



Class 9 - Isaiah, Hosea, Joel

Old Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Isaiah

Think of a couple who's been married for years, but whose relationship is now on the brink. Things are complicated, confusing, and difficult; there's been years of hurt, insults, and broken promises.

- What once seemed to be the problem turns out as just a symptom of a deeper problem.
- That deeper problem turns out to be one of many problems.
- There's been lots of sin; lots of pride; lots of damage.
- Apologies are not believed because trust has been broken. It's all pretty rough.

And the path forward is to look in two directions simultaneously: backwards and forwards. The couple must look back to their marriage vows, and what they originally promised to one another. And they must look forward with hope to what reconciliation might be like.

Introducing Old Testament Prophecy

The analogy isn't perfect, but reading the Old Testament prophets is a bit like jumping into such a counseling scenario mid-stream.

- Like a counseling situation, there are many overlapping stories which seem to get tangled together
- Like a counseling situation, you can jump from one situation to the next quickly, as one idea calls another idea to mind
- Like a counseling situation, moods change quickly, from hot to cold, tenderness to scorn, and back again

In fact, God uses this analogy of a broken marriage throughout the prophets to describe his relationship with Israel (Jer 2:32, Is 50:1)

So far in this class, we've studied the Pentateuch, the pre-exilic histories, and the wisdom literature. Today we enter the prophets. The prophetic books began in the middle of the eighth century BC and end some 300 years later. As I mentioned earlier, the prophets begin by looking backward. They compare God's covenant as it's given in the Pentateuch — especially Deuteronomy — with Israel's real history. And they say, "You've broken the covenant! You've been unfaithful — to God!"

People often think of "prophecy" as concerned with foretelling the future. Actually, prophesy begins with *forthtelling* — being forthright about the present in light of what was promised or warned in the past.

But then the prophets do turn to *foretelling*. They look forward, and promise one of two things: salvation or judgment. Keep in mind, even the promises of judgment are implicit calls to repentance, which would in fact turn away God's judgment.

One thing that can make them difficult to read is a complexity of time horizons. When they make predictions about the future, those predictions can have multiple fulfillments, such as Isaiah's promise in Isaiah 7 that the virgin or unmarried woman would be with child. That seemed to have a short term fulfillment, with Isaiah's then-virgin fiancé eventually giving birth (not as a virgin, of course) as well as a long-term fulfillment in Mary. The prophets have a telescopic view of history: everything looks like it's up close.

So let me give you a few tips for interpreting Old Testament prophecy, *in your handout*:

- i. Discern the immediate context — the structure and flow of the book.
- ii. Discern the kind of oracle employed (judgment, salvation, or something else).
- iii. Study the balance between the historical (forth-telling) and the predictive (foretelling).
- iv. Determine what kind of language is being used (Poetic? Disputation? Narrative?)
- v. Place these texts in their overall place in redemptive-history. *Be careful not to make wrong associations between Israel and your nation or church.*
- vi. Be alert for certain recurring and sweeping themes, especially those which bear on the relationships between the testaments.
- vii. Consider how the New Testament authors employ your passage, or at least your book.

[Questions]

Introducing Isaiah

Let's try a couple of these interpretative principles out as we open up the book of Isaiah.

The first four verses of chapters 1 and 2 function like two different introductions to Isaiah, each representing a different side of the book. Let me read from chapter 1:

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;
for the Lord has spoken:

“Children have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand.”

Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,
children who deal corruptly!

They have forsaken the Lord,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,
they are utterly estranged.

In verse 2, we have the beginning of an oracle for all the earth to hear.

What's the context? Verse 1 sets it up as a vision of Isaiah concerning Judah (the southern kingdom) and Jerusalem (its capital city), and Isaiah's words are datable to the reigns of these kings.

What kind of oracle beings in verse 2? Judgment.

What literary form is being used? Poetry.

Is Isaiah looking backward or forward? Backward. Recalling the Pentateuch, he refers to the Lord rearing Israel as children, but says they've forsaken him. As in marriage counseling, God's pain is profound.

I wonder if you ever view your own rejection and rebellion against God as something that would

cause God pain — that God would say of you, “He has forsaken me! She has turned her back on me.” It’s worth meditating on the profound grief your sin causes God.

