

**Message #1****Various Texts**

I think almost every believer has struggled with the question of wondering what God's will is for his life. What job should you take? What person should you date or marry? What school should you attend? In one way or another, we have all been there.

I want you to think for a moment about a young man who believes it is God's will to go into ministry. He graduated from High School and then went to a theological institution to be trained. Now he is nearing graduation and he is really struggling with God's will for his life. So because this young man wants to do God's will with his life he decides to come talk with you. He trusts you because he has seen your commitment to God and His Word. So one day this young man comes to you and asks you what you think God's will is for his life.

Now let's suppose that you sit down with this young man and you say I have been praying and I know exactly what God's will is for your life. God has revealed to me exactly what God's specific will is for you. God's will for your life is that you go to a brothel and pick out a prostitute and marry her. God's will for your life is that you go to a house of prostitution and find some prostitute who loves being a prostitute and make her your wife.

Now if that was truly God's will, you would have to admit that would be a shocking assignment. Any thinking person would realize the baggage that would come with such an action. Those who were serious-minded would challenge this counsel and probably say have you lost your mind. He would argue this cannot be God's will and you would say, "Yes it is." Are you sure this is God's will for my life?" You answer yes this is God's specific will for your life. This is your assignment. This is what God wants you to do.

So now the young man thinks about this and says okay, what you want me to do is to find and marry some repentant prostitute who is sorry for her sins and wants to be right with God. You say no that isn't God's will for your life. God's will for your life is that you marry a prostitute who likes being a prostitute and will continue to be immoral even after you marry her. In fact, you will actually have to go to a brothel and buy back your own wife (**3:1**). That is the kind of woman you are to marry.

Now at this point, probably most of you are saying has this pastor lost his mind? What kind of story is this? **This is the story of the book of Hosea** and in the next weeks we want to take you through this book.

Now we would like to introduce the book to you by asking and answering a series of introductory questions:

**QUESTION #1 – Why study Hosea?**

Let me share with you four very practical reasons:

**Reason #1** - Because Hosea is one of only 66 inspired books God has given to man.

It has been observed that one of the most neglected books in the entire Bible is Hosea. Very few churches preach even one message out of this book, let alone attempt to expound the entire book. The sad fact is most people who go to church are perfectly content to just drift through life without a careful study of God's Word, especially a book like Hosea.

Derek Kidner, who has written a good commentary on Hosea, said it is "rather easy to grow up with a naïve idea of God" (*The Message of Hosea*, p. 11). A book like Hosea is inspired by God and it is designed to give us a thorough knowledge of God. So if we leave out one inspired book our knowledge will be naïve. If we leave Hosea out, we will miss one of the major O.T. books.

**Hosea is the second longest of what is classified as Minor Prophet books. Only Zechariah is longer.** Hosea contains 14 chapters and 197 inspired verses, many of which are totally unique to this book. In fact, in Hosea there are a very high number of obscure Hebrew words that are used.

The book of Hosea was found in Qumran Cave #4 in the Dead Sea Scroll Discovery and it was also a book found in the Septuagint, which is the Greek Translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. J. Andrew Dearman said many fragments of Hebrew manuscripts of Hosea have been found which proves this book was carefully copied and studied by those who lived in Palestine (*The Book of Hosea*, p. 8). So without doubt this book of Hosea is a book that has been inspired by God.

Our English Bibles follow the Masoretic Hebrew Text, which also proves that Hosea is one of God's rare inspired books.

**Reason #2** - Because Hosea is a book in which God reveals to His people that no matter how unfaithful they may be, He still loves them.

Hosea has been called a book that truly does present God's "unconditional love." S. Lewis Johnson said when we use the term "unconditional love," what we mean is that Hosea is a prophet who "proclaims that the love of God for His people is without condition" (*The Pedagogy of Biography*, p. 5).

In Romans 8, the Apostle Paul makes an eternal security argument that basically says once one belongs to God by election through faith in Jesus Christ that one cannot ever be separated from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). The book of Hosea says exactly the same thing in the Old Testament. **God will always love His people. He may get angry with them because of the bizarre things they do; He may threaten them; he may discipline them; but He will always love them.**

God loves His people even when His people do not deserve to be loved. He loves His people when they are a mess. This is true for Israel and this is true for us. God loves His people even when they are loveless and worthless in their behavior.

**The convicting truth that is revealed in this book is that we are all a bunch of prostitutes who have rebelled and sinned against God many times and many ways, and still God loves us and takes us back.**

The prostitute named Gomer kept sinning and sinning and Hosea was told by God to go get her and bring her back. Now the reason for this story is because this is exactly what God has done and will do for Israel and this is exactly what He has done with us and for us time and time again.

