



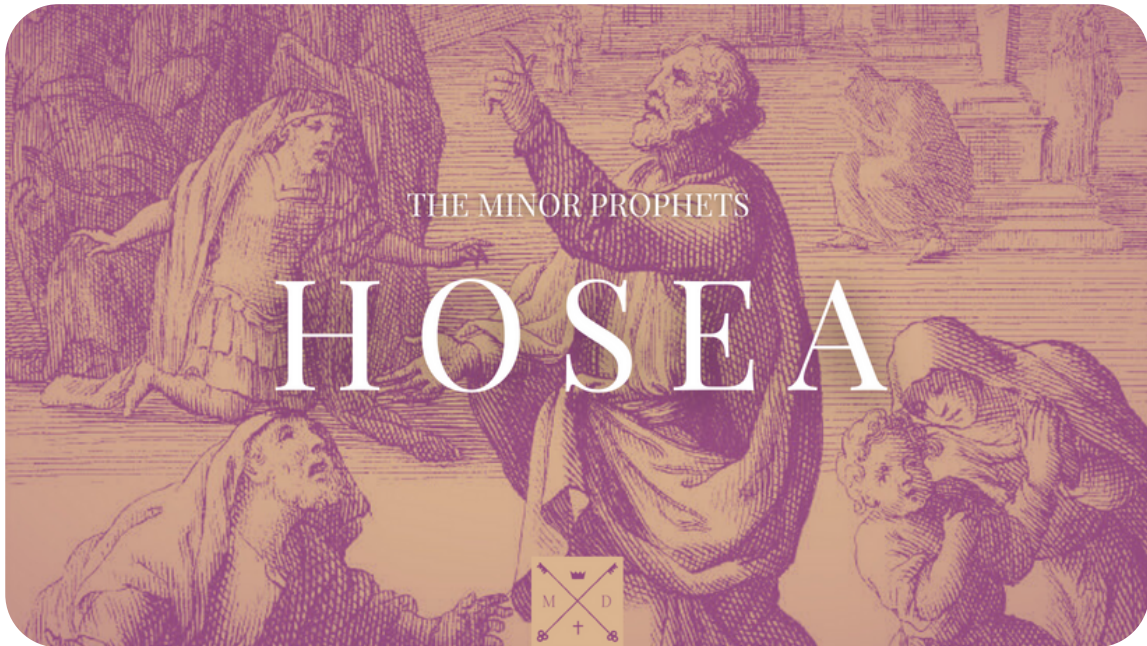
# THE MINOR PROPHETS

A Wayward People & the God Who Calls Them Home

# HOSEA

a study guide

M E R C Y S D O O R . O R G / H O S E A



# MORE RESOURCES AVAILABLE

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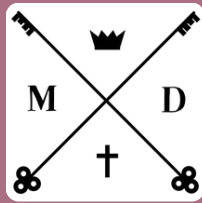
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# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Hosea stands out as a stirring narrative of faith, love, and redemption. It is not simply a catalog of Israel's transgressions and God's judgments but a profound illustration of God's unyielding love for His people.

Hosea, whose name means "salvation," was an 8th-century prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. His personal life became a heartrending allegory for God's relationship with His people. Commanded by God to marry an unfaithful woman, Gomer, and to have children with her, Hosea lived out a divine drama of fidelity, betrayal, and prodigal love.

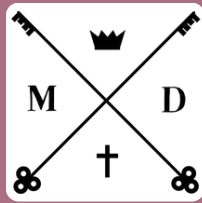
In the book of Hosea, we see a God who refuses to abandon His people, even when they waver, sin, and rebel. What begins in marital unfaithfulness becomes a beacon of God's unfailing love and His ministry of reconciliation.

## INTRODUCTION

Just as Hosea set his love upon Gomer despite her indiscretions, God set His love upon Israel, despite their turning to idols and breaking the covenant He made with them. However, the book is also unflinching in demonstrating the just response to Israel's spiritual adultery—divine judgment. Yet, even within these grave pronouncements, we discern the tender hope of restoration and the renewal of covenantal love.

As we go deeper into this powerful book, we witness God's relentless pursuit of His wayward people. We witness a love so fierce that it willingly endures heartbreak to bring about redemption.

