

Dear Bible Study Leader,

It gives me great pleasure to have this personal contact with you as we approach our study of the Minor Prophets because I feel as if these prophets are my “holy friends.” I exhort you to consult my general introduction to the prophets, found in the Leader’s Guide for the Major Prophets, before you begin your study of the Minor Prophets.

The part of the introduction that especially applies to these prophets is the principle “no problem, no prophet”. When the work of God on earth is being blocked by a problem or obstacle, God raises up a prophet who preaches against that problem/obstacle until it is removed and the work of God can move forward. As you approach each minor prophet, always ask yourself the questions, “What problem/obstacle was this prophet addressing by his life, his ministry, and his message?” And “How did God use the life and message of this prophet to remove that problem/obstacle so His work could continue again?”

As you study these prophets, in addition to asking the questions above, try to get to know these prophets until they become your “holy friends” too. As you focus on their message, realize that even though there is much doom and gloom and judgment, their primary subject is often the love of God. For example, the opening words of Malachi are “The message of God through Malachi ‘I love you says the Lord!’”

The fact that Jonah wrote his prophecy makes the statement that while he was in the city of Nineveh, God showed him that He loved that city and the people who lived there, even though Jonah hated them.

While you are studying these prophets, also ask yourself these questions: “What did the message of this prophet say?”, “What did that message mean?”, and “What does that message mean to me and to those I am teaching?”

I am praying for our Lord’s richest blessing upon you, your family and your ministry and that the experience of leading this study will continue to help you in your journey and establish you in your faith as you continue to grow in your spiritual life and lead others in their spiritual journey.

In His love,

Dick Woodward
Pastor and author of the Mini Bible College

Leading the Bible Study Group

The Mini Bible College has prepared this devotionally practical survey of the foundational books of the Bible. Your role as leader is to guide your group through the study sessions and exercises, helping them to understand the truth, discover the eternal principles, and, most importantly, apply them to their lives. This is a survey study that will take about four months and is designed to be more than just a course. This study is part of a strategic plan to provide you with the tools to nurture and grow personally and to help your church grow both spiritually and numerically.

To help you, we have provided the following tools:

- This Leader's Guide
- Report forms
- Audio of Hosea – Malachi (Audio Lessons Old Testament 74-90)
- A study booklet on Hosea through Malachi
- A set of workbooks for the students

GETTING STARTED

Before class

- Personally start inviting people to come to this spiritual banquet. “Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests” (Matthew 22:9-10).
- Prepare yourself in prayer for those who will attend. If possible, pray for them by name. Only God can change the hearts of people, and prayer is the most powerful tool. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1).
- Ask for help. Do not try to do everything yourself. Invite one or two people to help with music, singing, greeting, and keeping records for the class.
- Review the lesson and understand the lesson objective.
- Become familiar with the material; listen, read, and study each lesson and memorize the Bible verse before class time.
- Be sure all materials are ready for each class.
- Make sure the meeting area is adequate and comfortable for the class.

During class

(Remember to try to keep the class time to one hour and a half.)

- Greet everyone as they arrive. Remember how nice it is when you are welcomed? Extend God's welcome to all. Have someone serve as the greeter and introduce people to one another if they are not already acquainted.
- Open with a time of worship and prayer, asking God to help you and each one understand and apply the God's Word to your lives.
- Recite the memory verse.
- Listen to the audio lesson.

- Work through the workbook, inviting discussion with a focus on application. We trust the questions will raise interesting discussion and understanding that will lead to application. If the group is large (more than 10), consider dividing it into smaller groups of three or four people to encourage discussion. Be sure to monitor the time and be careful that the conversation does not detract from the focus of the lesson and the study of God's Word.
- Thank all for coming and encourage attendance to the next class.
- Challenge the students to invite others to join the Bible study.
- Encourage the students to memorize the biblical passages of the lessons each week.

After each class

- Gather up all materials.
- Restore the meeting room to the proper order. Leave things more orderly than you found them.
- Fill out and file report forms.
- If you are meeting in someone's home, be sure to thank them for their hospitality.

Special Instructions for Teaching Auditory Learners

It is important to remember that those who cannot read and write learn and retain information differently than those of us who are literate. The auditory learners learn from listening and telling what they have heard. Illiteracy was not an obstacle in Jesus' day. It is good to remember and even tell those in your class that most of the disciples and the majority of the people who first shared and spread the Gospel could not read or write.

In many ways, auditory learners have a greater capacity to learn what they hear than we who must write something down to remember it. Take the time, therefore, to allow your students to hear the Scripture and the lessons, pausing the message and even going back to listen again to a portion if it was not understood, and then allow them to respond to questions. When auditory learners can "story back"—tell in their own words what they have heard and learned—it indicates that they have properly grasped the principle. Therefore, use the study questions to guide the study time as it will help in the learning process. Ask the questions out loud and encourage all to participate. This will lead them into a deeper understanding of God's Word and a stronger relationship with His Son, Jesus the Christ.

