

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 14, Conclusion of Amos, Beginning of Hosea

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 14, Conclusion of Amos, Beginning of Hosea.

Alright, I'm going to get started, so let's have a word of prayer, please.

This is the day which you have made our Father, we don't have tomorrow, we have today. And we pray that today we will learn more in the school of Christ. Thank you that you called AJ Gordon to found a school of Christ.

Pray that our walk with you will have integrity, faithfulness, and honesty today. We thank you for the prophets who called their generation to the high and lofty ethical, moral, and spiritual truths of the Torah. Thank you. You've given us the Torah in your word to give direction to our lives.

I ask that what we learn from who you are in your relationship with Israel, we will remember that you are just the same to us. Thank you to the God of Israel, who is long-suffering; some of us wouldn't be here today. Thank you for the God of Israel who is faithful when all of us go through periods of time of unfaithfulness.

Thank you for who you are and the revelation of your word through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alright, I want to say a few final things about Amos.

I said Amos' view of what is true religion was found in 5.24 where he calls for the cascading down of righteousness and justice like a waterfall. And so again, the prophets are concerned with how you live, not just with all the fine details of ritual and ceremony. And we have to hold these things in tension in the Old Testament.

God wanted his people to have ceremonies, but the ceremonies had to be vested with an authentic life. So, Amos sounds extreme in wanting to remove the ritual. And he's right when he calls for the removal of heartless rituals, ceremonies that are hollow and a shame.

Now, the last part of the book he had the series of 5 visions. Before I talk briefly about those 5 visions, you'll recall there's this interesting little pericope or historical interlude in chapter 7 verses 10-17 where we get some insight into the personal life of the prophet. Here he goes over the line, these prophets are always going over the

line, but this case the geographical boundary into the southern part of the northern kingdom to Bethel.

And there he confronts a priest operating at the shrine there whose name is Amaziah. And he basically drops his prophetic bombs there, very disturbing, calling really for the overthrow of the northern kingdom in no uncertain terms. This was considered to be unpatriotic and subversive; Jeremiah would die by the sword, and Israel would go into exile away from their native land.

Nobody wanted to hear this from a southerner who was up north speaking at this pagan shrine. Amaziah remands him and says, go back to the land of Judah, eat your bread there, and do your prophesying there; don't come here to this sanctuary of the king and this temple of the kingdom. Then, in one of the most important verses of Amos, I think you need to circle in your thinking, and that's 7-14.

Amos simply says I am here not because I have a degree in prophecy, and I'm here to try it out; in fact, he disassociates himself from any kind of formal guild or prophetic connection at that particular time. He said, I'm not a Navi, I'm not a prophet, and I'm not a Ben-Navi, I'm not the son of a prophet, and I don't work for a prophet organization, I'm a non-prophet, basically is what he's saying. All he appeals to is his call, his calling, his calling.

The Lord called me from following the flock. Amos was a layperson whom God called and used. While he cared for sycamore fig trees, he was a horticulturalist of sorts, he was an outdoorsman, but God simply said, go prophesy to my people Israel.

Now, here, the word of the Lord sort of sounds like Ezekiel there. And he lays that on even further, telling how Amaziah's wife is going to become a prostitute and the family is going to die by the sword. No wonder he was persona non grata at Bethel.

In his final words up there at the shrine, Amos anticipates that Israel will certainly go into exile. In his words, 721, the northern kingdom would be exiled to Assyria, which would happen a number of decades after this time. In these last three chapters, Amos launches into his so-called five visions of Israel's condition.

I talked briefly last time about chapters 7:1-3, which concerns locusts. He serves as a bit of an intercessor like Abraham interceding for Sodom. He is here pleading with God, and so this is followed by God's pardon—God's pardon for Israel, so apparently, the locusts are called off.

So, God relents, verse 3. Then, in the second vision, verses 4-6 of chapter 7, the Lord is calling for judgment by fire. The description seems to be this primeval deep of creation, which is going to be consumed with fire. Fire is thought to be the source of the world's water supply.

