

I. Introduction to the Minor Prophets

If you have your Bibles this morning, let's turn to the book of Hosea. Today we are going to enter into what is commonly called in your Bible the Minor Prophets. This is the third section of the Old Testament that we have talked about before: the first section being the historical books, the second section being the wisdom books, and then the last section being the prophets. The prophets are contained in the major and the minor prophets.

You will find that when you come through your Bible, there are 17 books that make up the prophets. We have already studied Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations, and Daniel. Those are called the major prophets. Then there are 12 that are called the minor prophets. They are called the minor prophets not because they are less significant than the other books, but rather because they are smaller books; they are shorter in their content.

To a large degree, the minor prophets are really some of the hardest books in the Bible. You would be hard pressed to go to any Christian bookstore or anywhere to find any commentaries on the minor prophets. They are just not out there. Nobody wants to write about them because, very frankly, once you get past the historical application, which is generally known, you just do not know what you are dealing with. You will not find a commentary. You will find commentaries on Daniel; everybody likes Daniel. You will find them on Ezekiel and all of that; everybody likes those. But when it comes to the minor prophets, you will be hard pressed to find any books.

It is interesting if you have a Haley's Bible Handbook or even an Unger's Handbook, they go through every book of the Bible and give a short summary of it. Watch sometime in your leisure time, grab it and look through it. You will see when it comes to Jeremiah, they will have two or three pages, but when it comes to the minor prophets, you suddenly get maybe a line or a paragraph. They just do not know what they are dealing with in this book outside the historical application.

The truth of the matter is, these are the books where the keys of the Bible, the words, really open up. We are going to have some fun with the minor prophets because by the time we are finished with it, you are going to understand it better than 99% of the Bible scholars on the planet Earth. What appears to be a hard book is really an easy book if you just use the right keys. It is hard to get into your house when you have the wrong key. You can stand there all day long with your car key trying to get into your front door, and you are not going to get in. But if you get the right key, you are in in a moment.

It is the same way with the Bible. It is hard to get into the Bible when you do not have the right keys. Get the right keys, and you are in in a heartbeat. That is the minor prophets. As I have said many times, most pastors and most Bible teachers know a lot about the Bible because they get it from other pastors or what they read, but they really do not know the Bible. Show me somebody who understands the minor prophets, and I will show you someone who understands the Bible because they are such key books. The key to them and understanding them is the basic, simple

word. As we come through them, I am going to show you how they unfold themselves, and you will see in a very great way that they are really incredible books, and they are books that you need to know.

II. The Minor Prophets: Historical, Doctrinal, and Inspirational Applications

Historically, we know the minor prophets all deal with the time of Israel's exile. We studied it earlier that the exile comes in three phases during a 70-year captivity, which is the exile. We have books that are written before that period, which are called pre-exilic. We have books that are written after that 70 years, which are called post-exilic books or post-exile. We have talked about that.

We also know that the prophets are written either to the ten northern tribes, which are collectively called Israel, or the two southern tribes, which are collectively called Judah. The historical aspect is the easy part. Everybody can write on the historical significance of the minor prophets because it is history, and it is readily known. But when you get into the doctrinal application of the minor prophets, that is where you go through the ice. That is where they cannot get to because they reject the Word of God. The Word of God has the keys; therefore, you cannot get in.

Doctrinally, these books all deal with great undeveloped and unknown truths on future events, like the second coming of Christ, the tribulation period, the Antichrist, the millennium, and dealing with the Jew and the Gentile during that period of time. They fit right into Daniel and the book of Revelation, but nobody sees that because they are written in a more hidden way. You are dependent on the key words in the Bible, the words that I put on the back of your million-dollar bookmark there. They are the key words that open up these books. I am going to show you as we go through over the weeks and really help you understand it. You will be way ahead of most everybody else in the world when it comes to those books in the Bible.

