



A Course

In

**HOSEA, STUDIES
IN**

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

Pineland, Florida 33945

A COURSE
IN
HOSEA, STUDIES
IN

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the

AMERICAN BIBLE COLLEGE

Pineland, Florida 33945

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	6
I. A NATION ON THE WAY DOWN	8
II. HOSEA’S FAITHLESS WIFE.....	13
III. THE LORD’S FAITHLESS PEOPLE.....	19
IV. THE TIE THAT BINDS.....	24
V. BENT ON BACKSLIDING.....	29
VI. THE CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT.....	35
VII. THE CALL TO REPENTANCE.....	41
VIII. DISCOVERING GOD’S.....	46
IX. HOSEA’S MESSAGE FOR TODAY.....	52
X. REVIEW QUESTIONS.....	56

INTRODUCTION

As you study the Scriptures you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14) For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

The Scriptures should be studied as eagerly as a hungry person seeks for food. The formal reading of a portion of the Bible may have some worth as a religious exercise, but in order that the complete benefit may be obtained from its truths, they must be appropriated to personal needs. A milkman may deliver thousands of quarts of milk each day and yet go home thirsty. The Bible student may read large portions of the Bible with little benefit, unless he makes it his own by personal appropriation and feeds upon it.

In your studies of the Bible will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc? In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the expository method, the study of words, the study of important passages, and the biographical method. In our approach we are following the topical-expository method, as we study the various aspects of the Book of Hosea. Thus we will be using the expository method in dealing with it topically. In this way the Book of Hosea will be seen as God's practical plan of repentance for the Children of Israel.

The Book of Hosea is not a cool, detached, sophisticated study of social and religious conditions in Israel. It is the sobbing of a broken heart. Hosea's wife had deserted him for another, but still he loved her. Under such circumstances his heart was tortured beyond description. Out of this experience he grasped with rare insight the pain in the heart of God when his people forsake and forget him.

Hosea is not an easy book to study or interpret. Constantly, it leaps from one subject to another. There are very few extended passages dealing with a particular subject. Allusions are made to geographical locations, historical events, and local conditions without any explanation. It remains for us to endeavor to fill in the gaps and rightly relate these rather obscure references to the central theme of the message.

In this course, verses which seem to emphasize a certain truth will be considered together in order to pursue that particular truth as it is revealed in the entire book. To attempt to make an intensive study, chapter by chapter or verse by verse, would be exceedingly difficult because of the lack of orderly arrangement.

In some instances entire verses will be quoted. Sometimes only the reference is given. It will be necessary for the reader to have his Bible in hand at all times. Many verses are referred to frequently, since they shed light on more than one truth or deal with more than one problem.

As the language of this book is plain and frank, there is no way to tone it down. To do so is to lose the force of its message. Bear in mind that it is God's Word. Desperate circumstances call for strong measures.

As a citizen, Hosea primarily directed his book to Israel, although the message applies to Judah. The overall theme of the Book of Hosea is the unfaithfulness of Israel to Jehovah and God's redeeming love for Israel, which is uniquely expressed by the Hebrew word *chesed* (2:19; 4:1; 6:4, 6; 10:12; 12:6). It is also translated favor, good deed, goodness, loving kindness, mercy, merciful kindness, and pity; and it implies loyal love, steadfastness, and faithfulness. When used in reference to God's relationship to Israel, this word involves God's binding covenant relationship. Hosea's faithful love toward Gomer is a visible symbol of God's steadfast love for Israel, in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness to that love.

The central topics of The Studies In Hosea course are centered around the topics "Sin, Judgment, and Salvation" The Israelites were to remember their relationship with God's covenant. We will notice God's purpose, plan and provision for those who would repent from their rebellious sin and to be obedient to his commands.

Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Book of Hosea ten times before beginning this study.

CHAPTER I

I. LOCATING HOSEA HISTORICALLY

(Hos. 1:1; 2 Kings 14: 23 to 17:23)

II. DISCOVERING THE FACTS

(1 Kings 12:16-20; 2 Kings 17:6-8, 18; 14:25; 15:10, 13, 14, 16, 19)

III. RECOGNIZING THE EXTREME EMERGENCY

(2 Kings 15:8-26; Hos. 4:1-9; 10:5-7)

IV. INTERPRETING THE MESSAGE

1. Divinely Inspired (Hos. 1:1-2)
2. Growing Out of Existing Conditions (Hos. 4:1-5; Amos 4:12)
3. Colored by Personal Experience (Isa. 19:23-25; Amos 7:14-15; 2 Peter 1:19-21)

1

A Nation on the Way Down

"And now they sin more and more" (Hos. 13:2).

HOSEA SPOKE from a broken heart. This is always rich soil for great preaching. Much of the world's greatest preaching, literature, and music has found its origin in travail of soul and agony of heart.