So, the picture here is obviously one of drought because the vision is it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. And so, he cries out again, and once again, there is God's backing off, his relenting, his pardon. The third picture is one of the plumb line, and that's in verses 7-9.

First of all, a plumb line. A plumb line is a carpenter's tool. A plumb line very simply is a way on the end of a rope or a cord with a weight on the end of it, which for a construction worker, and they built plenty of homes and plenty of walls in the ancient world, all you need to do is archaeologically run around Israel and check out all the rocks and all the walls, and there are plenty of them.

But you had to build them to plumb, which means they had to be perfectly vertical. So when you took this cord with the weight on the end of it, and held it next to a wall, you would see whether the wall was leaning, to see whether it was perfectly straight, and whether that construction was right, or straight. We hear the word orthodoxy, well ortho is a Greek New Testament word, which means straight or right.

You go to an orthodontist to straighten your teeth. So, orthodoxy is straight thinking, or straight teaching. Now in this particular case, the wall is the northern kingdom, the kingdom of Israel.

And so, who's there with the plumb line? The Lord is there, and he says, Amos, what do you see? And he says a plumb line, and God says he's setting that plumb line in the midst of his people. The result is that Israel does not meet God's standard of straightness and verticality. Israel is not to plumb, and she does not comply with his standard of righteousness.

In short, Israel is out of line. Sort of like the Leaning Tower of Pizza, maybe. So, again, an illustration that Israel is leaning away from God's correct or straight standard of righteousness.

The fourth vision is that of the basket of summer fruit. The Hebrew word for summer fruit is qayetz. And there's a very nice pun here, which you miss if you don't hear these words together.

The word fruit, qayetz, and the word end, qayetz. Chapter 8, verse 1, this is what the sovereign Lord showed me, a basket of ripe summer fruit. What do you see, Amos? He said, a basket of kayetz.

And I answered, then the people said to me, what do you see? A basket of qayetz. And the Lord said to me, the qayetz, the thyme, is ripe for my people Israel. And here in English, the translations, depending on which one you look at, some do a better job than others in preserving the pun here.

The RSV says the basket of summer fruit and the end has come. And the word has come upon my people, Israel. And those two lines are parallel in 8:2. The NIV renders it a basket of summer fruit, and the thyme is ripe for judgment.

So, thyme is ripe, or end, is the qayetz, is plainly ripe for judgment. And the end is ripe for judgment. Cutting off the qayetz.

What is the point here? Israel outwardly looked fine. She looked beautiful outwardly. But she was really rotting at the core, rotting at the heart.

So, the nation is ripe for judgment. In the rest of Chapter 8, Amos expounds a little bit on why Israel is ripe for judgment. Again, we're reminded that integrity in lifestyle, honesty, and faithfulness in how we do business with other people are important.

Your conduct, your character. For example, look at verses 4 through 6. Amos has in his focus the rich, the greed of the rich, the tight-fistedness of the rich, and the flip side of that, the unbearable oppression of the poor. And so, let me read verses 4 through 6. Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land.

When will the new moon be over? Notice that's capital N, capital M, and new moon. It was built into ancient Israel to their monthly calendar, an extra Shabbat if you will because the new moon was a day when no work was done. And, of course, every 28 or 29 days, you had a Rosh Hodesh, a new moon.

The New Testament in Hebrew in the land of Israel today is the Berit Hodeshah, the new moon. In the New Testament, you hear the word Hodeshah, is a feminine form. And this Rosh Hodesh, this new moon, was a time when, like on a Sabbath, you did not engage in commerce.

But these greedy merchants during this time, Amos cites here, who are just can't wait for the new moon to be over to sell their grain. But it's more than simply selling their grain to the people. Or, in their greed, waiting for the weekly Shabbat to end on sundown Saturday afternoon so they could sell grain.

But it's how they sold grain that we may marvel at our wheat by skimping the measure, boosting the price, and cheating with dishonest scales. Today's English version renders this: when will the Sabbath and new moon end so we can overcharge, use false measures, and fix the scales to cheat our customers? That sort of lays it out there in very modern language. So, integrity in business.

