

CLASS #17: HOSEA, JOEL, AND AMOS

Introduction (Slide 1)

The Prophets are divided into two sections, the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. The Major Prophets consist of Isaiah through Daniel. And the Minor Prophets, which we will begin to study today, are Hosea through Malachi. Now, the reason some are called “Major” and some are called “Minor” is simply because the Major Prophets are, generally speaking, longer and the Minor ones shorter. So short, in fact, that the Minor Prophets were traditionally placed together on a single scroll, referred to as one book, called “The Book of the Twelve.”

And this Book of Twelve is striking unified in its message, despite the diversity of its human authors. You might say that its general thrust is sin, judgment, mercy, and hope. These prophets decry the sin and hypocrisy that we saw in both the Northern and Southern kingdoms in the book of Kings; they pronounce present-day and future judgment; they declare mercy to God’s people through the promises of a coming King like David; and they proclaim hope for a future restoration where the redeemed will dwell forever in God’s presence.

HOSEA

Context (Slide 2)

Hosea preached during from the reign of Uzziah up to the time of Hezekiah, kings in the South. This makes Hosea a contemporary of Isaiah. But unlike Isaiah, who ministered in the southern kingdom of Judah, Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel. It was a time of great economic prosperity, and in their comfort the people had slipped into worshipping foreign gods instead of Yahweh.

The following is the central theme (see slide 3)

(Slide 4-5) – Run through the outline briefly of the chapters of the book

Outline (slide 6)

The book of Hosea treats that central problem of idolatry in two main sections. The first three chapters are an extended parable based on the life of Hosea, using his marriage to an unfaithful wife to depict Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. And this image of a broken marriage really serves as the introduction to the entire Book of Twelve, because it provides the basic framework that runs throughout these twelve books: Israel has abandoned her covenant with the Lord, but, like a faithful husband, God will pursue his true people and restore them.

(slide 7) We can see the overall direction of Hosea’s prophecy: *Accusation* in which God recites and condemns the sin of the people; *judgment* threatened if they do not repent; and finally *mercy* as God redeems his covenant people.

How can we best summarize the themes of Hosea? Because the gripping story of Hosea's marriage provides an excellent analogy for the people's broken relationship with God, it is most helpful to see Hosea as a prophecy about love.

Hosea 1-3

Love's Strange Story (slide 8)

Love's Strange Story. Hosea's book begins with a picture that captures the message of the entire book, and as we mentioned earlier, for all the minor prophet writings.

The picture: Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful woman named Gomer. We see this in the opening verses of Hosea.

Hosea reminds us that Israel is in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, likening it to a marriage. However, the people have abandoned their covenant commitment. This rebellion is so awful, and so personal, that Hosea describes it with the gut-wrenching image of adultery. And not just any kind of adultery; Hosea uses the image of prostitution. You see this is in chapter 3:1-3.

(slide 9) Even though Gomer committed adultery, Hosea took her back. This is meant to symbolize what has been going on for generations on a greater scale: Israel has been playing the harlot by worshipping other gods, but Yahweh has always been a faithful and forgiving husband. However, things are about to change: it is time for Israel to endure the curses promised in the end of Deuteronomy for those who break the covenant of God's law. The fact that God is loving does not mean that he fails to judge those who are evil and opposed to him, which we see in chapter 2:13.

(slide 10) Will this punishment last forever? God would be just if it did, however the amazing message of Hosea is that God will show mercy to his people. We see this in chapter 2:19-20.

We play the part of Gomer as our lives are ones that turn away from God, yet it is his love for us that reclaims us to him. *Something you could do to reflect on this story even this week would be to meditate on how the sin in your life is marital unfaithfulness to God. And then rejoice in what he has done to rescue you.*

Judgment is coming, but what will happen after that? God shows mercy! Who will receive this mercy? Hos. 3:5 says it will be those who "return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days."

This is a fascinating verse, because as we saw earlier, Hosea prophesied during the reigns of kings who lived two hundred years after David! So when he says that the people will seek "David" their king, he's talking about the king who would rule God's people in the last days – the king who would be a son of David – the Messiah.

And that's love's strange story – a story about a faithful God who calls his people back to him in spite of their unfaithfulness. And as we survey the rest of Hosea, we'll see how God's love would be displayed to such a wayward bride.

Hosea 4-14

Love's Challenge: Sin (slide 12)

First in this section, we see love's challenge—the sin of God's people that challenged his love. Look at Hosea chapter 4:1-2:

Why was such evil typical in the people's hearts? Hosea pointed to false worship – idolatry. That's the reason for the image of adultery in the early chapters of the book, because idolatry is in fact spiritual adultery.

Hosea doesn't use tame terms to talk about sin. We shouldn't either. We must see sin the way God does. Disobeying the LORD is not the minor, inconsequential thing we often pretend it is. It's adultery! And because of the people's sin, God says that he will judge them. And much of these chapters are filled with that judgment.

Love's Recovery: Repentance (slide 12)

So if sin is the problem and it brings judgment, what's the way back to God? Hosea says that love's recovery is found through repentance. And this is where we find mercy amidst judgment. Read the appeal the prophet gives in chapter 6:1-2:

(slide 13) Sin looks good in the dark; but repentance means bringing sin into the light. We should always be seeking to expose our sin, through reflection, prayer, confession, and meditating on God's Word. Hosea gives a great description of this in 14:1-2: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously that we may offer the fruit of our lips.'"

Israel ignored this call to repentance, and so as Hosea prophesied, the Assyrian Empire did come and destroy the kingdom of Israel a few years after his ministry. But the promises and hope offered in this book continued on. And so much of the mercy described in this book pointed ahead, to events that unfolded in the time of Christ, and will yet unfold. That's our ultimate hope: restoration.

Love's Hope: Restoration (slide 14)

Sin challenges love. Repentance offers the way of recovery. And then the hope of those who are loved by God becomes restoration – restoration of perfect fellowship with God. As we saw earlier, Hosea redeemed his wife – he literally bought her back from her prostitution in Chapter 3. God would do the same thing. Though he would judge all of Israel's sin, he would purchase life for his true people and bring them into his wonderful presence. The passage in Hosea 13:14 is mirrored in Paul's letter to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 15:55, where it takes about redemption and restoration.

(Slide 15) God did banish sinful Israel from the land, but through Hosea God proclaimed hope for all who would listen in chapter 11:8-11.

We you see that Hosea's role as a prophet was not only to announce judgment, but to proclaim hope for all who would turn and believe God's promises! Of course, as we said earlier, the Old Covenant kingdom of Israel was destroyed – but God's true people were not. (*When Paul quotes from Hosea's restoration passages in Romans, he's showing us that Hosea's prophecy would not be fulfilled some Middle-Eastern nation-state to come, but in the church. Out of the exile of this world, all who believe in Christ will be welcomed and one day will dwell into God's presence forever.*))

As we conclude our overview of the book, remember that it is Jesus that secures the restoration this book foretells.

(slide 16) As we conclude our look at this book, remember how Hosea tells of God's covenant with Israel was like the covenant of marriage, yet Israel challenged God's love with their sin. They would not recover God's love through repentance like Hosea said. Where could hope for such sinners come from? It would come from a better Son – a perfect Israel. Although all of us have committed spiritual adultery against God, Jesus never did. He was always faithful. And so it is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we are reconciled to God.

JOEL

Context & Theme (slide 17)

As we take a look at the book of Joel, let us go through a brief introduction. Joel is the author of the book with his name. He was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom. Scholars don't know exactly when Joel prophesized, because he doesn't tell which king was reigning at the time. However, we do know that Joel's prophecy was motivated by a historical occurrence – a plague of locusts. And like Hosea used marriage as a symbol of something greater, Joel points to this locust invasion as a symbolic foretaste of the judgment that awaits the people of Judah if they will not repent. If the people do not surrender to God, the "Day of the Lord" will be a day of horror; if they return to the Lord, it will be a day of celebration and blessing.

This is the main theme I want us to focus as we go through Joel (slide 18)

Here is the overview of the book by chapters (slide 19)

Joel 1:1-2:11 – The Call to Lament (slide 20)

In the opening verses of Joel, you see the description and proclamation of the locust invasion that struck Israel. This is a foreshadowing of the "Day of Lord".

Can you imagine a plague of this magnitude? Utter destruction. How should the people respond to such ominous news? Look at chapter 1:14-15.

