

## Day 168

### The Prophecy of Hosea Hosea 1.1 – 3.5

Hosea (Heb הוֹשֵׁעַ Hoshea' – Deliverer, Rescuer, from the same root as the name of Jesus and Joshua.) is one of the most passionate and the most impacting of the prophets. He appears at this time of continued unfaithfulness in Israel, when the calves of Dan and Bethel are doing a brisk business, and the Asherah pole is still plying her trade in Samaria. The Lord tells him to become a living parable of the people of Israel by taking a wife who is a prostitute, whom he knows will go off with other men and not stay with him.

The historical context for the prophecies of Hosea, whose father's name is given as Be'eri, is during the reigns of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and the Israelite King Jereboam II.

1.3 Hosea marries Gomer (Heb. גֹּמֵר from a root meaning to finish or end) and she has a child whom Hosea names Jezreel, after the valley where Jehu received the heads of the seventy sons of Ahab, and where he slew Jezebel and the relatives of Ahaziah of Judah. This naming is in itself a prophetic witness against Jereboam and the house of Jehu, who will be brought to a stop by the Lord, partly because of the Jezreel massacre. Israel will meet her match, then, in the Jezreel valley.

### Israel the Faithless Wife

1.6 A daughter is born to Gomer, whom Hosea names Lo-Ruchamah (Heb לֹא־רַחֲמָה ) which literally means, 'shown no compassion'. Her name has within it the divine attribute of *rachum*, motherly love and feeling, but here, this love will be denied. Through this little girl, the Lord is sending a message to Israel that she will not be shown mercy. However, Judah, who has conducted herself more Godly, will receive this favour.

1.9 A third child, a son, is named Lo-Ammi (Heb לֹא־עַמִּי) meaning, 'Not my people', a confirmation of the status of prodigal Israel before the Lord. Yet the Lord also gives hope for the future. The promise is that Israel will multiply, and one day will be united with Judah again, and they will be known again as the people of God. Their names will then be, instead of 'Not my People' and 'Not Shown Compassion', 'My People' and 'Beloved'.

*As I was writing these words, on the balcony of our holiday apartment, Villa Mont Fleuri high above the city of Nice, in June 2010, the most awesome rainbow formed against the background of terrible storm clouds, which carry the most devastating rains this part of France has seen for two centuries. Like Hosea's words of hope in the midst of shattering judgement, the bow of God laid down in the skies is always a sign of future promise in the midst of darkness, as the light shines on the clouds of despair.*

2.2ff. The words of Hosea, full of personal anguish, are also the words of the Lord, full of His own emotion, as he inveighs against Gomer's prostitution and faithlessness. Mixed up in this outburst is a specific criticism of the fertility gods, the Ba'alim, the ones who claim to be responsible for the flax and the wine and the oil; yet these things come from the Lord, the creator of all things (2.8).

Because of this unfaithfulness, the Lord will put a stop to Israel's prosperity, and ruin her vines and her fig trees (2.12)

### The Lord Will Woo Her Back

2.14ff But the Lord will not leave her desolate. He will lead into the desert, not to destroy her, but to woo her back. The desert is the place of encounter with God, as well as the place of need and want. In this context, the desert will not be a physical desert, but the desert of the nations, exile from the land. But His ultimate intention is to restore her prosperity, and turn the place of trouble (Heb עָכֹר *Achor*) into a door of hope (Heb. פֶּתַח תִּקְוָה *Petach Tiqvah*, now the name of a town in Israel.) Then Israel will be restored to the place she was in when the Lord brought her out of Egypt in the days of the Exodus.

2.16ff There is a play in words here as Hosea looks forward to the day when Israel will call the Lord 'my husband' (Heb אִישִׁי *ishi*) and not 'my master' (בַּעְלִי *Ba'ali*), the Lord wanting to remove the memory of the Ba'alim from Israel altogether through intimacy with Him.

Covenant will be renewed, and all of the qualities of God's character which sustains Israel – his covenant obligation in *chesed*, his dependability, righteousness and compassion, and Israel will know the Lord, as a wife knows her husband.

Then the fertility of the land will be restored, and the one called 'no people' and 'no compassion' will be called 'my people' and 'graced with compassion.'

3.1ff Hosea is told by the Lord to go and get his wife back, even though she is whoring, because she is a picture of Israel's wantonness. So Hosea pays whomever she is with in silver and grain to buy her presence, a terrible indignity for a husband. He tells her she must live with him, which will be a sign that after her whoring with other gods, Israel will one day return to the Lord for good.

