

HOSEA'S MESSAGE FOR US

Understanding God's Love

THE PROPHET'S STORY (Chapter 1-3)

The Book of Hosea is not very widely studied by God's people these days, but it has one of the most important messages in the Bible! It's about God's love. It is true that other important themes are contained in this book: The Judgment of God, the Restoration of Israel, the Kingdom of Christ, the Way to Revival. But the Love of God is its overriding subject. And the prophet's own life and experience are set forth as an illustration of God's love. Do you know anything about the story of Hosea? The very first lesson in this seven-part series will tell you his story, one that everyone should know!

Hosea has been called the weeping prophet of *Israel* just as Jeremiah (who lived later) is famous as the weeping prophet of *Judah*. God's nation was divided at this time and for many years. I Kings 12 tells how the kingdom split after the death of Solomon. The northern and more disobedient part was called Israel, and the southern part, led by kings descended from David, was called Judah. The Book of II Kings tells how both kingdoms were destroyed. First Israel fell to the Assyrian Empire because of God's judgment on her sins. Later Judah, following the northern kingdom's example, sank into idolatry and vice and was delivered by God into the hands of the Babylonian Empire. As Jeremiah warned of Judah's coming fall to Babylon, Hosea earlier warned Israel of her coming Assyrian conquest. Hosea preached a message of judgment, calling for repentance, but it was definitely a message of love. God used the prophet's unhappy marriage to illustrate all His love for His unfaithful people. The story is a wonderful and moving picture of God's love.

Here are 5 things every member of our class should do in the coming weeks:

1. Read the whole Book of Hosea at least once during the time we are studying these lessons. We will concentrate in our lessons mainly on matters related to the love of God, but it will be good to read the whole book, especially if you have not read it recently. If you want to get well acquainted with a Bible book the length of Hosea, the best thing to do is to read it through once a week for a few weeks. Some may want to do this. But we ask that you read it at least once during these weeks of special study.
2. Try to memorize the weekly Hosea verse. You will find this week's verse elsewhere on this sheet. These seven verses are very helpful and powerful, and taking time to

- learn them will be unusually beneficial.
3. Read the lesson sheet given out each Sunday. It outlines the lesson that will be taught the next week. Read the chapters covered by the lesson and use the sheet to help you see the truths about the love of God revealed in those passages.
 4. Attend class every week. There will be a lot more taught in class than you can read on the lesson sheet. Also, we all need the encouragement and fellowship the class and church afford.
 5. Invite someone to visit our class with you. Others need to hear about the love of God, and you know some who need to hear this message soon. Be an evangelist this summer. Use our class to help somebody find the Lord.
 - 6.

Hosea's Marriage and Heartbreak

This prophet's story is vitally important to his message. God commanded him to marry a woman that would be unfaithful to him (1:2). The Lord told Hosea ahead of time that this was the kind of woman Gomer the daughter of Diblaim would be. With her, he had three children: Jezreel (a son), Lo-ruhamah (a daughter), and Lo-ammi (another son). Each of their names had a symbolic meaning for the nation of Israel.

“Jezreel” is a name that refers to a vast fertile valley in northwest Israel where many famous battles were fought and many other important events took place. The River Kishon flows down through the Valley of Jezreel and the range of mountains called Mt. Carmel borders the valley on the southwest. This is the valley where Deborah and Barak fought Sisera (Judges 4). Here is where Gideon's famous battle with the Midianites occurred (Judges 6). This is where the battle that killed King Saul took place (I Samuel 29 and 31). This is the place where Elijah slew the false prophets (I Kings 18). It will some day be the site of the last great battle, for the Valley of Jezreel is also known as Armageddon! (See Revelation 16:12-16). Napoleon said that it was the most ideal battlefield he had ever seen. Hosea's message about Jezreel, however, dealt with events that relate to Israel's royal house (1:4-5). The ruler of the northern kingdom at this time was King Jeroboam II (1:1), a descendant of Jehu. In the valley of Jezreel, Jehu had killed all the members of the royal family that ruled before him. King Ahab's house had defiled Israel (and even Judah) with Baal-worship, and God commanded that his whole family be destroyed (Read I Kings 9 and 10). Jehu was chosen to do this job, and he did it thoroughly (as you will see if you read the above-mentioned scripture). But his heart was not truly yielded to the Lord, His motives were not right. We know this because Jehu himself indulged in idolatry. Jehu's family ruled Israel for four generations, but none of these kings were righteous (Look over II Kings 13 and 14). Therefore God was going to *“avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu”* (1:4). Jehu's execution of Ahab's family was not carried out because of a desire to honor and obey God. It was bloodthirsty opportunism. Motives make a big difference to God. The house of Jehu would soon come to an end. Also Israel as a nation would fall in the Valley of Jezreel (1:5).

