The Book of Hosea

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Introduction**

* **Characters:** The book of Hosea is titled after the prophetic figure in the story. His name means salvation or help. The main character of the book is God.
* **Date:** The contents of this minor prophet can be dated somewhere between 755-710 BC. We arrive at this date because of the time Hosea received God’s word. Hosea 1:1 tells us he prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah (792-40; 2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chron. 26), Jotham (750-732; 2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chron. 27), Ahaz (735-715; 2 Kings 16; 2 Chron. 28), Hezekiah (715-686; 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chron. 29-32), Jeroboam II (793-753; 2 Kings 14:23-29).
* **Place of Origin:** We do not know exactly where Hosea is from. It is likely he is a prophet from Israel called to prophesy against his own people. We do not know anything else besides the fact that he is the son of Beeri.
* **Political Climate:** Amos prophesied during the prosperous days of Israel. Under Jeroboam II, the nation flourished, and its borders expanded. However, these days would be short-lived. Hosea prophesies during the period in which this prosperous time is quickly winding down. The mention of only one King (Jeroboam II) in Hosea 1:1 suggests that he was the last real king of Israel. During his lifetime there was a sense of political and economic stability. *“Soon after his death the situation approached anarchy; almost every king of Israel died by assassination at the hands of his successor. Israel's internal weakness, combined with the rise of an invigorated Assyria under Tiglath-pileser III (745–727) and his successors Shalmaneser V (727–722) and Sargon II (722–705), sealed the fate of the Northern Kingdom”* (Garrett).
* Of last 6 kings of Israel (Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea), 4 were murdered and the final one was carted off into captivity by the Assyrians. Israel’s glory days were quickly coming to a devastating end.
* The Syro-Emphraimite war (735-732; 2 Kings 16; 2 Chron. 28; Isa. 7-8) was also pretty significant during this time. When Assyria began to regain their power, Israel and Aram joined forces to fight against them. They asked Judah to form an alliance with them, but King Ahaz refused. This resulted in an attack against Judah by Israel and Aram. Ahaz saw it necessary to turn to Assyria for help which eventually began the siege on Samaria and would lead to the downfall of Israel as a whole.
* **Key Passage: Hosea 14:1-2:** *“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity And receive us graciously, That we may present the fruit of our lips.”*
* **Key Message:** Israel has been unfaithful (harlot) but God remains steadfast and faithful in His undying love for His people.

**Outline of the book of Hosea**

1. Hosea’s Family and Its Significance (1:1-3:5)
2. Hosea’s wife and children (1:1-9)
   1. Title and Hosea’s Marriage (1:1-2)
   2. Jezreel (1:3-5)
   3. Lo-Ruhamah (1:6-7)
   4. Lo-Ammi (1:8-9)
3. Future blessings (1:10-2:1)
4. Israel is unfaithful (2:2-13)
5. Israel will be restored (2:14-23)
6. Love the adulteress (3:1-5)
7. The faithless nation and the faithful God (4:1-14:9)
8. Israel’s harlotry is denounced (4:1-7:16)
   1. Lawlessness, adultery and ignorance pronounced (4:1-14)
   2. Warning to Judah (4:15-19)
   3. Israel is separated from God (5:1-15)
   4. *“Come let us return”* (6:1-3)
   5. God delights in loyalty (6:4-11)
   6. Ephraim’s sin remembered (7:1-7)
   7. A heterogeneous people (7:8-16)
9. Israel’s Judgment (8:1-10:15)
   1. Reaping the whirlwind (8:1-7)
   2. A nation swallowed up (8:8-10)
   3. Going back to bondage (8:11-14)
   4. Assyrian Captivity (9:1-6)
   5. A depraved people (9:7-9)
   6. The fleeting glory of Israel (9:10-17)
   7. God will punish Israel (10:1-10)
   8. Israel cut off (10:11-15)
10. The Holy and Loving God (11:1-11)
    1. A Father caring for His son (11:1-4)
    2. Assyria will be their King (11:5-7)
    3. How can I give you up? (11:8-11)
11. Ephraim’s Disobedience and God’s just judgment (11:12-13:16)
    1. Israel and Judah are guilty (11:12-12:6)
    2. Ephraim’s self-deception (12:7-11)
    3. Reproach on Israel (12:12-14)
    4. Ephraim’s Idolatry (13:1-3)
    5. God’s care and anger for Israel (13:4-8)
    6. Israel’s sin cannot be overlooked (13:9-16)
12. Israel’s future restoration (14:1-9)
    1. Return to God (14:1-3)
    2. Blessings renewed (14:4-9)

**Chapter 1**

* **1:1-2– Title and Hosea’s Marriage**
* The book begins in v. 1 by promptly stating the proceeding words came directly from Yahweh and His servant Hosea conveyed it. As we will study shortly, not only did Hosea convey the message, he lived it.
