

Hosea
Fall 2008 Adult Bible Classes, Sunday Morning

prepared by Bob Young

Introduction

What are the living messages of the OT prophets?

Background of text, social setting, and prophet provides parallels in our day

Points of interest

Hosea, "God is salvation"

Hosea is the only writing prophet of the northern kingdom (Amos was from south and preached in north; Jonah from Galilee preached in Nineveh).

The book begins with a historical account of the prophet's life, which provides a living illustration of the major point of the book. Some question whether the account is allegory or actual event. Nothing in text indicates it is other than a real situation.

Historical setting

Hosea prophesied about 746 B.C., shortly after the time of Amos. See 1:1 (Uzziah, 790-739 B.C.; Hezekiah, 715-686 B.C.).

Hosea began preaching at a time of peace and prosperity in Israel, but things quickly changed. Jeroboam's reign was followed by anarchy and confusion. Zachariah reigned only 6 months before he was murdered. Shallum was assassinated a month later by Menahem who ruled for 10 years. It was during this period that Assyria invaded Israel and made it a tributary. Later king Hoshea conspired with Egypt and refused to pay tribute to Assyria which resulted in Hoshea's captivity and the siege of the city of Samaria. The city fell after 3 years. [Read 2 Kings 14-17 for a more complete account of this time period.]

The social and moral life of Israel became chaotic as its political life became tumultuous. Worship of other gods became common, with sacred prostitution and drunkenness which destroyed family life (chapter 4). The priests and rulers became corrupt (5:1).

The people were ready for a word from God.

Textual considerations

The manuscript texts of Hosea are in a poor condition, making the text of Hosea difficult. No outline is discernible.

Two major sections are the narrative (1-3) and the prophetic message (4-14).

The narrative begins in third person (chapter 1, telling of the marriage to Gomer and the birth of children). Chapter 2 allegorizes the relationship to Gomer as symbolic of the Lord's relationship to Israel. Chapter 3 tells of Hosea's marriage in the first person.

The message can be divided as indictment (4:1-7:16), promise of punishment (8:1-10:15), and restoration based on God's love (11:1-14:9).

An interesting occurrence is the frequent use of simile in the book.

Contemporary lessons

Our lessons/principles

- a. Knowledge of God. God desires that his creation know the Lord. Knowing God is no mere intellectual matter but results in intimate relationship and changed lives (6:3). The absence of knowledge brings crime and corruption (4:1-2). Lack of knowledge destroys (4:6; 13:4; cf. John 17:3). Knowledge and mercy are more desirable than sacrifice (6:6).
- b. Loving kindness or mercy (*hesed*). This term, related to grace and loyalty, appears 6 times in Hosea (2:19; 4:1; 6:6; 10:12; 12:6).
- c. Spiritual adultery is the wrong kind of knowledge. Spiritual adultery is the opposite of grace and loyalty (4:13-14; 5:4; 9:1)

Israel's sins—false worship and failure to depend on God. These are again opposites of true knowledge, the opposites of grace and loyalty.

- a. Sacrificing in the high places (8:13). In false worship they sought grain, wine and oil (2:5-7,13; 4:10-13; 9:10; 10:1,2; 13:1,2).
- b. Prostitution profaned God's name (4:14).
- c. Open idolatry (13:2).
- d. International affiliations and dependence on surrounding nations (5:13; 7:8-11; 12:1-7).
- e. Trust in material resources rather than the Lord (10:13).

Questions

- a. Are Christians today ever guilty of spiritual adultery? When or how? (Also see James 4:4).
- b. In your opinion, why did Baal worship (or other false worship) appeal to Israel?
- c. In your opinion, how well does the contemporary church emphasize the importance of knowing God? How well does the church today make clear that knowing God is more about relationship and faithful living than about intellectual knowledge?
- d. If you had to construct similes to describe the church today in its relationship to God, what are some illustrations you would use?