

Finding
Hope When
Life Seems
Dark

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HOW TO GET STARTED...



Reading directions is sometimes difficult and hardly ever enjoyable! Most often you just want to get started. Only if all else fails will you read the instructions. We understand, but please don't approach this study that way. These brief instructions are a vital part of getting started on the right foot! These few pages will help you immensely.

FIRST

As you study Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, you will need four things in addition to this book:

1. A Bible that you are willing to mark in. The marking is essential. An ideal Bible for this purpose is *The New Inductive Study Bible (NISB)*. The *NISB* is in a single-column text format with large, easy-to-read type, which is ideal for marking. The margins of the text are wide and blank for note taking.

The *NISB* also has instructions for studying each book of the Bible, but it does not contain any commentary on the text, nor is it compiled from any theological stance. Its purpose is to teach you how to discern truth for yourself through the inductive method of study. (The various charts and maps that you will find in this study guide are taken from the *NISB*).

Whichever Bible you use, just know you will need to mark in it, which brings us to the second item you will need...

2. A fine-point, four-color ballpoint pen or various colored fine-point pens that you can use to write in your Bible. Office supply stores should have these.

3. Colored pencils or an eight-color leaded Pentel pencil.

4. A composition book or a notebook for working on your assignments or recording your insights.

SECOND

1. As you study these five minor prophets, you will be given specific instructions for each day's study. These should take you between 20 and 30 minutes a day, but if you spend more time than this, you will increase your intimacy with the Word of God and the God of the Word.


If you are doing this study in a class and you find the lessons too heavy, simply do what you can. To do a little is better than to do nothing. Don't be an all-or-nothing person when it comes to Bible study.

Remember, anytime you get into the Word of God, you enter into more intensive warfare with the devil (our enemy). Why? Every piece of the Christian's armor is related to the Word of God. And our one and only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The enemy wants you to have a dull sword. Don't cooperate! You don't have to!

2. As you read each chapter, train yourself to ask the "5 W's and an H": who, what, when, where, why, and how. Asking questions like these helps you see exactly what the Word of God is saying. When you interrogate the text with the 5 W's and an H, you ask questions like these:

a. **What** is the chapter about?

- b. **Who** are the main characters?
- c. **When** does this event or teaching take place?
- d. **Where** does this happen?
- e. **Why** is this being done or said?
- f. **How** did it happen?

3. The “when” of events or teachings is very important and should be marked in an easily recognizable way in your Bible. You could mark it with a clock (like the one shown here)  in the margin of your Bible beside the verse where the time phrase occurs. You may want to underline or color the references to time in one specific color.

4. You will be given certain key words to mark throughout these five Old Testament books. This is the purpose of the colored pencils and the colored pens. If you will develop the habit of marking your Bible in this way, you will find it will make a significant difference in the effectiveness of your study and in how much you remember.

A **key word** is an important word that the author uses repeatedly in order to convey his message to his reader. Certain key words will show up throughout each book; others will be concentrated in specific chapters or segments of a book. When you mark a key word, you should also mark its synonyms (words that mean the same thing in the context) and any pronouns (*he, his, she, her, it, we, they, us, our, you, their, them*) in the same way you have marked the key word. We will give you suggestions for ways to mark key words in your daily assignments.

You can use colors or symbols or a combination of colors and symbols to mark words for easy identification. However, colors are easier to distinguish than symbols. When we use symbols, we keep them very simple. For example, you could

color *repent* yellow but put a red diagram like this over it repent because it indicates a change of mind.

When marking key words, mark them in a way that is easy for you to remember.

If you devise a color-coding system for marking key words throughout your Bible, then when you look at the pages of your Bible, you will see instantly where a key word is used.

You might want to make yourself a bookmark listing the words you want to mark along with their colors and/or symbols.

5. AT A GLANCE charts are located at the end of each book's study. As you complete your study of each chapter, record the main theme of that chapter under the appropriate chapter number. The main theme of a chapter is what the chapter deals with the most. It may be an event or a particular subject or teaching.

If you will fill out the AT A GLANCE charts as you progress through the study, you will have a complete synopsis of the books when you are finished. If you have a *New Inductive Study Bible*, you will find the same charts in your Bible (pages 1453, 1499, 1506, 1514, and 1522). If you record your chapter themes there, you'll have them for a ready reference.

6. Always begin your study with prayer. As you do your part to handle the Word of God accurately, you must remember that the Bible is a divinely inspired book. The words that you are reading are truth, given to you by God so you can know Him and His ways more intimately. These truths are divinely revealed.

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows

the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

Therefore ask God to reveal His truth to you as He leads and guides you into all truth. He will if you will ask.

7. Each day when you finish your lesson, meditate on what you saw. Ask your heavenly Father how you should live in light of the truths you have just studied. At times, depending on how God has spoken to you through His Word, you might even want to record these “Lessons for Life” in the margin of your Bible next to the text you have studied. Simply put “LFL” in the margin of your Bible and then, as briefly as possible, record the lesson for life that you want to remember.

THIRD

This study is set up so that you have an assignment for every day of the week—so that you are in the Word daily. If you work through your study in this way, you will find it more profitable than doing a week’s study in one sitting. Pacing yourself this way allows time for thinking through what you learn on a daily basis!

The seventh day of each week differs from the other six days. The seventh day is designed to aid group discussion; however, it’s also profitable if you are studying this book individually.

The “seventh” day is whatever day in the week you choose to finish your week’s study. On this day, you will find a verse or two for you to memorize and **STORE IN YOUR HEART**. Then there is a passage to **READ AND DISCUSS**. This will help you focus on a major truth or major truths covered in your study that week.

To assist those using the material in a Sunday school class or a group Bible study, there are QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY. Even if you are not doing this study with anyone else, answering these questions would be good for you.

If you are in a group, be sure every member of the class, including the teacher, supports his or her answers and insights from the Bible text itself. Then you will be handling the Word of God accurately. As you learn to see what the text says and compare Scripture with Scripture, the Bible explains itself.

Always examine your insights by carefully observing the text to see what it *says*. Then, before you decide what the passage of Scripture *means*, make sure that you interpret it in the light of its context. Scripture will never contradict Scripture. If it ever seems to contradict the rest of the Word of God, you can be certain that something is being taken out of context. If you come to a passage that is difficult to understand, reserve your interpretations for a time when you can study the passage in greater depth.

The purpose of the THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK is to share with you what we consider to be an important element in your week of study. We have included it for your evaluation and, hopefully, for your edification. This section will help you see how to walk in light of what you learned.

Books in The New Inductive Study Series are survey courses. If you want to do a more in-depth study of a particular book of the Bible, we suggest you do a Precept Upon Precept Bible study course on that book. You may obtain more information on these courses by contacting Precept Ministries International at 800-763-8280, visiting our website at www.precept.org, or filling out and mailing the response card in the back of this book.

*H*OSEA

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA




In 931 BC, the kingdom of Israel was ripped in half. The southern kingdom, Judah, was composed of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, plus a few members of other tribes who remained faithful to the temple service in Jerusalem. The northern kingdom, Israel (consisting of ten tribes), created its own worship system of idols and priests. For almost 200 years, God raised up prophets to turn Israel away from idolatry and back to Him. Around 755 BC, He sent one last prophet to Israel—Hosea.

Israel had played the harlot, committing spiritual adultery with the gods of other nations. What message would God give Hosea to show them their sin? What method would God use to turn them back to Him?

A WIFE OF HARLOTRY



Would you select a wife you knew was going to practice prostitution? A wife who would be unfaithful to her vows, who would go after other men? And *have children* with them?




DAY ONE

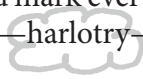
Read Hosea 1 and underline each phrase that mentions the Lord speaking to Hosea.

