosea. During this period, Israel was enjoying a period of resurgence and prosperity. However, there was the threat of the Assyrians, Israel's greatest enemy, who later conquered Israel in 722 B.C. Jonah was given the task of bringing God's judgment upon these people.



B. Date

The book was written approximately between 785-760 B.C.



C. Themes

God's loving concern for the gentiles is not a truth disclosed only in the New Testament. More than seven centuries before Christ, God commissioned the Hebrew prophet Jonah to proclaim a message of repentance to the Assyrians. God called him to preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which at that time was the most powerful nation on earth. The more we know about Assyria, the more we understand why Jonah was reluctant to preach there. The Assyrians were a fierce warring people who often treated their captives ruthlessly. Jonah had good reason to be afraid. But fear was not the only thing that made Jonah reluctant. Jonah could not imagine that God could care for other nations – especially one as vile and idolatrous as Assyria. The prophet Jonah represents the arrogance and bigotry of the Jewish nation and their failure to see how the gospel is for all who repent and believe. God wanted Jonah to know that He loves all the people of the world and that He does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9).

a. God is sovereign

When God commissioned Jonah to go preach to the people of Nineveh, Jonah fled to Tarshish, a city about 2,000 miles in the opposite direction of Nineveh. He thought that by escaping to Tarshish he could flee from the presence of God and evade his commission. How ironic that a prophet of God should fail to understand God's will and sovereignty (Ps 139:7-8). The sovereignty of God over life, elements and circumstances is clearly stressed throughout the entire book. God appoints the storm (1:4), the fish (1:17; 2:10), the plant (4:6), the worm (4:7) and the sultry wind (4:8) to achieve His purpose and to teach important lessons to Jonah.

2 Chronicles 18:12-33 records an incident where the prophet Micah predicted the death of Ahab, king of Israel. Although King Ahab purposely disguised himself to fool the enemy during battle, a random arrow from the Syrian army killed him. We can see that no human scheme can prevent the will of God. God can use anything, even an error, to bring His will to pass. Proverbs 21:1 says "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." As His children, our purpose is to submit to God's divine arrangement and to do His will.

b. True repentance averts disasters

The concept of repentance is a central theme in the book of Jonah. When the Ninevites heard Jonah's message, they proclaimed a fast and repented immediately. Such sincere and true repentance is rare. When God saw how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not destroy them. The repentance of the Ninevites, however, stands in stark contrast to Israel's stubbornness. The people of Israel heard many messages from the prophets, but they refused to repent. The Lord Jesus says that on the Day of Judgment, these Ninevites will rise up to condemn the Israelites for their failure to repent (Mt 12:39-41). Repentance is crucial in our journey of faith. We constantly transgress in our thoughts, speech and actions. Our iniquity separates us from God (Is 59:2), and causes us to lose peace and strength (cf Ps 32:3-5). Through confessing our sins and repentance, God's wrath can be averted (Ps 7:12), and we can receive His mercy and blessings.

c. God does not desire anyone to perish

When Jonah saw the generosity and compassion of God he was furious. In two

instances, Jonah becomes angry, but each time, God teaches Jonah valuable lessons regarding his misconceptions and the nature of God.

1. God corrects Jonah's prejudice

In Jonah 4:1, Jonah is angry because he has seen the Ninevites' repentance and how God did not destroy them (Jon 3:10). Nineveh was the capital city of the great, but evil, Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians flaunted their power before God and the world through numerous acts of heartless cruelty (Nah 1:9,10; 2:12,13; 3:4). In the wake of an Assyrian invasion in Palestine, Jonah felt reluctant to preach to his enemies because they were undeserving. His intense patriotic feelings towards his country made him unwilling to share God's favor with those who were non-Jews. But God used this occasion to teach Jonah and the Israelites that God was not only God of the Jews, but of all those who repent and believe (Rom 3:29). Sometimes we wish that judgment and destruction would come upon sinful people whose wickedness demand immediate punishment. But God is more merciful than we imagine. He feels compassion for the sinners we want judged. Do we possess Jonah's narrow-minded and self-righteous attitude? What is our attitude towards those whom we dislike or those who are especially wicked? Do we wish the worst for them? Would we wish that they too can experience God's mercy and forgiveness?

