

**GOD WITH US**  
**Part 6: Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love**  
**Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.**

**Message 8 – Minor Prophets with Major Messages**  
**Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah**

**Introduction**

The 12 minor prophets were raised up as mouthpieces of God to continually call the 10 northern tribes-Israel, and the 2 southern tribes-Judah, back to a sincere faith in Him. Up until these prophets, the former prophets like Elijah and Elisha, as well as the more 'minor' ones like Hanani and his son Jehu, were all prophets who ministered, but did not write books on a scroll in the O.T. The messages of the 12 minor prophets were "minor" only in the length of their messages. The messages the prophets spoke were from God's heart. God was calling the 12 tribes that He had chosen back to a faithful love relationship with Himself. They were to represent Him to the nations around them, to give all of humanity an opportunity to know Him and walk in His ways. But because they continued to stray and follow the customs and beliefs of the nations that surrounded them, worshiping the local gods of Baal and Asherah, God's 'unusual work' was to discipline them in love because He is *just and holy*. He also used the prophets to call the surrounding nations directly to repent of their evil beliefs and practices, and believe in Him as the one true God – Yahweh.

These writing prophets lived in the period after 2 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles<sup>25</sup>. The historical records in Kings and Chronicles give us the background to understand why the prophets' messages were so important. Most of the prophets begin their messages by naming the kings who reigned during their ministry.

The prophets had 2 main ministries: **1) Forth-telling**: To instruct and exhort the people based on words of God that were previously revealed. They dealt with the current or past sins, God's warnings, and the judgment that would come if the people did not repent and change their ways. As forth-tellers, they were functioning much like a modern pastor-teacher. **2) Foretelling**: To reveal God's words concerning future events. Their predictions centered around 4 points in history: Their current historical setting; the threatening invasions and captivities of the Assyrians and the Babylonians; the

future 1<sup>st</sup> coming of the Messiah; and the final days and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of the Messiah and His Millennial reign on earth. Interestingly, Peter, in the N.T. explains that even the prophets themselves wondered at times how and when the events they foretold would actually happen (see 1Peter 1:10-12).

## JOEL

### Outline

Joel's messages are arranged as follows. In general, the first 3 parts of his book deal with the current situation in Judah, while the last 3 point forward to distant future when God will judge all the nations of the world.

1. The Historical Situation
  - The Locust Plague 1:1-2:11
  - Call to Repentance 2:12-17
  - The Lord's Response 2:18-27
2. The Future Day of God's Judgment
  - A Future Day 2:28-32
  - A Day of Judgment 3:1-17
  - Judah Restored and Exalted 3:18-21

### Overview

Joel arose with a word from God during a devastating locust plague that destroyed the entire Southern Kingdom of Judah. He describes the locust plague like a vast army invading the country.

***“A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, it is like a desert waste—nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course” (Selections from Joel 1-2).***

In that day, with no pesticides to help ward off plagues, the entire economy of a nation could be destroyed for many years by such a vast infestation. Things were so bad in Joel's day that there was not even sufficient grain and oil to carry on the normal worship duties at God's temple.

But what God says through Joel is that HE sent the locust army to invade the land. This wasn't some freak of nature. It was the hand of God moving to discipline His people for disobedience to the covenant.

***“The LORD utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is He who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it” (Joel 2:11)?***

This idea that God disciplines His children is a theme echoed throughout the Bible. “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline, and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Prov. 3:11,12 and Heb. 12:5,6). How does God discipline His children? Locusts! He sends something to eat away something we’re clinging to. A relationship falls apart. A financial deal goes south. A plan we have crashes. Our health sidelines us. It’s always one kind of locust or another; God moving in various ways to strip away things that we cling to, things that are not good for us. But He always disciplines us in love to the end that we might be conformed to the image of His Son.

In the midst of this discipline, God calls the people to repent (turn back to Him). Yet, their repentance must be deeper than just an external display of remorse.

***“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Tear your heart, not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:12,13).***

God is fundamentally gracious and compassionate. So, even in times of discipline, He’s longing for us to turn back to Him. To “tear our garments” is to engage in external displays of remorse. To “tear our hearts” is to repent deeply and sincerely. God can see when we’re going through the motions. That’s what was happening in Joel’s day. People felt the sting of the locust plague, and they started “going to the temple.” But their hearts weren’t truly broken over their sin. They were going through the motions in the hope that a little “religion” would be enough to send the locusts away.

