

Hosea

Author

Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He called Israel's king "our king" in Hosea 7:5.

Hosea's name is closely related to that of Joshua and Jesus. Hosea's name means "he (Yahweh) has delivered or saved". His ministry was mainly to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Date

Hosea's prophetic ministry operated during the reigns of seven kings of Israel:

- Jeroboam II
- Zechariah
- Shallum
- Menahem
- Pekahiah
- Hosea (This is a different person from Hosea the prophet.)

Hosea 1:1 only mentions the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of the ten tribes of Israel. But note this verse says Hosea was given the Word of the Lord up until the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah. In the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign or the ninth year of the reign of King Hosea of Israel, the capital of Israel named Samaria was captured by the Assyrians and the people of Israel were taken captive to Assyria (see 2 Kings 18:10-12).

Background

During Hosea's time, four of the Israelite kings – Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah and Pekah – were assassinated and two others – Menahem and Hosea – became kings through assassinations. Sexual immoralities were practiced openly. Hosea 7:4 records: "***They are all adulterers...***" other moral standards in Israel had collapsed. The religious life of the Israelites included much idol-worship and mixing of the worship of the Lord with contemporary pagan religions. Hosea 4:1-2 records: "***Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed after bloodshed.***"

Hosea 4:11-14 states: "***Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides***

commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot..."

Crime was rampant everywhere in Israel (see Hosea 4:2 and 6:8-9). Hosea 7:1 records: *"...for they have committed fraud; the thief comes in; a band of robbers takes spoil outside."*

The Israelites in Hosea's time rejected learning from and obeying the written Word of God. Hosea 4:6 records: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."* Instead they followed their own religious theories, rules, customs and ethical standards. Hosea 5:11 records that the Israelites *"willingly walked by human precept."* Hosea 8:12 says the Israelites considered the commands, statutes, promises and teachings of the Mosaic Law *"strange": "I have written for him the great things of My law, but they were considered a strange thing."*

Hosea 6:9 made the following comments about the priests or religious leaders of Israel at the time: *"...Surely they commit lewdness."* In Hebrew, the word *"lewdness"* here is *"zimma"* which means *"wickedness in act"*.¹ *"Zimma"* is used especially in the Bible of sexual immorality, for example, incest (see Leviticus 18:17 and 20:14 (twice)), prostitution (see Leviticus 19:29), adultery (see John 31:11) and rape (see Judges 20:6).

Hosea 6:9 either was saying that the priests were committing many types of wickedness, this including murder and sexual immorality. Or this verse was focusing on the murders and sexual immoralities of the priests.

The original previous compromising in Jeroboam I's time

The original compromising by the people of the 10 northern tribes of Israel happened in the time of King Jeroboam I and led to more and more compromising and wickedness in the following centuries up to Hosea's time. Jeroboam changed the worship of the Lord alone into the worship of:

- the Lord and
- two golden calf idols which he set up at Bethel and Dan.

1 Kings 12:26-33 record: *"And Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.' Therefore the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!' And he set one up in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth*

¹ Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 273.

day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.

In Hosea 4:15-16, Hosea refers to this wicked compromising which began in King Jeroboam's time, when he said: ***“Though you, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend. Do not come up to Gilgal, nor go up to Beth Aven, nor swear an oath, saying, “As the Lord lives’ for Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf...”*** Beth Aven means “house of nothingness: and was a pun on the word “Bethel” which means “house of God”. Bethel was the place where God originally revealed Himself to Jacob (see Genesis 28:10-22). Jacob named it Bethel.

God led Hosea to call Bethel the house of nothingness instead of the house of God because the Israelites since King Jeroboam I's time had been worshipping the Lord and pagan idols there. Jacob had worshipped only the Lord at Bethel. It was therefore the house of God to him. But the Lord was tired of the Israelites regarding Bethel as the house of God when they had changed it to being a compromising mixture of the worship of Him and wicked pagan religion.

