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MINISTRIES

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Minor Prophets, Major Messages: Hosea - You Are not Irredeemable

The so-called “Minor Prophets” are a collection of twelve prophetic books in the TANAKH—that is, the Old Testament. Even though they are called the “Minor Prophets,” these books contain “major messages” that remain relevant to believers today. In this series, we will unpack the major messages of each Minor Prophet. We will discuss their practical applications for believers today and how they connect to the Messiah’s work and teachings in the New Testament.

Today, we are looking at the Book of Hosea. Let’s dive in.

Hosea: An Overview

Hosea was a prophet who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BC (J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 135). He prophesied during and following the reign of the wicked king Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-24), a time marked by intense turmoil and political instability. By then, Israel had split into two kingdoms (1 Kings 12), the northern kingdom called the kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom called the kingdom of Judah. In Hosea’s time, the northern kingdom was facing many internal issues, including idolatry, religious hypocrisy, and a rapid succession of kings who often attained power through conspiracy and violence (2 Kings 15). Additionally, they faced significant external threats from the Assyrians, who eventually conquered them in 722 BC (2 Kings 14-17). All of this is in the background of Hosea’s prophecies.

Hosea’s Major Message

In the Book of Hosea, the prophet Hosea is commanded to marry a promiscuous woman named Gomer. Their marriage symbolizes the relationship between God and his people (Hosea 1-3). This woman betrays Hosea and leaves him for other men, much like God’s people had betrayed him and gone after idols. And yet, Hosea redeems his wife and takes her back (Hosea 3:1-3). This mirrors God’s unwavering love for his people. Despite their idolatry, if they repent and return to God, he will take them back. In fact, Hosea prophesies of “latter days,” when the children of Israel will eventually return

to God and seek the Messianic king from David's line after having suffered the consequences of their sin:

Hosea 3:4-5

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD [YHWH] their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD [YHWH] and to his goodness in the latter days.

This theme of sin and punishment followed by redemption is again expressed in the poem in chapter 11 of Hosea. The portrayal of God in this chapter is that of a devoted father who adopts Israel as his son, nurtures him, and teaches him how to walk. The poem goes on to say that Israel grows up and rebels against God, so God punishes Israel by allowing them to be taken into captivity by Assyria. However, despite Israel's sin, God cannot resist feeling compassion for his son and chooses not to destroy him but to restore him.

Hosea 11:1-11

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels. My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.

How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the LORD [YHWH]; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD [YHWH].

As we have seen, the major message of Hosea is that despite his people's repeated unfaithfulness, God remains faithful to them. Again, Hosea calls on Israel to repent and return to God, promising that God will forgive them and take them back if they do so.

Like Hosea's original audience, believers today may find that they have strayed from God. Hosea's message is a reminder that God's love and forgiveness are not out of reach. No one is irredeemable. Even though God's bride has betrayed him, he is still willing to take her back when she returns to him.

Interesting Connections

Along the lines of Israel's redemption, in the New Testament, Peter and Paul understand Hosea's prophecies in an interesting way. In Hosea, God tells Hosea to name his and Gomer's second and third children "not my people" and "no mercy," symbolizing that Israel was no longer God's people and no longer received God's mercy (Hosea 1:6-9). As we learn in 2 Kings, God exiled the northern kingdom

of Israel, and they were scattered among the nations (2 Kings 14-17). Again, this historical situation is in the background of Hosea's prophecies.

Significantly, according to Hosea, God promised to restore Israel at the end of the age. One day, a faithful remnant of the northern kingdom will return and be reunited with the southern kingdom of Judah. God's judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel will be reversed:

Hosea 1:10

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

Hosea 2:23

And I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

Both Peter and Paul quote from these prophecies in Hosea and apply them to the people who were reading their letters (1 Peter 2:10; Romans 9:24-26). For example, Peter says this:

1 Peter 2:10

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

What's fascinating about Peter's and Paul's quotations of Hosea is that they apply Hosea's prophecies to their *Gentile* readers! In other words, Peter and Paul see their Gentile readers who have come to the Lord as the fulfilment of Hosea's prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel!

