

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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**Broadcast:** 03/04 January 2026

**No.:** T1440

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## **The Message of the Minor Prophets**

### **The message of Hosea**

*[The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **The Minor Prophets Overview**

The Minor Prophets are the twelve prophetic books from Hosea to Malachi, written between the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Some teachers consider them as one book, for in the ancient Tanak order of the Hebrew Bible they are one book, called 'The Twelve.' The reason they are called Minor Prophets is because of their brevity rather than their importance, we know that every Word of God is important and has been written down for our own instruction. The Minor Prophets were men who God spoke directly to. A prophet was a mouthpiece or spokesman who spoke in authority for another. Remember Moses in Exodus 4 where he told God that he was not eloquent enough to speak for Him. But God provided him a way through his brother Aaron to speak for Him. Prophets were an instrument of God to convey His will and word to the people. They were men who encountered the living God and were often a powerful witness for Him. Hosea was used in a time when God's people Israel had generally turned their back on Him. In fact, they were blatantly going against the Ten Commandments that had been brought to them by Moses. I don't know about you, but I must admit that I have rarely studied the Minor Prophets, except for Jonah and the famous story of the large fish which swallowed him, a great Sunday school lesson.

#### **The Background of Hosea**

Hosea was written around the 8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. There had been internal strife which had divided the nation of Israel. The northern kingdom broke away from the southern kingdom (1 Kings ch. 12). The southern kingdom of Judea was known as the 'House of David.' Hosea lived in the northern kingdom, whose capital was Samaria. Hosea was called to speak on God's behalf to the people of Israel during the reign of one of Israel's worst kings, king Jeroboam II. King Jeroboam had led the nation into chaos from which it never recovered. In the year 722 B.C., the Assyrian empire swept down from the north and destroyed Israel (2 Kings 14-17). Hosea the prophet saw it all coming. The northern kingdom had become adulterous. They never benefited from the godly rulers of the southern kingdom, who continued in the line of David, although over the years, they too, had both good and evil kings. Other kings who ruled around this time were Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Hosea is a book written from a collection of 25 years' worth of his preachings. It is written in the form of poetry, of imagery, and some of the language gives great expression to Hosea's thoughts.

#### **The Theme of Hosea**

The theme of the Hosea is redeeming love, God's redeeming, and I say reverently, God's outrageous love. The way that God never ceases to love, and to seek to win back those who have forsaken Him, humbles me. Some of the verses in the book reveal the true heart of God for His own. We will look at some later, but the words in chapter 11 verse 8 impress me greatly. 'How can I give you up, Ephraim? ...My heart churns within me; My sympathy is stirred.' God's faithfulness to Israel despite Israel's unfaithfulness is seen clearly throughout the book. God's promise to save and to heal Israel from its waywardness also comes out. There are themes of forgiveness, mercy, long-suffering, patience, grace, kindness and many more. Hosea illustrates the unfaithfulness of

Israel, which is set forth in the terms of a marriage relationship. This is not the first time in the Bible that God speaks in such a way to show the unfaithfulness of Israel; see Isaiah chapter 54. Israel was married to Jehovah but had committed 'spiritual adultery' and had turned to idols. The word harlot or prostitute is often used to illustrate where Israel had taken the relationship to. The Lord in this picture is the Husband, the Redeemer, and the Saviour. We see a picture of the love, intimacy, privilege, and responsibility that the Lord requires from His wife, Hosea had to play out the very thing Israel did to God in his own marriage relationship, and what a tragic experience. Israel's forsaking of the Lord was brought home to Hosea in the adulterous acts of his own wife, so his personal experience became an allegory of God's experience of Israel. She was not only unfaithful, but her sin also took its character from the exalted relationship into which she had been brought. In the future Israel will become the restored wife of the Lord.

### **The Structure of Hosea**

Hosea is divided into 4 parts.

Chapters 1-3 - Hosea's marriage.

Chapters 4-7 - Israel's sins.

Chapters 8-10 - Israel's judgement.

Chapters 11-14 - Israel's future restoration.