We encounter our own story within the lines of Hosea's profound narrative and discover anew the relentless love of God that graciously chases, tenderly heals, and passionately redeems wretched and wayward sinners such as us.



# SECTION 2

HISTORICAL  
CONTEXT

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To meaningfully understand and appreciate the book of Hosea, we should consider the historical context in which the prophet gently delivered his fervent messages. The 8th century B.C., when Hosea ministered, was a period where the Northern Kingdom of Israel was steeped in spiritual decline and set against the backdrop of political upheaval. This interplay between politics and religion underpins the prophetic directives in the book.

Hosea ministered within the Northern Kingdom of Israel, primarily under the reign of Jeroboam II. Israel had experienced considerable military expansion and economic prosperity under Jeroboam II. However, this material affluence led the people away from God as they sought satisfaction in heightened luxury, complacency, and the chase of foreign alliances and idols.



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

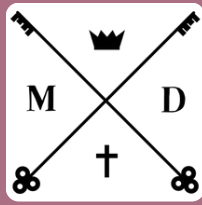
This prosperity inflated the people's sense of security and independence, leading them to presume they didn't need God, a dangerous assumption that played out in societal moral decay, social injustices, and rampant idolatry. The people of Israel had turned away from God, and instead of relying on Him, they placed their trust in political power, military strength, and foreign alliances.

Hosea's call to prophecy coincided with turbulent times in Israel's history, with his ministry extending to the threshold of the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. Assyria was at the height of its power, posing a potent threat to the relatively smaller nations like Israel and Judah. However, underneath the threat of Assyrian annihilation lay a more perilous adversary - spiritual faithlessness.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The political landscape of this period significantly influenced the messages of Hosea. The disheartening reality of impending exile is in the backdrop of Hosea's prophecy, as he made it clear to his listeners that Israel's infidelity towards God's covenant would not go unpunished.

Yet, amidst the narratives of doom and punishment, the chord of hope is never lost in Hosea's prophecy. His ultimate call was not only toward repentance but toward a relationship restored, mirroring God's unceasing, redemptive love for His wayward people. Remember that the book of Hosea is more than a condemnation of Israel's disobedience; it's ultimately a testament to God's unfailing love, and to His willingness to restore and renew His covenant with His people.



# 3

**SECTION**

BIBLICAL  
CONTEXT

## BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The larger scriptural context of the book of Hosea can be found in the book of 2nd Kings in verses 14:23-29 and in chapter 17, which give us a glimpse into the situations that characterize the era of Hosea's prophetic ministry.

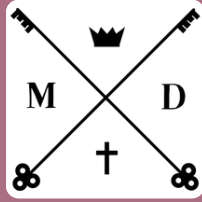
Jeroboam II, under whose reign Hosea began his ministry, is said to have done "what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 14:24). Even though Jeroboam restored Israel's traditional boundaries and ensured its military strength, the spiritual condition of Israel took a nosedive, with rampant idolatry proceeding from the heart of the nation.

The subsequent rulers of Israel didn't fare any better. In 2 Kings 17, we see the culmination of Israel's sins. The chapter chronicles the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria and attributes this devastating event to the Israelite's persistent disobedience toward God.

## BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The spiritual infidelity, the chasing of other gods, the practices of idolatry, and the blinding arrogance of the Israelites - all hallmarks of Israel's trajectory in the years preceding the exile - are laid bare in this chapter.

These passages bracket Hosea's prophetic activity, illuminating the layers beneath the prophet's words. While a surface-level reading may portray Hosea's message as overly stern, the wider biblical context unveils the scope of Israel's spiritual bankruptcy, lending weight to the direness of Hosea's prophecies.



# SECTION

# 4 CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS

## CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS

What we see in the writings of Hosea was not an isolated message during this turbulent era. Getting to know his contemporary prophets — those prophets who resided in the same historical context — will help us understand Hosea's message in a broader frame. Isaiah, Amos, Micah, and Jonah were all called during the same historical period in Israel's history.

Isaiah, like Hosea, operated during the 8th century B.C. and shared much of the same historical context. However, there was a significant distinction: While Hosea ministered chiefly in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Isaiah's prophetic activity took place in Judah, the southern kingdom. Isaiah spoke against the moral corruption and idolatry prevalent among the people, however, his message also echoed God's promise of redemption and the coming of the Messianic King, Jesus.

## CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS

Amos, whose name means "burden-bearer," bore a similar burden of conveying God's judgment to Israel. Like Hosea, he ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II. His scathing criticisms against social injustices, neglect of God's law, and rampant idolatry align with many of the themes within Hosea's messages.

Micah ministered a little later and primarily in Judah. However, his messages also reached the Northern Kingdom. A strong advocate for social justice and morality, Micah condemned the leaders of both Judah and Israel for their fraudulent practices, exploitation, and neglect of the vulnerable in society.

Jonah's prophetic mission was unique. His ministry was primarily an international one, directed at the heart of the very empire that would eventually annihilate the Northern Kingdom—Assyria. His message to the city of Nineveh, and his own reluctance to deliver it, serve as examples of God's universal compassion and justice.

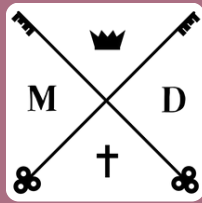


## CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS

All these prophets shared a common thread in their messages: a call for repentance, justice, and a return to God.

In the midst of this prophetic orchestra, Hosea's life and messages were a living testament to God's enduring love for His wayward people.

Their sins would bring upon them severe judgments as the holy God could not let sin go unpaid, yet His undying love and mercy would always reach out in the promise of restoration and hope.



# 5

**S E C T I O N**

MAJOR  
THEMES

## MAJOR THEMES

Now that we've considered the historical and biblical contexts of Hosea's prophetic mission, let's jump into the major themes that underpin the book.

**1.) Hosea's Marriage.** The narrative begins with the personal life of the prophet as a metaphor for God's relationship with the Israelites. This unique prophetic sign acts out the painful reality of Israel's relationship with God. Just as Hosea pursues his adulterous wife, Gomer, God continues to seek out Israel even as they stray.

**2.) Israel's Spiritual Adultery.** The longstanding covenanted relationship between God and Israel is framed within the marriage metaphor. But Israel, represented by Gomer, strays from the marriage bed seeking idols and alliances. The severity of the betrayal underscores a profound truth: To break the first commandment is akin to breaking all of them. The spiritual unfaithfulness of the Israelites mirrors that of Gomer.

## MAJOR THEMES

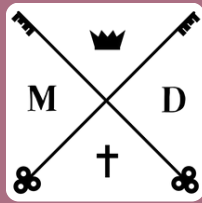
**3.) Impending Judgment.** The prophet does not soft-pedal the consequences of Israel's spiritual adultery. The assurance of impending judgment rings out throughout the book. Yet, God's fairness is evident even in delivering judgment, mirroring His divine justice.

**4.) The Promise of Restoration.** The narrative doesn't end in doom and judgment. Hosea's message, replete with God's unconditional, extravagant love, also harbors hope for Israel's future. Within the hard prophecies of destruction, we see glimmers of divine compassion, forgiveness, and restoration. God's ultimate intent is the redemption of His wayward people, not their destruction.

## MAJOR THEMES

These themes finely intertwine throughout the book, echoing the undeniable reality of God's perfect justice, the consequences of sin, God's boundless love, and His promise of a future restoration. As momentous as these themes are, they weave a tapestry of relatable human experiences and emotions, connecting us intrinsically to God's word across the millennia.

The ultimate invitation of Hosea is to witness and believe in the grandeur of God's unyielding love that continues to seek, save, and restore His people.



# 6

**S E C T I O N**

READING & STUDY  
TIPS

## READING TIPS

The book of Hosea may feel difficult to navigate, filled as it is with intertwining threads of judgment and mercy, wrath and love. Here are some practical tips to aid your understanding and enrich your reading experience.

### **1.) See Hosea as Prophetic Literature.**

While Hosea has historical narratives, remember that it is categorized as prophetic literature. Prophets often addressed the immediate context of their fellow countrymen while also being foretellers of what was to come. As you read, seek to understand what Hosea was communicating to his original audience, and ponder over its prophetic implications.

**2.) Embrace the Poetry.** Hosea is rich with metaphoric language, and its messages are often delivered in a poetic form. Don't rush through these sections! Pause and let the imagery sink in.