2. God corrects Jonah's values

In Jonah 4:8-9, Jonah again is extremely angry because God has destroyed the plant that has been a shade for him. God asks Jonah how he can feel sorry for a plant, yet not feel sorry for the many thousands of people in the city of Nineveh. Jonah would have been happy about Nineveh's destruction, but he wanted to die because of the death of a vine. Through the castor oil plant, God gently showed Jonah his wrong sense of perspective and the heart of God. By pitying the plant, Jonah is placing more value on the plant than the salvation of the Ninevites. There's nothing wrong with our being concerned about the smaller matters in life. But like Jonah we often have misplaced values. We care more about a wrecked automobile or a broken computer than we do about those who die daily without food or without Christ. Through this lesson God manifests His compassion and graciousness and enables Jonah to see how mixed up his values had become. Similarly, God wants us to overcome our preoccupation with ourselves, our interests and prejudices. God desires that we learn about His mercy and forgiveness and to be sensitive to the needs of people around us.



E. Questions to Think About

1. Was there anytime in your life when you knew you had to obey, but deliberately set out to go against it? What lessons did you learn? Did you regret that decision?
2. When have you “run away” from God?
3. What “storms,” then and now, bring you back?
4. What things in our lives has God used to bring about His purpose?
5. How do you respond when things do not go your way?
6. In what ways can you identify with Jonah’s anger?
7. In what ways are we sometimes more concerned with petty things (as Jonah was when the plant withered) than about those things under God’s judgment?
8. In the end do you think Jonah understood God’s attitude toward Nineveh? Why or why not?
9. In what area of your life might you be resistant to seeing things from God’s perspective?
10. What can we do to begin seeing things more from God’s perspective?



Part 2

The Book of Hosea



A. Author

Little is known of the life of the prophet Hosea. His place of birth is not given, but his familiarity with and concern for the northern kingdom indicates he lived in Israel, not Judah. Hosea whose name means, “Salvation” coincides with his message concerning God’s salvation and unending love. Hosea was the son of Beerai (1:1), husband of Gomer (1:3) and father of two sons and a daughter (1:4, 6,9).



B. Date

Hosea’s ministry stretched for about 40 years from c. 755-710 B.C. Hosea began his ministry during the latter years of Jeroboam II, during a time of great material prosperity. His ministry spanned the reigns of the last six kings of Israel from Zechariah to Hoshea. The reigns of Israel’s last six kings were relatively brief since four were murdered and the fifth was carried captive to Assyria.



C. Themes

The book of Hosea was written to a northern kingdom of Israel on the brink of disaster. Politically the nation was very unstable and the land was under the constant threat of the Assyrians and the Egyptians. Spiritually, moral corruption and spiritual adultery permeated the lives of the people. It is at this juncture that God used the prophet Hosea to convey His messages to His people. As Gomer is married to Hosea, so Israel is betrothed to God. Both relationships disintegrate – Gomer runs after other men, and Israel runs after other gods. Just as Hosea was to find, redeem and reconcile with his unfaithful wife, God is merciful and fully committed to be faithful to those He has chosen despite their spiritual infidelity. The book of Hosea is commonly called the Gospel Book of the Old Testament.



D. Teachings from the Book of Hosea

a. Spiritual infidelity

The book of Hosea opens with God’s instructions to the prophet Hosea to marry a woman of harlotry. God also told Hosea ahead of time that Gomer, his wife, would be unfaithful to him. God uses Hosea and Gomer’s relationship to symbolize the husband and wife relationship between God and His people. Just as Gomer ran off to be with her lovers, Israel forsook God, her rightful husband, to seek “illicit” relationships. In Hosea alone, the word harlotry is mentioned 11 times (Hos 1:2; 2:4; 4:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18; 5:3, 4; 6:10). The word harlot comes from the Hebrew word, *zanah*, which means to commit adultery. In what ways did the Israelites commit spiritual adultery?

