**Old Testament Survey**

**Book of Joel**

Hosea’s message grew out of a personal heartbreak in his own family; Joel’s message grew out of a national calamity: the invasion of a plague of locusts. Along with the locusts came a terrible drought (1:19–20), and the combination of the two brought the land to the place of famine. Joel had a message for the people of Judah, for he saw in these calamities the disciplining hand of God for their sins. But he looked beyond the locusts and saw another “army”—a literal army of Gentile nations attacking Jerusalem (3:2). In other words, Joel used the immediate judgment of God (the locusts) as an illustration of the ultimate judgment, “the day of the Lord.” So, Joel’s book is divided into two parts: (1) the present message about the plague of locusts, 1:1–2:27; and (2) the future message about the day of the Lord, 2:28–3:21.

**Joel 1 The description of the locust plague.**

1. Joel addresses several different groups of people as he describes the terrible plague and its devastating results. The old men are asked if they can remember such a tragedy from the years gone by. In v. 4 we do not have four different insects; rather, we have the locusts in four different stages of growth. There are some ninety varieties of locusts, and all of them are well able to ruin a nation.
2. Joel next turns to the drunkards (vv. 5–7) who weep and howl because the vineyards have been ruined and their supply of drink is gone. He then turns to the worshipers (vv. 8–10) who must go to the temple empty-handed because there are no sacrifices to bring. He addresses the farmers (vv. 11–12) who are howling because their crops are all ruined.
3. Finally, Joel turns to the priests (vv. 13–14) and tells them to fast and pray. Here we reach the heart of the matter, for it was because of sin that God was punishing the nation. So long as the people obeyed Him, He would send the rain and the harvest; but if they turned away from Him, He would make the heavens like brass and destroy their fields. See Deut. 11:10–17; 2 Chron. 7:13–14.
4. Joel blows the trumpet of alarm to warn the people that the destroying army of locusts is coming. Locusts do resemble tiny horsemen, and their ability to eat everything in their path has often been proved. Verse 10 suggests such great swarms that they will blot out the sun and moon.

**Joel 2 A Call to Repentance**

1. Joel blows the trumpet the second time, this time to call an assembly to fast, pray and confess sin. This is not to be the mere outward tearing of clothes, but rather the breaking of the heart. In 1:13, Joel called only for the priests to pray; in 2:16, he summons everybody to participate in the fast. No doubt he reminded them of the promise of 2 Chron. 7:14.
2. We have had the alarm and the assembly; now we have the answer from the Lord. What faith Joel had—“The Lord will answer.” God promises to drive away the army of locusts and restore the pastures again. In fact, He will give them such “bumper crops” that they will more than make up for the years wasted by the locusts (2:25). He will do this, not because they deserve it, but that they and the heathen nations might know that He is the Lord (v. 27).
3. Now Joel moves ahead and talks about another “day of the Lord,” a time of future judgment that will end in blessing for the Jews. The Spirit will be poured out before that day (2:28–32). This passage is quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21), so read that quotation carefully. But notice that Peter does not say, “Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled.” Rather, he says, “This is that which was spoken.” In other words, “This is that same Holy Spirit that Joel spoke about.” The full prophecy of Joel will not be fulfilled until the last days.

**Joel 3 Judgment poured out during that day.**

1. Verse 1 makes it clear that the Jews will be back in their land, delivered from the captivities in Gentile nations. But all the nations will gather together to fight Jerusalem. God will bring them into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where the Battle of Armageddon will be fought.
2. Verses 2–8 make it clear that this judgment will be God’s punishment on the Gentiles for the way they have treated the nation of Israel and the land of Israel.
3. As Joel preached, the people could see the dry fields, the starving cattle, and the empty barns. They could see and hear the locusts as they ravaged the country. But Joel is picturing a time when wine, milk, and water shall flow in ceaseless measure in the land. This is, of course, the kingdom age when Jesus Christ shall sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem, and when the land shall be healed and the blessing of God restored. This reminds us of Ezekiel’s final words: “And the name of the city from that day shall be, THE LORD IS THERE!

**Book of Amos**

It is about twenty-five years before the fall of Israel. The nation is enjoying peace and prosperity; in fact, it is living in luxury. He uses the word “captivity” several times (5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:17).

**Amos 1-2 Amos Looks Around**

1. Amos begins his message by looking around at the nations and announcing eight judgments. Verse 2 makes it clear that God is roaring in wrath, like a lion leaping on his prey (see 3:8). Amos begins with Syria and accuses them of awful cruelty in war. Then he points to Gaza, 1:6–8 and condemns them for the sin of slavery. Tyrus is also judged for cruel slavery. Israel’s old enemy Edom is accused of not showing pity but maintaining a constant hatred.  Ammon is judged for bitter cruelty and selfish greed. Moab for cruelty to Edom and Judah for rejecting the Law of God.
2. It must have pleased the Israelites at Bethel to hear Amos condemn their neighbors, but Amos did not stop. Judgment #8 was reserved for Israel. In 2:6–16 the prophet names the sins of the people: bribery, greed, adultery, immorality, selfishness, ingratitude, drunkenness (even forcing the Nazarites to drink), and rejecting God’s revelation. Amos cries, “I am pressed under this burden of sin.” (The name “Amos” means “burden.”).