* V. 1 continues by mentioning Hosea’s father. Besides that, we do not know much else about Hosea’s family or origin as we’ve stated before. The mention of 4 kings of the south and Jeroboam II of the north, are stated to provide a timeline of Hosea’s prophecies but also a backdrop to the deteriorating nature of Israel.
* It is quite interesting that only Jeroboam II is mentioned from Israel being that a King from Judah ruling into the 7th century BC is mentioned. Jeroboam’s reign came to an end in the mid 8th century thus, several years are missing in Israel’s timeline in v. 1. The reason for this may be that Israel’s last 6 kings after Jeroboam’s death were not really considered “kings” in the political and economic definition of the role. In a way Judah is still maintaining its legitimacy of rule while the northern kingdom lives in anarchy and chaos as the book will expound on.
* In v. 2, perhaps the book’s most debated point is broached. The text states what seems to be how Hosea’s life of prophesying began. God spoke to him and gave him a command to marry a wife of harlotry (zenunim) and have children of harlotry. If it were not for what God says next, the command would be almost absurd. We will visit this in a short time.
* The command *“Go and take yourself a wife”* is a very common phrase used numerous times in the OT to refer to one obtaining a wife (Gen. 4:19; 11:29; 24:67; 34:4). There is no dispute that Hosea must marry but who he is to marry is a topic of heated debate.
* Before we proceed any further, the nature of the word harlotry as it relates to Gomer’s sexual behavior is rather difficult to pin down. When used of her does it mean she is adulterous (promiscuous) or is she a paid prostitute (profession)? There may be an argument for both and there may be a harmony for both found in chapter one and three. She may start out as a promiscuous woman (chapter 1) eventually becoming a prostitute for profession (chapters 2 & 3). Either way it is difficult to know for sure.
* It is noteworthy to state that there are a variety of interpretations (maybe upwards of 10) when it comes to the use of the word *“harlotry”* and Hosea’s marriage to Gomer in 1:2. Chapter 3 also plays a role in these interpretations.
* For our purposes in this study, we will only speak of two views. In short, the root of the Hebrew word for *“harlotry”* in 1:2 is used to refer to idolatry (spiritual harlotry) several times in the OT (Lev 17:7; 20:5-6; Num. 25:1; Deut. 31:16; Judg. 2:17; 8:27; 8:33; 1 Chron. 5:25; Ezek. 6:9). It seems that this is the most used definition of the word in the book of Hosea.
* This use of the word suggests that in this first view, Gomer was not a literal harlot or prostitute when she wed Hosea but rather she possessed a spirit of harlotry (4:12; 5:4). This would fit well with what God says after the command: *“for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.”* Israel is often pictured as a harlot in the prophets (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 3:1-3, 6-8) as they are in the book of Hosea. The spiritual condition of the land was one of flagrant harlotry.
* Concerning this first view and the LORD’s statement (*“for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD”)* Graham states: *“…explains the spiritual background of the prophet’s times, probably making Gomer a woman of the age, who had imbibed the spirit of the time in preparation for her own physical unfaithfulness to her husband and her giving birth to children of whoredoms”* (Graham).
* The second view suggests that Gomer was in fact a literal harlot/prostitute and Hosea took her as a wife. This view would apparently violate Deut. 24:1-4 at the immediate onset but so would view one in light of chapter 3 which we will discuss later. Despite these apparent violations, a good argument can be made for both these views and the naming of the children may perhaps favor one view over the other as we will discuss shortly.