From an inspirational standpoint, we are again dealing with the great parallels. The great parallels that parallel the nation of Israel from the body of Christ, their mission, their relationship with God, their sin, and their rejection of the Word of God, all parallel each other. As you look at historically the nation of Israel, why they got in the mess they got in, how they got in it, and then you look at the church, we have talked about it week after week. One of the things that we have really done is focused on those parallels so you would not miss it because they are so key to our current events that we have today.

The minor prophets, like the major prophets, all carry the same message. They are very despondent; they are very gloomy. There is no "have a good day in Jesus." There is no "this is the day the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice." You will not find verses like that. On the other hand, you will find "this is the day that God has made; you are going to get it in the back of the head." It is that kind of teaching. It is destruction; it is carnage. Just like all the prophets, they focus on the downside of what happens to the nation of Israel or anybody when they reject God

and go their own way. So you are going to see it over and over again: the same message, God's coming judgment.

Many times, as we have already stated, these prophets are used as object lessons. These prophets are told to do something that maybe is a violation of the law to illustrate to the people where their ungodliness is and how far down they have come in the rung of the ladder of life, of their disobedience to God. Hosea is no different. We saw Jeremiah; he is called the weeping prophet. We saw Jeremiah; he was the only man in the Bible told not to marry. We saw Ezekiel; he was not allowed to cry when his wife died. We saw Isaiah; he walked around for three years preaching naked. And now we see Hosea.

III. The Book of Hosea: An Overview

Hosea is told to break the law. He is told in Hosea 1:1 to take a wife of harlotry, which is a violation of the Levitical Old Testament law. You will find that there are 12 chapters in Hosea. Hosea means salvation. You will find that the word Hosea is the Hebrew root word for Jesus or Joshua. So we see all the things begin to come into play here.

As I said, he is told to marry a wife of harlotry. His wife's name is Gomer. His new wife is a harlot, and she represents the unfaithfulness of the nation of Israel. She represents Israel at its worst. By Hosea being told to marry her, it echoes the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel, who have committed harlotry against God, spiritual fornication, spiritual adultery.

Through this story in the book of Hosea, God echoes three great messages of the nation of Israel over and over again:

1. God abhors the sin of his people.
2. Because of that sin, God's judgment is going to come.
3. God's faithfulness to the nation of Israel in spite of their harlotry, in spite of their turning their back on God.

Hosea, loving unfaithful Gomer, is a picture of God loving unfaithful Israel. There are many ways to study the nation of Israel in the Bible. You can study Israel as an animal; there are animals in the Bible that represent the nation of Israel. There are trees in the Bible that represent the nation of Israel. There is fruit in the Bible that represents the nation of Israel. There are people in the Bible that represent the nation of Israel. God has done it that way to teach you great concepts throughout the Bible by coming at the nation of Israel from different angles and different standpoints. You are going to find that the nation of Israel, in one way in the Old Testament, is likened to God's wife.

I am going to give you a great concept here that is going to help you with your Bible, so you will want to hear what I say right now. If you do not get anything else, I hope you do. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is called God's wife. God has a wife. I know that seems like a contradictory thing that you did not know God was married, that you thought God was God. We have got to understand, it is a picture of something.

The other concept is that Jesus Christ, His Son, has a bride. Those are two aspects by which you study two great concepts in the Bible:

4. The nation of Israel as God's wife.
5. The body of Christ as the bride of Christ.

It does not mean that God came down at some point and had a ceremony and took Israel. What it means is that God's love for Israel is just like the love that a man should have for his wife, and the relationship there is binding. The Old Testament picture, and the references for it, would be Jeremiah 3:1-14, Isaiah 54:1, Ezekiel 16:32, and Isaiah 62:4. Those verses, along with many other verses, will simply tell you that Israel is God's wife.

God called out the nation of Israel through the loins of Abraham. He called the nation of Israel out from Abraham as a peculiar people, different from everybody else in the world. In that relationship, God said, "I am going to choose this nation, and you are going to be to Me like a wife, and I am going to be to you a husband. I am going to treat you good like a husband should. I am going to do all. I am going to give you things. I am going to provide for you. I am going to do the role of a husband for you, and I expect you to do the role of the wife back to Me."

Of course, the nation of Israel did not do that. The nation of Israel goes after other gods. The nation of Israel forsakes God. The nation of Israel becomes unfaithful to God in the concept of their religion and their worship to God and goes after all the other gods of the Gentiles. God brings this up through the time period that we are through the major and the minor prophets. We have seen how God then puts them in exile. God takes them out of the land by Nebuchadnezzar. We saw the three sieges and how it all comes down. God takes them captive under the Gentile nation.

At that point, the Bible says in Isaiah 50:1 that God gives Israel a bill of divorcement. He divorces her under the Old Testament Deuteronomy law of putting her away for her unfaithfulness. But God has not, and this is where Gentiles, when you do not follow the Bible and you do not see the Bible, then you lose track of it and you get all screwed up. When God put her away, God did not put her away forever. God is going to be, and that is where God's faithfulness comes in, to an unfaithful nation. She was unfaithful. God judged her for her unfaithfulness, but God then is going to restore her.

God always sets down a great principle for you and for me, and that is simply this: always do what is right when somebody else does not. Somebody not doing right to you does not give you a right not to do what is right. Always do what the Bible says, and you will not go far wrong. God sets the example. While God puts her away, we have what we call the church age. While Israel is separated from God and God has put her away, we saw the story. God has hid His face from the nation. We looked at all that stuff when we came through. We are pulling a lot of material together. We have already taught you that you ought to be following along with.

When God put her away, He then turns attention to His Son, and He says, "I want to get a bride for My Son because we are going to go out into eternity, and I as God want to have somebody that is faithful to Me, Israel, and My Son, I want Him to have a person who was faithful to Him,

the church." So the nation of Israel in the Old Testament becomes God's wife. The body of Christ, you and me in the New Testament, becomes Christ's bride. Those two concepts divide out the Old Testament and the New Testament, and they divide out the two concepts of the whole Bible: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is with the nation of Israel as God's wife. The kingdom of God is with the church, the bride of Christ, and you find those two concepts.

Right now, God is calling out a bride for His Son. That bride is the church. There is coming a day, the rapture of the church is going to take place, the bride goes to be with the bridegroom. What does God do then? God then begins to restore His wife to Him, and through the tribulation period, that seven years where the Antichrist, under the guidelines of the devil, literally runs this world, He brings Israel, His wife, back to Him. At the second coming of Christ, He restores that wife, Israel, as a nation, and they go into the millennium as restored and on through eternity. God has His people, Israel, likened to His wife. Christ has His bride, the church, and the two have their relationships based on the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. It is an incredible, incredible concept, and that is why it is so important for you to understand that.

IV. Structure and Themes of Hosea

That is what you have in the main message of the book of Hosea, and the book of Hosea breaks down very simply. Now that I have given the introduction, let's have a word of prayer, and then we will look at the breakdown.

Father, we thank and praise You for all that You do for us, and we love You today. We ask You to help us to put together this great book, to learn from it, help us to go out of here today with more insight, more understanding, and how the Bible goes together, how it fits in our own lives, and all the things that we do. We pray, Father, You will bless us now in all that You do, in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it, amen.

The breakdown is fairly simple. Hosea 1-3 focuses on Hosea's love for his wayward wife, Gomer. Hosea 4-12 focuses on God's love for wayward Israel. You will find the parallels between the two, and through it all, you will find one great theme, and we are going to end on this when we get to the end of the book, and that is God's faithfulness to Israel. You can translate it into a practical application to God's faithfulness to you and to me, and we will talk about that a little bit later on.

The book of Hosea is a pre-exilic book. Remember, God's prophets are men. We have talked about this before. The prophets in the Old Testament, whether major or minor, they are men who take God's side on biblical issues against His people who are doing the wrong thing. The book of Hosea is written to the ten northern tribes, not to the southern tribe, but the ten northern tribes.