1. Israel trusted in men
During the time of Hosea, the nation of Israel was politically very unstable. Internally, assassinations and killings became commonplace. Within a span of 25 years, there were changes of five dynasties and seven kings. Furthermore, the Assyrians and the Egyptians constantly threatened

the entire nation. Under such precarious times, the kings did not rely on God, but went back and forth allying themselves with different nations. They trusted that military power could keep them safe and their kingdom secure. With money, they formed an allegiance with Assyria hoping they would not invade them (2 Kgs 15:19,20). They also sent olive oil to Egypt in the hope that Egypt would help them in times of trouble. But such efforts were futile. God would allow Israel to be taken into captivity by the very hands that they sought refuge from. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians besieged Israel and tore the people from their homeland (2 Kgs 17:3-23). Like the leaders of Israel, have we looked for security in wealth, pleasure, learning or relationships? Have we looked everywhere except to God for happiness and security in life? In reality, without God there is no lasting security. Only God can truly satisfy the deep longings of our soul. Look first to heaven, to the Most High God (Hos 7:16). He will meet our needs.

2. Turned to idols

During the time of Hosea, the Israelites were steeped in idolatry. They burned incense to idols (Hos 2:13), they inquired after wooden images (4:12), they used their silver and gold to carve out images and they consecrated themselves to Baal (9:10). Idol worship was so attractive because it was typically marked by drunkenness and orgies (Hos 4:11-14). Under serene settings (Hos 4:13), the people offered sacrifices and engaged in ritual prostitution to stimulate the gods to make the land fertile.

With such beliefs, the people were actually deceived into thinking that it was Baal who gave them the grain, wine, oil, silver and gold (Hos 2:8). They refused to acknowledge that God was their husband and the giver of all blessings (Hos 7:15). And so God was to make them like the morning mist, like the dew and chaff on the threshing floor, and like smoke, which disappears in an instant (13:3). Very soon, God would send this rebellious nation into the hands of the Assyrians. Have we given God the rightful praise and honor for all the blessings that He has given us, or have we attributed our successes to our own efforts and abilities?

b. Lack of Knowledge of God

In Hosea there are many references explaining why the leaders, priests and people sinned against God. One of the main reasons was that the people did not know God and had rejected knowledge (Hos 4:1, 6, 14). Because of their lack of understanding, they failed to practice or know God's will. How did the

people demonstrate that they did not know God?

1. In Hosea 4, God confronted the people of the land for their lack of faithfulness, kindness and knowledge of God. Although the people professed to know God, they did all kinds of evil; they lied, stole, murdered, committed adultery and worshiped idols. While practicing unrighteousness, the people came to the temple to offer their gifts to God. They did not understand what God really desired. If they knew God and His laws they would have known that God is just, faithful and compassionate and He desires His people to treat others in the same manner. God desires steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (Hos 6:6).
2. Hosea also rebuked the priests for preventing the people from knowing God. The priests were supposed to be spiritual leaders, but they became leaders in wrongdoing. Every time a person brought a sin offering, the priests received a portion of it. The more the people sinned, the more the priests received. The priests thus profited from the continuation of sin. So instead of trying to lead the people out of sin by teaching the people the laws of God, the priests encouraged wickedness and even rejoiced in the people's sins to have greater profit. Thus being ignorant of the law, the Israelites sinned more and more against God (Hos 4:6; 14). Let us resolve to learn and know the laws of God. The more we know of God's words, the more we will know God, and the more we will fear and love Him.

c. God's steadfast love and faithfulness

After Gomer married Hosea, she ran away from Hosea to be with her lovers. Later, she lost her freedom and became a slave. In Hosea 3, God asked Hosea to do the unthinkable – he was to buy back his unrepentant, adulterous wife from slavery and continue to love her. This act was to demonstrate how God still loved the unfaithful Israelites even when they turned away from Him time and time again to be with their false gods. Hosea 11:1-11 records a monologue given by God Himself. The struggle within God's heart is intense. On the one hand, because the Israelites are bent on turning away from God, God is determined to punish and destroy them. He considers giving up on Israel forever. But God's steadfast love and compassion restrains Him. In the throes of love for Israel, God cries, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I make you like Admah and Zeboiim?" (two cities that were destroyed together with Sodom and Gomorrah).

