

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE MINOR PROPHETS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY

PART ONE - THE BOOK OF HOSEA

The first principle in approaching every Bible book including Hosea is the same - Jesus Christ. He is our Teacher who alone can make it come alive and make sense. He is the theme of every book around whom all other ideas are arranged. He is our life and so will live out in us everything He teaches us about Himself.(Lk.24:27)

The historical context in the Bible itself is important. In the case of Hosea this is to be found in 1:1. Four kings ruled Judah, the southern kingdom, in turn. Uzziah began well but became proud and was punished by becoming a leper, isolated and ignored. Jotham was personally faithful to God but never made an impression on those he led by reaching out to challenge them. Ahaz was utterly godless and brought defeat and destruction on himself and his country. Hezekiah was a man of God who took responsibility for teaching his people the word of God, at least in the first half of his reign. (2 Chron.26-32) Jeroboam II was king of Israel in a time of political peace and material prosperity in which he and his people assumed they had no need of God.(2 Kgs.14)

New Testament references to Hosea are all clues to the message of the book. All of them relate to the theme of redemption.

1. 1:10 and 2:23 are quoted in Rom.9:25-27 and show us God's motive for redemption, His love not our performance.
2. 6:6 is quoted in Matt.9:13 and 12:7 to explain the necessary condition for redemption, our change of heart towards sin.
3. 10:8 is used in Lk.23:30 and Rev.6:16 to warn of the alternative to redemption, God's judgement.
4. 11:1 is the basis for Matt.2:15 which promises the Redeemer Himself, the Son of God, who would be taken to Egypt and then brought back to Israel.
5. 13:14 is found in I Cor.15:55 describing our state before redemption, defeat and death which can be replaced by life and victory.

References to earlier Old Testament characters, places and events all help to fill out the picture of redemption.

1. Adam(6:7) and Jacob(11:1; 12:2-4,12) show our need of redemption, and David(3:5) is a frequent picture of Christ, our Redeemer.
2. The valley of Achor(2:15) was a place where Israel had been redeemed through death. Jezreel(1:4) had been a place of treachery and death; Gilgal (4:15; 9:15) was a memorial to redemption; Bethel had been Jacob's place of redemption(10:15; 12:4) Egypt was a place from which the people of Israel had been redeemed.(11:1)

Hosea's own story of marriage to Gomer, a woman he was warned by God beforehand would be unfaithful, the birth of their 3 children, her unfaithfulness and eventual descent into being first a prostitute and then a slave, is a graphic picture of God's creation of us to be fruitful and multiply, but of our unfaithfulness to Him which eventually made us into slaves of sin. From that miserable situation, Hosea himself was sent to redeem his wife, as the Lord Jesus was sent into this world to redeem us out of slavery to sin. Hosea's name means 'salvation' which is very close to the name Joshua or Jesus which means 'the Lord saves', and so Hosea was called on in his personal life to be a picture of the Saviour.

An outline of the book might therefore be as follows:

- 1-3. **Illustration of redemption** from the personal life of Hosea
4. **Why redemption is needed.** Israel have been unfaithful - their ignorance of God has led them to break every command with consequences for the land and the people. Sin begins with idolatry. The first responsibility rests with the leaders, priests and prophets. Israel had gone first followed by Judah. How was God going to control them?

5. ***The condition of redemption.*** First the priests and princes, and then the people needed to come in repentance. Spiritual 'harlotry' results from not knowing the Lord. Calling on the Lord for help is not necessarily repentance.
6. ***The consequence of repentance.*** Repentance leads to being revived and restored by resurrection life in the form of the Holy Spirit, pictured as water. This in turn leads to a spiritual harvest. Repentance leads to a new loyalty as in marriage. The priests needed to come first.
7. ***The rejection of redemption.*** Sin is against God. Again it is like adultery in which we give ourselves to the gods of other nations. Despite God's offer of forgiveness, Israel still went her own way so she would suffer the consequences beginning with her leaders.
8. ***The alternative to redemption.*** Israel claimed to know the Lord when in trouble but still went her own way, worshipping idols. She would be swallowed up by Assyria because she rejected the word of God and forgot Him. Judah was following her example. Both faced judgement.
9. ***The obstacle to redemption.*** Israel refused to repent because she loved what she got out of her spiritual harlotry. Slavery was the consequence. Those who should have taught them have nothing worth hearing to say. As an unfaithful 'wife' she would bear no children. She simply would not listen to God who in the end can only give up on her.
10. ***The last chance for redemption.*** God made a last appeal to Israel but the richer she became, the more she turned to idols. Surely adversity would bring her to repentance? All seemed lost but still God longed to bless her. Perhaps Judah at least would listen?
11. ***The motive for redemption.*** God was calling Israel again like a child as He had once called them as a people in the time of Moses, and as one day in the future He would call Jesus and His family back out of Egypt. God's love makes Him reluctant to give up so redemption is always urged before judgement. Yet her lies continued... And Judah followed her example.
12. ***God persisted with redemption.*** As God persevered with Jacob even to the point of wrestling all night with him so God was now persisting with Israel. But she insisted on being self-sufficient despite God's offer to bless her and care for her. God kept Jacob, even when he handled marriage in his own strength, by redeeming his descendants. But if again Israel refused she must live with the consequences.
13. ***Redemption from death and judgement.*** Israel persisted in idolatry despite God's care for her. Pride caused her to forget. God had no choice but to judge though He still longed to redeem her from death and love her.
14. ***A prayer for redemption.*** A final plea for Israel to repent and a prayer she might use to express this to God based on turning away from sin and recognising that no-one but God can save her. God then promised a restoration of their relationship and a renewed fruitfulness. All of us are urged to consider the same simple choice and choose Him.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How do the biographies of the kings of Judah and Israel help to explain why Hosea's message was so timely? How can we make sure the gospel of Jesus Christ is relevant to the world's problems today?
2. Look up the quotes from Hosea in the New Testament. How do the New Testament writers apply Hosea's message to the needs of their readers?
3. In the same way check out the places and people elsewhere in the Old Testament to whom Hosea refers. How does each one add colour and illustration to his teaching? How can Old Testament stories make New Testament teaching more effective?
4. How would you present the book of Hosea to a teenage audience today?
5. Wasn't God unfair to lead Hosea into such a marriage? How do every day tragedies in our own lives or the lives of those we know illustrate the meaning of redemption?(chapter one)
6. How according to chapter 2 does God go about winning us back to Him? Why does He do it this way? What can we learn from this about dealing with marriage problems? How might you use the theme of redemption in Hosea as an outline for studying the same theme in the book of Romans?(chapter two)
7. How was Hosea going to treat his wife after he bought her and took her home again? What does this teach us about the extent of God's forgiveness of us?(chapter three)

8. What social problems does Hosea describe? Where do they start from? Who bears the greatest responsibility for the way our society is?(chapter four)
9. Why do some people find it so difficult to come back to God? What do we have to do to be 'married' to Christ again?(chapter five)
10. How does the Lord treat us when we return to Him? What does He want of us for this to happen?(chapter six)
11. How does continuing refusal to listen to God lead people further downhill? Can sin go too far?(chapters seven to ten)
12. Why does God not give up on sinners? How was God's dealing with Jacob a great example of what we can expect of Him?(chapters eleven to fourteen)