

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 48

Minor Prophets – Part Two HOSEA and MICAH

I. HOSEA

Who was Hosea?

Little is known about Hosea's life. What we know is gleaned from the reading of the book of his prophecies that bears his name. Hosea is unique among the Old Testament prophets who have prophecies written (the "literary prophets") in that he was actually born in the Northern Kingdom. Other literary prophets spoke of and to the Northern Kingdom, but those prophets were actually from Judah (for example, Amos from last week).

Some scholars believe that Hosea was a baker by trade, basing their opinion on Hosea 7:4ff. In that passage, sinners are noted to be "burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises." To extrapolate Hosea's occupation from that passage is risky. It seems equally likely that Hosea would be a farmer because of his repeated analogies to agriculture.

One piece of personal information we know more certainly is that Hosea was married to a woman named Gomer. That fact becomes a core part of the message of Hosea.

Background and Message

Hosea itself records that the prophet was called and active during the reign of Jereboam II in the Northern Kingdom. That puts the prophecies in much the same context as Amos from last week. This time in the Northern Kingdom was marked by prosperity. The rich were getting richer, but the poor were getting poorer. There was little to no social justice in the country. The rich corruptly owned the courts. The poor were mistreated and abused to further enrich the coffers of those with abundance. There was a growing storm on the horizon as Assyria was growing to what would eventually become the world's superpower for the next century. The Northern Kingdom was on its last legs, drawing near to its destruction and exile in 722 B.C.

A rough outline of Hosea divides up as follows:

1. Hosea's marriage illustrates God and Israel's relationship (1-3)
2. Pride, idolatry, and corruption condemned (4-8)
3. The coming punishment (9-10)
4. The Lord's love in analogy, judgment and restoration (11-14)

1. Marriage

Chapters 1–3 set forward the marriage of Hosea and Gomer as illustrative to the relationship of God and Israel. Chapters 1 and 3 give biographical details about the marriage while chapter two is an insert sermonizing the parallels between the marriage and God's relationship with Israel.

In a nutshell, the marriage is a tough one with betrayal and adultery. Hosea is told by God to take “an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness” (1:2). Hosea marries Gomer and they have child #1. God has Hosea name the boy “Jezreel” which means “God scatters.” The name is appropriate because God will soon “punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel and...will put an end to the kingdom of Israel” (1:4).

A second child is born. God instructs Hosea to name this daughter “Lo-Ruhamah,” which means “not loved.” God sets out this name because the child is born at a time where God “will no longer show love to the house of Israel” (1:6).

A third child is born and God has him named “Lo-Ammi,” meaning “not my people.” God sets out this name because the boy was born at a time where God explains the Israelites were “not my people and I am not your God” (1:9).

Before chapter one ends, there is a promise that permanent destruction will not come to the Israelite people nor would there be a permanent severing of their relationship with God or each other (*i.e.*, the divided kingdoms would one day unite).

Chapter two is the sermon setting out the parallels to Israel. When God entered into covenant with the Jews at Sinai, the process was closely parallel to the covenant of marriage. The people were seen as the bride and God as the bridegroom. The covenant was “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Ex. 6:7). Scripture is clear that God was taking a people with an adulterous heart who would persistently desert him for other lovers. The Israelites started such adultery with the golden calf while Moses was on Sinai and it persisted on and off throughout Israel’s existence. Fidelity to Yahweh was far from the norm. Instead, the people abused God and his gifts as an adulterer does her loving husband.

Chapter three then returns to the biographical story of Hosea and Gomer. God tells Hosea to return to Gomer and love her in spite of her adultery as God loves Israel in spite of the adulterous idolatry rampant. Hosea has to purchase Gomer back and he then instructs her to live no more as a prostitute or adulterer.

2. Sin Condemned

Chapters four through eight set out the charges and judgment against an unrepentant Israel. The charges against Israel include that among those in the land there is “no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God. There is only cursing, lying, and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed” (4:2). The people have a “spirit of prostitution” and are “stubborn like a heifer” (4:10, 16, 18, 5:3, etc.).

