

JONAH AND MICAH

Introduction

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers the books of Jonah and Micah.

[You can find the LDS outline of the study and resources here.](#)

LDS Study Focus

LDS study material will focus on the theme “*He Delighteth in Mercy.*”

Jonah was on a ship headed for Tarshish. There’s nothing wrong with sailing to Tarshish, except that it is far away from Nineveh, where Jonah was supposed to go to deliver God’s message. So when the ship encountered a great storm, Jonah knew it was because of his disobedience. At Jonah’s insistence, his fellow mariners cast him into the depths of the sea to stop the storm. It looked like the end of Jonah and his ministry. But the Lord hadn’t given up on Jonah—just as He hadn’t given up on the people of Nineveh and just as He doesn’t give up on any of us. As Micah taught, the Lord does not delight in condemning us, but “he delighteth in mercy.” When we turn to Him, “he will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and [He will] cast all [our] sins into the depths of the sea” ([Micah 7:18–19](#)).

Biblical Focus

“Who is a God like you” (**Micah 7:18**), proclaims Micah as he marvels at God’s incredible grace. Both the Books of Jonah and Micah display a merciful God who delights in showing compassion and mercy to the least of the deserving.

Jonah was a rebellious prophet who hated God for loving his enemies. His enemy, Nineveh, certainly deserved God’s wrath, yet God desired to show mercy to them. The Book of Micah presents the picture of rebellious Israel. Although God was like a husband to them, they continued in their idolatry generation after generation. Punishment for their unfaithfulness would soon come, yet God longed to show mercy and pardon their sins.

JONAH

Book Summary

The Book of Jonah takes place about 80 years after the time of Elisha and approximately 60 years before the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Israel continued to reject God and worship and serve idols. Yet, in love, God persistently sent his prophets. Jonah was one of these prophets who knew well God's character and his desire to show mercy and to forgive.

Nineveh was a powerful Assyrian city. The Assyrians were heathens with a reputation for brutality and extreme cruelty. They were known for amputating hands and feet, gouging eyes, and skinning and impaling their captives. Nahum describes God's anger with the Ninevites, saying, "Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims" (**Nahum 3:1**).

So, with whom does Jonah have the most significant problem? Obviously, he hated the Ninevites, but his bigger problem was with God. Jonah understood how vast God's mercy was and the truth that God wanted all people to be saved. But Jonah preferred that God's grace only be given to people whom he felt were more deserving and to those he felt were the worst of sinners (like the Ninevites). It was not that Jonah didn't understand God's grace; it was that he did not agree with it. In fact, Jonah was so angry at God for forgiving Nineveh that he wanted to die rather than live in a world ruled by grace (**Jonah 4:1–3**).

Isn't it fascinating how God persisted in his relationship with Jonah? He pursued him in the boat, in the sea, and outside of Nineveh. Considering his rebellion, what judgment did Jonah deserve? Did he deserve the mercy he received? Rather than letting Jonah go in his disobedience, God pursued him.

Ironically, Jonah never intended to evangelize anyone. Yet, the pagan sailors learned of the Lord and called on his name, and the city of Nineveh repented after hearing perhaps the shortest sermon ever (**Jonah 3:5**). Notice the power of God and his word even in the mouth of a reluctant preacher. One of the most wicked cities in the world humbled itself in repentance before God. Here we see the promise that God gives in **Isaiah 55:11** in action. His word will not return empty but achieve the purpose for which God sent it.

Jonah's prophecy (**Jonah 3:5**) about Nineveh did, in fact, come true, just not in the way that he had hoped. The word "overturned" can mean destroyed, like Sodom and Gomorrah, or it can mean transformed and changed. The hearts of the Ninevites were transformed as they repented and found God's mercy.

LDS Applications

Jonah's anger may be a prompt for an interesting conversation with your LDS friends. Why was he so mad? He didn't want God to forgive Israel's vile enemy. It was appalling and scandalous to consider mercy offered to the worst of sinners. This also would mean that Israel and Nineveh were on the same level in God's eyes. Neither was more or less deserving than the other to receive mercy. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be compared to a Ninevite?

