

The Minor Prophets

Introduction: When we think of the minor prophets we first think these twelve books are of minor importance. That is not true.

The old rabbis called them The Twelve. Since ancient times they were known as The Smaller Prophets because of their size compared to the writings of the other prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel).

We get the name of Minor Prophets from Latin Christianity who preferred to call The Twelve the Minor Prophets. Not because of their importance but their size compared to the other prophets.

The human authors lived and wrote from the ninth century till the fifth century BC.

The purpose was to call Israel (also called Ephraim) and Judah back to the covenant God had made with them at Mount Sinai.

Let's look at history to understand the times of the minor prophets and what was going on around them.

- Around 2000 BC= Abraham
- Around 1500 BC= Moses and the Exodus
- Time of the Judges
 - First king- Saul= around 1030-1000 BC
 - King David= 1000-966 BC
 - King Solomon= 966-922 BC
 - Divided kingdom until 722 BC- Assyrians
 - Judah destroyed 587-586 BC

One more piece to understanding the Minor Prophets is what was going on culturally and religiously.

- It was a time of prosperity and stability in the land but in a short period of time, it went sideways in a big way.
- When the Israelites went into the promised land they were to destroy the Canaanite religion. They did not and this false religion mixed into Israel's faith. In fact, the great faith was debased and was the exact opposite of what it was supposed to be.

The first prophet we want to look at is Hosea.

Hosea began to prophesy during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 BC) in the Northern Kingdom- they think he was active for about 50 years.

Hosea's message- The unfailing love of God. An example of what God was feeling is the experience of a parent who has loved and invested decades of parenting and guiding a child only to have the child rebel and walk away from the parent (Hosea 11:1-4).

He was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah and Micah in Judah.

Hosea 1:2-3

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, 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." 3So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

The first word from God to the prophet was for him to marry a woman who would become a harlot.

It should be noted that Gomer became a harlot after she was married.

- This marriage was a picture of the relationship between God and Israel.
- God chose Israel to have a relationship with Him like a marriage bond and Israel departed from the Lord and committed spiritual adultery- just like Gomer committed physical adultery while being in the marriage bond.
- We also see how much the heart of the prophet was hurt and wounded just like God's heart was toward his people.
- We also see that Hosea and Gomer had a son.

Verse 4

And the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

God told Hosea to name the child Jezreel.

- What in the world is God talking about? The name Jezreel means "God plants"- it refers to a beautiful city and valley between the mountains of Samaria and Galilee.
- This sounds nice but this place was a place of crazy violence. This place is where Jehu killed the kings of Israel and Judah (Jehu was the tenth king of Northern Israel. He reigned in Israel for 28 years around 841-814 BC). This is the place where Jehu displayed the seven heads of Ahab's sons. This is also the place that Jehu engineered the mass killings of Baal worshippers. It was known for violence and murder.
- Something else happened in Jezreel. We find the story in 1 Kings 21. It is the story of Naboth the Jezreelite who owned a vineyard near the palace of Ahab.

- The point= Jehu was gone but the king of Israel was Jeroboam II, who was of the house of Jehu. And Israel had departed from the Lord and was involved in full-blown adultery and God is bringing destruction.

Verse 5

And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

About 40 years from this time the King of Assyria by the name of Shalmaneser V brought an end to the Northern Ten Tribes.

Verses 6-7

She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. 7But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

They have a second child named Lo-ruhama. Ruhama means "great compassion, love, tenderness" but there is a negative prefix- Lo, which reverses the meaning and draws a picture of doom. In other words, the Lord will no longer have compassion on Israel.

- There is something else, God will spare Judah. This is seen in 2 Kings 19.

Verses 8-9

When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. 9And the Lord said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

After Lo-ruhama had been weaned, which in the East takes place around 2-3 years old, they have another child. The name of that child is "Not My People".

- Since the days of Exodus and the events of Sinai, God referred to the nation of Israel as "will be His people and He will be their God" (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12). Now God is in reversal mode.
- This will be a terrible progression. First, they would be without a king- God would destroy the house of Jehu. Second, God would remove his compassion. And third, a future without God- **wow!**

Remember as we go through this book the pain in the heart of Hosea is a picture of the pain that God feels when His people walk away from Him.

One more point, we need to understand. God made a covenant with Abraham called the Abrahamic Covenant and it was an unconditional covenant (found in Genesis 15). Abraham's offspring will always be God's chosen people and that is what Paul says in Romans 11:1 and nothing can break this covenant. The blessing and the promises that God made to the patriarchs will never be revoked and in fact, in the last days, you will see many Jewish people come back to God through Christ (Romans 11:28-29).

Hosea 2:2-3

*“Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—
that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts;
lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and make her like a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.*

What’s going on is a **proceeding** that took place at court in the gate of Ancient Israel. The accused is the **wife**- or Israel. The one bringing charges is the husband- or the **Lord**.

The husband does not address the accused directly but speaks to the **court** directly.

The **children** are the faithful portion of Israel who is to address the sinful acts of the nation and try to get her to stop.