Who was the man Hosea? When did he live? What were the conditions of his times? What about his personal life? What caused the heartbreak that underlies his message?

I. LOCATING HOSEA HISTORICALLY

Fortunately, these questions are answered for us in the book which bears his name. The Hebrew word for Hosea, *ho-shay-ah*, means salvation or deliverance. His ministry occurred "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel" (Hos. 1:1). This was just over two hundred years after Solomon's death. Hosea's ministry probably fell between 750 B.C. and 725 B.C.

This fact places him in the eighth century B.C., along with such great preachers as Isaiah, Amos, and Micah. He is recognized as a prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and his message is primarily directed to Israel (the northern ten tribes). His references to geographical places in the territory of the Northern Kingdom seem to indicate a personal knowledge of them which could only be true of one who lived there. He speaks of Gilead, Mizpah, Tabor, Gilgal, Bethel, and Lebanon. The whole picture presented in his book corresponds to the conditions known to prevail there at that time, and he seems to identify himself with the people in such a way as to indicate that he was one of them. The literary features of Hosea's book suggest he was a member of the upper class. His references to the Southern Kingdom of Judah are secondary.

To see Hosea's message against the background of its historical setting, it is necessary to read 2 Kings 14:23 through 17:23 and compare it with the message and theology of Deuteronomy. A comparison with the opening verses of Isaiah, Amos, and Micah indicates that their ministry either overlapped Hosea's in part, or was *very* close to his in point of time. All of them, therefore, dealt with some of the same conditions and problems. Hosea's message can be summed up in three words: sin, judgment, and salvation.

II. DISCOVERING THE FACTS

Following the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom about 931 B.C. (1 Kings 12:16-20), the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah had existed side by side. At times they maintained a friendly, co-operative relationship and at other times their relationship was strained to the point of enmity and warfare.

Although both kingdoms fell into the sin of idolatry and corruption, the drift away from God and from the things which accompany a spiritual type of worship was much more pronounced and rapid in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Judgment and defeat finally befell both Israel and Judah, but it was Israel which first committed spiritual and national suicide and fell before the onslaught of Assyria, in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6-8, 18). The reading of the record of the two hundred years of the life of the Northern Kingdom is marked by an oft-recurring expression which becomes almost monotonous because of the frequency with which it appears - "and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." Generally speaking, the kings of Israel were a sorry lot!

Apart from a few somewhat extended passages covering the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the books known to us as 1 Kings and 2 Kings give us merely an outline sketch of some of the main events in the lives of the kings of Israel and Judah, with a brief summary of the character and conduct of each of them. For our knowledge of the conditions that prevailed during the eighth century B.C., we have to depend upon this very brief treatment of the times as it is supplemented by the allusions made by the prophets to various events in their preaching, and on what little may be gathered from the few monuments or tablets whose inscriptions bear upon this period.

Putting it all together, however, we have enough information to give us a reasonably good picture of the political, moral, and spiritual conditions. On many specific points we would like to have more information, but we have to be content with reading between the lines. It would be helpful to us to know more about Hosea personally. That he lived in difficult, dangerous, troublous times is plain. His own life seems to have been a tortured, unhappy experience in which domestic distress and national confusion bore a great part. Possibly, a review of a few of the names and events well known to Hosea may help us to put ourselves in his place and to grasp more clearly the picture which he saw.

Amaziah, the son of Joash, was reigning in Judah when Jeroboam II ascended the throne in Samaria as king of Israel (2 Kings 14:23). Although a good man in many respects, Amaziah had rashly entered into war with Jehoash of Israel and suffered a humiliating defeat. Later, he was killed as the result of a conspiracy against him (2 Kings 14:19). He was succeeded by his son Azariah (the Uzziah of Hos. 1:1), who reigned fifty-two years. While he had many good qualities, he did not purge the idolatry of his kingdom, and he incurred the displeasure of the Lord for a sacrilegious act and became a

leper (2 Chron. 26:16-19). He was a powerful military leader and greatly strengthened the defenses of Judah.

Jeroboam II had been king of Israel for twenty-seven years when Uzziah began his long reign of fifty-two years in Judah. Two strong leaders, therefore, occupied the thrones of Israel and Judah simultaneously for a period of years.

The historian who compiled the material in 2 Kings indicates the extension of the borders of Israel under Jeroboam's leadership (2 Kings 14:25) and, incidentally, records the fulfilment of a prophecy made by the prophet Jonah (v. 25b). It is interesting to note that although Jeroboam himself was an evil man, the Lord used him to fulfill some of his promises to his covenant people (vv. 26-27).

