

INTRODUCTION:

Amos and Hosea were the last two prophets called by God to warn Israel that it would be punished if it did not repent and turn back to God. They followed other prophets of the northern kingdom that we have already studied including: Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha and Jonah. Amos actually lived in Judah, the southern kingdom, but was sent by God to Israel to proclaim God’s message. Amos’ message was a call for justice and righteousness because the wealthy in Israel were exploiting the poor and leading the nation to ruin. Hosea’s message was that of faithfulness, calling the people to again be faithful to God who still loved them and longed to be in the loving relationship He desired with them. Both prophets warned that in the absence of repentance, Israel would be carried off by the Assyrians. Hosea actually lived long enough to see this begin. What had begun as a lack of respect for God in their worship of other false gods, would grow into a general lack of accountability and loss of righteousness. The people became more self-centered, greedy and immoral, willing to exploit the poor to gain personal luxury. The lesson applies equally to us today. When we move away from our relationship with God we become less God-centered and more self-centered. In the absence of His moral standards and accountability, we begin to justify whatever we want and an immoral lifestyle often replaces a righteous one. If we don’t repent we are eventually carried off and lost to the evil way we have chosen rather than the WAY that leads to life.

BOOK OF AMOS:

Amos was a shepherd from a rural area in Judah (southern kingdom) whom God called to preach at Israel’s royal sanctuary at Bethel (in northern kingdom). His prophesying took place in about 750 B.C. during the reign of Jeroboam II and lasted only a few days. Amos found in Israel great social extremes of comfortable prosperity and abject poverty. His message was against the wealthy. The poor were being exploited and cheated. Merchants were greedy and dishonest. The judicial system was corrupt. There was religious arrogance, as well, and even the attempt to corrupt some of the religious leaders. Affluence had lulled the upper class into such apathy that they refused to recognize the sickness of their society. Amos’ warning to the worshipers at Bethel was that, because of their sins, destruction was coming upon them from both Egypt and Assyria, a prophecy made all the more bold because the international scene was relatively quiet, and Assyria

was still in a period of decline. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, made it clear to Amos that he was not welcome and that he should go home to his own country. Amos refused to back down, explaining that he was not a professional prophet, but he was there solely because God had sent him. The book is one of the most outstanding among the prophets, both because of its timeless message and because it contains some of the finest examples of literary artistry in the entire Old Testament.

AMOS 1:1—2:3

In the first verse we learn that Amos' call and instruction has come to him through a “vision” from the Lord. The focus of the remainder of this section is to proclaim judgment against Israel's neighbor nations, including: Damascus; Gaza; Tyre; Edom; Ammon; and, Moab. These nations today would consist, respectively, of the bordering Arab nations of Syria, Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Jordan. God has already proclaimed judgment against these nations.

(Location and Time of Amos)

Amos 1: (1) The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Comments:

Tekoa was in a desolate area about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. Amos was both a shepherd and a dresser of fig-sycamore trees (Amos 7:14), which was a seasonal job during fruit-bearing time. His call (about 750 B.C.) illustrates the fact that all God's prophets were not professionals, in the sense that it was their total work. Here God's purpose called for a certain shepherd-farmer, and the total ministry reflected in the book covered only a few days.

AMOS 2:4—4:5

In the second and third chapters God declares judgment against Israel and Judah because all the tribes of Israel are guilty of sinning before God. The cows of Bashan spoken of in Amos 4:1-3, east of the Sea of Galilee, were known for their fine quality. Here this metaphor refers to the well-to-do women of Samaria. The basis of this denunciation seems to have been their complicity with their husbands who were dishonest businessmen, because they urged them to bring home the finer things of life, something which was accomplished at the expense of the poor.

AMOS 4:6-13

In the fourth chapter God reveals that He has sent many warnings to get the people's attention, but they have failed to respond. The warnings include: “lack of bread” (4:6); “withheld the rain” (4:7); “scorching wind and mildew” and “devouring caterpillar” (4:9); “plague among you after the manner of Egypt” (4:10); and, “overthrew you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (4:11). The illustrations indicate that God sometimes sends hardships upon a people in order to get their attention and to persuade them to turn back to Him. In this case, nothing God has done has been heeded by the people.

