

Pre-Exilic Prophet: Hosea

INTRODUCTION

Hosea 1:1 identifies Hosea as the author and tells us that “[t]he word of the LORD that came to Hosea .” Most scholars believe that the book was written sometime between 760 and 722 B.C. During the time that this book was written, one of Israel's worst kings, Jeroboam II, was ruling the northern kingdom of Israel. His rule would eventually lead to the fall of Israel as the Assyrian empire conquered Israel in 722 B.C. The primary literary style found in Hosea is prophetic literature.

The purpose of Hosea was to remind the Israelites of God's unwavering love for Israel, as well as to warn those who chose to rebel against God. Hosea used the imagery of his marriage to Gomer in Hosea 1-3 to illustrate God's relationship with Israel... The remaining 11 chapters focus on Hosea's warning to Israel to repent from their sin and turn back to God. While God's warning is made clear in this book, His patience, love, and mercy for Israel is on display as well. God knew that Israel's repentance would never be permanent while living in a sinful world. Thus, God foreshadows the work that he would eventually do in Christ to “heal their waywardness and love them freely.” (Hosea 14:4)

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

Think about a significant commitment you've made in the past. Maybe it was purchasing a car, accepting a job offer, or deciding to move across the country. Now imagine, if you knew beforehand that the car would cost thousands of dollars per year to repair, the new job would have a cruel manager, or the new city would be nothing like you imagined — and not in a good way. Do you think you would still make the commitment?

That's exactly what God commanded of Hosea in chapter 1. Hosea entered a marriage covenant with Gomer, even though God told him that she would be repeatedly unfaithful. He committed to “for better or worse” with a full knowledge that “worse” was what lay ahead. While Hosea's commitment to and love for Gomer was surely imperfect, it points us to the perfect commitment that God made to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. Even though Israel would run from God time and time again, God would always pursue them because of His never-ending love and mercy.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

Hosea 1-3: Hosea's Marriage—Faithful Husband and Unfaithful Wife

Hosea 4-14: Hosea's Message—Faithful God and Unfaithful Israel

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Hosea previews the love that Jesus bestows on us. Just like Hosea was instructed to marry a bride that he knew would be unfaithful, Jesus would later be sent by the Father to take an

unfaithful bride—the Church. Not only was Jesus obedient to the Father in this command, but he did so with a love and joy that is impossible for us to ever comprehend. He knew that every single person he was sacrificing himself for would be unfaithful. While we might be able to imagine the pain that Hosea felt, the weight of what Christ carried on our behalf is unimaginable.

One particular verse that points to the future ministry of Jesus is found in Hosea 2:23. While at one time, only Jews were considered God's chosen people, Jesus would be the one to remove the dividing line between Jew and Gentile through his life, death, burial, and resurrection. Hosea 14:2 advises the Israelites to accept what is good, pay with bulls, and make vows with their lips. However, the rest of the Old Testament makes it clear that the Israelites (and all of us) were never capable of surrendering to God on our own strength. Hosea 14:4 describes how God will “love them freely, for [his] anger has turned from them.” The Israelites were incapable of satisfying God's wrath, but this verse alludes to 700 years later when Jesus fully satisfies God's wrath.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF HOSEA

OBSERVATION

- Hosea 1-2:13 focuses on Gomer's unfaithfulness, Israel's unfaithfulness, and God's subsequent wrath. Hosea 2:14–3:5 then focuses on God's love and redemption of Israel and Hosea's redemption of his wife.
- In chapter 2, after Israel's unfaithfulness is punished (vv. 1-13), the Lord has mercy on Israel (vv. 14- 23)
- In chapters 4-14, after every warning section (ch. 4-10; 12-13) the next chapter focuses on God's love and redemption of Israel.

INTERPRETATION

- Literary context:
 - There is a significant amount of imagery used, specifically in the first three chapters of the book. The story of Hosea and his wife is a metaphor that paints a portrait of the love that God has for Israel, as well as the unfaithfulness of Israel to their God.
 - In a time period when names held far more significance than they do now, the Israelites would have deeply understood the significance of their name. Having your name changed from “Not My People” and “No Mercy” would have been the equivalent of taking a scarlet letter off your back and having it replaced with a new name that you could wear like a robe of honor.
 - The original audience of Hosea was the Israelites.
- Narrative context:
 - Author: Most theologians agree that Hosea wrote the text.
 - Original Audience: The Israelites
 - Desired Response: The message of this book challenged Israelites to repent and turn to God instead of false idols.