This plague isn't a meaningless natural disaster. It's a divinely-ordained foretaste of a coming day – a day that will be much worse. This verse is the first of many references to the Day of the Lord in the Minor Prophets. These prophets are concerned that the people will experience disasters like locust attacks but that they still *won't* turn in repentance. And so they need to be warned that if they continue to ignore God, they will experience his even fuller wrath. We too

need to hear this warning, a reminder that one day God will bring an end to history and as it says in Romans 14:12, “Each of us will give an account of himself to God.” If the plague of locusts is like a mighty army, as Joel describes it early in chapter 2, then God’s army is far more powerful – as it says in 2:11, “The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?”

Joel 2:12-17 – The Call to Repent (slide 21)

That verse should make us ask, is there any hope to escape this end-of-time-judgment, this cataclysmic catastrophe? See Joel 2:12-13.

Like in Hosea, the way of escape is repentance. The people must *turn back* to Yahweh. Isn’t that interesting - Yahweh is the One bringing the destruction, yet He is also their only hope for safety! Who else can protect from God’s wrath but God?

We are once again reminded of the gospel. Only Jesus Christ, who is fully man *and* fully God, can possibly save sinners from God’s own wrath. As 2:11 asked, “Who can endure” the day of the Lord? The answer to that question is Jesus! Only Jesus could assuage the wrath of God and bring us to Him.

Joel 2:18-32 – The Promise of Salvation (slide 22)

This call to repentance is now followed in our next section by a promise of salvation for God’s people. And it’s interesting to see the LORD’s motive for why He saves them. Look at verse 17. Joel is concerned that the nations will mock the LORD if His people are destroyed. Out of concern for His name, fame, and global recognition, Yahweh saves His people, so that the whole universe will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is their God, as it says in verse 27.

So what we are seeing here is that for those who rebel against Yahweh, the Day of the Lord is a time of reckoning and justice. But for those who repent and gladly submit to Him, it is a day of mercy and joy.

But is the Day of the Lord something that is only fulfilled at the end of the world? Look at Joel 2:28-31.

A description of the Day of the Lord. But much more complex than just a description of the end of time. In fact, this passage is a good example of how many prophecies in the Old Testament are often fulfilled in multiple stages. Two things are described together, and no mention is made of the time interval between them. As one pastor says, “It’s like looking at a mountain range from a great distance, where all the mountains appear to stand next to one another. But drive into the mountains and you find that great distances separate them.”

The first “mountain” here is the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. That would be the day of Pentecost, when Peter quoted these verses to explain what was happening. But the second mountain is one that we haven’t reached yet – it won’t be fulfilled until Jesus returns. And that’s the description of the re-creation of the cosmos depicted here in the wonders in the heavens, the darkening of the sun, the turning of the moon to blood. The Day of the Lord is both *already* and

not yet. It already dawned in Jesus' first visit to earth, but it awaits completion when He comes again.

Joel 3:1-16 – The Promise of Justice (slide 23)

In Joel chapter 3, the prophet continues to look ahead to that final fulfillment of the Day of the Lord. First, God promises to show justice to the nations that had sinfully tormented his people. Look at 3:1-2.

Joel 3:17-21 – The Promise of Restoration

Then, the closing verses of the book promise how Judah will be restored in its relationship with Yahweh, never again to taste the bitter fruits of sin again. We see in 3:17-18 an amazing picture of the new heavens and the new earth where God will dwell with his people. That language shows us that the whole universe will be renewed

Conclusion

(slide 24) We should be reminded from this, that the Bible doesn't merely describe salvation negatively, as deliverance from God's punishment. It primarily describes it *positively*, as God restoring his people to himself and his own presence.

I hope you've seen that whether the illustration is a broken marriage or an invasion of locusts, the burden of this Book of Twelve is both to reveal the Lord's indignation against sin and to proclaim mercy and restoration to those who as Joel says "rend their hearts" in repentance (2:13) and put their faith in the perfect Son of God foretold in Hosea 11:1

AMOS (slide 25)

Amos is from the southern kingdom, but his preaching focuses on the north. He was preaching during the reign of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel. This puts Amos, and the writing of this book, in roughly the mid 8th century BC, only a few decades before the fall of the North and shortly before the prophet Isaiah undertook his ministry. This was a time of great economic prosperity, expansion, and security for both kingdoms.

