

BOOK OF HOSEA

This is the beginning of 12 books called the Minor Prophets. Books of the Minor Prophets are shorter books and these Minor Prophets are far less well known than the Major Prophets.

1. Hosea was the last prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel; basically he delivered the last warnings sent by God to the Northern Kingdom.
2. The last 2 prophets to the Northern Kingdom of Israel were Amos and Hosea.
 - a) Amos came before Hosea's time although the book of Amos was placed after Hosea.
 - b) Minor prophetic books were not placed in chronological order.
 - c) God has a spiritual reason for doing so and this is the beauty of the Bible where God places every book of the Bible in its perfect place.
3. Amos prophesied about 10 years before Hosea and was a tough accuser, giving stern warnings to the people. But it did not work.
 - a) Therefore, 10 years later, God sent Hosea who adopted a tender, wooing and pleading approach unlike Amos who shouted warnings!
 - b) While Amos focused on the judgements of God, Hosea focused on the compassion and mercy of God and that God would be doing all these out of His steadfast love and for the good of Israel.
4. Hosea preached during the reign of King Jeroboam the 2nd (not King Jeroboam the 1st who broke away from the Southern Kingdom and formed the Northern Kingdom).
 - a) Hosea preached about 200 years after the breakup of the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom of Israel.
 - b) Before the breakup, everyone worshipped at the Temple (built by King Solomon) in Jerusalem.
 - i. But King Jeroboam the 1st decided to prevent his Northern Kingdom Israelites from worshiping at Jerusalem (which was located in the Southern Kingdom), so he made 2 golden calves, placing one at the northern end and the other at the southern end of his kingdom.
 - ii. King Jeroboam the 1st misled his people into idol worship.
 - a) The Israelites thought that they were still loyal to Jehovah but for convenience, they worshipped these 2 golden calves. The golden calf is a bull and so it represents prosperity.
 - b) He appointed his own priests, these priests were not appointed by God (i.e. they were not of the line of Aaron or the tribe of Levites).
 - iii. Hence 200 years later, they totally forgot the covenant of Israel with God at Mt Sinai. They added to the worship of the golden calves, the worship of Baal (a fertility god) and had sex in the temple as part of their worship.
 - c) By Hosea's time, they were Israelites in name only.
 - i. These 10 tribes in the Northern Kingdom were worshipping another god but still called themselves Israelites.

- ii. It is very much like nominal Christians today. They never open the Bible to read a single page of it. They worship a god of health and wealth and are no different from pagan worshippers. Although 33% of the world claim to be Christians, this is far from true because the vast majority of these Christians do not know Him!
- d) The Northern Kingdom of Israel was very prosperous but they soon went into the Assyrian captivity (in 722 BC).
 - i. We should be clear that it is only a matter of time that God will act and punish the people for their disobedience towards Him!
 - ii. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was very corrupt at that time! Even the priests could be bought at a price. Lots of drinking (causing alcoholism), and violence were taking place and the people were money-crazy, sex-crazy and power-hungry!
 - iii. It is very much like the world today especially in the so-called “Christian world” but God will only allow it for a while. Hosea was sent as a prophet to warn these people. The message is also meant for today’s nominal Christians.
- 5. This book is difficult to read because:
 - a) It is a collection of 25 years of Hosea’s prophecies.
 - b) Also, 99% of these prophecies were written in Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is even more difficult for us to understand and appreciate than English poetry. Without using the heart to feel, it is difficult to understand even English poetry.

As such, it is better to listen to the audio version of Hosea to get the feel of it first. We must be aware that much of the Bible is in poetic writing like the book of Hosea, hence these books are often better listened to, using the audio version first, to get the feel of it before reading such books.
- 6. The name “Hosea” means “Salvation”.
- 7. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was called Israel in the Bible whilst the Southern Kingdom was called Judah. However, the Northern Kingdom was also often referred to as Ephraim or Jacob in the Bible, rather than Israel. Maybe God wanted us to note that these people were not His people anymore. It is a warning in a tender tone.

What were the Warnings that Hosea preached?

1. He warned the Israelites not to trust in Baal, the fertility god, whom they thought would give them good harvests because God would be taking all the food away! There would be famine and shortage of food.
2. He also warned them not to trust in idolatry for the security of their future because God would be sending them into exile if they would not listen and repent. The Northern Kingdom made political alliances with Egypt instead of trusting God and turning only to Him.

What is the Theme of this Book?

1. The theme of the book of Hosea is found in Hosea 2:19.
2. The Hebrew word “Chesed” is used in Hosea 2:19.
 - a) This word can mean “love”. But love is often mistaken as temporal lust. So a better definition of the word “Chesed” may be loyal love or lovingkindness (used in King James Version) or steadfast love (used in other Bible versions).
 - b) God’s love is not a momentary emotion and God is steadfast in His love even when He is meting out punishment.
 - c) God will never abandon His people although He should have divorced Ephraim(i.e. Northern Kingdom of Israel) long ago. It is the most terrible feeling when a spouse is unfaithful
3. Hosea 2:19 says that God betrothed Israel to Him forever, in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.
 - a) It is a righteous love, not just a feeling.
 - b) The marriage vow is a symbol of loyal love, “for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, in poverty or in riches, till death do us part.”
 - c) God’s love is for eternity. God looks at Israel and the Church as His wife. He loves and cherishes both Israel and the Church till eternity and beyond.
4. God rescued Israel (His bride) from Egypt with the Passover blood and established a covenant (between Israel and God) at Mt Sinai.
 - a) This is like a marriage ceremony. In Exodus Chapter 20, the phrase “I will” was used many times by God at Mt Sinai. E.g. “I will be your God and you will be My people!”
 - b) It is like in a marriage ceremony where a couple will answer “I will” when asked if they would take each other as lawful husband or wife. Marriage is a covenant and the couple is to be loyal and steadfast in love.
 - c) God brought Israel to the Promised Land which was like a bridal home, and provided her with everything she needed (in the land of milk and honey) and as long as she obeyed Him, she would be blessed.
 - d) But if she worshipped the golden calves and Baal, she had committed spiritual adultery. These people worshipped in the temples of Baal but still wanted the blessings of God. Therefore, God punished His wife, Israel, with famine and invasions, etc.
 - e) Finally, God punished His people, Israel, by sending them into exile. This, however, is not a divorce but a separation, because God cannot divorce as He had forbidden divorce (See Mark 10:9).
 - f) Israel turned away from God but God will never turn away from Israel. God will keep begging for Israel to repent and return to Him. In the New Covenant, God will give a new heart and a new spirit to all believers.