God's people have a habit of failing God. If the truth were known, we could not even number the amount of times we have missed the mark. We have failed God many times and yet God brings us right back to Him because He loves us. In fact, C. I. Scofield said the whole theme of this book is "Redeeming Love."

The word or form of a word that shows up some 17 times in the book is the word "love." Now the word "love" (ahab, ahabah) is one that refers to taking such a delight in something that you desire it and breathe after it. This kind of love means that you love something so much that it is the focus of your very life (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 15-16).

Now God uses this very word multiple times in this book to describe that this is His love for His people. However, His people do not have the same love for Him. In fact, in this book God makes it clear that He loves His people even though His people have loved other things (3:1). What is so amazing about this book is that, at times, His people love detestable and shameful things (4:18; 9:1) that certainly would cause a righteous God to not love them (9:15). **But what is so remarkable about this book is that in the end, God makes it clear that He will heal His people and freely love His people (14:4) no matter how shameful they have been.**

**If you are a child of God, no matter what you have done or are doing, you cannot separate yourself from God's love. This idea is clearly taught in this book of Hosea.**

I believe that this knowledge does have a purifying effect on the people of God. It does not motivate them to keep plunging into sinful and shameful things; it motivates them to want to please a God who loves them so much.

**Reason #3** - Because Hosea is a book that clearly establishes that God is an amazing God of forgiveness and grace to His pathetic people.

The word "loving-kindness" (chesed) is a word that shows up in this book. It is a word that means to show yourself merciful and gracious and kind to someone (*Ibid.*, p. 294).

The word is used in this very context of God loving His pathetic people and actually betrothing them to Himself (**Hosea 2:1**).

The whole reason for this book of Hosea was to show Israel and us just how pathetic we are and how gracious He is. **The reason why God wanted Hosea to marry an unfaithful prostitute was because this is exactly what God did when He pledged Himself to any of us.**

**When God entered into a covenantal relationship with Israel and us, He linked Himself to a pathetic harlot.**

Most people do not grasp this point. When God entered into a relationship with Israel and us, He was not entering into a covenant relationship with a bunch of winners but a bunch of sinners. In fact, we were all Gomer-type losers. But God is a God of amazing grace and amazing forgiveness and this book of Hosea clearly teaches that.

God delights in demonstrating His grace and mercy to His people when they turn back to Him. He delights to forgive them and use them even when they have done horrible and perverted things. God is an amazing God and when His people turn to Him, He will not only restore them; He will bless them.

**Reason #4** - Because Hosea is a book that clearly shows God's people just how much our sin hurts the heart of God.

When we sin against God, it is an act of horrible betrayal against our loving God. We need to know this and see this and we need to realize this. Whether the sin is immorality, greed, religious hypocrisy, murder, swearing, lying, stealing or adultery (**4:1-2**), it breaks the heart of God.

God takes our sin very personally, just as a husband would take the unfaithfulness of his wife very personally.

Hopefully when we get done with this book of Hosea, we will deepen our commitment to not do or say things that would break God's heart.

I heard a message that was given by Dr. Stanley Toussaint. In the message he told the story of when he was in school with his friend Haddon Robinson. When Haddon Robinson was a young man, he was going out one night and his father gave him a curfew time when he was supposed to be home. Dr. Robinson said when he finally decided to go home, it was way past his curfew time and he knew his father would be up and he knew he was in trouble. He said when he got home, his father did not lose his temper; but he calmly said to Haddon, "son I want you to know that you hurt me deeply tonight." With that Dr. Robinson said he turned and went to bed. Well, that impacted Haddon. He said he went to his room and was crushed, knowing he had deeply hurt his dad.

That is what we do every time we sin against God. We hurt God deeply and this book of Hosea will show us that.

## **QUESTION #2 – Who is Hosea?**

We don't know much about Hosea. Some have said they think he was a baker because he knew how to make bread (**Hosea 7:4**). Some say they think he was a farmer because he knew about sowing and plowing and harvesting crops (**Hosea 8:7; 10:13**).

Some say they think he was a priest because there are references in the book to the priests (**Hos. 4:4; 4:9; 5:1; 6:9**). Some think he was the son of one of the prophets or some professional prophet who had attended a prophet's school (**Hos. 1:2; 4:5; 9:7-8**). The truth is we just can't say for sure.

We do know that his father's name was Beeri (**Hosea 1:1**). Now we do not know if there is any connection but according to Genesis 26:34, Esau married a woman named Judith, who was the daughter of a Hittite named Beeri. It is hard to know if there is an ethnic connection. But one thing we do know is that you do not have to come from some big name Christian family to be greatly used by God. Hosea didn't.

