

Part 3: Jesus in the Prophets – The Heart of God and the Call to Repent

Tyler Velin | Hosea 14:1-9

January 15, 2023

We are nearing the half-way point in our series that walks through the narrative of the whole Bible. We are doing this primarily because we want to help all of us, myself included, grow in our ability to read and understand the Bible devotionally.

My goal as we work through this series is not to read the Bible for you, but instead it's to read the Bible with you. As we work through our Bible reading plan together I want each of us to be able to help each other in understanding and applying God's word. The truth of the matter is that no matter how old you get, no matter how many decades you follow Jesus, you will always be growing in your knowledge of God's word.

The 18th century pastor, Andrew Fuller, once encouraged a newly appointed minister in the same way I want to encourage us in this series: **"We need not fear exhausting the Bible, or dread a scarcity of divine subjects. If our hearts are but kept in unison with the Spirit in which the Bible is written, everything we meet with there will be interesting. The more we read, the more interesting it will appear, and the more we know, the more we shall perceive there is to be known."**

Today we will endeavor to discover the brilliant and divine interest in the Old Testament prophets. But before we go on, I have one quick note as to the order in which we have progressed so far. If you open up your Bible to the table of contents you will notice that after where we ended last week, the book of 2 Kings, the Old Testament moves to the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, and then to the wisdom literature, and after that to the prophets.

This is because what we have in our Bible's order is based off the Greek Old Testament. The order I have been following, and will continue to follow in this series is based off the Hebrew Old Testament. When we talk about the Hebrew or Greek Old Testament we are really only talking about two things: 1. The language in which it was written and 2. The order in which the books are arranged. The materials are the same, there aren't two Old Testaments—or two Bibles.

The Greek Old Testament is arranged in a way that best sets up the New Testament to the reader. It goes from the past (looking at the Pentateuch and the histories), then proceeds to the present (the wisdom literature) and then concludes with the future (the prophets). In this way it reads more similarly to a historical biography lumping chronology together and moving forward in that way.

However, the Hebrew order of the Old Testament, which would have been the Bible that Jesus and his disciples were most familiar with, was set up less like a historical biography and more like a memoir—grouping things thematically instead of chronologically.

This order was called the TaNaKa which is the first two letters of the three Hebrew words for the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings because that is the order it is presented in. The law included the Pentateuch which we looked at week one. The prophets included the former prophets which we examined last week, and the latter prophets which we will examine today. And the writings begin with

Ruth and the wisdom books and then resumes the narrative in the book of Daniel through 1 and 2 Chronicles.

One is not wrong to read the Greek order, and one is not right to read the Hebrew order. It's all the same content, but I think it is most fitting for the goal of our series to follow the Hebrew order because I feel it best helps us understand the story as it relates to Jesus Christ.

Our goal for each of these sermons is to help us do three things: to **Survey the Story**, **Study the Story**, and **Savor the Savior of the Story**.

The overarching theme we are going to see today as we look at **Jesus in the Prophets** is this: **The Heart of God and the Call to Repent**.

So let's begin by **Surveying the Story**.

The latter prophets include three Major Prophets—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Lamentations (these were grouped together)—and twelve Minor Prophets—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi. It's not that some of these are majorly important and the other minorly important. It's just that three of them are much larger in terms of length and the others are shorter.

When it comes to the story of the Old Testament, these prophets span nearly a two hundred year swath of history. It follows the story of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah until northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyria and the southern kingdom taken captive in Babylon. But the prophets also include the release of Judah back into the Promised Land after their captivity.

In other words it describes much of the history you will have already read in the former prophets and also some of the history you will read of again in the latter writings. But there is something unique about the prophetic books.

The history gives an account of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land, fall into exile, and return to the land from a human perspective. But as the prophets speak, God speaks. While all of the Bible is God's word, these words are God's direct dialogue to his people. Which means these books are God's divine commentary on the darkness we see in Israel's history and the revelation of his zeal to do something about it. The prophets reveal to us God's perspective and God's heart on the human condition in a unique way.

Why are God's people so broken? Why do our heart ache as we read of the darkness of the Kings of Israel? God tells us in the book of Hosea in **Hosea 10:1-2**.

