

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lessons 51 and 52: The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos

Introductions to and Outlines for

THE BOOKS OF HOSEA, JOEL, AND AMOS

Introduction to the Minor Prophets

The Hebrew Canon, from which our Bibles are translated, has the Minor Prophets in a single book titled, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, and arranged in the same order as ours. They are called minor because of the amount of material in them, rather than the value of the material.

The central issues were:

1. Whether the Lord still loved Israel or had voided His covenant promises. Its history is reviewed in terms of the blessings and cursings prescribed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30.
2. Whether the Lord actually had control over this turbulent and chaotic history that was unfolding so badly for His people.

Where is YHWY, and where is His promised Messiah King?

Together the Minor Prophets work to present a single message which reaffirms God's sovereignty, love and grace, and restate His great plans for Israel, once they have been judged for their sin and apostasy.

The books do not follow a strict chronological order, but by moving only one of them, I have placed them into like periods of time allowing us to use the same background material, and so I hope to deal with all twelve books in four lessons.

If you refer to your chart of the prophets you will see how that works, as we group them as follows:
See Prophet Chart from Lesson 41, Intro. To the Prophets

1. Hosea, Joel, and Amos
2. Jonah and Micah
3. Obadiah (out of Bible order), Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah
4. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

The biggest shock that comes when one moves from the Major Prophets into the Minor is the lack of good reference material, with the single exception of the book of Jonah. Teachers and students like Jonah. Most Christians, however, have never even read most of the Minor Prophets.

In our attempt to remedy that problem, let's begin with the book of Hosea.

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Introduction

Hosea introduces the Minor Prophets by dealing with the central question:

Does the Lord still love Israel and have a wonderful plan for her life?

Hosea's name, which means "salvation," like Joshua or Jesus, occurs in the title verse and narrative, but we know nothing about him outside of the sketchy details of his writings. The mention of the four kings in Judah help to set the time frame for his prophecies, but he, like his contemporary, Amos, prophesied to the Northern Kingdom (Israel or Ephraim), while Isaiah and Micah ministered in the Southern kingdom (Judah).

He worked for over fifty years (755-710 BC.), beginning in the period of physical prosperity and spiritual bankruptcy, during the reign of Jeroboam II (792-753). When Jeroboam died, anarchy developed and Israel fell rapidly. Before the final fall, 4 of the following 6 kings were assassinated by their successors. For a historical look at the period refer to II Kings 14-20, and II Chronicles 26-32.

Hosea zeroed in on the moral evil and the breaking of their covenant promises to the Lord, announcing imminent judgment. He lived to see the fulfillment of his predictions when Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were deported to Assyria in 722 BC.

I. UNFAITHFUL WIFE/FAITHFUL HUSBAND (Chapters 1-3)

The first part of the book of Hosea is a living object lesson using the prophet, and his God-instructed marriage to a prostitute, as a picture of the relationship of the idolatrous nation of Israel to their Lord. This message is clearly made and is the key to understanding the entire theme of the book.

A. Sin (1)

Hosea was commanded to marry a "*wife of harlotry*" (prostitute), knowing that the children she bore would probably not be his, but "*children of harlotry*" (v 1). Gomer had a son, whom Hosea accepted as his own, and named him Jezreel. God chose this name as a prediction of His intent to avenge the house of Ahab, which was slaughtered by Jehu in that city (II Kings 9 and 10).

The second, a girl named Lo-Ruhamah, ("not beloved, or better translated, "she that never knew a father's love") was disowned and was obviously an example of God's lack of compassion for an evil Israel. (vv. 6-7). The third, a son named Lo-Ammi, ("not My people," or "no child of mine") was likewise disowned as Israel would be disavowed by the Lord. (vv. 8-9)

Hosea's patient pleading with his unfaithful wife, who not only broke her vows, but his heart, was a parable of God's love for Israel (vv. 10-11).

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B. Sentence (2)

"Contend with your mother, contend" (NASB), or "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges" (NKJV). (v.2) Hosea challenges his children to bring charges against their mother, Gomer, still illustrating the need for the children (individual Israelites) to confront the mother (Israel).

