

## Old Testament Overview

### Hosea, Joel, and Amos

This afternoon, we will continue our study of the prophetic books

- We have discussed the five (5) major prophets
- Now we will look at the twelve (12) minor prophets

### Let's pray and get started<sup>1</sup>

Remember, the difference between the major prophets and minor prophets is based on length

- Not because they are somehow less important or less inspired

This group of minor prophets is regularly called the Twelve

- By the third century B.C., the Twelve were included together on one Hebrew scroll<sup>2</sup>

All in all, the twelve minor prophets have 67 chapters

- That is only one more chapter than the entire book of Isaiah!

If we are somewhat unfamiliar with the major prophets, I would dare say that the minor prophets are even more unfamiliar

- For some reason, these books are often neglected in our study
- Perhaps we don't know the historical context

But my goal through the twelve minor prophets is to whet your appetite

- I trust that you will read and study these books on your own

I want to give you the basics that you need in order to study these books

- They are relatively short books (read in less than an hour, in most cases)

The twelve minor prophets cover a span of 400 hundred years from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>3</sup>

- The Twelve are not written in a strict chronological order

These writings cover the span of three huge world empires<sup>4</sup>

- Assyrian
- Babylonian
- Persian

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson references material from Capitol Hill Baptist Church's core seminar on the Old Testament. <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/class-1-introduction-to-the-old-testament/>

<sup>2</sup> Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Dever, 673.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* 229.

## Hosea

Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom<sup>5</sup>

- He and Amos were the only prophets to devote their energies toward Israel
- The other prophets directed their focus toward the southern kingdom of Judah

The northern kingdom has a number of designations

- It is also called Ephraim since this was the largest and most prominent tribe in the north
- It is also called Samaria because this was the capital city of the northern kingdom
- Most often, it is simply called Israel<sup>6</sup>

Hosea's ministry spanned the reigns of Israel's last six kings (Hosea 1:1)

- Four of these were assassinated by their successors
- The fifth was carried away into Assyrian captivity

Hosea's ministry was approximately 40 years, from 755-710 B.C

- Amos preceded Hosea as a prophet to the northern kingdom by a few years

Hosea ministered about the same time as Isaiah and Micah

- The difference is that Isaiah and Micah ministered to the southern kingdom
- Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom

We have to keep in mind that Hosea is a pre-exilic prophet

- He ministered before the Assyrians destroyed the city in 722 B.C.

We have been used to dealing with the Babylonian captivity with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel

- But those prophets dealt with the southern kingdom

We have to switch gears back to the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom

- I know that it is difficult to keep straight

In this period of Israel's history, there was rampant idolatry and sexual debauchery

- The spiritual depravity of the nation was at an all-time high
- It was definitely not their finest hour

Despite this outbreak of sinfulness, the nation was enjoying outward prosperity<sup>7</sup>

- Successful military campaigns
- Ongoing building projects
- Agricultural advancements

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Alan B. Stringfellow, *Through the Bible in One Year*, 91.

<sup>6</sup> Dever, 674.

<sup>7</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 14.

So even though the nation of Israel was experiencing outward victory and blessing, they were rotting inwardly

- Their moral and spiritual state was at an all-time low

One writer has noted, “[What we see in the prophecy of Hosea are the last few swirls as the kingdom of Israel goes down the drain](#)”<sup>8</sup>

In a word, the nation of Israel was demonstrating spiritual unfaithfulness

- Little regard was given toward loyalty to the LORD or to His covenants or revelation

It was in this setting that the LORD used a man by the name of Hosea

- Very little is known about this man
- As a matter of fact, the only biographical information that we have of him is given in the book of Hosea

The name Hosea has a similar meaning to the names of Joshua and Jesus

- They all have a reference to salvation<sup>9</sup>

Despite the many sins of Israel, there is hope for salvation

- That is, if the nation repents of their sin and turns to the LORD
- But that is a big “if”

It appears that Hosea was born in the northern kingdom

- He is very familiar and concerned with Israel’s history, circumstances, and topography<sup>10</sup>
- He refers to the northern king as “[our king](#)” (7:5)

We will discuss his marriage and his three children later in the message

- But not much more is known about this man<sup>11</sup>

The book of Hosea breaks down into two (2) large divisions

- Chapters 1-3
- Chapters 4-14

## I. **Adulterous wife and faithful husband (Chapters 1-3)**

This first half of the book speaks of the physical marriage, unfaithfulness, and issues surrounding Hosea and Gomer

- These were two real, historical people who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

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<sup>8</sup> Wilkinson & Boa, 236.

<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 223.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>11</sup> Wilkinson & Boa, 234.

