

Hosea: A Chapter-by-Chapter Study

Introduction

It is believed by scholars that Hosea, son of Beeri and prophet of Israel, authored this book around 722 B.C. He is one of only three prophets from the northern kingdom of Israel (Amos and Jonah). Outside of this record, there is not much known about Hosea as a person. His name does not appear in any other book of the Bible.

The name “Hosea” means “salvation” and stems from the same Hebrew word as Joshua and Yeshua (Jesus).

The prophet Amos is a contemporary of Hosea. Amos prophesied that God’s judgment upon Israel would come swiftly from an unnamed source. Hosea confirms that the source would be Assyria. This book is believed to have been recorded after the fall of Israel and Hosea fled to Judah where this book was written down. It is unknown whether this book was written by Hosea himself or recorded by a scribe for posterity.

Hosea lived through the fall of Israel and watched as six different kings sat on the throne of the northern kingdom in a short span of just twenty-nine years. Four of those kings met with a violent death, one died in captivity. This kingdom had fallen far from the grace of God. The book of Hosea is a call to repentance so that God can restore Israel rather than cast judgment and punishment.

Chapter 1

V1

The opening line to this book states that Hosea was a prophet of Israel between the years of 760-720 B.C. as is shown by the list of rulers during Hosea’s time as a prophet. This period is during the divided monarchy after the Jewish civil war. There is a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah). This also shows that the book was written after the recorded events, not during.

V2

God tells Hosea the prophet to take a prostitute as a wife.

Why would God tell a holy man to take a prostitute as a wife?

Although the modern world approves, and encourages premarital sex and sees monogamy as prudish, the culture of this era held marriage and monogamy in high esteem. Obviously, there were prostitutes and men who engaged their services, but if their acts were revealed to the public then society would quickly shun them. Their reputations and livelihood would be ruined. For a prophet to even speak to a prostitute would raise eyebrows. Yet, God wanted Hosea to take Gomer as his wife.

What God asks of us is not always easy to do. Hosea probably had reservations concerning this union, himself. But God needed Hosea to not just speak on His behalf. God needed Hosea to know how He *felt*. Whenever the Jews turned away from Him and sought after the pagan idols and cultures, God felt betrayed. God felt like He was in a union with a harlot. Hosea would be able to convey this message to the people with a better understanding of what it meant for God to watch the chosen people betray Him.

V3-5

This passage is the first prophecy in the book of Hosea. The reign of king Jeroboam II of the Jehu dynasty was coming to an end. Jeroboam II would die and pass the throne onto his son, Zechariah. Zechariah would only survive roughly six months before being assassinated without an heir and ending the lineage.

God used the names of Hosea's children as an instrument of prophecy. The name Jezreel means "scattered."

What does a broken bow mean in verse 5?

In this era, archery was the primary weapon. Archers won wars. A bow was a symbol of power. God was going to end that power.

V6-7

The name Lo-Ruhamah means "No Mercy." This would be an awkward name not only for the daughter, but for anyone speaking to her.

The book of 2 Kings 19:35 records that the Assyrian army attacked and destroyed Israel, but God sent an angel to decimate the Assyrian army before they could harm Judah. Mercy was shown to Judah, but not to Israel.

V8-9

The name Lo-Ammi means "not my people." Scholars debate as to a possible double meaning in this name. The obvious meaning is God is turning His back on Israel just as they had turned their backs on Him. But many commentators point out that Gomer was not a faithful wife and that this second son may not be of the seed of Hosea. It is speculated that this name may have been directed to Gomer, as well.

V10-11

These verses comprise a song or poem by the prophet Hosea that promises a future restoration of Israel to God. Although mercy would not be shown in this era, mercy was on the way.

Although there are different interpretations on what this fulfillment will look like, the mercy of God will be celebrated by a unified people. Some scholars believe that this prophecy was fulfilled with the resurrection of Christ and the formation of the Christian church.

Chapter 2

V1

The first verse of this chapter is usually associated with the end of chapter 1. The words used here are the opposites of the names given to Hosea's second and third children in verses 6-9. Verse 1 says call your brothers "Ammi" or "my people" and your sisters "Ruhamah" or "Mercy is shown."

V2-13

Here is where Hosea illustrates his intimate knowledge of having a harlot for a wife. God uses the metaphor of an adulterous wife to the relationship He has with the Jews. The linguistics used indicates that the Jews have whored themselves to false gods, going so far as to attract pagan cultures with lewd behavior.

