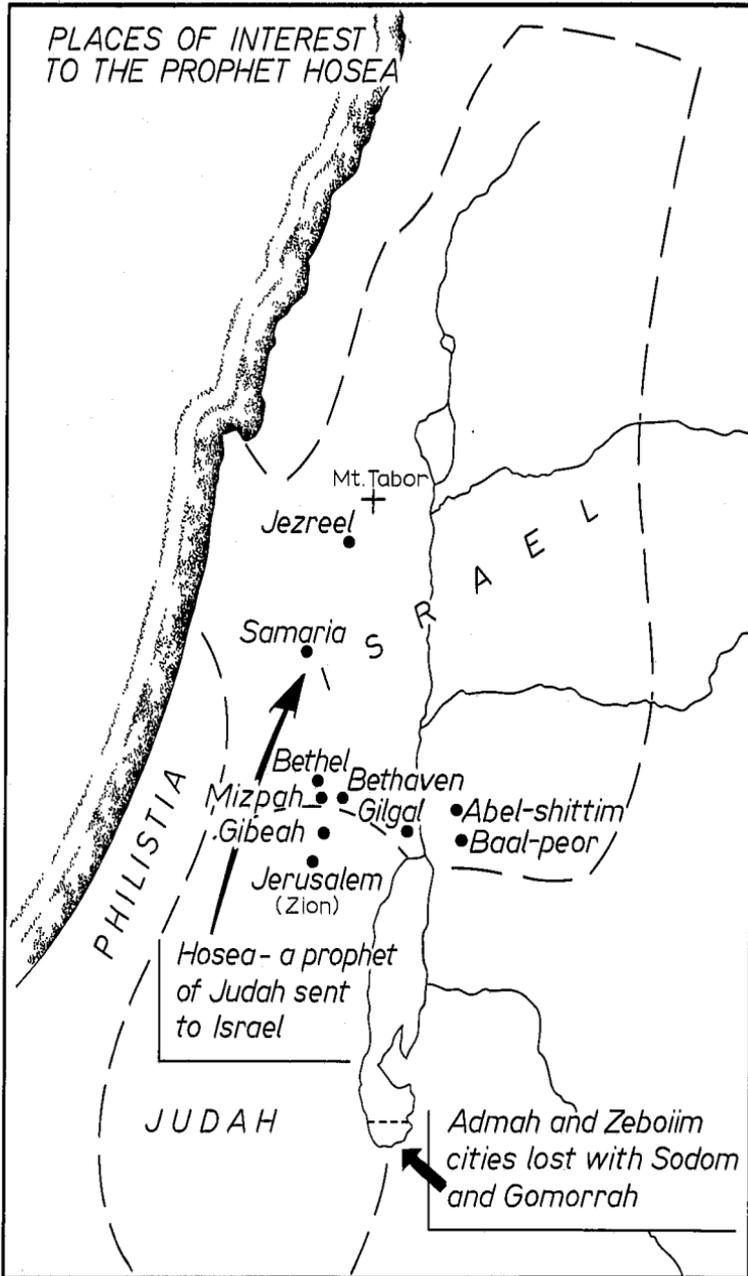


MINOR PROPHETS





Hosea 14:1-4

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.

Hosea 11:8, 9

1 O Asrael, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

2 Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.

3 Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

4 I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

# HOSEA

## INTRODUCTION

*Author:* Hosea means "Jehovah Saves" or "Salvation." Hosea appears to have been a gentle man but one of deep and fervent feelings. He expresses himself with many of the same emotions as Jeremiah. He has been compared with the apostle John of the New Testament because of his emphasis on the love of God. He was the son of Beeri (meaning either "fountain" or "one who explains"). He began his prophecy in the last days of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, and probably preached until the early days of Hezekiah, king of Judah. He was a young man when Amos was almost through with his preaching. While Hosea was preaching to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, Isaiah was preaching to Judah, the southern kingdom.

*Date:* We have assigned the probable date of the writing of Hosea's book somewhere between 790-725 B.C. The opening verses of the book itself (1:1) give us a basis for this period of time. Furthermore, its place in the canon indicates it was one of the earliest books. A tradition recorded in the Jewish Talmud places the book among the earliest of the prophets.

*Background:* At the beginning of Hosea's ministry Jeroboam II, the last strong king of Israel died. He was succeeded by Zechariah, his son, and this ended the dynasty of Jehu. Zechariah was murdered after only six months on the throne by Shallum (cf. II Kings ch. 15, 16, 17). Shallum was in turn murdered by Menahem after only one month on the throne. Menahem reigned for ten years and was succeeded by his son, Pekahiah. In two years Pekahiah was murdered by Pekah. Hoshea murdered Pekah and reigned nine years and then the kingdom of Israel came to a disastrous end in the Assyrian captivity about 722 B.C.

Hosea's ministry also overlapped the reigns of Tiglath-Pilezer, Shalmanezar IV and Sargon II, all of Assyria. Uzziah's long rule in Judah took place during the time of Hosea.

Although Hosea predicts, but does not record, the actual captivity of Israel which took place in 722 B.C., he still may have lived through the event. He would have been very old. The time of Hosea's early ministry was a time of material prosperity (cf. 2:8-13), but it was a society falling apart at the seams morally. The entire land, except for a very small remnant, was decadent and utterly corrupt. The evil which Amos had condemned earlier had grown worse. Religious apostasy and refusal to know God led to social and moral anarchy.

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Kings and princes are entertained by the people's misbehavior and sin (7:2ff); a degenerate priesthood wrings its hands in greedy glee over the sins of the people because its coffers are enriched through them (4:6-8); virtue and uprightness is gone and killing, stealing and bloody violence has come to the land (4:1-2; 6:8; 7:1; 10:4; 11:12); sin is rampant (8:1); the people will not tolerate rebuke (5:4) but persecute and revile the true prophets who are sent to them.

