

Introductory Thoughts on the Minor Prophets 2009 September 2nd for 30th

We have now arrived at the “minor prophets,” the end of the prophets, the end of the Old Testament. There are twelve authors: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. As before, we plan to take them in pairs, continuing in alternation with New Testament books.

Aside from the story of Jonah and a few verses scattered here and there, I know nearly nothing about the minor prophets, despite having read through them once or twice a long time ago. (I missed the Bible Study Fellowship year on Minor Prophets but have heard it was quite good.)

I may have introductory thoughts on one or two of the books, but not on each of them. Going in they would all say the same thing: Here is a prophet of Israel whose written output was important enough to canonize into the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, but not large enough for major recognition, such as is ascribed to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Expected themes are sinfulness and repentance of Israel (or others) with relationships to God.

To the degree that they are distinct, I may (or may not) have individual concluding thoughts.

The minor prophets are largely neglected in teachings of history and theology as far as I know. Perhaps we will see why. Perhaps we will be surprised. Perhaps they are taught and I just don't realize the source. In our Protestant consciousness, there is a nugget here and there from these writings.

We begin with Hosea.

Hosea 1

2009 September 4th for October 1st

Hosea was son of Beeri and prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah; and Jeroboam, king of Israel.

“When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, ‘Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.’”

Following this instruction, Hosea married Gomer. Soon they had a son who God commanded be called Jezreel, “because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for he massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel.”

Gomer then had a daughter who God commanded be called Lo-Ruhamah, “for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them.” He would, however still love Judah and would save them.

Gomer had a third child a son who God commanded be called Lo-Ammi, “for you are not my people, and I m not your God.”

Still, the prophet says, the people of Israel would be uncountable and it would be said of them that they were sons of the living God.

Hosea 2:1 - 13

2009 September 4th for October 2nd

The prophesy now enters and extended verse on the analogy of Israel’s faithlessness to Gomer’s faithlessness.

“Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts. Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.’ Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, “I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.” She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold -- which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days -- all her appointed feasts. I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot,’ declares the Lord.”

Hosea 2:14 - 3:5

2009 September 7th for October 5th

“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

“‘In that day,’ declares the Lord, ‘you will call me “my husband”; you will no longer call me “my master.”

I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground.

Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.

I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.

I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.

“‘In that day I will respond,’ declares the Lord --

‘I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called “Not my loved one.”

I will say to those called “Not my people,” “You are my people”; and they will say, “You are my God.”””

The problem apparently was that people were confusing God with the competing Baal, from Ugaritic mythology, even though the types of worship were very different. We have seen throughout the Mosaic writings what worship of the one true God was: sacrifice of animals and crops, feast days, and reading of the written word, all performed in one central place of worship staffed by Levites. Worship of Baal was performed at shrines everywhere, involved goods and materials of personal luxury, and often involved temple prostitution.

God considered this all to be sin and infidelity, thus Hosea’s marriage allegory.

As part of the demonstration, God now commands reconciliation of Hosea with his wife:

“The Lord said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.’”

“So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, ‘You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you.’

“For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will 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.”

Hosea 4

2009 September 8th for October 6th

God brings a charge against the Israelites.

“There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery;”

Also there is bloodshed and waste; “the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.”

No man can bring a charge against another. All the people stumble day and night. “... my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”

They rejected the priests, knowledge, and the law. God will ignore their children. The priests increased then sinned. “They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.” They will all be punished. They will eat and still be hungry. They will engage in prostitution and not increase. “They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood.”

They sacrifice on the mountaintops and engage in prostitution and adultery. But the women are not held guilty, the men are, “because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes -- a people without understanding will come to ruin!”

Because of this unfaithfulness, the people are not to go to God’s places, they are not to swear by their God. They are stubborn. They are “joined to idols.” They will be swept away. Their sacrifices are shameful.

Hosea 5

2009 September 9th for October 7th

God’s judgement is on Israel. They have been snared in a net. They are rebellious and will be punished. God knows all. What they have done is so bad they cannot return. They are arrogant, have ignored God, have been unfaithfulness to him and have reaped the consequences like illegitimate children. The land will be destroyed.

“Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain.
Judah’s leaders are like those who move boundary stones.
I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water.”

God will be to them like the moth, like rot, like sickness and sores. They turned to their lovers, Assyria for example, for help but get none. God will be a lion to Ephraim. He will tear them to pieces then go away. None will rescue.

“Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt.
And they will seek my face, in their misery they will earnestly seek me.”

Hosea 6

2009 September 14th for October 8th

The love - hate relationship of God's people with their God continues.

“Come, let us return to the Lord.

He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us;

he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.

After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.

Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him.

As surely as the sun rises, he will appear;

he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”

Judah and Ephraim have been fickle, their love is like the dew of the morning, it vanishes.

“Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgements flashed like lightning upon you.

“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”

The covenant has been broken. They have been unfaithful, wicked, marauders, murderers with blood on their shoes. They have committed shameful, horrible crimes, and prostitution. There is a harvest for this.

Hosea 7

2009 September 14th for October 9th

Every time God tries to restore his people, their sins come up again. He always remembers their sins. The king delights in their sins. They burn like an oven, they are “inflamed with wine” for their wickedness.

Israel's passions smolder all night. They are arrogant. “Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless--...” God will catch them in his net; they are like stupid birds. They are rebels and will be destroyed. They plot evil. They turn away from God. They do not turn toward God. They will be ridiculed and fall by the sword.

Hosea 8

2009 September 14th for October 12th

Announce with a trumpet that Israel has broken the covenant with God. They have set up kings without God's approval. They make idols and worship silver and gold.

“The calf -- a craftsman has made it; it is not God.

“They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.”

They are sterile and not productive. They have sold themselves to foreign lovers.

“Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning;”

They took God’s law as alien. Now this wickedness will be remembered. They will be sent back to Egypt. Their cities and fortresses will be consumed with fire.

Hosea 9

2009 September 15th for October 13th

“Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations.

For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor.”

Is this beginning to sound familiar?

The produce of Israel will not feed the people. Their sacrifices will not please God. They will return to Egypt and eat unclean food of Assyria. Prophets are considered fools. Feast days are barren. Punishment is coming. The people fall into snares. They are deeply into corruption.

“When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree.”

But then they consecrated themselves to an idol and became vile.

“Ephraim’s glory will fly away like a bird -- no birth, no pregnancy, no conception.” They will be bereaved of any children they have. God will make their wombs empty, their breasts dry. They will be driven out, blighted, withered, fruitless. Because of their disobedience “God will reject them.”

Hosea 10

2009 September 15th for October 14th

As Israel increased, more altars were built. With prosperity they made the altars fancier. “Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt.” God would destroy those altars.

They had no allegiance to a king or God. What difference would it make? They therefore made false promises and lawsuits abounded “like poisonous weeds in a plowed field.”

Sounds like modern America....

The people feared their “calf-idol” which would be taken as a prize to Assyria when Ephraim was disgraced. They would then be ashamed of their idols. The altars in the hills would grow

over with wild plants. “Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us!’”

“Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh;” so God would put her to work. They would have to break up the ground and plant it, then reap evil and deception. They would be overwhelmed by war and battle. All the fortresses would be devastated, mothers would be dashed to the ground with their children. This is what would come of great wickedness, and “the king of Israel will be totally destroyed.” too.

Hosea 11

2009 September 15th for October 15th

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals and the burned incense to images.
It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms,
but they did not realize it was I who healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love;
I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.”

But they returned to Egypt and Assyria because they refused to repent. There was war and destruction. They were determined to turn away from God.

“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?

God’s heart is changed, his compassion aroused. He does not come in wrath like a man would....

“They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion.
When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.”

They will return and settle in their homes.

Hosea 12

2009 September 16th for October 16th

Israelites spends their days in lies and violence, pursuing alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Jacob was a struggler from the beginning. Before birth he grasped his brother’s heel. He struggled with and overcame the angel of God. He found and walked with God at Bethel. God wants justice and love. God doesn’t like fraud or dishonest scales. Wealth cannot be used to cover misdeeds.

It was God who brought Israel out of Egypt and gave the law and scheduled the feasts then provided prophets and visions and parables. Israel has become wicked and worthless. They sacrifice on whatever pile of stones they have put up wherever. God will punish the guilt of their bloodshed and repay their contempt.

Hosea 13

2009 September 16th for October 19th

Hosea continues to march through Israel's history, giving analogy to his current time. This helps us understand how the ancient prophets themselves understood the scriptures. He refers to the law and the history that we covered some time ago (Genesis through Judges).

Ephraim (Israel) used to be great, but then turned to Baal worship and died. They worship images they fashioned themselves.

“Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window.

“But I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt.
You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Saviour except me.”

That was the First Commandment.

God took care of them in the desert and fed them and protected them from wild animals. Only when they became proud and turned away from their God did this become a problem. They were destroyed because they turned against him. In his anger he relented and gave them a king but the king didn't help. They had no wisdom.

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.
Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?”

But now, God would have no compassion. The hot wind would come off the desert and all the storehouses would be plundered. Rebelling against God has its consequences.

“They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open.”

Hosea 14

2009 September 16th for October 20th

“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.

Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses.

We will never again say “Our gods” to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion.’

“I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.

I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily.
Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; his young shoots will grow.
His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.
Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain.
He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.
O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him.
I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me.'

“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.”

These are the final written words of Hosea.

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