“Lo-ruhamah” was the girl's name. It means “no mercy,” as you can probably guess from reading Hosea 1:6. The prophet said that God would *“no more have mercy”* on the

northern kingdom.

“Lo-ammi” was the second son’s name. It means “not my people” (1:9-22). “Lo” is a negative prefix in Hebrew. God was even saying that Israel would no longer be His people. But his warning came with a promise that some day He would take them back (vs. 10 and 11). At this time the northern and southern kingdoms will unite under *“one head.”* We know from the rest of scripture that this *“Head”* or King will be the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Gomer bore other children. In Chapter 2, Hosea talks to the children about their mother’s unfaithfulness to him. Hosea 1:2 and 2:4 speak of *“the children of whoredom.”* Maybe Gomer bore some children by her illicit lovers after the three she had by Hosea (1:3). Her adulteries were shameless and many. Chapter 2 is a combination of merciful and rebuking words. It is also a combination of references to Gomer and references to Israel. The first verse reminds the children of God’s promise to restore Israel. Lo-ammi (“not my people”) would some day change to Ammi (“my people”). Lo-ruhamah (“no mercy”) would someday be Ruhamah (“mercy”). Then he says *“Plead with your mother”* (2:2). His plea begs for repentance, warns of tough reprisals, reasons for justice and love, and offers full forgiveness and restoration (Read all of Chapter 2 carefully). These words were both for Gomer and Israel.

But Gomer became a prostitute. She served for years as a slave engaged in prostitution for the profit of men who owned her. Chapter 3 tells the amazing conclusion of her story. God told Hosea to go and buy her back. The price he paid (3:2) was very low for a slave (Note Exodus 21:32). She was washed out and wasted, virtually discarded by those who had used her. But her husband bought her back. He didn’t only *take* her back, he *sought* her and *paid* to have her back as his wife. Weep as you read Hosea 3:2-3. Hosea even had biblical grounds to divorce her (Note Hosea 2:2, and see Jeremiah 3:1, Isaiah 50:1, and Matthew 19:9)! But instead of casting her off, he sought her, forgave her, and brought her home! What an example of the kind of love and mercy married people should display toward each other! What a picture of the love of God!

Truths About God’s Love

God’s love is knowing. God knew and told Hosea what Gomer would do before he ever married her. Hosea knew it before she ever committed adultery. God knows right now that some of us will be unfaithful to Him. But He loves us anyway. God’s love is not naive. He knows that not everyone will love Him back, but He loves us all. He sent His Son to die for all of us, knowing that many would not appreciate His love and sacrifice. Yes, His love is knowing.

God’s love is holy. There is no contradiction between God’s judgment on Israel’s sins and His love for them. Read I Corinthians 13, the “Love Chapter,” and note in verses 5 and 6 that true love *“doth not behave itself unseemly”* and *“rejoiceth not in iniquity, but*

rejoiceth in the truth.” If you love someone, you want him to be good and right. Love that condones sin is not real love. God loves us in spite of our sins, but His love is a force to turn us from our sins. This is like what some today call “tough love.” Often we must be “tough” with somebody we love, taking a stand with him about right and wrong. To go along with or even assist in the doing of evil is not a way to demonstrate true love.

God’s love is longsuffering. I Corinthians 13 says it *“suffereth long,” “endureth all things,”* and *“never faileth.”* Hosea took a lot from Gomer because he loved her and hoped to see her some day repent. God treats us that way, too. The day of grace does not last forever, but it does last much longer than the span of human patience.

God love is merciful. Repentance brings automatic forgiveness (I John 1:9). It would be good if our love were that way, too.

God’s love is sacrificial. Hosea paid a price for Gomer’s forgiveness and restoration. Think of it. It wasn’t Gomer that paid so that she could come home; it was her husband who paid to bring her home. That’s God’s love. He Himself paid the price His own justice demanded for our sins. His Son died on the Cross so that God could forgive and save us, and make us His own. What love! Hosea’s name means “Salvation.” Salvation for us is in the fact that God’s love caused Him to pay the price for our sins (Romans 5:8). Will you believe it? Will you receive God’s love for you? Will you here and now accept the gift of eternal life offered you through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23)? Let us note also that true love is always sacrificial. It may cost us something to love someone, even to forgive someone sometimes, but love makes us willing to pay the price.

Weekly Verse to Memorize:

“And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” (Hosea 2:23)