

Under The Fig Tree



WEEK 27

Around 722 BC, ten of the twelve Tribes went into exile. These Tribes comprised the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The exile followed the fall of Samaria, the Capital City. It was not that a better nation had defeated them. Assyria was a ruthless nation. It was that God took His protection away from His people and stirred up their enemies. It was His judgment in accordance with the terms of the Covenant. All that came to pass was in accord with what Moses had taught. We find precise terms of the Covenant in Deuteronomy 28.

When Israel turned to foreign gods Prophets were raised up to bring warning. Elijah was among the foremost of these Prophets and ministered at the time of Ahab, up to around 850 BC. He was followed by Elisha. Two other Prophets must now be studied who brought God's Word prior to the exile. They are Amos and Hosea. Both were full of the grace of God. Together they brought both God's warning and His heartfelt cry to repent before it was too late. We will read Amos first.

Day 1

Amos Chapter 1. Some time between 760 and 750 BC, Amos was sent from his home in the Southern Kingdom of Judah to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. God had sent signs to the Northern Kingdom. If the people had read Deuteronomy 28 they could have interpreted the signs for themselves. The signs had increased in magnitude because Israel was not heeding the warnings. They were signs in the weather, on the livestock and crops, in family decline, in famine and drought. Amos's ministry was to add a spoken word of interpretation from God. Even then the warnings were not heeded. An earthquake came two years later and exile within a generation. The kings who reigned at the time are identified at the beginning of the Book of Amos. We know how badly they had led the nation from what we read in 2 Kings.

There was a dramatic preparation for the message to Israel. First Amos identified the sins of the surrounding nations. Each of these nations knew their wrongdoing, not in such a detailed way that Torah revealed the sin of Israel, but even they knew the extent of their brutality and wickedness. Before turning to Israel, God made it clear that their sins would not be forgotten.

Chapter 2. Amos condemned the sins of Moab and Judah. The judgment on Judah would eventually take place, but now it was Israel's time. Read Verses 6 to 16 carefully. This could have been Moses himself speaking to Israel. It was a reminder of what God had done for them since bringing them out of Egypt.

Chapter 3. We are reading an ancient document written for a specific purpose. Yet it also reads like a message for today. God still sends signs and He still sends His prophetic Word to warn nations who follow false gods. If God judged Israel in such clearly understood terms, every nation today would be wise to study both Deuteronomy 28 and Amos alongside the daily news. The biblical Prophets are not hard to understand if we have an understanding of Torah. We must also put the message into the context of the Gospel of Yeshua HaMashiach. Recall that Yeshua did not come to destroy the Torah and Prophets but to fulfill them. Therefore, consider these Chapters from Amos both in their ancient setting and in their modern relevance.

Chapter 4. Sometimes there are figures of speech to interpret. An example is in Verse 6. *Cleanness of teeth* and *lack of bread* are parallelisms for the same thing – *hunger*. Generally, however, Amos spoke in plain language that is easy to understand. Step by step God had increased the intensity of the signs to Israel in accordance with Deuteronomy 28. The signs were sent so that Israel would wake up and turn back to Him, but they had not.

Day 2

Chapter 5. Recall the accounts of the kings of Israel, which we read prior to Amos. Israel became like any ungodly and wicked nation worshipping false gods and forgetting their own heritage. It is not pleasant to consider the vile sins that beset the nation. It is better to shut them out of our mind, and think of the goodness of God. Nevertheless, we must put the Books of the Prophets into context. If we could go back in time and observe daily life of Israel, we would have no doubts that Israel, as a whole, had abandoned God and that He should abandon them. We would be shocked at what we saw and amazed that God had been so patient. There was a believing remnant, as God had pointed out to Elijah. Apart from that they were dark and evil days, reminiscent of any evil nation throughout history. If we do not consider this context, the message of Amos might seem harsh. It was the opposite. God had been patient and forgiving beyond measure. He was slow to anger and slow to build up the intensity of His judgments. Because of His grace, He sent signs that could have been heeded, right up to the end.

