November 23–29: Amos; Obadiah; Jonah "Seek the Lord, and Ye Shall Live"

Introduction

Amos and Jonah were contemporaries who served as prophets in the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) shortly after the time of Elisha.

Obadiah served in the Southern Kingdom (Judah). He was a contemporary of Jeremiah (and Lehi) and was likely taken captive by the Babylonians when they conquered Judah, as Daniel was.

Warning to Israel

The Lord promises that He will warn His people before destruction comes upon them.

Amos 3:1-2,7-8
1 Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,
2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.
8 The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

What does the Lord promise to do before bringing destruction upon His people?

(Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets
the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy)

Milton R. Hunter
"Another distinctive characteristic of a prophet of God is that he is chosen, appointed, and called by the Lord. He draws his knowledge from the divine fountain of truth; therefore, he speaks in the name of the Lord and as one having authority. Let us give a few examples. The Prophet Amos, in his masterful discourse at Bethel, prefaced each of his predictions by 'Thus saith the Lord' (Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13)." (CR, April 1948)

N. Eldon Tanner
"There are many scriptures which assure us that God is as interested in us today as he has been in all his children from the beginning, and thus we

believe in continuous revelation from God through his prophets to guide us in these latter days. The Prophet Amos said, 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.'" (CR, April 1975)

However, simply warning Israel was not enough.

Amos 4:9-12
9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.
10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.
11 I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.
12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

How did the Lord try to bring Israel to repentance despite their continued refusal to return to Him?

(verse 10)

George Q. Cannon
"There is a passage in the book of Amos on this subject, which shows the Lord pleading with Israel, to bring them back to the consideration of [the] law....

"These are the calamities which God sent upon Israel with the intention to have them return to him; but notwithstanding they were poured out and pestilence visited the land, the people hardened their hearts against him, broke his laws and violated his ordinances, and his anger was enkindled against them, and they were driven out from the face of the land." (JD, 15:145)

Amos warns that the Lord will no longer accept Israel's temple ordinances and sacrifices.

Amos 5:18-24
18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.
19 As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and

leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.
20 Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?
21 ¶ I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.
22 Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.
23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.
24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Why do you think the Lord reject Israel's feasts, sacrifices, and worship instead of blessing them with light?

- They do not offer them with hearts that are committed to obeying the Lord.

Pride

Israel believes they are safe and protected, despite the prophets' warnings.

Amos 6:1-8
1 Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!
2 Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?
3 Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near;
4 That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;
5 That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David;
6 That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.
7 ¶ Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.
8 The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

What danger do these verses teach us about becoming so comfortable with our lives that we fail to heed the Lord's warnings and repent?

(Woe to them that are at ease in Zion
Ye that put far away the evil day
they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph)

2 Nephi 28:21,24,28
21) And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.
24) Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!
28) And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God! For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall.

Orson Pratt
"The purposes of God must be fulfilled; and we are the people who have to do the work; and to those who do not take part in it, I will apply the words of my text—'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.' And this woe will find them out; it will surely come upon them, and sorely afflict them... until they learn by sad experience that there is no such thing as being at ease in Zion until Zion has travailed in pain and brought forth her children." (JD, 9:174)

This attitude also comes because of pride

Amos 6:12-14
12 ¶ Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock:
13 Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?
14 But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the LORD the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness.

How did Israel's pride in its own strength and disregard for righteousness lead to the Lord's judgment?

(Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?)

Sidney B. Sperry
"Amos next turns his invective on the careless and reckless rich of Israel, on those who are at ease, on the self-satisfied and the arrogant—in short, on those who, having plenty, take no thought of the sad social and religious state of their country…. The nation is to be destroyed because its inhabitants pervert truth and righteousness and trust in their own strength." (Voice of Israel's Prophets, pg. 313)

Obadiah also teaches that pride was one of the factors that led to Israel's downfall.

Obad 1:2-4
2 Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised.
3 ¶ The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?
4 Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

How can pride deceive us into believing we are secure and beyond the reach of the Lord's judgments?

(I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised
Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down)

The Last Days

Amos teaches that in the latter days, before the Restoration, the word of the Lord will be unavailable.