We know that Hosea was married

- Chapter 1 tells us that he married a woman by the name of Gomer

It would be in the context of the intimacy of marriage that God would teach Hosea a great lesson about Israel

- Marriage should be guarded and protected
- God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman

But sin has caused deviations in the marriage relationship

- All sorts of sin can distort what God intended marriage to be

But God isn't merely speaking of marital difficulties

- He is not merely speaking of marital distortion

What God will show and teach Hosea through his own marriage is far more important and graphic

- God will show this prophet that the nation of Israel has been spiritually unfaithful

God will use the intimate marriage between Hosea and Gomer to portray what is taking place between the LORD and Israel

- The picture will not be pretty

The LORD tells Hosea in 1:2, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD"

- What does the LORD imply by this phrase, "take to yourself a wife of harlotry"?

It has been understood in a couple different ways

- Some believe that God told Hosea to marry a woman who was already acting unfaithfully
- Others believe that God told Hosea to marry a pure woman who would later act unfaithfully

I am inclined toward the second option

- Let me explain why

If Hosea married an unfaithful woman, he would have no grounds for expecting her to be faithful

- The way that she was acting before the marriage would be the way that she would act after marriage

But if Hosea married a faithful, pure woman, what would his expectations be?

- He would expect her to be faithful and pure after the marriage

The language of Hosea 1:2, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry" anticipates something about the future

- God knew how Gomer would respond (He knows everything)

God uses this marriage to show that the relationship between Himself and the nation of Israel is like a marriage

- An intimate relationship
- An exclusive relationship
- A personal relationship

But I have already told you that Israel is committing flagrant sins

- She is not being faithful and loyal to the LORD

Now you are beginning to understand how God will use the marriage of Hosea and Gomer to show the Divine perspective of Israel's sins

- Physical unfaithfulness in a marriage causes problems
- Spiritual unfaithfulness on the part of Israel will cause problems as well

Out of this marriage between Hosea and Gomer, there are children born

- This is to be expected, since marriage is the God-given means of bringing children into the world

But the names of these children are selected by the LORD to teach Israel some lessons

**"Jezreel"** means "God sows" or "God scatters"

- God is telling Israel that He will bring an end to the nation by scattering them

**"Lo-ruhamah"** means "no compassion"

- Israel's sins have caused major problems; punishment is inevitable

**"Lo-ammi"** means "not my people"

- Israel was not acting faithfully and loyally toward the LORD; therefore, God says that they are not His people!

Imagine having children, only to have their names illustrate what the LORD will do to the nation!

- Imagine having a wife who represents the unfaithful nation herself!

Hosea would be put to the test

- How would he respond?
- Would he continue to love Gomer?

The reality is that Hosea displayed amazing faithfulness to an unfaithful wife

- Even after Gomer had left the sanctity of marriage

Gomer had chosen to leave Hosea and pursue other men

- After a time of this unfaithfulness, God tells Hosea something amazing
- *“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” (3:1)*

Hosea had married a pure woman

- But sometime into their marriage, Gomer became unfaithful

After a period of time where Gomer was unfaithful to the marriage, God tells Hosea to *“go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress”*

- Hosea still loved Gomer, despite her unfaithfulness
- Hosea goes and loves his unfaithful wife

Did you notice the rest of verse 1?

- *“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” (3:1, emphasis mine)*

Hosea purchases Gomer back

- Her previous lovers had treated her like a slave

Gomer had gone after other men in order to satisfy her desires

- This was a picture of how unfaithful Israel had been toward the LORD!

## II. Adulterous Israel and Faithful Lord (Chapters 4-14)

Beginning in chapter 4, God begins to unveil the spiritual decadence and depravity of Israel

- The marriage between Hosea and Gomer had its problems
- But the marital problems illustrated a deeper, darker problem with the nation

Israel had chosen sin over loyalty

- They, too, had been unfaithful to the LORD

Let’s look at some of the Scripture references that point to their sin

- *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (4:6)*
- *“Since Israel is stubborn like a stubborn heifer, can the LORD now pasture them like a lamb in a large field?” (4:16)*
- *“But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me” (6:7)*

- “Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle *the enemy comes* against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed My covenant, and rebelled against My law” (8:1)
- “Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him” (8:3)
- “Since Ephraim has multiplied altars for sin, they have become altars of sinning for him” (8:12)
- “They have gone deep in depravity as in the days of Gibeah; He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins” (9:9)
- “My God will cast them away because they have not listened to Him; and they will be wanderers among the nations” (9:17)
- “They will not return to the land of Egypt; but Assyria – he will be their king, because they refused to return to Me” (11:5)
- “Ephraim has provoked to bitter anger; so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him, and bring back his reproach to him” (12:14)
- “Samaria will be held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword, their little ones will be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women will be ripped open” (13:16)

This is what sins the nation of Israel was committing

- No wonder the LORD is so strong against them!

In addition to these sins, consider that Israel also:

- Had unrighteous leaders (4:18; 9:15)
- Practiced deceit (4:2, 11; 7:5, 16; 12:7)
- Stole (4:2; 7:1; 12:7)
- Murdered (1:4; 4:2; 6:8; 12:1)
- Practiced sexual sins (4:2, 10, 13; 5:7; 7:4)

The core of their problem was in their religion!