In Chapter 5 we hear God's heart for Israel despite all. This is God's lament for His people. It is also a firm warning. *The Day of the Lord* is a phrase that occurs in several of the Prophets. It speaks of the day when He will rise up in judgment. It is a day that we would hope to be pleasant, but it is a dark day upon the earth. Israel's experience of a *day of the Lord* was to be a forerunner of other such days throughout history, especially in the end days prior to Yeshua's return. Israel, through blessing and curse, are a prophetic people. God speaks to us all though what they experienced at His Hand.

Chapter 6. Read the Chapter carefully. Let us not be like those who were *at ease in Zion*.

Chapter 7. Amos was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. This means that he did not come from one of the schools of the prophets that existed at this time. He had no known prophet to mentor him. He was a farm labourer. He had a heart like David whom God had taken from the sheepfold. We cannot be sure from where the prophetic voice will arise at the time of God's speaking to His people. It has always been thus. He found in Amos a person who had a heart for His people. He was obedient to the call of a prophet. He also had the heart of an intercessor, as we read in the first section of this chapter. God spoke plainly through signs and also through the words of the Prophet. God listened to Amos's intercessory prayers, but He could not compromise His Word. The plumb line of Torah was the standard against which God eventually had to judge Israel. Apostasy had to cease and the high places be torn down.

Chapter 8. The time of judgment was finally declared. The description of the darkening sun has ongoing meaning. The day of Israel's exile was not the end of God's dealing with Israel. This imagery also points to the day that Yeshua was crucified for the sins of the world, a day when

deep darkness was experienced. Such darkness will also typify the days of judgment coming at the end of time. Within Israel's judgment were further signposts. The famine of the Word of the Lord (Verse 11) speaks of the end time when men and women throughout the world, despite the wonderful Gospel message, will continue to turn to foreign gods. Notice the mention of the god of Dan (Verse 14). A root of Israel's trouble tracks back to the time when the Tribe of Dan first set up an altar to a false god.

Day 3

Amos Chapter 9. There was to be absolutely no compromise. The exile of Israel was sealed: just as Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, so Israel was soon to be banished from their Land. God was about to fulfill His Word and all sinners were to die by the sword (Verse 9). *The wages of sin is death* echoes throughout the pages of all history. We must all learn from God's judgment on Israel.

Yet, God is faithful to all His promises. The terms of His Covenant with Israel are not confined to punishment of sinners. God ensured that a remnant would survive the exile and, for them, the time out of their country would ultimately be restorative. In Acts 15, James quoted Verses 11 and 12 of Amos 9, recalling how God had promised to restore the nation and add to redeemed Israel those who are saved from the Gentile nations. Amos did not know the manner of the restoration. James realized that this was fulfilled in Yeshua through the gift of the Holy Spirit. At a future time there would be such a harvest of redeemed people it would be like no harvest that has ever been seen.

The *tabernacle of David* is a *sukkah*, one of the temporary dwelling places that are built at the *Feast of Sukkot* (Tabernacles). The raising of the fallen Tabernacle of David speaks of the restoration of Israel as a Pilgrim People waiting for the return of Yeshua.

These were dark days for Israel, but the Messianic thread of God's Covenant faithfulness was still strong.

Hosea Chapter 1. Hosea was a contemporary of Amos. Like Amos, he prophesied just prior to the fall of the Northern Kingdom. While Amos gave clear warnings about the consequences of sin, Hosea showed God's heart for His people. The names *Hosea*, *Joshua* and *Yeshua* all come from the root word meaning *salvation*. God sometimes seems harsh in His judgments. He is infinitely more loving than He is harsh. He cannot compromise His principles, but He feels the pain more than we do. This was shown to us most fully on the Cross. Through Hosea, God reminded His people that His relationship with them was as a husband is to his wife. He caused Hosea to share the pain of being married to an adulteress. Hosea was a living sign of the prophetic word. Hosea's experience is also preparation for understanding what Yeshua was doing for us in sharing the Father's grief for His people. Yeshua's relationship to His people is likened to betrothal.

In Chapter 1, Hosea was sent to find himself an unfaithful wife, and God began to speak to him through his experiences. Hosea was to understand God's pain for his people. See how you feel about this as you consider what it was like for Hosea. This is a taste of how it is for God when His people turn away from Him.

Chapter 2. Continue to hear God's heart for His people. Here is the sadness of a betrayed husband who must judge His wife justly when she has committed adultery. The physical adultery of Hosea's wife is likened to the spiritual adultery of serving foreign gods. Hear also, however, the

heart of our God to restore His people to Himself. What a ray of hope shines through Hosea's message, despite all.