* It is difficult to know whether she was a harlot before her marriage to Hosea in the literal sense. We know for a fact that she later was unfaithful (Hosea 3) becoming an immoral woman. Regardless of whatever view one is inclined to take, both of these illustrations discussed above find parallels in God’s relationship with Israel.
* If Hosea married Gomer prior to her becoming a harlot, this is likened to Israel being faithful at first but falls to idolatry later (Jer. 2:3, 21). If Hosea marries Gomer already being a harlot, it is likened to Israel’s history of serving idols before God took them as His people (Deut. 9:4-8, Josh. 24:2; Ezek. 20:5-8). The point of this marriage is to stress Israel’s unfaithfulness to God and their spiritual harlotry in going after other gods and religions.
* The command in v. 2 continues by telling Hosea he is to have children of harlotry. It could mean that the children are born out of an adulterous marriage (out of wedlock). If Gomer is a literal prostitute, having children of harlotry does not mean they would inherit her promiscuity. That would seem a little far out. The meaning that fits well with the context is that in terms of view 1, Gomer possessing a spirit of harlotry reflecting the nation’s spiritual condition, gives birth to children who are a part of the flagrant harlotry of the nation just as she was.
* The flagrant harlotry Israel commits is described in a most blunt and frank manner in Ezekiel 16 & 23 and elsewhere in Jer. 3:1-4. Hosea’s marriage with Gomer is to illustrate God’s relationship with Israel. This serves as the background for the rest of the book and what will be discussed.
* Hosea is not the only prophet called to do something that seems absurd. Prophets were often called to do something strange or shocking to drive home their messages. Ezekiel experiences such things in Ezekiel 4, 5 & 24:15-18 and other prophets share in this experience including Jeremiah (16:2) and Isaiah (20:3-5).
* **1:3-5– Jezreel**
* In v. 3, the text states that Hosea follows God’s command and takes Gomer as his wife. We do not know much about her mother and what their names may mean and that is not really significant to the text.
* The next statement in v. 3, that she bore him a son is often a talking point as perhaps a hint of the faithfulness of Gomer at first. The statement *“bore him a son”* is not present when the other two children and introduced in the story and many suggest that the reason may be because the first child is legitimate while the other two are not. One should not press that as evidence to suggest Gomer committed adultery after the birth of the first child.
* The Hebrew text does not necessarily establish fixed syntactical patterns when it comes to such use of statements and phrases. Having said that, the statement could be a hint at Gomer’s faithfulness now and unfaithfulness later, but there is no way of knowing that for certain.
* In v. 4, the first child is to be named Jezreel as instructed by God. Each of these names will serve as an outline, if you will, for the second half of the book. The name Jezreel means “God scatters” or “God sows” which plays an important role in the history of Israel. “God sows” may also be a reference to the productivity of the land that ties in to the fertility cult of the day: Baal worship. The idea is that God is the one who gives true life and fertility and not Baal.
* Jezreel is also the name of the city where the Omride dynasty resided besides Samaria and met its fate (1 Kings 18:45-46; 21:1, 23; 2 Kings 8:29; 9-10) and it is a place associated with great bloodshed as Jezebel, Joram, Ahaziah and the 70 sons of Ahab were all killed. The text states that Jehu’s house will be punished for the bloodshed at Jezreel. As can be observed above, the likes of Jezebel, sons of Ahab, Joram etc. were wicked and evil and deserved what they received.
* The text does not seem to be indicate that the action Jehu undertook to eliminate Omri’s dynasty was wrong (2 Kings 10:30) but rather it was the fact that he did not learn from those he eliminated (2 Kings 28-29, 31). He and his household became hopelessly corrupt even to the fourth generation. It is for these reasons Jehu and his household is called into account in v. 4 and he tables are turned on is dynasty as it was for Omri’s.