Amos 8:9-12
9 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day:
10 And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.
11 ¶ Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:
12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.

What are the consequences of losing access to the word of the Lord because of wickedness?

(they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it)

Joseph B. Wirthlin
"There is a gnawing hunger in the human heart that, if not fed by the truths of the gospel, leaves life empty and devoid of peace…. Such empty nostrums have led mankind to seek worldly goods and symbols of material power, blinding humanity to the truth that only the righteous life firmly established in the daily living of God's commandments brings true happiness. Anything less leaves the heart unfed, with a yearning inner

> hunger—a hunger which it is our mission to identify and define and of which we should make the people aware. I have seen... the fulfillment of the words of Amos, that there would be 'a famine in the land, not a famine of bread... but of hearing the words of the Lord.'" (CR, Oct. 1975)

Amos prophesies of the scattering and gathering of Israel.

Amos 9:8-10
8 Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the LORD.
9 For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.
10 All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us.

What does the Lord's image of sifting Israel among the nations teach us about the scattering of Israel?

> Wilford Woodruff
> "All that [Christ] said concerning them and all that Moses predicted concerning their dispersion and about their being driven, as corn is sifted through a sieve, among the nations... has been fulfilled.... They have been trampled under foot by the whole Gentile world for the last eighteen hundred years. In their affliction and persecutions they have had to suffer almost beyond the endurance of man." (JD, 13:156)

Amos 9:11,14-15
11 ¶ In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old:

14 And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.
15 And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.

What does the Lord promise He will do to gather Israel in the last days?

> (I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen... and I will build it as in the days of old:
> I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them)
>
> - Perhaps verse 11 is referring to the building of temples in the last days

which, we know from the teachings of Joseph Smith, is essential to gathering Israel

Obadiah teaches us more about the role of temples in the gathering of Israel.

Obad 1:17-18,21
17 ¶ But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.
18 And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.

21 And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

What do you think Obadiah means when he prophesies that "saviours shall come up on mount Zion"?

Joseph Smith
"The keys are to be delivered, the spirit of Elijah is to come, the Gospel to be established, the Saints of God gathered, Zion built up, and the Saints to come up as saviors on Mount Zion.

"But how are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts… and redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with them; and herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, which fulfills the mission of Elijah." (TPJS, pg. 330)

Perhaps this helps us to understand the statement in verse 17, "upon mount Zion shall be deliverance". And in verse 18, "and the house of Joseph a flame."

Jonah and the Whale

Jonah allowed his personal feelings to get in the way of obeying God's expectations.

Jonah 1:1-3
1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.
3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the

LORD.

Tarshish is commonly believed to have been the ancient city of Tartessus in Spain, near the Strait of Gibraltar.

Why do you think Jonah was unwilling to preach the Lord's message to the people of Nineveh?

Perhaps Jonah believed that the Israelites were God's chosen people and that no Gentile nation was acceptable to Him. Can you think of another occasion when the Israelites were commanded to teach the gospel to the Gentiles?

- Peter's vision

Perhaps Jonah didn't want them to have the opportunity to repent.

Lorenzo Snow
"Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, for he knew that... all nations and peoples that feared [God], and lived according to the light which they possessed;… that the Lord would forgive that people." (JD, 23:338)

Perhaps Jonah feared for his life if he went to Nineveh.

Henry B. Eyring
"Think of Jonah. He fled at first from the call from the Lord to warn the people of Nineveh who were blinded to the danger by sin. He knew that wicked people through the ages have rejected prophets and sometimes killed them. Yet when Jonah went forward with faith, the Lord blessed him with safety and success." (CR, Oct. 1998)

Perhaps Jonah felt overwhelmed with the task.

Orson Pratt
"He was going to condemn the great city of Nineveh.... Jonah finding that the Lord sent but one witness with such an important message felt almost discouraged, and when he was on his way to deliver it to a great people and city, he felt that he would almost rather die than go as a single and solitary witness with a message of so much importance, and he besought the people to throw him overboard." (JD, 14:253)

Victor L. Ludlow
"How can Jonah's experience be applied to our lives? Do we ever run from our responsibilities in the Church? Are we ever afraid to do a task

> given us by our leaders? Does the Lord seem to put obstacles in our lives to help us turn around and establish more valuable priorities? The example of Jonah provides answers to these questions as we understand how God works with his children." ("Unlocking Old Testament Prophecy," Ensign, Oct. 1990)

A violent storm arose at sea, and Jonah admitted to the ship's crew that it was likely because he had fled from the Lord's calling.