God is a God of absolute justice and love. Because of His divine justice, God will execute punishment. In Hosea 11:5, God has prophesied that the Assyrians will invade the land. But at the same time, because of His eternal love, He will restore the people back to their homeland after the 70-year captivity (Hos 11:10-11). Not only this, in 1948 the nation of Israel was restored after being completely annihilated. In the course of human history, no nation has been able to resurrect out of the dust except Israel. God also prophesies the restoration of the spiritual Israel, which is the true church.

E. Questions to Think About

1. How does the Book of Hosea illustrate spiritual unfaithfulness?
2. How might we be unfaithful to God?
3. What does the Book of Hosea teach us about God's love? Is there a limit?
4. The Israelites professed to know God but their deeds belied them. What does truly knowing God mean?
5. What are the ways that we can get to know God better?



Part 3

The Book of Micah

A. Author

The prophet Micah, whose name means "who is like God," was one of the eighth-century prophets, together with Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Jonah. Besides Micah 1:1 and the book of Jeremiah 26:18, there are no other biblical references concerning Micah's background. Micah's home was Moresheth Gath (1:14) a town probably located about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem, close to the border of the Philistines. Micah and Isaiah were contemporary prophets. Although Isaiah preached in the courts and Micah in the villages, the content of their message is similar.

B. Date

Micah prophesied in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Although Micah deals primarily with Judah, he also addresses the Northern kingdom of Israel and predicts the fall of Samaria. Much of his ministry therefore took place before the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 722 B.C..

C. Themes

The book of Micah is somewhat difficult to analyze because of its loose organization. Nevertheless, certain important themes are clearly evident. Samaria's doom is certain and Judah's is not far behind. Both Judah and Israel were strong and prosperous, many evils existed. From Micah's message two main sins can be identified – the perversion of worship (1:7; 3:5-7, 11; 5:12, 13) and injustice toward others (2:1, 2, 8, 9; 3:2, 3, 9-11; 7:2-6). Micah's spirit burned with indignation at how these sins, rampant in the capital cities, had now infiltrated the entire country. These internal evils eventually led to the downfall of the kingdom. When the enemies invaded the country, Micah severely warned them of their sins, proclaimed the impending disasters, but also proclaimed hope, repentance and the future blessings of God.

D. Teachings from the Book of Micah

a. True worship

Here the prophet Micah rebuked the cities of Jerusalem and Samaria, idol-worshipping centers, for their evils. Micah charged the rulers of Israel, the prophets and the people with injustice of many kinds. The rulers had rejected justice. They hated good and loved evil (3:1,9). They robbed and devoured the people of all that they had and were violent and murderous (3:1-3, 10). The prophets and priests served only to fatten their own pockets. They blessed those who gave contributions to them, but cursed those who didn't. The people were guilty of worshipping carved images and false gods (5:12-14). They traded dishonestly (6:11) and the rich men were full of violence. Although the people carried out religious ceremonies, they did not know what God truly desired. They tried all kinds of ways to please Him. They suggested offering up burnt offerings of rams and calves, or great rivers of oil. If this did not please God, they would even offer up their own children as burnt offerings. But God does not desire such things. Micah preached that God's greatest desire is not the offering of sacrifices, but changed lives where they love God

and their neighbors. God desires that His people do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God (Mic 6:6; Amos 5:24; Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13). In our efforts to please God, let us examine ourselves in these areas continuously. Are we fair in our dealings with people? Do we show mercy to those who wrong us? Are we humble? True worship is to offer ourselves up as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1), not just to do holy work or offer tithes.

b. The mountain of the Lord shall be the highest of the mountains

In this prophecy Micah foretells how in the end time, God will establish a kingdom for Himself which is His church (Micah 4:1-3). This same prophecy was also declared by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 2:2-5. Both prophets predict how the true church, represented by the mountain of the Lord, will be highest of the mountains. The true church will surpass all other religions in the world and the people of all nations shall flow to it (cf Heb 12:22-23) because the laws of God will issue out of Zion (1 Tim 3:15). Many people will come to the true church because the truth, God’s justice and judgment are found here.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



Due to the nature of this lesson, some questions can be found under “Questions to Think About”.