## READING TIPS

**3.) Look for Christ.** Given the position of Hosea in the Old Testament, it may be tempting to detach it from the later unfolding of the New Testament and the advent of Christ. However, remember that Jesus Himself affirms "the Scriptures... bear witness about me." (John 5:39 ESV) As you read, consistently reflect on how Hosea's message spotlights both the need for Christ and the promise of His coming.

**4.) Reflect and Apply.** As you study, consider penciling down your observations, reflections, and takeaways. The process will not only help you retain what you learn but will also prompt you to apply Hosea's themes in your life. God's word "is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), so permit it to move in your heart and transform you.



## STUDYING TIPS

As we wrap up this guide, we hope that it kindles in you a zeal to delve deep into the book of Hosea. As you prepare to enter this book, here are a few practical steps to consider.

**1.) Study Prayerfully.** As we seek to understand God's Word, let's do so with a posture of prayer. Ask God to open your heart and mind to receive His word and let it illuminate and guide your daily living.

**2.) Reflect Individually.** Spend personal time in Hosea, allowing the Spirit to speak to you directly through these words written centuries ago. Reflect on its relevance to your own life circumstances.

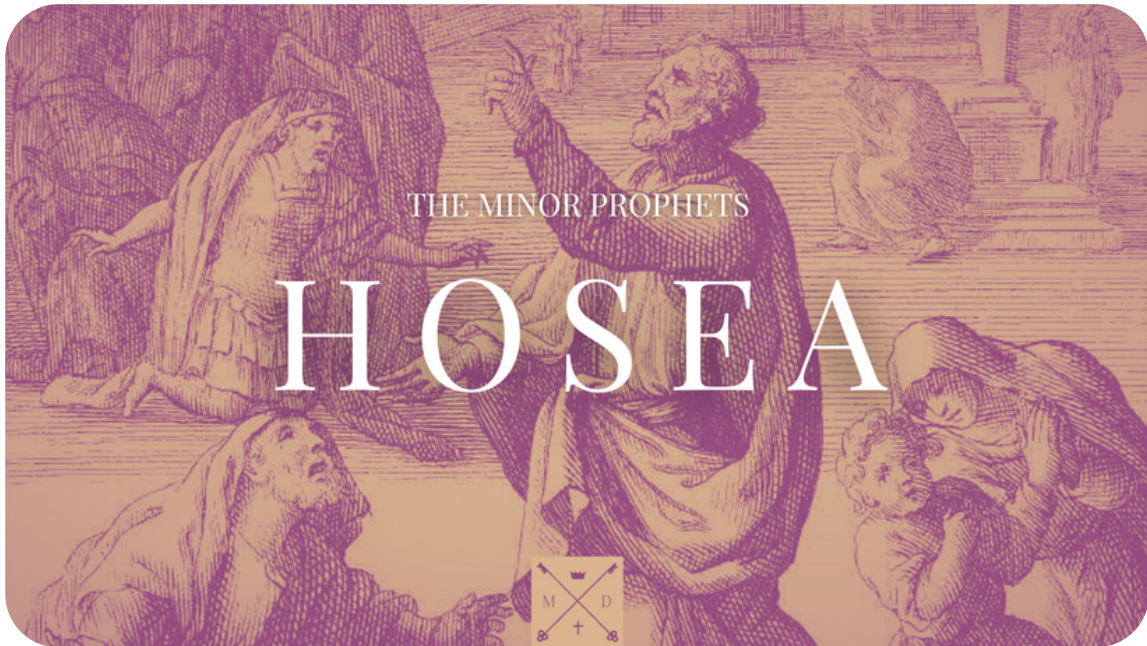
## STUDYING TIPS

**3.) Discuss Communally.** As we gather in gospel communities and other gatherings, let's share our insights from the book of Hosea. This will not only deepen our understanding but also enable us to learn from each other.

**4.) Apply Joyfully.** Let's strive to apply the gospel lessons we glean from this book in our day-to-day lives and let the mercy and justice of God be evident in our actions.

Through Hosea, God invites us to a love story filled with betrayal, justice, steadfast love, and overwhelming grace. As you engage this book, we pray that you will encounter the height and depth and length and breadth of God's love.

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