

January 2024

## **What's the Point....of Hosea?**

**Mark Garner**

*The book of Hosea shows us the depths of God's faithfulness and of the love he wants to give us. In particular, it focuses on God's desire to show us mercy, his eagerness to forgive us when we trust in him and the message of Jesus, and how willingly he calls us his own children.*

### ***God Desires Mercy, Not Sacrifice (Overview Of Hosea)***

Like many of the prophets, Hosea had to endure many sorrows. His wife was chronically unfaithful, yet God called the prophet to be merciful and take her back. The book starts with this situation as a metaphor for our relationship with God, and from there Hosea explains what it means to "return to the Lord", and helps us understand what God means by "mercy, not sacrifice".

Hosea opens with a contrast between human unfaithfulness and God's faithfulness (Hosea 1-3). God asks the prophet to marry an adulterous woman, as an image of the spiritual "adultery" that plagues humanity. Even their children are given names to represent the sadness God bears: Jezreel (a site of oppression and massacre), Lo-Ruhamah ("not loved") and Lo-Ammi ("not my people"). Yet God promises them that despite this, they will yet be called children of the living God.

Similarly, we may often even think that we couldn't be God's people, yet God reassures us that he accepts us and cares for us, and simply calls us to walk with humility in the grace and love of Jesus. Once more God tells us of his eagerness to renew us when we let him, his desire to call us his people, and to show his love to us, regardless of our mistakes. Indeed, he asks Hosea to redeem (to buy back) his straying wife as an example of God's redemption.

The next section builds on these ideas, and tells us that when we feel distant from God or are confused, simply to return to the Lord (Hosea 4-10). The key themes of the book are summarized in Hosea 6:3-6 - God's call simply to acknowledge him humbly; for as surely as the sun rises, he will appear; like spring rains that water the earth, he will nourish our spirits with what we need.

God's desire for mercy rather than sacrifice not only reminds us to show mercy to one another, it also reminds us of the basis of our relationship with God. He does want our relationship with him to depend on us making enough sacrifices or "doing enough", rather he wants us to trust in him rather than in ourselves, to rely on his love and mercy for us, and to acknowledge in our hearts that he alone is our God, our hope, our life.

In the closing chapters, we see God's awareness of our weaknesses, and his desire to heal our waywardness and to love us freely (Hosea 11-14). He again describes us as his own children, and him leading us with ties of love rather than with rules or force; and we also see images of God healing us, feeding us, and being gentle with us. Again we also see God enduring our sins because of his compassion for us, so he gives us every possible chance to seek him and come to him.

In the closing chapter, we see how God forgives our sins, receives us graciously, and pours out spiritual blessings when we acknowledge our need for him, and stop depending on our own strength and our abilities. God waits patiently for those moments when we sit humbly in his presence, and let him open our eyes so we can see him more clearly and understand him better.

January 2024

## **What's the Point....of Hosea? Caleb Dillinger**

Hosea is a lesser read minor prophet, more likely due to its challenging content than its confusing content. Take for example the second verse of the first chapter: the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." (Hosea 1:2). Not exactly easy reading or family friendly content, is it?

Hosea actually tells a powerful story, whether it is real or allegory. Hosea the prophet is to marry a prostitute to illustrate the union between God and Israel. Every time Israel serves other gods, it's like cheating on God. Yet, God never leaves! Punishment will occur, but so will mercy and opportunities to repent.

Many harsh words are written, but so are promises to relent. Consider this: <sup>9</sup>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." (Hosea 11:9). Humans rarely have such deep stores of forgiveness and love to answer like this. That's why God points out that God is not like man! Man would kill and divorce over this unfaithfulness; God punishes and the forgives.

The book ends with a plea to return to the Lord. It is the Lord, after all who provides. Why go elsewhere? "O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit" (Hosea 14:8). God is asking what's the point of chasing idols that can't give you what God gives you. Surely, the prophet concludes, the righteous will understand this and repent.

Hosea may not be the book of the Bible you read to your five year old before bed, but it contains essential elements of the gospel story. It reminds us of our fallen nature, our sin. It reminds us of God's unfailing love despite our sin. It reminds us of our call to live more righteously. Not because we HAVE to, but because we WANT our relationship right! Husbands and wives don't stop being husbands and wives because of unfaithfulness - not until those divorce papers are signed. But the promise of Hosea is that no matter the unfaithfulness of humanity, God is never signing those divorce papers. People are HIS. And he will patiently wait for their return. What's the point of reading Hosea today? It's to see God's patience and love and willingness to endure and forgive our unfaithfulness. Learn from this, and live faithfully.