

**Obadiah:** Name means “servant of the Lord” and occurs a dozen times in the OT. This, the shortest book in the OT, focuses on the region of Edom, south-east of Palestine. The Edomites were descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother. Although Genesis depicts a reconciliation of sorts between the two brothers, there was continuing friction and sometimes open enmity between Judah and Edom, which for several centuries was a prosperous realm with its capital at Petra, widely known today in part because of its appearance in one of the “Indiana Jones” movies.

The prophetic message of Obadiah first concerns God’s humbling of Edom, which will be made visible “among the nations” (1.2) and will be complete because of Edom’s hostility toward its “brother” Zion (v 12: “you should not have gloated over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune”). The prophet further announces that divine judgment will extend beyond “the house of Esau” (v 15) to bring down the lands of the Gentiles also.

The Promise of Obadiah is that “the exiles” of Israel shall be returned and, by the Hand of God, “possess the land” of their former tormenters and enemies (vv 17-20). While the people of “Jacob” are depicted as taking possession, a spiritual dimension is introduced in the conclusion (v 21) with the mention of “saviors” (those who have preserved true devotion to God) and the ultimate Ownership of all: “the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.”

For discussion: What does the message of Obadiah say to the “nations” of today? What is the message to Christians regarding God’s disposition of history? Who are those who, in the end, dwell in “the Kingdom?” Is it legitimate to apply the lessons of Ob to our own time?

**Jonah:** Name (Hebrew “Yonah” means `dove.´) This “prophetic book” could be thought as “looking through the telescope in the opposite direction” or “prophetic mirror.” Unlike other Books of the Prophets, Jonah looks, not at the message, but at the messenger—the prophet himself—in the form of a narrative story with plot devices, vivid images, drama and surprises.

Although the book depicts an ancient Galilean prophet mentioned in 2 Kgs 14.25, the author of this work is almost certainly post-exilic, with a wider view of the role of Israel in the world. The principal character is assigned by God to a mission to pagans—Gentiles—and Gentiles are depicted more favorably than the main character. Even the ship’s crew is more reverent toward God and anxious to please Him than is Jonah, presenting “people of right faith” with a challenging mirror for self-examination.

The Jonah story is best remembered by many for the “whale” incident, but the “great fish” is only one of multiple plot devices—the great storm, the great fish, the plant (4.6), the worm (4.7), and the hot east wind (4.8). The main thrust of the Book is something else entirely!

For discussion: What are the big “surprises” in the Book of Jonah? How do “expectations” set the stage for the surprises?

What does Jonah want at the beginning? What does he want while on the ship? Where does the ship’s captain find him, and what does this say about him? Why does he ask the crew to throw him overboard? How does Jonah view his being swallowed by the great fish?

What does he seek to do while inside the great fish, and how does he express this?

How does the behavior of the Ninevites compare to the behavior of the Israelites in the run-up to the Babylonian Exile?

What does Jonah finally reveal was his real fear when God asked him to go to Nineveh?

What other OT character does 4.3 remind you of? Is the reason the same, or different?

What does Jonah want to see happen to Nineveh?

What does God's final Word to Jonah say about the nature of God's mercy?

If the character Jonah is a symbol, what does this symbol represent?

What does it say to, and about, God's vision for the role of those represented?

In what way is a theme in the Book of Jonah similar to a key theme in the Book of Malachi?

If we put ourselves in the place of Jonah, what do we hear God saying?