### Day 169

#### Hosea – God's Frustration with Israel Hosea 4.1 – 9.17

4.1-6 The Lord has a strong complaint against Israel, for there is

אֵין-אֱמֶת וְאֵין-חֶסֶד וְאֵין-דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים בְּאֶרֶץ (read right to left)

*Eyn-emet ve-eyn chesed ve-eyn da'at Elohim ba'aretz*

No truth and no grace<sup>1</sup> and no knowing God in the land.

The qualities which most reflect God's heart and nature in His relationship with His people are completely absent from Israel's national life. In particular, knowing God – the intimate relationship between a husband and wife is described in these terms – is missing, there is no experience of the Lord's closeness and intimacy. Instead, the land is full of violence and vileness, in which 'they break all bounds' (4.2), which is having an effect on

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<sup>1</sup> *Chesed* – the covenant obligation of God is the Hebrew translation for the Greek word χάρις in NT

the creation itself – this would be a telling comment on the state of modern man operating apart from God also.

There is therefore no justice, because there is no straight path, and people stumble around blindly – thus the end will be destruction.

4.6- 9 Israel's priests are not the priests of God – the Levites. They left for Judah when Jereboam set up the golden calves at Dan and Bethel, and Jereboam appointed his own false priesthood, which the Lord has rejected.

4.10-19 The Lord highlights the practices associated with fertility worship to Ba'al and Asherah – feasting, shrine prostitution, bowing down to wooden images, sacrifices on the high places and in groves of trees. He is against all of these, and will bring them to ruin who practice them.

The Lord also warns Judah to stay away from the sin of Israel (4.15) , telling her not to go to the places such as Gilgal and Bethel (called here *Bet Aven* – Heb **בֵּית אָוֶן** , House of sin or wickedness) because of the impending destruction coming upon the northern kingdom.

5.1-15 The Lord identifies in Israel a 'spirit of prostitution' (Heb **רוּחַ זְנוּנִים** *ruach zenunim*) in their unfaithfulness, and pronounces his vengeance over them. God even describes Himself as a moth and as a rot to Israel (5.12) and even though they turn to Assyria for help, they will be of no comfort to them.

In fact, the Lord gives notice of their being transported away, which is coming in the future when they fall into the hands of Assyria. (5.14.)

6.1-3 Hosea envisages at the beginning of chapter 6 Israel's words of repentance, after such a terrible judgement. They will no doubt come and cry for healing and restoration, knowing the Lord is merciful, even 'pressing on to know Him', to build relationship with Him (6.3) They know His touch is like refreshing rain on dry land.

6.4-11 However, the words of the Lord in response to such a turning would be those of a frustrated and exasperated father – 'What will I do with you, Ephraim? Your *chesed* , your obligation to your promises is as dependable as the morning mist.' Because of that fickleness, the Lord has had to use harsh prophetic words.

For what the Lord is looking for above all is *chesed* – the fulfilment of the obligation to covenant – not religious actions done to appease Him. Their unfaithfulness is the real issue, they have broken the covenant, just as Adam did at the beginning.

Judah is also warned of a payback coming, for they will no doubt hear these words as well. (6.11)

7.1 – 7 Thus, whenever the Lord tries to bring restoration and healing to Israel, it shows up even more the sinful ways they practice. The whole state, from the King down, is involved in lewd and alcohol-fuelled dissipation, with no attempt to connect to God in loving relationship.

7.8-16 Hosea also takes Israel to task for her constant scouting around for foreign allies, looking to ingratiate herself with the big powers, Egypt and Assyria, to gain protection.

But in doing this, they are turning their backs on the one who can rescue them. (7.13)  
They carry on their fertility festivals (7.14) but they do not come to the Highest one (Heb על *Al*, topmost), they do not look to the one who is above all others claiming to be gods.

Hosea describes Israel as ‘an untrue bow’ (Heb קֶשֶׁת רְמִיָּה *Qeshet remiyyah*, a bow that is bent or out of line.) Their plans will rebound on them, and they will be laughed out of court by their so-called friends in Egypt.

### **Judgement against the Calf-gods**

8.1-14 God’s impending judgement over Israel is pictured as an eagle waiting to strike (8.1) because of the broken covenant and *Torah* rule of life which God has given them. In particular, Hosea inveighs against the calf-idols, reminiscent of the idols of Aaron when Moses was on Mount Sinai and says they will be destroyed for the transient things they are. In their worship of these things, Israel says she is worshipping God, but God says they have nothing to do with Him in their king-making or their worship.

‘They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind’ says Hosea (8.7) – all this is destined for destruction. All their religious actions are futile, because they have acted without the Lord – Judah also is implicated in this disobedience. (8.14)

### **The Judgement to Come**

9.1-17 The judgement of the Lord will strike at the elements of fertility worship which are most needed for their ceremonies. Since the Ba’alim are the gods of grain and wine, grain and wine will fail, there will be no supplies to use in their worship.

The Lord reminds them of how it was when He first loved Israel, ‘like finding grapes in the desert’, but the rot set in at Ba’al-Peor, when Israel was led into sin with the Canaanite women; since that time, there has been trouble for Israel, as they are constantly compromised with the fertility cults of their neighbours.

The chapter ends with a terrible cry of anger from the prophet – a prayer for miscarriages and dried-up breasts without milk, striking at the heart of family life in Israel. ‘Because they have disobeyed, they will wander among the nations.’ (9.17)

It is perhaps significant that while Judah later returned from exile to Jerusalem, the northern tribes were mostly scattered in their exile, never to return home. Their idolatry provokes a very telling response from the Lord, and they will not return to enjoy the land in the future.

### **Day 170**

#### **Hosea concluded; the end of Amaziah, (c767BC), the Reign of Uzziah, Kings of Judah**

Hosea 10.1- 14.9; 2 Kings 14.17 (mirrored in 2 Chron. 25.25); 2 Chron. 25.26-28 (mirrored in 2 Kings 14.18-20); 2 Kings 14.21; 15.1,2;; 2 Chron.26.1 – 15 (mirrored in 2 Kings 14.22 and 15.3)

## Captivity is Coming for Israel

10.1-15 Hosea likens Israel to a vine, a picture which Isaiah later will also use in Isa. 5, a vine which has gone bad, producing poisonous fruit of idolatry and unfaithfulness, which will be removed and the ground replaced with weeds, thorns and thistles over the broken altars of Dan and Bethel, (here called again *Beth-Aven*, House of Wickedness.)

The idol will be carried into exile by the King of Assyria (v.10.6) and the king and his court will 'float away like a twig on the waters' (10.7 NIV)

This is the time, Hosea says, to break up the fallow ground of hard hearts, to sow the right fruit, and to harvest *chesed*, the grace-obligation of covenant (10.12) instead of the wickedness which has been planted, producing evil and deception. The outcome of this treachery will be tragedy for Israel, as she is broken by war and battle.

## The Broken-Hearted Father

11.1-11 There is a deep pathos in the words of Hosea in chapter 11; here is the Father who has nurtured a child, rescued them from danger, yet the child has gone off with false lovers. 'It was I who taught Ephraim (Israel) to walk' says the Lord (11.3), showing them love (Heb אהבה *Ahavah*, parental or married love) and freeing them from slavery.

The outcome of this behaviour will be more slavery, though this time not in Egypt, but in Assyria. Even if they call to the Most High (Heb אל *Al*, Highest) they will not be heard.

Yet there is anguish in the Father's words – 'How can I give you up to this suffering?' and a turning away from the intention just announced. Then there is a change of mind, a repentance in God from his anger – He has the right to change His plans, He says in 11.9, and therefore He will not come in anger.

He sees that there is a possibility that they will yet love Him, and that they will return from their exile and be established.

11.12 – 13.3 Even though there is a change of heart in God at this point, there is still an accounting to be made. Forgiveness cannot be considered until the matters to be forgiven are rehearsed, pardon cannot be made unless the charges are known.

Israel is deceitful, unruly, traffics and politics with foreign powers. The Lord looks back to the story of Jacob here, to that grasper, that deceiver whom He met at Peniel in Genesis 32.24ff, and calls him to return to the Lord, to keep to *chesed* obligation and *mishpat* right-wising.(12.6)

There is dishonest dealing going on, in contravention of the *Torah* rule-guide to life which the Lord has provided, leading to unrighteous gain.

But the Lord says He will bring them back to a tented existence (12.9), as at the feast of Tabernacles, and speak to them through His intermediaries, the prophets, just as He did with Moses .

The Lord speaks of something dying in Israel when they turned from Him to Ba'al (13.1) as they give themselves to idols and even a suggestion of human sacrifice (10.2); because of this, they will be wiped away and disappear as a people.

## God's Jealousy

13.4 – 16 The Lord's anguish breaks out again as He claims Israel's sole loyalty, since He has rescued them as a nation. Now that they are provided for, they have forgotten Him, and thus He will not allow any other to have them, rather destroying them than allow their unfaithfulness to go unpunished.

There is a throwing back at them also their wanting a King, whom Hosea calls 'a son without wisdom' (Heb הוּא-בֶן לֹא חָכָם *Hu bhen lo-chakham*, lit. He son not wise) in 13.13. But while the King is useless in terms of delivering on his promises to rescue, the Lord can rescue even from death itself.

Hosea speaks words here so deeply hopeful, that even though destruction and death await Israel, the Lord can overcome even the grave itself, and He cries,

מִיַּד שְׁאוֹל אֶפְדֶּם מִמּוֹת אֲנֹכִי דְבַרְיֶךָ מוֹת אֲהִי קִטְבְּךָ שְׁאוֹל

*Mi-yad She'ol 'ephdem, mi-mavet eg'alem; Ehi debharekha mavet, ehi qatavkha She'ol?*

From hand of Sheol I deliver, from death I redeem; Where your plagues, death? Where your destruction Sheol

Even death cannot be the final destiny of people loved by God.

Yet, even though God will redeem, the people of Israel and Samaria must still bear the consequences of their forsaking of the Lord. Terrible suffering is hanging over them.

## Forgiveness Offered

14.1-9 Even now, though, Hosea tells Israel of possible salvation, not in uncertain pacts with Assyria, but through wholehearted repentance and turning away from sin and idolatry.

The prophecy of Hosea ends with a picture of beauty and refreshment available to Israel from the Lord, whose healing is available to them. The fruitfulness of the olive, the grainfield and the vine can be theirs once again, if they leave the idols. The wise will hear this, but for the rebels it will be their downfall.

## Amaziah of Judah Assassinated

Turning from Israel to Judah, we return to Amaziah, who has been worshipping the Edomite gods captured at Seir. Because of this, a coup breaks out against him, causing him to go into exile in Lachish. However, he is pursued and killed there, being returned to Jerusalem for burial.

## Accession of Uzziah in Judah

2 Kgs 14.21, 15.1,2, 2 Chron.26.1-3

Sixteen year old Uzziah (also called Azariah) is now made king of Judah; he is the son of Amaziah and his wife Jecoliah. He is Godly, though he still allows the unauthorized high places to remain as places of folk-worship to the Lord. He rebuilds the port of Eilat on the

Gulf of Aqaba in the south, and also suppresses the Philistines who have remained a thorn in the flesh on his western borders. Because of this, the Ammonites to the east voluntarily submit, and his reputation as a strong king is carried as far as Egypt.

He has a large, well-ordered army of over three hundred thousand trained men, well equipped by the King's treasury.

## **Day 171**

### **The Prophecy of Amos Amos 1.1 – 4.13**

Amos (Heb. אַמּוֹס ) is not part of the Judean or Israelite establishment. He demonstrates how God can take ordinary people and speak through them powerfully. Amos is a herdsman or shepherd, who comes from Tekoa near Bethlehem in Judah, though the main thrust of his message is towards northern Israel.

Amos' words do not refer much to the idolatry of Israel, but more to the shallowness of their religion; He is looking for a holy heart-attitude towards God more than a right practice.

The book opens with eight messages against different nations and people-groups around the region. They take the form 'For three sins of ... and for four, I will not hold back my anger.' This format is a poetic way of saying that there are more than a few reasons for the judgement coming on the nations.

Amos then goes on to share a number of images which the Lord shows him and speaks to him from. At the end of the book, he looks to a time of restitution of the life of God in the nations.

1.1 Amos is set in context of the reigns of Jereboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah. The time is set as two years before the earthquake, although there is no other reference to this event in Scripture.

#### **1.2 God Speaks from Zion**

In setting out on his prophetic words to the nations, Amos makes clear where the dwelling-place of the Lord is located – the Lord speaks from Zion, from the Temple, not from any other high place or idol temple. He has the ability to bring both blessing and hardship to the peoples of the earth.

#### **1.3-5 Word Against the Syrians**

Amos speaks judgement against Syria and her hero-king Hazael based at Damascus for their occupation of Gilead, the lands east of the Jordan which had been the settlements of Israel until their action. They will be taken into exile for their sins.

#### **1.6 – 8 Word Against the Philistines**

The ancient inhabitants of the south-west of Judah along the coast are an old enemy to Israel, with their base in the Gaza region. Because they have enslaved and trafficked people in the areas of the southern tribes of Israel, and sold them on to Edom, the south-

eastern neighbours, their cities and kings of Ashdod, Ekron and Ashkelon will be destroyed.

### **1.9-10 Word Against Tyre**

Like the Philistines, Tyre has been trafficking people to the Edomites, and will be destroyed for it.

### **1.11-12 Word Against the Edomites**

The Edomites themselves are now addressed and judged for their lack of compassion to a people who were descended from the same roots in Abraham, since Edom is the other name for Esau, brother of Jacob-Israel. Because of their lack of mercy toward Israel, they will be put to the fire.

### **1.13-15 Word Against the Ammonites**

The Ammonites to the east of Israel and Judah are now the object of Amos' words, and they will be taken into exile because of their abhorrent treatment of the eastern Israelites in Gilead across the Jordan.

### **2.1-3 Word Against the Moabites**

Addressing the people to the south and east of the Dead Sea, Amos speaks to Moab's sin against her neighbour Edom, because they treated the dead Edomite king with dishonour by burning his bones to obliteration. Such barbarity will be recompensed with loss and destruction through fire and war.

### **2.4-5 Word Against Judah**

Amos now singles out his homeland for judgement, because of their rejection of God's rule for life, the *Torah* and because of their pursuit of false gods. For this, destruction is also coming upon them; Amos does not leave out his own people, but sees them as just as sinful as the nations around them.

### **2.6-16 Word Against Israel**

Amos now comes to the main target of his prophetic words, the northern kingdom of Israel under her ruler Jereboam II. He weighs in against their dishonesty and corruption, oppressing the poor.

He highlights also the shrine prostitution and the pitiable state of the women who serve there, using in their revelries the goods they took as deposit from the poor against loans.

The Lord reminds them of His deliverance of Israel from Egypt and their enemies, and their heritage of men of God, including the Nazirites who took a vow of abstinence. But Israel has scorned them, and forced them to drink alcohol.

Because of this, God will see to it that they consumed in war, with no escape.

### 3.1- 10 **God Speaks Through the Prophets**

Amos makes clear that the word spoken is against the whole family of Israel, all those who came out of Egypt, including Judah. This was His chosen jewel, His people, but now they have given the Lord good reason to take action against them.

He is continuing to make His will known through the prophetic voices who still listen to His voice, even though that will may be fierce as a lion. When God speaks, the prophet cannot refuse to prophesy, even when it is harsh words that come.

The prophet calls the Philistines and the Egyptians as witnesses against Israel of her corrupt and detestable ways, to come and see a people who are looting, but not in enemy territories, rather among their own townships.

#### 3.11-15 **Retribution is Coming to Israel**

There is a wave of attack coming against the region which will be irresistible, although a shred of hope is given that there may be a tiny remnant left after the deluge of suffering to come. The outcome of this overwhelming force will be the destruction of the false calf idols and the homes of the wealthy corrupt, and all this from the Lord's hand.

#### 4.1-11 **Israel Has Had Chances to Change**

Amos' words pinpoint the sin of the women of northern Israel, the 'cows of Bashan' who drive their husbands to feed their hunger for luxury and ease. These will go into exile, being herded like cattle or caught like fish on hooks, leaving through the ruins of the protective walls which have been torn down

Amos taunts Israel in her sinful worship – 'Go on then, sin even more, since this is what you enjoy! Follow your invented ways of worship, using yeast in bread sacrificed when the Lord has commanded bread without yeast, and gather your income from your religious acts...'

Even though the Lord has sent drought and famine, blight, mildew and plagues, and even though, as in Joel's prophecy, locusts have eaten the harvests, and Israel's armies have been heavily defeated in battle, yet Israel has not cried for deliverance to her Lord, to her God – 'you still have not turned to me...'

#### 4.12-13 **'Prepare to Meet Your God'**

Because of all this stubbornness of Israel, God will reveal Himself in one awesome encounter with His people – they will know at last the one who created all things, the Lord Almighty (Heb יהוה אלהי-צבאות *Adonai (YHWH) Elohey Tzebha'ot* – literally, the Lord, the God of Armies) and the encounter will be decisive and devastating, putting an end to their idolatry and corruption.

## Day 172

### Amos' Pictures from the Lord

Amos 5.1 – 7.9; 8.1 – 9.15

#### 5.1 – 15 A Lament over Israel

Amos now takes up a lament over the people of Israel, comparing her to a deflowered virgin, a woman whom no one wants any more. There is a threat of terrible defeat coming, which will decimate her forces militarily.

But the Lord still calls Israel to seek Him and live (Heb דַּרְשׁוּנִי וְחִי *Dirshuni ve-chayu* – the verb *darash* means to make a bee-line for, to aim for.) There is still a place in the Lord's heart and plan for them, if they will stop going to their idol-shrines – and here Be'er-Shebha is included, in the southern desert – the shrines which are about to be destroyed.

The Lord then upbraids His people for their oppression of the poor and their corruption of the law, while living a luxurious lifestyle. The Lord calls them to love the good, to hate evil and maintain *mishpat*, the restoration of God's order in their courts.

5.16-20 A reckoning is coming for their sins, a day of recompense, which other prophets have already referred to, the Day of the Lord, the *Yom Adonai (YHWH)* (Heb. יוֹם יְהוָה ) Amos asks why they are looking forward to this Day, because for them it will be tragic, it will be darkness, not light.

5.21-26 The Lord despises empty religion which is conducted against a background of warped values and standards. Instead of all their sacrifices and songs, the Lord is looking for right action, calling out; (5.24)

וַיִּגַּל כַּמַּיִם מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה כְּנַחַל אֵיתָן

*Ve-yiggal ka-mayim mishpat, u-tzedakah ke-nachal eytan*

Let roll as waters justice and righteousness as a river continuous

The Lord reminds Israel of her time with Him in the desert, and the relationship built up between them. But now they have exalted the idols instead, which they have made for themselves.

5.27 Because of this, captivity is coming in a distant place.

#### 6.1-14 A Warning to the Leading Citizens

Amos warns that although the leaders of Israel and Judah feel secure and complacent, they are no better than the surrounding pagan nations, relaxing in their hedonism, but with no regret for their betrayal of the nation's story with God.

As a result of this treachery, this 'turning of justice into poison and righteous outcomes into bitterness' (6.12) the Lord will bring a nation against them which will deal wholesale with their pride and arrogance, leaving no place to hide.

**7.1-3 Vision of Locusts** The Lord now gives Amos a series of pictures, speaking through them. The first is reminiscent of Joel's prophetic word, since Amos sees a swarm of locusts forming, whose destruction is so great that Amos cries out for God's pity on Israel, since they cannot survive it. At this point, the Lord says He will not carry out this vision.

**7.4-6 Vision of Fire** The next picture is of a wild fire, spreading through the land, so great it dried up the sea and consumed the land. Again, Amos cries out for Israel to be spared, and God relents from this step.

**7.7-9 Vision of a Plumb-line** Now Amos sees the Lord standing by a well-built wall with a plumb-line in his hand, a piece of weighted string, which indicates how straight something is built. The Lord is now testing to see whether Israel is true-built, but is ready to pull them down because of King Jereboam's sin.

**8.1-3 Vision of Ripe Fruit** The picture is now of a bowl of ripe fruit, through which the Lord is saying that the time for judgement on Israel is now ripe, and inescapable. Their empty religion will be silenced.

#### **8.4 – 14 Judgement Coming for Corrupt Ways**

All the time they are going through the motions of their warped religious practices, the people have an eye to making more money. They can't wait for the service to finish so they can get back to robbing the poor with shady deals.

Because of this the Lord will bring judgement on their religion, and there will be, not a famine of food, but a famine of hearing God speak (8.11) , despite searching for Him, and those who swear by the gods of Samaria, Dan and Be'ersheba will be destroyed for their faithlessness.

#### **9.1-10 The Devastation of God's Judgement**

The inescapability of God's pursuit of sin is rammed home with this terrible judgement on Israel – there will be absolutely nowhere to run from this all-engulfing tide of retribution.

To the Lord, His people are no different to the other nations around them, which He brought from different places, and all are subject to His judgement. Yet there is a promise of some survival for Israel even through the storm of judgement. This is to be a devastating shaking-up, to bring them to their senses.

#### **9.11-15 God will Restore**

Amos ends his prophetic words with a sign of hope, that on the coming day of the Lord, He will restore David's 'fallen tent' – the place of worship of the Lord in a united Kingdom, so that the promise of blessing through them to all the nations can be fulfilled.