Dwell on the forgiveness that God offers. It is for everyone, full, free, and comes with no requirements. LDS theology attaches many conditions, works, and requirements to forgiveness and it is rarely obtained with certainty. Additionally, the sin of murder is also unforgivable. Do you think Jonah would have been

as angry if the Ninevites had to earn forgiveness? From Jonah's perspective and from the LDS perspective, the forgiveness that God offers is outrageous and offensive.

Conversation Starters:

- How does this story show that Jonah understood God's grace? How does this story show that Jonah did not understand God's grace?
- Did Israel deserve God's grace any more or less than Nineveh? Is it possible to deserve God's grace more? (Ironically, Israel continued to rebel and was eventually taken captive by the Assyrians.)
- Considering how evil the Ninevites were, why did God want to save them?
- Should evil people (murderers, rapists, pedophiles) be allowed to receive God's forgiveness? Should *you* be allowed to receive God's forgiveness? How would Jonah answer that question? How would Jonah's God answer that question?
- Whom do you struggle to forgive? Does God struggle to forgive you?
- Am I ok with the fact that God loves my enemy?
- How did God show grace and compassion to:
 - The sailors? (**Jonah 1:15–16**)
 - Jonah? (**Jonah 1:17–2:10**)
 - Nineveh? (**Jonah 3:1–10**)
 - Again, to Jonah? (**Jonah 4:1–11**)
- How do sinful believers find this comforting?

Sharing personally

Jonah

God desired that Jonah would find joy in his mercy, which had not only spared Nineveh but spared him amid his selfish anger. He hoped that Jonah would find joy in seeing that he acted just as unfairly to him as he did to the people of Nineveh, that he was to Jonah what he was to them, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. Jesus wants you to know that same mercy of God too. So, this day he stretches his arms in love for you, he bleeds for you, he is abandoned by his Father for you, and he dies for you to make it a Good Friday for you.

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

God makes a habit of calling the unfit and the unworthy! He does it to magnify the power of the gospel and show that salvation can only be a gift of God, never a work of man or even a cooperative venture between God and man. No more unfit worker could there have been than Jonah. No city deserved destruction more than Nineveh. But God called both to repentance and showed the power of his word in giving grace to both according to his good pleasure.

Jonah 3:10

Does God's compassion surprise you?

Look what he did for the ancient city of Nineveh when Jonah warned them of impending judgment: "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:10). God surprised the people of Nineveh with his compassion. He freely forgave them. He canceled the punishment he had planned for them.

Here we see a beautiful picture of the grace of God. He's much more merciful than people picture. Most people believe that God forgives, but only if you're nice. You have to earn God's forgiveness by being good. But look at what God does here. These people didn't earn God's forgiveness by groveling. All the groveling in the world could never make up for all the sins they had committed. God forgave them freely. He showed them undeserved, unearned love. Grace is what God showed the people of Nineveh.

Why would God do this? God forgave these people because of his Son, Jesus Christ. You see, God knew that his Son, Jesus, would come.

And Jesus would do what these people of Nineveh could never do—he would live the perfect life. And then, Jesus would let himself be punished for the sins of Nineveh. When Jesus died on the cross, he was punished for Nineveh's sins. He was letting himself be destroyed so that these people wouldn't be destroyed. Jesus let himself feel God's righteous anger so that these people wouldn't have to feel God's righteous anger. Because of Jesus, God declared the entire city of Nineveh "not guilty." They were completely forgiven. What amazing grace and amazing compassion God shows Nineveh in these verses.

This is the same compassion, same forgiveness, that God shows to you. You see, instead of destroying you for your sin, God forgives you. And this isn't the kind of forgiveness the world pictures—the world says that God forgives you only if you're nice. No! God forgives you freely! He doesn't make you earn it. He doesn't make you perform a list of good works to earn his forgiveness. God forgives you freely.

MICAH

Book Summary

Have you ever considered that the announcement of God's judgment is also an act of grace? If God wanted to judge us, he would just do it. But when God shares his impending judgment, it is to call his people back to him. He wants his people first to know the seriousness of their sinful condition and then to know his mercy and be saved.

The Book of Micah takes place during the time of Isaiah. The Israelites had been violating their covenant with God for 500 years. They combined temple worship and idol worship having duplicitous adulterous hearts. Because of their continued rebellion, God would soon send judgment through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

Micah is not just a book of judgment but of hope in God's character and promises. He is the righteous Judge and tender Savior who would pay the penalty our sins deserved and open the floodgates of compassion and mercy.

