

Hosea

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Background

Prophet's Name

Unlike most names of the prophets, הוֹשֵׁעַ, *Hosea*, is not a composite word but simply a form of the verb יָשַׁע, *to help, to deliver, to save*.

It is a Hiphil infinitive absolute of the verb and as such is very difficult to translate apart from some specific usage in a given sentence. The English noun *Salvation* or *Deliverance* may be used as an approximation. Note: this name הוֹשֵׁעַ is better transliterated as *Hoshea* rather than *Hosea*. The name of the last king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (cf. 2 Kgs. 15:30) is, in fact, identical to the name of our prophet here. They are spelled differently in our English Bibles simply to distinguish between the two men.

Apparently, הוֹשֵׁעַ, *Hoshea*, was also the original name of Joshua,

Moses' successor, until Moses at some point changed it to יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, transliterated *Yehoshua*. It is very likely derived from the same Hebrew verb and thus means *Yahweh saves* or *Yahweh is salvation*. This is the Hebrew name for Joshua in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 Kings 16:34, and 1 Chronicles 7:27; he is called *Hoshea* only in Numbers 13:8, 16 and Deuteronomy 32:44.

In post-exilic times, יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, *Yehoshua*, was generally shortened to

יֵשׁוּעַ, *Yeshua* or *Joshua*. Moses' successor was called by this shorter form in Nehemiah 8:17. Also, the post-exilic high priest that returned with Zerubbabel is called by the long form (*Yehoshua*) in Haggai and Zechariah but the short form (*Yeshua/Joshua*) in Ezra and Nehemiah.

This is also the name of the Messiah. The Septuagint (LXX)

transliterates both the long and short forms as Ἰησοῦς. Since Matthew wrote his Gospel in Greek, he uses Ἰησοῦς in Matthew 1:21:

She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus [Ἰησοῦς], for He will save His people from their sins.

The spelling "Jesus" is a poor reflection of his true Hebrew name, Yeshua. The series of transliterations went from Hebrew to Greek to Latin and finally to English. Many Jewish believers in the Messiah prefer Yeshua. We should feel confident in using this pronunciation also. To reflect the Hebrew pronunciation, the accent is on the second syllable, "shu"; the first syllable, "Ye" should not be accented, but the "e" is long: *Yē-shu'-a*.

Therefore, the name of Moses' successor, the high priest in Ezra and Nehemiah, and the Messiah is one and same: Yehoshua or, in post-exilic times, Yeshua, meaning *Yahweh saves* or *Yahweh is salvation*; the name of our prophet here is Hoshea, meaning *Salvation* or *Deliverance*.

Identification

*Hosea's Personal Life:
The Backdrop of His Public Ministry*

G. Campbell Morgan summarizes as follows (*Hosea: The Heart and Holiness of God*, pp. 8-9):

Hosea married a woman named Gomer. As the result of the marriage, three children were born to them--Jezreel, Loruhamah, and Lo-ammi, naming them as they were named. Then Gomer played him false, and he cast her out judicially, as she had left him in infidelity. After a while, when she had descended to the uttermost depths of degradation, having become merely a slave, the property of someone else, Hosea sought her out in her degradation, bought her at the price of a slave, and restored her to his side as his bride.

God's object lesson for Israel

God intended that, in general, Hosea's marital history picture the relationship between himself and Israel, the Northern Kingdom. In particular, however, Hosea was enabled to speak firsthand of the

broken heart that Yahweh experienced over unfaithful Israel. That was the *focal point* of the value of the object lesson: first to experience himself and then to better communicate what God was experiencing. To quote Morgan again (p. 11),

The result of the tragedy in his life was that he, Hosea, came to understand the heart of God, and what God suffered when his people sinned. He was admitted, through the mystery of his own tragedy, into an apprehension of what the sin of the nation meant against the heart of God. Hosea has been described as the prophet of the broken heart. The pain and agony of the man's heart is everywhere apparent, but it had become to him an interpretation of the agony of the heart of God. In his own experience he discovered what infidelity means to love; and so, that the infidelity of Israel roused, not the wrath of God, though he was compelled by it to act in judgment, but the heart-break of God.

Additional information

Only what may be deduced about Hosea from the book itself is known. First, since he refers to the king of Israel as "our king" (7:5), he was probably a citizen of the Northern Kingdom.

Second, according to Archer (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 322),

The author's diction betrays traces of a dialect not found in Judah but suggestive of northern Israel near the Aramaic-speaking territory of Syria.

Third, his family evidently had some social status, for his father's name is mentioned in the introduction of the book (1:1).

Finally, Hosea must have had an agricultural background, because he uses many agrarian terms and phrases.