Amos prophesies during a time after the Kingdom has been divided, but before there is any Assyrian threat in the picture. Both North and South are both standing – and standing pretty strongly and confidently. Similarly to Joel, Amos uses an historical event to embody his message. He mentions in 1:1 that he prophesied two years before "the earthquake?" Well, apparently this was a pretty big earthquake. So big, that a prophet even as late as Zechariah makes mention of it, in Zechariah 14:5

Theme (slide 26)

Here is the main theme to focus on for the book of Amos. (To add, it was Israelites oppressing their kinsmen)

(slide 27) We will see this reoccurring theme of Yahweh's anger because of sins, and the call to repentance lest He break out in wrath. In this particular book, Yahweh is angry about two things. One, *His own* people are acting corruptly, by trying to get rich off the oppression of their own kinsmen. Two, He is angry because His people despise those who are righteous in their midst, and despise the word of Yahweh. What Amos is saying with the earthquake is that if the people don't repent from their sinful economic practices, Yahweh will come in judgment and shake the earth unlike *any* earthquake they've ever experienced. You can imagine how unpopular this made Amos. No one enjoying their ill gained riches and easy life likes being told that they are going to be judged and that those riches and comforts are going to be ripped away from them if they don't repent. It was only a generation after these days that the North was swept away entirely by the Assyrians. It was a swift fall from a very lofty place for Israel.

(slide 28) – Let's briefly go over the outline for this chapter

I. God Judges the Nations (slide 29)

We see God judging the nations around Israel. Though the focus is on Israel in this book, the first chapters of Amos are prophecies against the surrounding nations. You can see in **1:3** attention is on Damascus, in **1:6** Gaza, **1:9** Tyre, **1:11** Edom, **1:13** Ammon, and **2:1** Moab. Those are some of the gentile nations of Amos' day. And these are all short prophecies of destruction against those nations because of their sins.

Note what God judges them for. He judged Syria because she pillaged and robbed and left Gilead barren. God judges Gaza because "she took captive whole communities and sold them." God judged Edom because "he pursued his brother with the sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked." He judged Ammon because "he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders." These are sins of cruelty, oppression, slavery, and murder. They are big and obvious sins, war crimes on a grand scale. Even though the gentile nations had not received God's revealed law or been given tablets with the Ten Commandments, they could not seriously plead ignorance of the moral law. Paul specifically argues in Romans 2:14-15 that gentiles "are a law for themselves." The requirements of God's moral law are written in their conscience, and it will accuse them of their wrongdoing before God's judgment seat. The gentile nations cannot escape the judgment of God.

God's judgment of the gentile nations demonstrates his universal kingship. God made Israel to be his special people, but God is the rightful sovereign over all people and all nations in creation. We see here in his judgment of the nations that he will hold them all to account and make his universal sovereignty known. Whether or not you have heard the gospel you are accountable for your actions and you will answer to God one day for your sins. Same message that we see from the book of Joel.

II. God Judges His People (slide 30)

In chapter 2 there begins a prophecy against Judah. And in **2:6** Amos begins a *long* prophecy against Israel. With those first prophecies, the covenant people would have applauded Amos, because those nations have long been the enemies of Israel and Judah. But then Amos says "Not so fast there Israel and Judah. Your sins are not overlooked either." In fact, the

prophets are often a lot more critical and condemning of the covenant people for just that reason: they are in covenant with Yahweh, and they ought to know better than the gentiles. Look at **chapter 3:2**. They were supposed to be lights to the gentiles, displaying the glories of the holiness of the only true God, Yahweh. But instead, they behaved just as corruptly and immorally, and sometimes worse so. There are two broad categories of sins that Israel is judged for. First, there are sins of social and political injustice. Second, there are religious sins, sins of idolatry, neglect of God's word, and faithlessness to his covenant.

First, Israel was experiencing a brief period of luxury and peace. In the midst of their plenty, they were rife with social and political injustice. Israel was guilty of slavery, corruption, bribery, favoritism towards the rich, and exploitation of the poor, exactly contrary to God's will for them. God had shown specific concern for the poor in his law. He told Israel "do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits," in Exodus 23:6. He said "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." (Deuteronomy 15:11). Israel in the time of Amos clearly did not reflect the character of God nor follow the law he has set down for them.

(slide 31) I hope the same is not true for us. God is clear that he will hold his people accountable for how they act and treat others in this life. Remember Jesus' own words in Matthew 25 that when He returns to judge the world, that judgment will be based on how we treated other people, particularly those trodden down by the world. He said "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it [good deeds] to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me (v. 40)." James echoes the same point when he says "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress," (1:27).