Interestingly, chapter 2 feels like a different introduction:

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

It shall come to pass in the latter days

that the mountain of the house of the Lord

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and shall be lifted up above the hills;

and all the nations shall flow to it,

and many peoples shall come, and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go the law,

and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,

and shall decide disputes for many peoples;

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war anymore.

And let me ask the same questions:

What’s the context? A vision about Judah and Jerusalem.

What kind of oracle beings in verse 2? Salvation and promise.

What literary form is being used? Poetry.

Is Isaiah looking backward or forward? Forward, to a time of hope. And notice the difference.

The Jerusalem mentioned in chapter one felt gritty and historical. The Jerusalem mentioned here feels almost otherworldly: “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” The biblical scholar’s term for this is “eschatological.” “Pertaining to the end times:” when God brings history to a close.

We need to ask these questions when we turn to prophesy. In fact, I’m going to structure the

remainder of our time around three of the interpretive principles listed above for reading prophesy.

Principle 1: Know the Structure

These two passages are a good springboard into the structure of Isaiah. The structure of a book is like a road map. It helps you know where you are at any time, which is especially helpful in the prophets. In a sense, these two passages represent the two halves of Isaiah. Throughout the book, and particularly prominent in chapters 1 to 39, are oracles of woe and judgment concerning the historical Jerusalem. Chapters 1 through 39 are spoken by an eighth century prophet and are directly aimed at his eighth century audience. He points to their particular sins. And he points to the immanent invasion of Assyria. Chapters 1 to 39 sound like the first verses of chapter 1.

Beginning in chapter 40 and continuing through the end of Isaiah, something changes. Isaiah doesn't address the present, historical Jerusalem. He's addressing some future version of it. It sounds more like the first verses of chapter 2. At face value, he's addressing the Jerusalem which, in a century's time, would be in exile in Babylon. But remember what we said about multiple horizons of fulfillment? Really, Isaiah seems to describe an eschatological Jerusalem. The language he uses in these chapters, especially in the final ten, is much too dramatic and grandiose to be referring simply to the small band of Israelites who would return from exile in the fifth and sixth century BC — swords-into-plowshares sort of language. There's talk of God's glory being revealed, and God creating a new heavens and earth. It envisions life on a whole different plane. This eschatological Jerusalem, furthermore, is comprised of a *remnant* of the original, but doesn't appear to be tied to ethnic Jews but to everyone who is united to God. Though there are oracles of salvation in the first half of the book, they abound in the second half.

That's the biggest division in Isaiah: the first thirty nine chapters, broadly speaking, focus on the historical Jerusalem and its failed kings, while chapters 40 to 66, broadly speaking, focus on an eschatological Jerusalem and another character who, at first glance, doesn't sound like a king, but indeed is.

Across these 66 chapters a dramatic change happens to Jerusalem. In chapter 1, Isaiah says of Jerusalem, "How the faithful city has become a whore!" (1:21). By the end of the book, however, he anticipates her presentation as a "bride" in whom the Lord "will take delight" (62:4-5). She moves from harlotry to holiness, from whore to bride.

That, in a sense, is the beginning and the end of the plot, and it shows up in the structure of the

whole book. I'm sorry if I spoiled the ending for you. How does this transformation happen? That brings us to a second principle for reading the book, and one where we will find plenty of challenge for ourselves...

[Questions]

Principle 2: Be Alert for Recurring and Sweeping Themes

Reading through the prophets can be difficult, as we've said, because they jump around. But you'll be amazed that, as you read over broad sections of a book like Isaiah, certain themes appear again and again. It's worth noting them in the margins of your Bible. Jerusalem is one, as we've already seen. And there are several more that are prominent in Isaiah, and that help us understand how intense this marriage counseling is as we move from harlotry to holiness.

1) Pride

The theme of Israel's pride — and humanity's pride — comes up again and again in Isaiah. The Lord continually addresses it:

- **Isaiah 2:11** The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low
- **Isaiah 5:21** Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight

And there are many more. Behind the rebellion of Israel, of the nations, of all of us sitting here this morning is our pride.

The nation of Israel, in many ways, is nothing more than an example of humanity. So as we read through Isaiah, and read of their despicable pride and the injustice it yields, remember that, apart from Christ, that is us.

2) Trust

Another massive theme in Isaiah is trust — especially chapters 7-39.

