

Major Messages from the Minor Prophets

A Study of the Book of Hosea

Intro: Let's turn to Hosea together as we continue this month our series called "Major Messages from the Minor Prophets. Hosea prophesied during the tumultuous last decades of the northern kingdom of Israel. Tiglath Pileser III, the Assyrian king, had set his sights on conquest in the west, making Israel a target of his military exploits. The northern kingdom was in a state of political turmoil. Several of its kings were removed in rapid succession through assassination plots and bloody coups. The land suffered from the spiritual and moral degradation of many years of idolatrous worship introduced by Jeroboam I and the even more degrading worship of Baal introduced by the wicked Ahab and Jezebel, worship that even involved cultic prostitution and Bacchanalian orgies.

It's not hard to imagine God looking upon from above with a broken heart as He saw His bride, Israel, play the harlot, committing spiritual adultery by worshipping these false gods. But how would He be able to convey the passion of His wrath? How would He make Israel see the depth of His love in spite of their sins? He chose to raise up in the northern kingdom a prophet from among the Israelites to reveal His message. That prophet was Hosea.

God's message to Israel through Hosea was to find its passion and its power in the experiences of Hosea himself; for He was to share, with God's foreknowledge, the pain of a failed marriage, of an unfaithful wife. And through these experiences he was to relate personally and powerfully to feelings of God as the husband of unfaithful Israel. To appreciate then the message of Hosea we must first understand:

Hosea's Relationship to Gomer

God's first words to Hosea may even shock us a bit.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord." (Hosea 1:2)

When Hosea first heard these words, he might have understood them to be speaking of the tendency of Israel to be spiritually unfaithful to the Lord. What God appeared to be saying is that his wife and children would be unfaithful to the Lord; but such would be in character with the spirit of the age. For Israel, as a people, was unfaithful to the Lord. Obviously such a marriage would be less than ideal for a true prophet of God; yet he humbly obeyed God and took Gomer to be His wife. Perhaps Hosea thought that the Lord's command meant the deliverance of Gomer from such a life and through her relationship with him, her destiny might be changed to one in which God was loved and served by her and the children of their union. And, it appears that for a while they were happily married. They had a child together. The Lord revealed to Hosea that he

should be named “Jezreel” to symbolizes God's judgment upon the house of Jehu at Jezreel.

However not long afterward, Gomer appears to have betrayed her vows and committed adultery against her husband. It is possible that she become attracted to another man or she may have yielded to the social pressures to participate in the idolatrous worship of Baal. During those days the Israelites engaged in the worship of Baal; and the “worship” involved participation in ritual sexual acts as an offering to Baal and a means of ensuring the fertility of the land. It is possible that Gomer, like other Israelite women, thought that the participation in the cult worship of Baal would ensure her own child-bearing capacity. Whatever the case Gomer appears to have children by another man besides her husband, Hosea.

Though Hosea could acknowledge that the first child by Gomer was conceived by him, he could not say so about the second and third, each of which also received symbolic names that casts doubt about the source of their conception. The second Lo-ruhamah (meaning “no compassion”) symbolized how God would show no compassion to Israel. And the third Lo-ammi (meaning “not my people”) indicated God's rejection of them as His people. Perhaps the names were selected by God to indicate to Hosea that these were “children of harlotry” and not his own.

Thus, the words that Lord had spoken to Hosea were beginning to take on deeper meaning—“wife of harlotry” was more than a figurative spiritual description, it was a literal moral description! Hosea was to experience first hand the heartache of an unfaithful wife and a broken relationship. The two were now separated.

But Gomer's immorality was not to be without a price to her. The next picture we have of her is that she become a slave. Such was the sad plight of a woman who turned from the Lord and her husband to live a spiritually and physically immoral lifestyle. It is not a pretty picture. Yet in spite of her reprehensible behavior, Hosea had still loved her as his wife and had come to know first hand the pain that God feels when His people are unfaithful to Him; but perhaps he could not have been prepared for the next command from the Lord. If we are surprised that God initially commanded Hosea to marry a woman who would become unfaithful to him, then we are equally surprised by the command to take her back again, even after her unfaithfulness.

