

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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Hosea

Hosea suffered deep pain because his wife was unfaithful. His experience shows how God feels about the sins of his people. God's justice demands judgment, but his love also leads him to save and restore his chosen people. Hosea helps us understand God's heart.

Setting

Few times in ancient Israel had as much chaos as the middle of the 700s BC. Hosea began his ministry in the northern kingdom near the end of Jeroboam II's long and stable rule (793–753 BC). Jeroboam was an evil king ([2 Kings 14:23–24](#)). He was a strong and capable leader. He expanded Israel's boundaries to distances not known since the days of kings David and Solomon ([2 Kings 14:25–28](#)). Jeroboam's success made some Israelites wealthy, but many others remained poor.

Jeroboam II died early in Hosea's ministry. In the next 30 years, six different kings ruled Israel. Only one died naturally. Four died by assassination. During this political chaos, hostile foreign powers threatened to destroy the nation.

The northern kingdom had worshiped false gods from the start and now turned even more to these foreign idols (images of false gods) for help. The Israelites desperately sought any way to avoid destruction. But they refused to turn to the Lord. In 722 BC, no one could stop the Assyrian Empire, which destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel.

Hosea warned the nation about God's coming judgment during its last days. He also gave hope, urging the Israelites to return to the Lord, who alone could restore them.

Summary

Chapters 1–3 describe the prophet's unhappy marriage to a wife who was not loyal. This section is not a biography. But it shows God's painful relationship with Israel, the people he chose. Just as Hosea's wife, Gomer, was not loyal, Israel acted like a prostitute by worshiping Canaanite gods. Hosea proclaimed God's judgment. But he also announced God's desire to again claim his non-loyal bride and restore her relationship with him.

Chapters 4–14 include a variety of Hosea's prophecies. They are arranged in order from early in his ministry to just before Israel's destruction in 722 BC. In these chapters, the prophet shares God's accusations against the people of Israel, especially their leaders.

The consequences for their sins would be severe. The nation would encounter destruction. However, God would not abandon his chosen people. The book ends with a divine promise of future restoration.

Author and Date

We know nothing about the prophet Hosea except what is in this book. We learn his father's name ([1:1](#)). He married a woman named Gomer. They had children together.

Hosea delivered prophecies to the northern kingdom of Israel from about 760 BC until just before Assyria captured Israel in 722 BC (see [1:1](#)). Hosea probably memorized his spoken prophecies. Later, he or his followers probably wrote them down and compiled them into one collection. This work might have occurred in the southern kingdom of Judah after Israel's destruction in 722 BC.

Literary Characteristics

Hosea was well-educated in Israel's literature, history, and faith. He used literary and speech (rhetorical) techniques like figures of speech, wise sayings (proverbs), and folk sayings. These made God's message more plain and more compelling to the Israelites.

Meaning and Message

God's covenant (special agreement) with Israel is central to Hosea's prophecy. At Mount Sinai, God gave the Israelites a chance to have a close relationship with the creator of the universe. This covenant promised them spiritual and material blessings if they lived the way God required. God kept his promise, and the Israelites enjoyed his blessings. However, they chose to rebel and ignore his plan and purpose.

Marriage is a strong symbol of the covenant between the Lord and his people. Like a caring husband, the Lord gave Israel land, food, water, clothing, and safety. But like an unfaithful wife, Israel tried to satisfy herself by worshiping the Canaanite gods (local gods from the land of Canaan). These gods became her "lovers," and she gave them credit for all the blessings that came from the Lord. The prophet Hosea's marriage to Gomer showed the same pattern. His wife was unfaithful, and he felt grief like God's grief for Israel.

Israel rejected its covenant with the Lord. In response, Hosea announced God's judgment. The covenant was the basis for both judgment and mercy. God did not judge Israel just to punish it. He wanted to save it. The purpose of divine judgment was to guide Israel back to its true "husband." In his mercy, God intended to restore Israel and renew his covenant with it.

Hosea shows that God extends mercy to Israel through judgment, not by avoiding it. God did the same for his church. Through the judgment at the cross of Christ, God invites everyone to receive mercy.