

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



THE STRANGEST MINISTRY

HOSEA

In making it to Hosea, we have moved past the section of the prophetic books known as the minor prophets. Our entrance here has the potential of being extremely interesting because the messages of these books are not as well known. This is not an indictment, but only to say that because these books are not carefully considered, the content could provide you with lessons and stories that you may find particularly compelling because their messages have been forgotten or maybe never experienced.

Take this book of Hosea for example. Hosea had one of the strangest ministries among all of the prophets because of what God had called him to do. The name Hosea means “Salvation” but during a portion of his ministry, his life looked like a contradiction of sorts. Instead of salvation, it seemed that God had doomed Hosea to bleak despair as he was instructed to take a woman, whom he knew would betray him in her marital vows, but to resolve to marry her anyway.

Now, this is easy enough to say, but you need to remember that because of the institution of marriage, because of everything that it is, there were real emotions involved. There was real pain, there was real betrayal, there was real confusion, there was real shame, and, to top it all off, there were real children caught in the middle.

However, this was all to bring a real illustration of what was ultimately coming. Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom, which if you remember is called Israel. At this point, the kingdom had split and Jeroboam now ruled over the ten northern tribes of Israel but realized that his people would continually travel south to go and worship at Jerusalem. Fearing that his people and power would be lost, he made two golden calves, setting one in Bethel and the other in Dan, and told the people “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28).

This was the start of the rapid decline of the Northern Kingdom and Jeroboam would forever be known as the king who ‘...taught Israel to sin...’ And because of this continued idolatry, God was about to use the Assyrian Empire to completely decimate this land.

This is where the main ministry of Hosea rests. He is the sounding alarm that Israel’s final hour is upon them. But even with all of what will befall God’s people, God’s ultimate message through Hosea is in fact one of salvation. Let’s look at it.

How to Think About Hosea

The book of Hosea follows a direct line of thought and covers his ministry from the standpoint of his personal life, and then moves to a series of sermons preached before God's people were finally taken over by the Assyrians.

A Life Used to Speak to a Nation (Chapters 1-3)— In these chapters, there is the detailed account of God's instruction to Hosea to take "... a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredoms..." (1:2)

I don't think we should understand this as a situation where Hosea went into a brothel of some kind and took a wife from this place. However, I do believe that the wife selection process would be one in which Hosea would understand that there would be a day when his wife would stay by his side no longer. How exactly this was accomplished, I have no idea. However, did it happen? Yes.

This would be an odd command to go to sleep with at night. No sane person would willingly get into a marriage fully understanding that you will give this person everything you have, be determined to provide love, and raise a family with knowing full well that this marriage would come crashing to a halt because of the grossest infidelity. That is simply not the picture people have when they truly are committed to a marriage. Yet this is what God required of Hosea.

The purpose of this assignment was to show all of God's people what they had done as a nation and why judgment was soon to follow.

A Message Used to Preach to a Nation (4-14)— Here are a series of messages delivered by Hosea that would detail exactly what their sin was, what would happen as a result, and what God would do with His people for the future.

The Crime (Chapters 4-6): In this section, God outlines that He had been entirely faithful to Israel by way of His promise, but despite His care and provision, Israel played the harlot by taking other gods and abandoning their covenant with God.

The Punishment (Chapters 6:4-10:15): It is here when God tells these people that according to the law, He would put them away for their spiritual adultery. From here we can see Hosea's story. According to Old Testament law, the offender in a covenant vow could be put away, and even put to death for this offense. And here we have God bringing a warning against His people detailing this very situation applies between Himself and His people.

The Forgiveness (Chapters 10:16-14): After long rolling indictments God has a final word for His people, "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (14:1). It's true. Once again it wasn't God who abandoned His people, it was His people that abandoned God. God is attempting to cause His people to understand their error and His truth. And by this, God calls back His people once more.

What to Look for in Hosea

Names— When God calls Hosea to take a wife of whoredoms, God instructs Hosea of the names of the children that are born by Gomer were to be called. These names tell a story of God's indictment on His people.

Jezreel: This name was given to Hosea's firstborn son, and was to serve as a warning to God's people. It is a name derived from the name Jezebel, that wicked queen who was eventually thrown from an upper story window and died from the impact. As the story is recorded for us in 2 Kings 9:30-37, we see that dogs came to eat her body. Because of this, the courtyard in which Jezebel fell was called Jezreel and would serve as a place in which everyone would know of the judgment that happened in that place. It is a place of disgrace and abandonment. Therefore, God is telling these people that their name would no longer be the covenant name of Israel, but hold a new name of disgrace— Jezreel.

Lo-Ruhamah: This name was given to Hosea's second born and the name means "not loved." This name pointed to the fact that God's love for His people would be over and because there was no love, they would no longer experience mercy if they continued on the path they had chosen.

Lo-Ammi: A third child was born by Gomer, but it is clear that this child coincided with the experience of God. If Hosea was left questioning whether or not the second child was his, he was quite sure now that this child did not belong to him after witnessing Gomer's indiscretions. Therefore, the name of this child was called, "not my people." Probably an awkward event to take place in a public marketplace when a passerby would stop for a moment, bend down, and ask for the name of this little fellow. And this is what God was saying now. He looked down and saw a people that were no longer His own.

Words—Aside from the obvious spiritual harlotry taking place in this message, another word God uses to describe the situation with his people:

Stumble: Hosea describes those false prophets and those who followed them as individuals who were stumbling in the dark. In this case, it was due to the ramped idolatry that was taking place in the nation of Israel. Over and over again these idols would come up and then God's people would trip over them, but no one thought to turn on the lights so they could see. They were insistent on fumbling around and refusing to walk without being thrown to the ground.

What to Gain from Hosea

Most of what we have spoken about in this book has been fairly depressing. Hosea, his wife, their children, the nation, and the dynamic with their God all swirling around in drama, disappointment, and pain. However, the ending result of Hosea's ministry is anything but tragic. If anything, how God ends Hosea's story is nothing short of stunning and there is so much to gain from this incredible book.

Unfaithfulness to God of Any Kind Really Is Spiritual Adultery— This is a bold statement, but a true statement. Any time a person gets into a covenant relationship with the God of all, they enter into a sacred union where God's faithfulness falls to us, and our faithfulness rises to Him. God never creates another being like you in order to replace you in His love relationship. There will never be a time, nor has there ever been a time when God looked to another creation and decided to break His covenant or order that His relationship with you might be abandoned and He would come to you whenever it was convenient to Him. No, when God covenants with a person to be their God, He never breaks it. However, on the other hand, we routinely replace God and dishonor our covenant.

Unfaithfulness to God Really Does Cause Him to Suffer Because of Spiritual Adultery— Because the spiritual realm is hard to perceive sometimes, we have to be shown in the physical realm what is happening. Therefore, if you have a spouse you poured all of your love and emotion toward (as you are supposed to) only to have them engage in the most intimate of marital actions with multiple partners insomuch that they literally become enslaved by it, what would that do toward your emotional disposition? Furthermore, what we have in God is not only ultimate love that is betrayed, but ultimate justice that must condemn, and therefore there is the added factor of God having to judge for such offenses.

This is further what we see when Hosea's wife is captured and being sold into slavery. She had a home, a family, and a husband who loved her, and she ran away from it all, got entrenched in a life she could not escape, and as far as the law was concerned, she truly deserved death.

A PROPHET ON THE RUN - JONAH

In just a small microcosm, Hosea was able to experience what God experiences because of the unfaithfulness of His people.

Unfaithfulness to God Can Really End in Complete Forgiveness— What would Hosea do? What would his response be? Would he abandon the relationship? Would he condemn her to justice according to the law? Would he watch as Gomer was sold into a life of servitude because of her sin? No. None of these things. To complete the ultimate picture of God and of us, God had Hosea purchase Gomer, take her to the wilderness where they could learn to be together again, and then Hosea renewed himself to Gomer and Gomer would learn to renew herself to her husband, and they would be together forever.

Here is the picture that God wanted us to understand. That as Christ came to this earth, he ultimately entered into the slave market of sin by going to Calvary. And then, as justice called out its price of death for the sin debt we accumulated, Jesus paid for it with His life so that we could be with Him forever.



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