### **Some Truths of Hosea**

God really feels it when His people are unfaithful to Him, and God cannot condone sin. God will never cease to love His own, and consequently, He seeks to win back those who have forsaken Him. There is also no denying the place that Israel has in the Lord's heart, they are His beloved people. In John 1 vv. 11-12 we read that,

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

### **The Prophet Hosea**

Hosea's name means 'the Lord saves.' The Lord will save His people Israel in a future day. Hosea warned the people of the consequences of their unfaithfulness to God. We need to remember that Hosea was a man who had a family, a wife and children. What happened to him was real life. In one sense I feel sorry for Hosea. Imagine your life being lived out in the open for everyone to see and judge. He even had to go back to the marketplace to buy back his wife who had turned to prostitution! He had to forgive her and welcome her back, thus illustrating the redeeming love of the Lord. There are other servants of God in the Bible who had to go through some harrowing things in their lives to allow us to see and understand the ways of God. Being a servant of the Lord can be tough and may feel unfair at times. I often remember the instruction of God to Ananias regarding Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9 vv. 15-16,

Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.

Paul did suffer many things in his faithful service for the Lord. Give Hosea his due, he was obedient and carried out the instructions he was given by the Lord without a murmur or complaint, which is a good lesson for us!

### **The prophecy of Hosea**

Hosea's prophecy was directed to the people in his generation. They had sinned and been unfaithful; they had sold themselves to other nations, and they were worshipping other gods. He warned them that Assyria would come and overrun the nation and that there would be terrible slaughter, and that God would allow this to happen. God did graciously hold back His judgement for another

150 years. Hosea's prophecy also points forward to Israel's future restoration. For now, Israel has been sidelined in God's plans until the Lord comes at the Rapture to take the Church home to Heaven. The Church is the virgin bride of the Lord Jesus, whereas Israel is the forgiven wife of the LORD. Israel will be the LORD's earthly wife, whereas the Church will be the Lamb's heavenly bride. The Lord Himself will come back into the world, and He will save, in power, a repentant Israel. He will defeat Israel's enemies, and He will rule and reign from Jerusalem and His people will be restored to their land.

## **The message of Hosea**

### **Chapter 1**

Hosea was told by the Lord to go and take a wife of prostitution and to have children by her because this was what Israel had done in departing from the Lord. It is difficult to understand if Gomer was a prostitute before Hosea married her, or if she went into prostitution during their marriage. Either way God was showing Israel how far they had gone from a caring intimate relationship with Himself to selling themselves to others. Hosea and Gomer had a son who was called Jezreel which was to indicate the judgement that would come on Israel and the end of the house of Israel. Then she had a daughter who was called Lo-Ruhamah which means 'no mercy.' God would not save them this time. They then had another son, and he was called Lo-Ammi which means, 'For you are not My people, and I am not your God.' The children of Israel had departed so far from God. God has great mercy, patience, forgiveness and grace; however, enough was enough with His beloved people. Yet, He comforts them to say that one day Israel will be great again, Judah and Israel shall be joined once more, and then they will again be known as 'sons of the living God.'

### **Chapter 2**

In chapter 2 we learn of God's view of Israel's prostitution and their unfaithfulness. The Lord distanced Himself from them, 'for she is not My wife.' Israel had left the care and protection of a loving and faithful God, whom they had proved on many occasions. Instead, they had sought protection from other nations. They had played the fool. They had broken the Ten Commandments. God was going to leave them naked, exposed, and desolate before other nations. They were even using the grain, wine, wool, and the linen that God had given them in their sacrifice to Baal. In verse 13 the Lord said, 'But Me she forgot.' How sad it must have been for the Lord to see His people in such a state after all He had done for them. Verse 14 shows His measure of outrageous love, 'Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her.' She, Israel in the future millennial reign of Christ, will be restored and they shall have all they need and nothing, or no one, will be able to harm them. They will respond as His holy people in worship and praise and adoration to their Lord.

### **Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 is short but poignant. Almost unbelievably Hosea was told to go and love Gomer who is in prostitution to other men. Hosea faithfully headed down to the marketplace where He purchased her for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. The shame that Hosea must have felt must have been terrible. Yet he put aside his own feelings and redeemed his wife and brought her back to his house. It seems that Gomer was not brought back fully into the relationship she and Hosea had before she went into prostitution. So, likewise Israel was sidelined; they would not have a king or a prince, neither could they worship until they returned to seek the Lord. Israel had broken their covenant with God.

### **Chapters 4-5**

You can almost hear Hosea's voice cry out to the people. 'Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: 'There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land.'" Hosea lays out God's charges against the children of Israel in various ways.

