

## CHAPTER 15: Hosea, Joel, Amos and Micah

We're going to take a look now at four of God's prophets from around the same time as Isaiah. Their messages are very similar to Isaiah's. Hosea and Amos are prophets in the northern kingdom of Israel. Micah and Joel prophesy in the southern kingdom of Judah just like Isaiah. And like Isaiah, these prophets offer a three-part message: (1) You, Israel or Judah, have broken the covenant with God and better repent! (2) If you do not repent judgment will come upon you. (3) There is some hope beyond judgment. God will restore the nation and send His messiah king.

### JOEL

Historically the first of the four prophets we are going to look at is the prophet Joel. He preceded Isaiah by about 80 years. Very little is known about him. He's not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament. Though no indication is given of when the book of Joel was written or who it was written to, we do get a hint from the nations that Joel mentions – Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Greece, Egypt and Edom. We know that these nations were prominent in Judah's history in the 8th and 9th Centuries B.C. Also, Joel does not mention either Assyria or Babylon who came to dominance later. So Joel is a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah around the time of King Joash, a good king who reigned 40 years. Joel's prophetic ministry would have coincided with Elisha's prophetic ministry that was going on up in the northern kingdom.

**Listen to this, you elders; pay attention all inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your whole life or in the lifetime of your ancestors?** (Joel 1:2) A severe drought has hit and there is an invasion of locust that strips the land of its vegetation. Joel sees this as an act of God with spiritual significance. He realizes that the locust infestation is an indication of God's displeasure with the nation of Judah. It is a wake-up call from God for His people. Joel calls for national repentance and he urgently pleads for God to help.

Joel has a vision of a very large invading foreign army. He sees vivid parallels to the actual locust swarm he just witnessed. Both leave the land devastated. Both are unstoppable. And both are a result of God's judgment against His people.

**How awful that day will be! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come as destruction from the Divine Destroyer.** (Joel 1:15) **Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm signal on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land shake with fear, for the day of the Lord is about to come. Indeed it is near!** (Joel 2:1) **Yes,**

**the day of the Lord is awesome and very terrifying – who can survive it?** (Joel 2:11) This “day of the Lord” Joel talks about here is God’s dreadful judgment which is coming.

**“Yet even now,” the Lord says, “return to Me with all your heart – with fasting, weeping and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your garments!” Return to the Lord your God, for He is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and boundless in loyal love – often relenting from calamitous punishment.** (Joel 2:12-13) Once again the call goes out to blow the trumpet in Zion. But this time it is to summon the people to fast and mourn; to repent and return to the Lord who is waiting for them with open arms.

Well, God responds favorably to the repentance of Joel and the people of Judah. **Then the Lord became zealous for His land; He had compassion on His people.** (Joel 2:18) God says He will reverse the devastating effects that the locust and invading foreign army had on Judah. The threatening invaders will be turned away to their own ruin. The devastated land will be brought back to life and made abundant again. **I will make up for the years that the locust consumed your crops... my great army that I sent against you. You will have plenty to eat, and your hunger will be fully satisfied...** (Joel 2:25)

**It will so happen that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who survive, just as the Lord has promised; the remnant will be those whom the Lord will call.** (Joel 2:32)

The book of Joel ends with a prophecy that will take place in the distant future: **For look! In those days and at that time I will return the exiles to Judah and Jerusalem.** (Joel 3:1) After His people return home, God will judge the foreign nations who had oppressed them. There will be one final war...

**Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for a holy war! Call out the warriors! Let all these fighting men approach and attack! Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears!” Crowds, great crowds are in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision!”** (Joel 3:9-10, 14)

Here we see a battle to end all battles and God is going to win!

The book of Joel shows how human sin and failure bring devastation and destruction. These are the result of God’s holy judgment. But we also see something very important about God – He longs to show mercy to anyone who will confess their sin and turn to Him.

## HOSEA

Hosea is a prophet living in the northern kingdom of Israel. He is a contemporary of Isaiah's. Hosea is called to speak on God's behalf during the reign of King Jeroboam II. Jeroboam is a successful military leader who has won many battles and gained new territory for Israel. Under his leadership the nation has prospered. But in the eyes of the prophets Jeroboam is one of the worst kings ever. His wealth has led to spiritual and social apathy. He has allowed the worship of Canaanite gods. So at this time the nation of Israel, though strong and prosperous, is on a downward spiral spiritually and morally. Eventually the Assyrian Empire will come and conquer Israel and will destroy its capital city Samaria (2 Kings 17). But Hosea will not live long enough to see this happen.

