

Hosea-by Nathan White

Chapter 1

Hosea was written at a difficult time in Israel's history. The nation was split into two kingdoms: Israel in the North and Judah in the South. The Northern Kingdom is the primary audience of Hosea. They were wrapped up in idol worship, had gone through six kings in thirty years, and now the Assyrian army was closing in. Hosea depicts God as being married to His people, so their idolatry is cosmic adultery. God calls them to repentance with both Hosea's words and his life. God calls Hosea to marry a woman involved in ritual prostitution. She continues to be unfaithful and even has the child of another man. Hosea does not leave her, however, pointing to God's covenant faithfulness. In fact, Hosea's name comes from the Hebrew verb meaning, "to deliver." It is the same verb on which Jesus's name is based. Hosea will highlight God's faithfulness in the face of His people's adultery; faithfulness ultimately fulfilled in Christ, the true and better deliverer.

Chapter 2

Chapter two of Hosea is basically split into two parts. Verses one through thirteen detail what the adulterous wife – God's idolatrous people – legally deserves. Verses fourteen through twenty-three are about God's mercy and His faithfulness to uphold His covenant in spite of His people's sin. In the first part, God promises that He will prevent His people from continuing in their cosmic adultery by taking their idols away. He will remove from them the blessings they have been using to worship their idols. These actions are actually merciful, as we see in the second part of this chapter. God will not only remove their idols from them, He will bring them back to Himself. This discipline is meant to bring about repentance. God will call the wife who committed adultery His own. He will betroth His people to Himself forever. God's covenant faithfulness toward His people is a major theme of this book and the rest of Scripture as well.

Chapter 3

At some point, Hosea's wife wound up in slavery of some kind. The Lord, still teaching us a lesson through the life of Hosea, commands him to buy her out of this predicament. The price at which Gomer was purchased was not high in comparison to other slaves of the era, which reveals to us the indignity of her circumstance. Hosea's redemption of his runaway wife mirrors the promise God makes to Israel. While they "will dwell many days without king or prince," they will eventually repent and "seek the Lord, and David their king." One day, the rebellion of God's people would end and they would have a king from the house of David. This promise for a king and redeemer of God's people would be fulfilled in the same place all of God's promises to His people are fulfilled – in the person and work of Jesus Christ. While we, along with Israel, rebel against God, He has promised that by faith, redemption can always be found in Christ.

Chapter 4

Chapter four of Hosea sees God continue his legal accusations against Israel in her current state. While God has been faithful to His covenant with Israel, Israel has not been faithful to her covenant with God. A repeated accusation in the chapter is that the people don't know God. In fact, they don't even know *about* Him. God goes so far as to tell them that they are destroyed specifically for their lack of knowledge. The fault for this, throughout the chapter, falls on false prophets and negligent priests. They have failed to lead faithfully. Practically, this underscores for us the importance of being under good teaching and Godly spiritual leadership. The voices we allow to shape our understanding of God matter immensely. But this chapter about the failure of these priests and prophets should also lead us to thank

God for Christ, who fills those offices finally and faithfully.

Chapter 5

God continues to condemn the royal and religious leadership of Israel for leading the people into apostasy. Israel has “borne alien children” through adultery just as Gomer had. While the overarching theme of the book is repentance and redemption, it won’t come without discipline first. God promises that His wrath will pour out like water. He even tells them that the “great king” of Assyria won’t be able to save them. God determines the fate of all nations, and He cannot be stopped. Some might consider this harsh in light of some of the previous chapters. It is important to first note God’s patience in bearing with Israel’s sin at all. Even now, the ultimate goal of God’s discipline is repentance, not just destruction. What’s more, He still isn’t pouring out the fullness of His wrath for their sin. God’s discipline is ultimately meant to cause them to look forward – and us, back – to Christ, who does take the fullness of God’s wrath on our behalf.

Chapter 6

Chapter six opens with Israel’s cries of repentance. They recognize that the Lord has stricken them down, but they also believe He will bind them up. They hope that on the third day, God will revive them to allow them to live before Him again. They rightfully recognize that they are never beyond the Lord’s healing, but they still don’t understand their sin. Their repentance isn’t genuine. God reminds them that their love dissipates like the morning dew. They profess to love Him now, but as soon as morning comes, they’ll return to their idols. This fickle affection is in fact what God holds against them. He desires “steadfast love” and “knowledge of God.” He wants faithfulness, not just rote obedience. God’s people, like Adam, have transgressed His covenant. Thankfully, Christ, the true and better Adam, would fulfill the covenant on behalf of God’s people *and* take the wrath earned for breaking it, rising on the third day, as Israel hoped they would do.

Chapter 7

This chapter opens with the Lord stating again that He would heal Israel if they would repent, but they refuse. Not only do they refuse to repent, their taste for sin only grows. Their evil passions won’t be extinguished and ultimately spill over to consume the nation. In fact, four of Israel’s last six kings had been assassinated due to an unfettered desire for political control. Even in such a tumultuous time, God points out that Israel doesn’t call upon Him. Rather, in the absence of domestic leadership, Israel places their hopes on other nations. They, “like a dove, silly and without sense,” go between the idolatrous nations around them, playing them against each other for their own good. They are so dependent on those nations for strength that they eventually become indistinguishable from them. Ultimately, their dependence on ungodly, human institutions will be their downfall. God will judge them with the very nations they trust.