V. Hosea Chapter 1: The Object Lesson of Gomer and Her Children

In Hosea 1, we will begin to walk through this a little bit and look at some great concepts. In Hosea 1, you have Israel and Gomer, and you have the comparison of how he is told to take a wife of harlotry, "for the land hath committed great harlotry against God," and this has become the object lesson. This is what the whole book of Hosea is about. The whole book of Hosea is an object lesson, but within that object lesson are some incredible truths.

She bears him three children whose names all picture the desperate situation of the nation of Israel.

6. The first boy she has is a guy by the name of Jezreel. Jezreel means "God scatters."
7. The second child that she has is a girl. Lo-Ruhamah means "not pitied."
8. The third child that she has is another boy, Lo-Ammi, and that means "not my people."

What you see by Hosea 1 is that not only is Israel in a bad state, but the fruit that Israel is putting forth is the wrong fruit. You see that God names these children, who are the fruit of Gomer's womb, as things that are in a negative context with God. Why? Because Israel is not only doing wrong itself as a nation, but the fruit that Israel is producing as God's people is also wrong. You see that great concept in Hosea 1.

VI. Hosea Chapters 2-3: God's Stormy Divorce and Restoration

In Hosea 2 and Hosea 3, you will find God's stormy divorce and the restitution with His wife. This is a thing where in Hosea 2, and I need to show you this because this is a great illustration. A couple of weeks ago on Thursday Night Bible, Pam asked me the question about paragraph marks in the Bible. You asked me there in the book of Acts 20 or one of those places, where was the last place you found paragraph marks in the Bible? I went through and I explained why paragraph marks are very important. I showed you how the paragraph marks are one of the key ways that you figure out the Bible. Then I told you why it was not after that.

Here is a chapter that exactly means it. Look at Hosea 2. Here is what I mean; this is a great example. In fact, once I saw this, I went back to my notes and I put this in as an example in case anybody else ever asked the question. Look at Hosea 2. There is a paragraph mark in verse 6. Look at verse 14; a paragraph mark there in verse 14. Two paragraph marks in this chapter, which makes three sections. I showed you how paragraph marks many times will change dispensations, and that is exactly what you have got.

In Hosea 2:1-5, you have a picture of her sin and the thing that she did historically. There is a paragraph mark in verse 6. In verse 6, it changes, and from verses 6-13, you deal with her judgment. That would be the tribulation period. In Hosea 2:14, there is another paragraph mark, and the context changes again. Now you have the millennium and a restoration. You see that? Your whole Bible is in one chapter and laid out historically, laid out the tribulation period, and laid out through the millennium by two paragraph marks.

In Hosea 2:1-5, it is Israel's history and her sin and her being cast away by God. In Hosea 2:6-13, it is the tribulation period and her paying for her sin by the judgment of the tribulation. In Hosea

2:14 to the end of the chapter, verse 23, it shows you how God is going to restore them. You have the whole concept of God, what He is going to do with Israel from Genesis to the end of the Bible in one chapter, and it is figured out by two paragraph marks being put in the same place. 99.9999999999 percent of the Bible scholars, Bible teachers, radio guys, and pastors in this world today will tell you those paragraph marks mean nothing. Let me say those guys mean nothing, and the paragraph marks mean something because God put them in there because it is His book. Imagine God writing a book and letting somebody else punctuate it. Give me a break.

VII. Hosea Chapter 4: The Core Problem: Loss of Truth, Mercy, and Knowledge of God

Now we come to Hosea 4, and Hosea 4 is the key to the book of Hosea, and Hosea 4 is a key chapter really in the Old Testament and the New Testament concerning the main problem we have, which are the parallels between the two. I want to read Hosea 4:1-6 for you. Before I do that, I want to give you a new scripture. There are verses that I consider salient verses. You know what salient means? I do not either, but it is a great word. It means you have got to have them. It means very important. It means "do not forget this."