While Amos was sent from Judah to Israel as a stranger, it would appear that Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom. Hosea writes as one perfectly familiar with the internal condition of Israel socially, morally, politically, religiously and even geographically. As Kirkpatrick says, "The picture is drawn with a force and feeling which attest an eyewitness; and an eyewitness who does not merely view things from the outside as a stranger, but is keenly and bitterly alive to the sense that his own country is being dragged headlong down to ruin by the sins and crimes which he rebukes but cannot reform."

*Hosea's Marriage:* It is well to deal with the problem of Hosea's marriage before any attempt is made at exegesis of the text for such exegesis is necessarily based upon one's interpretation of the marriage.

Lange says, "The question . . . is encumbered with difficulties so great as to seem almost insuperable, and it is probable that it will never be satisfactorily settled. Instances might even be quoted of the same interpreter holding directly opposite opinions within a very short period of time." We recognize that competent Bible-believing scholars have held to the symbolical or allegorical view but we prefer, on the basis of what appears as good evidence, the literal view. Note:

- (a) The whole narrative bears the stamp of reality.
- (b) Only by literal interpretation does the narrative of the first chapter receive its natural meaning.
- (c) Only by literal interpretation do we get the connection between Hosea's life and his teaching which is the true key to his writings.
- (d) The name of the wife strongly indicates literal interpretation for if the story were allegorical we would expect the wife's name to bear some symbolical or allegorical significance but there is no such significance attached to the name Gomer whatsoever.
- (e) There is not the slightest hint or inference in the book itself that the marriage is allegorical.

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- (f) An allegorical interpretation does not relieve the supposed moral difficulty for if God's commanding Hosea to marry a literal harlot or adulterer would raise a moral difficulty, it would raise the same difficulty to Hosea's mind, or to anyone's, to command him to do so allegorically.
- (g) The exegesis based upon a literal marriage involves no wresting of the rest of the texts as, we believe, an allegorical marriage does.

*Purpose:* Hosea is the prophet of "unrequited love." His great commission was to break the hearts of the people of Israel unto repentance.

He plunges the plow of God's righteous indignation into the fallow ground of their calloused hearts. Sometimes tenderly, sometimes roughly, but always purposely he paints vivid, dramatic pictures of their unfaithfulness to the God who so passionately loved them. Kirkpatrick says, "Hosea's personal history supplies the master-key to his teaching." Indeed, it was his own heartbreaking experience with the infidelity of Gomer that branded on Hosea's soul the message God wished conveyed to the unfaithful bride, Israel. Hosea learned something of God's feelings through his own personal experience. G. Campbell Morgan writes, "The great burden of Hosea is first a recognition of sin, and sin in its ultimate and worst form, infidelity to love. The supreme sin is disloyalty to the love of God, and it is all here in Hosea."

But Hosea not only shows the ugliness of such sin, he also warns of the terrible and perfect wrath of God upon the impenitent. *Perfect love must* punish the impenitent rebel.

Yet the great undertone running all through the book of Hosea, breaking through over and over again, is that of the constancy of God's love. As Dr. Morgan points out, Hosea validates the lines of Shakespeare which go—"Love is not love . . . Which alters when it alteration finds." The most touching and beautiful picture of God's love toward the people is in the dialogue between the penitent people and Jehovah with which the book closes (chapter 14). The people approach Him in a prayer of repentance, confessing their sin and promising no more to turn to worldly powers or material forces for help. Back comes the tender, gracious promise of God to "heal their faithlessness, . . . love them freely . . ."

Hosea's message is not as specifically Messianic as Isaiah. That it was intended to find its overall and ultimate focus on the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom, however, is plainly evident from the few quotations interpreted for us by the divinely guided apostles (Rom. 9:25-26; Matt. 2:15; II Pet. 2:10).

Hosea's book, in our opinion, falls into four main divisions as we have outlined below:

Theme: The Love of God

I Love Rebuffed, 1:1—2:13 and 4:1—8:14

A. Gomer's Ingratitude

1. Spirit of harlotry, 1:1-9; 1:10-11; 2:1-5
2. Spurious Lovers, 2:6-8
3. Shame Revealed 2:9-13

B. Israel's Ingratitude

1. Lack of knowledge, 4:1—6:11
2. Love of Sin, 7:1-13
3. Lament of the Lord, 7:14—8:14

II Love Rebuking, 9:1—13:16

A. Reproving ("Thou hast sinned"), 9:1—10:11

1. Forsook God, 9:1-9
2. Followed Baal, 9:10-17
3. Fell into anarchy, 10:1-11

B. Remonstrating ("Seek Jehovah") 10:12—11:12

1. Renovate "fallow ground" 10:12-14
2. Recognize the Lord's compassion, 11:1-9
3. See Judah's unfaithfulness, 11:10-12

C. Requiring ("I will destroy"), 12:1—13:16

1. Ephraim has provoked, 12:1-14
2. God will punish, 13:1-8
3. Israel will perish, 13:9-16

III Love Reconciling, 2:14-23; 3:1-5; 14:1-8

A. Penitence Required, 2:14-23

1. Lured, 2:14-15
2. Laved, 2:16-20
3. Loved, 2:21-23

B. Pardon a Result, 3:1-5

1. Lured, 3:1-2
2. Laved, 3:3-4
3. Loved, 3:5

C. Peace Remains, 14:1-9

1. Lured, 14:1-3
2. Laved, 14:4-6
3. Loved, 14:7-8

IV Postscript, 14:9