Verse 3 warns of the punishment for breaking the trust of an intimate relationship. God's blessings upon Israel are about to be removed.

Verse 4 uses the metaphor of the unfaithful wife being the whole of Israel, while the children represent individual people. All of Israel will be judged, but individuals will suffer more or less depending on the role they took in the downfall of Israel.

The latter part of verse 5 shows that Israel went after the pleasure of immediate satisfaction. They were enticed by sin which provides pleasure only for a short time but has long-lasting consequences.

Verse 6 shows more of a parental love between God and Israel. Hedging up the way with thorns means that God is making it painful for Israel to stray off the right path. Just like a child being rebuked for doing something that might harm them, God is rebuking Israel for their misbehavior. These thorns will cause the harlot to return to her true love.

Verses 7 and 8 show that God has provided for Israel even though they've been disobedient. Israel even went so far as to use the blessings God gave them in sacrifices to the false god Baal. They used the gifts that God gave them to serve another god. But God grows weary of providing for an unfaithful people. Soon, the harlot will have nothing to give the adulterous lover because the blessings will dry up.

V14-23

This passage talks about the restoration of Israel. The Valley of Achor is a reference to a passage in Joshua 7:26 that means "Valley of Trouble." Once Israel is ready to repent, God will be accepting and loving. The joy of Israel will be not only restored but overflowing. Verse 16 is an important indicator in the Bible of the type of relationship God wants with us. He doesn't want a creator-and-creation or even master-and-slave relationship. God wants an intimate, loving relationship.

It should be noted in verse 16 that some translations use the word "Baal" in place of the word "master." This is not a mistake. The name Baal comes from the Hebrew word master and the two often sound alike and in some cases can be interchanged.

The remainder of this chapter discusses a future without war or the need for weapons. This is a picture of Heaven and a land without sin where love is the predominant language. The name of Hosea's first child is used in verse 22 but with positive connotations. In chapter 1, God meant to break Israel apart. In this usage of Jezreel, it means to plant seeds far and wide. God continues this trend by reclaiming the names of Hosea's other children in the verse that immediately follows. All three names used for Hosea's children are restored in this passage showing a sign of complete restoration.

Chapter 3

V1

This is a verse packed with symbolism for the way God loves His creation. This verse is used as an example to a couple experiencing marital problems as how much forgiveness should be shown to an unfaithful spouse. Although divorce is permissible, it is not the desired outcome even under these circumstances. If divorce was the only option, then God would have left His creation eons ago.

V2-3

It is not made clear here in early translations, but Hosea paid a fee to “buy” Gomer from her current employer. She had returned to a life of prostitution after being married to Hosea. Instead of divorce, Hosea purchased her as a slave and renewed his commitment to her.

V4-5

Hosea’s loss of his wife and then his purchase of her out of slavery to renew their marriage is reflected in this prophecy. Israel will lose their leadership, their spirituality, and their Godly protection. But God will not give up on them. God will provide a ransom for them (Jesus), and they will once again renew their vows to God. The reference to David as their king reflects the contemporary prophecies from Isaiah 55:3-5, Jeremiah 30:9, and Ezekiel 34:23-25.

Chapter 4

V1-3

Verse 1 sets the tone for the rest of the chapter with God calling out Israel for their wrongdoing. A more modern translation could be, “You are being sued by God. You have been served.” The charge against Israel is that they have forsaken truth, mercy, and knowledge of God. The result of the lack of truth, mercy, and knowledge is that there is no self-control, no desire beyond what the “self” wants. There is no consideration of others. The consequence of these sins is the wasting away of the “self” since there is no purpose.

V4-8

This passage describes how the focus of the Israelites on themselves has turned them away from not only God, but the God-appointed leadership of the priesthood. This will cause them to fall into anarchy. Whatever deeds they do that they find themselves proud of will turn them against each other and they will be not only in disagreement, but in disarray. They not only forgot about God, but about God’s law and this has caused them to be divided.

God also calls out the priests in this section. God holds them accountable for their lack of leadership and faithfulness. God blessed them with being plentiful and the more of them there were, the more turned away from faith. The priests still benefitted from performing the priestly duties, such as food and even money, but they offered nothing in return to the people or God.

