

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 19: Prophetic Rewind Part 3 (Hosea)

Daily Reading for Week

- Isaiah 61-64, Psalm 120
- Isaiah 65-66, Psalm 121
- Hosea 1-5, Psalm 122
- Hosea 6-10, Psalm 123
- Hosea 11-14, Psalm 124
- Joel, Psalm 125
- Amos 1-5, Psalm 127
- Videos: Hosea, Joel, Amos
- Read Hosea 3-4

Focus of time together

To understand and feel God's heart for Israel, despite their constant disobedience, through the story and words of Hosea.

Connecting Exercise

Share with the group in one minute a high or a low from this week.

Opening Prayer

Have one person pray for you as a group before you begin looking at Hosea together.

Intro to Discussion

Congratulations! You made it through the first major prophet, Isaiah. This week, we get to dive into some of the so-called minor prophets. The first one we get to meet is Hosea. While Isaiah spoke to the kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom, Hosea's prophecies are for the people of the northern kingdom, Israel. Hosea's life and ministry took place a few generations before Isaiah — and therefore, before Israel was destroyed by Assyria. Israel, or Ephraim or Jacob as Hosea referred to it, was under the reign of Jeroboam II when Hosea started his ministry. Over the next 20 years, Israel saw four of its kings assassinated or forcefully removed from kingship.

Hosea takes place during this incredibly tumultuous, unsettling time. Not only was Israel in the midst of political upheaval but it was also in a state of deep moral decay. Hosea describes it in chapter 4, verses 1-13. Read this together.

God speaks to Israel through Hosea in the midst of the corruption of its kingdom and people. Hosea is ministering to an Israel that had become just like every other nation, doing whatever was right in their own eyes and prostituting themselves to other gods rather than worshipping and following Yahweh, their Rescuer, who had led them out of Egypt and made a covenant with them.

Hosea is given the unenviable and dreadful task of not only calling out Israel for her sin, but also living firsthand God's emotional experience of being cheated on by His people (or bride). God actually calls Hosea to marry a "promiscuous woman." In doing so, God is inviting Hosea to experience what it is like to be in a marriage covenant with an unfaithful spouse, which is what God is experiencing with Israel.

The significance of this command is profound. This wasn't about God calling Hosea into symbolic behaviour that would prove a point to the people. Rather, God asked Hosea to spend several years of his life embodying the experience of being cheated on by a disloyal spouse.

God did this in order to instil in Hosea a deep, whole-body empathy with God's heartache over Israel's idolatry. Only after this experience was Hosea then fully able to communicate God's anguish to Israel on His behalf. As we read and reflect, consider how important it is for us to empathise with God's emotional response toward the world and His people.

Whole Group Discussion (45 minutes)

Questions for Basic Understanding

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

1. God tells Hosea to marry a "promiscuous woman" and name their kids "not loved" and "not my people." And then, after Hosea's wife is unfaithful, God tells him to buy her back and remain married to her. How do you think the community around Hosea viewed him?
2. Reading Hosea 4 in the Introduction and remembering what you read in the book of Hosea and in the latter part of the book of 2 Kings, try to paint a picture of the current state of the northern kingdom. What do you imagine day-to-day life in Israel looked like in those days?

Questions for Listening to Scripture

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

1. What do you think Hosea must have felt when he heard God's command to marry a "promiscuous woman"?
2. Read Hosea 11:1-12. What does this chapter show you about the heart of God over Israel?
3. What is God wrestling with in this chapter?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

1. What is it like for you to engage with such an emotional God as depicted in Hosea? Does it bother you or comfort you to consider God experiencing heartache, jealousy, and humiliation?
2. Do you typically interact with God on such emotional terms, or do you find that your relationship tends to assume a pattern where you and/or God are simply calm, cool, and collected?

3. Hosea married a promiscuous woman not merely as a symbol for what Israel was to God — unfaithful to their covenant — but to actually experience what this felt like for God. Have you ever had an experience where you felt God's disturbed yet gracious heart toward you and your people? How did you feel in that moment, and what did it bring up in you?

Closing Prayer

Finish your time together by praying Hosea 6:1-3 aloud together:

Come, let us return to the Lord.
He has torn us to pieces
but he will heal us;
he has injured us
but he will bind up our wounds.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
that we may live in his presence.
Let us acknowledge the Lord;
let us press on to acknowledge him.
As surely as the sun rises,
he will appear;
he will come to us like the winter rains,
like the spring rains that water the earth.”