**When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, he said to him, "Go marry a prostitute who will bear illegitimate children conceived through prostitution, because the nation continually commits spiritual prostitution by turning away from the Lord."** (Hosea 1:2) So, Hosea marries a prostitute named Gomer. They have three children together. But at some point Gomer, not surprisingly, commits adultery and abandons her family.

God tells Hosea that, despite Gomer's unfaithfulness, Hosea is to go find her and commit his love to her again. **The Lord said to me, "Go, show love to your wife again, even though she loves another man and continually commits adultery."** (Hosea 3:1a) Hosea does find Gomer, but she has become a slave. So he buys her off the auction block and takes her home with him.

In this analogy Hosea represents God while Gomer is Israel. It underscores just how deeply God loves Israel – **"Likewise, the Lord loves the Israelites although they turn to other gods and love to offer raisin cakes to idols."** (Hosea 3:1b)

God has every reason to end the covenant and divorce Israel. They have been unfaithful. But God continues to show His loyal love to her. He is committed to keeping His covenant with her. God pursues Israel even though she has abandoned Him for other gods.

**Afterward, the Israelites will turn and seek the Lord their God and their Davidic king. Then they will submit to the Lord in fear and receive His blessings in the future.** (Hosea 3:5) The first few chapters of Hosea have this wonderful theme about God's unfailing love for His unfaithful people.

But then in Chapter 4 God's tone shifts... **Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites! For the Lord has a covenant lawsuit against the people of Israel. For there is neither faithfulness nor loyalty in the land, nor do they acknowledge God. There is only cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery. They resort to**

**bloodshed... They consult their wooden idols... they commit spiritual adultery against their God.** (Hosea 4:1-2, 12) Through Hosea, God exposes Israel's various sins, which includes the worship of other gods.

In Chapters 5-6 Hosea announces the punishment for the nation's prostitution. Foreign nations will come and defeat both Israel and Judah and take their people into captivity. They will be oppressed and displaced. We know from 2 Kings 17 that the people of Israel are taken north and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. The king of Assyria then brings foreigners in from other nations and settles them in Samaria and the other cities of Israel. And we saw earlier in our story where the people of Judah are taken captive into Babylon. So, there will be severe consequences for the unfaithfulness of God's covenant people!

In Chapters 7-10 Hosea points to Israel's recent history where they went to Egypt and Assyria seeking their help for defense rather than relying upon God for protection. This will prove to be their downfall. Assyria, their so-called ally is going to come and devastate their land. To escape the Assyrians, many Israelites will try to take refuge in Egypt. Either way, they will be removed from their land. **They will be fugitives among the nations.** (Hosea 9:17)

But there is still some hope. In Chapter 11 Hosea portrays God as a loving father who raises His son Israel and shares everything good with him. But the son grows up and rebels and turns on his father. On one hand this makes God very angry with Israel. But on the other hand it breaks God's heart. **How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? I have had a change of heart! All my tender compassions are aroused!** (Hosea 11:8) While God eventually does allow Israel to be conquered, this will not be a permanent judgment. God will show them compassion!

In Chapters 12-14 Hosea pleads for Israel to repent and turn back to God. If they repent then God says, **"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for My anger will turn away from them."** (Hosea 14:4) This will open the door for God to be able to restore His blessings upon Israel.

The last verse in the book of Hosea is a bit like an editor's note. Given all that God has spoken through the prophet Hosea, we the readers are asked... **Who is wise? Let him discern these things! Who is discerning? Let him understand them! For the ways of the Lord are right; the godly walk in them, but in them the rebellious stumble.** (Hosea 14:9)

The book of Hosea shows us a lot about God's good character and about human nature. Consider this balance: while God is just and holy and He must and will render judgment on human sin; God's heart's desire, motivated by His love for humanity, is to heal and to save all who will call out to Him. He IS a good God!

## AMOS

Amos is a shepherd from Tekoa, located in the southern kingdom of Judah. He is a contemporary of both Isaiah and Hosea. Amos senses God's calling on him to prophesy up in the northern kingdom of Israel, currently ruled by King Jeroboam II. So, this is the same general location and timeframe as Hosea's prophetic ministry.

Injustice and the neglect of the poor are rampant in Israel. So God directs Amos to travel north and announce God's word to the people of the kingdom of Israel.

