



PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

HOSEA

Return to the Lord





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HOSEA

BY JAMES STONE



matthiasmedia

SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Return to the Lord

Pathway Bible Guides: Hosea

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Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

Email: sales@matthiasmedia.com

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Our world continues to experience confusion when it comes to the meaning and expression of love. Just one example is the revolution that the Western world has witnessed in the attitudes towards, and practices of, marriage. Love, it would seem, remains a mystery—and our homes, societies and nations continue to suffer as a result.

Yet for all our uncertainty about love, there are some areas where almost everyone would still agree. Few would argue, for example, over whether a child should respond to a loving parent with love. Few would argue over whether a husband and wife can rightly expect the unconditional, committed love that they have promised to one another. How incredible and confronting, then, to turn to the pages of the Bible and find the God of the universe pictured as a jilted lover—a betrayed husband and a rejected father. Yet this is exactly what we encounter in the message of Hosea, the 8th-century BC prophet to Israel.

These images communicate sobering and uncomfortable truths about humanity. As it was for the nation of Israel, so too for people today—we have all been like an unfaithful wife and a disobedient child towards God, more than we could ever have realized apart from God’s word revealing the truth. Our attitudes and actions show that we are justly charged with nothing less than the spiritual equivalent of adultery. We

are undoubtedly deserving of judgement. Yet Hosea's prophecy also communicates rich and precious truths about God's unbreakable love. Incredibly, he steadfastly remains the ever-faithful husband and the ever-gracious Father. And all this penned by a prophet who, far from being removed from the truths he proclaimed, actually embodied them in his own marriage!

In Hosea, the first of the 12 'minor' prophets, we find a message that was major in its importance for Israel and a message that is no less important for us today. We find a love that takes people's attitudes and actions seriously. We find a love that is not the opposite of judgement but rather, and necessarily, incorporates it. We find a love that passionately and repeatedly calls for repentance and return. We find a love that goes to extreme lengths to forgive and reconcile. We find a love that prepares us for God's graciousness revealed in all its fullness in the coming of his own dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ. It is a love that will not let you go.

James Stone

February 2016

1. INTRODUCING HOSEA



Getting started

What, if anything, do you know about the book of Hosea?



Light from the Word

Read Hosea 1:1.

It is clear from the very first verse of Hosea that we are at a particular time and location in God's dealings with his people. Therefore, to rightly understand the book we need to work out where we are in the storyline of the Bible.

1. Place these events or eras of biblical history in chronological order.¹ If you're part of a group, you could do this exercise together as a large group or split into two or three smaller groups.

- Covenant with Abraham
- Creation
- The death of Jesus
- Entry into the Promised Land
- Exile of Israel and Judah
- Exodus from slavery
- **Hosea's prophecy**
- The Fall: Humanity's first sin
- Kings rule Israel
- The Law given by God
- The life of Jesus
- The new creation
- Pentecost
- The resurrection of Jesus
- The return of Jesus

Read Hosea 1:1 again.

5. We have spent some time getting a feel for the days in which Hosea lived and spoke. This is important in order to rightly understand his words. The first verse of the book also tells us that Hosea's words are ultimately "the word of the LORD". Why is this important to remember as we study Hosea?

Read Hosea 14:9.

6. This is the final verse of the book of Hosea. What does it suggest our approach should be to this book?



To finish

What are some of your hopes and expectations as we look at Hosea together?

Read Hebrews 1:1-2.

How does this help us as we prepare to read the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea?



Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for revealing himself in his word, and particularly for the way in which he does that through the book of Hosea.
- Ask God to help you to grow in your love for him and understanding of him as you work your way through the book of Hosea.
- Ask God for his help to be wise and discerning by rightly responding to his word.

.....
1. The correct order is found in the leader's notes in the back of this book.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. INTRODUCING HOSEA

► Remember 60/40/20

Big idea

A 'big idea' will be provided for each study. We suggest you don't share this with the group; rather, the hope is that the group members will discover the big idea (or something very close to it) as they study the passage for themselves. The big idea should help you as the leader to know what the study is about and help you to keep discussions headed in that direction.

The big idea for this first study is to provide an introduction to the life and times of Hosea, and to prepare your group members to respond rightly to this part of God's word.



Getting started

Try to encourage most (if not all) group members to provide some kind of response to the 'Getting started' question—even if only to confess that they have no idea about Hosea! For most people it will be relatively unfamiliar, so members are not likely to feel reticent to admit their lack of knowledge as nearly everyone else will be in the same boat. Encourage the group with the fact that, God willing, by the end of the series we will have much we can share in response to this question.