And so we should ask ourselves: How is our heart's attitude towards money? Do we crave it for ourselves, or welcome it as a tool God has lent you for life and ministry? How is our attitude towards tithing? Are we resentful, or cheerful? How do we care for the poor? Are you tempted to pride or arrogance?

(slide 32) Second, God's people are judged for religious sins. The gentile nations are condemned for political and military cruelty. But Judah is condemned "because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees," (2:4). Israel "commanded the prophets not to prophesy," (2:12) and belittled God and people's vows to him, for example by making Nazirites drink wine, something a Nazirite had vowed not to do.

What we learn here is that **God's election** is not a blank check to irresponsibility, loose moral standards, and presumption. Rather, God's election actually *heightens* one's responsibility to live uprightly before the LORD. Some people reject the doctrine of election because they say it undermines the Christian's responsibility to live a holy life. Well, the prophets don't think so. They see the doctrine of election as something that should weigh heavily on the people's minds. Election never leads to presumption, but great responsibility. God's people have been given his revealed will and so are capable of a greater sin: neglecting God's word. God says in 3:2 "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins."

In fact, this is the same thing we see in the New Testament. Peter says the same thing to us in **1 Peter 1:15**, "Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" And in **1 Peter 2:9** he says, "But you *are* a chosen generation, a

royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, *that* [emphasis added] you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Paul too tells us that the intended end of predestination is holiness in **Ephesians 1**, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (vv.3f).”

III. God’s Judges With Justice and With Certainty (slide 33)

God will judge the nations and he will judge his people. Amos also talks about the character and the cause of God’s judgment. In Amos 7-9 we see that God will judge with *certainty* and with *justice*. In this vision, God is measuring Israel against his perfect standard, and finds them wanting. God is giving Amos a visual representation of sinful Israel’s position (the wall) compared to his perfect standard (the plumb line), to emphasize the certainty and the justice of his judgments.

Jesus said “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” (Matthew 5:48). God’s standard is perfection, God justly finds us wanting and judges us accordingly. In a later passage (Matthew 19) Jesus’ disciples rightly despaired about the possibility of salvation, understanding that because God’s standard is perfection, salvation is simply impossible for sinful people. How then can we be saved?

IV. God Judges with Mercy (slide 34)

Finally, we see that God judges with mercy. As we have seen the pattern of accusation, judgment, the call to repentance, and then mercy from Hosea and Joel, the prophets always end on grace and mercy. No matter how long the accusations and the pronouncements of judgment are, no matter how long the list of offending nations, the prophets always end their message with the promise of salvation.

Amos foreshadows his conclusion earlier in the book. He tells the people how they can escape the coming judgment. And that way is through repentance. See chapter 5:14-15. God even displays his mercy in action. In chapter 7 God gives Amos two visions of judgment—fire and a plague of locusts. Both times Amos cries out and asks God for forgiveness. “So the Lord relented. ‘This will not happen,’ the Lord said,” both times (v3, 6), exhibiting his mercy.

Amos returns to the promise of mercy and salvation at the book’s conclusion. He prophesies about the coming day of judgment, the Day of the Lord in chapter 9:11. This day is a day of judgment, but this “day” will also see the restoration of the division of the kingdom and the exile. Yahweh *will* remember His promises of old, and the people will again taste Yahweh’s covenant love, which we see in chapter 9:14-15. This is a picture of the new creation after God’s final judgment and Christ’s return, a return to the paradise God always intended for us to enjoy.

Conclusion – Slide 35

Amos also states that those who desire to be rich should seek justice, do righteousness, and put their hopes in Christ for the reward to be had in the *coming* world, *not this one*—a theme Jesus later picks up when he tells his followers to store up treasure in heaven and give to the poor on earth.

Finally, we see that God's mercy extends to all of God's people, including gentiles. In 9:12 God promises that restored Israel will "possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear by name," (*an echo of Numbers 24:18, in which Balaam makes a similar prophecy*). Amos is here saying that when David's tent/house is rebuilt, people from *all* the nations of the earth will find saving shelter there! This is an awesome promise! And we see this promise fulfilled in the New Testament through the person of Christ which we see in **Acts 15**. Here we read the apostle James' words to the Council of Jerusalem that is trying to figure out what to make of all the gentiles turning in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remarkably, James quotes this passage from Amos. James is saying that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, David's house is rebuilt and can be a home for Jew and gentile alike. And now all who repent (just as Amos was preaching) and put their faith in Jesus are included in this salvation.