But, how does that work? Well, we know that Israel was "God's people"; they were told so when they became a nation. As Exodus 6:7 says, "**I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.**" However, when the northern kingdom of Israel was exiled, they became "not my people." So, this northern kingdom became just like the Gentiles, the other nations, who are also not God's people. When Israel was then scattered among the nations, they became indistinguishable from the Gentiles. There was no way to tell them apart. Why is this significant? Because, in the minds of Peter and Paul, when their Gentile readers—who are "not my people"—come to faith in the Messiah, the promise of Israel's restoration is coming to fruition. Since the northern kingdom of Israel became indistinguishable from the nations, then the only way for God to restore Israel is to bring in *the rest of* the nations! Since Israel became "not my people," the only way to restore them is to welcome in everyone who is not his people—every Gentile who puts his faith in the Messiah. As the scholar Jason Staples writes:

God has provided for the salvation of the Gentiles by scattering Ephraim among the nations only to be restored. In saving Ephraim, God saves the nations; in saving the nations, God saves Ephraim. Thus, the new covenant not only restores Israel but also—in the unforeseen plan of God—fulfills the promises to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed, not "through" his seed (i.e., as outsiders) but by inclusion and incorporation *in his seed* (Gal 3:8).

-Jason A. Staples, "What Do the Gentiles have to Do with 'All Israel'? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25-27," *JBL* 130, no. 2 (2011): 371-390

While it does not always happen how we might expect, God is faithful to keep his promises. In Hosea,

he said that he would restore Israel. That promise is being fulfilled as the gospel goes out to all nations.

The Messiah Revealed in Hosea

One way that Hosea's message draws a connection to the Messiah Yeshua can be seen in his prophecy in Hosea 3:5. Remember, Hosea prophesied about a Messianic king from David's line who would rule over Israel in the latter days. Yeshua is the fulfillment of that prophecy. He is from David's line, and he is prophesied to return and rule over Israel forever:

Luke 1:31-33

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus [Yeshua]. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Another connection to the Messiah is Hosea's future expectation that God will "heal" Israel's apostasy, forgiving and transforming them (Hosea 14:4-7). Despite Israel's sins against God, which Hosea compares to a bride's adultery against her husband, God says he will forgive Israel and make them a faithful people who are firmly rooted "[like the trees of Lebanon](#)" and who "[blossom like the vine](#)" (Hosea 14:5, 7). This promise is reminiscent of Jeremiah's New Covenant prophecy. Israel had broken the covenant between them and God, despite the fact that God was a "husband" to them (Jeremiah 31:32). Nevertheless, Jeremiah prophesies that God will take his people back and will make a New Covenant with them. In this New Covenant, the Torah will be written on his people's hearts, and he will remember their sins no more (Jer. 31:31-34). Yeshua's death and resurrection inaugurated this promised New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 9:15; 12:24). As the author of Hebrews writes:

Hebrews 9:15

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Yeshua's death and resurrection has made atonement for sin and has enabled the Torah to be written upon the hearts of God's people, transforming them into a people who obey God (Rom. 8:4-5).

Finally, Yeshua repeatedly emphasized radical forgiveness. For instance, Yeshua's parable of the prodigal son expresses a similar theme as chapter 11 of Hosea, the poem representing God as a devoted father and Israel as a rebellious son. Like Hosea, Yeshua reminds us that God loves us and is anxiously waiting for us to return to him so we can be fully restored:

Luke 15:21-23

And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

And that is Hosea's major message, a message echoed by the Messiah Yeshua. You are not

irredeemable. Whatever your sin may be, it is not bigger than God's love and willingness to forgive you and take you back. If you find yourself having betrayed God and gone astray, it is not too late. Return to him.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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