Date

The Span of Hosea's Ministry

The reigns of Uzziah (Azariah) through Hezekiah mentioned in 1:1 cover the years 790 through 697, a total of some 90 years. Among the Northern kings, only Jereboam II is mentioned (793-753), his reign roughly coinciding with that of Uzziah in the South (790-739).

Taking the end of Jereboam's reign (753) and the beginning of Hezekiah's reign (728 or 715; see next paragraph), one must conclude that Hosea's ministry spanned some 25 years, perhaps even close to 40 years.

There is a problem establishing the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, the last king mentioned in 1:1. Payne, *An Outline of Hebrew History*, for example, puts it at 728, while Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, argues for 715, based, among other things, on 2 Kgs. 18:13. The problem of dating Hezekiah's reign is still an open question in Old Testament history. Its relevance here has to do with the date of composition of the book of Hosea. (For a much more detailed discussion of the problems related to Hezekiah's reign, see Appendices 4 and 5 in our paper, "A Brief History of the Kings of Israel and Judah," also on this Web site.)

Important Historical References In Hosea

The messages in the book were delivered over many years. Here are some historical references that show the span of Hosea's ministry.

- The name of Hosea's firstborn son, Jezreel, signified that the dynasty of Jehu was to be violently ended. The fulfillment was in 752 when Shallum assassinated Zechariah, son of Jereboam II and the fourth and last king in Jehu's dynasty (2 Kgs. 15:8-12; cf. 10:29-31).
- Chapter 5, according to Archer (p. 322), has reference to the reign of Menahem (752-742; 2 Kgs. 15:16-22) in the Northern Kingdom.
- Chapter 7 brings us to the reign of Hoshea (732-722), last king of the Northern Kingdom: it denounces the policy, begun by him, of trying to pit Egypt against Assyria (2 Kgs. 17:1-6).

But for Hosea himself to have compiled all his messages, which is generally assumed, he would have had to do so shortly after the beginning of the reign of Hezekiah, for Hezekiah is mentioned in 1:1, and Hosea would by then already be quite old. If, then, Hezekiah began to reign in 728, composition would have just *preceded* the fall of Samaria in 722, the middle of the reign of Ahaz in the South. On the other hand, if Hezekiah began to reign in 715, composition is necessarily placed shortly *after* the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Since the fall of Samaria is nowhere mentioned in the book, it is more likely that composition occurred before 722. This observation, in turn, becomes an argument for dating Hezekiah's reign from 728.

See Archer, pp. 291-92, for a more detailed critique of Thiele and the 715 date, and for the case to amend 2 Kgs. 18:13 to read "twentyfourth year."

Date of Composition

The likely conclusion is that Hosea composed the book around 725, the beginning of Hezekiah's sole rule after the death of his father Ahaz. According to Archer (p. 322):

Therefore we are justified in regarding the book as combining excerpts from sermons delivered over a period of at least twenty-five years. Possibly the final compilation was published in 725 B.C., perhaps thirty years after Hosea's preaching ministry had begun.

Basic Theme

Archer (p. 321) summarizes the theme as follow:

The theme of this book is an earnest testimony against the Northern Kingdom because of its apostasy from the covenant and its widespread corruption in public and private morals. The purpose of the author is to convince his fellow countrymen that they need to repent and return in contrition to their patient and ever-loving God. Both threat and promise are presented from the standpoint of Yahweh's love to Israel as His own dear children and as his covenant wife.

Unger (*Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, p. 334) sees the theme as fourfold: Israel's idolatry, wickedness, captivity, and restoration. But throughout the book, God's unchanging and enduring love for Israel is emphasized. It is the basis for the entire ministry of Hosea and is personally illustrated by the prophet's own life.

Outline

- I. Hosea's marriage and God's object lesson (1:1-3:5)
 - A. The marriage to Gomer and Hosea's three children (1:1-2:1)
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-2)

2. The three children: three messages of judgment (1:3-9)

3. Future restoration of Israel (1:10-2:1)

B. A message to Israel (2:2-23)

1. Judgment is about to come for spiritual harlotry (2:2-13)

2. Future restoration of God's adulterous wife (2:14-23)

C. The restoration of Gomer and the resulting object lesson for Israel (3:1-5)

II. God's legal suit against Israel (4:1-14:9)

A. The statement of God's case (4:1-5)

B. Charge 1:

No **knowledge** of God in the land (4:6-6:3) דעת

1. Accusations and punishment (4:6-5:14)

2. Promised restoration (5:15-6:3)

C. Charge 2:

No **covenantal loyalty** in the land (6:4-11:11) חסד

1. Accusations and punishment (6:4-10:15)

2. Promised restoration (11:1-11)

D. Charge 3:

No **truth** in the land (11:12-14:9) אמת

1. Accusations and punishment (11:12-13:16)

2. Promised restoration (14:1-9)

Important Passages and Problems

Idolatry and Harlotry

Idolatry is worshiping other gods instead of, or in addition to, Yahweh.