The more Israel enjoyed the fruits of God's promise, the more they built altars to false gods. The more Israel should have turned into God's covenant, the more they improved their worship of idols.

God explains how things got so dark in Hosea 5:11 where he says, "Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgement." Why? "Because he was determined to go after filth."

We need God's perspective to make sense of our own experience. And here God gives his perspective: pursuing sin is pursuing filth, and violating God's law. In other words you don't ultimately get what you want out of sin, and by choosing sin you earn God's judgement.

The three P's we've been following in this story are God's people, God's presence and God's place. The story of the prophets is how God is going to deal with a people who don't look like his people, who have caused chaos to ruin his place, and whose sins provoke God's presence.

How is he going to do it? By his mercy. God's people have broken God's covenant so he's going to make a new one. He's going to call his people out of the wages of their sin and the brokenness of their judgement by calling them to repentance.

And here's where we see God's heart in the prophets. God is brutally opposed to sin. He hates it. But God also loves his people. The prophets track God's justice and wrath to deal with sin while simultaneously calling his people to repent. And what we see is that God calls his people back with the voice of a heartbroken father, a defrauded lender, and a spurned and abandoned lover.

What drives God's judgment and God's salvation is God's zealous heartfelt affection for his people and his hatred towards sin.

The prophets always interweave both of these activities and we see this most clearly in God's commission to Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 1:9-10**.

God is going to remake his people by judging them, plucking them up and breaking them down, but also by restoring them, by building and planting.

The story tracks Israel's arrogance which refuses to trust God and humble themselves by turning back to him. On account of this God will break them by humbling them himself. This is the geographic progression of the prophets: Into exile and back again. God is going to judge his people by sending them into exile, but as they repent, he's going to plant them back in the land.

This leads us to the theological progression of the prophets: from the Old Covenant to the New by the Spirit of repentance. How is God going to heal an unrepentant people? He's going to make a New Covenant with them that actually changes their hearts.

A key text which explains the tension of the prophets is here in **Hosea 14:1-9**. How is God going to save Israel from the judgment idolatry produces? By calling them to "return" that's the Hebrew word for "repent." Whoever is wise, understand these things.

So what does it look like to understand this? Let's turn our attention to **Study the Story**.

The Prophets and Their Speech

When it comes to the style of writing you will find bits and pieces of narrative as you would have in the history. But for the most part the prophetic books are made up of what are called prophetic oracles.

These are often introduced with a phrase such as, "The Lord says," or "Thus says the Lord," and are meant to be read as God's direct communication to his people. Sometimes these oracles are lined up in

a linear form, but other times they might seem a bit disjointed and that's because (as you'll read in books like Isaiah) the many oracles were written down and compiled by a scribe. Meaning sometimes they are grouped thematically, sometimes they are grouped chronologically, and sometimes they are grouped almost in a question and answer format.

God uses poetic language in these oracles to help us understand in vivid form the realities that are at play beyond our senses. It's vivid imagery because it's a vivid problem. We will talk more about how to interpret some of this when we get into the poetry and the book of Revelation.

But one thing that is going to be really helpful to understand as you read the prophets is a cursory understanding of the names and nations that you'll encounter. When you watch a movie from the 80s and you hear Russia, you naturally begin to impute the context of the Cold War into it and that helps you understand what is happening.

We need the same help if we are going to understand the prophets. So I'm going to give a little background on geo-political happenings in the Prophets.

The Names and Nations of the Prophets

The nations of Egypt and Assyria often show up as symbols of false hope. That's because during the civil war between the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel, Israel teamed up with the nation of Syria to conquer Judah. And instead of Judah trusting in God's promise to deliver them they tried to strike a backroom deal with Assyria and Egypt to save them instead of exclusively relying on God.

But we also see Assyria is spoken of as a means of judgement. That's because in 722 B.C., the Kingdom of Israel was wiped out by Assyria and in the year 701 Assyria nearly wiped out Judah apart from God's miraculous providence. Nineveh shows up often in these books and is synonymous with Assyria because it was the capital city of the nation.