This mixing of pagan religion with the worship of the Lord is evidenced in the following:

- a) Hosea 4:12 refers to the Israelites asking ***“counsel from their wooden idols and their staff informs them.”*** Their staffs were their rods of divination.
- b) Hosea 8:4 mentions their worship of silver and gold idols.
- c) In Hosea 13:1-2, Hosea records that the people of Israel worshipped Baal and kissed the calf idols: ***“When Ephraim spoke, trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died. Now they sin more and more, and have made for themselves molded images, idols of their silver, according to their skill; all of it the work of craftsmen. They say of them, ‘Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!’”*** The worship of Baal involved sex outside of marriage.
- d) The Israelites loved the golden calf at Bethel so much they were going to mourn for it when it was taken to Assyria in future (Hosea 10:5-6 prophesies this).
- e) At Bethel, the people were still making oaths in the Lord's Name, saying, ***“As the Lord lives”*** (see Hosea 10:5). This is despite the fact they were worshipping the golden calf there.
- f) The Israelites were pleased to seek the Lord by giving generous offerings from their flocks and herds to Him. Hosea 5:6-7 states: ***“With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them. They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, for they have begotten pagan children...”***

Even though they were such generous givers, God promised to punish them and not give blessings to them (see Hosea 9:1-17). This was because God does not approve of people who claim to have faith in Him and are generous givers but live continually wicked lives and refuse to repent of their sins (see Matthew 7:21-23, James 2:14-18 and Revelation 2:18-23).

In Hosea 6:6, God told these wicked generous givers of Israel: ***“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”*** The Israelites claimed they knew God but He said they had broken His covenant and rebelled against the Mosaic Law.

Hosea 8:1-3 records: ***“Set the trumpet to your mouth! He shall come like an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law. Israel will cry to Me, ‘My God, we know You!’ Israel has cast of the good; the enemy will pursue him.”***

Hosea 11:7 reveals that the Israelites prayed to the Lord but none of them really exalted Him to being first place in their lives: ***“My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him.”***

Hosea’s prophetic ministry occurred at the same time as that of Amos in Israel and Isaiah and Micah in Judah.

The main teachings of Hosea

The main teachings of the Book of Hosea are:

1. *God’s character is wonderfully loving, gracious, merciful and kind.* Hosea records that God loves people no matter how wicked and evil they have become and in His grace and mercy wants them to return to Him.
God’s love is mentioned in Hosea 3:1, 11:1, 11:4 and 14:4. Hosea 3:1 records: ***“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 11:2-4 reveals that even though the Israelites turned to the Baal religion with its idol worship and sexual immorality, God still ***“drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love. And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.”*** So despite their disgusting wickedness, God still showed His love towards them by providing them with food. Jesus’ Words in Luke 6:35 reveal this amazing aspect of God’s character: ***“...For He is kind to unthankful and evil.”***
Hosea 2:19 uses the amazing Hebrew word “hesed” when referring to God’s love, kindness, grace, mercy and faithfulness to His people. “Hesed” means “lovingkindness, steady love, love, grace, mercy, faithfulness.”² Hosea 2:19 states: ***“I will betroth you to me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy.”***
Hosea 1:6, 1:7, 2:4, 2:23 (twice) and 14:3 refer to God’s marvelous mercy. In Hebrew, the word ***“mercy”*** used in these verses is “raham” which means “love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate”³ or “to love, to have tender affection”.⁴ Hosea 2:19 refers also to God’s mercy or compassion.⁵
God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute (see Hosea 1:1-3). This was a symbol of God’s love for His adulterous bride – the nation of Israel (see Hosea 1:3-9).
2. God will *redeem or purchase His people* from bondage. This was symbolised by God telling Hosea to purchase his wife back from another man after she had abandoned him as

² Vine, page 142.

³ Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 841.

⁴ Green, page 217.

⁵ In Hebrew, the word ***“mercy”*** here is the noun “raham” meaning “compassion” (Brown Driver and Briggs, page 933).

her husband (see Hosea 3:1-4). Hosea purchased her from a state of total depravity, sin and bondage to Satan. His purchasing of her was based on *pure undeserved grace* and *mercy*. Gomer had no merit of her own that would make her deserving of Hosea's love and grace. In Hosea 13:4, God promises that He would pay a ransom to redeem His wicked people back to Himself.

3. The people of Israel had abused God's grace. They had treated God's grace as *cheap grace* by compromising with the wicked pagan standards of the world. They became unfaithful or adulterous to the Lord despite Him continually being gracious toward them this was symbolised by the fact that Gomer again became adulterous and unfaithful to her loving gracious husband.
4. The Book of Hosea reveals that false teachings religious practices and compromised ethical standards' sometimes spread quickly among people who claim to be worshippers of the Lord. Hosea 4:15 and 5:5 show that the people of Judah were being tempted by the wicked compromising example set by the ten northern tribes of Israel. Similar things have happened in recent centuries. False doctrines, compromising attitudes, unbiblical religious practices and moral standards have spread them from some of the churches in Europe, Britain and the United States around the world.
5. Because God in His undeserved grace and mercy had prospered the 10 northern tribes of Israel under the reign of their wicked King Jeroboam II (see 2 Kings 14:26-27), the Israelites assumed that this meant that they had been doing nothing which God classified as iniquity or sin. Hosea 12:8 records: ***“And Ephraim said, ‘Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they shall find in me no iniquity that is sin.’”***