* Zechariah was the last king of the house of Jehu and he was murdered by Shallum in 753 BC (2 Kings 15:8-12). This begins to mark Israel’s rapid downfall as the northern kingdom and it is probably why God says He will put an end to the house of Israel. Jehu’s dynasty coming to an end signified the end of Israel in more ways than one (political and economic downfall). In terms of this judgment, God is scattering Israel (Jezreel).
* In v. 5, the *“bow”* is a reference to the power of the nation (military and political might; Gen. 49:24; 1 Sam. 2:4; 2 Sam. 1:18; 2 Kings 13:15-16). The valley of Jezreel is different than the city mentioned in v. 4 and it was associated with decisive battles such as is seen with Gideon’s victory in Judges 6-8. Megiddo was on the southern edge of the valley and Megiddo is associated with brutal battles and victories as well (Judg. 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29).
* In 733 BC, when Israel and Aram fought against Judah, Assyria came against Israel and captured this very valley which was the start of the destruction to befall Israel.
* **1:6-7– Lo-Ruhamah**
* In v. 6, a daughter is born, and her name is Lo-Ruhamah as instructed by the LORD. Some suggest that since there is no clear statement tying Hosea to this child, that she is not his. That may be true but that may also be speculative. We don’t know for certain if that is the case. If it is, it may mean that Gomer committed adultery after the birth of Jezreel.
* The verse goes on to state the significance of the name in that God will no longer have compassion on Israel. They have forsaken him repeatedly and he will no longer show mercy (that I would forgive them; 2 Kings 17:23-41). That time is past and the time for God’s judgment has come.
* In v. 7, conversely, Judah will be shown compassion. They will see God’s mercy not by means of a physical deliverance but through His power alone. If Assyria is understood to be the enemy delivering the judgment against Israel and v. 7 continues the idea, then God is saying Judah will be delivered from Assyria. Such a scenario plays out in 2 Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-37 where the angel of the LORD destroyed 185,000 men of Assyria when they came against Jerusalem.
* **1:8-9– Lo-Ammi**
* In v. 8, the text says after Gomer weaned Lo-Ruhamah another child was born. The inclusion of the weaning process is significant as weaning in the ANE often took about 3 years. Thus, when the 3rd child is born, Lo-Ruhamah is at least 3 years old.
* In v. 9, the 2nd son is called Lo-Ammi meaning *“not my people.”* Israel’s flagrant harlotry has led God to disown a people that was once His (Ex. 6:6-7; Jer. 15:1). In a very real sense He is divorcing them. This however, would not be permanent. Some point out Hosea now knows for certain Gomer has been with other men and he divorces her, or she abandons Him (microcosm of Israel forsaking God and God divorcing His people). We do not know if that is certain.
* **1:10-2:1– Future Blessings**
* In v. 10, a glimmer of hope and blessing is seen. It must be understood that the words of the prophet speak of events to take place in the future under the reign of the Messiah. The first part of v. 10, brings to mind the promises made to the patriarchs concerning their descendants (Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 22:17; 26:24; 28:14; 32:12). We know from these passages that Jews are not the only ones to be included in these promises.
* The names of the children are now changed from judgment to blessing starting in v. 10. A people who was once not a people will become sons of the living God (Rom. 9:25-26; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). Paul and Peter both speak of this passage as a reference to the Kingdom of God and inclusion of the Gentiles.
* In v. 11, in these days of blessing, Judah and Israel will be gathered together or sown (Jezreel) together (Jer. 31:27-34; 33:15-26; Ezek. 34:23-24; Ezek. 37:15-28; Jn. 10:16). It is without a doubt that this verse speaks of the new covenant and kingdom under the one leader Christ. He is the head of the church i.e. His body (Col. 1:18).
* They will return from exile (the land) which is a type of resurrection and they are sown for righteousness (Jezreel). A new and decisive day has come, and it is one of blessing and life and not bloodshed and judgment.
* In 2:1, these who have been sown together shall call each other Ammi (My people) and Ruhamah (shown mercy). The blessings to be found under Christ brings all people together from all different backgrounds and types (Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 3:26-29) and we all share the mercy of Christ through His death on the cross. Notice how the 3 names have changed and it is only because of Jesus this happens.