



## THE MINOR PROPHETS

We come to the so-called “Minor Prophets,” the last twelve books of the Old Testament which were commonly known among the Jews simply as “the Twelve” (see page 87). These prophets are “minor” only with regard to the size of the books which bear their names; their messages are as well inspired of God as is the rest of the Bible. They spoke to the people of their day with as much purpose and authority as did the other prophets, and among their words are some of the most specific details of the coming Messiah.



### The Book of HOSEA

The name *Hosea* is in Hebrew the same as *Oshea* and *Hoshea*, the prior name of the man Moses called *Jehoshua* (Num. 13:8, 16), later shortened to *Joshua* (Num. 14:6). In Romans 9:25, translated from Greek, the prophet’s name is *Osee*. Hosea lived and preached in the northern kingdom of Israel beginning in the days of Jeroboam II, whose reign ended about 41 years before the captivity of the kingdom in Assyria (II Kings 14-17; see Appendix C). Hosea does not mention Amaziah, who reigned in Judah during the first 14 years of Jeroboam’s reign in Israel, so it is supposed that he did not prophesy that early. He names the next four, ending with Hezekiah, who began to reign in Judah about 6 years before Israel’s captivity. These points being considered, we conclude that Hosea prophesied not fewer than 35 years, nor more than 64 years. Assuming he prophesied until the end of the kingdom of Israel, it is generally thought that his preaching occupied approximately 40 years (not such a *minor* prophet).

The book records a sample of Hosea’s preaching by which God called Israel to recognize the heinousness of their sin and return to the merciful God for forgiveness and restoration. Because events in his own life illustrate the spiritual state of Israel and her relationship to God, some personal details of Hosea’s life are printed here as well: his God-ordered marriage to the prostitute Gomer, the birth and naming of their three children, her adultery and her return to Hosea with his forgiveness.

As Jeremiah prophesied at the end of the kingdom of Judah, so Hosea prophesied (about 80 years earlier) at the end of the kingdom of Israel. His message is very similar to that of Jeremiah in content and tone (Hosea has even been called “the weeping prophet of the north”). Three other literary prophets were contemporary with Hosea. In Hosea’s early years, Amos prophesied in Israel (see Amos 1:1). Later, Isaiah and Micah prophesied in Judah (see Isaiah 1:1 and Micah 1:1). As Judah’s sin was not so far advanced as Israel’s, the messages to the two kingdoms differed somewhat in urgency, but God did speak to both kingdoms through all four prophets, warning Judah not to fall as far as Israel had fallen, and urging Israel to compare themselves with Judah, see how far they had fallen, and to come back to the Law.

Hosea is also sometimes called “the prophet of divine love” because, even through the condemnation of the horrors of their sin, God still called Israel to respond to His love and come back to be forgiven. He was a true prophet, by whom God promised to preserve His people (12:13), but the people didn’t listen.

The message of the book is concluded and summarized in the last verse: “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein (14:9).

### OUTSTANDING FEATURES OF THE BOOK

The single most obvious significant feature of this book is God’s comparison of spiritual apostasy with carnal adultery. In one form or another, Hosea uses the word “whoredom” fifteen times to express God’s evaluation of Israel’s departure from the Law and their practice of idolatry.

God ordered Hosea at the beginning of his ministry to marry a prostitute (1:2) as an object lesson to Israel (3:1) of the nature of their religious practices. The children which were born to them were each named as lessons and prophecies from God to the people (see the Verses of Interest section).

Through Hosea, God prophesied the destruction of the northern Kingdom (1:4; 8:8), the sparing of Judah at that time (1:7), the later fall of Judah (5:5, 10-15), the resurrection (and other details) of Jesus (6:2), the restoration of the Jews in the Messiah (3:4-5; 6:11) and even the salvation of the Gentiles (1:10-11).

God's words to Israel and Judah have application to all peoples everywhere in every generation. Passages as 4:15-18; 5:4 and 9:1 describe the spiritual condition of many even in our own generation. The New Testament describes the status of an apostate Christian in the same terms (Rom. 7:1-4; Jas. 4:4). God doesn't change (Hebrews 13:8), and is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35); we are warned with ancient Israel to hear and heed the word of God (I Cor. 10:11).

## AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Summary of Content: God's appeal to Israel & Judah that they realize the serious nature and consequences of their sin and accept His love and restoration

- I. A foundation for illustration of the lesson established in Hosea's marriage (chs. 1-3)
  - A. The marriage to Gomer, and their three children born (ch. 1)
  - B. Gomer's return to prostitution, and recitation of the lesson Israel is to learn from Hosea's marriage (ch. 2)
  - C. The restoration of Gomer, and the promise of restoration of Israel (ch. 3)
- II. The lesson drawn in specific detail from the illustration (chs. 4-14)
  - A. The steps Israel took into apostasy (chs. 4-6)
  - B. Similes of Israel's present condition (ch. 7)
  - C. Unfaithful children are punished (ch. 8)
  - D. Israel is that unfaithful child (ch. 9)
  - E. Further illustration - by simile and analogy - of Israel condition, and its remedy (ch. 10)
  - F. Israel's present condition contrasted against her beginning status with God (ch. 11)
  - G. Plain statements of Israel's (and Judah's) condition, and declarations that God is their only possible Savior (chs. 12-14)

## SOME VERSES OF INTEREST IN THE BOOK OF HOSEA

- 1:4 "The house of Jehu" includes five kings of Israel: Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam and Zachariah. Hosea began to prophesy "a little while" before the end of that dynasty. Zachariah reigned only six months after the death of Jeroboam. "The blood of Jezreel" is that described in II Kings 10, in which Jehu earned the vengeance of God for his brutality.
- 1:10 The first part of this verse is the promise God made to Abraham (Gen. 22:17). Hosea shows that it had not referred to the nation Israel, but to later "children" (*i.e.* Christians - Gal. 3:7). The second part of the verse clarifies that the prophecy is of the Gentiles. Peter alludes to this in I Peter 2:10.
- 2:16 "Ishi" means "my husband"; "Baali" means "my lord." The statement is a prophecy of the relationship of the church to Christ (Rev. 19:9; II Cor. 11:2).
- 4:1 God has a controversy with people who don't keep the truth, practice mercy and retain knowledge of Him.

- 4:6 The first step identified in Israel's downfall is their lack of knowledge of God and His law (v. 14). Compare Isaiah 5:13.
- 5:6 God withdraws from apostates. Thus, the Jews were cast out of their land, and thus the church is warned of removal from God's presence (Rev. 1:12-13, 20; 2:5).
- 6:1-2 A prophecy of Christ's resurrection on the third day, and it's result in drawing souls to Him, this is also recognition of the fact that God who punishes also restores.
- 6:4 Israel's professed "goodness" wasn't sincere; it disappeared soon after it appeared. Compare 13:3 – their presence on the land will be about as stable as their "goodness." Discipleship must be sincere, from the heart (Deut. 6:5; Rom. 12:2; John 4:24).
- 6:5 Judgment and condemnation is by the word of the Lord (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12).
- 6:6 When the Pharisees condemned His eating with publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:13), and His eating of grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:7), Jesus referred to this prophecy of mercy.
- 6:10 God sees man's apostasy as "an horrible thing."
- 7:2 God sees and remembers all man's wickedness, and also his righteousness (*cp.* Mal. 3:16).
- 7:8 When Ephraim (synecdoche for the northern kingdom, Israel) "mixed himself among the people" he illustrated the error against which God warns the church (*cp.* II Cor. 6:14-18). "A cake not turned" is only ½ what it ought to be (as a pancake cooked only on one side): Ephraim is half-hearted in professing godliness (see 6:4 and note above).
- 7:14 When Israel was oppressed, they did not turn to God. They came together in the place of food distribution, but they excluded God from their lives (*cp.* Ezek 33:31).
- 8:7 Israel illustrates the truth written by Paul in Galatians 6:7 – "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (*cp.* II Cor. 9:6).
- 8:8 Contrast this sad description with Paul's of "a vessel unto honor" (II Timothy 2:21).
- 10:8 On his way to Golgotha Jesus referred to this prophecy of falling mountains (Luke 23:30).
- 10:12-13 Having plowed wickedness and reaped iniquity, it was now time for Israel to sow righteousness that they might reap mercy.
- 11:1 Here is the prophecy of Jesus' coming out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15; *cp.* Ex. 4:22).
- 11:7-11 On "Admah" and "Zeboim" see Gen. 10:19 and Deut 29:23. God's holiness will not "enter into the city" to utterly destroy those whom He knew would one day return to righteousness.
- 13:9 Man's destruction results from himself (14:1); only God can save him.
- 13:14 In I Cor. 15:55 Paul alludes to this prophecy of the grave's loss of "sting" and "victory."
- 14:2 "Calves" are offspring, that which comes from another. Israel is urged to ensure that what comes from their lips is only praise of God (*cp.* I Pet. 4:11).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why are the last twelve books of the Old Testament called “the Minor Prophets”?
2. During what generation did Hosea live?
3. Why did God direct Hosea to marry a prostitute?
4. What is the significance of the name God gave Hosea’s first son, Jezreel?
5. What is the significance of the name God gave Hosea’s daughter, Lo-ruhamah?
6. What is the significance of the name God gave Hosea’s second son, Lo-ammi?
7. From 4:6, 5:5 and 6:4 identify 3 factors that contributed to Israel’s fall into captivity
8. Name at least one figure of speech used by Hosea, and show where it is used.
9. Identify at least one verse that gives the true reason for Israel’s captivity.
10. Identify at least one verse of Hosea that is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament.