

Speaking Truth to Power: Amos and Hosea

General Introduction to Old Testament Prophecy First Presbyterian Church LaGrange, Georgia Winter Quarter

What Manner of Man Is the Prophet?

Abraham Heschel: The Prophets

A. Introduction

- a. A biblical prophet is a person who is selected by, and speaks as a formal representative of God, and the intention of the message is always to effect a social change to conform to God's desired standards initially specified in the Torah dictated to Moses.
- b. A list of Old Testament Prophets would include those who wrote: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi plus several earlier prophets who did not write their oracles: Nathan, Elijah, Elisha and others.

B. Hyper-sensitivity to wrong

- a. The Old Testament prophets reacted hysterically to what we might consider commonplace wrongs.
- b. To the prophets a minor injustice assumes cosmic proportions.
- c. Prophets feel deeply in a manner that mirrors commonplace indifference to wrong.
- d. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony of the plundered poor. God rages in the prophet's words.

C. The Importance of Trivialities

- a. Unlike the pagan gods, the God of the Old Testament prophets reflects over the plight of humans rather than contemplate eternal ideas
- b. The prophet is intent on making people feel more responsibility for their worlds.
- c. The prophet is impatient with excuses or self-absorption

D. The Highest Good

- a. Ancient society valued wisdom, wealth, and might—all of which was ludicrous and idolatrous to the prophets.

E. An Iconoclast

- a. The Prophet knew that religion could distort what the Lord really wanted from people. The Prophets were unafraid to criticize such conventional religion.
- b. This, of course, infuriated people

F. The Message of Hope

- a. Almost every prophet begins with a message of criticism and doom and ends with a message of hope.

G. Prophets are sweeping in their judgments—all are responsible

- a. This pits prophets against all of the pretensions of power and against all of the statements of false prophets who insist that everything is alright.
- b. It is, consequently, lonely to be a prophet. The prophetic vocation is nothing to brag about.

H. Prophets speak for God

- a. Prophets ultimately reveal not simply God's judgment on the activities of God's people, but more importantly, God's feelings about what is happening.
- b. Prophets are in touch with the fact that God is both involved with his people and has intense feelings about what goes on in society.

From Walter Brueggemann's, Prophetic Imagination

1. Prophets are not just critics of their culture. They are calling their culture back to the tradition that God attempted to establish. In many ways, prophets are trying to recover the spirit of the Exodus under Moses.
2. The prophet evokes a consciousness that is an alternative to what has become the dominant culture.
3. The social crisis is always—at bottom—a religious crisis. At its heart prophetic criticism is criticism of what has become the functional religion of the people. Basically, prophets are identifying the false gods of their society.
4. The prophet energizes people and communities by also holding up the promise of a better time in the future which is brought about by God.
5. The prophet does more than complain. He demonstrates that the dominant culture and its leaders are fraudulent and that their claims to authority are false.

Carolyn Sharp: Old Testament Prophets for Today

Who is the Old Testament Prophet?

- A. In the Hebrew scriptures we see the prophet as wild man (Elijah) as sage court advisor (Nathan), as frenzied ecstatic (Saul) and as letter-writing political prisoner (Jeremiah), as mute seer of disturbing visions (Ezekiel) and as singer of luminous hymns to God's holiness (Isaiah); as compassionate intercessor (Moses) and as unrelenting mediator of divine judgment (most of the prophets).

- a. Through visions and dreams, prophets see God's purposes—sometimes for Israel or Judah, sometimes for the whole earth.
 - b. Prophets name the people's sins and predict God's grave punishment through the instrumentality of other nations if the people do not turn from their rebellious ways back to obedience to God.
 - c. Some prophets draw on their own lives as material for theological reflection. They enact God's word in a kind of "street theater" for dramatic effect with their audiences. We see this in Hosea's marriage to a prostitute.
- B. Who is the prophet today?**
- a. Prophets are mediators of God's holiness in the world. Prophets in all times position themselves in the space between sacred and profane, living a threshold life and they invite us into that life. Prophets plead for us to share with the Creator the wondrous and alarming purposes of God
 - b. Prophets are idealists. They do not call us to mediocre efforts and half-serious attempts. The prophetic vision is God's gift to our confused and struggling world. Their's is a passionate call for us to offer ourselves fully to God's service.
 - c. The prophets are our companions. Like true friends, they are honest with us if we're hurting