Outward prosperity was no indication of real national security, however. Upon the death of Jeroboam, he was succeeded by his son Zachariah, who was assassinated within six months (2 Kings 15:10). Shallum, who conspired against him and killed him, occupied the throne for only one month and was, in turn, done away by Menahem (vv. 13-14). His reign began with a dastardly act of vengeance (v. 16), and in a little while he found himself in desperation offering a bribe to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria (v. 19). Israel's days of independence and power were over!

It is well to recall that much of Israel's history involved conflicts with Ammon, Moab, Syria, and Assyria (and some uncertain and shaky alliances with Egypt, who never afforded any real help).

International tensions and complications are not new. The Old Testament prophets believed and taught that God "raised up" various other nations to discipline and punish his own people for their disobedience.

The century in which Hosea lived is known as the golden age of Hebrew prophecy, for it was during this period that God gave to his people some of the greatest revelations of the Old Testament period. Hosea came on the scene when the harvest of sin was almost fully ripened. Some of the greatest preaching of all time is found in the impassioned preaching of God's messengers who pleaded with a stubborn, rebellious nation to "hear the word of the Lord."

God did not promise the prophets that their preaching would always meet with success or bear abundant fruit. He did ask them to be faithful, and indicated that no matter how dark the days he would never leave himself entirely without witness.

Elijah felt that he was the only faithful witness left (1 Kings 19:10). Isaiah was given a discouraging pre-view of his ministry (Isa. 6:9-12): "Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." Jeremiah faced known opposition upon every hand (Jer. 1:18-19). Ezekiel was under no misapprehension as to the difficulties of his task (Ezek. 2:3-7).

Historically, there is no record of the reaction of Israel to the preaching of Hosea. Subsequent events indicate that it was

largely ignored. In spite of heartbreaking appeals, impenitent living brought final judgment upon the nation.

III. RECOGNIZING THE EXTRME EMERGENCY

Sin is an insidious thing which infiltrates the heart and life of the individual and the nation. It is also a cumulative force which builds up to a climax, if permitted to remain.

The influence of a long line of weak, vacillating, compromising rulers had its inevitable result upon the nation as a whole. Spirituality declined, ideals were forgotten, standards were lowered, habits degenerated, character deteriorated, corruption flourished, and the stage was set for disintegration and destruction.

Israel was but one of many nations which have followed the same pattern with a similarly tragic result. In her case, however, it was especially tragic, for her particular mission was to witness for God. In recent years thoughtful students of human affairs have witnessed striking illustrations of the moral and spiritual decay which has undermined the whole structure of nations.

It was true in Israel, also! The last thirty-five or forty years in the life of the Northern Kingdom were characterized by a pitiful lack of stability of character on the part of the leaders and by a corresponding confusion and lack of purpose on the part of the people. Anarchy, conspiracy, idolatry, and complacency in the face of spiritual hypocrisy were the order of the day. Among the last six rulers, one reigned for six months (2 Kings 15:8-11), one for only one month (2 Kings 15:13-14), and another for two years (2 Kings 15:23-26)!

Political intrigue and international conspiracy were substituted for obedience and faith. Panic gripped the hearts of leaders and confusion characterized the people in the closing, hectic days of a nation which had forgotten God. However, during a good portion of the time covered by the ministry of Amos and Hosea there had been an outward prosperity which gave the people a false sense of security.

Jeroboam, frequently referred to as Jeroboam II to distinguish him from the first ruler of the Northern Kingdom (see 1 Kings 12:19-20; cf. 2 Kings 14:23-28), was a strong military leader who did much to enlarge the territory and strengthen the material position of the kingdom. He was, however, numbered among the many who "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 14:24).

Briefly, the political conditions during Jeroboam's reign were characterized by outward prosperity and evidences of luxury and ease. Socially, the sins attendant upon wealth and luxury abounded. Princes, priests, and people showed signs of moral decay. Family life was at a low ebb. Religiously, idolatry and apostasy had separated the people from God. With some of them a mere lip service toward the God of their fathers remained, but it was divorced from the practical affairs of life. The nation as a whole was sadly backslidden.

IV. INTERPRETING THE MESSAGE

Bible scholars are generally agreed that the message of Hosea is not easily interpreted. The book is not built upon any recognizable logical or chronological outline. It leaps from one subject to another with overtones and undertones which are not easily understood or explained.

Diamonds are not always picked up upon the surface of the ground. The richest veins of gold do not always appear as the result of a casual prospecting of a given area. A careful study of Hosea's message is most rewarding. Here will be found some of the great revelations of the Old Testament. Few of the prophets show a more intimate knowledge of the nature and character of God.

1. *Divinely Inspired* (1:1-2)

Although we may search in vain for a convenient or clearly developed outline, there can be no question as to the divine origin of the message of Hosea. Revelation is not so much concerned with logic as with truth. The cold logic of men may be foolishness in the sight of God.