The charge is found in the second part of verse 2, *“she is not my **wife**, and I am not her **husband**—”* (1:9)

In verse 3 we see the punishment. This seems like a divorce proceeding but in fact, he wants his wife to stop playing the harlot so there could be **reconciliation**.

Verses 4-5

*Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom.
For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully.
For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’*

Two things:

1. She is worse than other prostitutes who wait for their customers- no **she chases her** lovers. In other words, she was not ashamed, she pursued her idols and Canaanite fertility rituals with **reckless abandon**.
2. She credits not the Lord for the blessings of a **great harvest** but the pagan gods she was worshipping.

In the following verse, Hosea tells of the destruction of Israel and it would come at the hands of the **Assyrians** in 722 BC.

Verse 13

*And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals
when she burned offerings to them
and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry,
and went after her lovers
and forgot me, declares the Lord.*

A key verse is found in this passage is verse 13. We see Israel's basic sin and that is she **forgot God**. The verb *forgot* does not refer to a mental lapse or a loss of knowledge rather it means a refusal to **acknowledge** the Lord's goodness and authority (Hosea 13:6)

It said Moses repeatedly told them not to forget what God has done for them (Deuteronomy 4:9; 8:11). But Israel had a problem with this in their **history** (Jude 3:7; Psalm 78:9-11; Jeremiah 23:27).

Believers in **New Testament times** did the same thing (Revelation 2:4-5). We also have the same problem. We forget what Jesus has done for us and we drift **away**.

Hosea 3:1-5: God's love for His people pictured

Verse 1

And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."

God tells Hosea to go and get his **wife** who had left Hosea and was living with other men and was openly worshipping false gods. The cake of raisins refers to the worship of the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 44:19).

Verse 2

So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.

We do not know how she became a **slave**. It could also mean she was a temple prostitute.

Whatever happened, Gomer had really debased herself because her price was half of what a slave was worth. The barley that is referenced speaks of her **worthlessness** because this was food for animals.

Verse 3

And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

Hosea will bring Gomer back to his home but there would be total **abstinence** of sexual relations for a while until they could resume the normal life of a husband and wife.

Verse 4

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.

In this verse, Hosea is talking about what will happen to Israel and the days we are living in today. **Israel** will be without a king. Since the death of Christ, there has not been a king. **Israel** will be without sacrifice. The temple was destroyed in 70 AD, since then no priests or sacrifices. **Israel** will stay away from idol worship.

Verse 5

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to His goodness in the latter days.

This verse I call the Prodigal Son verse. The keyword is **return**. Israel is not done. When they repent and return to the Lord the Lord will bless them once again (Hosea 5:15; 6:1; 14:1-2). This is God's heart. He loves to restore all those who repent.

God wanted to restore Israel but they refused to come back to him, so in **chapter 4** God has an arraignment and brings the charges against Israel.

Verses 1-3 the nation as a whole is addressed.

1. **First charge**- Lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). This means more than head knowledge, it means personal knowledge.
2. **Second charge**- Sin of the priests (Hosea 4:4-16). When Israel split in two Jeroboam I became the first king of the Northern Tribes and he set up his own religious system and ran many of the true priests out of town and appointed his own priests (2 Chronicles 11:13-15). The priests did not lead but followed the ungodly conduct of the people and they fed off each other.
3. **Third charge**- Moral corruption (Hosea 4:12-14). The people practiced a lifeless ritual which led the people into idolatry and every unclean thing you can think of.
4. **Fourth charge**- Ephraim (largest tribe) was joined to idols (Hosea 4:15-19). Ephraim was another name for the Ten Northern Tribes. Both Ephraim and the two Southern Tribes were driving off the cliff. But Ephraim was going faster and God tells Judah to back away from them (Hosea 4:17).

The sentence **Hosea 5**.

Verses 9, 12, & 14

*9Ephraim shall become a desolation
in the day of punishment;
among the tribes of Israel
I make known what is sure.*

*12But I am like a moth to Ephraim,
and like dry rot to the house of Judah.*

14For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,

*and like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I, even I, will tear and go away;
I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.*

They will be laid to waste (verse 9). The inner decay of the nation was like the slow destruction of a moth (verse 12). But the destruction by the Assyrians would be like a **lion** (verse 14).

Instead of turning to God for help when they were falling apart, they turned to **Assyria**- which did not care for them and in fact, would be the empire that would destroy Ephraim in 722 BC (the destruction Hosea is writing about in 5:13).

God rejects their appeal **Hosea 6-7**.

God's heart is always wanting reconciliation with his people. In 6:1-3 it seems the nation wants to come back but it's **just words**- they want to be healed but not **repent** of their sin. They wanted happiness, not **holiness**. God saw this and you're not going to scam God (7:10, 13, 16).

The ten tribes of Israel will be swallowed up by the Assyrians.

Hosea 14

Even though God's people turned away from him he still loved them and would not abandon them. You see this in chapter 14 and I think of 2 Timothy 2:13. Israel has a **future** and we will see this as we go through the minor prophets.

2 Timothy 2:13

*if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.*