

Prophecy in Future Ruins: Amos & Hosea

Thomas Robinson, July 9, 2017

Amos 5:18-24

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD (*Yahweh*)! | Why would you have the day of the LORD? | It is darkness, and not light, | ¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion, | and a bear met him, | or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, | and a serpent bit him. | ²⁰ Is not the day of the LORD (*Yahweh*) darkness, and not light, | and gloom with no brightness in it? |

²¹ “I hate, I despise your feasts, | and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. | ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, | I will not accept them; | and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, | I will not look upon them. | ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; | to the melody of your harps I will not listen. |

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, | and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Hosea 14:1-9

¹ Return, Israel, to the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God. | Your sins have been your downfall! |

² Take words with you | and return to the LORD (*Yahweh*). | Say to him: | “Forgive all our sins | and receive us graciously, | that we may offer the fruit of our lips. |

³ Assyria cannot save us; | we will not mount warhorses. | We will never again say ‘Our gods’ | to what our own hands have made, | for in you the fatherless find compassion.” |

⁴ “I will heal their waywardness | and love them freely, | for my anger has turned away from them. | ⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel; | they will blossom like a lily. | Like a cedar of Lebanon | they will send down their roots; | ⁶ their young shoots will grow. | Their splendor will be like an olive tree, | their fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. |

⁷ People will dwell again in their shade; | they will flourish like the grain, | they will blossom like the vine – | Israel’s fame will be like the wine of Lebanon. | ⁸ Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? | I will answer them and care for them. | I am like a flourishing juniper; | your fruitfulness comes from me.” |

⁹ Who is wise? Let them realize these things. | Who is discerning? Let them understand. | The ways of the LORD (*Yahweh*) are right; | the righteous walk in them, | but the rebellious stumble in them.

Hosea 4:1-6; 6:5-6

4:¹ Hear the word of the LORD (*Yahweh*), O children of Israel, for the LORD (*Yahweh*) has a controversy with you. “There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land.

² There is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. ³ Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens ...

⁴ My dispute is with you, priest.... ⁶ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you’ve rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest ... since you’ve forgotten the Torah of your God....”

6:⁵ ... “My judgment goes forth as the light. ⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Matthew 9:11-13 (Cf Matt 12:7)

¹¹ And the Pharisees ... said to Jesus’ disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard it, Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ (Hosea 6:6) For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Romans 5:19-21

¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were given the status of ‘sinners,’ so through the obedience of one the many will be given the status of ‘right’ with God. ²⁰ In addition, Torah / law came in to fill out the trespass to the full. But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ in order that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through God’s faithful righteousness leading to life of the age to come through Jesus Messiah our Lord.

Prophecy in Future Ruins

The early written prophets take us mid 8th cent (750) bc. Time of Homer & Rome’s founding. David was as long ago as the American Revolution is to us. Kingdom divided: Israel, north; Judah, south, since Solomon nearly 2 cent. In the north a strong king, Jeroboam II (784-47 bc). The empire of Assyria was in inner turmoil and Jeroboam expanded territory, brought trade, prosperity.

Israel’s worship centers at Bethel and elsewhere were prospering. Both Yahweh and Baal Hadad and other gods were worshiped. The very definition of good religion. Religion was always a bargain/contract with the gods. Offer sacrifice and pay vows so that the gods will bless you with fertility, prosperity, victory. That was the language of most religion, Canaan, Greece, Assyria, even Israel.

But in Israel, something more was always pushing into that traditional language. Prophets come into Israel’s ideal religious world. Hosea from Israel. Amos from Judah. In the midst of prosperity that shows religion is working, both challenge Israel’s failure at the core. Both foretell a coming disaster nobody wants to hear, Israel’s destruction by Assyria in 722. Why!? Israel’s worshiping God/gods.

Knowing God and Idolatry

Israel’s faith was always supposed to point to a reality fundamentally different from the gods of religion. The prophets called them idols, not just because they had images, but because they are at most beings/forces within the world. You serve them like a great emperor that you need to keep happy, benevolent. Modern gods are power, money, pleasure, nation, race, control, security, etc.

But Yahweh is not one of the gods. God is creator beyond all creation. He needs nothing, gives everything, existence itself. The aim of worship is to change, refocus human life, not meet God’s needs. But Israel’s corruption and injustice showed that they knew nothing of Yahweh, beyond all human manipulation.

Amos focuses, for example, on the “Day of Yahweh.” You don’t know Yahweh! He is not a human-sized bargaining God. He wants you, manifested by your actions of justice and concrete care for others. He hates religious acts that manipulate.

Hosea saw that the fundamental crisis was not knowing God as God. Manifested in corruption. God’s character of steadfast love is humanity’s goal. God is better.

The God of Steadfast Love

Hosea 6:6 was one of Jesus’ favorite passages. He had meditated and grasped the meaning of these prophets and embodied it. He challenged the religious leaders of his own day to simply learn the meaning of one verse of Hosea. It would overturn so much emphasis on form rather than substance in religion. Today, it’s easy to reject form, what’s challenging is embodying substance.

Paul saw the drama of these prophets as showing the deep human brokenness that the Torah brought to clarity and focus. The varied corruptions of the nations were brought to a point in Israel. God healed them through defeat (exile) and in his grace taking all our sin on himself in Jesus. Grace reigns for life!