

Unit 1: Major Messianic Prophecies

Lesson 5 | December 29, 2024

Jesus, Joseph, and Jonah

Study Text

Micah 5:1–4; Hosea 11:1; Jonah 1:1 through 2:10; Matthew 2:1–15; 12:38–41

Central Truth

Following God’s plan will take you to unexpected places but will always work out for good.

Key Verse: Matthew 12:41

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here (KJV).

“The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore how passages in the Minor Prophets connect to Jesus’ life and ministry.
- Students will affirm that God uses unexpected people and events to bring about His will.
- Students will respond to the gift of salvation with ongoing repentance and joyful service.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Some of humanity’s greatest discoveries—from penicillin and quinine to Velcro® and X-rays—were made by accident. Sometimes an unexpected setback or deviation from our plan can lead to amazing results.

Discussion Starter—Surprise!

Tell us about a time in your life when a surprise or obstacle led to an unexpected blessing.

Say: “We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps” (Proverbs 16:9). In today’s lesson we’ll see that Scripture illustrated in the messianic prophecies of Micah, Hosea, and Jonah. These prophets went through difficult, unusual experiences that may have seemed counterproductive to God’s plan. But each circumstance helped prepare the way for Jesus and His ministry.

Resource Packet Item 1: Timeline of Minor Prophets

This handout will help students understand how Micah, Hosea, and Jonah fit in the timeline of the twelve Minor Prophets.

Romans 8:28 is one of the Scriptures that has become so familiar that we have allowed it to lose some of its impact. But it perfectly illustrates the theme of today's lesson: "We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." The Bible is full of examples of God bringing about His plan despite (or even through) difficulty.

- Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and imprisoned by Potiphar. But God worked through Joseph's circumstances to save his family and preserve the people of Israel. As Joseph told his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20).
- Daniel refused King Darius's command not to pray to the one true God and was thrown in a pit full of lions. But God spared Daniel's life and the king called the nation to "tremble with fear before the God of Daniel" (Daniel 6:26).
- Jesus was misunderstood, falsely accused, rejected, tortured, and crucified. "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:24, NIV). Because of His sacrifice, forgiveness and eternal life are freely offered to anyone who believes.

Keeping God's goodness and sovereignty in mind, let's look at the surprises and difficulties surrounding three messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Part 1—The Bethlehem Birthplace

A Small Village

Micah 5:1–2

Say: In the Book of Micah, the prophet deals with two main themes: the injustice and corruption of Israel's leaders, and God's long-term plan of restoration. As is often the case, God's plan would unfold in unexpected ways.

Micah's prophetic ministry coincided with the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria around 722 BC. He foresaw that the southern kingdom of Judah would also fall to Babylon (4:10), which happened around 100 years later. Micah 5:1 picks up on the prophecy that had begun in 4:6—namely, that the people would eventually return from exile and Jerusalem's glory would be restored.

Micah follows up his distress call in 5:1 with a description of the ruler who would lead the Jewish people into peace (verses 2–5):

- He would be born in Bethlehem, a humble town that was an unexpected birthplace for any powerful ruler. It is identified by its ancient name Ephrath (*EE-frath*) or Ephrathah (*EF-ruh-thuh*) in Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7; Ruth 4:11.
- He would have origins “from of old, from ancient times” (Micah 5:2, NIV). When the terms “old” and “ancient times” are applied to God, they likely carry the idea of eternity (Psalm 68:33; Isaiah 37:26; 46:10).
- He would lead with God’s strength, attaining honor and securing peace.

Centuries later, this prophecy was one of many being recited by Jewish religious leaders as they waited for the Messiah. Although they knew many details about His life and ministry, most would not recognize Him when He arrived. May we not become so attached to our preconceived ideas about who God is and how He works that we also fail to recognize Him.

Discuss

? Why might God choose to fulfill His plans in unexpected ways?

? Think of all the details that had to align for Jesus to be born in that exact place at that exact time. Why do you think these details mattered so much to God?

Where Is the Messiah?

Matthew 2:1–12

Say: The story of the Wise Men can teach us a lot about how messianic prophecies were understood by people in New Testament times.

Resource Packet Item 2: Who Were the Wise Men?

While the Wise Men are a familiar part of the Christmas story, little is known about them. This handout explores some of the historical possibilities surrounding the Magi.

Matthew 2:1 tells us Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great, who died in 4 BC. The Wise Men likely visited up to two years after His birth, since Jesus is called a child (verse 11) and Herod called for the death of all boys under two based on the Wise Men’s report of when the star appeared to them (verse 16). That would push the date of Jesus’ birth back to at least 5–6 BC.

Having followed the star from the east, the Wise Men traveled to the capital city of Jerusalem to inquire about the newborn king of the Jews (verse 2). King Herod justifiably felt threatened, fearing the Messiah had been born. The legitimacy of Herod’s power was doubly vulnerable because 1) he had been appointed by Rome as a client king (or puppet monarch) and 2) his father was an Edomite (*EE-duhm-ight*). Not only was Herod disturbed at the arrival of the Wise Men but so was “everyone in Jerusalem” (verse 3). Not only were they in danger from their Roman occupants who crushed any hint of rebellion, but they were in danger from Herod himself. He was notorious for

murdering anyone he suspected of disloyalty, including prominent Pharisees, court officials, and three of his own sons.

When Herod asked his religious advisors where the Messiah was prophesied to be born, they recounted Micah's prophecy that He would be born in Bethlehem (verse 6). Herod sent the Wise Men there, instructing them to report back "so that I can go and worship him, too!" (verse 8). Following the miraculous star, they found Jesus in Bethlehem and presented their gifts. Their joy in finding Him contrasted starkly with Herod's fearful, murderous reaction to the news of His birth.