**We know that the name Hosea (pronounced in Hebrew “Hoshea”) means salvation.** It is closely related to the name “Joshua” which means the Lord is salvation. We may assume that Hosea received this name from his father Beeri, which would seem to suggest that he could have been raised in a God-fearing home; one that relied completely on God for salvation.

**He apparently lived in Northern Israel and perhaps in the area known as Ephraim because he uses this proper noun Ephraim over 35 times in the book.** Ephraim is a term often used pertaining to a very plush and wealthy part of the Promised Land that was located in northern Israel, rather than in southern Judah. It is often a general term used for Israel, but it may be that Hosea was from this very area.

If this is true, then he lived and prophesied in an area where he knew the people and the people knew him. So this would be even more humiliating for him to go to some brothel and pick out a prostitute to marry. Everyone would know him and probably know something about his wife.

## **QUESTION #3 – When did Hosea live and write and prophesy? 1:1**

It is clear from the **first verse** of Hosea that his life and ministry spanned several decades and it spanned the reign of four specific Judean kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah) and one Israelite king, Jeroboam.

These four Judean kings are the same ones mentioned by Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1), which would mean that Hosea lived and prophesied in the north the same time as Isaiah was prophesying in the south.

Three of the kings, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, were mentioned by Micah, which means Hosea live and prophesied at the same time Micah also did in the south (Micah 1:1).

Uzziah and Jeroboam are mentioned by Amos (Amos 1:1), which would mean that Hosea was a contemporary of Amos, which would mean that both of these prophets were ministering in the north in Israel at the same time. It was a time of prosperity for Israel.

**Actually even though Hosea's life spanned more than one Israelite king, he only mentions one Israelite king (Jeroboam) and four Judean kings.**

This actually seems odd because Hosea is ministering to Israel and yet he only mentions one king from Israel, Jeroboam, but he mentions four kings from Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He completely eliminates Israel's kings (Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea) (II Kings 15). **Most believe the reason for this is because Jeroboam was the last good king and those who came after him were worthless kings who led Israel into idolatry and immorality.**

Now if we calculate the first and last Judean kings that he mentions—**Uzziah began reigning about 792 B.C. and reigned for 52 years until about 740 B.C. and Hezekiah stopped reigning in 686 B.C..** This span of time from 792 B.C. to 686 B.C. would be 106 years. So we know that Hosea lived and wrote somewhere in this 106 year period of time, and probably lived a relatively long life.

Now Jeroboam's reign was from 793-753 B.C., which is a span of 40 years. We suspect by virtue of the fact that he mentions just one Israelite king that he prophesied and wrote primarily in this time period.

Our conclusion is that Hosea was a contemporary of Amos in the north and Isaiah and Micah in the south. He lived and wrote about the same time they did. In fact, we may remember that in Amos, he said that because of her unfaithfulness God was going to raise up an enemy and bring them against Israel. **Well, Hosea names the enemy: the enemy will be Assyria (Hosea 7:11; 8:9; 10:6; 11:11).** Since Assyria would sweep into Israel in 722 B.C., we know that Hosea wrote before this. **We may assume that his prophecy and writing occurred somewhere near the years of 793-753 B.C..**

One other observation we want to make. God had more than one prophet out on the front lines proclaiming the truth that His people were unfaithful and, as a result, they were going to experience His chastisement. However, if they were to turn to Him, He would have compassion on His people because He loved them.

**QUESTION #4 – What is the theme of Hosea?**

When you read through this book there are about four key themes that surface. There is the theme of God's loyal love. There is the theme of God's peoples' unloyal response to that love. There is clearly a theme of rebellion in spite of the love.

There are also the themes of the punishment from God because of the rebellion, but also a future hope from God because of His love. The theme of the book is actually pretty simple:

**When God's people turn away from God and His Word, they deeply hurt God and they will be punished by God; but God's people can always know that one day they will be completely restored and forgiven because of God's love.**

**QUESTION #5 – What is a simple outline of Hosea?**

- 1) God has a sovereign, redemptive plan for His people illustrated by the life of His prophet. **1-3**
- 2) God's people are often faithless to Him and not faithful to Him. **4-7**
- 3) God's people are punished for their unfaithfulness. **8-10**
- 4) God's people are redeemed and restored because of God's love. **11-14**

This book of Hosea certainly will teach us all that God can do great things with people who have lived crazy lives. God can save, restore and use people who have sunk to the lowest levels of depravity. God continues to love His people even when His people have loved things other than Him. When we sin we break the heart of God, but we can never break the love of God.