Read Hosea 1 again and note the names of kings. Compare them to the ones listed on THE RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HOSEA'S TIME on page 18. This will help you see the historical setting of this book.

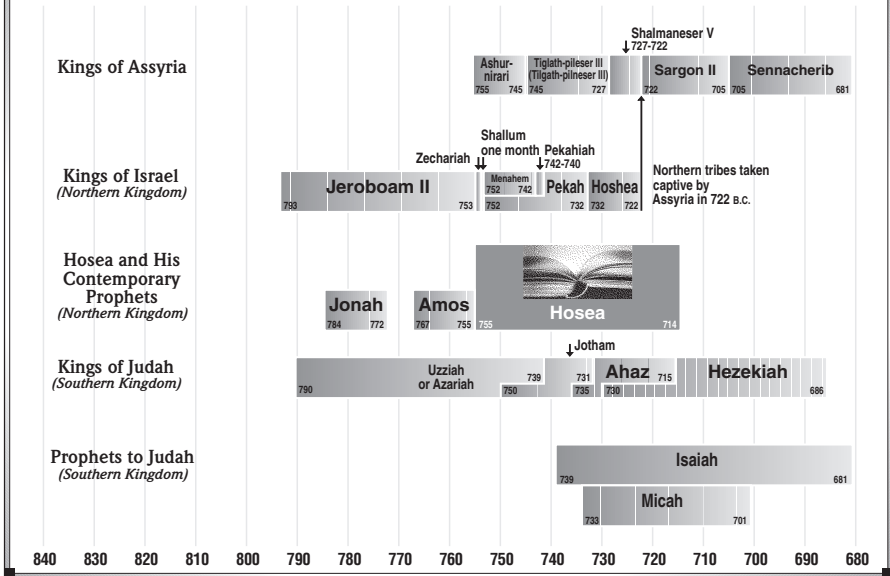
Note the names of Hosea's children and any marginal notes that interpret the names. What reasons does the text give for the children's names?



DAY TWO

Now read through the chapter again and mark every reference to *harlotry*¹ with a red cloud like this——and underline the phrase *I will*.

THE RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HOSEA'S TIME



Why did God tell Hosea to marry a harlot?

Who's behind all the "I will's"? List the actions this phrase introduces.

Notice the first word of verse 10. How does the tone of the chapter shift there? What does God say in verses 10 and 11?

Read Genesis 22:17-18; Ezekiel 37:21-24; and Romans 9:22-26. What does Hosea 1:10-11 mean?

What practical expressions of hope can you find in this chapter?

Think through the chapter and determine the theme of this chapter—the main topic, point, or message—and record it on HOSEA AT A GLANCE on page 61.



 DAY THREE

Read Hosea 2:1-13 today, marking references to *harlotry* and *I will* as you did yesterday. Now, from what you've seen in chapters 1 and 2 so far, does this section refer to Hosea's wife, Gomer, or to the nation of Israel? Explain your answer.

Who are her lovers?




 DAY FOUR

Today, read Hosea 2:14-23, marking references to *harlot* or *harlotry* and *I will* as you have before. Also mark *covenant* in red with a yellow outline. This word is key throughout the Bible.

Read Hosea 2 through and identify the shift that occurs in verse 14. How does this relate to the shift in Hosea 1:10?

Read through 2:14-23 again, marking the phrase *in that day*—a reference to the day of the Lord.



 DAY FIVE

Read Hosea 2:14-23 again, this time marking *compassion*.² Now go back and read Hosea 1 and 2 and mark *compassion*. When you come to the phrase *no compassion*, put a backward slash through the word, like this: *compassion*.

Who is the “her” in Hosea 2:14-20? What is the flow of thought in this chapter?

Compare 1 Peter 2:10 with Romans 9:22-26. Are God's messages in Hosea 1 and 2 consistent? What additional information do we learn with time?

Determine the theme of Hosea 2 and record it on HOSEA AT A GLANCE on page 61.