Hosea claims divine inspiration for his message! He does not claim it as the creation of his own mind. Three brief phrases in the introduction to the message establish its divine authorship: "The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri" (1:1); "The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea" (1:2); "And the Lord said to Hosea" (1:2).

Difficult though it may be to understand and interpret, it is God's Word and "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The very difficulties of interpretation mark it as a revelation of unusual import and value. It deals with the "deep things of God." In the study of God's message through Hosea, we stand upon holy ground!

2. *Growing Out of Existing Conditions* (4:1-5)

Here we have no casual, prosaic sermon prepared by a professional preacher who knows that some utterance is expected of him and gropes around for an acceptable subject which he discusses in vague generalities phrased in pious platitudes! Here is a message which is pointed, personal, pungent. Hosea says, "The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land" (4:1), and he proceeds to say what it is in words so plain that no one can possibly misunderstand (4:1-5).

The preaching of Hosea was not given by revelation to a man who lived the sheltered existence of a hermit shut away from human experience, but came to him through the heartbreak of a man of sensitive nature who was watching his own people recklessly traveling that way "whose end is destruction."

The urgency of the days demanded an urgent prophetic message. The condition of Israel was desperate. Amos had faced the same appalling conditions with the fire of God's retributive justice burning in his soul. He could see no hope for a people so utterly sold out to sin, and, being convinced

that judgment on a national scale was imminent, he had cried, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (Amos 4:12).

To the ghastly conditions which prevailed, the tender, compassionate, poetic soul of Hosea responded in a message more poignant and personal than that of any other preacher up to that time.

3. Colored by Personal Experience

Although it is divinely inspired and came to us by revelation, the message came *through* the hearts and minds and hands of men. God's Word does not follow a fixed, unchanging, unvarying pattern of expression. It bears the imprint of human personality and of individual temperament. There is nothing artificial about it. "God spake all these words" (Ex. 20:1), but in doing so he used the personality, the experience, the background, and the several abilities of the men whom he had chosen in order to clothe the message in a form that would best meet the particular need.

Isaiah spoke with the lofty vision and impassioned oratory of a world statesman (Isa. 19:23-25). It is easy to see that he was a man accustomed to mingling with men of influence and authority (Isa. 37:21-35; 38:1-8)

Amos used the plain, blunt, forthright words of a country preacher (Amos 7:14-15) and illustrated his message profusely from nature, speaking of fig trees, olive trees, gardens, vineyards, calves, lambs, horses, summer fruit, and the like.

Each of these men brought God's message to his own day and to all time. Peter summed it up in the words, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: *but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*" [author's italics] (2 Peter 1:19-21).

In other words, godly men who were in touch with the Lord were literally "borne along" or "carried along" by his spirit. They spoke for God and under the direct leadership of the Holy Spirit, but he caused the message to be characterized by a refreshing variety of expression as he used the dedicated personality of each man to accomplish his purpose.

This is particularly true in the case of Hosea. Possessed of a warm, affectionate nature and with the gracious ability to forgive and forget, he became an interpreter of the love and grace of God. His own tragic domestic experience enabled him to understand the deep grief in the heart of God over the faithlessness of his own beloved people. Out of bewilderment, heartache, and deep, pent-up emotion Hosea spoke. Small wonder that there seems to be no orderly arrangement and that the message clearly bears the evidence of emotional upheaval.

This brief and altogether inadequate study of the background may help in some measure to explain the reason for some of the difficulties in understanding and interpreting one of the truly great prophetic messages of the Bible.

Hosea spoke to a backslidden, worldly, impenitent people who were so blinded by compromise and sinful living that

they did not recognize their own condition, and, therefore, failed to realize that judgment was inevitable and close at hand. His message graphically pictures the moral and spiritual decay of a nation which was on its way down. Outward prosperity is no evidence or guarantee of security.

To a man deeply religious and strongly patriotic, the gradual moral and spiritual disintegration of his people could only mean personal grief and growing concern. Hosea saw what was happening and knew that if the present trend continued there could be only one outcome—judgment upon a national scale.

There was, and is, however, a way out. It is the gracious forgiveness and love of God. The heart of God was torn by the thought of what must inevitably happen to his people and he pleaded for repentance and return. In this plea Hosea passionately joined.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Read carefully the book of Amos, which reflects the conditions existing some years before the ministry of Hosea.
2. Note how greatly Jeremiah was influenced by Hosea in his early ministry (Jer. 3-4; 8:4-10; 12:13-17; 17:1-4; 18:13-17).
3. Read 2 Kings 14-15 and 2 Chronicles 26, passages which give some of the historical background of the time in which Hosea ministered. Point out what these passages reveal about moral and spiritual conditions which prevailed.

END OF SAMPLE