- The problem was not that they were irreligious

God’s people were definitely worshipping

- But they were worshipping the wrong gods!

Instead of worshipping the LORD, they were bowing down to the gods of immorality, Baal, and a host of other idols

- They were committing spiritual adultery!

Listen to some of these verses that speak of idolatry

- “My people consult their wooden idol, and their *diviner’s* wand informs them; for a spirit of harlotry has led *them* astray, and they have played the harlot, *departing* from their God. <sup>13</sup> They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains and burn incense on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters play the harlot, and your brides commit adultery” (4:12-13)
- “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone” (4:17)

- “The inhabitants of Samaria will fear for the calf of Beth-aven. Indeed, its people will mourn for it, and its idolatrous priests will cry out over it, over its glory, since it has departed from it” (10:5)
- “And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves molten images, idols skillfully made from their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. They say of them, ‘Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!’” (13:2)

Through this book, we see just how personally God takes our sins<sup>12</sup>

- Sin is not just a breach of a human government
- Each and every sin is a violation of God’s perfect, holy, and righteous character
- Our sin is first and foremost against Him!

Just because we have been delivered from our sins does not give us a license to forget this

- Even more, as God’s children, we need to pursue obedience
- We shouldn’t become lax and comfortable

When we find ourselves sinning, we need to repent of it

- That is exactly what God told Hosea to tell the northern kingdom

“Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn *us*, but He will heal *us*; He has wounded *us*, but He will bandage *us*. <sup>2</sup> He will revive *us* after two days; He will raise *us* up on the third day that *we* may live before Him. <sup>3</sup> So let *us* know, let *us* press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to *us* like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth.” (6:1-3)

- This is further explained in chapter 12, verse 6, “Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice, and wait for your God continually”

Through the unfaithfulness of Gomer, Hosea began to see the loyal love of God toward His people

- Hosea’s heart was softened as he had to endure seeing his wife leave him for others
- This caused Hosea to have a real compassion for people
- He began to understand a little bit of God’s grief over sin<sup>13</sup>

Hosea was used to portray God’s faithfulness, justice, love, and forgiveness<sup>14</sup>

- Hosea displayed this in his marriage to Gomer
- The LORD displayed this in His dealings with His own people

The utter holiness and purity of the LORD is contrasted with the sinfulness of the nation of Israel

- What a contrast it is!

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<sup>12</sup> Dever, 680.

<sup>13</sup> Wilkinson & Boa, 234.

<sup>14</sup> Wilkinson & Boa, 235.

Just as Hosea illustrates the LORD, Gomer represents the nation of Israel

- This marriage is used to portray the intimate relationship between the LORD and His people

You might say that the theme of Hosea is God's loyal love for His covenant people, despite their idolatry<sup>15</sup>

Hosea is very blunt about the sins of Israel

- However, he deals with their sins in a compassionate and broken-hearted manner

After seeing his own wife leave him for other men, Hosea is a qualified man to speak on the subject of loyal love

- The love of God (illustrated by Hosea's love for Gomer) is put on display in this book

The good news is that despite Israel's sin, the LORD promises restoration

Let's read the entire 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hosea

- It is a fitting end to our survey of this book

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. <sup>2</sup> Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips. <sup>3</sup> Assyria will not save us, we will not ride on horses; nor will we say again, “Our god,” to the work of our hands; for in Thee the orphan finds mercy.’ <sup>4</sup> I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them. <sup>5</sup> I will be like the dew to Israel; He will blossom like the lily, and he will take root like *the cedars of Lebanon*. <sup>6</sup> His shoots will sprout, and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like *the cedars of Lebanon*. <sup>7</sup> Those who live in his shadow will again raise grain, and they will blossom like the vine. His renown *will be* like the wine of Lebanon. <sup>8</sup> O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress; from Me comes your fruit. <sup>9</sup> Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; *whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them.*” (14:1-9)

Just as Hosea told the northern kingdom, Assyria came in and destroyed their kingdom<sup>16</sup>

- Israel had failed to repent
- God's holy love would be put on display through the discipline of a foreign nation

You remember that Hosea was told to go after his adulterous, unfaithful wife (3:1)

- He was to pursue her even though she wasn't pursuing him

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<sup>15</sup> MacArthur, 224.

<sup>16</sup> Dever, 683.

What do we see with the LORD and Israel?

- Israel wasn't pursuing Him
- God was pursuing the sinful, adulterous nation!

We see the heart of God in pursuing those who are not faithfully devoted to Him

- He did that with Israel
- He did that with many individuals of the OT
- He did that with us, didn't He?

You see, we may not like the comparison, but we are the Gomer of the story!

- We are often unfaithful
- We often run away to idols and forsake the living God

Yet the LORD continues to pursue us

- Amazing love
- Amazing loyalty
- Amazing grace

This is the story of Hosea!

Next, we will study the book of Joel

- Just four chapters
- A very short book