**Amos said: "The Lord comes roaring out of Zion; from Jerusalem He comes bellowing! The shepherds' pastures wilt; the summit of [Mount] Carmel withers."** (Amos 1:2) Amos uses a metaphor of a dangerous lion to describe God. He sees God like a hungry lion encircling His prey and getting ready for the kill.

God declares judgment on six nations that surround Israel – Damascus (Syria), Gaza and Ashdod (Philistia), Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Then God pronounces judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah. For all of them God's judgment is the same – fire.

But Amos is not done yet. In Chapter 2 Amos unleashes a message of God's judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel. It's three times longer and more intense than any of the judgments against those other nations. God charges Israel with a variety of social, sexual and religious sins. Israel's wealthy ignore the poor. They allow injustice to rule the land. They sell their own people into slavery. They are grossly immoral. They worship false gods.

**A lion has roared! Who is not afraid? The sovereign Lord has spoken!** (Amos 3:8) Staying with the lion imagery, Amos describes God's judgment on Israel: **This is what the Lord says: "Just as a shepherd salvages from the lion's mouth a couple of leg bones or a piece of an ear, so the Israelites who live in Samaria will be salvaged. They will be left with just a corner of a bed, and a part of a couch."** (Amos 3:12) Amos sees that a small remnant will remain in Israel after the Assyrian invasion.

Amos continues his scathing rebuke in Chapter 4 thru 6 as he goes into more and more detail about all of Israel's sins. God says basically, "Go on and continue with your rebellion..." **"Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel. Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, Israel!"** (Amos 4:12)

In Chapters 7 and 8 God gives Amos four visions that symbolically depict the coming judgment, the day of the Lord. The first vision is that of a terrible locust plague, similar to what Joel described. The second vision is a scorching fire. Just like the fiery

judgments on the other nations he saw earlier, so it will be for Israel. In the third vision God shows Amos a wall that represents Israel. God holds a plumb line to the wall. But the wall is leaning. It is quite unstable and can easily fall over. In the fourth vision Amos sees a basket of summer fruit. It's ripe and ready to be eaten. This indicates that the time is ripe for judgment on Israel!

Well, predictably, when the leaders of Israel hear Amos's words about a coming judgment on their nation, they reject his message. **And Amaziah [the priest of Bethel] then said to Amos, "O seer, leave! Run away to the land of Judah! Earn your living and prophesy there! Don't prophesy at Bethel any longer, for a royal temple and palace are here!"** (Amos 7:12-13). In other words, "Go home, Amos! Get out of here! How dare you speak like that about us and our king and our country?"

Amos leaves the leaders with one final word from God: Israel is going to be destroyed by a foreign nation whose army will wipe out Israel's cities and carry its people away. We know from 2 Kings 17 that this will, in fact, occur.

But just like Hosea, Amos ends with a message of hope. God says that a remnant of Israel will survive. **"Look, the sovereign Lord is watching the sinful nation, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth. But I will not completely destroy the family of Jacob," says the Lord.** (Amos 9:8) At the end of the book of Amos God promises to restore the family of Jacob, the house of David. **"I will bring back My people Israel; they will rebuild the cities lying in rubble and settle down...I will plant them on their land and they will never again be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.** (Amos 9:14) Someday Israel will return to the land and they will prosper again. These final words from Amos offer a glimmer of hope for God's people following judgment.

So then, here in Amos, as with Joel and Hosea, we see the balance between God's love and His justice. He must deal with evil – both among the nations and His own people. But because of His great love and mercy, God has a long-term plan to restore His people and redeem His fallen world.

## MICAH

The prophet Micah is from Moresheth located in the southern kingdom of Judah. He is a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea and Amos. At the very beginning of Micah it states: **The prophecies pertain to Samaria and Jerusalem.** (Micah 1:1) Micah's messages are directed at both Israel and Judah. Both nations have violated their covenant with God, the one the Israelite nation agreed to back in Deuteronomy.

**Look, the Lord is coming out of His dwelling place! He will descend and march on the earth's mountaintops! The mountains will disintegrate beneath Him...** (Micah 1:3-4) Micah pictures God descending down from heaven to the earth in judgment.

In Chapters 1 and 2 Micah begins naming off the various towns in Judah that God says He will deal with. Micah then rattles off a laundry list of charges against both the nations of Israel and Judah. Micah says that their leaders have abused their power and become wealthy by defrauding people of their lands and houses. He says their prophets mislead the people by offering promises of God's peace and protection to anyone who will give them food. Based on the prophecies we've heard so far from Isaiah, Joel, Hosea and Amos – there is not going to be any peace. They have talked only about God's judgment coming. So these prophets who are promising peace are obviously false prophets!

**Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the Temple Mount will become a hill overgrown with brush!** (Micah 3:12) Micah gives the same message about God's judgment as those prophets we already looked at. It will take the form of an oppressive enemy who will come and devastate Jerusalem and reduce Solomon's glorious temple to ruins.

But as we saw before, God's harsh words of judgment are followed by a message of hope. This comes in Chapters 4 and 5. Like a shepherd, the Lord will rescue and lead His flock, that is, the faithful remnant of His people. In the future He will bring them back to Zion, back to Jerusalem. There they will live in peace with the Lord Himself as their sovereign Ruler.

**As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, seemingly insignificant among the clans of Judah, from you a king will emerge who will rule over Israel on My behalf, one whose origins are in the distant past.** (Micah 5:2) A new king from the line of David will come. This underscores what several of the other prophets have been saying about the coming messiah king. But here Micah adds one little detail. This king will be born in Bethlehem, a small town in Judah near Jerusalem. He will rule in Jerusalem over all of God's people. This king will "shepherd" the people. He will bring peace and protect them from their enemies.

Micah now presents a covenant lawsuit against Israel and Judah. Remember, both of these nations are guilty of violating God's covenant. **He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord really wants from you. He wants you to promote justice, to be faithful, and to live obediently before your God.** (Micah 6:8) This is what God wants His nation to do.

Of course this is the exact opposite of way God's people have been living! God compares their practices to those of Kings Ahab and Omri, two of Israel's most evil kings. They have been exhibiting "bottom line" rather than "top line" behavior.

The result – God's judgment is coming! **"I [the Lord] will strike you brutally and destroy you because of your sin. Therefore, I will make you an appalling sight; the city's inhabitants will be taunted derisively, and nations will mock all of you."** (Micah 6:13, 16) Micah's message coincides with what those other prophets said – God's judgment will take the form of defeat and exile for God's people from the land. This is very sad and so Micah laments. He personifies the rebellious nation who, in captivity, sits alone weeping.

Micah longs for God's mercy and he pleads with God to listen and to forgive His people. But why should He?

Micah offers two reasons. The first is based on God's character. **There is no other God like You! You forgive sin and pardon the rebellion of those who remain among Your people. You do not remain angry forever, but delight in showing loyal love.** (Micah 7:18)

The second reason is because of God's covenant promise. **You will be loyal to Jacob and extend your loyal love to Abraham, which You promised on oath to our ancestors in ancient times.** (Micah 7:20) Micah reminds God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob back in the book of Genesis – through Abraham's family all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 22:18).

But if Israel is to be this conduit of God's blessing to the nations like He wants them to be, then they themselves must lead the way and be faithful to God. It is for this reason that God must confront and deal with the evil He sees in His own people. God's judgment is what leads ultimately to hope. Remember, God's purpose is not to destroy, but to redeem. This is what God ultimately wants to do.

Micah's message concludes with a declaration of trust in God. **You will once again have mercy on us; You will conquer our evil deeds; You will hurl our sins into the depths of the sea.** (Micah 7:19)



Prophet after prophet after prophet goes to the leaders and people of both Israel and Judah exposing their many sins and calling upon them to repent and turn back to God. We heard from Isaiah last time and we have just heard the words of Joel, Hosea, Amos and Micah.

We know from earlier in the story, from 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, that God's covenant nation eventually does get exiled away from their land, just like it was prophesied. So then, right now they are scattered. The people in the northern kingdom of Israel have been dispersed throughout the Assyrian Empire. The people in the southern kingdom of Judah have been taken captive to Babylon.

As the people sit and lament their terrible misfortune, they need to recall the words of God's prophets and realize that the nation's lack of repentance back then was what sent them to the place they are living now. But if they dwell on that, they will only feel a deep sense of regret, sorrow and despair. They need to also recall the words of those very same prophets who predicted God restoring His people back to their land and sending His messiah king. They have promises they can hang onto. Focusing on these promises will sustain them in their current situation.

These promises along with the words found in the Wisdom Literature should help to transform the hearts of the people to become the holy nation God wants them to be. Even now God is preparing them for the future. Remember, the refrain that echoes throughout the prophets is this: God is not finished with Israel yet!