

Lesson for March 22, 2009

Old Testament Survey

The Books of Obadiah, Jonah and Micah

The Book of Obadiah

The book of Obadiah is only 21 verses long, but presents the prophetic message to the nation of Edom (a Gentile nation). God has always been interested in all nations, not just Israel. This prophetic book proves it. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the son of Isaac, who sold his birthright for a bowl of cereal.

The Edomites were continual foes of Israel. When Babylon assaulted Jerusalem, Edom joined the Babylonians in the assault. (Psalm 137:7). If there is one thing clear in the Bible, it is that those who oppose Israel oppose God Himself. Such was the case for the nation of Edom and God sent Obadiah to deliver the message of judgment.

The first nine verses of Obadiah relate the humiliation of Edom for their treatment of the Jews. Verses ten through fourteen relate the crime Edom had committed against the nation of Israel. And verses fifteen through twenty-one relate Edom's impending doom and the blessing for Israel.

The Book of Jonah

All of us know the story of Jonah and the whale, but few know the doctrine behind it. The story of Jonah was used by Jesus to illustrate the fact that He would be in the grave for three days and three nights after His crucifixion. (Matthew 12:39-41)

Jonah was called by God to be a prophet to the Assyrian city of Nineveh (a very wicked Gentile city). Actually, Nineveh was the capitol city of Assyria and probably the largest city in the world at that time with approximately one million people. When Jonah got the news from God, he packed up his belongings and went the exact opposite direction. Jonah apparently did not object to being God's spoken, but he wanted to be sent to his own people, not the wicked Assyrians. Perhaps he was even afraid that they would kill him or run him out of town.

So Jonah boarded the first ship to the city of Tarshish on the opposite coast from Nineveh. It is interesting that Jonah actually thought he could run and hide from God. As the story goes, Jonah is the cause of a great storm while the ship is at sea and is eventually thrown overboard in order to calm the storm. Immediately

Jonah is swallowed by a great fish (perhaps a whale) and finally deposited on dry land after three days and three nights in the fish's belly.

Now the Lord tells Jonah to go to Nineveh the second time and immediately Jonah headed for Nineveh. Amazingly, the entire population who were able to understand the message apparently came to know Jesus Christ as their Savior as a result of Jonah's preaching. (Jonah 4:11)

Was Jonah happy at the result? No, he was upset with God for sparing the city. Even though Jonah had a million come to know Christ, he still wanted God to destroy the city. So Jonah leaves the city and builds a lean-to of sorts to sit under in order to wait to see when the Lord would destroy Nineveh. Apparently the lean-to didn't work out, so God prepared a gourd tree for Jonah to sit under. Then God used that tree to teach Jonah a valuable lesson regarding the grace of God.

Jonah was happy with the gourd tree, but not with the fact that all those people that God loved had come to know Jehovah (Jesus Christ). So God prepared a worm to come and destroy the gourd tree (symbolic of the people of Nineveh). Why would Jonah choose to be angry about a tree and unhappy at the grace of God in saving all those people. If God did destroy the city of Nineveh Who He loved, it would be like the worm destroying the tree that Jonah "loved." Remember that the priority for the nation of Israel was to preserve the Word and God and disseminate the Gospel to other surrounding nations. Apparently, Jonah had forgotten.

Witnessing for Christ

I. Why Witness

A) The Need

The question of the need to witness for Christ should be obvious to any Christian. There are people without Christ who we can introduce to the Gospel. It is true that God is not limited by our lack of faithfulness to share the Gospel. However, in order for us to be obedient, we need to witness for Christ. It is always a great joy to see a person trust Christ as Savior as a result of our witness. (Luke 16:23-26; John 3:18; II Corinthians 5:11)

B) God's Command

The most important reason to share the Gospel is that God has commanded us to do so. We have studied in the past the fact that we are ambassadors for Christ. As His representatives, we have been entrusted with the Gospel message, much like Israel was under the Law. I believe

we can all agree that we do not want to fail as Israel did in our responsibility to the unsaved. (Mark 16:15; II Timothy 4:1-2; I Corinthians 9:16)

C) Our Privilege

The final reason for witnessing is that it is our privilege as believers. God could have chosen angels to carry the message of salvation but He didn't. God gave us that privilege. If God loved us so much to send Christ as our substitute, it only makes sense that we would want to share this information with others. (I Thessalonians 2:4,19; II Corinthians 5:19; Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16; John 15:8)

II. The Message

A) Plan of Salvation

God's plan of salvation was designed in eternity past. Jesus Christ always knew the plan and joyfully executed it. This plan, as you know, called for Jesus Christ to take on human flesh, become a man, live a sinless life and go to the cross as our substitute. He did exactly this and while still on the cross, having been judged by God the Father for the sins of the world, He said, "It is finished." Because Christ did all the salvation work, salvation is a matter of God's grace. This means that we cannot work for it and we do not deserve it. Salvation is appropriated by faith alone in Christ alone. Some churches call this "easy believism". However, there was nothing easy about what Christ did for us, but the fact is that God did make the plan of salvation easy, so that anyone can be saved by a simple act of faith. There are over 150 verses in the New Testament alone that tell us that eternal life (salvation) is by faith and faith alone. (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5)

B) Eternal Life

One of the results of our faith in Christ for salvation is eternal life. Doctrinally speaking, the reason we receive eternal life is that we are sharing Christ's life. (John 3:18, John 6:47, 10:28; I John 5:13)

C) The Messenger

It is important that we maintain a good testimony before the World. As we have studied before, the World will most likely judge Christianity by how we live. Therefore, if we desire to obey God's command to witness, we must be credible when we speak of Christ. Remember our study on the "Law of Liberty, Love, Expediency and Supreme Sacrifice." We never want to be a "stumblingblock" to an unbeliever because we are exercising our liberty under grace. (Romans 14:13; I Peter 3:15-16)

