



Hosea

Get Started

"Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry..."

It sounds like the worst premarriage counseling of all time. And it would be if it wasn't the command of God to His young prophet, Hosea.

Skip Heitzig calls it, "a heartfelt message from a heartsick prophet about a heartbroken God."

Hosea was raised up at Israel's zero-hour. Divine judgment was coming. What Jeremiah was to the southern kingdom of Judah, Hosea was to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Get Studying

Hosea is the first of the minor prophets. At least, his book is first in order if not chronology. We're not sure why they are in the order they are.

The term "minor prophets" refers to the length of their books, not their significance. It would probably be better to not use the term at all since they each have major things to say. But that's not gonna happen.

The Jewish people treat them as one book called "the Twelve." All of them taken together are about as long as Isaiah.

The minor prophets ministered during the time the nation of Israel was split by civil war into two separate kingdoms – Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

The ten tribes that comprised Israel would eventually be overrun by the Assyrian Empire. The two tribes that comprised Judah would be taken captive by Babylon, then return to Jerusalem after their seventy years of captivity were ended.

The reign of Jeroboam II in Israel's northern kingdom (793–753BC) was the "golden age" of the north, with great military successes and a thriving economy. Spiritually, however, the nation was not doing so well.

Hosea had to tell them that although a loving God had provided their abundance and was prospering them, their sin would force Him to use their enemies against them as His instruments of judgment.

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 (see 2 Kings 17).

After Jeroboam's death, four of Israel's final six kings assassinated their predecessors. 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 of its final restoration. He has been called "the prophet of immediate doom and eventual hope."

There are two key words in Hosea. The first, "stumble" (4:5; 5:5), literally means "to totter," "to trip and fall," or "to stumble." The prophets frequently used this word to describe the spiritual life of the Hebrews.

For example, Hosea likens both false prophets and their followers to those who stumble in the dark: They are stumbling over the sin of idolatry and falling to their ruin (4:5; 5:5; Isaiah 3:8). Isaiah warns that those who rely on their own strength will stumble and fall (Isaiah 40:30), but those who are led by the Lord will not stumble (Isaiah 63:13). In fact, the Lord will provide strength to those who have stumbled in the past and now call upon Him (1 Samuel 2:4).

The other word is translated by two English words, "commit harlotry" (2:5; 3:3; 4:15). It refers to having illicit sexual relations, especially involving prostitution.

Two forms of prostitution were practiced in the ancient world: common prostitution and ritual, or "religious," prostitution, which involved pagan fertility rites. Both forms were strictly forbidden in God's Law (Leviticus 19:29; Deuteronomy 23:17).

The Old Testament frequently uses prostitution as an image of the sin of idolatry. Israel was pledged to serve one God (Exodus 20:3), so idolatry was like marital unfaithfulness against the Lord.

To emphasize the point, God wanted Hosea to act out this marital drama before the people of Israel. He cast Hosea as Himself and Gomer as unfaithful Israel.

If you look at Hosea as the drama it was, it can be said to have two acts:

- Act One, in chapters one, two and three, depict the adulterous wife and her faithful husband.
- Act Two, in chapters four through fourteen, depict adulterous Israel and her faithful God.

In Act One, Hosea marries Gomer. She bears him three children who are prophetically named:

- Jezreel - God scatters. God was warning Israel they would be cast away if they didn't turn from their spiritual adultery.
- Lo-Ruhama - Not pitied or no mercy. God's longsuffering with sin does have boundaries even if His love for sinners does not.
- Lo-Ammi - Not My people. It was a final, desperate warning of how God must treat them, for a time, if they continued backslidden.

Their names warn the audience - the nation of Israel - that God will judge and scatter them if they do not repent and return to Him.

Gomer seeks after other lovers and deserts Hosea. Despite the depth of her sin, Hosea finds her in the slave market and redeems her.

The remaining chapters establish that Israel is committing spiritual adultery and refuses to repent. God predicts judgment by dispersion, barrenness, and destruction.

But for all that, God remains faithful and prophesies the restoration of Israel.

Hosea 1:10 “Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You

are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.'

Hosea 1:11 Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!

Chuck Missler writes,

No other prophet gave as complete an outline in the ways of God with His earthly people as did Hosea. God suffers when His people are unfaithful to Him. God cannot condone sin and yet will never cease to love His own. And consequently, He seeks to win back those who have forsaken Him.

Woodrow Kroll said, "This is the backslider's book. If you or friends or family have drifted far from God, be encouraged through the story of Hosea... This is the perfect book for anyone who needs to know that no sin is so great that God's forgiving love is not greater still."

Get Spiritual

Hosea 1:1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

Hosea 1:2 When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD."

Prophets sometimes do strange things!

- For three years, Isaiah embarrassed people by walking the streets dressed like a prisoner of war.
- For several months Jeremiah carried a yoke on his shoulders.
- Ezekiel was always putting on a show - digging holes through the wall of his house, refusing to speak, playing siege of Jerusalem with a model of the city, etc.

These were illustrated messages. The people of God were ignoring His Word so God called upon His prophets to illustrate His Word in the hopes His people would heed His message.

No prophet preached a more painful illustrated message than Hosea. He was called upon to marry a woman who would prove herself unfaithful – an adulterous, a prostitute, a harlot. She would bear him three children, and he wasn't even sure if the last two children were fathered by him. She would leave him for another man, go from man to man until destitute and enslaved, and Hosea would have the humiliating experience of buying back his own wife at half the price of a decent slave.

It was a vivid illustration of what the children of Israel were doing by prostituting themselves to the pagan gods and thereby committing spiritual adultery.

You and I face this same temptation. James 4:4 is written to Christians and says,

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Throughout the Old Testament, it is good to remember that "...all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Hosea 1:3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim...

Hosea took Gomer to be his wife, fully aware she would later prove not only unfaithful, but become a despicable harlot.

After their third child was born, Gomer left Hosea, presumably for good. Was it good riddance?

Hosea 3:1 Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans."

Hosea 3:2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley.

The phrase "loved by a lover" refers to Hosea. He was the lover of Gomer, just as in the next phrase God is the lover of Israel. Despite her harlotries, Hosea loved her.

Gomer had left Hosea and passed from man to man. At last she was to be sold as a slave. Hosea went to the auction and offered fifteen pieces of silver – half the price of a slave – and some barley. He purchased his own adulterous wife after her vile life of harlotry.

Hosea 3:3 And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man - so, too, will I be toward you."

Hosea pledged his love to Gomer – fully and unconditionally. His love broke her heart! She became a loving, faithful wife.

The rest of the book goes on to apply this illustrated message to the nation of Israel.

J. Sidlow Baxter wrote, “Sin does not merely break God’s law, it breaks His heart.”

If you’re not careful, your intellect will be over-drawn to analyze your walk with God as a merely legal relationship rather than a love relationship. You will consider your sin as missing the mark... falling short... failing to measure-up to God’s standards.

Those are accurate statements; but all the while God’s heart is broken as you play the harlot.

It’s a much more passionate appeal to remain faithful. Or, if and when you are unfaithful, to return and be restored to your heavenly Husband as He beckons to bring you back.

Let's close by looking at a remarkable prediction in Hosea.

Hosea 3:4 For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim.

Hosea 3:5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.

That prophecy is being fulfilled today. Ever since the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD the Jews have been without a king and without sacrifice and without a priesthood.

But afterward - and we would say, soon - The Lord is coming to establish His rule over them.