There are verses in the Bible that I call salient. Salient in the sense that you cannot get along in life without them. Salient in the sense that it is one verse that will explain something huge. There are verses in the Bible that are great verses, but they just go along with the story. Then there are verses in the Bible that are really good verses, and they will show you some great things. Then there is what I call the salient verses. I have about 400 of them marked in my Bible. I have them cataloged in the back of my Bible. They are what I call the salient verses. They are the absolute verses. They are the verses that you read one verse, and it just explodes the whole Bible into a picture in front of you and tells you why you are the way you are, why things are the way they are, how you deal with it, and how you understand it. They are called salient verses. They are not, you do not go anywhere to find that; that is my word for them. Salient is a word that I found one time which said that is what those are.

I am going to give you one. I am going to add another one to your repertoire. I do not know what repertoire means. I hope it is not a dirty word, but it sounds good too. Hosea 8:12. I am going to give you one now. You want this because you are going to use this through the book, and you are going to use this through the rest of your life. Every time somebody makes fun of you, I know a lot of you, we spend time in the Word of God together, and God is putting you in great circumstances, and He is putting you in circumstances where you are talking to people who are supposedly Christians, and they probably are, but they really are idiots when it comes to the Bible, are they not? And they think they know more than you know about it, and they resent the fact that they look at you like you are an idiot because you believe some things about the Bible that they have never heard. I have had that problem all my life, and it was always amazing to me that 100 years ago, the average guy on the street corner knew about the Bible. Today, those same great truths, the body of Christ looks at and thinks that anybody that believes it is an idiot.

When a man gets arrogant to the point that he rejects the authority of the Word of God, the problem is never him; it is always you. It is always you. It could not be him. Of course, that is exactly what you have got in Christianity. It is not a matter of fact that what we believe in the Bible, you can follow a solid line right back to Acts 11 where they are first called Christians. It is not about any of that. Some of the weirdest stuff that people look at you and say, "Well, that is really off the wall, that is really strange. I think you are a heretic. You are some kind of weird, sometimes I am kind of teaching heresy over there. What kind of church are you anyhow?" are the same things if you were back in history, you would find the Albigensians and the Huguenots believing back in the 10th and 12th century. Why? Because they are Bible believers. They believe the Bible.

We get all caught up with that, and I am going to give you a salient verse here. This is a great verse, and this will help you understand, and from now on, I have ruined your day because from now on, when somebody bombs you with something, this verse is going to come to your mind, and this is the answer. This thing will answer a lot of questions you have when you come over to me and you say, "Bob, what is wrong with people?" Here is what is wrong. It is found in a parallel between the nation of Israel and the body of Christ. They had forgotten God. They had forsaken His Word. They had a religion just like most Baptist churches where they went to church every Sunday. They sang songs. They did all of this, and they had everything going, but they did not have God. They did not have the Bible, and they had no understanding, and I am going to show you that in just a second.

When they are faced with the truth of God's Word, which is salient, which is definable down through history, here is what they do:

Hosea 8:12

I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.

You see, when you reject God and the Word of God and you go your own way, and you still play church, and you want to be Christianity, and you want to be nicey-nicey, and you think you are really spiritual without a Bible, without a relationship with God, and without the doctrinal teaching of the Bible, then in time, because of your arrogance and because of your "there is nothing wrong with me, what is wrong with you folks," you get to the point where the great things that God wrote in His Bible become strange things to you, and you just cannot see them. You cannot figure it out because God wrote some tremendous, incredible things in that Bible, but the key of getting them is your attitude of heart of believing the book that He wrote them in. When you do not, those great things to us become strange, weird things to them, and that is just the way it works. I give you that verse starting the key chapter because here is the problem, and the great parallels here is between Israel and the church because this is our problem.

Now follow with me here, and he says:

Hosea 4:1

Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

The first thing I want to point out to you is that God has a controversy, and the controversy He is having is not with unsaved people. The controversy that He is going through here is not with the Amalekites or the Hittites or the Philistines or the Moabites. The controversy He has is with the inhabitants of the land, that is, the land that God has given to Abraham, and the inhabitants that He is talking about here are His own people. This is not a passage that is written to the lost. In the Old Testament, historically, you make it Israel because it is. In the New Testament, inspirationally, you make it the church because that is the parallel. God has a controversy with the church today just like He had a controversy with the nation of Israel back in the book of Hosea.

