

Hosea

Overview and Summary

Author:

- ⇒ Hosea is the stated author of this book. He is said to be the son of Beeri. Beeri is listed only one other time in scripture (Genesis 26:34), so it is unclear just who this Beeri was.
- ⇒ We are not told of Hosea's previous occupation or if he was a part of an order of prophets.
- ⇒ Most of what we know about Hosea concerns the details of his marriage to Gomer and the brief mention of his children.
 - Gomer (wife of Hosea)
 - Jezreel (God sows; reminiscent of the place Jehu slaughtered the Israelite royal family)
 - Lo-ruhamah (No Compassion)
 - Lo-ammi (Not my people)
- ⇒ The name Hosea means "salvation."

Date:

- ⇒ Hosea places himself and his ministry within the reign of four different Judean kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah) and one Israelite king (Jeroboam II).
- ⇒ We cannot specify exactly the beginning of Hosea's prophetic ministry since Uzziah (king of Judah) began to reign by himself in 767BC and since Jeroboam II (king of Israel) ended his reign in 753BC. Which means Hosea's ministry could have begun anywhere between 767 and 753BC.
 - Israel at this time was experiencing a time of peace and prosperity, where Jeroboam II recovered much of the land lost to previous kings, so much so that his borders neared that of Solomon's reign. The neighboring nations were relatively at bay, with Assyria occupied with its own internal affairs leaving Israel in a position of peace. Such peace and prosperity had led Israel into a state of spiritual stagnation, giving rise to sinful inclinations.
 - There are no other Israelite kings mentioned after Jeroboam II, while three Judean kings are recorded. The most likely reason for this was that after Jeroboam II there six kings who followed him, many of whom were assassinated after a short reign. Zechariah ruled after Jeroboam II for six months and was killed by Shallum. Shallum ruled one month and then was killed by Menahem. Menahem ruled ten years and died naturally. Pekahiah ruled after Menahem for two years and was killed by Pekah. Pekah ruled

twenty years but was eventually killed by Israel's last king, Hoshea. It may have been that such tumultuous rule in Israel led Hosea to not record the reigns of these men in his prophecy.

- ⇒ The end of Hosea's prophetic ministry is also loosely tied to the reign of the Judean king Hezekiah (715-686BC), which means the earliest date that Hosea could have died or ended his ministry is 715 BC. Depending on the dates you decide on for Hosea's beginning and end, he could have served in this prophetic role for 30-40 years. This also means that Hosea was prophesying when Assyria besieged Israel and exiled her in 722BC under the rule of Shalmaneser V.

Audience:

- ⇒ Hosea is writing to the northern nation of Israel in the intermediate period right before their eventual exile. Israel had spent years practicing false worship, synchronizing the Jewish religion with the local pagan religions, and engaging in escalating sinful behavior.
- ⇒ Being a prosperous nation at peace, Israel seemed to feel little outside pressure to return to God but instead was satisfied indulging themselves on their own desires. What Israel was unwilling to see was that very soon in their future, exile would break their kingdom apart.
- ⇒ In 743BC the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III marched westward reclaiming land for Assyria. Even though he reached Israel, he did not conquer it. Instead, Tiglath-pileser III enacted a heavy tribute on Israel. In 724BC Shalmaneser V marched on Israel taking with him king Hoshea. Then in 722BC Samaria fell to the Assyrians, officially ending the Israelite kingdom.

How to Interpret Hosea:

- ⇒ As a prophetic book, it is important to understand the geography, regional politics, history, and current religious status of Israel. Doing so allows the reader to better understand not only what Hosea is saying but why the prophecy against Israel (and other nations) is so necessary.
- ⇒ The book is also full of imagery which requires the reader to look at what Hosea is saying and then determine how such a use of imagery helps paint a picture for the reader.
- ⇒ Gomer's promiscuity and its interpretation within the context of judgement is often a source of question for interpreters. Generally, there are three ways to understand Gomer's promiscuity:
 - The marriage never really happened but is to be understood as simply symbolic of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh.

- The marriage did happen and Gomer was promiscuous previous to her marriage to Hosea.
- The marriage did happen, but Gomer was chaste before the marriage and then engaged in adultery after the marriage.

Structure & Content:

- ⇒ To organize the content and structure of Hosea has been a difficulty by many translators. This is especially true in chapters 4-14, where the contents seems to be a collection of oracles and sermons aimed at the failing and coming judgment on the northern nation of Israel. Yet it is important to note, like other minor prophets, that amidst the scattered messages of judgment, there is a common pattern set out by the author. (1) Israel has broken the covenant she made with her God. (2) God will send Israel her due judgment for breaking her faithfulness to God. (3) Even though Israel has rejected God and God has brought judgment, there is hope for a final restoration of Israel bringing her back to covenantal faithfulness.
- ⇒ We will simply diving Hosea into two portions: Chapters 1-3 (Hosea's Marriage to Gomer) and Chapters 4-14 (Israel's Unfaithfulness and Coming Judgment).
- ⇒ Chapter 1: Yahweh speaks to Hosea telling him to marry Gomer who is (or will be) a wife of "whoredom." Immediately in verse two, Hosea shows us that his marriage is an illustration of the marriage between Israel and Yahweh. Hosea and Gomer have three children: Jezreel (God sows), Lo-ruhamah (No mercy), and Lo-ammi (Not my people). The children of Hosea and Gomer are representative of God's judgment on Israel.
- ⇒ Chapter 2: With Hosea and Gomer as the background, the Lord details the unfaithfulness of Israel and her going after other "lovers." God laments Israel's unwillingness to see His tender watch care over them throughout the years. Even though Israel (and Gomer) has been unfaithful, the end of chapter two promises a restoration of Israel back to God.
- ⇒ Chapter 3: Hosea is commanded to buy back Gomer from her lovers, symbolizing God buying back the people of God from their exile and returning them to the land.
- ⇒ Chapter 4: The Lord declares over Israel, "There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land" (v. 1). In verse 4-5 the Lord highlights the failures of the priests and prophets of the land, ultimately rejecting their "ministry. Verse 7-19 ends this chapter, highlighting the "whoredom" of Israel, describing Israel this way eight different times.
- ⇒ Chapter 5: Yahweh pronounces His coming judgment on Judah and Israel (named Ephraim in ch. 5). The children of these two nations are described as "aliens" since Israel and Judah failed to teach them the ways of the Lord. Because of their