Yet, IF the people would truly repent, God would respond:

***“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten . . . My great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed.”***

*Is God trying to get your attention on something? Has He sent some locusts to eat away at something that you are holding onto? Maybe it's time to take a message from Joel. God disciplines us for our good; but we must respond to His discipline with humble hearts of repentance. Tear your heart, not your garment!*

**\*\*Note:** Joel's prophecy played an important role on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell upon the infant church. Peter pointed to Joel 2:28-32 to say that the promised outpouring of God's Spirit had happened (see Acts 2:16-21).

## **AMOS**

### **Outline**

Amos was a shepherd and grower of fig trees. He was from the rural south of Judah, but called to go to the urban north to confront Israel over their sins.

1. Oracles against the surrounding nations 1:1-2:5
2. Oracles against Israel 2:6-7:9
3. Historical Interlude: Amos and Amaziah 7:10-17
4. Visions of the Coming Judgment 8:1-9:10
5. A Vision of Future Hope 9:11-15

### **Overview**

Amos ministered during the 41-year long reign of Jeroboam II, a hugely prosperous time for the people of the Northern Kingdom. It was a time when people were basking in the lap of luxury. Amos' message centers around the social injustices that were happening during this time of prosperity.

***“They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Your women oppress the poor and crush the needy while saying to their husbands, “Bring us some drinks!” They oppress the innocent***

*and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. You say, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"—skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales ... (Selections from Amos 1-8).*

They were living the lifestyle of the rich and famous; but they forgot that God had given them riches so that they could be generous, not greedy. God had blessed them so that they could, in turn, bless the less fortunate in society, instead of just building bigger houses. Through Amos, God gave a warning and then an appeal. First, God's warning:

***"I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished," declares the LORD. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins" (3:15 and 5:11).***

God warns His people: If you continue to revel in your luxuries and abuse the poor, I will strip it all away from you. Your *managers* of wealth that I have granted to you; not *owners*. If you won't share with the poor and needy, I'll take it all away from you.

And then God makes this appeal:

***"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21-24).***

God says: I want action, not religious posing. I want justice, not a religious festival. I won't accept your offerings ... or your songs ... or your ceremonies. But I will accept some social justice and the right treatment of people who are hurting.

*Social justice matters to God. It should matter to us too. The line from Amos: "Let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-ending stream" was at the center of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.' "I Have a Dream" speech that catalyzed the Civil Right Movement in America. Social justice continues to be such an important issue in our society today. The apostle John put it this way: "Whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1John 3:17,18). Does your heart reflect God's heart for those who are oppressed? Do matters of Social Justice burden your heart, as they do the heart of God?*

## OBADIAH

### Outline

Although Obadiah contains only 21 verses, we can still see a clear outline of his message to the Edomites, Israel's southern neighbor.

1. Edom will be humbled vv.1-9
2. God's case against Edom vv.10-14
3. Vindication and Restoration of Israel vv.15-21

### Overview

Obadiah prophesied against Edom, the southern neighbor of Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the brother and rival of Jacob (see Genesis 25-27). The contention between Jacob and Esau played out in the ongoing historical rivalry between the Israelites and Edomites. (It was very much like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of today.) Obadiah specifically condemns Edom for cruelty toward Israel during times when Israel was being oppressed by foreign powers.

***"Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame you will be destroyed forever. On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune . . ." (vv.10-12).***

Not only did the Edomites "gloat" over Israel's misfortune; they also piled on and assisted Israel's enemies in furthering their pain. "You were like one of them" (i.e., Israel's cruel oppressors).

Through Obadiah the prophet, God points at something deeper than their sin of cruelty.

***“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD” (vv.3,4).***

The Edomites were a very smart and proud people. Their capitol city of Petra was literally carved out of cliffs in the mountains. They picked a mountain at the top of the world and carved the fronts of buildings into the mountains. They turned caves into homes and castles and temples. They believed they had built the most destruction-proof city ever.



Pride breaks the heart of God. As the Proverb says: *“Pride comes before the fall, and a haughty spirit before destruction” (Prov.16:18)*. In fact, the Edomites were subjugated by the Assyrians and other foreign powers. In the centuries just before Jesus came, the Edomites were subject to the Jews. Herod the Great, the “king of the Jews,” who ruled for the 40 years leading up to and including the birth of Jesus, was an Edomite!