Chapter 3. Just as we read in Amos, Hosea shows us that God has a future and a hope in mind for Israel. There will be days of exile. They will be long hard days, but through those days a faithful remnant will seek the Lord. At such a time He will restore them. Hosea's prophetic act of buying back an adulterous wife still has significance for Israel today!

Day 4

Chapter 4. As you read Hosea, take the opportunity to consider the heart of God for His people. We can make mistakes when we read the Prophets. A surface reading sometimes leaves the impression that they are ancient legal manuscripts, full of imagery which has lost its meaning, with no ongoing relevance. We often read them as from a harsh and judgmental God. A more careful reading, inspired by the Spirit of God, shows that, at the heart, the Prophets are more about the love of God for His people.

God gave His people the *Torah*. Like the Books of the Prophets, *Torah* can be considered to be an ancient legal document, hard to understand and irrelevant to today. Through balanced study, however, inspired by Yeshua's teaching and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we discover that at the heart of *Torah* is the love of God. God required Israel and Judah to live by the precepts of *Torah* because this would bring them protection. *Torah* was the marriage contract between God and His people. Through the principles of *Torah* they were set apart as a Holy people. The Creator of the Universe was their God and King and the world would see how God loved them. The message of Hosea is about this loving relationship and the pain of its breaking down. Hosea shows us the heart of God and reminds us of the uncompromising love that He desires from all of His people.

Judgment was to bring exile for Israel, but not before God reminded His people of His love. Recall how wicked kings had led Israel astray. God's love was made known despite even this. God also declared that He would never forget Israel even to the end of time, through all the remaining history of the world. After nearly 3000 years, right up to our day, this promise from the heart of God remains true.

Hosea speaks to us as well as to Israel. God created all human beings; first two people – Adam and Eve – and now billions of us are spread across the earth. He is still looking for people who will accept His love and live in loving relationship with Him. How many find this narrow road that leads to life, God alone knows. From the evidence around us we know that, more and more as time goes on, most people are at best lukewarm towards God, and the majority denies Him completely, often preferring to believe in gods who had no part in our creation. Let God speak to you as you consider the message of Hosea.

Verse 6 refers to God taking away Israel's right to be Priests. A Priest has the privilege of personal relationship with God, the responsibility to bring prayer on behalf of others and to carry God's Words to His people. This is the privilege and responsibility of prayer, and Israel was now losing this ministry, as God cast them out of His presence as well as from their Land.

Chapter 5. The Northern Kingdom was known as Israel. It was also referred to as Ephraim, the name of Joseph's younger son, who inherited the double blessing. Even in judgment, God remembered all that went before in the history of His people. This is why we must read the entire Bible as one connected whole. The Tribes named in Revelation 7 are remembered by God over all

history, right up to the end of time. Read the judgment on Israel remembering the entire context of history.

Chapter 6. Key principles and key verses are found in these chapters. Sometimes we quote them out of context. Consider this carefully. Even at this last moment before exile, through Hosea, God showed His patience and His love to Israel. He called them once more to repentance. If they would repent, how quickly they would be restored. God might inflict them with hurt, but He would also bind up their wounds. Verses 1 and 2 were possible for Israel at the moment before exile. If they had repented, God would have been quick to heal them and restore them. The verses can be interpreted in another way too. If one day is equivalent to a thousand years, these verses carry hope for the future. Despite all, even after 2000 or 3000 years, God has a plan for Israel's restoration. These verses speak of the end times and Yeshua's return. They also pointed to the suffering of Yeshua on the Cross. Yeshua became Israel's substitutory sacrifice, taking upon Himself all the pain of being separated from the Father. The exile of Israel was small compared with this pain. He was raised up on the third day to fulfill this prophecy and restore hope for outcast Israel. These are the deeper issues of Hosea's prophecy. Verse 6 touches this same depth, bringing balance to our understanding of *Torah*. God looks for mercy more than He does sacrifice. He prefers restored relationship to external rituals.

Chapter 7. How quickly God would have healed Israel, but they continued to prefer idolatry and to follow the ways of the nations who followed false gods. Therefore, they would be shown what it was like to be scattered among these nations whom they envied.

