

Introducing Hosea: A God Who Judges and Restores

Note to Bible study and worship leaders: The subject matter of the Book of Hosea includes explicit references to sexual unfaithfulness in marriage and “addiction” to a life of prostitution. If children are included in your group that will study this Unit, the Home Church Online staff strongly urges you to consider either skipping this five session Unit of study or limiting it to a group of adults only.

These themes, used by Hosea to teach God’s judgment and restoration, will be commented on in both the Bible Study and the Worship Time.

What do people think about God's judgment today? Don't they tend to think it's real when it is to be applied to someone else but tend not to think it has much relevance for them? After all, they're good people—good enough, at any rate.

What do people think about God's grace today? This questioning of the reality of God's judgment also means that many tend not to believe they need God's grace. We can handle life just fine ourselves, thank you. Others believe that God's judgment is real but that keeping the rules is all that's important in avoiding it. Since they believe they themselves do that, then if others would just keep the rules, too, there would be no problem. Such attitudes consider grace unnecessary or perhaps even dangerous. Of course, many other people feel so burdened by the difficulties of life that they find it hard to believe that God has a word of grace for them.

The Book of Hosea teaches us that God's judgment and God's grace are both real. Indeed, God's judgment and God's grace are bound together in the Book of Hosea.

Although Hosea is known more for his prophecies of God's merciful promises to restore Israel, judgment actually occupies more than half of the book. As with Amos, Hosea's prophecies are filled with condemnation of his nation for its unfaithfulness to God. Hosea saw this unfaithfulness demonstrated in such things as lawlessness, idolatry, greediness for material gain, oppression of the poor, and reliance on human efforts such as militarism and foreign alliances to solve the people's problems. Such acts disobeyed Israel's covenant with God and were subject to God's judgment.

Even with this emphasis on God's coming judgment, however, the theme that stands out about Hosea is God's gracious promise of restoration. The two prime passages in which this theme is seen are perhaps the best known in the Book of Hosea—(1) Hosea 1—3, in which Hosea's relationship to his wife serves as a metaphor for God's relationship to Israel; and (2) Hosea 11, in which God's love for Israel is couched in terms of a parent's love for a child.

Whatever wrongs Israel had done, God wanted Israel back. Thus, in loving mercy and grace, God offered Israel a way back, the way of repentance. Hosea reminds us that God's grace is both real and available to us if we, too, return to God. Hosea's balance of judgment and grace can help people today who often do not believe in either one.

Hosea prophesied in somewhat the same situation as did Amos. The time period was the middle of the eighth century BC, with the prophecies of Hosea likely coming just a bit later than the prophecies of Amos. In fact, their ministries likely overlapped, although neither mentioned the other. Hosea's prophecies likely relate to the period of time from the mid-eighth century BC into the 720s.

Session one in our studies in Hosea is titled "Trouble in the Family." It considers God's message in Hosea's troubled family situation (Hosea 1:1-9). Session two, "Restoring the Relationship," is a study of Hosea 1:10—3:5, and treats God's desire to restore the relationship with Israel in spite of Israel's disobedience to him. Session three, "God's Charges," provides a summary of God's charges against Israel in Hosea 4—8. Session four, "God's Yearning Heart," focuses on Hosea 11:1-11, in which God expresses loving concern for Israel and promises restoration. Session five, "Return to the Lord," focuses on God's call in Hosea chapter 14 for Israel to repent.

Additional Resources for Studying the Book of Hosea:

Roy L. Honeycutt, Jr. "Hosea." The Broadman Bible Commentary. Volume 7. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1972.

James Limburg. "Hosea." Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988.