

5. Hosea 755-715 B.C.

The book of Hosea has 14 chapters. It is a Pre-Exilic Northern Kingdom book.

Date, Author, and Background

The author and date of the book are clearly given in the first verse. Some commentators suggest a second author was involved because of the prophecy aimed at Judah, but it is common for prophets of one kingdom to also address the other.

All we know about Hosea comes from this book, but that is quite a lot, given what we know about his (dysfunctional) family situation. Hosea is a contemporary with Isaiah and Micah, who prophesied to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and his ministry parallels that of Amos, both ministering to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (often called Ephraim, its largest and most central tribe). Hosea and Amos also prophesied during a time of physical prosperity, and moral decadence, of the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C. recorded in 2 Kings 14:23–17:41). At the beginning of Hosea's ministry, judgment seemed remote. But in 732, the Assyrians captured Damascus, and in 722, they captured the Northern Kingdom of Israel and deported the people.

Purpose

The purpose of Hosea is to tell the people of Israel that their sin (especially their idolatry) was spiritual adultery, placing them in alienation from God. Their only hope for salvation was the redemption supplied by God, and that could only follow the judgment of sin. The foundation for their judgment comes from God's Mosaic Covenant with Israel, where obedience results in blessing, and disobedience results in judgment (Deuteronomy 27–30). Their sin required judgment. But through Hosea, God announces, not only sin and judgment, but also salvation. To illustrate Israel's spiritual infidelity, God commanded Hosea to marry a woman who would, like Israel, prove unfaithful to her husband. Divorce was inevitable. Judgment was inescapable. But Hosea's reconciliation to his wife, by redeeming her from slavery, illustrated Israel's ultimate restoration, in the Millennial Kingdom, and pictures our redemption through the blood of Christ.

Theme

Subject: Salvation

Complement: requires redemption from God, which requires judgment for sin.

Comment: The reason Jesus had to die, is because God always judges sin. Therefore, *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Key Verse

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (6:6).

Commentary

Verse 1:1, *The word of the LORD which came to Hosea [his name means salvation] the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the*

days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. Again, notice that the revelation came to Hosea in words, not mystical feelings, or mental telepathy. The dates of the kings listed are: *Uzziah (790-739), Jotham (750-731), Ahaz (731-715) and Hezekiah (715-686), kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam (794-753) the son of Joash, king of Israel.*

Verses 1:2-3, *When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.”* Hosea was commanded to marry a woman who he knew to be a harlot. Hosea could choose his wife, but she had to be one he already knew was a harlot. The idea that she later became a harlot, because God would not ask a prophet to marry a harlot, is unjustified since the reason for Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was because it was already true that *the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.*

Verses 1:4-9, *So he went and took Gomer...she bore a son, [God said] “...Name him Jezreel...I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.”* In the valley of Jezreel, near the palace of Ahab and Jezebel, Jehu killed King Ahaziah, the Judean king in the line of David, and 42 of his relatives (2 Kings 9:27-28; 10:12-14). Then Gomer gave birth to a daughter [God said] *“Name her Lo-ruhamah [meaning “not pitied”] for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel...”* [Lastly] *she gave birth to a son, [God said] “Name him Lo-ammi [meaning “not my people”] for you are not My people and I am not your God.”* The comment in verse 7, on delivering Judah, is probably a reference to the incident when God intervened to save Jerusalem when Sennacherib besieged it (2 Kings 19:34-35).

Verses 1:10-11, *Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured...It will be said to them, “You are the sons of the living God.”* This will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom, but it tells us that the focus of Hosea’s prophecy was not on judgment, though judgment was certain, but on the salvation, which only comes from God.

Hosea 2 is a blended description of Hosea’s relationship with Gomer and God’s relationship with Israel. The chapter starts with Hosea talking about Gomer and only a hint of it also being about Israel. The chapter ends with God talking about Israel, and only a hint of it also being about Gomer.