- In chapter 7, the northern kingdom of Israel, together with the Aram, make war on the Southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah tells King Ahaz of Judah not to make any foreign alliances, and even promises Ahaz a sign. But Ahaz, in a show of false piety, refuses to ask

for a sign (Isaiah 7:12). And he proceeds to move toward foreign alliances, which angers God.

- This theme is further developed through chapter 31: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord.” (v.1)
- The question of trust reaches its climax when the city of Jerusalem, under king Hezekiah, is surrounded by the armies of Assyria, and the Assyrian field commander taunts the inhabitants of Jerusalem about their trust in Hezekiah and Israel’s God. Isaiah 36:14-20: The Assyrian army commander shouts, *“Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, ‘The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’ ...Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”*

The people have a choice: trust God, or trust someone else? Gratefully, Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem in this episode, unlike Ahaz, do trust God, and God delivers them miraculously from the Assyrian army.

So read these chapters of Isaiah, and reflect on where you place your trust.

3) God as the Holy One

The first two themes have centered on people. But really, the book of Isaiah is about God. First he is the Holy One. Isaiah calls God the Holy One thirty times in this book, while he’s called this only six times in the rest of the Bible. Why does Isaiah have such a strong sense of God’s holiness? Probably because of how Isaiah’s was called to be a prophet in chapter 6:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

Holy means to be set apart — on a whole different plane. And what is the culmination of God’s holiness? Look at the second half of verse 3. It is to be known and understood by everyone. “The

whole earth is full of his glory.” God’s driving purpose is that his greatness might be known and enjoyed by his creatures. That’s why he does everything — even saving sinners. Chapter 48: *“For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you ... For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”* (v. 9, 11).

So we learn that God is holy and therefore committed to his own glory.

4) God as the Sole and Incomparable Ruler of Creation and History

We also learn that he’s the sole and incomparable ruler of creation and history. This theme becomes particularly prominent beginning in chapter 40 and is highlighted in the following eight chapters.

- **Isaiah 40:25** To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One
- **Isaiah 45:5-6a** I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me;
- **Isaiah 45:21b-22** Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

5) God as the Sole Redeemer

Notice in this last passage how God being the only ruler of creation means that he alone can save. That’s another prominent theme in Isaiah.

- **Isaiah 54:5** For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.
- **Isaiah 54:8** In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord, your Redeemer.

God refers to himself repeatedly as the Holy One *and* the Redeemer of his people.

6) The Remnant

But who does God save? He doesn't save everyone. Through the course of Isaiah, it becomes clear he means to save a remnant.

- **Isaiah 10:20-21** In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.
- See also **Isaiah 28:5**

What's interesting, however, is that it becomes clear in chapters 56 to 59 that even the remnant still sin. They are not entirely holy before God. In fact, the true remnant appears to be a remnant of one:

- In Isaiah's call, Isaiah is told that God will bring destruction until everything is laid waste, everything, that is, except a "holy seed" (6:13). Who is that holy seed? Chapter 11 has the answer.
- **Isaiah 11:1-2** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.

Who is it upon whom the Spirit will rest? We know from the first half of Isaiah, particularly chapters 9 and 11, that it's a messianic and kingly figure. Then in the second half of Isaiah, we discover a little more...

7) The Servant

God's Spirit will specially rest on one who is a servant. We learn about him in four songs:

- **Song 1: Isaiah 42:1** Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
- **Song 2: See Isaiah 49:1-6**
- **Song 3: See Isaiah 50:4-9**
- **Song 4: See Isaiah 52:13-53:12:** Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you — his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind — so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him...

8) The Conqueror

Remarkably, a few short chapters after Isaiah 53, we learn that God's Spirit is going to rest not just on one who is this suffering servant, but on one who is a conqueror. Could this be the same individual? There are four conqueror songs:

- First Conqueror Song: Isaiah 59:15-21: "The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak....
- Second Conqueror Song: 61:1-4. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (v. 1).
- Third Conqueror Song: 61:10 - 62:7. The conqueror comes as a bridegroom to take his bride away, to rescue her.
- Fourth Conqueror Song: 63:1-6. There is a horrible image of judgment. When the Conqueror comes, he is coming to judge.

9) New Jerusalem — the Bride

With this servant/conqueror in place, the final chapters of Isaiah focus especially on the new Jerusalem as the new bride, which is also representative of the new heavens and earth.