You shall have no other gods before Me.... You shall not make *other gods* besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves (Exod. 20:3, 23).

You shall not worship any other god, for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Exod. 34:14).

You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for Yahweh your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of Yahweh your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the land (Deut. 6:14, 15).

I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images (Isa. 42:8).

But Israel did not obey these commands but committed idolatry throughout most of their subsequent history.

"Indeed the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have been doing only evil in My sight from their youth; for the sons of Israel have been only provoking Me to anger by the work of their hands," declares Yahweh. "Indeed this city has been to Me a *provocation of My anger* and My wrath from the day that they built it, even to this day, so that it should be removed from before My face, because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah which they have done to provoke Me to anger--they, their kings, their leaders, their priests, their prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned *their* back to Me and not *their* face; though I taught them, teaching again and again, they would not listen and receive instruction" (Jer. 32:30-33).

God had warned Israel that the result of persistent idolatry would be exile from the land (Lev. 26:27-35; Deut. 28:58-63; 1 Kgs. 9:6-9), and this is exactly what happened to both the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs. 17:5-8) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah:

Many nations will pass by this city; and they will say to one another, "Why has Yahweh done thus to this great city?" Then

they will answer, "Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh their God and bowed down to other gods and served them" (Jer. 22:8-9).

Both Israel and Judah had been warned time and time again through the prophets (2 Kgs. 17:13). Warning the Northern Kingdom was Hosea's primary commission as the Lord's prophet.

Yahweh's relationship to Israel is often depicted as a husband to a wife (e.g., Isa. 54:5; Jer. 31:32). Adultery is when a husband or wife is unfaithful and seeks out another for a sexual relationship. The Scriptures extend the analogy of a husband and wife relationship between Yahweh and Israel to include adultery as a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh when she worships other gods (Ezek. 16:32; cf. Hos. 2).

Adultery becomes harlotry (prostitution) when it no longer makes any difference who the male partner is. In the analogy, Israel and Judah become harlots by worshiping multiple gods; see, e.g., Jer. 3:9; Ezek. 16:15-19). The harlotry of the Northern Kingdom was the specific theme of Hosea:

My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner's wand informs them; for a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, And they have played the harlot, departing from their God (Hos. 4:12).

Also, to see how widespread this harlotry became not only in Israel but also in Judah, the following texts refer to the "high places"

(בָּמֹתַי, *bamah*) where altars were built for burning incense and offering sacrifices to pagan gods:

For long ago I broke your yoke *and* tore off your bonds; but you said, "I will not serve!" For on every high hill and under every green tree you have lain down as a harlot (Jer. 2:20).

Then Yahweh said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there (Jer. 3:6).

Then you will know that I am Yahweh, when their slain are among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, under every green tree and under every leafy oak--the places where they offered soothing aroma to all their idols (Ezek 6:13).

The Problem of Gomer

1. When did she become a harlot, before or after her marriage to Hosea (1:2-9)?

This problem revolves around the question of whether the Lord commanded Hosea to marry an adulterous woman. Priests were forbidden to marry a prostitute (Lev. 21:5-8), and it was frowned upon for Israel as a whole. So would God direct Hosea to do this?

Many scholars argue that the language of verse 1:2 demands the conclusion that God told Hosea to marry a woman who was already a harlot. However, according to Archer (p. 323),

The better solution to this problem is to be found in the supposition that at the time Hosea married Gomer, she was not a woman of overtly loose morals. If Hosea delivered his message in later years, he may well have looked back upon his own domestic tragedy and seen in it the guiding hand of God. Hence the Lord's encouragement to him to marry her in the first place, though her future infidelity was foreknown to God, would have been tantamount to a command: "Go, marry an adulterous woman," even though the command did not come to the prophet in precisely these words.

2. Did Hosea marry a second woman (3:1-5)?

Some scholars have suggested that the woman Hosea was directed to love in 3:1 was not Gomer. However, that would not fit the parallel between Hosea's marriage and God's relationship to Israel. As Feinberg (p. 23) points out,

God speaks directly to the prophet and tells him to love again that woman who, though beloved of her husband, had become an adulteress. Specifically, this was to portray the boundless love of God for Israel.

The Restoration of Israel

Following the directive to Hosea to restore Gomer 3:1-3, verses 4-5 give one of the greatest promises of Israel's final restoration at the second advent of King Messiah and the establishment of the Messianic (millennial) kingdom. This same theme is portrayed in a

most beautiful and touching way in chapter 11 and then serves as the climax of the book in chapter 14.

The Great Love of God for Israel

Closely related to the theme of Israel's restoration is the theme of God's great love for her, his chosen, covenant people: 11:1-11; 14:4-9.

Note: Hosea has been called the "Gospel of John of the Old Testament."