Apparently: Hosea went to a place of ill repute, found, and married a prostitute named Gomer. He had three children with her. But then he realized she had gone back into prostitution and the children were *children of harlotry* (verse 4). Gomer then left Hosea and went back to her former lifestyle and her former lovers. But Hosea did not give up on her. He pursued her and even supported her while she was living with another man, as God supported Israel while they were worshipping idols. Hosea said, *“For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold.”* But God also applied it to Israel adding the comment, *“...which they used for Baal.”*

Determined to get his wife back, Hosea planned for the time when, *she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now’* (verse 7). The chapter ends with God’s determination to get back Israel, His adulterous bride. *“It will come about in that day,”*

declares the LORD, "That you will call Me Ishi [my husband] and will no longer call Me Baali [my Baal]." Chapter 2 ends with God's objective, "For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth" (verse 17). And I will say to those who were not My people, "you are My people!" And they will say, "You are my God!"

Hosea 3 is about salvation through the redemption of Israel, displayed in the redemption of Hosea's wife. The chapter begins much like chapter one, with God speaking to Hosea. *Then the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman...yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes."* The raisin cakes are apparently a reference to Israel's desire for the material goods and physical prosperity.

Apparently: Gomer was living with a man who no longer wanted her, so he sold her as a slave. Hosea, learning of this, went and bid on her at the slave market, or possibly just bought her from the man selling her (which shows that Israel did that sort of thing). Hosea said, *"So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley."* The normal price of a slave was 30 shekels of silver (Exodus 21:32). Apparently, Hosea paid half of it in barley. God also pictures this as His purchase of Israel at the Millennial Kingdom. *"Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days."*

An Application: This tells us of the heart of God, and our redemption. God had to buy us back out of our sin and rebellion and our love affair with the world, with the redeeming price of the blood of Christ.

Hosea Chapters 4–14

The remainder of the book is in three main sections:

4:1–6:3, the Lord's Case Against Israel Stated

6:4–11:11, the Lord's Case Against Israel Expanded

11:12–14:9, the Lord's Case Against Israel Concluded

Each section is a judgment/salvation cycle which illustrates the theme presented in chapters 1–3. Each section reveals:

- The omniscience of God, in that He knows all their thoughts and motives as well as their deeds
- The omnipresence of God in that He mentions the specific places He is with them, for judgment
- The omnipotence of God in that He has power over Israel's future
- The justice of God in that He will judge Israel, and all mankind, according to His own character
- The holiness of God which is absolute and violated by their sin
- The immutability of God in that His holy character never changes
- The love of God in that His judgment is followed by salvation, through redemption of a repentant people.

Hosea 4:1–6:3, the Lord’s Case Against Israel Stated

Verses 4:1-2, 6, 8, 12, 14, a list of Israel’s sins. *Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, for the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness [truth] or kindness [loyal love] or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed... My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...My priests... feed on the sin [or sin offering] of My people and direct their desire toward their iniquity...My people consult their wooden idol and their diviner’s wand informs them...and offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes.* Notice the foundation of sin is a lack of truth, love, and the knowledge of God. The clergy directed the desires of the people toward sin. The sins included both spiritual mysticism and physical adultery.

Verses 5:4, 8-9, 15 sin does not allow us to return to God. *Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, and they do not know the LORD... Blow the horn in Gibeah [Saul’s home town], the trumpet in Ramah [Samuel’s home town]. Sound an alarm at Beth-aven [probably the worship center at Bethel, where Abraham and Jacob built an altar 1300 years earlier]: behind you, Benjamin! Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke... I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face.* Notice the sin of the sinner will not allow him to return to God because sin destroys the knowledge of God. The *spirit of harlotry* is the mysticism of idolatry. Notice also, God is omnipresent in all the specific places where His people sin. Notice also that God’s presence (not His omnipresence) leaves His people until they recognize and admit their guilt. He is waiting for them to turn back to Him.

Hosea 6:4–11:11, the Lord’s Case Against Israel Expanded

Verses 6:6, God delights in love and knowledge. *For I delight in loyalty [loyal love] rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.* Notice (again) that love and knowledge, and truth (4:1) are more significant than religious practices.