AMOS 5

In the fifth chapter God proclaims final judgment upon Israel, calls for repentance, and declares that justice will flow like water. In verse 4 God says, “*Seek Me that you may live.*” And then in verse 24 God declares, “*But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*” This is the most famous verse in the Book of Amos, and it is ethical statements such as this one which stand out so prominently in the prophets. During the period when Amos preached in Israel, justice was a scarce commodity. No prophet exhibited a greater concern for the fair treatment of one's neighbor than Amos.

AMOS 6

In the sixth chapter God proclaims “woe” upon those who are “at ease” or those who are wealthy and comfortable. I am reminded that God calls prophets and pastors to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” This is an example of God doing exactly that.

AMOS 7:1—9:15

In the final portion of the Book Amos there are three visions depicting a “plumb line”, a “basket of fruit” and an “altar.” The visions also describe the depths of dishonesty and irreligion to which some merchants had sunk. Their greed was so great that they could not even wait for religious holidays to end, so they could start making money again. To compound their guilt, they were selling adulterated wheat, shortchanging the amounts, and increasing the price. We live in a society today that does everything that God held up as detestable in the time of Amos. We do not close our doors on Sundays or for religious holidays. We sell inferior and worthless products at inflated and unfair prices, and fix prices often higher than necessary in order to increase our profits. In these visions God proclaims that Israel will suffer greatly and be carried off into exile for these practices.

But God also promises to preserve a remnant that He will some day restore in the land where they will again flourish. Much of the language used by Amos is consistent with the language of other prophets and Jesus Himself, such as God making “*the sun go down at noon*” and making “*the earth dark in broad daylight*” (Amos 8:9). What Amos describes seems to be a description of what will soon happen when the nation is carried into exile, but the words could also be applied to the great tribulation which will befall the whole world prior to Christ’s return. There are clear parallels between God’s message through Amos to Israel and God’s message to believers today. We too are called to repent and put God first again.

BOOK OF HOSEA:

Hosea is the first book in the Book of Twelve Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The prophet preached in Israel in the second half of the eighth century B.C., beginning during the reign of Jeroboam II. He was a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah in Judah and began his career shortly after Amos’ brief one in Israel. Hosea foresaw Israel’s exile to Assyria and actually witnessed some of it happen. He was the last prophet God raised up in Israel (northern kingdom) to try to get the people to repent. Hosea’s task was doubly sad, because, at God’s direction, he took a wife who was just as unfaithful to him as Israel was to her God. The first three chapters relate the sordid details of their stormy marriage. Of three children born while they were living together, only one was Hosea’s. Gomer left Hosea for other lovers but got herself into such trouble that she wanted to return home. In loving forgiveness, Hosea bought her back. All of this was an object lesson to Israel, who had been just as faithless to God. The remainder of the book records Hosea’s portrayal of their sins and the disastrous consequences. Through it all, God’s love and compassion stand out to a remarkable extent. The picture of God in Hosea is that of a loving husband who yearns desperately to have a faithful wife. Israel, however, will have none of it, and the consequences of her sins must play themselves out, although hope for the future is never lost.

HOSEA’S TWO PARTS:

The Book of Hosea can be divided into two distinct parts. The first three chapters belong to the early period of the prophet’s ministry and focus on the example of infidelity in marriage as a way of demonstrating the idolatry of Israel in its relationship with God.

The second part consists of chapters 4 through 14. This portion is not believed to be a series of discourses, or one continuous sermon, but a summary of his prophetic teaching, prepared by him toward the close of his ministry or by one of his disciples after his death. Chapters 4 to 14 may be divided to four units of thought complete in themselves, as follows:

(1) Chapters 4:1—6:3: The thought that binds the various utterances together is sin and the need of repentance. The people are arraigned for gross iniquity (ch. 4), and the princes and priests as being the leaders in sin (ch. 5). The arraignment is followed by a beautiful exhortation to repentance and the promise of God’s return in favor (ch. 6:1-3); yet it seems that the people had only a lighthearted repentance, and further chastisement was necessary.