However, God judges Assyria for her own violence in the year 612 when the nation of Babylon (also called "Chaldea") conquered Assyria. So Assyria was what God used to judge the kingdom of Israel, Babylon is who God used to judge Assyria, but then in 586 B.C. God also used Babylon to judge the kingdom of Judah carrying them off into captivity.

So depending upon which countries are being mentioned at any given point in time, you're able to understand relatively where we are and what the present mood is in the story. Another name to be mindful of is the name of Ephraim. And Ephraim is a tribe which is used as synonymous with the northern kingdom of Israel. It's meant to be a contrast to Judah or to the house of David.

Understanding the genre of the prophetic oracles and the general conflict between the nations helps better piece together the meaning and experiences wrapped up in any given book.

But what I want to do for the remainder of our time in this portion is to walk us through the Major Prophets in brief, and then to summarize three key themes in the prophetic books as a whole.

What's interesting to notice is that each of the major three prophets seems to give a unique emphasis to a particular theme.

Jeremiah and God's Place

In the book of Jeremiah, **God's place** takes center stage. This is seen not only in the passage we read where God is going to replant his people in the land, but there's a key allegory that God asks Jeremiah to participate in in Jeremiah 32.

One thing you'll notice about God's prophets is that God often calls them to act out spiritual realities before his people. In Hosea, the prophet is called to marry a prostitute and to be faithful to her as a representation of how God will remain faithful to his people even though they have committed adultery with false gods. In Ezekiel 4, the prophet is called to be bound for 390 days to "bear the punishment of Israel," acting as a representation of Israel's judgment.

And in Jeremiah 32 the Babylonian army is actively attacking Jerusalem. People are fleeing the city and property rates are plummeting. But God calls Jeremiah to buy a field. This would have been the world's worst investment as the field was about to be conquered by another nation. But look at what Jeremiah says in **Jeremiah 32:14-15**.

Though Babylon was going to take the land, one day houses, fields and vineyards will be bought again in the land. Even though God was going to judge on account of sin, he would bring his people back into the land. His place will be restored.

Ezekiel and God's Presence

Ezekiel includes some of the wildest visions you'll read in all of the Bible. But one thing is clear in all of it: **God's presence** is on the move. There's this indescribable vehicle Ezekiel sees that symbolizes God's presence looking for a place to rest. Finally in chapter 44 the presence of the glory of God fills God's new temple. And look at what is promised to Judah despite their sin: **Ezekiel 37:26-28**.

God would dwell with his people. How? By making a sanctuary—by bringing his presence into the midst of them.

Isaiah and God's Place

And lastly, the book of Isaiah captures the recreation of **God's people**.

One thing you'll notice as you read through the prophets is how God does not discriminate. God judges without prejudice. You'll read of oracles where God judges pagan nations for their sin (Assyria, Moab, Babylon) but also passages where God judges Israel and Judah for their sin.

God's judgement is real among all the nations. But what you'll also notice is that his salvation is also without discrimination. That doesn't mean that all are saved, but it means any can be saved. Isaiah gives us this beautiful picture of God's people and his new creation in the end of his book and notice who is included in it: **Isaiah 56:6-8**.

The foreigners among the nations will be part of God's people. Why? Because they join themselves to the Lord, they love him, they become his servants. Because of God's faithfulness to Israel, nations will flock to the God of Jacob. God will faithfully judge all and any who remain in sin, but God is faithful to welcome all and any who humble themselves and return to him.

Despite sin, God is going to make a way for his people, to be in his presence, and in his place—it's going to be like Eden, but even better.

As you read the remainder of the prophets there are three themes you'll find repeatedly.

First, ***The de-creation of the land and the de-humanization of the people.***

You will see how sin ruins everything. Remember how Genesis started? Look back at **Genesis 1:2**. Before God created his perfect creation, the earth was formless and void. But look at how Jeremiah describes the Promised Land on account of the people's sins: **Jeremiah 4:23**.

Sin de-created what God made perfect. Sin ruins everything. It doesn't get you closer to Eden but closer to emptiness!