V9-10

After the civil war when Judah and Israel had split into their own kingdoms, the northern kingdom almost immediately began to corrupt the priesthood. King Jeroboam I had appointed non-Levites to the priesthood which caused some of the true priests and prophets to leave Israel for the southern kingdom. There was not much holy about Israel’s holy priests. These two verses tell of the judgment of God coming to these so-called priests. For many generations, the priests felt that they were immune from punishment because of their priestly duties. God tells them they will suffer the same punishment as anyone else.

V11-14

In keeping with the spirit of the redemption of Gomer by Hosea, God speaks of what an adulterous relationship looks like in His eyes. He watches as His creation seeks false gods like a husband watches his

wife leave with someone else. This sin seems good in the moment, but the consequences are devastating.

In the pagan cultures of the time, a man could “worship” at the temple of a false god by offering a sacrifice and then having sexual relations with a priestess. God made it clear that men would be held accountable for this type of immorality while the women would not be punished for this particular sin.

V15-19

Verse 15 offers a warning to Judah to not follow in Israel’s footsteps. For Israel, this was not a warning to turn back, but a prophecy of the punishment to come.

In verse 17, most translations call out the tribe of Ephraim. It should be noted that in this era, the largest tribe of a nation could be used interchangeably with the name of the nation itself. Since Ephraim was the largest tribe, it was not uncommon for the nation of Israel to be called by the name of Ephraim. God is going to let Israel suffer outside of His purview. He will turn His back on them, and the nation of Israel will fall.

Chapter 5

V1-4

The opening to this chapter speaks directly to the leadership of Israel. It is no accident that the priests are called out first, even before the king. The priests wronged both the people and the royalty of their country.

This passage speaks of God’s rebukes to Israel and how the Israelites simply ignored God. There are no more warnings. Hosea speaks of the coming punishment.

V5-9

Pride is at the center of Israel, and it has distracted the people from God. They no longer follow the commands of God or even attempt to listen to the will of God. Here, God let’s them know that He will reciprocate the “deaf ear” to their cries when Assyria overtakes them.

V10-13

The opening of this chapter is a metaphor for corrupt leaders who cheat the very people they are entrusted to serve. God’s punishment for corrupt leaders is harsh. They choose to follow a human path. The main problem with this is that Israel was following God’s path and they voluntarily turned away. This makes God justified in their punishment.

God also reminds Judah in verse 12 that they have yet to repent, and they will suffer the same fate if they do not turn away from the path Israel is on. The metaphors used in this verse are both subtle. A moth is a mere annoyance. Judah can sense the rottenness and they still have a chance to do something about it. But both of these annoyances speak of greater inflictions to come.

V14-15

The closing of this chapter speaks to God’s intention with these punishments. Even though punishments can be harsh, they have a purpose. God wants the Israelites to turn to Him in their final moments. He wants them to seek Him even if it means they have to die.

Chapter 6

V1-3

Chapter 6 is Hosea's prayer for the Jewish people with an ominous prophecy included at the beginning. Just as Jesus was torn and stricken, Israel and Judah will suffer. Here, Hosea sheds light on the length of time between suffering, death, and resurrection. This passage was written over 700 years before Jesus was born.

In verse 3, Hosea gives instructions to Israel and Judah on how to restore themselves to God. Hosea 4:6 demonstrates that the problem with Israel was their lack of knowledge. Hosea prays for his people to seek God, to learn about God, and to get to know the heart of God. If we seek God, He will reveal Himself to us like rains to the crops, the first spring rain when the seeds are planted and the autumn rains just before the harvest.

V4-6

This passage is a little obscure in its meaning depending upon the translation used to read it, but Hosea is reminding Israel and Judah that although they may have been faithful in their sacrifices, their hearts had long since left God. They were simply going through the motions of serving rather than desiring to serve.

V7-11

The closing to this chapter reveals how evil the priests had become. By day they would perform their temple duties and perform sacrifices for the people. But by night (metaphorically, they would sneak away) the priests would visit pagan cities and temples. This was an adulterant, thieving, killing sin. The final sentence was a death knoll for Israel. Judah would have captives return to their land while Israel would be wiped away.

Chapter 7

V1-3

These verses recount the sorrow of God as He repeatedly offered redemption and was just as often ignored. Israel had thought they could hide their sin from God and that He wouldn't care.

Verse 3 is a prelude to upcoming verses 5 and 7 concerning the fall of the kings of Israel.