In the midst of these strong pronouncements, the baker language is also used. Israel, in its sin, are “all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises” (7:4). Their hearts are like an oven...their passion smolders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are like a hot oven...[they] mix with the nations...like a flat cake not turned over” (7:4ff).

3. Punishment

God’s judgment on the people is assured. It is certain that “they will not remain in the LORD’S land” (9:3). Instead, Israel will be “wanderers among the nations (9:17).

4. Yahweh's love

In chapters 11-14, the love of God is set forth in another family analogy. God's love for Israel is likened in chapter 11 to a father's love for his children. God loved Israel as a child brought out of Egypt. God taught Israel to walk. God led Israel with kindness, took their burdens, and bent down to feed them.

Yet, Israel did not recognize and appreciate what God was about. Israel was determined to turn from God and surrounded God with lies and deceit. So as a father punishes a son, God was to punish Israel. This punishment was one to move Israel to repentance and restoration with God. Here is where the prophecy ends, but not without a final word of nudging on the right path:

Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them. (14:9)

II. MICAH

Who was Micah?

Micah grew up about 20 miles from Amos. Micah's prophetic ministry picked up where Amos's left off. Micah sought out the abuses in Israel subsequent to the reign of Jeroboam II. Micah would have prophesied during the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz in Israel. Hezekiah would have been Judah's king. Micah would have been a country prophet contemporary of Isaiah who prophesied in Jerusalem for King Hezekiah.

Background and Message

The background for Micah would not have been much different from that of Amos. There was at least ten more years before Israel and its capital city of Samaria would fall to Assyria. The landed peasants were still the subjects of extreme abuse. While Isaiah was prophesying over political issues in the city, Micah sought to help the lonely peasant out in the countryside. Micah's cries for justice flowed not only to the landed rich folk, but also to the religious leaders of the day. Micah also found those

leaders corrupt, lending their office and teachings to encourage the sin of the wealthy while ignoring the plight of the poor.

Final recipients of Micah's harsh language were those administering the courts. The courts were a refuge for the rich controllers of society rather than a place of fairness and justice for the underprivileged.

All of this sin was particularly galling to Micah because it was carried out with an air of "spirituality" and religiosity. Micah foresaw the judgment of God on these people and practices. Micah saw that God was going to visit righteous judgment upon those who were unrighteous in their treatment of others. God was also going to punish those who wrongfully denied others what was fairly theirs.

An outline of Micah can see:

1. Judgment against Israel and Judah (1-3)
2. Hope for Israel and Judah (4-5)
3. The Lord's case against Israel (6)
4. The ultimate triumph (7)

1. Judgment

Chapters one through three set forward the coming of God in judgment over the people and their choices. "Yahweh is coming... because of Jacob's transgression" (1:3-5). They were a people who "plot evil on their beds. At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it" (2:1). "They covet fields and seize them" (2:2). "They defraud a man of his home [and] inheritance" (2:2). Although they should "know justice" they instead "hate good and love evil" (3:1-2). The leaders "judge for a bribe;" the "priests teach for a price;" and the "prophets tell fortunes for money" (3:11).

2. Hope

In spite of all the serious sin and judgment, Micah prophesies a coming hope. "In the last days" (4:1), there is a Messianic reference that Yahweh's temple will be established "and peoples will stream to it" (4:1). This will be a time when people "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (4:3). Yahweh will "gather the lame...assemble the exiles." He will "make the lame a

remnant, those driven away a strong nation” (4:7). A ruler for this time is promised in chapter five:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times...He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace. (5:2,4)

3. The Case

God furthers his case against Israel in Chapter 6. Israel has failed God, even though God “God showed you, O man, what is good. And what does Yahweh require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8). In this charge, Israel failed.

4. The Triumph

Israel is on the road for misery because of its choices and denials of God. However, God makes it clear that the misery is not permanent. Ultimately, Israel will see life because:

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us. (7:18-19)

With that strong affirmation of God’s character, Micah closes.

III. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Hosea is not a marriage manual.
2. God is faithful.
3. We should honor him.
4. God is not mocked or fooled.
5. We have a compassionate and forgiving God.
6. Who has given us our Messiah in love.