**Amos 3-6 Amos Looks Within**

1. Having announced judgment to the nations, Amos now looks within the hearts of the people and explains why this judgment is coming. Remember that Israel was enjoying a time of peace, prosperity, and “religious revival.” People were attending religious services and bringing generous offerings. But the true servants of God do not look at the outward appearance; they look at the heart. In these chapters, Amos delivers three sermons, each one prefaced by, “Hear this word” (3:1; 4:1; 5:1).
2. “How can our God send judgment upon us?” the people were asking. “Are we not His chosen people?” But that was the very reason for the judgment. Amos is using an argument from cause and effect. If two people are walking together, they must have made an appointment. If a lion roars, he has prey. If a bird is in the trap, somebody set the trap. If the trumpet sounds, calamity is near. If the prophet is preaching, then God must have sent him. Then Amos announces that the Assyrians are coming to destroy the nation (4:9–15), and the lovely services at Bethel will not hold them back.
3. The fearless prophet begins to name sins. He calls the women living in careless luxury “fat cows of Bashan.” Amos is not impressed with the religion at Bethel; to him it is just another sin on their records. God had sent his warnings to them, but they would not listen. Now He would come Himself (4:12). “Prepare to meet your God.”
4. Amos weeps as he contemplates the judgments coming to his nation. Amos 5:3 suggests that 90 percent of the people will die. Note the repetition of the word “seek” (5:4, 6, 8, 14). “Don’t seek religious services; seek the Lord!”

**Amos 7-9 Amos Looks Ahead**

1. In the closing part of his message, Amos beholds five visions, and from these visions he discovers what God will do to the nation. (1) Vision of Locusts (7:1–3)—The locusts are about to destroy the crops, but Amos intercedes and the Lord stops them.
2. (2) Vision of Fire (7:4–6)—An awful drought overtakes the land; the prophet prays, and God delivers the land.
3. (3) Vision of the Plumb line (7:7–9)—The Lord stands beside the wall and tests it to see if it is straight. God is measuring Israel, and she does not conform to His Word; therefore, judgment is coming. At this point in the message, the “priest” Amaziah could take no more, so he interrupted, “go back to Judah and preach”. Amos was not afraid. He told the false priest, “God called me to preach, and I must obey. As for you, Amaziah, you will pay for your compromise and sins, because your wife will become a harlot and your family will die by the sword.”
4. (4) Vision of the Summer Fruit (8:1–14)—We must take a brief lesson in Hebrew to understand this vision. The Hebrew word for “summer fruit” means, “The end is come! Israel, like summer fruit, has ripened for judgment.” Again in vv. 4–14 the prophet names the sins of the people: robbing the poor of their homes (8:4); complaining about holy days interfering with business (8:5); setting excessive prices that hurt the poor (8:6). God warns that He will send His wrath upon the people, not only in natural calamities, but in a famine for the Word of God. They would not listen to the Word when they had the opportunity; therefore, He will take His Word away from them. In that day their idols at Dan and Beersheba will do them no good (8:14).
5. (5) Vision at the Altar (9:1–10)—Now Amos sees the Lord Himself, and not some symbol. Why is God at the altar? Because judgment begins at the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). The people had been outwardly religious, but they were not sincere from the heart. God orders the doorposts to be broken—and the roof caves in. Verses 8–9 summarize what God plans to do. He compares the coming judgment to the sifting of grain (see Luke 22:31–34). The good seed will be saved, but the chaff will be burned up. Amos closes on a note of victory, for in 9:11–15 we have the promise of future restoration. Verses 11–12 are quoted in Acts 15:14–18 at the first church conference.

**Book of Obadiah**

The time is 586 B.C. and the place is Jerusalem; the event: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies. We see the angry soldiers as they wreck the walls, slay the people, and burn the city. We also see a group of neighboring citizens—the Edomites—as they stand and encourage the Babylonians to ruin the city. Who are these people? Esau moved to the mountains in the south and established the Edomite kingdom, but they remained enemies. This little Book of Obadiah (the shortest in the OT) deals with these two brothers, Esau and Jacob—Edom and Israel. The prophet presents a two-fold message:

**God’s Vengeance on Esau (vv. 1–16)**

1. In Jer. 49:7–22, Jeremiah had already announced the doom of Edom; in fact, there are some quotations from his prophecy here in Obadiah. This is the “rumor” or “report” that Obadiah had heard: God would avenge Israel and destroy Edom. Why? Because of her sins.
2. But note v. 15—God would treat them just the way they treated the Jews. They were traitors to the Jews; therefore, their own confederates would betray them (v. 7). They plundered and looted, so their nation would be robbed (vv. 5–6). Edom was violent, so they would be cut off completely (vv. 9–10). Edom wanted the Jews to be destroyed, so she would be destroyed by Babylon (vv. 10, 18). Edom would reap what she sowed. See also Isa. 34:5–15; Ezek. 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Amos 1:11–12.

**God’s Victory for Jacob (vv. 17–21)**

1. That little word “but” in v. 17 marks the turning point. God promises deliverance and cleansing for Mt. Zion. Yes, Israel had sinned, and the temple was destroyed because of their sins, but God would cleanse and restore “the house of Jacob” and not the house of Esau (the Edomites). The day will come when the Jews will possess their land, their temple, their city, and their kingdom. The key word in vv. 17–20 is “possess.” Certainly Israel owns the land because of God’s promise to Abraham. She owns her city too. But she does not fully possess them, for her land has been overrun by the Gentile nations for centuries. There is coming the day, however, when Jesus Christ will return to give Israel back her possessions that she might enjoy them and use them to the glory of God.
2. “And the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.” What a wonderful way to end this brief book! Today, the Jews are in the sad condition described in Hosea 3:4–5—without king, priest, sacrifice, or priesthood. But when Christ returns, the nation will look upon the One they pierced, they will be cleansed and forgiven, and the kingdom will be established. Daniel saw Christ, the Stone, come down and crush all the kingdoms of the world (Dan. 2:44–45).

**Book of Jonah**

That Jonah was an actual person in history is verified by 2 Kings 14:25, where we find his prophecy that Jeroboam II would expand his kingdom. This message certainly made him a popular preacher. But when God called Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, then the prophet rebelled. History tells us that the Assyrians were a cruel and heartless people. “If the city of Nineveh is going to be overthrown, then let it be overthrown,” argued Jonah. “I would rather disobey God than see my enemies saved from judgment.”

**Jonah 1 Jonah Backslides.**

1. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah ran in the opposite direction. He fled “from the presence of the Lord,”. He became a backslidden prophet.
2. The course of his backsliding was downward. Down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the sea, and down into the great fish. Disobedience always leads downward.
3. The consequences of his backsliding were tragic. He lost God’s voice, for now God had to speak to him in a storm. He lost his power in prayer, and even his desire to pray. The heathen were praying, but Jonah was sleeping. He lost his testimony. But how patient and long-suffering the Lord was with him.

**Jonah 2 Jonah Prays**

1. Jonah was first of all chastened under the loving hand of God. Jonah admitted it was God who cast him into the sea, not the hands of the sailors (v. 3).
2. Next Jonah was convicted of his sins. This is the purpose of chastening—to bring us to the place of conviction and confession. In faith he asked God for His forgiveness. God forgave Jonah and gave him another chance.

**Jonah 3 Jonah Preaches**

1. Jonah came to the great city to preach the message of God. The city itself had great walls and towers. It was the center of the rising empire of Assyria. But it was a sinful city (read Nahum 3) because the Assyrians were a ruthless, cruel people who had no pity for their enemies. “Violence” was their chief sin (v. 8). God gave Jonah a great commission, to preach to these Gentiles that they could escape the wrath of God and be forgiven. What a message!  The shortest message in the Bible. Jonah didn’t preach about God’s love, mercy, grace or repentance, just judgment.
2. The Message came to the King. Jonah 3:6–10 (NLT) When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes. 7 Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: “No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all. 8 People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. 9 Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.” 10 When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.  They repented and God responded in Grace.
3. Jesus used Nineveh to illustrate an important point (Matt. 12:38–41). He had preached to that generation for three years and had reinforced His message with His miracles, yet they would not repent and believe. The Ninevites heard one sermon from one preacher, and that sermon emphasized wrath, not love—yet they repented and were forgiven.

**Jonah 4:1 Jonah’s Anger at the Lord’s Mercy**

1. Instead of meeting a rejoicing preacher, we meet a rebellious preacher, angry at the people and angry at God. We see Jonah sitting outside the city, trying to make himself comfortable, and actually hoping that God’s judgment will fall on the people.
2. Here is an amazing thing: God sent a great awakening under the preaching of a man who did not even love the souls of the people he preached to!
3. This is the key lesson of the book: God’s love and pity for lost souls. Jonah felt sorry for himself, and even felt sorry for the plant that sheltered him and then died, but he had no heartfelt love or pity for the multitudes in the city of Nineveh.
4. God could control the wind and waves in chapter 1, the fish in chapter 2, and the gourd, worm, and wind in chapter 4, but He could not control Jonah without the prophet’s surrender. Everything in nature obeys the Word of God except human beings, and human beings have the greatest reason to obey.
5. The book closes with Jonah mad at God even after the Lord tries to talk to him. We have no evidence that Jonah repented of his anger or hatred.