

What's the Message – Lesson 66

We continue our study of the Prophets with the book of Hosea.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that the Lord will open our eyes to see that we have been just as unfaithful to God as the wife of Hosea was, and that we deserve only His judgment. But His mercy is so great that He is ready to forgive us, and take us back to him, if we repent and obey Him only. Amen

Last time we heard the words of Amos in protest of the behavior of the people of Israel. He spoke against turning religion into an empty mechanical ritual that had no concern about their practices outside a church service. They failed to understand that to be chosen by God also meant they must have complete trust . . . in today's language, . . . faith. And this meant obedience and joy, or judgment and death.

Hosea was a contemporary of Amos, and repeated the same warning as Amos did, but used his own life as a symbol for the intended relationship between God and His children. The book of Hosea is in two parts: the first part is covered in chapters one through three, and the second part in the remainder of the book. As Hosea tells us in verse one, he served during the reign of Jeroboam the Second in Israel, and the reigns of four kings of Judah - Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

We have seen in our previous studies that this was a time of political chaos, almost total anarchy. In only 25 years, six kings followed Jeroboam the Second, half of them through assassination. It was also a time of spiritual and moral decay. In his book **The Kingdom of God**, professor Bright says: *Instruction in the true religion had lapsed, and with it all knowledge of the God of Israel; the land is permeated with the poison of paganism. Parents set for their children examples of immorality which the children only outstrip.*

This is the situation in which the preaching of Hosea was heard. But the book of Hosea is largely unknown to many people, and there are only a few verses that you might recognize as being familiar.

Probably the best known of these is in chapter 8, verse 7 – *They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.*

Another one might be from chapter 6, verse 6 – *For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.*

But standing alone, without context, we have little idea what was really meant by these verses. So Teacher, what is the message of Hosea, and how does it apply to us?

To begin with, in chapter one we meet the adulterous wife of Hosea, a woman by the name of Gomer. She is incapable of being true to Hosea, just as Israel has been unfaithful to The Lord. Gomer apparently leaves Hosea for a time and becomes a slave, and under instructions from God, Hosea goes to the market and buys her back. The analogy of God being the loving husband of Israel is a picture that Isaiah and Jeremiah will also paint. And just as a husband deserves the faithfulness of his wife, so God reasonably requires Israel to be faithful to Him. We read in chapter two, verses 19 and 20, a wonderful forgiveness and restoration awaits those who repent and return to God: *I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.*

It is a foreshadowing of the role of Jesus, who came to buy us back from Satan with the shedding of His blood, and to restore us to God as his faithful children. As John Bright writes in the chapter “A Remnant Shall Repent”: *Most interesting of all is the formulation Hosea gave to the covenant bond which bound Israel to her God. It is a formulation which became classic, and which was taken up by many a subsequent prophet – particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The covenant is a wedlock; in it God “married” Israel and made her His “wife.” To worship other gods as Israel had done is plain “adultery,” and if no sincere reconciliation is effected, the end of it will be “divorce” – national ruin. God demands of His people that utter loyalty which is the only proper response to God’s covenant favor.*

It is into this setting that Hosea utters his familiar condemnation about the empty ritual of meaningless worship, that God wants our faithfulness, not just our burnt offerings. It is a message relevant to all ages. Are we God's faithful children, or have we replaced Him with other gods in our life? In His love and mercy He will restore us to His family if we are faithful, but He is also the God of justice who will punish us just as He did Israel for turning our backs on His word.

Next time we will study two of the lesser-known books of the Old Testament: the books of Micah and Joel.