Structure and Summary of the book of Hosea

Chapter 1

1. The book starts with Hosea being told by God to marry a prostitute, who was a terrible woman. They had three kids. The first 2 were Hosea's own children but the 3rd kid was likely to be from adultery of his wife.
 - a) The 1st child was named Jezreel (rebellious) a rebellious kid, like rebellious Israel.
 - b) The 2nd daughter was named Lo-Ruhamah which meant "no mercy" or "not pitied". God would not pity Israel and would send them famine and merciless attacks by her neighbours.
 - c) The 3rd child was named Lo-Ammi which meant "Not my people". God was effectively saying to Israel, "I AM separated from you. Go into exile!".
2. God's prophets often have to go through "prophetic symbolisms" in their lives. For example, Jeremiah was not allowed to marry so that he could feel what it was like without a wife. Hosea had to marry a promiscuous prostitute.
3. God loves Israel but Israel rejected God as her husband. God has no loyal wife as in the case of Hosea. Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful wife was to symbolize the message of unfaithfulness so that the Israelites could see themselves as being as unfaithful to God as Hosea's terrible wife was unfaithful to Hosea.
4. Hosea's wife was always trying to run away to other lovers. Hosea must have felt like how God felt about adulterous Israel. It is like Christians, always running away from God. His wife left him after the 3rd child was born because her lover could pamper her with more luxuries and not burdened her at home with chores, etc. Many Christians feel that way, "we cannot do this and that", we cannot party, etc.

Chapter 3

1. God asked Hosea to take his wife back after she was abandoned by her lovers. Nobody wanted her anymore and Hosea had to pay 15 shekels of silver to buy her back although she had abandoned the family and shamed his name. This also reflects the redemptive love of God who sent His only begotten Son Jesus to die and redeem us.
2. The love of God for Israel is seen in Hosea's love for his wife. The whole Bible is not about people, not about Hosea but about God. The whole life of Hosea was to demonstrate the character of God.

Chapters 4 to 11

There are a whole lot of warnings in these few chapters.

1. Why was Ephraim always wanting to run away from God?
 - a) The main reason is found in Hosea 4:1.
 - b) There was no truth or mercy in Ephraim and they had no knowledge of God. Here, we are not talking about the intellectual knowledge of God. In Hebrew, this word "knowledge" refers to experiential knowledge and not just head knowledge. The knowledge of God is not about knowing the Bible verses or memorizing them.

- c) We must experience God and know how real He is.
 - i. One can better experience Him in the mission field. We tend not to experience God in comfortable environments as we do not seem to need God. We may experience His blessings but not Him. He is like a third party, far away in heaven.
 - ii. In a mission field, you are nobody and may sometimes face danger. You need God for protection and provision especially if you are in an unfriendly place and you will experience God when you cannot get help from others.
- ci) The priests in Hosea's days had totally forgotten God. People had no experiential knowledge of God because they were prosperous. But when they went into exile, they needed God and could experience His mercy. Therefore, one reason why Christians today run away from God to other gods is because they have no experiential knowledge of God.
- 2. Hosea 4:6 says "My people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge" because they had rejected knowledge (not the knowledge that comes from bible study).
 - a) People rely on office politics, financial investments, taking of health supplements, etc. to help make themselves satisfied and happy.
 - b) To them, they need other things on Earth because God is for heaven only. They do not trust God to provide everything that they need.
 - c) Hence they have no experience of God's mercy, love, kindness, provision, etc.
- 3. In Hosea 11:8-9, God was saying, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? My heart churns within Me. My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute My anger." This was depicted by the picture of Hosea redeeming his wife who went astray.

Chapters 12 to 14

Again, we see a lot of warnings in these chapters. Hosea was telling his wife not to do these things again otherwise he would still have to punish her.

- 1. Hosea 14:4. One day, God would heal Israel's backsliding and hinted that He would give them a new heart. This is not the main theme, though, in the book of Hosea.
- 2. Hosea 14:8. God was saying, "Do not turn to anyone else, I AM all that you need." So, Christians, remember to do your best and God will do His will in your life.
- 3. Hosea 14:9. This verse was added by someone else (and not written by Prophet Hosea). It exhorts us to "understand these things". The book of Hosea is for us to understand the following:
 - a) The steadfast love of God who never gives up on us.
 - b) The covenant between Israel and God will never end. After God regathered the Israelites in 1948 and brought them back to Israel, we will see in the book of Revelation that Israel will be called back to Him eventually.
 - c) The suffering of God when He sees Israel and Christians worshipping idols just like how Hosea experienced through his own sufferings. See God's heart when He says, "How can I give you up?" So do not turn to other idols, or human alliances, etc. but depend only on Him.