Hosea (God) continues to follow Gomer (Israel), hounding her, confronting her, making it hard for her, even punishing her, ". . . *I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifices to them . . .*" (v 13). Always, as in the case of proper discipline, with the view of restoration in mind and heart (vv. 14-23).

C. Salvation (3)

"Then the Lord said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raising cakes.'" (v. 1)

Showing unconditional (agape) love Hosea followed her, and found her destitute, dishonored, deserted and in slavery. He purchased her at a high price, disciplined her and finally restored her to position and relationship. (vv. 2-5)

His whole devastating life story gave him (and us) a glimpse of the tragedy and heartbreak Israel caused their Lord.

II. UNFAITHFUL NATION/ FAITHFUL RULER (Chapters 4-14)

Hosea dedicated himself to the sad task of translating his personal life experiences into a picture of the passionate and painful wooing by God of an errant Israel.

A. Sin (4-7)

The sins of the nation were many: swearing, lying, murder, robbery, oppression, adultery, drunkenness, idolatry, backsliding, pride, treachery, insincerity, forgetfulness, ingratitude, love of sin, and anarchy.

They stopped listening to the Lord (4).

They have become spiritually sick (5).

Their pagan priests took part in murder (6).

Their civil leaders urged alliances with Assyria or Egypt (7).

B. Sentence (8-10)

The nation refused to listen to Hosea giving no excuse and the rumbling of a coming storm of judgment could be heard. (8). *"The days of punishment have come, the days of retribution have come; . . . "* (9). All Israel's cities, fortresses, temples (both to God and idols), and the monarchy will be destroyed (10).

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C. Salvation (11-14)

Hosea tells the people that their sin against God not only breaks the Law, but breaks His heart. *"When Israel was a youth I loved him, " (11:1). "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? (v. 8).*

The Lord will chastise His people, but the ultimate goal is full restoration, and thus we find a promise of ultimate salvation tingeing the storm clouds. *"I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, For My anger is turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily, and he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon." (14:4-5).*

The book of Hosea ends with a great challenge, *"Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them. For **the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but the transgressors will stumble in them.**" (v. 9)*

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INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

Introduction

Joel's name means "YHWH is God," and he prophesied during the days of the young King Jehoash (835-796 B. C.) who was a child king in Judah under the watchful eye of the priests (II Kings 11:21). Dating of Joel's life and writing of the book are based on the absence of reference to later world powers, Assyria, Babylon, or Persia, and the mention of the Phoenicians, Philistines, Egyptians, and Edomites (II Chronicles 21).

We have no data on him outside of the book of Joel and it gives us very little information. He is excited about the temple and its sacrifices, but his working knowledge of agriculture and farm life indicates he was a rural man as opposed to a Levite. This is confirmed by several Jewish historical sources.

Using a physical disaster as a point of illustration, Joel explains that God has plans to judge His enemies and reward His faithful followers. There are no specific sins mentioned, no mention of idolatry or apostasy, so we can only assume that the problem had to do with a coldness or indifference to the Lord which required them to repent in order for spiritual revival to come.

I. DEVASTATION (Chapters 1:1-2:17)

The first part of the book of Joel is a picture of terrible devastation used to explain the plan of action that God will instigate to purge the land and bring a restoration of His covenant relationship to Israel.

A. Picture (1)

I was raised in the mid-west and on our trips to the country and from Chicago to Denver, we sometimes saw the results of a natural plague called the seven year locusts. The crops and all other plants and trees were stripped bare, and we listened to tales of swarms so large they would make the day seem like night, cover the entire ground, and even invade the buildings. Nothing but time could stop them, not chemicals, nor machines, nor fire. All the people did was pray and wait for them to move on or for a strong wind to come and blow them away.

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Judah has obviously experienced this phenomenon and he uses it to illustrate a prophetic message of a devastation that is coming that is like nothing they have ever seen before. He describes the plague in detail, naming four kinds of locusts, each type doing different damage until the entire land is left barren and parched. The effects are wide spread:

1. Drunks have no wine (v 5)
2. Priests have no meat, grain, or drink offerings (v 9)
3. Farmers crops are gone bringing starvation (v 11)
4. Surpluses are depleted (v 17)
5. Cattle and sheep are dying (v 18)
6. Fire spreads through the bare, dry stubble (v 19)
7. Even the wild animals are in trouble (v 20)

He indicates that this is a judgment from the Lord and calls on the nation to fast and cry out to the Lord (13-14).