Then the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” (Hosea 3:1)

And so he goes and buys her from slavery, paying the price of a redeemed slave. But he cannot live with her as a wife until she has learned to control herself and remain faithful to Him. So he keeps her for time, without the rights and privileges of marriage, to discipline her and to teach her to be faithful. But clearly the implication of the story is that

Hosea's love not only rescued her from her sad plight but brought her into a new relationship with him.

Consequently, no one was better qualified to talk about God's relationship to Israel than Hosea; for in his own life he had experienced the feelings of God, both the deep hurt and the compassionate love, toward Israel. Hosea's experiences symbolized God's own relationship with Israel.

God's relationship with Israel

God had taken Israel to Himself and loved her deeply.

Israel was taken by the Lord to be His pure and beloved bride. He had made a covenant with her to provide her needs.

But Israel became unfaithful to her covenant promises to God.

Instead of remaining true to the Lord she engaged in the worship of false gods, ostensibly to secure greater blessings.

Consequently God had no choice but to put her away for a time, so that she might see that her blessings did not come from those false gods to which she had shown allegiance.

The three children of Hosea symbolized the rejection of Israel as His people.

God would end the dynasty of Jehu at Jezreel.

He would no longer view his people with compassion.

He would no longer view Israel as His people.

Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians where she suffered great things because of her sins against the Lord. This experience would teach the Israelites that they could not rely upon false gods to deliver them.

But the time would come after this period of discipline, when Israel would be allowed to return back to God and to enter again into covenant with Him with all the blessings.

Hosea speaks of a time when the people of God would be reconciled to Him again.

Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, "You are not My people," it will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God." And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one leader, and they will go up from the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. (Hos. 1:10-11)

He speaks of a time when Israel will turn again to the Lord and seek Him and serve "David their king".

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days. (Hosea 3:4-5)

All that had been symbolized by the children of Hosea would be reversed:

“And it will come about in that day that I will respond,” declares the Lord. “I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to the earth, and the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine, and to the oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. And I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ and they will say, ‘Thou art my God!’” (Hosea 2:21-23)

These promises find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ and His church.

Jesus Christ, the son of David, is the “David” who fulfilled these promises & the church of Christ is the Israel upon whom God now shows “mercy” and whom He calls “my people”.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Even we Gentiles are also a part of this “new Israel” of God. God could see us as a part of the purpose he made known to Hosea.

As He says also in Hosea, “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ And her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’ And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘you are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God.” (Romans 9:25-26)

What Hosea teaches us

Hosea teaches us that our sin is painful to God!

When we choose to live in sin, we not only a sin against God’s law; we sin against God’s love. We cannot fathom the pain we bring to God when we reject His love to live in sin.

If you have ever known the pain of a broken relationship, your experience is teaching you the pain that we cause God when we break our covenant with Him!

Hosea teaches us that God is Holy & Just

Those who enter covenant with God must be faithful to Him. When they persist in unfaithfulness, He cannot continue His fellowship and blessing with them.

He allows them to suffer the consequences of their ungodly decisions. We must experience the discipline of God when we turn away from Him.

Hosea teaches us that God love reaches out to us even when we are at our worst.

Though God justly punishes the sinner, He yearns for the restoration of fallen men and His wayward people. We see the amazing grace of God who can look upon sinful men and say to them, though they are not worthy of it at all, "How can I give you up?"

We must imagine what great love it would take for a man to restore an unfaithful wife or a woman to restore an unfaithful husband, even paying the ransom for their return. But this is what God did for us. Through Jesus' death He paid the ultimate price for our redemption.

Conclusion: Hosea tells a great love story about a prophet whose love reached out to a fallen bride and brought her back. Hosea tells a greater love story about a God who reaches out to a fallen bride and brings her back.

You can be a part of that love story! Through you may have chosen to live in sin, God's love reaches out to you and longs to restore you to His fellowship. To you He is saying, "How can I give you up?" But we must make the choice to return to Him.