

Major Messages from the Minor Prophets
God Loves You!
The Book of Hosea

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Text Introduction: The Prophets of the Old Testament are divided by scholars into the major prophets and the minor prophets. More precisely, we call Isaiah, along with Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel, major prophets. The remaining books of the Old Testament are called minor prophets. The terms major and minor refer to the size of these books, not the degree of their importance.¹

There are 12 minor prophets. I want to begin today preaching through the minor prophets. We will devote one Sunday (one message) to each of the 12 minor prophets. Our goal is going to be to discover that central core message of the book.

A Word about Old Testament Prophetic Books: We usually assume that the word prophecy has to do with predicting the future or foretelling of coming events. This understanding is only partially true. Strictly speaking, a prophet is one who speaks for God. I remember a professor in Seminary saying, "Prophecy is forth-telling, not fore-telling." The prophets were called to speak forth the message of God. However, the prophet's message usually told of some future doom if the receivers of the prophecy did not change their course of action.

Today, we start with the first book of minor prophecy—Hosea. I want to begin in chapter 3, but keep your Bibles open to see other parts of this prophetic book.

Text: Then the LORD said to me, "Go again; show love to a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes."² So I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and five bushels of barley.³ I said to her, "You must live with me many days. Don't be promiscuous or belong to any man, and I will act the same way toward you."⁴ For the Israelites must live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols.⁵ Afterward, the people of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come with awe to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.

Introduction: Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the days before the exile. The message, though, is one of urgency that God's judgment is about to fall. God used Hosea's marriage to a woman named Gomer as an analogy of God's relationship with Israel.

The most complicated question in Hosea is Hosea's marriage to Gomer. The question concerns whether Gomer was a prostitute before or after Hosea married her. That is, did Hosea marry a pure Gomer who then turned to prostitution or was she a prostitute when he married her?

The analogy is powerful either way, but I believe that it is most consistent with Israel's relationship with God if Gomer became a prostitute after marrying. God is declaring that the nation had committed spiritual adultery in forsaking Him and His covenant.

¹ Lamentations is considered with these books as a major prophet because it is written by Jeremiah.

Chapter 3, though short, is a powerful theological look at the love of God. Even though Israel was unfaithful, He loved them anyway. The love was not so that they continue in sin, but that they would in return be faithful. God's covenant love relationship demands obedience in return.

The Major Message from Hosea: God loves you!

God pursues us with His love! How?

God is crazy about you! This should not surprise us. He is the Heavenly Father. He created us. He created us for relationship with Him. Regardless of what we have done or not done, He pursues us with a faithful, forever love. How does He do that?

Chapters 1-3 tell the story of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, Gomer's betrayal of her husband, and Hosea's pursuit of his wayward lover. At the same time, chapters 1-3 tell the story of God's love for Israel. In both cases the pursuit happens in at least these three ways.

- **Provision**—Even though Gomer leaves Hosea, Hosea provides for her basic needs. He doesn't get credit for it. The same is true for God's provision for Israel. I am afraid that the same is true for God' relationship with us.

- **Pain**—Then, we see pain. The pain for Gomer is that she is sold into slavery by the lovers that she ran to when she left Hosea. Perhaps you are familiar with the famous statement of C.S. Lewis:

“Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

- **Persuasion**—Hosea persuades through appeal for Gomer to come home. The ultimate persuasion is buying her out of slavery.

Hosea, like all of the Old Testament Prophets, is a story of God warning Israel and Israel ignoring that warning. Chapters 4-14 of Hosea are more than likely a compilation of the sermons that Hosea preached during his 50 year ministry. These chapters give us a good idea of the kind of responses that are possible when we face the warning of the LORD. How do you respond? Three possible responses are noted in Hosea.

How will We Respond to the Love of God?

The question is not whether God loves us; the question is how will we respond to that love?

Response #1: Calloused Hearts which leads to Coldness.

One response to God's conviction is that we harden our hearts against His conviction. This is the case as expressed in Hosea 5. Hosea 5 gives us the characteristics of a Hard Heart.

Characteristics

How can I recognize that my heart is growing hard? Is this me?

1. I have difficulty hearing from God. (5:1)

Notice the three different ways that God says, "Listen!"

2. I think I can hide from God. (5:3)

We all know intellectually that God knows all things and sees all things, but in the midst of sin, maybe we rationalize that no one else knows. God always knows. Some years ago, I saw a man confronted by the police for stealing meat at the grocery store. As it turns out—those glass panes that look like mirrors at the meat market are only one way mirrors. The workers in the back can see through these mirrors into the store. Apparently, the store workers had observed the man stuffing meat into his coat. The man thought he had positioned himself in such a way as to get away with stealing, but he could not get past the store employees who could see all.

We try to position ourselves in such a way so as no one can see our sin, but God always sees. Trying to hide from God or thinking that we can hide from God is a sure indication that our heart has grown hard.

3. I would rather sin. (5:4)

We know that our hearts grow hard when we begin actually to desire to sin.

4. I begin to rely on myself. (5:5)

5. I feel alone. (5:6)

Ultimately, we will feel alone. God has not moved, but by the hardness of our hearts, we will feel alone. Sin does that to us. The guilt of sin causes us to feel as though we are all alone.

Consequences

The consequence of a hard heart is that we get increasingly away from God. Like a cycle, we get farther and farther away from God.

Response #2: Counterfeit Heart which leads to cycle of sin

The second response that we might make to the LORD's conviction is to counterfeit our commitment. That is, we might say that we renew our commitment, but in reality, we do not. An example of counterfeit commitment is evident in Hosea 6:1-3.

Characteristics

If you stop reading at verse 3, you might think, "Finally, Israel is returning to the LORD." But, notice verse 4. Verse 4 begins to show us the characteristics of a counterfeit commitment. Is this me?

1. Confession, but no commitment. (6:4)

Israel's words, as recorded in 6:1-3 look right, but God sees right through their words and sees their true commitment.

2. Worship, but no walk. (6:6)

Consequences

A counterfeit commitment is no commitment at all. God sees right through our words. We might fool people with our words, but the One who judges righteously will judge us rightly.

Response #3: Captured heart which leads to change

The only acceptable response is to return in repentance.

Notice how the book of Hosea concludes in chapter 14. (1-3, 8-9)

The only way to have revival is to respond to God's conviction by repenting of our sin. The modern day church is much like Israel I'm afraid. God has called us to repentance, but we harden our hearts or counterfeit our commitment. We have sung louder and called it revival. We have changed worship styles and called it revival. We have changed churches and called that revival. We have written vision statements and called that revival. We have tried some fancy program and called that revival. However, the only way to ever experience authentic revival is to repent of our sin. We will never experience revival without dealing with our sin.