Jonah 1:10-15
10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.
11 ¶ Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.
12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.
13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.
14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.
15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

> What does Jonah's willingness to sacrifice himself to save the sailors teach us about taking responsibility for our actions?
>
> > (the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD
> > I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.
> > we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood)
> >
> > Lorenzo Snow
> > "In Jonah again we find an interesting trait of character. When upon the raging waters, and fears were expressed by the sailors as to their ability to save the ship, Jonah, feeling conscience-stricken at the course he had taken in not proceeding to Nineveh as commanded of the Lord, came forward and confessed himself as being the cause of the disaster that was about to befall them, and was willing to be sacrificed in the interest of those on board." (JD, 23:189)

Jonah is swallowed by a great fish.

Jonah 1:17

17 ¶ Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Some people question the story of Jonah because they believe it is impossible to survive inside a whale for three days.
What does this verse state that helps us understand this miracle?

(the LORD had prepared a great fish)

Joseph Fielding Smith
"Are we to reject it as being an impossibility and say that the Lord could not prepare a fish, or whale, to swallow Jonah?… Surely the Lord sits in the heavens and laughs at the wisdom of the scoffer, and then on a sudden answers his folly by a repetition of the miracle in dispute, or by the presentation of one still greater." (Doctrines of Salvation, 2:314–15)

Let's also remember that the Lord used the story of Jonah and the great fish to teach an important principle.

Matthew 12:39-41
39) But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:
40) For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
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.

Jonah repents and commits to obeying the Lord.

Jonah 2:1-2,8-10
1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,
2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.
9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.
10 ¶ And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

What did Jonah come to realize while he was in the belly of the great fish, and how can we apply that realization in our own lives?

(I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving)

Marie Searle
"Jonah spiritually stagnated in the belly of the fish for three days and nights until he repented and expressed this interesting realization to the Lord:

"'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.'

"Even if we have the same callings year after year... we can still gain new and vital knowledge and skills and 'with joy... draw water out of the wells of salvation' (Isa. 12:3).... Through Church callings, we are able to learn to understand many eternal principles." ("An Invitation from the Lord," Ensign, Dec. 1989)

The word of the Lord came to Jonah again, and this time Jonah listened and obeyed.

Jonah 3:1-6,10
1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,
2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.
3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.
4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.
5 ¶ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.
6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

10 ¶ 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.

JST, Jonah 3:10
And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way and repented; and God turned away the evil that he had said he would bring upon them.

What does the response of the king and people of Nineveh teach us about how genuine repentance can change our lives and bring the Lord's mercy?

(the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast
the king of Nineveh... covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes)

Lorenzo Snow
"Jonah turned up at last in Nineveh, a wiser, if not a better man. And he

went to work in earnest, performing the mission to which he had been called, and delivered the message to the people. The king heard of it, and he had that faith in and that knowledge of the character of the Almighty that he believed and humbled himself, and used his influence with his nobles and people that they should do likewise,... and the people repented and humbled themselves before God in the hope that he would turn away his wrath from them. And they so fully complied with the requirements that his judgment was reversed, and the great city preserved." (JD, 23:338)

Despite Jonah's diligent obedience to the Lord's commandments, he seems disappointed that the people of Nineveh repented and were spared.

Jonah 4:1-3,9-11
1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.
2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.
3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.
10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:
11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

What did the Lord understand about the people of Nineveh that Jonah failed to recognize?

The people of Nineveh were searching from the truth
(wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand)

Perhaps God was preparing the way for the people of Judah to be accepted by the Babylonians.

The Babylonians captured Syria shortly before conquering Judah. Recall how King Nebuchadnezzar welcomed Daniel and other Jews into his court and encouraged his people to recognize the God of Israel. Perhaps this acceptance was made possible, in part, by the faith and devotion of some of the Syrians, which had helped prepare the way.