

Session 7: Intro to the Prophets

Amos and Hosea

Prophets:

Who are the prophets?

In the most basic sense, a prophet is someone who acts as the mouth piece for God. In Greek the word prophet comes from two Greek words: pro – on behalf of or before, and phone – sound, voice, or to speak. In Hebrew the word prophet is Navi which translated to spokesman, speaker, or prophet. This purview of different translations isolate the most important function of a prophet: to be the spokesman or mouth piece for God. This definition is far different from the image of a prophet as a future-teller or wise sage. Instead, as we will see in the texts themselves, the prophet will also speak on behalf of God.

The prophets fit into three main categories: professional prophets, guild prophets, and appointed prophets. Professional prophets were hired by the king or other officials to discern the will of God for the king. These prophets normally lived in the same building as the person who hired them and would be called upon to serve as the intermediary between God and the official (see 1 Kings 22). Guild prophets are much more nuanced. Throughout Scripture we meet bands of prophets or groups of prophets who are not associated with a king or ruler but instead are normally associated with a temple or shrine (see 2 Kings 2). Guild prophets probably came from a tradition of prophets and were trained in the art of prophesy. Appointed prophets are those specifically called by God to call out a specific message to the people. These include the fifteen prophets who have books named after them as well as many found throughout 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. Appointed prophets normally have some call or commissioning that gives them their authority to speak on behalf of God. They have a specific message that God wants them to portray to the people and normally get abused or maltreated for speaking this message.

In the prophetic texts the “one size fits all” mentality does not work. The places of origin, the places they preach to, the conditions they preach under, the message they portray, their social or economic status, and the amount of information we know about these people varies widely from one prophet to another. I find this to be one of most exciting parts of the prophetic texts: the prophets are their own unique individuals who share parts of their story with us.

The society of the Israelites was rather complicated in regards to the prophets. On the one hand, the prophets were highly revered and both a necessary part of society and an exalted part of society. On the other hand, the message of the prophets was received rather poorly. They called out the infidelity of the people and especially the king. Challenging the king meant death. This highlights the great challenge of the prophets. The prophet was required to call out the infidelities of the king with the penalty of execution. But the king knows that this man is sent from God and it is a huge disgrace to kill a servant of God. Thus the tension forms. In a similar vein, a prophet who speaks falsely on behalf of God deserves death for falsely representing

God's word. Thus the Israelites held a place of reverence and caution towards every prophet. The prophet needed to be tested to be found true before the people would believe in their word (see 1 Kings 13).

Prophetic Call:

The prophetic call is that specific moment in the life of a prophet that gives them the authority to speak on behalf of God. These call narratives can be elaborate and lengthy like in Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Jeremiah or simple to non-existent like in Amos and Micah. The details to watch for in these narratives are the following: location of the event, how God manifests himself, what does he tell the prophet, what details would lead to the people understanding that this man is a prophet of God. These call narratives tell us a great deal about the life and teaching of a particular prophet. If we read them well, we can figure out what their message will be and who their audience will be.

Oracles and Visions:

This section of the prophetic texts are some of the most confusing and complicated. Most of the oracles are in poetic form. Normally our editors will help us to note the change in style by setting off these passages from the rest of the text and formatting the text differently. Not all oracles are poetic. The prophet Ezekiel commonly speaks oracles that are not in poetic form. Note about Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is normally arranged in sets of ideas called couplets. The first line contains the message and the second line clarifies the message. The second line can either emphasize the main message or contrast it to guide the reader/listener into a deeper understanding of the message. Visions are normally in prose (a style of writing common to narrative, not poetry). Visions are not necessarily oracles but expressions of God's will. These are normally rather detailed and explicit. Our main focus in reading visions and oracles is to find the main message that God is pointing his people towards through the spoken words of the prophet. Normally we will need a good grasp of the historical and law books to understand the underlying themes. The prophets assume we know the law and the history of the people really well and thus they gloss over any clues to laws and tradition.

Prophetic Act:

A prophetic act is an event in which the prophet does something strange or different to get the attention of the people and draw them back to God. Most of the prophets have some type of prophetic act that they perform. The main elements of these acts that we need to pay attention to are the following: who is the audience, what is action, and how does the action relate to following God's law or returning to his law.

Types of prophetic texts:

Within the corpus of prophetic texts in Scripture there are three main types of prophets/prophetic texts: pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic. During the last two sessions we spoke about the importance of the exile and what the exile meant for the Israelites. The prophets will continually call out the issues that led to exile, what happens during exile, or what will happen after exile. The prophets that comprise the pre-exilic prophets are Amos, Hosea, 1 Isaiah

(although not in the text, Isaiah is broken into three sections), Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Micah, Nahum, and Jonah. The prophets that comprise the exilic prophets are Ezekiel, Baruch, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and 2 Isaiah. The prophets that comprise the post-exilic prophets are Obadiah, 3 Isaiah, Joel, Haggai, and Malachi. Usually the opening lines of the book clearly indicate which of these three the prophet is living in. Important clues include, a Babylonian king indicates either during or after exile, stating that the prophet lives with the exiles indicates exilic, where the call takes place or no mention of exile indicate before exile.

