

Tuesday Evening Bible Study
Series #8: The Minor Prophets
Introduction to the Prophetic Books
& Hosea, Chapters 1-3
Tuesday, January 3, 2017

Introduction to the Prophetic Books

- In both Jewish and Christian canons, the prophetic books form a distinct section of the Bible.
 - Placement and classification differ between canons, however.
 - In Jewish Bibles, the books Joshua through 2 Kings (excluding Ruth) are categorized as the “Former Prophets,” and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets are categorized as the “Latter Prophets.” They are all considered to have been written by prophets, but the “latter” group includes the books that bear the name of the prophet. Note that Daniel is not included in this grouping, because it is included in the “Writings” section of the Hebrew Canon, and is an apocalypse (meaning, a genre of writing that deals with end-times). (Remember there are 3 sections in Hebrew Bibles: The Torah (or Law), the Prophets (Nevi'im), and the Writings (Ketuvim).
 - In Christian Bibles, the Prophets form the last section of the Old Testament. Joshua through 2 Kings form the section of “historical” books. Daniel is included among the prophets, as is Lamentations, which is not a book of prophecy, but is placed after Jeremiah, because of the collection’s association with the prophet. (In Roman and Orthodox tradition, the apocryphal book of Baruch is placed after Lamentations.)
- The prophetic books are complex compositions. They are not transcriptions of their words in real time, but compilations of their authentic words.
- The prophetic writings span a large historical period and address a variety of circumstances.
- The collections were subject to editing, rearranging, annotating, and expanding, with some occasional biographical information about the prophet himself. They may even have been edited for particular situations. For example, Amos and Hosea were originally addressed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but were brought to the Southern Kingdom of Judah after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Isaiah appears to have been influenced by the oracles of Amos, and Jeremiah’s writing was influenced by Hosea.

Prophecy in the Ancient Near East and the Bible

- Prophecy was widespread in this region. There are many themes that have parallels in other non-biblical writings.
- There were many more prophets than are represented in the Judeo-Christian Canons.
- The prophet was considered to be an intermediary between God and his people, and functioned as a messenger.
 - The typical prophetic formula for introduction is, “Thus says the Lord.” (*“Ki amar Adonai.”*)

- Prophecy in Israel can be traced back 1000 years before the Christian Era and are defined by four major periods:
 - Early Monarchical Period (11th – 9th Century)
 - The Assyrian Crisis (8th Century)
 - The Babylonian Crisis (late-7th Century – early 6th Century)
 - The Post-exilic Restoration Period (mid-6th – mid-5th Century)
- The earliest prophets may have been local or itinerant holy men and women who, revered for their special religious powers, would have been consulted for a variety of private reasons from finding lost property to the fate of a sick child.
- The role of the prophet seems to have changed around the time of the emergence of the monarchy, where they served as messengers, particularly in matters pertaining to a king's rule or power, or in times of war.
- A major shift occurred in the 8th Century when the words of the prophets began to be compiled and written down. This shift catapulted prophets from being private counselors to being national public figures.
 - Prophets of the 8th Century (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah) interpreted international affairs, commented on religious practices, and condemned abuses of social justice.

The Book of the Prophet Hosea

- The name Hosea means 'salvation.' It is a shortened form of Hoshaiah, meaning 'God has saved.'
 - Son of Beerī.
- He lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but refers to it by name of the dominant tribe of Ephraim.
 - He seldom speaks of Judah (Southern Kingdom) or of Jerusalem
- Probably written 750-735 BCE, just prior to the Syro-Ephraimite war (Isaiah 7-8) or the campaigns against the Northern Kingdom by Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 13-16). It is thought to overlap with the end of the period described in Amos and with the beginning of the appearance of Isaiah.
- The beginning of Hosea's time was relatively quiet, but over time, Assyria's strength and influence grew, such that by the reign of Tiglath-pileser, Assyria was a major empire. During this period, Israel was in a state of anarchy, and as Assyria ruthlessly swept across the region, made the people they conquered submit to them and pay tribute.
 - 5 kings within a 10 year period after Jeroboam—three seized power by violence.
 - Influence by outside rulers: King Rezin of Damascus and King Hiram of Tyre.
 - Israel's King Menahem, who had usurped the throne, became a vassal of Assyria.

Structure of Hosea

A. The Title (Hosea 1:1)

- B. Marriage as a metaphor for God's relation to his chosen people. (Hosea 1:2-3:5)
 - a. Hosea's children as symbols of judgement (Hosea 1:2-9)
 - b. The restoration of Israel (Hosea 1:10 – 2:1)
 - c. God's unfaithful wife (Hosea 2:2-23)
 - d. Love for an adulteress (Hosea 3:1-5)
- C. The Sayings of Hosea (Hosea, Chapters 4-14)

Notes

- The Title (Hosea 1:1)
 - This formula, "The word of the Lord that came to N." is often used in titles of the prophetic books.
 - The list of kings places Hosea during the period described in 2 Kings 15-18)
- Hosea's children as symbols of judgement (1:2-9)
 - Here Hosea uses his own life as a symbol of God's relationship to Israel.
 - Wife of whoredom = a woman who has the capacity to be a whore. It is a metaphor for Israel's involvement with the religion of the surrounding regions and people.
 - Jezreel – "God sows"
 - Lo-ruhamah – "Not pitied"
 - Lo-ammi – "Not my people"
- The restoration of Israel (1:10 – 2:1)
 - Ammi – "My people"
 - This section deals with Israel's guilt and a plan for her punishment and reconciliation.
 - The "lovers" are local manifestations of the Canaanite deity of fertility and storms.
 - 2:2 – "not my wife" does not presume divorce; rather, a wife who has deserted her status as wife because of her promiscuity, and has relieved her husband of any responsibility for her.
 - 2:14 – The wilderness represents a state of total dependence on the Lord.
 - 2:15 - Valley of Achor is a route out of the wilderness into the heart of the land.
 - 2:16 – In Hebrew, Baal is both the name of the chief Canaanite deity and the legal title of a husband.
 - 2:23 – Reversal of the names.
- Love for an adulteress (3:1-5)
 - Again, God commissions Hosea to make his own life a symbolic enactment of God's way with Israel.
 - Raisin cakes are sacrificial offerings to a Canaanite goddess.
 - 3:4 – Israel must live without government and religious ritual because they consulted a foreign deity. = loss of national identity.
 - 3:5 – represents restoration

Resources

Notes from The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), 2010

Notes from HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), 1989

“Osee” in *New Advent.org*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11337a.htm>

“Tiglath-pileser” in *Jewish Encyclopedia.com*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14393-tiglath-pileser>

Abraham J. Heschel, “Hosea” in *The Prophets* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001)