Day 5

Chapter 8. *They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind:* this is the emotive picture language of the Prophet. Israel's kings thought that they could set up altars to false gods and not reap the consequences, but then came the time of reckoning. They were about to discover what it was really like to follow these gods, by being carried off to Assyria.

Chapter 9. Hosea was trained for his call as a Prophet through the experience of marrying an adulterous wife. He learned how to share God's pain of rejection by His people. His Prophetic words carried the heart of God for His people. On the one hand was God's love for the people whom He had brought out of Egypt. On the other hand was inability to compromise for all the sins that had been committed. Israel was soon to become a homeless people, wanderers in an alien world. Do you feel the sadness of God as you read these chapters?

Chapter 10. Israel's glory departed when they set up altars to false gods. Their ancestors had set up a golden calf in the wilderness, but later generations did not remember the judgment that this brought upon them. This is true for all nations today. Bible truths are considered to be quaint stories that did not actually take place – among the myths and legends of ancient days. Leaders of nations choose to ignore the ongoing testimony of Israel, despite the fact that this nation is still at the forefront of world history. God's judgment on Israel, because of their worship of idols, carries an ongoing prophetic message for all people. Israel was about to take their idols and live among idolatrous nations.

Chapter 11. *Out of Egypt I called my son:* God first said this of the twelve Tribes of Israel. Consider how God's heart is still for His people, despite all. It is as if waves of emotion engulf Him. He must stand firm and discipline His people, but then comes remembrance of times when He wooed them and they responded to Him, and deep sadness engulfs Him again. Let the Holy Spirit show you the heart of God for His people as you read these chapters prayerfully.

In Matthew 2:15 we discover a new application for the phrase, *out of Egypt I called my son.* Yeshua fulfilled this so that, in Him, the Israel of God would be restored to fellowship with Him. He did not replace Israel but *became* Israel, so that despite all, the Covenant God made with Abraham would be fulfilled

Day 6

Chapter 12. At this time, the Northern Kingdom, sometimes call Israel and sometimes Ephraim, was soon to be exiled. God preserved Judah so that He could be faithful to the terms of His Covenant. The Messiah was to come from the line of David. Nevertheless, we also read in this chapter, warnings against Judah. Nothing went unnoticed by God even from the time that Jacob grasped the heel of his brother Esau when he was born, and later struggled with the Angel at Peniel. All people should consider this. There was a day of judgment for Israel. There will also be a day of judgment for the entire world when Yeshua returns and when all things that were ever done on this earth will be remembered – all that is not hidden under the atoning Blood of Yeshua. As Judah witnessed the exile of Israel, God intended them to take stock of their own situation.

Chapter 13. Note the imagery that is used in these chapters. The same sort of imagery is used by other Prophets. The pain that Israel will experience in coming days will be like the pain a woman bears in child-birth, long and unrelenting until the moment of relief. It will indeed be a long process, but hope for restoration is ever before those Children of Israel who seek to be restored to relationship with God. Paul realized that Verse 14, *O Death I will be your plagues...O grave I will be your destruction*, was fulfilled through Yeshua, the hope of Israel even at this dark moment before exile.

Chapter 14. When Hosea prophesied to Israel his warnings were not heeded. Exile followed. Israel missed an opportunity to repent even at the last moment. At the time, they would not have understood this final Chapter of the Prophet. Yet, here it is preserved for us after more than 2700 years. God's judgment on Israel was immense and the consequences still go on today. Yet, restoration of the Nation has always been in God's mind. Just as He turned away from His people, so He has promised to turn back to them, restore them and love them. This love was demonstrated through Yeshua on the Cross. In the latter days, when the entire world has heard the Gospel message, we will see that God will complete His plan of restoration for Israel. Those who seek Him will find Him. The idols will be rejected once more. The Prophecy of Hosea comes from the heart of a patient and forgiving God, who devises plans so that those who are lost might be restored.

Day 7

A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

The Prophecies of Amos and Hosea complete the account of the Northern Kingdom, exiled just over 700 years before the birth of Yeshua. In one sense this is ancient history. In another sense it is an account as relevant today as it was then. Take time to review the condition of Israel at the times of the wicked kings, who led the nation into idolatry after the time of Solomon. Contrast this with the deep emotions of God for His people shown through the message of the Prophets.