Then, there will be a return to the land, and a revival of the fruitfulness of former times, when they will never again be uprooted. In spite of the storm of God's retribution, there will come a *right-wising* through God's promise to His people.

## Day 173

### Amos Rejected in Israel

Amos 7.10 – 17

Amos 7.10-17. The priest of Jereboam's calf-idol shrine at Bethel reports to King Jereboam this attack from Amos on his state religion. He is stirring up turmoil in the land, and saying the king will be killed and the people exiled (which is not specifically what Amos has been saying, but what Amaziah the priest reports.)

Amaziah confronts Amos and calls him a visionary (Heb. **חֹזֶה** *Chozeh* from a verb meaning to see, gaze upon). He tells him to get back to Judah and leave the king's sanctuary (Heb **מִקְדָּשׁ-מֶלֶךְ** *miqdash-melekh* , literally 'the holy place of the king') alone.

Amos responds that he is not a professional or trained prophet, but a humble shepherd and orchardsman, but the Lord inspired him with the prophetic word and sent him.

Amos responds to Amaziah with a withering word of coming war and its horrible consequences of desperate loss and degradation, which will fatally affect Amaziah's family.

*There is a serious comment to be made from this encounter between Amos and Amaziah about the compromise the people of God make when they become the property of a ruler's religious system. Amaziah calls the idol shrine at Bethel 'the King's sanctuary', and this places the king at the centre of national worship. It also means that prophetic correction and admonition are impossible, because of fear of retribution.*

*Looking back on recent history, to the present day, it has to be acknowledged that a great deal of oppression and subversion of the church of Jesus Christ has come through its unfortunate marriage with the state. When a church is tied to the apron-strings of government, it becomes 'the King's sanctuary' and fails to meet its clear prophetic calling to challenge the status quo of sinful human government.*

*It has also, like Amaziah, used the state's backing to persecute and exclude those who disagree with its theology, resulting in the terrible periods of state-sponsored heresy-hunting of the mediaeval period.*

### **The Death of Jereboam II of Israel , (753BC) and Uncertain Succession**

2 Kgs 14.28 – 29; 15.8 – 18

With the death of Jereboam of Israel, a turbulent train of events is set in motion. Jereboam's son Zechariah succeeds him as king, but reigns only six months, before he is publicly assassinated by Shallum Ben-Jabesh, fulfilling the words of the prophet to Jehu that his family would only be on the throne for four generations.

However, Shallum's reign lasts even less time, and he is dispatched violently by Menachem Ben-Gadi of Tirzah, who grabs the throne and rules in his place in 752BC.

Menachem demonstrates the kind of monarch he intends to be by attacking the Israelite town of Tiphseh, which refuses to acknowledge his kingship and keeps its gates shut to him. He breaks in, sacks the city, and with particular cruelty, disembowels all the

pregnant women in the town. Such are the depths to which power takes sinful men who have no fear of God.

Unsurprisingly, he continues the state religion of Jereboam throughout his reign.

### **Death of Uzziah in Judah.** 2 Chron. 26.16- 21

Meanwhile, in Judah, King Uzziah, whose reign has been noted as one of faithfulness so far to the Lord and His ways, in 1 Kings 15.1-2, perhaps encouraged by the King's grip on the religion of neighbouring Israel, takes it into his head to go into the Temple and burn incense to the Lord. He is pursued by Azariah and eighty other priests, who are called 'sons of strength' (Heb בְּנֵי-חַיִל *Beney-Chayil*), or courageous – they are not afraid to resist the King in his presumption. (Compare these with Amariah priest of Israel and his attack on Amos).

The priests warn Uzziah to leave the Temple, because he has been unfaithful to God. He rebukes them angrily, but while he is doing so, lesions break out on the skin of his forehead, and he gets out quickly from the Lord's presence. Because of this foolish political action, Uzziah is treated as a leper and separated from his people and from the Temple until his death. His place is taken therefore by his son, Jotham, as regent.

### **Day 174**

#### **Opening The Prophecy of Isaiah**

Isaiah 1.1 – 9; 5.1-7; 1.10- 26; 2.6-18; 3.8- 4.1; 32.9-11; 5.8 – 23

1.1 Isaiah, from the commencement of his prophecy, is placed clearly in the context of speaking mainly to the kingdom of Judah. While many scholars suggest that the book of Isaiah is an amalgamation of the work of two prophets, there is a description here of a concrete character and time. This Isaiah is the son of Amoz, and has a long ministry spanning the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah.