Moreover we see that sin causes us to lose our humanity. Unrighteousness, oppression, murder extortion reigns when sin reigns. The prophets repeatedly call for justice and righteousness because sin hurts humanity. We may think that embracing our sin and allowing people to follow their hearts is the key to unleashing humanity.

But look at how Jeremiah warns of the false prophets in his own day: **Jeremiah 23:16-17**.

It is foolishness to think that following a heart broken with sin leads to hope for humanity. Sin ruins everything and it will ruin you.

This leads us to our next theme: ***The Day of the Lord.***

Even though God makes it clear that Israel will be judged, destroyed and killed by other nations on account of their sin, there is a greater day of judgement yet to come. That is the Day of the Lord.

Because God is righteous, he will judge sin. And because sin is ultimately against a spiritual God, our judgement will not only be physical but also spiritual. All physical judgement we read in these passages is meant to cause us to fear the day when the Lord comes to judge in the flesh and in the spirit.

One thing you'll notice is that we are often warned of false assurance in light of this judgement. Look at **Amos 5:18-21**.

What's Amos' point? Many assume that this day of the Lord will be nothing for them. After all, they are God's people. They have the temple. They make their sacrifices. Everything will be fine.

Maybe you feel the same way. Maybe you have no fear of standing before Jesus because you have a false assurance that when God judges your heart he'll find more good than bad, or he'll accept the superficial acts of worship. But the prophets make it clear that in ourselves we have no confidence in that day. None. Zero.

So how do we move from confidence only in our judgement to confidence in salvation?

The prophet Joel helps us understand how: **Joel 2:11-14**.

How might we be spared? Return to the Lord with all your heart. Come with not the outward scraps of religion but the inward rending of the heart. Repentance is both a change of affection and a change of action.

To return to the Lord, to repent with grief and weeping requires a change of heart. But what if we feel we cannot change. What if the grip of sin feels too intense, the pain of guilt too permanent, or the reality of judgement too far out to bring us biblical fear?

This is our last theme in the prophets: ***The Dawn of the New Covenant.***

And it's here were we transition to our final point this morning: **Savor the Savior of the Story.**

God's word of judgment in the prophets is simple: if you remain in your sin you will die. But God's word of mercy is clear in the prophets—repent and live. Change your heart, love me again, tear down your idols, put away your false prophets and fake comforts and return to me. But Israel's history, our history shows we can change just about everything in the world—but we can't change our hearts. But look at what is said in **Ezekiel 36:22-31**.

How are our hearts changed? By finally grieving with a new Spirit. By being cleansed from our sins. From where does this grief come? Look at **Zechariah 12:10, 13:1**.

If we want our hearts to be changed we need to gaze at the wonder of the one who was pierced for our sin. It's not enough to simply see how bad your sin is if you do not also see how supremely scandalous the cross of Jesus is. The gospel not only sees the weight of the problem but also the wonder of the solution.

The New Covenant we need is one where Jesus in all his holy, perfect, righteousness takes our sin on the cross and lights a fire of Spirit filled-affection in our hearts. This is the foundation of the New Covenant the author of Hebrews speaks of in **Hebrews 9:13-15**.

Jesus is Isaiah's child-king and suffering servant. Jesus is the greater Jonah, not reluctant to preach repentance to his enemies but eager to offer mercy to all who respond. Jesus is the righteous remnant, Jeremiah's true vine, and the greater Ezekiel who bears the sins and punishment of his brothers. Jesus takes Gomer's unfaithfulness, Ephraim's filth, Isaiah's unclean lips, and Judah's exile. He is the prophet who didn't live out a spiritual metaphor, but lived out the true reality of sin and salvation on the cross and in his resurrection.

Dear church, it is not that God would want you to lack confidence before him. It's not that all of life is only the fear of plucking up and throwing down. There is great hope and great confidence in God's desire to plant and rebuild. But do you know how you get there?

Because of the work of Jesus, we can look at him, and repent. We can have our hearts turned by the work of the Holy Spirit and we can walk humbly with the Lord confident of our sinfulness but more confidence in his grace to forgive all who repent.

What should a reading of the prophets produce in you? I want to leave you with the word of the Lord from **Hosea 12:6**.