B. Prophecy (2:1-2:17)

The locust army is presented as just a small taste of what is coming, as Joel calls for the trumpet of assembly and alarm to be sounded.

There is a coming invasion of Judah and a "day of the Lord," in both the near and far future. In dramatic terms Joel compared the drought and locust to fire, horses and an invading army.

Only repentance and turning to the Lord can end the calamity and save the day. And so a call for personal repentance "*return with all your heart, . . .*" (v 12), the heart representing the mind as well as the emotion, and corporate repentance, even babies and newlyweds (v 16).

II. DELIVERANCE (Chapters 2:18-3:21)

Beginning with 2:18 the text makes a transition from devastation to deliverance, from retribution to restoration. It assumes a repentance on the part of Israel and, as a result, the Lord brings physical, spiritual, and national restoration.

A. Picture (2:18-2:27)

Again, like an army of locusts, a great military force will come out of the north to threaten the very existence of Israel, but this time the Lord will "*drive it into a parched and desolate land, and destroy it.*" This battle can be visited in Ezekiel 38-39 and happens during the Tribulation.

"Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, . . . and you shall have plenty to eat and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God." (vv. 25-26).

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This section concludes with the phrase, *"Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the LORD your God and there is no other; . . ."* (v 27). This is the promised reversal of the event we saw in Ezekiel 8-11. THE MESSIAH RETURNS!

B. Prophecy (2:28-3:21)

These physical blessings will be followed by great spiritual blessing, as God pours out His Spirit on the believing remnant in Israel (v 32).

The Jewish people will be regathered in the land of Palestine (v 1), and the gentile nations will be judged in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Rev 16-19) (Armageddon). And, *"you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, . . ."* this shall be the earthly location of God's visible presence in the Millennial Temple (Ezekiel 40-48) and from then on, the glory of Judah will never be surpassed (v 17).

The book of Joel ends with a great promise for the Hebrew people in verses 20 and 21, *"But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for all generations . . . FOR THE LORD DWELLS IN ZION."*

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

Introduction

Amos, whose name means "burden bearer, was born and raised in Tekoa, a village 10 to 12 miles south of Jerusalem, where he was a sheep breeder, or perhaps a head shepherd (1:1), and also harvested sycamore figs (7:14).

His call was definitely from God (7:15) and he was surprisingly street-wise and capable of taking on the establishment. Perhaps he had traveled widely, selling his wool and fruit at various markets.

He was a southerner, from Judah, and not a professionally trained prophet. He traveled up into Bethel, one of the two northern religious centers that were set up in Israel to compete with Jerusalem and keep the people from going south to worship.

Remember their temples were dedicated to the Lord, but they also had golden calves as part of the worship system. That meant Amos traveled into hostile foreign territory, into the center of idol worship, and into the royal city of Jeroboam II.

He was not welcome! In fact, he aroused such passionate opposition that he was accused of treason and forced to return to Judah and write God's message to Israel.

In Judah, the righteous King Uzziah was leading his nation in reform and a period of renewal and prosperity (791-740 BC.). At the same time Syria, one great threat, had been defeated, Nineveh had repented, and Assyria, another enemy, was in an era of internal conflict and temporary collapse. King Jeroboam II was ruling an outwardly prosperous, but inwardly corrupt and evil, Israel (793-753).

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All of this means he was contemporary with Jonah, Hosea and Isaiah and period also explored in II Kings 14, and II Chronicles 26). It would be only a short time until Israel would be in a state of anarchy and a reborn Assyria would capture Samaria and Bethel, and carry the people into exile.

Amos deals with two primary problems:

1. Their lack of true worship--their poor relationship to God.
2. Their lack of true justice--their relationship to man.

I have chosen to break the Book of Amos into three sections based on the three types of messages he presented from God to the people:

I. Prophecies, II. Sermons, and III. Visions. For you who are disappointed that I did not illiterate them, and I know that may be many, you may use: I. Prophecies, II. Preaching, and III. Prognostication, for example.