(2) Chapters 6:4—10:15: The unifying thought is the grievous punishment that must come for heinous sin. Halfhearted repentance does not satisfy God (ch. 6:4-11). The immoral life and shameless excess of the mighty is manifest to God (ch. 7:1-7). For Israel’s stupidity and folly in seeking aid from the powers of the world, and for its foolishness it shall be chastised (ch. 7:8-16). The invader is near because of Israel’s idolatry and schism (ch. 8:1-7). Israel has drawn judgment upon itself by dallying with Assyria, by religious abuses, and by trusting in human means (ch. 8:8-14). Israel’s infidelity (ch. 9:1-9) incurs consequent punishment (ch. 9:10-17). Israel, flourishing like a vigorous vine, only increases its idolatry; but judgment shall spring up as abundant and as destructive as the noxious weed (ch. 10:1-8). Israel’s sin is compared to that of Gibeah (ch. 10:9-11). Whatsoever one sows, that shall one also reap (ch. 10:12-15).

(3) Chapters 11 to 13: This passage is characterized by yearning and expostulation. Yahweh’s love for Israel is the unquenchable love of a father for his child, even for a wayward child (ch. 11:1-11). Jacob relied upon his own strength and shrewdness at first, but finally importuned God and prevailed; therefore, turn from earthly alliances to thy God (chs. 11:12 to 12:6). Ephraim is a dishonest tradesman, and, having become rich, excuses himself of sin; but Yahweh will cast him out of his home, he who saved Israel from Egypt will now punish (ch. 12:7-14). Ephraim’s idolatry is condemned (ch. 13:1-8), and its consequence declared (ch. 13:9-16).

(4) Chapter 14: This contains exhortation to repentance, confession, and humble supplication, and the promise of God’s gracious acceptance of the penitent and bestowal of richest blessings.

HOSEA’S THEOLOGICAL HIGH POINT:

Hosea 6:6 marks the high point of the theology of the Book of Hosea. Its importance was recognized by Jesus, who used it to explain both His association with sinners (Matt. 9:11-13) and why His disciples could pick grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-7).

Hosea 6: (6) *“For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”*

HOSEA’S WITNESS OF GOD’S UNQUENCHABLE LOVE:

Found in Hosea 11:8-9 is an example of God expressing His love for His people even in the midst of their rebellion and sin. God cannot bring Himself to destroy that which He loves even if the behavior of His people merits their punishment of destruction.