In Hosea 13:6, God said that the more He prospered the people of Israel, the more they turned away from Him: ***“When they had pasture, they were filled; they were filled and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me.”***

6. Just like modern liberal compromising churchgoers, the Israelites deceived themselves into believing that God would not hold them accountable for their wickedness and wrongdoings. In Hosea 7:2, God says: ***“They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face.”***
But Hosea 4:9 reveals that God was going to punish the Israelites: ***“And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds.”***

God's answer to their massive problems

In the Book of Hosea, God gave a clear message about how wicked people could begin to have a relationship with Him and remove His hand of judgment from them. God said:

- a) they must *return* in their hearts to Him. Hosea 6:1-2 records: ***“Come and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.”*** Hosea 5:4, 7:10, 12:6, 14:1-2 and 14:7 also refer to the need of the Israelites to turn or return to God.

- b) such returning to Him needed to be done in reliance on His *help* and *undeserved grace*. Hosea 12:6 says: ***“So you, by the help of your God, return...”*** Hosea 14:1-2 states: ***“O Israel, return 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; receive us graciously...’”***
- c) if some sincerely returns to God in their hearts, this will result in them observing mercy or lovingkindness and justice or right judgment in their daily living. Hosea 12:6 states: ***“So you, by the help of your God, return; observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually.”***

To begin to act with lovingkindness and right judgment implies turning from known sins. Under the Mosaic Covenant, God’s standards of right judgment and lovingkindness were expressed in the Mosaic Law. In Hebrew, the word **“justice”** in Hosea 5:6 is “*mishpat*” which means “judgment”. The same word is used many times in the Mosaic Law when referring to the laws and commands of the Mosaic Covenant.⁶ Deuteronomy 4:8 says: ***“But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you.”***

Matthew 22:37-40 reveal that all of the Mosaic Law was based on love or lovingkindness. God enables humans to repent (see Acts 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25). But He does not force people to repent. They must choose to repent themselves. In Hosea 11:5, God said that the Israelites ***“refused to repent.”***

A marvelous prophecy

Hosea 3:4-5 contains a marvelous prophecy of how in the latter days, the people of Israel would be without a king, prince, animal sacrifices, the ephod of the High priest (see Exodus 28:1-14), pagan sacred pillars and household gods or teraphim and would then return to God and David their king – Jesus Christ: ***“For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return, seek the Lord their God and David their king, and fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.”***

Hosea 2:23 contains another wonderful prophecy: ***“...Then I will say to those who were not My people, you are My people! And they shall say, ‘You are my God.’”*** Romans 9:25-26 records this prophecy was fulfilled under the New Covenant.

Hosea’s final point relates to today

Hosea 14:9 concludes the Book of Hosea by emphasising that all of God’s ways are *absolutely right* or *correct* and those who have a right legal standing before Him by His grace live according to His absolutely right standards: ***“Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.”*** In Hebrew, the word **“right”** here is

⁶ See Exodus 21:1, 24:3, Leviticus 18:4, 18:5, 18:26, 19:37, 20:22, 25:18, 26:15, 26:43, 26:46, Numbers 36:13, Deuteronomy 4:1, 4:5, 4:8, 4:14, 4:45, 5:1, 5:31, 6:1, 6:20, 7:11-12, 8:11, 11:1, 11:32, 12:1, 26:16-17, 33:10 and 33:21.

“yashar” which means “straight, stretched out (opposite of crooked and bent)...right, correct”⁷ or “straight, upright, correct”.⁸

God led Hosea to say the above because He wished to emphasise that one of the main problems the Israelites had at that time was they wished to blatantly disobey or at least to amend or change many of God’s absolutely correct or right ways and standards. These compromisers wanted to either ignore God’s written commands, laws and instructions or at least to make them more flexible, contemporary and relevant to the then modern Israelite society. This is a profound lesson for the Church today because our modern Western world is so similar in many ways to the people of Israel in the time of the prophet Hosea.

⁷ Holladay, page 148.

⁸ Green, page 106.