Amos was concerned about the rich because they were cheating. They were dishonest in acquiring their riches. Verse 8 says the whole land will rise and fall like the Nile. And, of course, here he's talking about the inundation season.

Late September, early October, the Nile rises all the way as high as 50 feet in very, very good years. Along the Nile, archaeologists have found Nile meters that show the rising and the falling in the numbers of feet. But the land of the Northern Kingdom is going to sink like this great river of Egypt.

Interesting again, he chooses a figure from nature. The water which brought life to the whole Nile Delta, the Northern Kingdom is going to fall and singing will turn into weeping and people will wear sackcloth, which is the black, dark brown, goat skins, which people wore in tragedy for times of mourning. You will shave your heads, you will mourn like the death of an only son because famine will come through the land.

A famine for hearing the words of the Lord, says Amos. He ends chapter 8 by referring to some of the gods of the various religious centers of the Northern Kingdom. He mentions Dan and Beersheba.

That's why we study Bible 101 at the college because you know what happened to Dan and Beersheba. Because as soon as Jeroboam came back out of Egypt, following the split of the kingdom at the time of Solomon's death, he brought with him the golden calves and those became the great centers of apostasy. Dan and Bethel, and even he refers to his own Southern Kingdom, the god of Beersheba.

These will fall. Even pagan altars have been discovered in Beersheba. So, he says they will fall, never to rise again.

Exaggerated, extreme, over the top, that was sometimes the poetry of the Bible to get people's attention. The last vision in chapter 9:1-10 is the Lord standing beside the altar. Picture of judgment.

A temple filled with worshippers and the whole building suddenly collapses on them and no one escapes. Sort of reminds us of the Samson narrative there in Judges. The building topples and none escapes.

Now, with a series of five visions of Israel's condition and God's judgment, which is so typical in the prophets, we move from the bitter to the sweet. From the judgment to the hope. And so that's how Amos ends his prophecy.

It's with a view to Israel's restoration. Before he talks about that, however, he has an interesting little verse you shouldn't forget in 9:7, tucked away here. Because once again we read the Old Testament Scriptures and we realize God is particular.

That is, He has a covenant with a set of people. But yet, we have these scattered texts in the Old Testament particularly that remind us that it's not just the God of Israel. He has that international love we talked about in Jonah.

That God is providentially indeed working among other nations at the same time. And so, the Lord says in 9-7, Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? Ethiopians? These people from Africa? You mean you are not like them? You have an interest in them? God says through the prophet, Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt and the Philistines from the isle of Caphtor? What's Caphtor? It's the isle of Crete in the Mediterranean. They came, according to this text, from Caphtor, and they settled along the coast.

God says He brought the Philistines into the land, and I brought the Syrians from Kier. In other words, God cares for other nations, loves them, and is concerned for them.

The Hebrews are no different in the eyes of God. They are on one level than the Ethiopians. God's concerned for foreign nations, too.

So, there's really no reason for the Hebrews to boast that God brought them into Canaan from Egypt into the land of Israel. God also brought the Philistines from their homeland and the Syrians or Arameans from theirs. God has a love for all humankind.

Now, of course, Jonah is big on that theme. Ruth will be big on that theme when a Moabitess comes into the Messiah's bloodline. Those books also illustrate that theme.

The book ends with the theme of restoration, with God once again restoring David's fallen tent. Does that mean there may be a revival of David's line? I think so. David was gone two days to three centuries when this was written.

Remember, we date David approximately 1000. And Amos is writing this toward the middle of the 700s. So, it speaks of this greatest king of Israel, this warrior king.

This one is from the one who engineered the bringing of all of the tribes, the twelve tribes, together. He reigned over his own tribe in Hebron for seven and a half years and then moved everything up to Jerusalem for the final 33 years of his reign. So, it seems that this is David's fallen dynasty. Could this be the house of David, the united Kingdom of the twelve tribes? Or, could this be the house of David, the revival of David's tent be a reference to David's spiritual reign in Jerusalem, which started with Christ's death and resurrection as the greater David to come, the inauguration of his reign according to the New Testament, is in fulfillment of the Luke 1. The New Testament 32 and 33 announce this one who would be born.