An Agonizing Allegory

Chapter 1

Audio Lesson: Old Testament number 74



Objective: To understand the message of the prophet Hosea and how he is an example of God's love for Israel.



Come, let us return to the LORD; ... He will set us on our feet again, to live in His kindness. Oh, that we might know the LORD! Let us press on to know Him, and He will respond to us as surely as the coming of dawn or the rain of early spring.

—Hosea 6:1-3

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

—Psalm 9:9-10

We now begin studying the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament, called minor because their books are shorter. It is helpful to understand when each prophet lived and preached. Biblical Hebrew history can be divided into seven major periods: 1) Kingdom, 2) Divided Kingdom, 3) Assyrian conquest of Northern Kingdom, 4) Extinction of Northern Kingdom, 5) Babylonian captivity of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, 6) Persian conquest of Babylon and 7) Judah returns from captivity.

Hosea was commissioned by God to be the prophet of the love of God to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel during the divided kingdom. The people of Israel had turned away from God and were worshipping idols, and God considers this to be spiritual adultery. God called Hosea to marry a prostitute who, after bearing children, would return to her life of adultery. Hosea was led to love her unconditionally as a living illustration of God's love and acceptance for his people.

As a consequence of their spiritual unfaithfulness, worshipping other gods and idols, Israel would be taken into captivity. Though these ten tribes would never become a nation again, Hosea prophesied their spiritual return to God one day. As a faithful husband who loves his wife, God would respond to them with mercy and forgive their sins, just as he does with us when we repent of our sins.



1. True or **false**? The last 12 prophetic books of the Old Testament are called “minor prophets” because they are not as important as other books.
2. True or **false**? Hosea understood exactly why God told him to marry a prostitute.
3. **True** or false? Unlike most prophets, Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Unless otherwise noted, choose one answer for each question.

4. What was Hosea’s primary message about?
 - a. The destruction of Assyria
 - b. The coming judgment of God
 - c. The love of God**
 - d. The future Messiah
5. When did Hosea preach?
 - a. Before Israel’s captivity by Assyria**
 - b. After Israel’s captivity by Assyria
 - c. After Judah’s captivity by Babylon
 - d. During the reign of David
6. In what way were Israel’s people like an adulterous wife?
 - a. They did not believe in marriage.
 - b. They were unfaithful to God by worshiping idols.**
 - c. They were unfaithful to their king by serving other countries.
 - d. They were unloved by God.
7. How many other prophets preached of God’s unfailing love?
 - a. None. Hosea was the only one.
 - b. One—only Jeremiah.
 - c. Two or three.
 - d. Most of them.**

8. How does the Bible describe Hosea's love for Gomer?
- a. **He loved her unfaithfully, like God loves his people.**
 - b. He only loved her when she was faithful to him.
 - c. He never really loved her because he knew she would betray him.
 - d. He only loved her after she came back to him.
9. Who did Hosea blame for Israel's spiritual problems?
- a. God
 - b. Himself
 - c. The king
 - d. **The priests**
10. What did Hosea say about Israel's future?
- a. They would never want to return to the Lord again.
 - b. God would never accept them again.
 - c. **They would one day be spiritually restored.**
 - d. They would be restored immediately.
11. What did God want from Israel's people?
- a. Their sacrifices
 - b. Their offerings
 - c. Their work
 - d. **Their love**



Have you ever felt that you are not good enough for God's love? How does Hosea's message encourage you? In what ways has God shown you his love?



Thank God for his unfailing love. Ask him to help you love Him faithfully and to love other people with the love He has shown you.



Going Deeper

1. An allegory is a story that may be true or fiction, in which the people, places and things have a deeper meaning. Describe how God has allowed you to experience a personal agonizing allegory so that you, like Hosea, could speak in the first-person a message God has given you to bless and edify His people. _____

2. How many books do you have in your library about the love of God? Since the book of Hosea is a book about the love of God, what would be a profile of the love of God as preached by Hosea? _____

3. In what ways are the first three verses of the sixth chapter of the book of Hosea an eloquent expression of the love of God? _____

4. What are several ways that Hosea demonstrated the spiritual adultery of the people? _____

5. Try reading the book of Hosea in the Living Bible. When you read the hard-hitting sermons of this great prophet in a translation you can more easily understand, which is your favorite of all his sermons? _____

6. Each prophet addresses an obstacle that is blocking the work of God, until that obstacle is removed and the work of God is on track again. What obstacle that was blocking the work of God was addressed by the Prophet Hosea? _____

7. What did the book of Hosea mean to you personally? _____
