

Amos and Hosea
Class 5 — Study Guide

1. *The first set of texts — The Knowledge of God*

The first set of texts discloses several aspects of Hosea's understanding of the knowledge of God. As we saw in the video introduction to this class, for the Hebrews knowledge is experiential. To know God is to experience God. Hosea's concept of the knowledge of God is close to our own concept of faith. Among other aspects, knowledge of God lies at the root of morality. If we encounter God, then a moral universe unfolds. There are actions that we do that please God; there are other actions that God abhors and demands that we not perform them. Hosea rooted the knowledge of God in Israel's experience of God in the past as we see in Hosea 13:4-5.

I am Yahweh your God
from the land of Egypt;
And you know no God but me;
for besides me there is no savior.
It was I who knew you in the wilderness,
in the land of drought.

(Hosea 13:4-5)

God's action in the past forms the basis for life in the present. But we can only understand God's action in the past if we continue to remember the saving events and act on them in the present. This means that we recreate them in the worship of the community, but we also recreate them when we act morally in the present as our active response to the saving actions. To experience God includes accepting God's demands as valid, true, important, and binding. It involves acknowledging that humans have free choice. They can respond, or they can refuse to respond. In all cases, though, the initiative lies with God. God's love seeks the response of human love.

2. *The second text — Knowledge of God and the Covenant*

The second text is very familiar to us. It is a key text for understanding Hosea in particular, the prophets in general, and the whole Bible. It can serve admirably as a way to pull together the key insights into the prophets that we have been exploring. In verses 19-20 it lists the core values of the covenant.

19 And I will betroth you to me forever,
 in righteousness and justice
 in love and compassion.
20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness,
 and you shall know Yahweh.

We note first the terms of the covenant; it is an agreement “forever”. The new covenant will never end. The text then list six values that stand at the heart of the covenant — righteousness, justice, love, compassion, faithfulness, and knowledge of God. Righteousness and justice form a foundation. There can be no relationship with God without justice, and this means concretely that the covenant society must be ruled with just decisions governing every aspect of life. The word “love” (Hebrew: *hesed*) refers to a covenant love that includes commitment over a lifetime with total care given to the covenant partner. The model for this covenant love is Ruth in her total commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi. When Naomi presses Ruth to return to her family, Ruth responds in a way that dramatizes covenant love (Ruth 1:16-17)..

16 But Ruth said,

“Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

17 Where you die, I will die —
there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!”

In this text we see how deeply love reaches. When we live this love, we live the covenant according to Hosea. We can explore also the other terms that Hosea uses to describe the covenant. In each instance we should bring our reflections down to our own life and our own faith.

We can use “compassion” as an example. If we act compassionately, what do we learn about God? What do we learn about life? What do we learn about being human? Think of specific instances. If you help a friend who is ill, for instance, what do you bring away from the experience that sheds light on your relationship to God?

3. *Further work*

You might want to read further in the Book of Hosea. If you have questions, feel free to contact me at any time by phone. If I am not at home, leave a message with your phone number; and I will return your call.

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