*The message of Obadiah should make us constantly wary of any roots of pride, arrogance, or gloating over others. God will always bring us down from our self-constructed fortresses of pride. Is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about any roots of pride in your life? It is good to confess the sin of pride, but to also allow other people to know about your struggle with pride and to be able to speak into your life when they see signs of pride arising from within you. “God is opposed to the proud; but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6 and 1Peter 5:5).*

# JONAH

## Outline

The book of Jonah is more of a historical narrative of the prophet's life than it is a collection of prophetic messages. The narrative is continuous, but can be broken down into 4 sections:

1. God's Command and Jonah's Flight ch.1
2. Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance ch.2
3. God's Renewed Call and Nineveh's Repentance ch.3
4. Jonah's Complaint and God's Response ch.4

## Overview

Jonah, like Amos, ministered during the 41-year reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. (Note the reference to Jonah at 2Kings 14:25). But the major legacy of Jonah had nothing to do with his words to Israel; rather, his refusal to go speak words to the people of Nineveh, the capitol of the Assyrian Empire. God told him to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent of their evil ways, or they would be destroyed.

***“But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD” (Jonah 1:3)***



He was told to go 550 miles east by land. He went 2,500 west by water. Why did Jonah run the other direction? Because he knew that God was compassionate and merciful toward *all people*, and he didn't think the wicked Assyrians deserved any hope for God's mercy. They deserved judgment, not mercy. So Jonah said, in effect: *I'm not going to be your mouthpiece to these people*. Jonah stopped seeing the world through God's eyes of compassion.



God could have allowed Jonah to die in the great storm at sea, and He could have found another willing prophet to do the work that Jonah refused to do. Instead, God gave Jonah 3 days in the belly of a “great fish” to rethink some things. This shows that God was not only concerned with the ministry and message of His servant; but also with the heart of His servant. God led Jonah to repent even as He prepared him to lead the people of Nineveh to repent.

Then God gave Jonah a second chance. The great fish vomited Jonah up on the beach. God then re-commissioned Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh with a message of repentance.

***“The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” (3:5).***

The whole city turned to God and asked for His mercy! People’s hearts were ready. Nineveh was saved! That should have produced delight in Jonah’s heart. Instead, it made Jonah very angry.

***“But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:1-3).***

Jonah could not get his head around God’s mercy toward all kinds of people. Deeply disturbed, he went outside the city and waited to see if, perhaps, God would change His mind and destroy Nineveh. In the attempt to try to get Jonah’s attention, God allowed a plant to grow up to provide shade for Jonah in the sweltering heat. Jonah fell in love with his shade-plant! Then, God allowed a worm to attack the plant, and it died, causing Jonah great grief. When God asked Jonah if he had good reason to be sad over the death of the plant, Jonah replied that he most certainly had reason to be upset. Then, God ends the narrative with this question:

***Then the LORD said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (Jonah 4:10,11).***

*A recent study of thousands of non-Christians revealed that the #1 disposition they feel coming from the Christian community toward them is JUDGMENT, not love. CONDEMNATION, not compassion. So, we have a problem with the mission. Our heart is not accurately reflecting God's heart. How about you? Do you have God's heart of compassion for the world? Are there certain groups of people that you are unwilling to show God's love to? "Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now. -Saint Teresa of Avila*

### **Discussion Questions**

These 4 minor prophets have given us major messages to ponder for our own lives. Let's allow each prophet to ask us questions:

1. Joel – Has God sent something to eat away at something that you are holding onto? Do you recognize this “locust invasion” as a discipline from the loving hand of your Father-God? Have you turned back to Him in humble repentance over this issue?
2. Amos – Does social injustice break your heart, as it breaks the heart of God? Are there matters of social injustice that you need to personally get involved in? Are you using your wealth/prosperity to bless and help those less fortunate than you?
3. Obadiah – Has the sin of pride crept into your life in some way? Have you developed any sense of invincibility? Do you need to cultivate a deeper dependence upon God? He is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.
4. Jonah – Do you have a heart for those who are far from God? Are you willing to be God's ambassador of love to anyone He sends you to?