- Historical context: What was happening at this point in history?
 - Jeroboam II was ruling the northern kingdom of Israel. His rule would eventually lead to the fall of Israel in the Assyrian conquest in 722 B.C. The primary literary style found in Hosea is prophetic literature. The Israelites were not following God, which is why Hosea received a message from God to share with Israel.

APPLICATION

- How can we respond to God in light of his never-ending mercy for us?
- What lessons can we learn from the Israelites constant cycle of disobedience and repentance?
- Why do we struggle to trust in God when he has already proven himself repeatedly?
- How should we live now in view of the knowledge that temptation/sin is temporary and one day God will restore everything?

PRAYER

- Ask God to reveal where/if you have been running from him. Repent and confess to the Lord and even to another believer. Remember, there is no condemnation in Christ!
- Before sitting down to write your devotional, ask the Lord for humility and to give you words that come straight from him. We could never understand the Bible on our own, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit in us.
- Ask that God would clearly speak to the readers of Join The Journey and that their hearts would be stirred through this passage of Scripture and the words you write.

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF HOSEA

“‘Go and marry a prostitute.’ These are the first words God spoke to his prophet Hosea. Why would he ask this of one of his spokesmen? Because he wanted to teach Hosea, the nation of Israel, and all of us today a lesson that we will not forget, a lesson that is painful yet joyous. Hosea’s somber portrait of the human condition is our lesson in pain. All of us have played the harlot by forsaking God and his ways. The picture is not pretty, but it’s true. Yet Hosea’s clear illustration of God’s love for us brings joy. While we are yet sinners, God comes to us and loves us.” — Derek Kidner

“If we look at the original state of God’s people, we shall gaze upon a very gloomy picture. Yet this portrait reveals the state in which every unconverted man is tonight, the state in which all of us, who are now saved, once were. We were not God’s people; that is to say, *we had not God’s approval*. I speak now of all those whom God has saved. There was a time when there was no approval of them; as the apostle says, ‘They that are in the flesh cannot please God.’ So was it with those who were not God’s people; their thoughts were contrary to God’s thoughts; their ways were such as God could not endure; their speech grated in his ears; they followed the devices and imaginations of their own hearts; the prince of this world had dominion over them, and God’s grace had not been displayed upon them. They went astray like lost sheep. That is your condition tonight, sinner, you are the object of divine disapproval. ‘Not beloved’, says the

text. 'Not beloved.' How can you be beloved of God? How can the Lord take any delight in a man who takes no delight in his God, who tries not even to think of him, who breaks his law with impunity, and finds pleasure in that which God abhors? 'Not my people', says the text, that is, they were not the subjects of divine approval." — Charles Spurgeon

"The mind of God is revealed to this prophet, and by him to the people, in the first three chapters, by signs and types, but afterwards only by discourse. In this chapter we have,

I. The general title of the whole book, Hos. 1:1.

II. Some particular instructions which he was ordered to give to the people of God.

1. He must convince them of their sin in going a whoring from God, by marrying a wife of whoredoms, Hos. 1:2, 3.
2. He must foretell the ruin coming upon them for their sin, in the names of his sons, which signified God's disowning and abandoning them, Hos. 1:4-6, 8, 9.
3. He must speak comfortable to the kingdom of Judah, which still retained the pure worship of God, and assure them of the salvation of the Lord, Hos. 1:7.
4. He must give an intimation of the great mercy God had in store both for Israel and Judah, in the latter days (Hos. 1:10, 11), for in this prophecy many precious promises of mercy are mixed with the threatening's of wrath." — Matthew Henry



Sources:

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- <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-hosea/>

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- [https://www.preceptaustin.org/hosea commentaries](https://www.preceptaustin.org/hosea_commentaries)
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