faithlessness, Ephraim will become a “desolation.” Describing himself as a young lion, Yahweh suggests that in his judgment he will “tear and go away; he will carry off, and no one shall rescue.”

- ⇒ Chapter 6: Verses 1-3 implores the nation of Israel to return to the Lord and to know Him once again so that they might find healing and restoration. Verse 4 sees this hope dashed to pieces as the love of Israel is compared to the quickly vanishing dew of the morning. Verse 6 is a key verse for all of Hosea, stating, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Towards the end of this chapter Israel’s priests are likened to robbers who lie in wait for a man to rob and kill him.
- ⇒ Chapter 7: This chapter is full of imagery and metaphors. The people of Israel in this chapter are likened to a hot oven, burned cake, and a witless dove. While not caring for the things of God, the people wail and mourn over their grain and wine, forgetting that it was God who has sustained him all these years.
- ⇒ Chapter 8: The beginning of this chapter compares Israel to a dead corpse, with a vulture (the judgement of God) standing over it ready to devour. Verses 4-7a looks at the uselessness of religion in Israel, suggesting that the idols of Samaria will soon be broken to pieces. To summarize their religion Hosea says, “For they sow the wind (nothing), and they shall reap the whirlwind (destruction).” The altars built in Israel are no longer places of worship, instead they have become places of sin. Therefore, the Lord promises that Israel shall return to Egypt (captivity).
- ⇒ Chapter 9: Riddled with statements of judgment, chapter 9 continues to proclaim that Israel has played the whore to various other gods. Because of this, their sacrifices, priests, and prophets are all seen as worthless, intentionally leading the people away right into a snare. Lest anyone forget God’s mercy, the prophet reminds the reader that Israel’s harlotry is nothing new, but all the way back in Numbers 25:1-9 the wandering people of God had forsaken their God and turned toward Baal-peor. Ending this chapter is a terrifying curse, “Give them, O Lord, what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.” As Israel continues to lead generation after generation astray, Hosea pleads for Israel to stop childbearing. Instead of having a home in the Promised Land “they shall be wanderers among the nations” (v17b).
- ⇒ Chapter 10: Although Israel had experienced recent prosperity, we are told that their heart was wicked. Such prosperity has left them boisterous and prideful. God promises to eradicate their idolatrous altars and completely destroy their wayward/godless king. God had called Israel to “sow righteousness” which would have resulted in blessing, but instead they have “plowed iniquity,” “reaped injustice,” and “eaten the fruit of lies.” Because they have trusted in their own might, God will

remove his protection over them, and they will be overtaken and the king will be “utterly cut off.”

- ⇒ Chapter 11: Reminding Israel of who it's true father is, Yahweh states that when Israel was young He called them out of Egypt, taught them to walk (possible allusion to the Law), and set them in their own land. Their place had nothing to do with their own merit, but it had everything to do with the lovingkindness of God. They will now be sent back to captivity, this time by the hands of Assyria. Yet God promises that he is not giving up on Israel, “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over O Israel?...My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim” (vv. 8-9). He will one day roar like a lion, calling his people back home, restoring them to the covenant and showing His lovingkindness toward them.
- ⇒ Chapter 12: Taking a break from describing the judgment on Israel, Hosea now pronounces judgment on Judah, who is compared to Jacob who strove to be the first born and wrestled with God. Israel has blinded themselves, thinking themselves rich on their own accord, and without sin. God therefore declares that he will rip their homes away from them and make them to live in tents once again.
- ⇒ Chapter 13: Israel has set up for themselves metal images to worship, but God reminds the people “But I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt, you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior” (v. 4). God promises to be like a lion, leopard, and bear, seeking to destroy Israel. Yet even still, once again, God promises restoration, “I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol, I shall redeem them from Death. O death, where are you plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?” (v. 14).
- ⇒ Chapter 14: Even though the book of Hosea thus far has been full of judgment, it's ending reminds the people of Israel that if they truly repent and return to Him he will once again show them his lovingkindness, blessing them abundantly.

Message:

- ⇒ The story of Hosea's marriage to Gomer serves as the overall emphasis to the book. In it we see a faithful husband to an unfaithful wife. We are to understand Hosea's purpose/message as portraying God's faithful love toward unfaithful Israel.
- ⇒ Israel has strayed after foreign gods and godless nations. For their wickedness God promises a coming judgment through the hands of Assyria. Yet God still holds out hope for the nation, as he calls them to repentance, where once again they can/will receive his loving care and tender mercy.