Isaiah 62:3-5 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate... for the Lord delights in you... as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

What a glorious vision! Think back to the fact that we're talking about the Holy One. We're talking about the sole and incomparable ruler of creation and redemption. And it's this one who says to his people, "I take delight in you. I rejoice over you." Christian, he says this to you! Isaiah says that all true Christians are a crown of splendor in his hand! Is this because we of anything we've done? Or anything we intrinsically are — good looks, intelligence, career success, keeping our nose clean? No, you have to go back to the servant song of chapter 53 to understand how God could say these things. It's through Jesus.

Principle 3: Consider the NT's Authoritative Interpretation

But finally, we need to read all of Isaiah in light of the New Testament. That's the third principle for reading Isaiah. Read it all in light of the New Testament's authoritative interpretation. I've mentioned the fact that Old Testament prophecy often yields several horizons of fulfillment. Sure enough, the New Testament literally reverberates with the sounds of Isaiah, and says all that its great and glorious promises are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1) Jesus is the Promised Messiah

Looking back to the Messiah promised in Isaiah 9 and 11, Paul says, "And again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.'" (Rom. 15:12) and he applies this to Jesus.

2) Jesus is the Holy One

Referring to chapter 6 of Isaiah, the apostle John says, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him." Did you catch that? Who is the Holy God that Isaiah saw on a throne, high and lifted up, the train of his robe filling the temple? According to John, it was Jesus!

3) Jesus is the Promised Redeemer

All four Gospels quote from the opening words of Isaiah 40 to say that Jesus is God who has come to give salvific comfort to his people. So in Luke 3, John the Baptist — who has come to prepare the people for Jesus — explains his role in the words of Isaiah. "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him... And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"

4) Jesus as Suffering Servant

The New Testament authors knew that Jesus was the suffering servant. To explain Jesus' ministry, Matthew writes, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'Here is my

servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight' ” (Matthew 12:17-18)¹.

5) Jesus as Conqueror

And the New Testament also shows that Jesus is the Conqueror: so in the first conqueror song, we read that this promised one will repay each “according to what they have done” (59:18). And so who is it who says in

Revelation 22:12, “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done”? It’s Jesus!

And I could go on. The New Testament is full of examples showing that Isaiah is pointing to Jesus.

[Questions]

Conclusion

I’ve said that we want the New Testament’s interpretation of Isaiah. But the same thing is true in the opposite direction. To understand the New Testament, and who Jesus is, you need to read the Old Testament, and the prophecies of Isaiah in particular. What does it mean that Jesus is holy, and a redeemer, and a conqueror? What is sin? Who is God? What’s he like? Is he really in control? Isaiah gives us pre-interpretation, you might say. It gives meaning to the words used by the New Testament. Do you want to understand and know and love Jesus? Then read, study, and learn Isaiah. I hope I’ve given you a taste of that this morning.

Transition

Does history have meaning? If it does, how do we learn its lessons? Last week we walked through almost 400 years of history in the books of 1-2 Kings. Well, the prophets are God’s commentary on that history. Both the history they’ve seen, and the history that’s yet to come. So as we continue on with the prophets over the next several weeks, our goal will be to unravel the meaning of the history we looked at in Kings.

¹See also Acts 8:35

In fact, go ahead and turn to the table of contents in your Bible. Do you see where Isaiah is? From Isaiah on, are what are called The Prophets. The Prophets, in turn are divided into two sections. The Major Prophets consist of Isaiah through Daniel. And the Minor Prophets, which we begin studying now, 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 in its unity of 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. 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

Hosea 1:1 tells us the author: Hosea. And it gives us the time period too: Hosea preached 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 were worshiping foreign gods instead of Yahweh.

Outline

In terms of an outline, 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 provides a basic framework that runs through the entire Book of Twelve. Israel has abandoned her covenant with the Lord, but, like a faithful husband, God will pursue his true people and restore them.

Then, chapters 4-14 contain messages from God to his people. With all the poetry and apocalyptic language, it’s very easy to get lost. But if you look at the outline in your handout, you’ll see

that there's a basic threefold cycle which is repeated three times. *Accusation* in which God re-cites and condemns the sin of the people; *judgment* threatened if they do not repent; and finally *mercy* as God redeems his covenant people. Knowing where you are in these cycles can help you keep track of the overall direction of Hosea's prophecy

How can we best summarize the themes of Hosea? Because the gripping story of Hosea's marriage provides the analogy for the people's broken relationship with God, it's most helpful to see Hosea as a prophecy about love. Love – even God's love – is greatly misunderstood today. So let's take a look at Hosea and see what it teaches us about what God's love is really like.