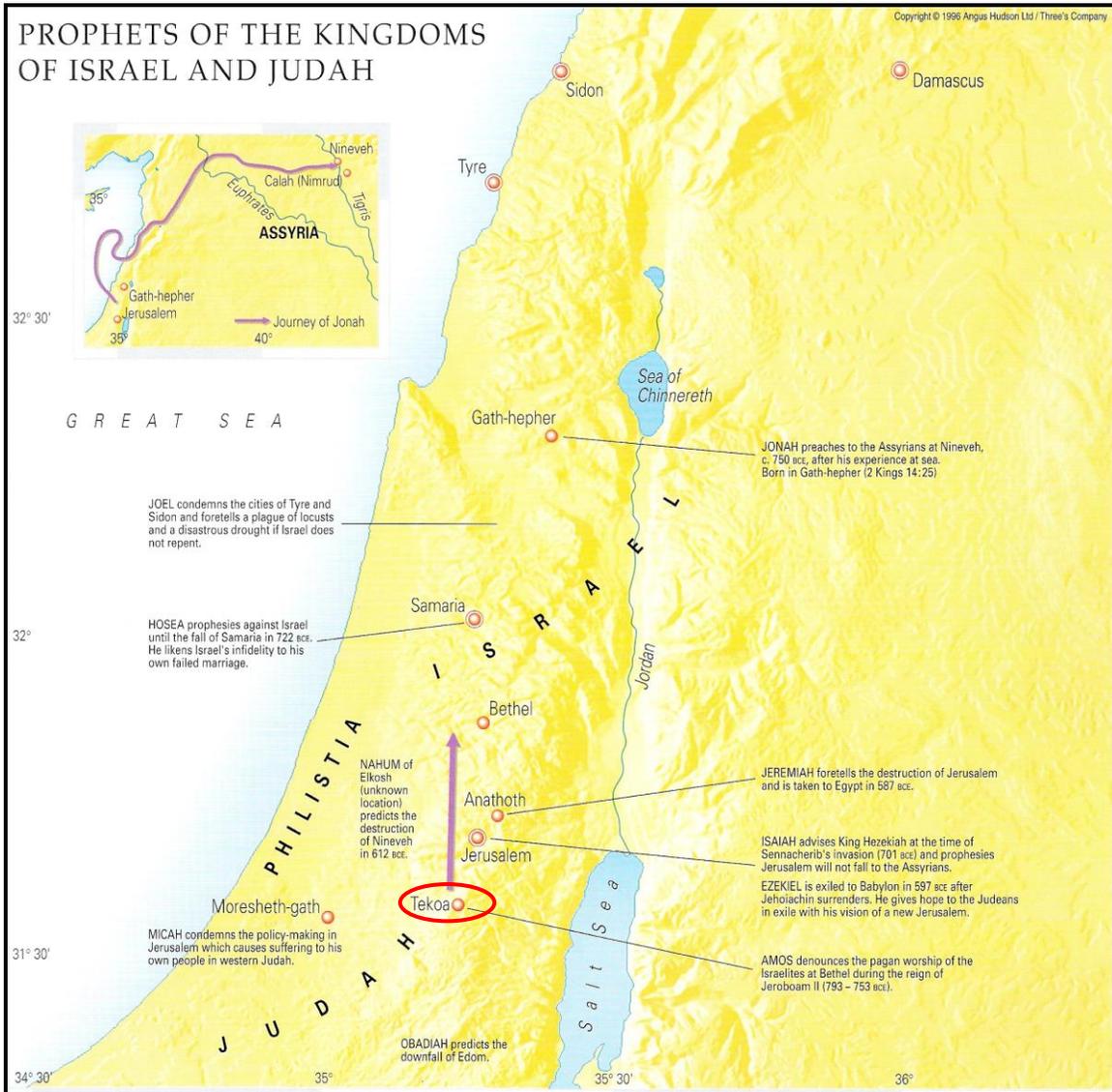
Hosea 11: (8) *“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zebüim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. (9) I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.”*

MEANING OF EPHRAIM:

