

Welcome to the study on the book of Hosea. Hosea is known as one of the minor prophets. Yet, as we say of all the minor prophets, “they have a major message.” This is true of prophet Hosea. Most of this first lesson will be spent with an introduction to the book of Hosea. What is the theme of the book? What is the purpose of this writing? What do we know about the author Hosea? What is the date and place of the writing of Hosea?

Introduction

Hosea is a prophet of God sent unto the people of Israel. All we know about the man Hosea is found in the book of Hosea. In chapter 1 verse one he is known as “*Hosea the son of Beeri.*” His name means “salvation.” We know nothing of his father Beeri. There is one other man in the Bible by the name Beeri found in the book of Genesis but this is, of course, a different man than Hosea’s father.

In the course of the prophecy of this book, Hosea is commanded to marry a woman named Gomer. Hosea and Gomer will bear a son. Then, Gomer bore 2 more children that were illegitimate. Throughout this prophecy of Hosea, the prophet’s personal history is very important. Why is this? It is because God uses Hosea’s personal life to be a picture of the relationship between Jehovah God and Israel. We will find Hosea suffers tragedy in his personal life. He becomes a brokenhearted prophet and provides a good illustration of the brokenhearted Lord in his relationship with sinful mankind. Hosea’s wife brings tears to his eyes and heartbreak to him. Jehovah God was sorrowful for Israel’s behavior, and Jesus Christ was sorrowful for sinful man’s behavior.

Hosea was a contemporary of Amos who ministered in Israel. You may read the commentary on the book of Amos provided by World Bible Missions. Hosea was a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah who ministered in Judah. Hosea ministers to the northern kingdom, Israel, just as Amos did. He was to the northern kingdom what Jeremiah was to the southern kingdom- a weeping prophet. As Hosea ministered and warned Israel of their sin, he was pointing forward to the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom. Jeremiah preached about the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom, Judah.

Hosea’s prophecy is closely related to that of Amos. Amos was very severe in his prophecy. Amos reminds us in his preaching of John the Baptist of the New Testament. Hosea was somewhat lighter than Amos in his speech and reminds us of John the Beloved of the New Testament.

Both Amos and Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom, though Amos was a native of the southern kingdom, Judah, while Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom, Israel. Hosea was a little bit younger than Amos. Their ministries overlap. Therefore, we see in the ministry of Amos and the ministry of Hosea similarity in the sin they were condemning in the message that they preached. In Amos, the prophetic discourses are very plain. In Hosea, because of the intense personal pain involved in his own life, the words are not very distinct and defined from one another. This fact makes the book of Hosea a tad bit more difficult to outline and understand relative to the book of Amos.

Although Hosea is the first of the minor prophets as they are arranged in our Bible, chronologically his prophecy was preceded by Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos. Hosea dates his prophecy by the following words of chapter 1 verse one: *“in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.”* This information informs us that Hosea had an extensive ministry of more than half a century from about 790 BC to 725 BC (about 65 years). He most likely ceased his prophecy and his ministry about five years prior to the Assyrians taking the northern kingdom into captivity about 722 BC. Hosea was a citizen of the northern kingdom. Therefore, he was not a visitor to the northern kingdom as was Amos. Amos was from the southern kingdom but God sent him in the form of a missionary to minister to the northern kingdom, Israel.

What is the writing of Hosea like? The writing of Hosea is characterized by intense emotion because of the prophet's personal tragedy. The prophet combined severity with gentleness as he warns Israel that God's love for them also includes His wrath because of their sin. God commands Hosea to take a wife. His wife became an adulterous woman and has illegitimate children. She then came back to Hosea to once again be his wife. Hosea's wife's name is Gomer. Israel, the bride of Jehovah God, went into spiritual adultery. There is a promise of future restoration of Israel if she will turn from her adulterous ways and return unto God. Some day future Israel will return to God and be true to Him. However, Israel will pay dearly for those years of spiritual adultery. God is a jealous God. He will not share His lover with anyone else. Israel is God's people created as the seed of Abraham. They were to be the apple of God's eye. Yet, they went into spiritual idolatry. One day they will awaken and return.

Therefore, Hosea's personal life is very important as we make this study of this book. Despite Gomer's time spent in adultery, Hosea took her back. God is tenderhearted and long-suffering and is willing to receive Israel back if they will bow before him and once again be true to Him.

If we could put one sentence on paper that would provide the theme of Hosea it would be “God's love to His people in spite of the spiritual infidelity of the people He loved.”

(Verse 1-2)

Note the words “*the word of the Lord that came.*” These words serve as a very appropriate opening to the book of Hosea. These words tell us this book is not Hosea's writing, but it is God's writing. It is a prophecy that originated with the Lord and was placed into the mind of Hosea who penned down these words that we may have them included in our Bible. Not only did Hosea pen down these words, but he also preached these words to the people of the northern kingdom. Therefore, we can rest assured the words of the book of Hosea are authentic and have the power and authority of Jehovah as their basis. When reading the words of this prophecy, one is not dealing with the words of man, but with the very words of God.

Hosea is introduced to us in verse one as “*Hosea, the son of Beeri.*” Hosea occurs in several forms in the Bible including Joshua and Jesus. The name Hosea means “salvation” or “Jehovah saves.” It is interesting to note the prophet Hosea bore the name later given to our Savior who was the epitome of the tenderness, compassion, and love Hosea foreshadowed in this book. Concerning Beeri, nothing is known about him in the Bible. His chief claim to fame lay in the fact that he was prophet Hosea's father.