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N

Aspects of Love



Several years ago, Gary visited Russia at the dawn of their new republic. On one of his free afternoons he visited historical Red Square just outside the Kremlin. As he began to take in the incredible splendor, he noticed a crowd gathering in front of one of its monuments. The monument turned out to be Lenin’s tomb. The crowd had gathered to watch the famous changing of the guards. Gary found himself surrounded by a crowd of Russian-speaking spectators. Since Gary doesn’t speak Russian, the sound was all a blare.

As the replacement guards began to march to the tomb, the spectators began taking pictures, pointing at the scene unfolding before them. Suddenly, to Gary’s left, he heard a familiar sound.

“Hey, Larry! Come over here. You can get a great picture.”

Instantly, Gary tuned in. Why? Because someone was speaking his native language. No one else turned toward the other two Americans, for one obvious reason: They didn’t speak English. And while they quickly realized another language was being spoken, they could not relate to it.

While the crowd at the tomb stretched to see the event, Gary accidentally bumped into the man standing behind him. Gary turned his head and said, “Excuse me.” Although those words came to him spontaneously, he realized the person he spoke to had no idea what he just said. While English was Gary’s primary language and the one he would naturally speak, it did not make sense to his neighbor.

Say to students:

This story provides a great analogy for the language of love. Most of us here tend to speak English but this may come across to some other people in another part of the world as an unknown tongue. As a result, our efforts to demonstrate love can be frustrated or misunderstood. But if this was taken into the context of God and His people – sometimes God and His people do not speak the same language of love. From our lesson we discover that the Israelites thought they loved God whereas in fact God abhorred their behaviors. Contrastingly, there may be times when we have misunderstood God’s love; sometimes God’s love is interpreted as unkindness, neglect or joviality. God’s version of love and human understanding of love are very different. In the following exercise, list the different qualities of God’s divine love and our own human understanding of love.

1. **What does love look like to God?**
2. **What does love look like to you?**
3. **Look up the following Bible verses to see what love truly is:**
 Jn 14:15, 21, 24
 Rom 5:8
 Rom 13:8-10
 1 Jn 2:5
 1 Jn 3:17; 3:18; 4:8; 4:20
 Eph 2:4-7

Now let’s look at a famous Bible passage on love – 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. As you read, list the seven characteristics of what love is and the eight that it is not (1 Cor

13:4-7). Rewrite each of the “Love is....” qualities to show what love looks like in their specific situation, at home, work, church. Examine yourself and think of real situations in life where you have failed to practice these aspects of love. The first is done as an example.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7	Areas where I have failed to love	Love in action
Love is patient	I screamed and yelled at my brother to get off the computer after chatting online for hours	I need to let him know kindly
Others		

Discussion:

1. Which aspect(s) of love do you feel you need to work on most?
2. How can we love others when we really don't “feel” like it?
3. How can we love others who are unlovable?
4. How does this passage enhance your understanding of what true love is?

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



A League of Their Own is a film about the women's professional baseball league that existed during WWII. At one point in the movie, the star catcher for the Rockford Peaches, Dottie Hinson, tells the manager, Jimmy Dugan, that she's quitting the team to go home.

"It just got too hard," she says.
"It's supposed to be hard," Dugan says. "If it weren't hard, everyone would do it. The hard is what makes it great."

Jesus spoke similar words to His disciples when He said, "If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else?"

Love isn't right only when it's easy; it's right when it's hard too. The most holy God demonstrated this by sending His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners, not desiring that anyone should perish. Let's not excuse or explain away our unloving attitudes and actions toward such people because it's too hard or that we don't feel like it. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love, so that we may love as the Lord loves.