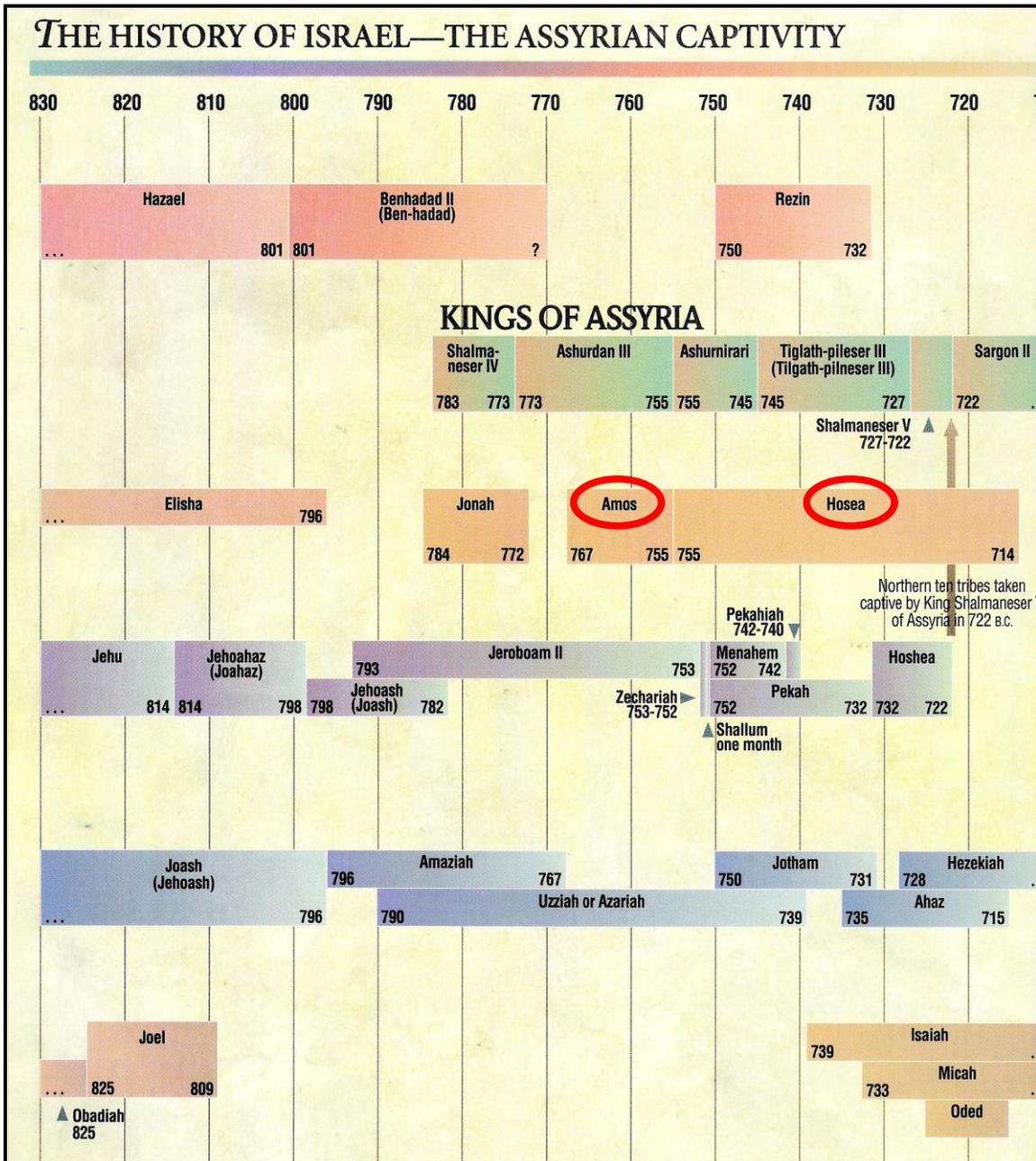
As you read Hosea you will note there are many references to Ephraim. God through Hosea refers to “Ephraim’s” iniquity, punishment, idolatry, etc. The use of the name Ephraim is a reference to the “ten northern tribes” which Ephraim became the head. Thus, the reference to Ephraim equates to the northern kingdom of Israel rather than the southern kingdom of Judah. These ten tribes will be lost forever but Judah will return from its exile in Babylon. Of course the people of all tribes, Israel and Judah, will be united again in the modern nation of Israel as the prophet Ezekiel will reveal.

The map below illustrates the location of Tekoa, home of Amos, and other locations relevant to the prophets Amos and Hosea. The inset map indicates the location of Assyria which will eventually carry Israel into exile. Also shown are Damascus and Tyre, mentioned by Amos among those who God has already passed judgment.

Damascus and Tyre are located, respectively, in the current nations of Syria and Lebanon. Also mentioned in Amos for judgment were Gaza, Edom, Ammon and Moab. Gaza is located on the lower coast in the area of Philistia and corresponds to the current Gaza Strip. Edom, Ammon and Moab all bordered Israel to the east and were located east of the Jordan river. They would correspond today with the Arab nation of Jordan.



The chart below illustrates the time period in which Amos and Hosea lived.



References:

Commentary from “*The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*” and “*Zodhiates’ Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*” published by AMG Publishers.

Map from “*Atlas of the Bible and Christianity.*”

Chart from “*The International Inductive Study Bible*”