And what is the announcement of Christ's birth? He would sit on the throne of his father David and reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom, there would be no end. These were the words spoken by David in the text concerning the birth of Jesus, the annunciation that somehow his birth was tied into a revival, a restoration, a making good in some way of the promises God had given to the Davidic family. Of course, we understand this as a spiritual kingdom, not as a literal kingdom.

Spiritual, earthly, and political kingdom. Some scholars would say this revival, restoration, and renewal in the end of Amos, where these words were originally given to Israel, and that she would be vindicated in the face of her earthly enemies, verse 12, they will possess the remnant of Edom. In all the nations that bear my name, which seems to speak of a universal reign of the Messiah whenever this happens, in that day by Yom HaHu, in that day, which is a typical prophetic formula when God acts in the future.

The language of the text speaks of a kind of Edenic, messianic prosperity that speaks of a renewed earth which can only be brought about by divine intervention, ala Ezekiel, ala Isaiah 2 and Micah 4, where God's reign and rule and the art of war comes through God's intervention. Here, he talks about agriculture returning to almost an Edenic, pristine society, where the language is poetical, but things are so fertile the plowman overtakes the reaper. In the midst of all of this, God once again assures his people that he will plant them in their own land, never again to be uprooted, Amos 9.15. Are you aware that there were Jewish people who came to the UN in New York City prior to the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, who quoted this text and a number of other texts, that they had a divine right to come home and build their cities and to live in peace and productivity in that land?

It does say in this text they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, and they will engage in agriculture and other things. You may not read the Bible exactly the same way as Jewish people do, but this end of Amos has inspired many modern Zionists in their return home. Is this the final return? Certainly, no one knows.

Jews have come back to their home and been uprooted again. It's happened a number of times in their history. In the book of Acts, at the Council of Jerusalem, this passage is quoted as Jesus' half-brother gets up to chair the Council of Jerusalem.

And you remember the issue of the Council of Jerusalem. Gentiles were coming in to join Jews in the fledgling Messianic Church. And they were swamping out the Jewish presence with an abundance of Gentiles.

And so, James actually quotes this passage for the purpose of showing that the present salvation of the Gentiles is in accord with God's predictive purpose. And there are many people in the world, many scholars, who would see in this passage kind of a multiple fulfillment. It's been inaugurated with the restoration of the Davidic presence through the coming of the Davidic Messiah who came.

Gentiles came largely to receive the message of that Messiah. There are some who believe that God still is a future for national Israel. The language of Amos about returning to the original context here of Israel's restoration to her ancient homeland yet will have meaning in the future.

So, Amos ends then on a very positive note. Any questions about Amos before I move to Hosea?

I said there are a few books in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, that are challenging in how we interpret them. Song of Songs is one of those. And Hosea is one of those because he is a man of great wisdom. He is a man of great wisdom. The issue of Hosea's marriage raises an interesting question about God commanding a prophet to marry a woman of ill repute, to marry a whore, a harlot, or an adulteress.

She's called a number of different things depending on what text you use. The name Hosea is a good Hebrew name. You can hear Jesus' name in Hosea, Yashah, the Hebrew verb meaning to save or to deliver.

Hence, Hosea, which is also the Hebrew name for the woman of ill repute, is parallel to the name Joshua and even Isaiah's name that incorporates this root, which means salvation, help, deliverance, Hosea. He is operating in the Northern Kingdom at the time of Amos. How do we know this? Look at your historical background in the following few verses.

He's out there prophesying in the Northern Kingdom, first half of the 8th century BC in the days of Uzziah. Remember Uzziah died in 740. So, he's prophesying in the period of time prior to that.

And during the time of Jotham, Amos, and Ammon, and Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah. And in the days of Jeroboam II that we just talked about when Amos was at the shrine of Bethel. That's Jeroboam II, taking us to the middle of the 8th century.

The word Israel, Yisrael, is used in many ways in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 22 talks about the encounter with this angel, this divine being at Jabbok and out of the wrestling match we have the man who gives his name to descendants who according

to Jacob's ladder, or this staircase that rises into heaven, are the children of Israel. His descendants are going to spread out in the North, East, South, and West.