As with many Old Testament books, the time of the book is dated by the kingship of the southern and northern kingdoms. Hosea prophesies “*in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.*” Therefore, the ministry of Hosea spans the reign of four kings of Judah and one king of Israel. If we calculate the time and duration of the reign of these kings it can be seen that Hosea's ministry was in length from 50 to 70 years. It is clear that the prophet Hosea ministered until the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom. Bible authorities place his ministry in the time frame of 790 BC and 725 BC.

It has frequently been said that the preacher should be the embodiment of his message. This was to be true of Hosea. His message reflected the life he experienced. His wife “goes bad” in this book of prophecy. Shame will be brought into the life of the prophet Hosea. As stated previously, this tragedy in the personal life of Hosea will be used to present a picture of the tragedy that arose in the mind of God when Israel went into spiritual adultery. Furthermore, the tragedy in the life of Hosea is a picture of the tragedy that arose in the mind of the Son of God when he wept tears as He beheld the spiritual adultery of mankind.

Hosea is told in verse two “*go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms.*” Bible scholars have had much discussion in regard to this phrase. Is God instructing Hosea to marry a harlot? Or, is God instructing Hosea to marry a woman who is morally pure but who will later become discontented and go into harlotry? It is clear that she was from a family involved in whoredom. I just do not believe she was involved in the practice of adultery when Hosea met and married her. Why do I say this? Because Israel was not in idolatry when God first introduces her to mankind in the Bible. Gomer is pure when the man of God marries her. She is not practicing harlotry. Later in their marriage she will step into harlotry and follow the path of her family. For some reason, she became discontent with her life with Hosea, and she left him to lie with another. That is why, as we have already stated, the life Hosea and his wife Gomer are a clear picture of how Israel became discontent with God and stepped into spiritual adultery to be like the world. We must feel sorry for Hosea because of the way his wife did him. Yet, God chose this unusual scenario to graphically illustrate what Israel did to Jehovah God. Verse two closes with these words “*for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.*” “*The land*” speaks of Israel. Israel was in such idolatry that when a boy chose to marry, all that was available were the daughters of idolatrous people.

(Verse 3-5)

Hosea did as God commanded and sought out a woman to be his wife. He chose Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, to be his wife. Though the Bible does not say, wonder what was on the mind of Hosea? Could he have said to God “God, why shall I marry a woman who is from a family of whoredom?” “God, are you sure you are not making a mistake?” It is human nature for man to have such thoughts and, rest assured, Hosea was human, though a great prophet of God.

Soon after marriage, Gomer conceived by Hosea and a male child was born. The baby boy was named Jezreel. Did you notice who named the baby? God did. From this it is evident God has plans for this baby boy. What are those plans? The name Jezreel means “God scatters.” The house of Jehu is mentioned in verse 4. The present king of Israel is Jeroboam. He is of the bloodline of Jehu. Many years prior to the time of Hosea, God raised up Jehu to wrestle away the kingdom from wicked Ahab and Jezebel. Jehu took great pride in his dethroning of Ahab and gave God no glory. God is set to get even with Jehu for his attitude. The present king Jeroboam is a descendent of Jehu. Thus, God intends to avenge the sin of Jehu by bringing blood upon his descendent Jeroboam. Do you believe God can and does avenge the sins of the father upon the son? Read the following verse and your vision will be made clear: Exodus 34:7 “*Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving*

iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Dad (and mom) behave today or your kids may pay for your bad conduct tomorrow!

"I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." Just as God promised, it was in the valley of Jezreel that the northern kingdom was defeated by the Assyrians, and Israel was brought to her knees. Whatever God says *will* come to past.

Verse (6-7)

Verse 6 brings another baby on the scene. The new baby is a girl. The name is Lo-ruhamah. Note that the scripture says *"she (Gomer) conceived again, and bare a daughter."* It is not stated that "Gomer bare Hosea a daughter." We believe this daughter to be a product of Gomer's harlotry. In other words, this child is illegitimate.

The name Lo-ruhamah means "never knew a father's pity." The daughter never knew who her father was. Thus, we have the revelation of the scandal in the house of Hosea. In the spiritual application to the nation Israel the Lord says *"I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel."* God is telling them "you will not know my pity, for I am not your father."

At the time of the writing of Hosea, we have the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah. Verse seven says the Lord promises that He is not ready to judge the house of Judah. Why did God choose to spare the land of Judah for they, too, had sinned? We believe it is for the sake of David that Judah is spared. In more than one place in the scripture God promised that for the sake of David He would spare the southern kingdom. Someone may want to criticize this action of God to say He is not fair. For sure, Judah is not a sinless people. They have faults and failures just like the northern kingdom. Yet, we are in trouble when we try to determine whether or not God is being fair. That is beyond the realm of man's thinking and is not for man to decide. By the way, God has not been fair to me! I feel like pitching a pity party! He has given me far more mercy than I deserve. He has given me far more peace than I deserve. He has given me far more blessings than I deserve. If God turns loose His wrath on me today to the end of my life, I will die ahead!

Note the power of God in the final portion of verse 7. God says, in effect, "I am not going to save them by the fact that they have Phantom jets and atom bombs. I'm not going to save them because they have the most powerful tanks and armored personnel carriers. I am not going to save them because they have drone aircraft." No armor will keep you safe from God. It doesn't matter

how big your navy is; it does not matter how many men march in your army. If a nation or a people or a person is to be spared from God, it will be because God's **mercy** spares them. Weapons won't work! Works won't work! You can run, but you cannot hide from God when it is your time to face judgment.