

Hosea

Authorship: Hosea 1:1 identifies the author as “Hosea son of Beeri.” Hosea’s mission was to the northern kingdom, and he was probably from that area as well. His many illustrations drawn from agriculture suggest he may have been a farmer. His name means “Salvation.”

Date and Location: Hosea’s ministry probably began c. 760 B.C. and ended c. 720 B.C., two years after the northern kingdom’s fall. It is likely that he is one who escaped. He may have fled to the southern kingdom and completed his writings there.

Background: The reign of Jeroboam II in Israel’s northern kingdom (793-753 B.C.) was the “golden age” of the north, with great military successes and a thriving economy. Spiritually, however, the nation did not do so well. Hosea began his prophetic ministry near the end of Jeroboam’s reign, and during most of his 40 years of ministry things only became worse, climaxing in Israel’s fall in 722 B.C. (see 2 Kings 17). Four of Israel’s final six kings assassinated their predecessors (“one murder another,” 4:2). As the last prophet before Israel’s fall, Hosea pleaded with his people to turn to God and be saved. He warned of Israel’s coming judgment but also its final restoration. He has been called “the prophet of immediate doom and eventual hope.” In obedience to an unusual instruction from God, Hosea married a prostitute and, as could be expected, endured her unfaithfulness in marriage (1-3). The lessons he learned from his marriage helped him address the issue of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God (4-14). Hosea’s ministry overlapped that of Amos and the first half of the ministries of Isaiah and Micah.

Occasion: Hosea’s tragic marriage to Gomer – who left the prophet and became a slave, only to be bought back by her own husband – is one of the great love stories (but hardly a romance) in Scripture. Gomer bore three children: **Jezeel** “**may God scatter**” or “**may God sow**” (a son); **Lo-ruhamah** (“**not beloved**” or “**had not obtained mercy**” a daughter); and finally **Lo-ammi** (“**not my people**” or “**no kin of mine**” a son). The last two children may have been fathered by one of Gomer’s lovers; if so, it makes Hosea’s personal story that much more poignant. Hosea’s marriage experiences and the names of his children were at the LORD’s command. Other than this no precise occasion can be offered for his prophecies, but clearly he spoke in the name of the LORD. No one knows exactly what prompted Hosea to compile his writings at the end of his long ministry.

Recipients: Though he mentions Judah as well, Hosea addressed his prophecies primarily to the northern kingdom, which he often referred to as “Ephraim,” the dominant tribe.

Unique Features: (1) Hosea was the only prophet from the northern kingdom who recorded his prophecies (though Jonah was from the north, the book of Jonah is primarily a narrative about him, not by him); (2) He was the only prophet to minister to the northern kingdom right up to its fall. He has been called “the deathbed prophet of Israel.”

Purpose: To warn of God’s impending judgment on Israel while showing the balance between justice and his love:

(1) God’s love does not mean he can forget sin. Sin must be punished;

(2) On the other hand, God’s justice does not mean that he desires to completely end his relationship with his wife (Israel). God constantly tries to draw Israel back to himself. Even in the wake of judgment he will preserve a remnant.

Outline:

I. A Case Study of Adultery: Gomer (1-3)

II. A Case Study of Adultery: Israel (4-14)

A. The charges against Israel (4-7)

B. The coming judgment of Israel (8-10)

C. The final restoration of Israel (11-14)

Key Term: “Unfaithfulness”

The marital unfaithfulness to Gomer, Hosea’s wife, became a symbol that Hosea used to proclaim his message. The people of the northern kingdom had become unfaithful to the Lord by aligning with Baal, yet God longed to take them back.

Key Verse

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being a priest to me.
And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children” (Hosea 4:6 ESV).

Meaning of Name

Hosea, the eight century prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, has given his name to this book as its composer. His name means “Salvation” in Hebrew.

Meaning of Children’s Names

Jezeel = “may God scatter” or “may God sow”
Lo-ammi = “not my people” or “no kin of mine”
Lo-ruhamah = “not beloved” or “had not obtained mercy”

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