V4-7

The Israelites were going through the motions of being a Jewish people before God, but their hearts were elsewhere, desiring pagan gods and the sinful satisfaction that came with it. Even when their leadership was in disarray with the assassination of the kings, the Israelites still pursued idols.

V8-10

The imagery in verse 8 is comparable to a modern-day saying of being "half baked." The Hebrews (and others of this era) would cook cake similarly to a pancake. Hosea is saying the Israelites are burnt on one side and raw dough on the other. This imagery continues with Hosea saying that the Israelites don't even realize how "half baked" they have become. Their sin is no longer recognized by themselves. They are as foolish as an older man who thinks he is still in his youth.

V11-16

When their predicament finally is realized, Israel will seek everyone *but* God to help them. And God will let them fall without protection or grace. They will cry out in their calamity without realizing they brought it upon themselves. Everything that Israel does to try and remedy their situation will fail.

Chapter 8

V1-6

Numbers 10:1-10 speaks of how two trumpets were used to assemble the Jewish people when they were ready to march through the desert. In the opening of this chapter God says that trumpets will be sounded for the destruction of Israel.

The Israelite leadership was chosen without any consideration for what God wanted. This was followed up with idol worship and the outright rejection of the law of God. In verse 5, the literal translation is “your calf smells rancid.” God did not appreciate the idols of silver and gold.

V7-10

The imagery used in verse 7 indicates that Israel will cry out to God that they think the punishment is more than their crime. God had given them the law, grace, and patience for repentance, yet they still turned away from God. Their punishment is just.

V11-14

God is using Hosea to speak directly to the Israelites. They welcomed and encouraged sin by building altars for pagan gods. It also turned them away from the law that God Himself wrote for the Jews.

The Jews did continue in their temple rituals, but God knew their heart was far from Him. These rituals are meaningless without a passion for God behind them.

The last verse of this chapter calls out a different sin by Judah. Israel had built temples and altars for other gods, but Judah had built up an army and fortified cities, trusting in themselves more than they trusted God.

Chapter 9

V1-9

Israel did not understand what was about to come and they lived like there were no consequences for their actions.

Verse 1 also indicates that idol worship was being carried out on the threshing floor as certain pagan gods were believed to increase the fertility and harvest of the land. They no longer relied on God for their wellbeing. God would see their harvests fail.

Verse 5 reminds the Israelites that they have not observed any of the festivals given to them in the book of Leviticus. Their punishment for this would be either death for most or the lack of any festivities for those that were captured and exiled.

Verse 7 makes an interesting statement concerning Amos and Hosea (“fool” and “insane”). God sent prophets to Israel to warn them, and Israel failed to listen. These prophets would be vindicated by God.

What does the reference to Gibeah in verse 9 mean?

This is a reference to Judges 19 when Israel before the days of kings and the civil war had found the city of Gibeah to be much like the city of Sodom with violence and perversion. God is saying Israel has become like this ancient city.

V10-13

Wild grapes and figs on a young tree are considered unexpected blessings. God used to consider Israel like this when they followed Him. Now, they give themselves to sexual immorality and pagan rituals. They have become so corrupt at this point that God tells them that they will no longer multiply. Israel is doomed to be wiped out.

V14-17

Verse 14 can be confusing if read out of context, but Hosea is actually praying for mercy for Israel. He is asking God to not let there be any children to suffer on account of their parents.

Gilgal at one time in Israel's history was the center of training and learning for prophets. In Hosea's time, it had become the center of pagan worship. This would explain God's anger towards it in verse 15. Israel had disgraced the promised land of God, so God would drive them out of their home permanently.

The pagan gods Baal and Ashtoreth were considered fertility gods. Infant sacrifice was not an uncommon ritual during Baal worship. Because of this, God would dry up the wombs of Israel. Their legacy would die with this generation.

Chapter 10

V1-2

These first two verses speak of how much God had blessed Israel. When someone is blessed, they should be willing to share those blessings with others and worship the One who gave them the blessings. Instead, Israel wasted their blessing on false gods and pagan temples. God would not only cease His blessings but smash their places of worship.

V3-8

The statement in verse 3 could have been written after Hosea had fled to Judah and Israel had fallen. At this point, Israel would be wiped out and the few remaining survivors would be captives to Assyria. The remainder of this passage is a lament of not heeding the warnings God gave them.