As you begin your studies, you will probably need to help your group members find Hosea in their Bibles. Be sure not to make anyone feel inferior or silly for not knowing where it is. One helpful approach might be (at least for the first study) to get everyone to turn to the contents page in their Bible and find the book of Hosea that way.

Studying the passage

The activity in question 1 flowing from Hosea 1:1 is important not only for this introductory study but also for each of the following studies. In order to rightly understand the book, group members need to work out that Hosea is located at a particular time and location in God's dealings with his people, and where that time and location occurs in the storyline of the Bible.

The correct order of events for the timeline is:

- Creation
- The Fall: Humanity's first sin
- Covenant with Abraham
- Exodus from slavery
- The Law given by God
- Entry into the Promised Land
- Kings rule Israel
- **Hosea's prophecy**
- Exile of Israel and Judah
- The life of Jesus
- The death of Jesus
- The resurrection of Jesus
- Pentecost
- The return of Jesus
- The new creation

After the activity, explain the following: Hosea preached at a time when the kingdom of Israel had been divided into the northern kingdom of Israel (often called 'Ephraim', and formed by ten of Israel's twelve tribes) and the southern kingdom of Judah (formed by the two remaining tribes). Hosea prophesied in and mostly about the northern kingdom, Israel, though he also mentioned Judah several times. Hosea began preaching some time around 760 BC and continued preaching until around the time of Israel's exile at the hands of Assyria (c. 722 BC). Judah went into exile at the hands of Babylon around 587 BC.

The passage in 2 Kings 14 (question 2) shows that although in some ways Jeroboam was quite successful (restoring Israel's borders from Lebo-hamath to the Sea of the Arabah; v. 25), the stark assessment of his reign is that "he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" and "did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin" (v. 24).

The same kinds of issues are present in 2 Kings 17 (question 3), with the focus shifting from King Jeroboam to the people. Responses to the question of how the Israelites have related to their God include: they “sinned against the LORD their God” (v. 7); they “did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right” (v. 9); they “did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger” (v. 11); they “served idols” (v. 12); they “would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God” (v. 14); they “despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them” (v. 15); and they “abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God” (v. 16).

In response, the Lord was rightly angry with the Israelites and removed them from his presence (vv. 11b, 17b, 18, 20b, 23a), rejecting them and giving them into the hands of plunderers (v. 20); “So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria” (v. 23). Knowing that Hosea prophesies during this time—of an evil people under the leadership of an evil king, with the nation about to be exiled to Assyria—we expect Hosea’s message to be filled with judgement (question 4).

As well as orienting us to the book’s time and location, Hosea’s first verse also reminds us that as we read the words of Hosea’s prophecy we are reading and listening to the very words of God himself. He reveals himself through the pages of this book. He provides insights into his character and brings an authoritative assessment of the lives of his people—one that is not just relevant for Israel in the 8th century BC, but also has much to say to 21st-century Christians like us (question 5). God’s word is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing and discerning thoughts and intentions (Heb 4:12). He esteems the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at his word (Isa 66:2). We are not to merely listen to the word; we must also do what it says (Jas 1:22-24). Therefore, we need to ask God for his help in reading, understanding and applying his word.

The final verse of the book (Hos 14:9) tells us that if we have wisdom and discernment (which are ultimately gifts from God), we will understand and know what God is saying through Hosea. We will see that the Lord’s ways are right. Given that the righteous walk in his ways but transgressors will stumble in them, we are therefore faced with a choice each and every time we open and read Hosea: will we respond like the righteous, or like transgressors? Will we be wise and discerning?



To finish

There is no need for any great insights in these closing questions. Obviously the message of Hosea is yet to unfold. But it would be helpful to make sure two points are raised as you finish: firstly, that we should expect God to speak to us today; and secondly, that we should be mindful of where we stand in the Bible's big storyline, remembering that we need to read Hosea's Old Testament prophecy through the lens of the New Testament and particularly through the coming of Jesus—the full, final revelation of God given to us “in these last days” (Heb 1:1-2). We'll see much more of this in the studies to come.



Give thanks and pray

Each study will end with suggestions for thanksgiving and for prayer. These are intended only as a starting point. However, it is always helpful to model thanksgiving and prayer that flow directly from what you have learned from the Bible.