

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 39: Joel – Nahum, *Six Prophets and One Giant Fish*

Welcome to Week 39 of the Bible Reading Coach Podcast. My name is Karl Vaters, and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we will cover more books than we will cover in any other single week until we get to weeks 50 and 51. One we will cover 6 books in 50 and 7 books in week 51. This week, we will be covering six books, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum. Of the six, only one of these books is well known even to longtime churchgoers, and that, of course, is the book of Jonah. The rest of the books, if you were to ask the typical, even maybe pastor, what's this book about, we'd have to scratch our heads and go, let me look that up, partly because they're so small. Secondly, because Jonah has this vivid story. And the other ones are really about important prophecies, but they don't have vivid stories connected to them. So what we will do in this session today is we'll take a look at each of the six, we will look at them by date, by the circumstance around which they were written. And we'll give you a quick summary of what to look for as you get to each of the books.

So let's get to them one by one. First of all, we'll be reading the book of Joel. Joel is one of the hardest Old Testament books to find a date for. Because it doesn't give us timestamps in the middle of the text. It probably happened before the fall of the northern kingdom, which means way back in the day, probably around the time or shortly after the time of Jonah and Amos and Hosea and even Isaiah. It prophesied the coming day of the Lord that is a day of judgment that is on its way. And it has an actual really sharp contrast story behind it, well, sharp contrast image behind it. And that is that the coming day of the Lord is symbolized as a plague of locusts that will come that will destroy everything, and that will cause a long drought.

Now, the reason Joel uses the image of a plague of locusts is locusts were especially feared in that part of the world still are today. Because when locusts come through in a plague, first of all, not only do they eat all the food that's on the ground, they are small enough that they can get into storage bins and eat all of the food in the storage bins. And then they go down and they eat all of the seeds beneath the ground, and even the root of the harvest, so that not only do you not have a harvest this year, but you don't have seeds for next year. A plague of locusts is about as devastating to a people as anything could possibly be at that time. Basically, it was their version of today's nuclear war. It produced a nuclear winter for years that was really, really hard to recover from. But the book also has hope that if they repent, chapter 2:28 says this, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten."

Now again, this is not a literal plague of locusts that is being prophesied, but that when God's judgment comes it will be as severe or in fact more severe than a plague of locusts. It won't just hurt you for the moment, but it will put devastation upon you for generations if you don't repent and get right with God. It famously has a book or a verse that is quoted in the book of Acts in Acts chapter two on the day of Pentecost. Will you read this in Acts chapter two, you read it first of all this week, "I will pour out my spirit on all your people, your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." That's the hopeful part of the coming day of the Lord that will begin with judgment that we will read about in the book of Joel will then move to the Book of Amos.

Amos was a small town Shepherd. He was a keeper of a sycamore fig grove and he speaks with that kind of imagery. He lived in the nation of Judah that's the southern of the two kingdoms. But he was called to prophesy against the northern kingdom, which is really an unusual thing to happen at that time. Unlike Joel, which was hard to date, Amos we know an exact date for because he includes the lives of the kings that were happening at the time. We know that this happened through the seven hundreds BC. The next three that we're going to take a look at or this one actually plus the next two are the three earliest of the prophets, Amos, Obadiah and Jonah are if you were to put all of the prophets in chronological order, you would read these through Prophet these three prophets first, okay, again, the prophets are not listed in chronological order.

But if you were to read them that way, Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah would be the first three that you would read. You'd probably be reading Jonah, then Obadiah, then Amos, but these are the first three of them. Amos also uses a metaphor of locusts just like we saw in the earlier book. Plus it uses an image of a fire upon a plumb line, a basket of ripe fruit. There's some real sharp imagery in Amos. So pay attention to that.

We'll then go to Obadiah. Obadiah is the shortest Old Testament book. It only has 21 verses in it. Either Obadiah or Jonah are the earliest of the prophets. Amos is probably the third Prophet Obadiah and Jonah compete for which one happened first, they may have been prophesying at exactly the same time Obadiah prophesied during the time of Elisha, when the Philistines were the main enemy. So we've been reading about the Babylonians and the Assyrians being the main enemies. This one goes all the way back to the time of the Philistines.

Okay. So that's how far back it goes. And the prophecy itself is primarily against Edom, and the Edomites were the descendants of Esau, whose story we first learned about way back in week two in Genesis. So it's not about Esau, it's not about back to Genesis chapter two, but it's about the descendants of Esau and the Philistines and way, way back before even the northern kingdom had been exiled. So we're going a long way back and Obadiah. We're going back about the same distance to the book of Jonah. And this is the one book of the six that you have that we all have some familiarity with. He is one of the most well known prophets.

This is one of the most well known Bible stories, either Jonah or Obadiah are the earliest of the prophets. This is a prophecy against Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which was the dominant empire before the Babylonians. So he was prophesying against Assyria, specifically against their capital city of Nineveh. So famously, God says, go to Nineveh, and tell them repent, and I'll save you. Jonah, famously, of course, decides I'm not gonna go there, I'm getting on a ship heading exactly the opposite direction, to literally the end of the known world for them to a place called Tarshish.

