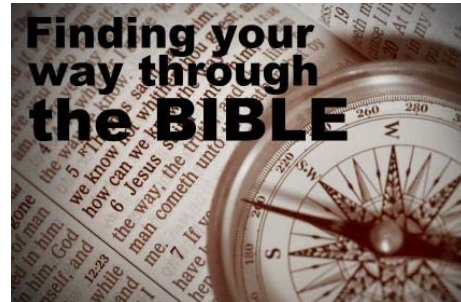


Hosea

Author and Date



Hosea son of Beeri prophesied about the middle of the eighth century b.c., his ministry beginning during or shortly after that of Amos. Amos threatened God's judgment on Israel at the hands of an unnamed enemy; Hosea identifies that enemy as Assyria ([7:11](#); [8:9](#); [10:6](#); [11:11](#)). Judging from the kings mentioned in [1:1](#), Hosea must have prophesied for at least 38 years, though almost nothing is known about him from sources outside his book. He was the only one of the writing prophets to come from the northern kingdom (Israel), and his prophecy is primarily directed to that kingdom. The book of Hosea stands first in the division of the Bible called the Book of the Twelve or the Minor Prophets (a name referring to the brevity of these books as compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel).



Background

Hosea lived in the tragic final days of the northern kingdom, during which six kings (following Jeroboam II) reigned within 25 years ([2Ki 15:8–17:6](#)). Four (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, Pekah) were murdered by their successors while in office, and one (Hoshea) was captured in battle; only one (Menahem) was succeeded on the throne by his son. These kings, given to Israel by God “in anger” and taken away “in wrath” ([13:11](#)), floated away “like a twig on the surface of the waters” ([10:7](#)). “Bloodshed” followed “bloodshed” ([4:2](#)). Assyria was expanding westward, and Menahem accepted that world power as overlord and paid tribute ([2Ki 15:19–20](#)). But shortly afterward, in 733 b.c., Israel was dismembered by Assyria because of the intrigue of Pekah (who had gained Israel's throne by killing Pekahiah, Menahem's son and successor). Only the territories of Ephraim and western Manasseh were left to the king of Israel. Then, because of the disloyalty of Hoshea (Pekah's successor), Samaria was captured and its people exiled in 722–721, bringing the northern kingdom to an end.

Theological Theme and Message



The first part of the book ([chs. 1–3](#)) narrates the family life of Hosea as a symbol (similar to the symbolism in the lives of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) to convey the message the prophet had from the Lord for his people. God ordered Hosea to marry an adulterous wife, Gomer, and their three children were each given a symbolic name representing part of the ominous message. [Ch. 2](#) alternates between Hosea's relation to Gomer and its symbolic representation of God's relation to Israel. The children are told to drive the unfaithful mother out of the house; but it was her reform, not her riddance, that was sought. The prophet was ordered to continue loving her, and he took her back and kept her in isolation for a while ([ch. 3](#)). The affair graphically represents the Lord's relation to the Israelites (cf. [2:4,9,18](#)), who had been disloyal to him by worshiping Canaanite deities as the source of their abundance. Israel was to go through a period of exile (cf. [7:16](#); [9:3,6,17](#); [11:5](#)). But the Lord still loved his covenant people and longed to take them back, just as Hosea took back Gomer. This return is described with imagery recalling the exodus from Egypt and settlement in Canaan (cf. [1:11](#); [2:14–23](#); [3:5](#); [11:10–11](#); [14:4–7](#)). Hosea saw Israel's past experiences with the Lord as the fundamental pattern, or type, of God's future



The second part of the book ([chs. 4–14](#)) gives the details of Israel’s involvement in Canaanite religion, but a systematic outline of the material is difficult. Like other prophetic books, Hosea issued a call to repentance. Israel’s alternative to destruction was to forsake her idols and return to the Lord ([chs. 6; 14](#)). Information gleaned from materials discovered at Ugarit (dating from the 15th century b.c.; see chart, p. xxiii) enables us to know more clearly the religious practices against which Hosea protested.

Hosea saw the failure to acknowledge God ([4:1,6; 8:2–3; 13:4](#)) as Israel’s basic problem. God’s relation to Israel was that of love ([2:19; 4:1;6:6; 10:12; 12:6](#)). The intimacy of the covenant relationship between God and Israel, illustrated in the first part of the book by the husband-wife relationship, is later amplified by the father-child relationship ([11:1–4](#)). Disloyalty to God was spiritual adultery ([4:13–14;5:4; 9:1](#); cf. [Jer 3](#); see note on [Ex 34:15](#)). Israel had turned to Baal worship and had sacrificed at the pagan high places, which included associating with the sacred prostitutes at the sanctuaries ([4:14](#)) and worshiping the calf images at Samaria ([8:5; 10:5–6; 13:2](#)). There was also international intrigue ([5:13; 7:8–11](#)) and materialism. Yet despite God’s the major purpose of the book is to proclaim God’s compassion and covenant love that cannot—finally—let Israel go.

Outline

- Superscription ([1:1](#))
- The Unfaithful Wife and the Faithful Husband ([1:2–3:5](#))
 - The Children as Signs ([1:2–2:1](#))
 - The Unfaithful Wife ([2:2–23](#))
 1. The Lord’s judgment of Israel ([2:2–13](#))
 2. The Lord’s restoration of Israel ([2:14–23](#))
 - The Faithful Husband ([ch. 3](#))
- The Unfaithful Nation and the Faithful God ([chs. 4–14](#))
 - Israel’s Unfaithfulness ([4:1–6:3](#))
 1. The general charge ([4:1–3](#))
 2. The cause declared and the results described ([4:4–19](#))
 3. A special message to the people and leaders ([ch. 5](#))
 4. The people’s sorrowful plea ([6:1–3](#))
 - Israel’s Punishment ([6:4–10:15](#))
 1. The case stated ([6:4–7:16](#))
 2. The judgment pronounced ([chs. 8–9](#))
 3. Summary and appeal ([ch. 10](#))
 - The Lord’s Faithful Love ([chs. 11–14](#))
 1. The Lord’s fatherly love ([11:1–11](#))
 2. Israel’s punishment for unfaithfulness ([11:12–13:16](#))
 3. Israel’s restoration after repentance ([ch. 14](#))

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