He seems to have good access to the royal ear, and this suggests that he may well be a court prophet, one received and listened to. This is particularly the case when we come to the reign of Hezekiah, when Isaiah is instrumental in the healing of the King in Isa.38.

Isaiah addresses the sinfulness of Judah and calls them back to the covenant; he in particular speaks to a time coming of deliverance and restoration for God's people, though this will be via a period of exile. Isaiah more than any of the prophets points to a coming Rescuer, an anointed One who will change everything. This is why Isaiah's prophecy is the one Jesus reads from at the introduction to His ministry in Luke 4, and also why the Ethiopian eunuch is shown the good news from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah's prophecy.

#### **1.2 – 9 Judah is in Sin**

As with Hosea's appeal to Israel, there is the cry here of an exasperated Father through Isaiah's words to Judah. His children have rebelled and rejected Him, they have forsaken His love and seem to be addicted to their pain which results from going their own way. They are sick and wounded, attacked and isolated.

Mention is made for the first time in the book of the Lord's plan to have survivors (Heb **סָרִיד** *Sarid* from root meaning to survive, be left) of whatever is coming upon Judah, so that she will not be completely wiped out. This concept of a *remnant* is one which will become more familiar through the pages of Isaiah.

### **5.1 – 7 The Parable of the Vineyard**

Hosea (9.10) has previously described Israel as grapes on a vine, and here Isaiah carries the theme in a parable of God's people, His beloved, as a vine planted in good ground and cared for, but which yielded only bad grapes. The Lord asks Judah to say what more He could have done for them to care for them, but now the vineyard will be uprooted and destroyed, both Israel and Judah being part of this judgement.

### **1.10 – 17 Empty Religion Useless**

As with Amos to Israel in Amos 5.21-26, Isaiah takes issue with Judah over their religious, heartless formalism; their sacrifices and prayers are meaningless against a background of oppression of the poor and widowed. God will not listen to them, and urges them to 'pursue justice' (Heb **דִּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט** *dirshu mishpat*) and rebuke all oppression.

### **1.21-26 Corruption is Rife**

Isaiah likens Jerusalem to a prostitute who is selling herself for gain; everyone is living for what they can get, ignoring the dispossessed. The Lord's aim is not to wipe everything out, but to restore it to what once was, to purge the dross, like refining previous metal and bring justice back so that once again Jerusalem can be called the City of Righteousness and Faithfulness, of straight-dealing and dependability.

### **2.6-18 Against Judah's Idolatry and Pride**

Judah has fallen into the same pattern as Israel; the surrounding nations have infiltrated their faith, with superstition and divination, and idols made of silver and gold. For this there will be retribution.

Isaiah makes reference here to a coming day, a day of violent shaking which will reduce the proud rich to nothing, removing the idols, but making the Lord's name to be exalted.

### **3.8-15 Rich, Chaotic and Unjust...**

In their rise to prosperity, Judah is brazen with its sin – the youth oppress, strident women take power to themselves, and the leadership is taking them off God's pathway. The Lord's judgement is that this has been the leaders' and elders' failure, in their corruption and injustice.

### **2.16 – 4.1, 32.9-11 Well-Off Women Reprimanded**

It seems that a sign of the decadence that Judah has fallen into is portrayed in the display of wealth put on by the womenfolk; they love to look good, outwardly, but they will be stripped of all their jingles and bangles. They will be reduced to mourning and weeping,

because of their complacency and their sense of false security in their possessions and jewels.

### **5.8 – 23 Land-grabbing, Binge-Drinking, Arrogance, Relativism and Corruption.**

Isaiah has swingeing words to speak against particular issues in Judah's lifestyle.

- big landowners hoard land to themselves; they will end up with nothing
- Binge drinking is a big diversion on the nation's attentions; it will end up in starvation and death.
- The arrogant will be brought low, but God will be seen as just and right.
- There are those who make black appear white and call evil good, clever people who try and rewrite morality. They are warned of dire outcomes.
- The guilty are let off if they bribe the judge, and the innocent are therefore treated unjustly.

*It is amazing how many of these sins are applicable to modern British society today, causing the same social ills as to Judah in Isaiah's time; the words of Ecclesiastes seem to ring in our ears – what has been will be again, there is nothing new under the sun.*