So, Israel, after Jacob's time, whose name is changed to the one who has struggled, wrestled, or striven with God, his descendants become the B'nai Yisrael. We translate B'nai Yisrael, King James, and children of Israel. Properly B'nai means son of Israel.

The word Yisrael means of Israel but includes women. Although since the women's movement, we have heard more about the Benot Yisrael, the daughters of Israel, the word is also used simply to refer to his descendants in certain translations of the Old Testament, the Israelites.

That's who the B'nai Yisrael are, the people of Israel. During Amos and Hosea's time, Israel had particular reference after the kingdom was divided. That kingdom was Israel, and it was divided into two parts.

The northern tribes were called Israel. The southern kingdom of course was Judah. Amos however, while sometimes he refers to the northern kingdom as the house of Joseph, usually doesn't use the name of the largest tribe, Ephraim.

But Hosea does during this time. More than 35 times, Ephraim, a Hebrew word that means doubly fruitful, is used for the northern kingdom. And Ephraim was in this large central area of the land.

Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim. Do you think he had any vested interest as soon as Israel came into the promised land to put the tabernacle at Shiloh, where it stayed for a good amount of time? Shiloh was in the tribe of Ephraim. Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal were the curses, and the blessings were to be recited, which was in Ephraim.

Samaria was in Ephraim. So, Ephraim represented really the heart, the central area in one of your largest tribes of the northern kingdom. Jacob had adopted Ephraim.

He was actually Jacob's grandson. And he gave him the same status as his own sons. So, Ephraim becomes Hosea's term for the northern kingdom of the north.

If Hosea was the home missionary of the northern kingdom, Jonah was the foreign missionary from Gath-Heifer. Amos, on the other hand, came from Tekoa in the south and went up to the north. So here is our third prophet of the northern kingdom.

Some have called Hosea the Saint John of the Old Testament. What they mean by that is probably Hosea's father, Hosea talks about God's steadfast love, God's hesed

as much as any of the prophets of Israel. There is a decisive emphasis in Hosea on God's compassion and love for his bride, Israel.

A bride who is wayward, as we know from the opening of the book. And the book is part autobiographical as well as a book which instructs out of Hosea's own marriage to this woman. And the severing of that relation where God no longer has pity and actually says temporarily, at least you are no longer my people.

There is a breach, there is a break in that relationship between God and the northern kingdom. And so what was true of the prophet own marriage was true of the nation. And one is a picture of the other.

And they all get blended together particularly in the opening narrative. Speaking of an opening narrative how might we then outline Hosea? I think in three big chunks of material. Chapters one through three, the prophet's married life is your main theme.

The prophet's married life. His marriage to Gomer. Now as I just said there is more than just Hosea and Gomer and the three children.

God is using this symbolically also and interactively to talk about a bigger picture. What was going on in the prophet's own life was also true of some real serious problems of Baalism which led to sacred prostitution and that was true of the northern kingdom in general. Chapters four through thirteen is Israel's unfaithfulness and consequent judgment.

So, we have a lot of narrative in four through thirteen that speaks of Israel's unfaithfulness to the God of hesed, the God of covenantal love. I'll talk about the meaning of hesed which means God has loyal love and he wants his people to reciprocate with the same hesed, loyal love. But those chapters are pretty much God's unfaithfulness but God hanging in there not because of Israel but in spite of Israel.

And I might say, as an aside, one of the reasons I strongly believe in the grace of God as persevering in the life of any genuine believer is precisely because of what the book of Hosea teaches that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, as the New Testament version of that goes. We may make our runs, we may prove to be unfaithful even for a period of time but God persists.

His love is an everlasting love. He does not let those who truly belong to him go. They can push him out of their life where he's not a living reality, but in the end, God will prevail, and people will return.

And that's what the third main point of the section of the book is all about. Chapter 14 is a call to return, and that's the first word in chapter 14. Return O Israel to Lord your God.