DAY SIX

Finally this week, read Hosea 3, marking *harlot*³ as before. Also mark *love*, *return*, and time phrases. Mark *love* with a red heart and shade it red. Shade *return* yellow with a red arrow like this: return.

Now, how does the Lord's word to Hosea in this chapter parallel what He said in Hosea 1?

Looking at the time phrases in Hosea 3, in what order do the events occur? When does life seem dark for the sons of Israel in Hosea 3, and what is the message of hope in this chapter?

Determine the theme of Hosea 3 and record it on HOSEA AT A GLANCE on page 61.



DAY SEVEN



Store in your heart: Hosea 2:23b

Read and discuss: Hosea 1:2-11; 2:14-23; 3:3-5;
Romans 9:22-26

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

- ∞ What significant meanings do Gomer's children's names have?
- ∞ Who committed harlotry? What is the metaphorical meaning of *harlotry*?
- ∞ Discuss the darkness Israel and Judah will live in because of their harlotry.
- ∞ List the practical expressions of hope in Hosea 1–3.
- ∞ When will God provide this hope? What order do the events seem to happen in?
- ∞ What idols might you have in your life? Discuss what God might consider “harlotry” today.
- ∞ When you consider the darkness in and around you, what hope do you find in Hosea 1–3?
- ∞ How do these events show God's character? What traits do they show?

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Sometimes life goes along just great, and then seemingly out of nowhere, calamity strikes. We don't always see clearly when things go well because we don't think we're doing anything wrong. At least that's how it seems in my life. I go on day to day, not really examining myself, and suddenly—*wham!*—I'm blindsided by something that produces darkness, something that tests me.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to watch a partial eclipse of the sun. The moon was moving between the sun and the earth, blocking out some of the rays of the sun. I

didn't know this was coming, and I wasn't paying attention. I was just leaving a hotel in Thessaloniki, Greece, when the doorman stopped me, pointed to the sun, and handed me some darkened glass. Even though the moon was partially blocking the sun, I couldn't watch the eclipse without this specially prepared glass.

God works this way too. He “dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man...can see” (1 Timothy 6:16), but through His Word “we see through a glass, darkly” until the day Jesus returns, when we'll be able to see Him face-to-face (1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 3:18 *κῑν*). God hands us specially prepared glass for us to look through so we *can* see Him—so we can know His mind and will. (It's called the Bible!) He enables us to see both His marvelous light and the darkness that separates us from Him, darkness that blocks out the light, darkness He calls us out of (1 Peter 2:9).

The Word of God—written by holy men and translated and printed so we can observe, interpret, and apply it—reveals to us what light and darkness are. With this specially prepared glass, we can see when darkness blocks out light, but God first has to draw our attention to look through it.

God uses a variety of means to get our very distracted attention. Sometimes He uses natural disasters like hurricanes, floods, or fires. At other times He uses man-made catastrophes like automobile accidents, violent crimes, or war. When dark times like these come, we're alerted to look for help. We need someone, something, to give us hope. We reach out, searching for explanations—why we are where we are, why we experience difficult circumstances, why calamities happen, why pain and loss are parts of life.

God did something very different in Hosea's days to draw Israel's attention. His people needed someone to point out that their darkness was blocking out His light, and they

needed a special lens to see it. To point out Israel's darkness, He commanded Hosea to marry a harlot and produce children of harlotry.

Normal education and experience tell us that eclipses are temporary phenomena—light doesn't disappear permanently. But someone who had never heard of an eclipse might be afraid that the sun was disappearing forever.

Similarly, without the Word of God, the deep darkness of catastrophes can easily cause people to think the sun won't shine again. People like this live without hope in the world.

But the Word of God tells us that God has a plan for us: to *give* us hope, show us compassion, and extend to us an opportunity to turn *from* our ways and *to* Him and His goodness. We find hope in God's character, which is revealed in His Word.

Where do we find hope in times of trouble, when life seems dark? In God's Word.