The book begins with an introduction including the **who**: Amos the shepherd; **what**: visions; **where**: Israel; **when**: the days of Jeroboam II, two years before the earthquake; **why**: to warn the unfaithful flock of Israel of a coming roaring Lion who would punish them.

He then plunges into eight prophecies, each referring to a separate nation.

I. PROPHECIES (Chapters 1 and 2)

Amos began with God's prophecies against the enemies of Israel. *"For three transgressions . . . and for four I will not revoke punishment, . . ."*

In this very Jewish, idiomatic form, he drives home the fact that God has had enough--the cup of sin is full, . . . no, it is overflowing.

It is my guess that, at this point, Amos was a very popular prophet. And, when he announced judgment of Judah, the "Northerners" were ecstatic. I can almost hear the people cheer: Go Amos! Preach it brother! *Amen!* But, when he turned to Israel, he lost all of his fans, was accused of treason, and eventually driven out of the land.

A. Enemies (1:3-2:3)

1. Damascus, Syria--Gilead, located in the northeast of Israel had long been vulnerable to Syria's brutal attacks, now Syria would be crushed by Tiglath-pileser and exiled to Kir (v 5).
2. Gaza, Philistia--This was the pearl of the Philistines, a trading city between Egypt and Israel. Many Israelites were sold into slavery from this location, but now it, and three other major cities, would be destroyed under Uzziah's leadership.
3. Tyre, Phoenicia--King Hiram helped Solomon build the temple and signed a treaty promising not to go to war against Israel, and not to allow the selling of Hebrews into slavery (II Sam 5, I Kings 5). Eventually they engaged in that practice with Edom, and so now, they would pay. Alexander the Great conquered them in 330 BC destroying several glorious palaces.

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4. Teman, Edom--Without compassion, Edom pursued his brother and became major slave traders in Hebrew flesh. For graphic description of their destruction see Obadiah chapter 9.

5. Rabbah, Ammon--The Ammonites were descendants of Lot through Ben-ammi, Lot's son by his youngest daughter (Gen. 19). The inhumane act of war described is recorded in II Kings 8.

6. Kerioth, Moab--Moab, decedent from Lot, by his oldest daughter (Gen. 19:37) was to be destroyed for crimes related to the burning of the bones of a king. This indicates vengeance extending beyond death and it is not mentioned elsewhere.

B. Judah (2:4-5)

As Amos moves steadily closer to the nation of Israel, he deals with the Lord's judgment of its sister nation, Judah. The punishment will come because they, ". . . *rejected the law of the Lord.*" (v. 4)

They had the written Law, that was reestablished again and again, and still they chose to ignore it and its author, until God allowed King Neb, of Babylon to fulfill His judgment (II Kings 24, 25)

C. Israel (2:6-16)

Finally, the climax, the coup-de-gras, the purpose of this entire section of prophecy. . . The judgment on Israel.

Where the problem of Judah was rejecting the law, the three problems in Israel that finally tipped the scale, or "overflowed the cup," were: **1) Injustice**, oppressing the poor even to selling them as slaves for small debt, and **2) Immorality**, uncontrolled lust, and **3) Blasphemy**, perverting religious vows.

Israel's present prosperity, or military might, or political strength would be able to stop the oncoming Assyrian assault and enslavement.

II. SERMONS (Chapters 3-6)

This section begins with an accusation against an Israel who should have known better. After all they are the "chosen people" whom the Lord had brought out of bondage in the land of Egypt (v 1).

A. Irresponsibility (3)

Amos begins with a potent statement, "*You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*" Privilege creates responsibility; the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility, the greater the privilege, the greater the punishment.

Amos had to deal with a false understanding of what it meant to be God's Elect, His "chosen nation." They seemed to think that, since they were special, they could not come under judgment. But election doesn't lead to status it leads to service.

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Is that a lesson for all of us? I think so!

Amos points to the seemingly weak enemy, Assyria and predicts that they will devastate Israel, leaving only remnants of her prosperity, like the few remaining pieces of a sheep's carcass a shepherd would snatch from a lion's mouth. Meanwhile the leaders in the capital city, Samaria, live in luxury, *"The houses of ivory will also perish and the great houses will come to an end, . . ."*

B. Idolatry (4)

Amos referred to the well fed women of Samaria as, *"you cows of Bashan,"* (Bashan was known for its fat cattle Ps 22:12) because they cared only for luxury and pleasure and oppressed the poor to get it. Their doom is sealed and it won't be pretty.

