

Through the Bible Book by Book

Old Testament

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Hosea

The book of Hosea is the first of the minor prophetic books. These books are termed "minor" not in relation to their importance but in relation generally to their length, in which respect they stand in contrast to the writings of the Major Prophets.

Let the student read II Kings 14:23 to 15:31, which will give him the historical background of the book.

Theme: The book of Hosea is a great exhortation to repentance addressed to the ten tribes, during the fifty or sixty years preceding their captivity. Their cup of iniquity had been fast filling.

The kings and priests were murderers and debauchees; idolatrous priests had lured the people away from the worship of the Lord; when in trouble the government resorted for help either to Egypt or to Assyria; the people in many cases went imitating the moral vileness of the Canaanites; they were living in a careless security, interrupted only in times of danger by a feigned repentance; above all, GOD and His Word were forgotten.

These sins of the nation in her condition of separation from GOD is summed by the prophet as the sin of spiritual adultery, and is illustrated by his own experience in his marrying an unchaste woman and her forsaking him for another lover. Israel's sin is more grievous than that of the nations surrounding her.

The sins of the latter are offences committed by those who have had no relation to the Lord. Israel's sin is that of unfaithfulness to her husband the Lord, who delivered her from Egypt, provided for her, and with whom she entered into sacred vows of obedience and faithfulness at Mt. Sinai. But instead of putting this adulterous wife to death as the law prescribed, the Lord manifests love toward her that is above the human - He receives her again unto Himself.

The following will serve as the theme of Hosea: Israel, the unfaithful wife abandoning her husband; the Lord, the compassionate Husband receiving her again.

Author: Hosea was a prophet of the northern kingdom (the ten tribes). He prophesied at the same time as Amos in Israel and Isaiah and Micah in Judah. His prophetic ministry, lasting about 60 years, is the lengthiest of all the prophets.

Scope: The historical events referred to in the book of Hosea cover a period of about 60 years from about 785 B. C. to the time of the captivity of the ten tribes.

CONTENTS:

- I. Separation: Israel, the Unfaithful Wife of the Lord (Chs. 1-3).
- II. Condemnation: Israel, the Sinful Nation (Chs. 4 to 13:8).
- III. Reconciliation: Israel, the Restored Nation (Chs. 13:9 to 14:9).

I. Separation: Israel the Unfaithful Wife of the Lord (Chs. 1 to 3)

- 1. Hosea's marriage to an unchaste woman (Ch. 1).

GOD often spoke to His people through signs and symbolic actions (compare Jeremiah 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Chs. 27, 28; Ezekiel Ch. 4). These signs were necessary in order to provide forceful illustrations for the prophet's message and to arouse the people's attention at times when they refused to give heed to the spoken word. Hosea is commanded to marry an unchaste woman as a sign

to the people that they are the wife of the Lord, have been unfaithful to their vows of fidelity. This union must have shocked the people; and this it was intended to do, in order that, on their enquiring concerning this union, they might discover that they themselves were represented by Hosea's unfaithful wife. Moreover the prophet's motive in marrying the woman was a pure and lofty one.

He was to give her his name and his protection, and lift her out of her former life of moral degradation unto the same high plane on which he lived.

But why does he do this? Is it not clear that Hosea's marriage with this unchaste woman illustrates the Lord's marriage with an unchaste people? Did Israel have anything more to commend her to GOD's love and care when He took her to Himself, than this woman when Hosea married her (Deuteronomy 9:4-6; Isaiah 51:1, 2)? - Dr. Gray. The children of this union were given names symbolical of GOD's judgments on the nation:

(a) Jezreel ("*GOD will scatter*"): a sign of the doom of both the house of Jehu and of the nation of Israel. Jezreel was the royal city of Ahab and his ancestors. Here Jehu exercised his greatest cruelties. It was here that the Assyrians routed the armies of Israel.

(b) Lo-ruhamah ("*unpitied*"): a sign of GOD's withdrawal of mercy from His people.

(c) Lo-amini ("*not my people*"): a sign that GOD would disclaim His people.

- 2. The restoration of Israel in the last days and their union with Judah under the Messiah (1:10,11).

- 3. Israel, the unfaithful wife (Ch. 2). Chapter two gives us a more expanded view of Israel's guilt

and misery and their final restoration. It contains an explanation of the signs of chapter one. After enjoying the Lord's goodness and protection, Israel deserted Him and joined herself in an idolatrous union to Baal (vv. 1-8). Because of this the Lord will strip her of all His gifts and bring her land into desolation (vv. 9-13). Through tribulation Israel will return to her husband the Lord to whom she will be betrothed forever (vv. 14-23).

4. The Lord the faithful husband (Ch. 3). As a sign of the Lord's mercy and love toward His people Hosea is commanded to take back his unfaithful wife who had deserted him (v. 1).

It seems that she had been sold in slavery from whence Hosea redeemed her (v. 2). But before full restoration to conjugal rights there were to intervene many days during which she was to live free from impurity (v. 3)

In like manner Israel is to remain for a long period free from all idolatry until the time of her restoration to full covenant privileges under Messiah (vv. 4, 5).

This last prophecy has been remarkably fulfilled in the Jewish people. For hundreds of years they have been without a king or prince, without priest or sacrifice, and since the return from the Babylonian captivity, they have been free from idolatry.

II. Condemnation: Israel the Sinful Nation (Chaps. 4 to 13:8)

In the first three chapters the Lord spoke of Israel's unfaithfulness to Him by means of the sign of Hosea's marriage. In chapters 4-13 He speaks in plain language to the nation, mentioning the different sins that went to make up Israel's apostasy.

This section consists of many discourses that do not lend themselves readily to analysis. We may sum up the theme of this section as follows: Israel's sin and guilt and the Lord's exhortation to them to repent.

III. Reconciliation: Israel, the Restored Nation (Chs. 13:9 to 14:1)

1. Though Israel has destroyed herself through sin and died as a nation, GOD will bring about her national resurrection (13:9-16. Compare Ezekiel Ch.37).

2. As one teaching a child to pray, the Lord gives Israel the very words she should use in returning to Him (14:1-3).

3. As soon as Israel is ready with words of repentance the Lord is ready with words of blessing and restoration (14:4-9).

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