

HOSEA: UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE AND THEIR FAITHFUL GOD

“When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, ‘Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.’” (Hosea 1:2)

Author: The prophet Hosea to whom God spoke also serves as the book’s author. This is not widely debated.¹

- Hosea’s name means “YHWH has saved” and is a variation of the name Joshua (Numbers 13:8, 16).
- Hosea’s father’s name Beeri means “my wellspring” but we know nothing about him or any of Hosea’s family.
- Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom. His reference to the king of Samaria as “our king” (7:5) makes this certain.

Date: 760-715BC²

- The LORD spoke to Hosea during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Judah) and Jeroboam II (Israel).
- Hosea was a contemporary of Amos (Israel, 767-755_{BC}) Isaiah (Judah, 739-681_{BC}), and Micah (Judah, 733-701_{BC}).
- All the Minor Prophets (twelve books) were arranged as a single book in the Hebrew Bible.

Audience and Purpose: Northern Kingdom of Israel

- Israel unfaithfully turned from the Lord to idols. Their idolatry produced violence (4:2; 6:9; 12:1), political corruption (7:3-7), foreign alliances (7:11; 8:9), ungratefulness to God (7:15), social injustice (12:7), and forgetfulness of God (13:6).
- Hosea was sent to warn Israel that because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord, judgment was coming (Deut. 28:15-68). Similarly to Micah, Hosea warned Judah that if they followed in Israel’s idolatry, they would also face God’s judgment.
- Understanding God’s messages to Israel through the prophets is predicated upon understanding the Law and God’s promises of blessing for covenant faithfulness and promises of cursing for covenant unfaithfulness.
- Hosea may have singled out Jeroboam because he was Israel’s primary king during his ministry. It is also possible he mentioned several Judean kings because he considered them Israel’s legitimate kings in contrast to the northern kings.
- Hosea’s ministry came during a time of great financial prosperity and military strength (2 Kgs. 14:25-28; 2 Chron. 26:2-15).
- Assyria was the predominant ruling power of the world in Hosea’s day. Israel’s prosperity rose and fell depending upon Assyria’s strength, but by 734BC, Tiglath-Pileser III’s power had reduced Israel to a puppet nation within its empire.
- Israel attempted to revolt against Assyria, but Samaria was destroyed in 722BC and Israel was taken into captivity (2 Kgs. 17:1-6, 18:10-12). Judah also became a vassal state in the Assyrian Empire during Hosea’s ministry (2 Kgs. 16:5-10).
- Hosea has been called the “death bed prophet of Israel” because he was the last to prophesy before Israel fell to Assyria.

Theme: God is faithful to His unfaithful people by judging their idolatry and redeeming them by His mercy.

¹ Background information and teaching notes draw from Tom Nelson (Denton Bible Church, Young Guns), Thomas Constable’s Hosea Notes (DTS Prophets Class, 2003), John H. Sailhamer, NIV Compact Bible Commentary, and David Allen Hubbard’s TOTC commentary.

² Hosea began ministering at the end of Uzziah’s (792-740BC) and Jeroboam II’s reign (793-753BC) and concluded during the early days of Hezekiah’s reign (715-686BC). There is some flexibility in these dates, which means Hosea could have ministered between 45-80 years.

KEY TERMS

- **Whoredom** (x11) Israel has been an unfaithful harlot who turns from the Lord in adultery with idol lovers
- **Idols** (x6) Israel looks to the nations' gods for strength, security, and supply; Baal is the primary god of choice
- **Hesed** (2:14–16; 6:1–4; 11:1–4, 8, 9; 14:4–8) God's steadfast love is Israel's hope,
- **Love** (x19) Israel's devotion to idols is an issue of the affections which must be redirected toward the Lord
- **Stumble** (4:5, 5:5, 14:1, 9) disaster awaits those who will not walk in God's way
- **Ephraim** (x37) was the largest tribe of the N. Kingdom and therefore was used to represent the 10 northern tribes
- **Assyria** (x9) the nation of Assyria was an ally of Israel who would soon consume her and take her to exile
- **Return** (x16) God would not abandon Israel in exile, but promised to show mercy and return her to the land

AN OUTLINE OF HOSEA

Cycle #1 – Israel's Adultery Illustrated (1:1-2:1)

1:2-9 - Judgment – An Unfaithful Wife and Her Unclean Children

1:10-2:1 - Restoration – A Faithful God and His Innumerable Children

Cycle #2 – Israel's Reconciliation Unveiled (2:2-3:5)

2:2-13 - Judgment – Shame Falls on the Unfaithful Bride

2:14-3:5 - Restoration – Salvation Promised by the Forgiving Husband

Cycle #3 – Israel's Iniquity Abounds (4:1-6:3)³

4:1-5:15 - Judgment – God Rejects Ignorant Israel

6:1-3 - Restoration – God Heals Afflicted Israel

Cycle #4 – Israel's All-Encompassing Evil (6:4-11:11)

6:4-11:7 - Judgment – The Evidence of Israel's Evils

11:8-11 - Restoration – God Rescues Trembling Israel

Cycle #5 – Israel's Idolatry Overcome (11:12-14:9)

11:12-13:16 - Judgment – Israel's Idolatry Incites God's Wrath

14:1-9 - Restoration – God Turns Israel's Apostasy to Allegiance

³ Beginning in 4:1, God seems to shift away from Hosea and Gomer's marriage specifically, though it clearly hangs in the background.