What is it over? What is the controversy over? Here it comes:

- 1.) There is no truth. The first thing Israel lost is the first thing the church lost: truth. When you lose truth, you lose everything because now you have no measuring yardstick wherefore to judge anything by. Everything becomes secular, humanistic, and relative. There is no more absolute truth. There is nothing to judge anything by. Therefore, man is left to his own devices to define what truth is, and we know where that will go. That will go from Beersheba to Dan in a very quick way. It goes downhill quickly. Man left to himself will always destroy even farther because he has rejected truth. The very fact that man rejected truth in the first place shows you that man did not care about what God thought or what was absolute, but wanted the ability to do his own thing.
- 2.) No mercy. Once you lose truth, then you lose mercy, and that is why nobody wins people to Christ today on their own. That is why today the church has to provide programs. The church has to provide something for you. I remember years ago somebody said to me, "When are you going to give me somebody to disciple?" And I said, "Why do you not just want to win somebody to Christ and disciple him? What is wrong with that concept?" I talked to a guy a couple of weeks ago, and he said, "You know what?" He lives across the country, and he is struggling with a little church, and he says, "I have got a church of 40-50 people, and we are struggling." He said, "I do not understand it. I have got like nine or ten really good families in this church. I have got some men that know the Bible, in fact, better than I do." He said, "Some of them have been to Bible college, some of them have done this." He said, "I do not understand, but what do you think the problem is?" I said, "Well, let me ask you a question. I do not know because I am not there, but let me just say this to you. I am telling you right now, maybe you better look at this. I am saying everybody in your church, all those guys who are the great guys that want to do, that all know the Bible, and it is an easy thing to fall into. Everybody wants to help you preach. Everybody wants the better responsibility of preaching, but nobody probably in your church wants the better responsibility of helping you build the church." I said, "Ask yourself, look at yourself, ask those guys, 'When is the last time, pastor, you really personally won somebody to Christ? When is the last time you went out, won somebody to Christ, disciplined them, and did that?'" That is the problem today. We do not understand the personal accountability of winning men and women to Christ. We expect to bring them to church. "I will win them." We expect to bring them here or get a program that the church will give you somebody to win. That is fine, and the church needs to do that, but the danger of that is simply this: you can never come to the point in your life

where you cease to be a soul winner. You can never come to the place that you like, and I do not care, people, I have heard every excuse. I had a guy one time say to me, "Well, you do not understand where I work, you cannot witness." Winning people to Christ has nothing to do with working someplace where you cannot witness. Winning people to Christ has something to do with your own personal relationship with the Holy Spirit of God. If that is right, and you have all the buttons flying and everything is moving, God's Spirit will lead you to people, and you will win them to Christ. That is the way, and what happens is when you lose truth, you lose mercy. We are living in an age where unborn babies being aborted is unprecedented. Now we as Christians, we want to have rallies. We want to have pro-choice or pro-life and all these things, and we want to get together, we want to pass legislation, we want to stop abortion, we want to stop unborn babies from being aborted before they hit full term. We want to do the right thing, we want to do the moral thing, and we want to blame the wickedness of the unsaved world for all those problems. I have a terrible news flash for you. Abortion is on the rise not because of wickedness. Abortion is on the rise simply because anytime truth is gone, mercy is gone, and when there is no mercy, you abort every baby in the world that gets aborted today. Nobody cares. You know why nobody cares? There is no standard of life anymore, and that is not the unsaved people's fault; that is God's people's fault. A guy said to me one time, "What are we going to do to stop pornography?" And I said, "Let's get Christians to quit buying it," and probably cut it in half right there. When there is no truth, there is no mercy, and you can play big-time preacher all you want. Whenever you are pastoring a church, you can walk around and say, "Well, I know the Bible, and I know this," all you want. The bottom line is, the real proof of it is not how well you know the Bible, it is not how well you preach the Bible, not how well you teach the Bible, it is what it is doing through you and the lives of others on your own. That is the key. That is the key.

➤ Hosea Chapters 5-9: The Problem of Ephraim and Dan