

Hosea



GOD'S FAITHFUL LOVE
FOR HIS FAITHLESS PEOPLE

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Lesson 1 – Introduction and Overview of Hosea

It's one of the most shocking and heartbreaking scenes imaginable. A hard working husband comes home early to surprise his wife, only to find a surprise waiting for him. Another car in the parking lot. A stranger in the home. The woman who promised to love him and him only with another man.

It's shocking and sickening. It's shameful and embarrassing. It's downright uncomfortable to think or talk about. Yet it's the picture that God chose when describing the sins of his people: adultery. And nowhere in the Bible is that image more developed than in the book of Hosea. This message is one that is needed not just by Israel, or Judah, but by everyone of us today.

I. Hosea: The Man

Nothing is known about Hosea or his family outside of the book that bears his name. Hosea doesn't show up in the historical records of Israel (Kings, Chronicles) nor does any member of his family. The most significant detail we know

about Hosea is his home life. God instructed Hosea to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him as a picture of Israel's relationship with God. Partway through their marriage, she leaves him, but when she hits rock bottom Hosea buys her back demonstrating God's love for his wayward bride, Israel.

II. Hosea: The Genre

A. Understanding the Role of the Prophets

We often think of prophets solely in terms of predicting the future. While prophets did do this, it was always a means to an end. They did not simply inform Israel and others of the future to satisfy curiosity, but to make a point. Rather than viewing prophets as fortune tellers, it is better to think of them as revival preachers. They were the enforcers of the covenant that God had made with Israel, and it was their job to remind the nation of Israel that they had gone back on their word and warning them what would happen if they continue to resist God.

B. Understanding the Writings of the Prophets

1. The prophets wrote anthologies.

New Testament letters were sermons that were written and meant to be read in one sitting. The book of Hosea, like most other prophets, is different because it is a compilation of the material that Hosea produced over a 30-year period (1:1). It includes sermons, oracles, and reflections that represent the highlights of Hosea's career. Because of this, there isn't always a clear line of progression from one section to the other. This isn't to say that

the book isn't unified or that it doesn't have a coherent message, but that often that it doesn't carry one line of argument all the way through as we might be expecting.

The prophets were also very poetic, using metaphors and illustrations to make the truth vivid and real in the minds of people. The goal isn't so much to show someone something new, but to change the way they think and see and feel about the truth they already know.

2. The prophets wrote political/spiritual sermons.

Although they weren't one unified sermon, the prophets were writing messages to specific people at a specific time. This means that understanding the political scene of the day is important if we are going to understand the message of the book. Today people are careful to differentiate between God and politics, but for the prophets the political events of the day carried spiritual weight. This means to study the prophets, one must also study history.

III. Hosea: The History

Israel's history as a nation really begins when God brings them out of the land of Egypt and makes a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. There he gives them his laws and promises blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Once in the land, the nation goes through

several cycles of rebellion, discipline, repentance and revival, followed by more rebellion.

Once Saul takes the throne, the twelve tribes are unified under one king and truly become a nation. David and Solomon follow Saul, and then Solomon's son Rehoboam foolishly causes a revolt in which the nation of Israel is split into two, the northern 10 tribes, called Israel, and the southern tribes, called Judah. Israel is also called Ephraim (the largest and most influential tribe) or Samaria (the capital city), and Judah is sometimes referred to as Jerusalem (the capital city).

Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, worries that people worshipping in Jerusalem will draw their hearts back to the south and so he puts up 2 golden calves and tells Israel to worship them instead. This results in a downward spiral for the north that was never reversed. Bad king after bad king reigned until eventually Ahab takes the throne and tries to convert Israel to Baal worship. God judges him by allowing a man named Jehu to overthrow the government, and now his great-grandson is on the throne, Jeroboam (II).

At the beginning of Hosea's ministry, things looked great, but as his ministry progressed the country would deteriorate until it was finally conquered. Assyria, who had been a major threat, was struggling and left Israel alone leading to a wealth and extravagance that Amos condemned. Jeroboam II reigned from 782-753 and accomplished much (2 Kings 14:23-29), but following his reign 6 kings would reign in a 20 year time frame, and only one would not be murdered or captured. The internal

political turmoil would set things up perfectly for the freshly invigorated Assyrian empire under Shalmaneser to attack and destroy Israel in the year 722 BC. Hosea is the deathbed prophet of Israel.

IV. Hosea: The Message

A. Israel's fickle affection

God depicts Israel's sins in 2 basic categories:

1. Looking for other lovers – Israel engaged in Baal worship, not in place of the worship of the Lord, but alongside of it (5:6, 6:6, 8:13). In fact, they even got to the point where they began to confuse the two (2:16). God viewed Israel's problem first and foremost as a heart problem (4:1) that leads into all kinds of other problems (4:2).

Israel viewed themselves as “hedging their bets.” They could worship God and Baal, the Canaanite gods, and be even more likely to succeed. God viewed it as unfaithfulness and showed them that they really didn't know or love him. This is also shown in Israel's foolish attempts to play Egypt against Assyria in an attempt to figure their own way out of things, rather than trusting God (7:11).

2. Sins against fellow man – Israel's wrong relationship with God led to wrong relationships with others (4:2), particularly the immorality that went along with worshipping Baal (4:14) and violence (6:8-9).

B. God's jealous loyalty

God's emotions are on full display here as perhaps nowhere else in Scripture. He is depicted as a jealous husband (1-3) and a caring father (11:1-4). God warns in no uncertain terms that punishment is coming and that it will be severe (7:11-12, 9:15-17, 13:16), yet he feels overwhelmed with compassion at the same time (11:5-9). Hosea presents God as conflicted. Furious with his people, yet unable to give them up (1:4-11).

Sin is not a speeding ticket. It is not tax evasion. It is not an impersonal offense against a law book. It's cheating on God. It's being unfaithful to him, and it wounds him deeply when his people are unfaithful to him after all he's done.