Chapter 8

Chapter eight continues to deal with Israel’s trust in foreign nations and political power as opposed to God. They claim to know God, but they have “spurned the good.” They have been in rebellion against the house of David, who still rules the southern kingdom, and have repeatedly propped up illegitimate monarchs and formed new alliances instead. Just as they have made for themselves new kings, they have made for themselves new idols. They have replaced worship of the true God with worship of foreign gods. As they spurned God, God spurns these idols and God will crush these idols just like He crushed Aaron’s golden calf. Israel has foolishly trusted in idols and unstable alliances, “they sow the wind,” but for it they will “reap the whirlwind.” The nations whose idols they worship and on whose strength they rely will overtake them. God gives them over to what they say they want. God not only

disciplines His people *for* their sin, but *with* it.

Chapter 9

Israel, like Hosea's wife, has prostituted herself to idols and God will now send the people back to slavery. God rescued Israel from Egypt, but their thankfulness has been short-lived and He will now expel them from the land he gave them. They'll have no sacrifices and their food will be unclean (vs. 3-4), so they have no way to come back to God. Their only hope of redemption will be if He initiates it (and praise God, He does in Christ!), but they will face exile until then. God also promises that their crops won't grow (vs. 2) and they will struggle to bear and raise children (vs. 12, 14, 16). These warnings concerning their children seem shocking to us, but it is important to remember how longsuffering God has been. This isn't a hasty move. What's more, the idols they worshipped promised fruitfulness and fertility. In taking these things away, God strips Israel of what fueled their rebellion – it is a crushing blow, but it is in direct response to their sin.

Chapter 10

The more Israel prospered, the more idolatrous they became. It might seem counterintuitive to us, but "the more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars." Their abundance did not corrupt them, but it did reveal what was already in their hearts. The more they had, the less they assumed they needed God and the more determined they became to do anything necessary to maintain their wealth. Israel was given freedom and comfort, but they abused these good and gracious gifts. Many of us proudly assume that we would never fall into the same snare, but nearly everyone does. John Calvin says this: "Men are undoubtedly more in danger from prosperity than adversity. For when matters go smoothly, they flatter themselves, and are intoxicated by their success." Israel forgot God in their prosperity and we are capable of doing the same.

Chapter 11

The Lord loved and raised Israel. He led them out of slavery in Egypt, healed them, and gave them a new law, land, and identity. He trained them like a father trains a child, but Israel was ignorant of God's provision. Now, because of their sin, God will give them over to a new Egypt – Assyria. Israel is "bent on turning away" from God, and they have been repeatedly warned about the penalty. But verse eight sees a striking change in tone. Even in His just anger, God will not destroy His people. Even in their high-handed treason, God is full of compassion toward them. He has made promises to them, and He will not break those promises. He will eventually roar like a lion, and His people will return at the sound of His voice. God will ensure that the fulfillment of His promises will not be hindered. His people will survive and a Messiah will arrive. Even the most violent rebellion against God cannot thwart His plan for divine redemption.

Chapter 12

God reminds Israel of their forefather, Jacob, after whom they are named. God calls for them to remember Jacob's birth, and later his striving with the angel (Gen. 32:22-32) when he was wounded and renamed "Israel." He reminds them of when He assured Jacob of His promises at Bethel and when He protected Him in the land of Aram. God refuses to let His people forget the promises He's made to them. While they are still in unrepentant sin and will face consequences for it, God is making sure they understand that His promises won't fail now just like they didn't fail then. Just like the divine wound Jacob received when He wrestled with God, Israel is about to suffer a heavy blow. And like Jacob, they will be renewed because of it. Just like the provision God gave Jacob in the land of Aram, God will protect Israel in their exile. And like Jacob, they will face hardship, but find that God keeps His

word.

Chapter 13

Chapter thirteen recounts many of the accusations that God has made throughout the book. They began down the path of idolatry and have only grown more desirous of their sin. They offer child sacrifice. They worship the work of their hands. They have forgotten God in their prosperity even though He called them out of slavery and raised them. God, unlike Israel's idols, is alive and active and able to save them. They only have to repent and turn back to Him, but they won't. Because of their impenitence, they will be like a mist that dissipates, chaff that is burned up, and smoke that blows away as it billows out of a window. This living, almighty God will descend upon them like a "bear robbed of her cubs." He is jealous for His people, and their idolatry has blinded them to Him as idolatry always does. They have committed cosmic treason, engaged in cosmic adultery, and even as their sin is recounted to them, they tragically refuse to repent.

Chapter 14

Chapter thirteen recalled Israel's faithlessness and sin. Chapter fourteen recalls God's faithfulness and mercy. It is true that Israel, as a nation, will not repent and they will face exile, but God reminds them that He is always eager to reconcile His people to Himself. It is a final call to repentance and healing. They are called to ask God to remove their iniquity and accept their sacrifices. They are to seek salvation nowhere else and quit worshipping the works of their hands. Their repentance will bring healing and reconciliation and God will love them without fear of judgment for covenant unfaithfulness. Like an evergreen tree, the Lord is full of life and strength and He promises to bring forth His people's fruit. Ultimately, the removal of iniquity, the acceptable sacrifice, and the promise of salvation and spiritual fruitfulness in spite of sin are all fulfilled in Christ. The sin of God's people is great, but the grace He gives us in our Deliverer is greater.

-Reflecting on Hosea-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Hosea. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Hosea before we move forward?

But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Luke 11.28