## **Chapters 6-7**

Hosea calls the people to repentance. He speaks of healing, of binding up, of revival, but for what purpose? To live in God's sight! Hosea calls them to go after knowledge; it seems that the history of the people, and God's dealings with them, had been lost through the generations who had turned their back on God. It is important to teach your family the truths of God. Hosea often uses Ephraim as the name for the people of the northern kingdom, whose largest and most important city was Samaria. I was just thinking of that scene in John 4 when the Lord brings blessing through a sinful woman of Samaria to the people of Samaria. Hosea continues to speak out in words of imagery describing how the people had behaved against the Lord. A silly dove, without sense. A cake unturned, half baked. Prepared hearts like an oven. He points out their reliance upon other nations like Egypt and Assyria, and that destruction would come upon them because they had transgressed against the Lord.

## **Chapters 8-9**

Hosea highlights the apostasy of Israel. They used the silver and gold that God had given them to melt down to make idols for their homes, making altars to worship and sin against God. God remembers their iniquity, and He will punish their sins. They will return to Egypt, the place where God had saved them from in the great deliverance. The last verse in chapter 8 is quite a rebuke for Israel. 'For Israel has forgotten his Maker.' Israel although being materially rich were told not to rejoice with joy like other peoples because they had played the prostitute against God. Days of tribulation and trial were soon to come upon them, and God would not protect them, He would allow their destruction because they had brought it upon themselves. Again, the last verse in chapter 9 God says that He will cast them away, and they will be wanderers among the nations.

## **Chapters 10**

Hosea continues to outline Israel's sin. He speaks about them embellishing the sacred pillars of the Lord, so that their hearts were divided between the worship of idols and God. They are guilty! They ploughed wickedness and now they are paying the consequences of the fruit they have sown. Having trusted in their own ways, Hosea tells them it is time to sow righteousness, reap in mercy as it is now time for them to seek the Lord. He reminds them that the Lord is coming to reign in righteousness.

## **Chapters 11-13**

As we go into the last few chapters of the book we see the wonderful love of God, His outrageous redeeming love. God remembers His love for Israel in their infancy. He remembers His own Son, Jewish born, the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, 'Out of Egypt I called My son.' He ponders His love and care, 'taking them by the arms.' Drawing them with gentle cords, and with bands of love. Feeding them. He almost can't believe that they have backslidden and worshipped other gods. But, in wonderful love He says, 'How can I give you up, Ephraim?' 'My heart churns within Me, My sympathy is stirred.' God is God and He is faithful and thinks in a different way to you and me. His love never fails, it never gives up, it will never give up on you. Israel had provoked the Lord to anger. They had gone too far, God would deal with His people in judgement, however He will never ever give up on them. He reminds them that the judgement would be relentless. That they would learn the hard way that the Lord is their true King, that He was the Lord their God, and there was no other.

## **Chapter 14**

The last chapter speaks of the restoration of Israel in a future day. Israel will eventually be ashamed for what they have done, when they will look on the Lord whom they have pierced. They will repent and turn to the Lord. The Lord will have mercy on them, and He will graciously heal them. They will once more be the apple of God's eye, and they will truly be His people in word and deed, forever. They will flourish, they will grow like the lily, they will be beautiful like an olive tree, and they will express a beautiful fragrance like Lebanon. They will again appreciate that God will always provide every need for His children. These things will come to pass after the Rapture, and

the day of tribulation when the Jewish nation will suffer terribly, before the Lord appears in power and great glory, unlike the last time the earth saw the Lord, which was in the shame and horror of Calvary.

### **What does message of Hosea mean to us today**

Firstly, the Church today can prostitute itself to the world and still claim to be faithful to the Lord (James 4:4-10). On the face of things, they seem faithful, but their love is for another, not fully for God. Secondly, the redeeming love of our Lord Jesus Christ is almost unbelievable, that's if we didn't know the true heart of God. We all have sinned, but wonderfully the Lord Jesus has purchased us by His precious blood which was shed on the cross of Calvary. Thirdly, even if we are unfaithful, the Lord will never give up on us. Lastly, the Lord's feelings and His compassion towards mankind is unrelenting.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29 v.11).

I pray that this study will challenge your hearts and give you a taste to further study the Minor Prophets.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on The Message of the Minor Prophets, 'The Message of Hosea'. Talk number T1440.

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