Hosea 1-3: Love's Strange Story

First, Love's Strange Story. Hosea's book begins with two pictures that capture the message of all the minor prophets.

First picture: Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful woman named Gomer. Let's read Hos. 1:2-3.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord." So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

The rebellion of God's people 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. Take a look at 3:1-3.

And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

Even though Gomer committed adultery, Hosea took her back. And that symbolizes what's been going on for generations on a much greater scale. Israel has been playing the whore by worshiping other gods, but Yahweh has always been a faithful and forgiving husband.

But things are about to change: it's time for Israel to endure the curses promised in the end of Deuteronomy for covenant-breakers. The fact that God is loving does not mean he turns a blind

eye to evil (2:13).

Will this punishment last forever? God would be just if it did. But the amazing message of Hosea is that God will show mercy to his people. Take a look at 2:19-20:

And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

God's love is not earned. It's not given because the subjects of his love are so lovely! No, our role in this story is not that of Hosea, the loving, virtuous husband. Nope: we play the part of Gomer. And that means that for us, the fact that God's love is free and gracious is good news indeed.

But there's another picture here to portray God's love, and it's the names that God gives to Hosea's children. In 1:4, Hosea's first child is named Jezreel – the name of the site of a terrible massacre that aroused God's anger against Israel. In 1:6, Gomer's daughter is named Lo-Ruhamah, which means "not loved." In 1:9, Gomer's second son is named "Lo-Ammi," which means "not my people." The names get progressively more ominous, and the tragic point here is that God is casting Israel off as his people! Judgment is coming. But what will happen after that? Hos. 2:23 gives the answer: "I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'" Now, these fearful names are reversed! 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.

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. When Paul explains in Romans 9:25 that Gentiles as well as Jews would know salvation through Christ, he quotes that verse from Hosea 2:23 about the reversal of the children's names. He's showing us that not only Israel, but all of us, are estranged from God because of our sins, and we all deserve to be cast away from His presence for eternity. But Jesus Christ has endured the wrath of God and brings us back into fellowship with him.

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. And there are three specific themes that run through these chapters.

Hosea 4-14

Love's Challenge: Sin

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

Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel,
for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or steadfast love,
and no knowledge of God in the land;
there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery;
they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Why such evil? Hosea's diagnosis: 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. 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

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. Where we find mercy amid judgment. Listen to this appeal the prophet gives in 6:1-2:

“Come, let us return to the Lord;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.

Sin looks good in the dark; repentance brings sin into the light. We should expose our sin, through reflection, prayer, confession, and meditating on God's Word.

Well, as it turns out, Israel ignored this call to repentance. 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 still stood. So much of these promises of mercy described unfolded in the time of Christ, and some will yet unfold. That's our ultimate hope: restoration.

Love's Hope: Restoration

Sin challenges love. Repentance offers recovery. And then the hope of those God loves is 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 back into his presence. That's what's described in Hos. 13:14: "Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes." Do those words sound familiar? Paul quotes this exact verse in 1 Corinthians 15 where he explains the resurrection of Jesus! Because Jesus rose from the grave, death has no power over those who believe. God pays the ransom that his own justice requires by sacrificing his Son – and we who believe go free.

And not only does Hosea tell us of the new life God grants to those he loves, he tells how those believers are restored to God's loving presence. God did banish sinful Israel from the land. But through Hosea, God proclaimed hope for all who would listen. 11:8-11:

My heart recoils within me;
 my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my burning anger;
 I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not a man,
 the Holy One in your midst,
 and I will not come in wrath.
They shall go after the Lord;
 he will roar like a lion;
when he roars,
 his children shall come trembling from the west;
they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
 and like doves from the land of Assyria,
 and I will return them to their homes, declares the Lord.

What an amazing picture! What hope! Who says the prophets are just about judgment! 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.

And if you struggle to believe Hosea’s message of hope, remember it is Jesus who secures the restoration this book foretells. As we conclude our look at this book, consider what Hosea says in 11:1. “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” God is talking about how he rescued Israel from slavery, even calling the nation his son because the relationship was that close. But 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. That’s why, in a surprising demonstration of God’s inspiration of scripture, Matthew quotes that same verse from Hosea in 2:15. “This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” Now, what’s the fulfillment? Not Israel as God’s son but the infant Jesus, as he returns from hiding in Egypt. In other words, Jesus is the son that Israel never was. He perfectly kept God’s covenant like Israel never did. He was the true Israelite. And though all of us have committed spiritual adultery against God, Jesus never did. He was always faithful. So it is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we are reconciled to God. And that is a fitting place for us to close this overview of Hosea as a book about love.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Joel

Well the theme of restoration, where we concluded Hosea, is an appropriate segue to the next section of the Book of Twelve: the book of Joel. Flip the page from Hosea and you should be there. The author is the prophet Joel. Hosea introduced the notion of restoration at the last days – and now Joel spells out more of what the end of history will look like. He describes, to use his term, the coming “Day of the Lord.” Unlike Hosea, Joel prophesies to the Southern Kingdom, Judah. We don’t know exactly when Joel prophesied.² But we do know that Joel’s prophecy was motivated by a historical occurrence – a plague of locusts. Like Hosea used marriage as a symbol

²Scholars disagree on the dating of Joel – see Intro to OT (Longman & Dillard) pp. 411-414. Its inclusion right before Amos is probably a thematic, rather than chronological link. No need to mention this during the class unless someone has a very specific question on it.

of something greater, Joel points to this locust invasion as a foretaste of the God's judgment if God's people don't 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.

As you can see, the book of Joel contains just three chapters, and it falls into a fairly neat outline, which you can see on your handout. Let's dive in and walk through the book.

Joel 1:1-2:11 – The Call to Lament

Let's look at Joel 1:2-4.

Hear this, you elders;

give ear, all inhabitants of the land!

Has such a thing happened in your days,

or in the days of your fathers?

Tell your children of it,

and let your children tell their children,

and their children to another generation.

What the cutting locust left,

the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left,

the hopping locust has eaten,

and what the hopping locust left,

the destroying locust has eaten.

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

Consecrate a fast;

call a solemn assembly.

Gather the elders

and all the inhabitants of the land

to the house of the Lord your God,

and cry out to the Lord.

Alas for the day!

For the day of the Lord is near,

and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

There is purpose to this plague! It's a divinely-ordained foretaste of a coming day – a day that will be far 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 this but 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, "So then 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 utters his voice
before his army,
for his camp is exceedingly great;
he who executes his word is powerful.
For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome;
who can endure it?"

Joel 2:12-17 – The Call to Repent

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

"Yet even now," declares the Lord,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments."
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.

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?

Once again, we're 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, God incarnate, could possibly endure

the wrath of God and emerge a Savior.

Joel 2:18-32 – The Promise of Salvation

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, the last verse in the previous section: "Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Joel's concern is that the nations will mock the Lord if His people are destroyed. Therefore, to vindicate His own glory, look at the very **next verse**. "Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people." Out of concern for His name, fame, and global reputation, Yahweh saves His people. Then the whole universe will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is their God, as it says in verse 27. "You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is no none else, And my people shall never again be put to shame."

So what we're seeing 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 merely about the end of the world? Let's look at another passage together: Joel 2:28-31.

"And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

"And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

The Day of the Lord. But way more complex than just the end of time. In fact, this passage is a good example of how many prophecies in the Old Testament are fulfilled in multiple stages. Two things are described together, and no mention is made of the time interval between them.

As one author writes, “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.”³

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 around him. But the second mountain is one that we haven’t reached yet – it won’t be fulfilled until Jesus returns. That’s the description of the un-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

And that’s what we see as Joel concludes in chapter 3, with the prophet looking 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.

“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel...”

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 3:18 an amazing picture of the new heavens and the new earth where God will dwell with his people.

“in that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah
shall flow with water;

³Dever, *Message of the Old Testament*, 710.

and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord
and water the Valley of Shittim.”

This language shows us that the whole universe will be renewed. This should remind us 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.

[TAKE QUESTIONS]

Conclusion

Well, we've completed the first two books of the Minor Prophets today. 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 does two things. It reveals the Lord's indignation against sin. And it proclaims 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. By trusting in Jesus, we come to know God as a gracious husband and we look forward with hope and faith to the Day of the Lord when we will be with him forever.

[PRAY]

This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/old-testament-overview/>