You've stumbled but forgiveness and blessing can yet be yours if you come back. So, this book is a call to return to the story of an unfaithful people but a persistent God. When people tell me they look at Israel in the Middle East today and see how imperfect this modern nation-state is and how flawed and failed sometimes they are in military actions or decisions the government makes.

And I'm often reminded of Israel in the Old Testament. God's faithfulness persists. It's not because of ancient Israel or even modern Israel that you have a picture of perfection, but God remains true to his purposes in the world.

God uses flawed vessels. God uses flawed vessels. This professor was first in line to witness that.

These are the only people God uses. Check out the women in the Messiah's bloodline. Three out of the first four you meet in Matthew's genealogy are women of ill repute, but God works despite human sin.

Alright, so here is a picture of Israel. Israel's purposes in the world were up in terms of her own personal fidelity and down but God never gave up. God never gave up.

And so when we read this book, I think it has a very important place in the canon. Hosea's message speaks then of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord, and it's depicted by Hosea in terms of a wife who has turned her back upon a faithful husband in order to follow paramours, that is, lovers. Now how we understand the marriage of Hosea, let me briefly mention several possible ways of interpreting Hosea's marriage to Gomer.

I said this is one of the more challenging parts of Hosea. Thinking about how we might interpret the opening verses, which in Hosea 1-2 says, the Lord said to Hosea, go take to yourself a wife of harlotry or an adulterous wife as the NIV puts it and have children of harlotry for the land commits great harlotry, that's the RSV language, by forsaking the Lord. One way of understanding this language is it speaks of spiritual adultery.

Gomer would be called a wife of harlotry not because she was an immoral woman but because she belonged to a spiritually adulterous people. Israel had a broken marriage. Israel came to Sinai and pledged their fidelity to Yahweh, and all that Yahweh said, Israel replied, we will do it; we agree.

So those who interpret this spiritually would say it's an idolatrous people. Gomer is a harlot or an adulterous in the spiritual sense of the word because Israel had forsaken God as a harlot forsakes her husband, so Gomer is guilty of spiritual adultery. Another interpretive approach to the book is that Gomer is a professional cult prostitute, a devotee of the Canaanite fertility rites of Baal.

The technical Hebrew term for religious harlot is not used for her, however. We do find in the law of Moses a technical term for male prostitutes and another term for female prostitutes who would operate around Canaanite religious shrines. This word is lacking here.

And further I think it's not likely that the marriage to such a person would have been any less distasteful to Hosea who scathingly denounces cult prostitution than marriage to an ordinary adulteress. Another way this has been interpreted is the allegorical or parabolic approach. Actually, the allegorical is John Calvin and Kyle of Kiel and Delitzsch fame, one of our older commentators on the Hebrew Bible held to this view.

Saying it was parable or allegory designed to impart a spiritual lesson of Israel's unfaithfulness. Hosea did not actually contract this marriage. As you know from parables no one presses the issue whether the story actually took place but it can be a teaching tool.

The great medieval Jewish philosopher, one of the certainly greatest Jewish thinkers of all time, Maimonides held to this particular viewpoint. He argued in fact the incident took place in a vision or a dream. It was never an actual event in the life of the prophet.

Heschel, who was an expert on Maimonides by the way and wrote a book on Maimonides we have here in the library, Abraham Joshua Heschel, disposes of Maimonides's approach to take this as an allegory or parable listing eight problems with such an interpretation. A fourth way is Heschel's own way of understanding this, which for Heschel, one might call the sympathy view. That is, this experience of the sympathetic view of the Jewish people once was for the benefit of the prophet.

It was to make him personally sympathetic to God's feelings about Israel. The prophet himself had to be deeply wounded and hurt in his own marriage in order to really existentially feel how God felt, the pathos of God, the concern of God. If you want to know divine sympathy, the prophet then would understand this divine sympathy through his own experience.

So, the story of the marriage is the prophet's experience, and the event stirred and shocked the life of Hosea, and that's exactly God's concern intended to move Hosea and see how God feels as his people's condition. That's how God sees things. So we

might call that the sympathy view and you can read Heschel's book on the prophets as the pathos of God is a big, big theme of Heschel.

I'll say more about that next time when we come back.