LDS Applications

In the introduction, the LDS resources say,

As Micah taught, the Lord does not delight in condemning us, but "he delighteth in mercy." When we turn to Him, "he will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and [He will] cast all [our] sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18–19).

Did you notice the condition in the above statement, "When we turn"? But who pursued whom in the last lesson? Did Jonah pursue God, or did God pursue Jonah? Did Nineveh pursue God, or did God pursue Nineveh? God's goal was to turn the hearts of people to him, but they certainly did not make the first move. Focus on God's tenacious love. LDS believe that there are many conditions attached to receiving grace and forgiveness. They are in charge of preparing their hearts for him, and turning to God requires good works. Marvel at the God who pursued the wicked who have not yet turned to him.

Another verse highlighted in LDS study material is **Micah 6:8**, "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

An article by Elder Dale G. Renlund is based on this verse with the intention of diminishing uncertainty about exaltation. "Am I doing enough?" "What else should I be doing?" or "How can I, as a flawed person, qualify to 'dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness'?" He uses **Micah 6:8** to encourage LDS to examine their hearts so that they can know how they are doing.

The original intention of the verse in Micah was to show the leaders and prophets the corruption of their hearts. Although they may have followed some of God's laws outwardly, greed reigned and led to extortion, dishonesty, and violence. These words were meant to shine a light on dark hearts exposing sin. Therefore, if one attempts to use these verses to bolster their confidence in themselves, one must either lie or die.

You can set an example by bravely sharing what confession grounded in the security of certain forgiveness looks like. Because you believe in a God who will "hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (**Micah 7:19**), you are free to confess the corruption of your heart.

Conversation Starters:

- Many commentators compare believers to Daniel, saying we, too, are foreigners living in modern Babylon. What do you think is meant by this comparison? Do you agree or disagree?
- How does **Micah 6:8** teach that motivation matters? Does this convict you or comfort you?
- For those who are convicted, how does **Micah 7:8–9** comfort you?
- What comfort is there for sinners in **Micah 7:18–20**?

Sharing Personally

Micah 7:19

*How deep is the ocean? Pretty deep! The deepest trench goes down almost seven miles underwater. It's hard to swim to the bottom of a 10-ft swimming pool. I don't want to imagine the dark depths miles down in the ocean. So why think about it? Because that's how far away your sins are! Listen: **"You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea"** (Micah 7:19). This is what God does for us: He hurls our sins into the depths of the sea.*

Isn't that amazing to think about? The devil constantly torments us. He wants to make us feel guilty over and over again for the sins we have committed. His goal is to lead us into despair and shame and unbelief. But the devil has no power over you. When Jesus died on the cross, he died for the sins of the whole world, including your sins and my sins. They are paid for and taken away. You are forgiven by Jesus!

Those nasty words you said in anger? Jesus' blood washed them into the sea. Those embarrassing sins you committed when you were younger? Into the sea! Those acts of adultery you wish you could take back? Jesus trampled them and forgave them on the cross. Those sinful desires you still struggle with today? Each day, Jesus washes them away with his forgiveness. So, when the devil comes to torment you, you can tell the devil: "If you want to talk about my sins, you'll have to go way down to the bottom of the ocean. I don't have those sins anymore. Jesus took them away. He hurled them into the sea!"

Micah 7:19

Do you have sins to confess? As an individual? As a family? As a nation? It's obvious, isn't it? The hatred and anger. The selfishness and arrogance. The insults and violence. The lack of love for everyone. The trust in princes instead of in God. There are moments in human history when the disgusting depth of our sinfulness rears its ugly head for all to see. Do you have sins to confess? I do.

*Know what's amazing? God forgives. **"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea"** (Micah 7:18–19).*

This is what we as people and as a nation need more than anything else in the whole world: The God who forgives. Jesus Christ, our Savior, died to take our sins away. He squashed our sins under his feet and hurled them into the depths of the sea. It's amazing. It's a miracle. Our God delights to show mercy. Sins to confess? Repent! Let's turn from our sins to our Savior. Who is a God like our God? He forgives!