The Prophet Hosea:

The Book of the Prophet Hosea is one of the most corrupt texts in all of Scripture. This means that the fragments of text and manuscripts of this text which we have do not agree. When an editor attempts to translate a book of Scripture, the editor will compile all of the manuscripts and fragments of that text that are available and make a decision on what the original text said. If many manuscripts agree on a particular choice of words, that phrase is probably the original. The Book of Hosea contains many strong disagreements about what the text said, and many of the texts that differ widely from one another.

The Book of Hosea is a pre-exilic text. We know the historical setting for this text because of the opening lines of the book: “Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah.” All of these kings and their histories are found in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, i.e. before the exile.

We know very little about the prophet Hosea. Unlike other books, we have no sense from the text of where Hosea was from or to whom he preached. However scholars suggest that Hosea was from the Northern Kingdom and was probably one of the priests. They also think that his prophetic training may have come from a cult of prophets to whom he belonged. Beyond this information we know nothing about Hosea.

Outline:

- I. Marriage with a prostitute: prophetic act (1-3)
 - a. Marriage of Hosea and Gomer (1)
 - b. The purpose of the prophetic act (2)
 - c. Restoration through commitment (3)
- II. Crimes of Israel (4-14)
 - a. Infidelity (4:1-3)
 - b. Priestly guilt (3:4-19)
 - c. Guilt of leaders (5:1-7)
 - d. Insincere return to covenant (6:1—7:2)
 - e. Problems with the king (7:3-7)
 - f. Foreign alliances (7:8-12)
 - g. Israel’s perversity (7:13—8:14)
 - h. Imminent exile (9:1-6)
 - i. Hosea ridiculed (9:7-9)
 - j. Punishment for Idolatry (10:1-10)
 - k. Restoration (11)

- l. Infidelity of Israel (12)
- m. Punishment for ingratitude (13:1—14:1)
- n. Sincere conversion (14:2-10)

Hosea 1: Hosea's Prophetic Act:

Hosea was called to take Gomer, a prostitute as his wife. A woman who has had sex with another man is considered defiled and unfit for marriage. Thus, by Hosea taking a prostitute for his wife, he is defiling himself in the sight of all the people. Hosea calls out the infidelity of the people through showing them what infidelity looks like. On top of that he names all of his children based on the revelation that God is giving to his people about the effect of infidelity. Remember: the Israelites believed that the infidelities of the parents were passed down to the children.

Hosea 5-10: the infidelities:

This section of oracles add to the understanding of the problems in Israelite society as given by 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Since we have read through the laws, we should be able to note rather quickly why Hosea is listing these specific problems.

Hosea 11: restoration:

Regardless of how dark or how many problems the prophet calls out, the books will always contain a section about the joy of restoration or the hope of restoration. This particular chapter is one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture. The tender love of God cannot be more tangible than in this passage.

The Prophet Amos:

The Book of the Prophet Amos is one of the best texts in all of Scripture. This text varies little from one translation to another, unlike the Book of the Prophet Hosea. Therefore the writers and readers of this text saw something in it that was so important that every word needed to be accurately preserved.

Amos gives us more autobiographical information than we would expect from such a short book. In Chapter 7 the priest of Bethel (Northern Kingdom) sent a message to the King of Israel about Amos being a conspirator. This indicates that Amos was from the Southern Kingdom and preaching at the temple in Bethel, which is in the Northern Kingdom. Not only is he preaching a message that the king doesn't like, he is preaching it in a place that already doesn't like him. This can only lead to conflict. Some other details to note about this passage is that Amos was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees. Having two jobs meant that he probably was the landowner and thus rather wealthy. Also, he was told to go "earn his bread by prophesizing" (Amos 7:12). The people were required to feed and protect true prophets. This means that if Amos was seen as a true prophet then he would be taken care of by the people.

Amos is a pre-exilic prophet like Hosea. The list of kings in Chapter 1 as well as the list in Chapter 7 indicate the time period in which Amos preached these messages.

Outline:

- I. Judgement on the nations (1-2)
 - a. Aram (1:3-5)
 - b. Philistia (1:6-8)
 - c. Tyre (1:9-10)
 - d. Edom (1:11-12)
 - e. Ammon (1:13-15)
 - f. Moab (2:1-3)
 - g. Judah (2:4-5)
 - h. Israel (2:6-16)
- II. Crimes of Israel (3-6)
- III. Visions (7:1—9:8)
 - a. Vision part 1 (7:1-9)
 - b. Biographical information on Amos (7:10-17)
 - c. Visions part 2 (8:1—9:8a)
- IV. Messianic prophesy (9:8b-15)

Amos 1-2: Judgement of the nations

Amos judges the problems of each of the nations that surround Israel and Judah. Each of these nations have abominations that anger God and thus will be punished for them. The land of Israel, however, contains the longest of the list of crimes and punishments. Remember where Amos is preaching. Until this point, the Israelites are super excited because all the nations around them will finally get the wrath of God for all the crimes they committed, including Judah. Imagine how they feel as soon as Amos tells them that it will be far worse for the Israelites than it will be for the other nations.

Amos 7:10-17: biographical information on Amos:

I mentioned most of this in the introductory notes on Amos. Important notes: not from Israel but from Judah, preached to northerners, angered the king, earned bread by prophesizing, wealthy person.

Amos 7:1-9: Visions

Notice how Amos intercedes on behalf of the people for each of the punishments God is planning to inflict.

Amos 9:8b-15: Restoration:

Every prophetic book has some element of God's restoring the people and returning to the promise. The final lines of the book note how God desires that the people return to their land and that he will restore all of Israel.