The Three Children

Was Hosea the Father?

In view of the phrase, "children of harlotry" in verse 1:2, some scholars have raised the question of whether the children were actually Hosea's children. However, in the case of the first child, the Hebrew is unambiguous: וַתֵּלֶד-לוֹ בֵּן, "and bore *to him* a son." Since this son was one of the "children of harlotry," that phrase cannot preclude the possibility of Hosea being the father.

The explicit לוֹ ("to him") is missing with the following two children. However, as Feinberg (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 23) comments,

The children of Gomer are called "children of whoredom," not because they were not the children of Hosea. Nor were they some already begotten but rather those yet to be born. In other words, the marriage of the prophet was normally to issue in children, who are so named ("children of whoredom") because their mother was unfaithful in marriage.

The Meaning of the Names

Jezreel: יִזְרְעֵאל

3rd masculine singular Qal imperfect of יָרַע, *to sow, to scatter*
Literal meaning: *God shall scatter or God shall sow*

Loruhamah: **לֹא רַחֲמָהּ**

3rd feminine singular Pual perfect of **רָחַם** , *to have compassion*

Literal meaning: *she has not experienced compassion*

Loammi: **לֹא עַמִּי**

Noun **עַם**, *people*, with 1st singular possessive suffix

Literal meaning: *not my people*

Metaphors For Israel (Uncomplimentary!)

Stubborn heifer (4:16)

Cake not turned (7:8)

Silly dove (7:11)

Deceitful bow (7:16)

Wild donkey (8:9)

Luxuriant vine (10:1)

Trained heifer (10:11)

The Essence of the Law of Moses

Compare Hosea 6:6-7 with Deuteronomy 10:12, 13; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 9:10-13; and 12:1-8.

Victory over Death

Compare Hosea 13:14; with 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 51-58.

Commenting on Hosea 13:14, Feinberg writes,

Hosea has been speaking about a situation which could easily, and often does, issue in death (see v. 13). Now the Lord promises the death of death itself. Grace shines through in the midst of words of judgment. The Lord, who has threatened to appear as lion, bear, and other ferocious beasts, will appear as Redeemer from Sheol and death, to those who trust Him. In the midst of proclamation of doom, God foretells that He has future purposes of mercy and redemption.

Charles Hodge (*An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 358) has this to say about Paul's citation of Hosea 13:14:

The apostle is not speaking of the delivery of the souls of men from any intermediate state, but of the redemption of the body. In Hosea 13, 14 [sic; 13:14] God says, "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." This is the literal version of the Hebrew....These [various translations of the Hebrew] are all different forms of expressing the idea that death and the grave are completely conquered. The apostle does not quote the prophet. He expresses an analogous idea in analogous terms.

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26)

"Out of Egypt I Called My Son" (11:1)

Matthew in 2:15 cites this verse from Hosea and seems to say that it is "fulfilled" when Joseph and Mary return from Egypt with Jesus. The problem is that Hosea is very clearly speaking of Israel and the exodus. However, in biblical usage, the term "son" is a corporate term and refers to a corporate solidarity. "Seed" is another example. Abraham's "seed" will be as the "dust of the earth" and as "the stars in the sky" (Gen. 13:16; 15:5). Yet Abraham's "seed" could also be viewed as a single individual, Isaac (Gen. 21:12), in whom the multiple seed, the nation of Israel, is viewed as incorporated. "Son" is used similarly. God's multiple son is Israel (Hos. 11:1), but "son" can also be viewed as a single individual, Jesus (Matt. 2:15), in whom the multiple son is viewed as incorporated (cf. Gal. 3:16). The New Testament writers use the word "fulfill" in several different ways. Hosea 11:1 is not direct Messianic prophecy of the flight to Egypt under Herod.

Hosea and the Gentiles

Paul cites Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 in Rom. 9:25-26; cf. 1 Pet. 2:10. The problem is that Hosea is not referring to the Gentiles and yet Paul applies the text to them. The best solution is given by both Hodge (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 240) and Godet (*Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 365): In Scripture, a general truth enunciated in regard to a particular class of men can be afterward applied to any other class whose character and position are found to be the same. Once the ten tribes had lapsed into idolatry, they were as the Gentiles in both character (religious apostates) and position ("not God's people"). But they, as well as the Gentiles, are to be restored. Thus Paul and Peter may apply Hosea's description to the Gentiles.

Hesed

חֶסֶד, Hesed (2:19; 4:1; 6:4,6), is a very important term in biblical theology. It carries the following ideas:

- Loyalty: hence often connected with covenant or community obligation
- Love
- Direction: it has a source and an object (God to man, man to God, or man to man)

Possible translations: steadfast kindness, loyalty, covenantal loyalty, devotion, grace, mercy, love, loving kindness, etc.

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