

Hosea

by Ross Callaghan

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- Author** The prophet Hosea. (*Hosea* means *deliverance*). Hosea is the first of the Minor Prophets (but his prophecies are anything but minor!). Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and was the main prophet for Israel in the final years before it was taken into captivity by the Assyrians.
- Written to** The Northern Kingdom, Israel. Some of the prophecies are written for Ephraim, the largest of the ten tribes in the Northern Kingdom.
- Date** Hosea prophesied during the *reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel*. 1:1 This means he prophesied around 760-722 BC. These were years of relative prosperity for Israel but the people rejected God and turned to idols more than ever before.
- Type** Prophecy. Hosea was told by God to marry a prostitute, Gomer. She was unfaithful to him, but through this, Hosea learned the greatness of God's love. God used this to show Israel how she was treating Him, and enabled Hosea to bring a prophetic message of God's love to the nation.
- Purpose**
- To bring God's word of judgment and love to the people of Israel so they would repent and come back to Him.
 - To predict the scattering of Israel among the nations, and to reveal her final restoration, forgiveness and eternal blessing.

Occasion

Hosea lived in the final days of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. This was a period in which the Kings of Israel *did evil in the eyes of the Lord*. See 2 Kings 15:8—17:6. Four Kings were murdered (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, Pekah) and one (Hoshea) was captured in battle. Only one (Menahem) was succeeded on the throne by his son.

Hosea explains that when Israel said *"Give me a king and princes"* God's response was *in my anger I gave you a king, and in my wrath I took him away*. 13:11. The result of this was that *Samaria and its king will float away like a twig on the surface of the waters*. 10:7. (Samaria was the capital of the northern Kingdom). This is indeed what happened. Hoshea, the final king of Israel was defeated by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria and the nation was taken into captivity in Assyria. The Northern Kingdom came to an end and its people gradually dispersed.

Key verses

I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people', and they will say, 'You are my God'. 2:23

"Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence. 6:1,2

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. 6:6

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the lord, until He comes and showers righteousness on you. 10:12



Overview

Chapters 1-3

The first part of the book tells the story of Hosea's marriage to the prostitute Gomer. God told Hosea to marry Gomer and then to endure her unfaithfulness. This was to be a symbol of the relationship between the Lord and His people in Israel. *Because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.* 1:2.

Hosea and Gomer had three children and they were given names which were symbolic of God's message to Israel. Jezreel means *God scatters*, 1:3,4; Lo-Ammi means *not my people*, 1:8,9; and Lo Ruhumah means *no mercy*. 1:6. The children were told to drive their mother out of the house so she would come to her senses and change her ways. Hosea was told to continue loving Gomer, even though she was unfaithful to him. This showed the Lord's continuing love for His people, and His desire that they would walk in His ways. *In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', they will be called 'Sons of the living God'.* 1:10.

Because Israel had departed from the Lord she will suffer greatly. *I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land and slay her with thirst.* 2:3. Yet she will be restored! She will have a 'door of hope' and will sing as in the days of her youth. God will betroth her to Himself forever in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. *I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord.* 2:15, 19,20. *I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'. I will say to those called 'Not My people', 'You are my people', and they will say 'You are my God'.* 2:23.

God then told Hosea to take his wife back, just as He was going to receive Israel back to Himself. Hosea was told to *Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods.* 3:1 When she came back he was to tell her that she must no longer be a prostitute. In a similar way the Lord would restore Israel back to relationship with Him. *Afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their King. They will come trembling to the Lord and to His blessings in the last days.* 3:5.

Chapters 4-14

The second part of the book contains the prophecies that Hosea brought to the Northern Kingdom. They include God's call for Israel to forsake the idols she was following; His anger at her sin; His requirement that the people repent and return to the Lord; His punishment and judgment if they will not repent, and a declaration of His love for them. There is also a promise that if Israel will repent God will bless her and restore His relationship with her.

The people and their priests had forsaken the Lord by turning to Canaanite idols and religious practices.

- They had failed to acknowledge God. (4:1-6; 8:2-3; 13:4).
- They had broken the special covenant relationship between God and His people and lost intimacy with Him. (Like the intimacy in a husband-wife or father-child relationship). Effectively this was spiritual adultery. (4:13-15; 5:4; 6:7-10, 7:1-7, 9:1; 11:1-4).
- They had turned to Baal worship, sacrificed at high places, engaged in prostitution and worshipped calf images. (4:10-19, 5:4,7; 8:5; 10:5-6; 13:2).
- They had turned to other nations for help, and not turned to the Lord. (5:13; 7:8-11).

Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord. 5:4.

As a result of this God's judgment was upon them.

I will punish them for their ways, and repay them for their deeds. 4:9. *The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand.* 9:7.

God used Hosea to tell the Israelites what they must do if they are to come back into relationship with God:

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. 6:6.

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until He comes and showers righteousness on you. 10:12.

You must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always. 12:6.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but Me; no Saviour except Me. 13:4

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips". 14:1,2.

Israel is un-repentant

Despite God's condemnation of their practices and the dire warnings of judgment they will face, Israel still chooses to reject the Lord.

Whenever I would restore the fortunes of my people, whenever I would heal Israel They practice deceit ... but they do not realise that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before Me. 7:1,2.

They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. 8:7.

Yet the Lord still loves His people and cannot let them go.

God's compassion and covenant love are such that He will not forsake His people. He longs to redeem them. (2:19-23; 6:6; 7:13; 10:12; 11:1-11; 12:6; 13:14; 14:1-9).

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? 13:14.

I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them I will be like the dew to Israel, he will blossom like a lily. 14:4,5.

Conclusion

The first and second parts of Hosea end in a similar way. God promises to restore His people if they will return to Him in repentance. He will then maintain His relationship with them and bless them. This is because He loves them!

I will plant her for myself in the land. I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'. I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people', and they will say, 'You are my God'. 2:23.

Who is wise? He will realise these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them. 14:9

Discussion questions

1. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute, and then to receive her back when she was unfaithful. What was God's purpose in doing this? Does this legitimise prostitution and unfaithfulness? How can God (who is wholly righteous) ask someone to do something which is not righteous?
2. The story in Hosea would seem to support a view of morality that is common today: that it is OK to sin if there is a 'higher good'. Is this valid from the story in Hosea, and is it valid as a basis for morality?
3. What does the Book of Hosea teach us about:
 - God's standards of righteousness?
 - What happens when a nation rejects the Lord?
 - How a nation can come back into relationship with the Lord?
 - God's love for Israel?
4. What did Israel do in response to Hosea's prophecies? What happened to the Northern Kingdom after Hosea's time? How were the prophecies for the Northern Kingdom fulfilled? How has this influenced the current political situation (where Samaria is part of the West Bank which is in dispute between the modern State of Israel, and the Palestinian Authority)?