Verses 7:2, 10, the Lord remembers. *And they do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness. Now their deeds are all around them; they are before My face.... Though the pride of Israel testifies against him, yet they have not returned to the LORD their God, nor have they sought Him, for all this.* The tendency of sinning believers is to think God does not remember their sin, but He does. He waits for sinners to return to Him, but their pride (value independent from God) keeps them from Him.

Verses 8:4, 12, Sinners set up leadership, but it is not from God. *They have set up kings, but not by Me; they have appointed princes, but I did not know it. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves, that they might be cut off...Though I wrote for him ten thousand precepts of My law, they are regarded as a strange thing.* God said sinful Israel had set up kings, but not by Me. We might do the same in our church-age organizations. We often hear that all leaders come from God. God is sovereign over the leaders (Daniel 2:21), but His sovereignty does not blot out man’s free will to choose leaders that are not from God. The reason people choose bad leaders is they disregard the Word of God.

Verse 9:9, Greater sin requires greater judgment. *They have gone deep in depravity as in the days of Gibeah; He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins.* God compared the depravity of Israel to that of the near elimination of the tribe of Benjamin at Gibeah, a war caused by sexual perversion and refusal to repent.

Verses 10:1, 12, Idolaters credit their idols for their gain. *Israel is a luxuriant vine; he produces fruit for himself. The more his fruit, the more altars he made; the richer his land, the better he made the sacred pillars... Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you.*

Notice the sequence:

- Sinning believers produced luxuriant things for themselves
- They then give credit to their idols for their success
- So, they build more idols

For example, when the Word of God is replaced with personal mysticism and superstition, “God told me,” “God called me,” “God spoke to me in a dream...,” then any success is credited to their mysticism instead of the Word of God. So they seek, teach, and preach about more divine communication through mysticism. God wants us to focus on righteousness (applied holiness) rather than our mystical idols.

Verses 11:8-9, Salvation follows judgment, for those who belong to the Lord. *“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.”* Notice the necessity of judgment [Admah and Zeboiim were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah], and the necessity of salvation, both come from the character of God.

Hosea 11:12–14:9, the Lord’s Case Against Israel Concluded

Verses 12:1, Sinners tend to look for man-made solutions. *Ephraim feeds on wind and pursues the east wind continually; he multiplies lies and violence. Moreover, he makes a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt.* Notice that Israel tried to maintain their luxury, while continuing in their sin, by appealing to Assyria and Egypt for peace. Similarly, our churches and Christian organizations often attempt to accommodate the world by compromising on things like divorce/ remarriage, homosexuality, and evolution.

Verse 13:2, Sinful religion often uses skillful craftsmen. *And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves molten images, idols skillfully made from their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. They say of them, “Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!”* Notice that the sin of Israel did not always end in something ugly. Often, they used skillful craftsmen to form their idols. Sinful Christians might do the same, building magnificent structures. Skillful craftsmanship does not indicate righteousness.

Verse 13:14, Biblical scholars differ on the meaning of this verse. *“Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol,*

where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight". Some say the first questions imply a negative answer, indicating God will not redeem them. Their judgment is certain. Others say that, since the Apostle Paul used this verse in a positive sense (1 Corinthians 15:55), it means God will redeem Israel. Without the last phrase, the verse could be depicting the redemption of God. One other possibility is that the salvation of Israel, and everyone, does not come from the compassion of God alone, which would overlook judgment, but rather a redemption provided by God, which assumes sin has been judged first. That is indeed what has happened with our salvation, redemption through the payment of the cross of Christ.

Verse 14:4, In the end those who belong to the Lord will be saved. *"I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them."* Notice that the reference to the coming salvation for Israel is in the Millennial Kingdom (verses 4-8). Salvation follows and requires judgment.

Verse 14:9, Conclusion. *"Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them"* (14:9). Notice, salvation is righteousness, and righteousness comes from understanding and discerning the ways of God from the Word of God.

An Application

Salvation requires judgment, and judgment means justice. The holiness of God can only commune with sinners when their sin has been paid for with a payment that equals the sin. That payment must come from God. In the case of Hosea's adulterous wife, he had to pay the price to buy her back. In our case, God had to pay the price of sacrificing His Son to pay the redemption price for our sin. Because of that, and only that, can we choose to return to God.