

Hosea

Hosea is called by God to prophesy during Israel's last hours, just as Jeremiah would be called years later to prophesy to the crumbling kingdom of Judah. Hosea's personal tragedy becomes an intense illustration of Israel's national tragedy. It is a story of one-sided love and faithfulness - between the prophet, Hosea, and his faithless wife, Gomer, and Jehovah and His faithless people. Just as Gomer is married to Hosea, Israel is betrothed to God. In both cases the bride plays the harlot and runs after other lovers. But unconditional love keeps seeking even when it is spurned. In Hosea's case, that means buying back his wife from the slave market; for Israel it means purifying punishment followed by restoration to the Land of Promise.

INTRODUCTION

Hosea, whose name means "salvation," ministers to the northern kingdom of Israel (also called Ephraim, after its largest tribe). Outwardly, the nation is enjoying a time of prosperity and growth; but inwardly, moral corruption and spiritual adultery permeate the people. Hosea, instructed by God to marry a woman named Gomer, finds his domestic life to be an accurate and tragic dramatization of the unfaithfulness of God's people. During his half century of prophetic ministry, Hosea repeatedly echoes his threefold message: God abhors the sins of His people; judgment is certain; but God's loyal love stands firm.

The names Hosea, Joshua, and Jesus are all derived from the same Hebrew root word. The word *hoshea* means "salvation," but "Joshua" and "Jesus" include an additional idea: "Yahweh Is Salvation." As God's messenger, Hosea offers the possibility of salvation if only the nation will turn from idolatry back to God. Israel's last king, Hoshea, has the same name as the prophet even though the English Bible spells them differently.

AUTHOR

Hosea was the author of this book. His place of birth is not given, but his familiarity and obvious concern with the northern kingdom indicate that he lived in Israel, not Judah. This is also seen when he called the king of Samaria "our king" (7:5). Hosea was the son of Beerī (1:1), husband of Gomer (1:3), and father of two sons and a daughter (1:4, 6, 9). Nothing more is known of him since he is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

Hosea had a real compassion for his people, and his personal suffering because of Gomer gave him some understanding of God's grief over their sin. Thus, his words of coming judgment were passionately delivered but tempered with a heart of tenderness. He reprimanded his people for their lying, murder, insincerity, ingratitude, idolatry, and covetousness with cutting metaphors and images; but his messages were punctuated with consolation and future hope.

DATE & SETTING

Hosea ministered during the reigns of Uzziah (767-739 b.c.), Jotham (739-731 b.c.), Ahaz (731-715 b.c.), and Hezekiah (715-686 b.c.), all kings of Judah. When Hosea began his ministry, Jeroboam II (782-753 b.c.) was still reigning in Israel. This makes Hosea a younger contemporary of Amos, another prophet to the northern kingdom. Hosea was also a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah who ministered to the southern kingdom. Hosea's long career continued after the time of Jeroboam II and spanned the reigns of the last six kings of Israel from Zechariah (753-752 b.c.) to Hoshea (732-722 b.c.). Hosea evidently compiled this book in the early years of Hezekiah, and his ministry stretched from about 755 b.c. to about 710 b.c. The Book of Hosea represents approximately forty years of prophetic ministry.