

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS**

From the NASB Minor Prophets introductory material: “The Book of the Twelve, or the Minor Prophets”:

In Ecclesiasticus (an Apocryphal book written c. 190 B.C.), Jesus ben Sira spoke of “the twelve prophets” (Ecclesiasticus 49:10) as a unit parallel to Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He thus indicated that these 12 prophecies were at that time thought of as a unit and were probably already written together on one scroll, as is the case in later times. Josephus (*Against Apion*, 1.8.3) also was aware of this grouping. Augustine (*The City of God*, 18.25) called them the “Minor Prophets,” referring to the small size of these books by comparison with the major prophetic books and not at all suggesting that they are of minor importance.

In the traditional Jewish canon these works are arranged in what was thought to be their chronological order: 1) the books that came from the period of Assyrian power (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah); 2) those written about the time of the decline of Assyria (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah); and 3) those dating from the postexilic era (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). On the other hand, their order in the Septuagint is: Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (the order of the first six was probably determined by length, except for Jonah, which is placed last among them because of its different character).

In any event, it appears that within a century after the composition of Malachi the Jews had brought together the 12 shorter prophecies to form a book (scroll) of prophetic writings, which was received as canonical and paralleled the three major prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The great Greek manuscripts Alexandrinus (5th century A.D. codex containing an almost complete copy of the LXX) and Vaticanus (4th century A.D. codes containing an almost complete copy of the LXX) (both Alexandrinus and Vaticanus appear to have a common Egyptian origin) place the Twelve before the major prophets, but in the traditional Jewish canon and in all modern versions they appear after them.

### **NAME**

The word “Hosea” means “salvation.” It is closely akin to the names “Joshua” and “Jesus.”

### **AUTHOR**

Mitchell:

We know very little of Hosea. His father (Beer) probably was a farmer because of the frequent reference to rural life. He seems to have been fairly well educated in history, diplomacy, and politics. Hosea is known as the “prophet of love” even as Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet.” Hosea’s seems to have been a long ministry (1:1), possibly lasting for 72 years. This would make it longer than any other writing prophet. He was the last prophet to speak to the 10 northern tribes. God sent some mighty good men to the north (Elijah, Elisha, Amos).

### **DATE**

Probably 760 to 722. Hosea prophesized during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793-753), Menahem (752-742), Pekah (752-732), and Hoshea (732-722) in the north and Uzziah (792-740), Jotham (750-735), Ahaz (735-715), and Hezekiah (715-686) in the south. He was probably contemporary with Jonah (770) and Amos (760-722) in the north, and Isaiah (740-681) and Micah (740-700) in the south.

He was the last of the prophets to Israel and probably saw the great Assyrian invasion and captivity of the 10 northern tribes (721 B.C.).

Mitchell:

He lived in the darkest times of the Northern Kingdom. He has been called the “Jeremiah of the Northern Kingdom.” Hosea has been referred to as the saddest book of Holy Scripture. It is, in effect, the lamentations of Jehovah over His unfaithful people. To make the prophet’s preaching more vivid, God taught him the major lesson of the book by means of a heart-breaking personal experience.

God often wants His preachers to experience what they are going to preach - at least on the heart level.

### **THEME**

Type of Literature: Prophecy / Minor Prophet

Halley (page 43): *“Apostasy of Israel”*

Carl: *“God loves you in spite of how many times you poke Him in the eye.”*

Mitchell: *“Love can be sinned against and still persist.”* Regardless of how much and how long Israel sinned, God still loved her. Though He would chasten her, He still loved her. God’s love does not cease when sinned against.

Key Word (Nelson’s): The Loyal Love of God for Israel - The themes of chapters 1-3 echo throughout the rest of the book. The adultery of Gomer (chapter 1) illustrates the sin of Israel (chapters 4-7); the degradation of Gomer (chapter 2) represents the judgment of Israel (chapters 8-10); and Hosea’s redemption of Gomer (chapter 3) pictures the restoration of Israel (chapters 11-14). More than any other Old Testament prophet, Hosea’s personal experiences illustrate his prophetic message.

Key Verses (Nelson’s):

*“Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land...”* (Hosea 4:1).

*“My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, He shall not raise them up at all. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within Me; My compassion grows warm and tender. 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 11:7-9).

Key Chapter (Nelson’s): 4 - The nation of Israel has left the knowledge of the truth and followed the idolatrous ways of their pagan neighbors. Central to the book is Hosea 4:6: *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to Me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”*

Outline:

- I. The Personal Experience 1-3  
There is direct application to the nation of Hosea's personal tragedy from the experience of the prophet and his faithless wife, Gomer.
- II. The National Message 4-14
  - A. The sin of Israel 4:1-7:8  
Israel has played the harlot
  - B. The punishment of Israel 7:9-11:7
  - C. The restoration of Israel 11:8-14:9

**RECIPIENTS**

Mitchell:

Hosea's message was principally to Israel (i.e. 10 northern tribes). The name Ephraim occurs in this book over 35 times, and the name Israel with equal frequency; while Judah is not mentioned more than 14 times and Jerusalem is never mentioned.

**CONTRIBUTION TO CANON**

Hosea find himself in a rotten moral and spiritual situation. He tries to make Israel see that the Lord loves them in spite of their sin. Those who are wise will understand the way of the Lord is just and someday He will openly be able to love them. Regardless of how much and how long Israel sinned, God still loved her. Though He would chasten her He still loved her. God's love does not cease when sinned against. Hosea points out the seriousness of sinning saints. Our sin is against God's love and breaks His heart.

The book also advances the theme of spiritual adultery as illustrated by marriage. This theme also fits with the Church in relationship with Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33, especially v. 32).

**RESOURCES**

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

*Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts*, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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