

The Minor Prophets

The Divine Call

A 12-Part Bible Study

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Table of Contents

1. Hosea	
<i>The Call to Faithfulness</i>	5
2. Joel	
<i>A Call to Repentance</i>	11
3. Amos	
<i>The Call for Justice</i>	16
4. Obadiah	
<i>The Call to Love Your Brothers and Sisters</i>	22
5. Jonah	
<i>The Call to Love Our Enemies</i>	29
6. Micah	
<i>The Call to Court</i>	36
7. Nahum	
<i>The Call to Leave Judgment in God's Hands</i>	43
8. Habakkuk	
<i>The Call for Patience</i>	49
9. Zephaniah	
<i>The Call for Change Amid Judgment</i>	54
10. Haggai	
<i>A Call to Godly Priorities</i>	60
11. Zechariah	
<i>The Call to Wait for the Messiah</i>	66
12. Malachi	
<i>The Call to Depend on God's Grace</i>	72
Reorder Information	78
Books by Kent Groethe	79
Leader's Notes	81

LESSON 1:

HOSEA

The Call to Faithfulness

Around 900 B.C., the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms because of political divisions. The northern kingdom retained the name *Israel*. The southern kingdom took the name *Judah*. Israel had 19 kings over the next 250 years, all of them ungodly. The kings' unfaithfulness to God drew the people of the nation into ungodliness along with them. Because of their rebelliousness and sin, God allowed the growing power, Assyria, to destroy them in 722 B.C.

Amos had already come from Judah decades earlier to preach against Israel's sin. Now it was Hosea's turn. He is the only one of the writing prophets (prophets with books named after them in the Old Testament) who was from the northern kingdom, Israel. He arrived in order to give a last call to the nation to repent and return to her God. She did not, and Hosea saw Israel's destruction at the hands of the Assyrians.

READ HOSEA 4:1-13

1. What stood out to you as you read/heard this passage?
2. What are Israel's sins according to Hosea 4:1-12?

3. What image is used four times in Hosea 4:10-13 to describe Israel's sin?

Israel was unfaithful to the one true God and was worshipping and making sacrifices to idols. In Hosea, this is portrayed as spiritual prostitution. Although literal prostitution was a part of some pagan religious practices, Hosea claims that any worship of a false god is like a person who leaves her spouse to have intimate relations with another person.

4. How is idolatry (worship of anything that is not the true God) similar to adultery?

READ HOSEA 1:1-9

5. What did God ask Hosea to do? (1:2)

What happened as a result? (1:3, 6)

READ HOSEA 2:2-17, 19-23

6. What is Israel's sin, according to these passages? (2:2-17)
[NOTE: God is speaking to Hosea and "*your mother*" is Israel].

7. What was Israel's motive in "*going after other lovers*," that is, worshipping other gods? (2:5)
8. What was wrong with their thinking? (2:8)
9. What does God say He will do because Israel has gone after other gods? (2:9-10)

Human beings worship things other than God, thinking they are doing something beneficial to themselves.

10. What do people worship or make gods, other than the Lord, in our culture?
11. What lies lure people to make these things gods?

Can they ultimately satisfy?

12. What does God say He will do because Israel has forgotten Him and gone after other gods? (2:9-12)

13. What is God's motivation for allowing Israel to suffer loss of things valuable to her? (2:7)

14. How can losing precious things of this world make us drop our petty worship of idols and run back to God?

Suffering and loss may be the best means to help break our idolatrous love for things of this world. Without reminders that this world is finite and unable to meet our deepest longings and needs, few would follow the only true God.

15. What did God say He was going to do to faithless Israel? (2:19-20)

16. In what ways does it show that the Creator of the universe desperately wants to be in an intimate relationship with faithless humanity?

READ HOSEA 3:1

17. Was Hosea to take his wife back before she changed or after?
18. According to Hosea 3:1, does God love Israel only when they are good and faithful?

READ ROMANS 5:6-11

19. With what adjectives do these verses describe humans when Jesus died for them? (5:6, 8, 10)
20. What would have happened if God had waited until we were faithful and good before He loved us and reconciled us to Himself?

Hosea is a call for us to be faithful to God as the only one worthy of worship and our ultimate commitment. But, like Israel, we fail time and again to completely obey God and serve Him with our entire heart, mind and strength. The good news is that although Hosea begins with our need to be faithful, it ends with the declaration that God is the one who is faithful—even if we are not. The key to understanding our life with God is this: His amazing grace for sinners.

The incredible thing about God is that He loves sinners wildly and completely. His greatest longing is to be intimate with humans who have proven themselves to be unworthy and incurably imperfect. The more we attempt to be faithful and holy, the more we appreciate His faithfulness. All that is left is to embrace His grace and relish in His unexplainable mercy and kindness toward us. And after we relax our embrace of Him and His grace a bit, we turn our attention to seeking to return God's faithfulness with faithfulness of our own. We seek to live our lives to the glory and honor of the One who betrothed us to Himself when we were at our worst.

CLOSING

READ PSALM 130:3-8

Sing or read *Amazing Grace*. (LBW #448)

PRAYER

We celebrate your unfailing love, Lord. Your grace is the centerpiece of our lives. Thank you for lavishing your affections on us when we don't deserve it. Empower us to love others with the love and mercy with which you have loved us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

ASSIGNMENT: Read the book of Joel before the next class.