Tarshish was probably either the Rock of Gibraltar or modern day Cadiz, which is in Spain, it is the exit from the Mediterranean to go into the Atlantic. And as far as they knew, if you go out into the Atlantic far enough, you found dragons and you fell off the edge of the Earth, okay. That was what they believed, that is not what God believed, because of course, God made the planet the way he made it. God knew that. But as far as Jonah knew he was heading to the place as close as he could to the edge of the world from where he was supposed to go in the opposite direction.

Why? Because the people in Nineveh, the people in Assyria, were dominating the world. And they were so evil in the way that they did it. He didn't want them to repent. He wanted them

hurt. How do we know that? Because after he is swallowed by the big fish, and he does go back to Nineveh, and he does preach to it, and they do repent, he gets upset. He is maybe the most successful of all the prophets, his message gets through, and the biggest, greatest city on earth repents, and he gets ticked off about it. So yeah, it's more than a big fish. There's also the story that follows it. That's really fascinating and at times, just plain humorous. When Jonah pouts to God, it's actually kind of funny, look for the humor in that as well. Well then move to the book of Micah. Micah was a small town man who lived in Judah, that is the nation to the south. He was one of the early prophets as well. We know exactly when he prophesied because he gives the kings that were in power at the time.

During his time of ministry, the northern kingdom fell, and their capital city of Samaria fell as well. And then the attack on the southern kingdom of Judah, and eventually the attack on Jerusalem would begin, he spends some time outlining the sins of the people the reason why they were about to be overtaken, and under God's judgment, because their sins include idolatry, prostitution, fraud, false prophecy, injustice, bribery, and then also in the middle of all that mess.

Take a look in chapter five of Micah, for this wonderful prophecy that the Messiah will be from Bethlehem. When we get to the book of Matthew and week 41, we're going to read through the famous Christian Christmas story where the Wiseman, the Magi, are following the star. And then they show up and they ask the teachers of the law, where does the law say Messiah will be born in and they say, Bethlehem. That's from the book of Micah, which we'll be reading this week. So look for that when you get to Micah chapter five.

Then we'll read the book of Nahum. The last of the six books this week, Nahum prophesied between the years of 663 and 612 BC. We know that again because it gives us the timestamps with really exact dating Okay, by the time now I'm this prophesying Samaria has already fallen, and Jerusalem is about to fall. They were about to fall to especially brutal people, the Babylonians and the Assyrians. So this is the Bible's first book of judgment that does not offer a way out, it tells them this is happening. You're done. All of the offers of mercy are over. Exile is on its way.

It's an early book, it's kind of a follow up to Jonah, after Jonah asked the people to repent, and Nineveh does repent, their repentance doesn't last long, and the name comes along and goes, That's it. This is your last chance. It's over. And of course, it shouldn't surprise us that now that Nineveh after repenting, withdraws that repentance and behaves badly again, because of course, the Hebrews both in the northern and southern kingdom did that constantly back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.

So that's six books with a lot to cover this week. A lot of it happens with a back and forth timeline. So here are the things to note, four things to note as you're reading through this week. First of all, note the themes that each prophet talks about more than trying to match up timelines. If you try to figure out exact timelines, you'll go crazy this week. So note the themes of the prophets.

Secondly, note that we tend in our era, and in every era, we tend to concentrate on one of three types of sins. There are some people who are concentrated on personal sins, like sexual sins, and so on. There are other Christians who concentrate on corporate sins, that is, calling people to justice and so on. And there are other Christians who tend to concentrate on religious sins. That is, what's the church doing wrong. But you'll notice in these prophets, the Bible denounces all three, God isn't just concerned with personal moral sins. He's not just

concerned with corporate and justice sins. He's not just concerned with the sins of the church. He's concerned with all three. And he deals with all three in these six prophets. So pay attention to that.

Thirdly, take a look at the fact that God comes against the sins of both his people and their enemies. Okay, why? Because sin is the real enemy, whether it's committed by his people, or by those who are coming against his people. Nobody gets off the hook if they're sinning.

And then finally, note that God's hope is so constantly mentioned that in the one book where it isn't mentioned, it's kind of jarring when we get to know Him. And there's no out mentioned, it's really surprising, because every other book gives them an out. And so this is just the lack of it, there is a reminder that when it doesn't show up, it's a shock, because God always gives us a way out.

All right, at the end of this week, we will be halfway through the Minor Prophets a little more than halfway through. And then we'll have just one more after this week. And then we'll be at the end of the Old Testament. We're just about there. We're just a couple weeks away from Jesus. But before we get to that, we got some amazing stuff in these, let's call them lesser known profits, because we don't spend as much time in these profits as we should. So let's really dig into what they have to offer us this week. All right, hope you have a great time with it. I will see you next week.

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