

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Part 5: Prophets

Questions for Personal Study

- Review the Story. What are the major points so far?
- Do you feel like you could tell the Story of the Old Testament to this point?
- How have you seen Jesus in the Story?
- Read the book of Hosea a few times this week. What do you notice?
- Why does Hosea marry a prostitute? What is God trying to communicate?
- What is God's relationship like with Israel when Israel is in rebellion?
- What does Hosea say God is going to do b/c of Israel's sin?

Questions for Study in Community

- Why does God bring judgment on Israel? What is her failure?
- How is Israel's failure similar to the church's failure today?
- How are you as an MC living in the story of God's people & God's mission?
- What role does Jesus play in making the church the new Israel?
- How does the gospel empower us to be a people on display for God?

Questions for Staying on Mission

- When Israel fails the mission, what does God do? Why?
- How are you failing in the mission?
- How does Jesus fulfill the mission in a way you could never do?
- How does his accomplishment of the mission empower us today?

For Further Reading and Learning

The God of the Bible is a strange God - not the kind of God we can manage, manipulate, accommodate, or domesticate to our familiar experience. We cannot find this God by looking within ourselves. His Word is not the same as our inner voice. He cannot be pared down to our size, measured by our speculations, experiences, or felt needs. Rather, he stands over against us, telling us how things actually are. When God actually confronts us, our speculations are exposed as idols, our experience judged as little more than a projection of ourselves, and our felt needs give way to more pressing needs that we did not even realize that we had. God confronts us, disorients us, and pulls us outside our comfort zones." Michael Horton

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Understanding The Story

Over the last few weeks, we've been tracing the Storyline of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. It is truly a remarkable and surprising Story, and our goal has been to "rediscover" it - to be surprised by it again - so that we might repent and leave our lesser stories and find life in God's Story.

The surprise of the Story is well summarized by author and playwright Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957): "So that is the outline of the official story—the tale of the time when God was the under-dog and got beaten, when He submitted to the conditions He had laid down and became a man like the men He had made, and the men He had made broke Him and killed Him. This is the dogma we find so dull—this terrifying drama of which God is the victim and hero. If this is dull, then what, in Heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting? The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore—on the contrary; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him 'meek and mild,' and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies." Brace yourself as we rediscover and re-enter this scandalous story!

Reviewing the Story

We've tracked with this Story from the very beginning, when a good and gracious God created a universe that displayed his Greatness, and then created a people with whom he could share the overflow of his gracious heart. Adam and Eve, God's first people, were blessed by God and given the glorious task of creating a kingdom that magnified and celebrated God's glory. It was a beautiful beginning, but humanity wanted that beauty for themselves. We watched as Adam and Eve began a rebellion, and willfully plunged the human race into misery. The misery spread like cancer through each generation, corrupting the thoughts and hearts of each individual, and creating a culture as rancid and putrid as the hearts of the people. God's story seems derailed.

But God was not surprised, and he did not give up on his rebellious creation. He began to pursue them like a scorned lover, fully intent on winning his bride's affections again. He called Abraham, and from this one man began to create a new people. He gave this people, called Israel, his Law, teaching them how to live before him and how they might become a blessing to the whole earth. God, in fact, came to dwell with this people, and positioned them in the center of the known world that they might represent Him and draw the surrounding nations.

But this was not to be, because the cancer of sin continued to eat away the hearts of his people from the inside out. Israel, God's chosen and blessed people, saw themselves as privileged and entitled to God's blessing, and they presumed upon his grace. So he removed his blessing, and the great nation rapidly succumbed to the cancer of sin.

The Prophets

We pick the story up this week in the midst of this slide toward total rebellion against God - again. Israel's kings, rather than mediating between God and his people and keeping his people faithful to Him in grateful worship and missional obedience, lead the charge toward idolatry, unrighteousness, and using the nations for Israel's own gain! The nation does almost the *exact opposite* of what God created them to do. God's response is to send prophets.

Prophets are in many ways the primary Story Tellers. Their work is to remind the people of the Story God is telling, what he is up to in rescuing and working with Israel, and how they can be faithful to Him. The prophets call people to be faithful to God, to trust his heart, and to live for his purposes. Prophets don't call people to try harder to obey; they aren't trying to guilt Israel into doing something different. Rather, they call Israel primarily to remember God's work and repent or return to Him so he can use them again. The prophets focus on God, and remind Israel to look back at God's faithfulness, his rescue, his gifts, and respond in thankful obedience.

The Charge

The main charge that the prophets bring against Israel is "covenantal unfaithfulness." The prophets - each in his own way - focus on how Israel has failed to cling to God in faithfulness. Some of the prophets focus on the injustice happening within Israel as the people fail to walk in obedience to the Law. Others focus on Israel's formality in worship, underneath which is a lack true desire to honor and worship God. Still others focus on Israel's idolatry, both in worship-

ping false gods (called the baals) and in worshipping God falsely (as in trusting themselves or other nations for protection and provision). Whatever the outward signs of disobedience are, underneath it all is a failure to be God's rescued and blessed Family and to live into God's mission of blessing the nations.

The Punishment

In response to Israel's faithlessness, the prophets give warning of impending judgment. God is not content to allow his people to run into sin indefinitely. In the early years, the prophets call God's people to remember and repent, promising they will find God gracious and ready to forgive. As time goes on without repentance, the prophets begin to speak of foreign nations coming into Israel to destroy the nation, remove them from the land, and bring them into captivity. In 586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar came into Israel, laid siege to the city of Jerusalem, and carried away God's people to Babylon. For 70 years God's people were in Babylon as captives, waiting and weeping. Though they eventually return to the land, Israel is never again restored to greatness, and God is silent.

The Hope

The surprising twist in the Story during this time is that the prophets are not all gloom and doom. Even though they boldly predict the downfall of Israel as a nation, in the very same breath they promise God will forgive, restore, and renew his people! Though judgment will come, God is not giving up on the Promise he made to Abraham. God will save a remnant of Israel, a chosen people, whom he will call to himself and use for his glory. This people will not be like Israel has been, constantly doubting God's heart and presuming upon his grace. This new people, the new Israel, will have God's Law written on their hearts and will walk in obedience to him forever.

There is a profound contradiction happening in the prophets. On one hand, they declare God's righteousness and holiness, and promise that He will not allow the faithlessness of Israel to go unpunished. On the other hand, God loves Israel and has committed himself to her. Hosea uses the imagery of a man marrying a wife who chooses to be a prostitute. Though Israel whores herself out to other gods, her true Husband still loves her and longs to be with her again.

How can God punish sin and save his people? Just as before, God will provide a substitute. Many years later God sends his own Son, who perfectly obeys but suffers the judgment we each deserve. Through Jesus, God makes a new promise, draws a new people, and makes this people a blessing - forever!