The Wise Men were warned in a dream to avoid Herod and return home by another route. Again, God was protecting His Son and moving His plan forward in an unexpected way. These men involved in the ungodly practice of astrology were participants in His will, while Herod, a king of the Jews, had no discernment or revelation. Repeatedly in Scripture, we can see God working in unexpected ways to bring about His plan of salvation for the world.

Discuss

? Why do you think Gentiles like the Wise Men are featured so early in Jesus' story, even though He came first as a "servant to the Jews" (Romans 15:8–9; Matthew 10:5–6; 15:24)? (This is even more significant since Matthew—with his overtly Jewish focus—is the Gospel writer who includes their account.)

Part 2—Called Out of Egypt God's Love for His Children

Hosea 11:1

Say: The Book of Hosea, like many of the Minor Prophets, is complex. It served as a last warning to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. If they didn't repent of their idolatry and wickedness, judgment was on its way.

Despite its message of warning and repentance, Hosea also contains some of the clearest affirmations of God's love for His people that we find in the prophets. This is especially true in chapter 11, where the Lord reflects on Israel's history, calling the nation "a child" and "my son" (verse 1). The reference to Egypt brings to mind Exodus 4:22–23. Returning to Egypt after forty years in the desert and his encounter with God at the burning bush, Moses wondered what he would say to Pharaoh. The Lord replied, "Then you will tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son. I commanded you, "Let my son go, so he can worship me." But since you have refused, I will now kill your firstborn son!'"

Israel was the Lord's "firstborn son" in the sense that they were His beloved people, chosen to carry His blessing to the entire world (Genesis 12:1–3). Hosea 11 recalls the Father's loving care and highlights the horror of Israel's sin and rebellion. Ultimately, a permanent solution to their sin problem would be required.

Discuss

? Read Hosea 11:1–11 and note the descriptions of God’s love for His people. How does this affect your view of His love for you?

? Read Hebrews 12:5–11. How is God’s discipline related to His love for His children?

Flee to Egypt

Matthew 2:13–15

Say: If you’ve ever had to take a highway detour, you know how unpredictable they can be. When you’re on a detour, you simply have to trust that the signs will point you in the right direction and take you to your ultimate destination. Following God’s directions can be like that too. As we listen for His voice and take one obedient step at a time, we can trust He will get us where we need to go.

After the Wise Men left, Joseph experienced a divine dream like many other faithful followers of God before and after him. Matthew repeatedly emphasized the role of divinely inspired dreams related to Jesus’ birth, often involving the angel of the Lord (1:20; 2:12–13, 19, 22). In the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord was often linked to specific instructions from God (Genesis 22:11; Exodus 3:2; Judges 2:4; 2 Kings 1:3).

In this dream, Joseph was instructed to travel approximately 200 miles to Egypt with Mary and Jesus so they could escape Herod’s murderous plot. Joseph’s reaction to this command was similar to his reaction in Matthew 1:20–24 when he was instructed in another dream to take Mary as his wife. Both instances record no questions or debate with God; he simply obeyed without hesitation.

In Old Testament times, Egypt was a natural haven for people fleeing trouble (1 Kings 11:40; Jeremiah 26:21). Just as Abraham, Jacob, and Jacob’s sons were driven to Egypt out of necessity (Genesis 12:10; 42:1 through 43:34; 46), so was Jesus. Moses fled to escape Pharaoh’s judgment (Exodus 2:15); the Messiah had to flee to escape Herod’s persecution. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled specifically to Egypt so that Israel would observe these parallels and acknowledge Jesus as Messiah.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus stayed in Egypt—possibly in the Jewish settlement in Alexandria—until Herod’s death. “This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: ‘I called my Son out of Egypt’” (Matthew 2:15). In what sense did the flight to Egypt fulfill God’s words in Hosea? To understand, we must take a step back and realize Jesus did not just check a few prophetic boxes here and there; He is the fulfillment of salvation history. He is the culmination of the entire message of the Old Testament. “The law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us” (John 1:17–18).

Discuss

? Describe a time when God directed you in an unexpected way. What did you learn from this experience?

? Jesus fulfilled over three hundred messianic prophecies in His life, death, and resurrection, a mathematical improbability so great that it boggles the mind.¹ What do you think is the significance of the prophecy of Hosea 11:1?

Part 3—Jonah Foreshadowed Christ

Three Days in the Fish

Jonah 1:17 through 2:10

Say: So far, we've looked at prophecies related to Jesus' birth and childhood. But let's turn our attention to an unlikely prophecy concerning His burial and resurrection.

Jonah's story is so strange and exciting that it is familiar to many people who have never read the Bible. Its most recognizable moment happens when Jonah is thrown into the sea during a storm and swallowed by a fish sent mercifully by God to keep him from drowning (Jonah 1:17).

Our focus is Jonah's prayer inside the fish, where he stayed for three days and nights. Although the unbelieving sailors had come to the point of desperate prayer much earlier (1:6), Jonah only called on God for help when all other options had been exhausted.

His prayer might seem odd at first glance. After all, Jonah was inside a fish, but his words did not reflect terror or despair. Instead, he thanked God for delivering him from death. In fact, his prayer followed the pattern of thanksgiving in the Psalms:

1. *Describing the crisis.* Jonah had been thrown into the depths of the sea and sank deeper until drowning seemed inevitable (2:3–6). The wild, untamable

1. "The Mathematical Probability That Jesus Is the Christ," Empower International, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://empower.global/the-mathematical-probability-that-jesus-is-the-christ/>.