Bethel and Gilgal were supposed to be places of worship to the Lord but, since idols we placed in their temples, they were useless. With acid tongue in cheek, Amos calls the people to worship, trying to force them to realize how far from God they had strayed.

The Lord sent warnings in the form of natural disasters: famine, drought, hot winds, caterpillars, plagues, and war, *"Yet you have not returned to Me,"* declares the Lord. (v. 10) And now they have to meet their Lord as a God of judgment.

C. Immorality (5-6)

"Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel." A funeral song is the last part of the ceremony, just before the burial. It is too late to start formal worship now. Don't bother to go to Bethel, or Gilgal, or Beersheba now. The only hope left is to cry out to the Lord for a miracle of mercy and grace. Chapter 6 is a direct reprimand to the entire nation of Israel, a series of woes, or covenant curses, which are the result of their sin.

They still look at the "day of the Lord" as the day of deliverance, the setting up of the kingdom, but since they are living in sin, "the day of the Lord" will be a day of judgment.

III. VISIONS (Chapters 7-9)

The last section of the book of Amos is a series of visions of future judgment, interrupted by a description of a confrontation between Amos and the priest of Bethel, the religious headquarters of the Northern Kingdom (Israel).

A. Locust, Fire, Plumb line (7:1-9)

1. Devouring Locusts (1-3)

Amos saw green fields and, *"He (God) was forming a locust-swarm,"* and they destroyed the king's crop. Amos prayed, *"Lord God, please pardon!"* and *"The Lord changed His mind about this. It shall not be, . . ."*

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2. Consuming Fire (4-6)

Next Amos saw a fire so intense that it consumed the water as well as the farmland. Again, he asked, "*Lord God, please stop!*" And again, "*The Lord changed His mind about this. This too shall not be, . . .*"

3. Perfect Plumb line

Then Amos saw the Lord measuring the city for destruction, using a plumb line to compare Israel to His building code. They were so far out of the line of God's law and God's will, that Amos couldn't even bring himself to pray for mercy. They deserved to be punished and the Lord said, "*I will spare them no longer.*" (v 8)

B. Historical Interlude (7:10-17)

Amos announced the impending death of Jeroboam II. That, along with all of the other prophecies of impending doom for Israel, made the priest, Amaziah, livid and he ordered Amos to cease and desist and leave the country..

Amos responded by telling Amaziah to his face that, even though he didn't have a pedigree or formal education, he was a prophet and could, therefore, foresee the day when Amaziah's wife would, "*become a harlot of the city, your sons and daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line, and you yourself will die on unclean (foreign) soil.*" (v 17) His message was clear. Things were going to get worse before they got better.

C. Fruit, Altar, Blessing (8:1-9:15)

1. Ripe Fruit (8)

"Summer-fruit," was fruit that was so ripe that it would soon be of no value. It looked great sitting in the show basket, but the rot was spreading from the inside and it would soon be putrid.

Israel was rotting at its heart with pride, greed, injustice, drunkenness, immorality, and profanity and needed to be destroyed.

2. Forsaken Altar (9)

The Lord stands beside the altar in Bethel and demands that the temple be destroyed, falling on the false worshippers and sparing none.

This final Judgment is summarized in verse 8: "*Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob, . . .*" (There is always a small but faithful remnant.).

Amos ends, as do most of the prophets, with a picture of the final "Day of the Lord," including the Millennial kingdom, the reestablished Throne of David, the rebuilt Temple, and the "Promised Land" of fertility (v 13), prosperity (v 14), and security (v. 15).

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Freedom of speech was not guaranteed to prophets in Israel and Amos finally was forced to leave, but they could not silence him. He returned home to Judah and wrote his messages down so all could read and understand. His message is still important.

God still has a righteous plumb line, a standard by which we measure our lives. If we are not "straight" we need to repent, and rebuild our personal relationship with our Lord.

Homework:

Read: The books of Jonah and Micah

Think: Do we presume like Israel that we can keep sinning or rebelling and not expect to be disciplined?

Apply: Remember that God loves you and has control over your circumstances.