V9-15

The chapter closes with God's rebuke of Israel and telling them that it is time to accept their punishment. They need to realize that they have earned their punishment. Verse 12 tells Israel to soften their hearts so that they will seek God before it is too late. The second part of verse 13 is considered to be the root of all evil. Thinking that we know better than God and putting God aside because of our ego is what leads to our downfall as sinful humans.

Chapter 11

V1-4

Hosea may not have realized it at the time, but this same verse is echoed in Matthew 2:15 when Jesus' family returns to their home after escaping to Egypt fearing what Herod would do if he discovered the prophesied child. In this passage, though, Israel was called out of Egypt only to seek other gods from pagan cultures.

The imagery used here is of a parent caring for a child only to watch that child grow to rebel. Just like a parent, the child may never realize the full extent of how much the parent cared, protected, and loved that child. And Israel certainly didn't realize how humbling it is for a parent to serve their child.

V5-9

Here it shows how much God laments the loss of Israel. It wasn't their sin that caused their punishment. It was their lack of repentance that brought their destruction about.

Verses 8 and 9 are in a sort of song format as God is still crying out for Israel in sorrow. Verse 9 speaks to the few who will escape to Judah or those who will be taken as captives and spare having Israel wiped away completely.

V10-12

The "roar" of God, or the wrath of God, will hopefully cause Israel to seek Him before their ultimate destruction. God warns Judah not to suffer the same fate as their brethren, knowing full well that they are on the same path.

Chapter 12

V1-6

In this passage, God is reminding Israel of their roots going all the way back to Jacob (Genesis 25). Israel had relied on themselves instead of God. When that didn't work, they sought the help of Egypt and Assyria. Israel still sought man before God. God reminds them that their trust is misplaced.

God invokes the image of Jacob who gained his inheritance and other things through deceit. Israel is just like their forefather in that regard. And just like God had to subdue Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30), God will subdue Israel.

V7-11

Even though Israel had turned away from God, the nation itself was prosperous. Hosea reminds them that even though they are financially secure, they need God more than ever. In verse 8, Hosea poetically tells Israel that they feel they don't need God because of their wealth. God will soon show them that their wealth and pagan god worship mean nothing.

V12-14

Just like Jacob fled when he feared his brother Esau, Israel will be exiled from their home. God reminds them that they have been warned by prophets to repent and they still will not listen. There is no one to blame but themselves.

Chapter 13

V1-3

God accuses Israel of using His blessing upon them to build up their own temples of worship to false pagan gods. The end of verse 2 is literally translated “the sacrificers of men.” Some translations reference the practice of infant sacrifice while other translations soften the verbiage used here that speaks of human sacrifice. God will judge them because of this.

V4-8

The comparison of a marital relationship is strong in this passage as God reminds Israel that He has been the only true God they have ever known. Yet, they turn away and seek someone else repeatedly. After so many chances for redemption, Israel is ready for judgement and harsh punishment. God speaks of their impending, vicious destruction.

V9-11

God speaks of how the gradual turning away occurred by reminding them that they asked for a human king rather than God as King. God let them have their way only to show them how quickly He could destroy their human leadership.

V12-16

Punishment would come similarly to that of a mother in labor. Sharp, unexpected, and sudden pains would occur before their final death.

The closing of this chapter speaks of how God will redeem those in the future by defeating death. This passage is quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:55 by the apostle Paul. Samaria, found in some translations, is used interchangeably with Israel in verse 16. God speaks of a future hope for Israel and all mankind, but their current punishment is inevitable.

Chapter 14

V1-3

The closing chapter of Hosea tells of how the Israelites should return to God, even in the face of their punishment. Their own wickedness, disobedience, and idolatry has caused them to turn from God. They must return to God with humility and repentant hearts. Verse 2 says that they should be willing to express their repentance in sincere prayer, forsaking everything that has taken their eyes off of the Lord.

V4-8

This passage speaks to the love of God for His people, even when they wallow in their sin. They cannot escape punishment, but that doesn’t mean that God wants to condemn them for eternity. God still is offering them a way out even as He prepares their destruction. The forgiveness and restoration of God is a complete love that begs the people to repent of their sin so they can be whole with God.

V9

This final verse is a tidy wrapping of a dark but hopeful book of history for the Jewish people. There is some debate on whether this final verse is from Hosea himself or if a scribe penned these last words for the audience of Judah to take heed.

References

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