



THE MINOR PROPHET CHALLENGE

The Prophecy of Hosea

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA

published by Zondervan Publishing. We highly recommend it for your personal study library.

Little is known about the background and training of the author of this book; the prophet Hosea, son of Beeri (1:1). Though not clearly stated in the book, Hosea's familiarity with the geography (4:15; 5:1,8; 6:8,9; 9:15; 10:5; 12:11) and history of the northern kingdom, Israel (5:13; 7:7,11; 8:4,9-14), suggests that he was a native of Israel.

Time and Place of Writing

Hosea provides a record of a prophetic ministry in the northern kingdom between about 760 B.C. and a few years before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Hosea prophesied during the last years of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). His prophecy was written c. 760-722 B.C.

Hosea also saw Assyria take control of Syria and Israel (2 King 16:7-9) in its expansion north and west under Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) and his son Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.).

Hosea's preaching reflected shifting political circumstances in the northern kingdom. In the relative calm under Jeroboam II, Hosea spoke concerning injustice and complacency and warned of impending judgment (e.g., 2:5,8,13). Other passages reveal later turmoil in domestic (e.g., 7:3-7; 13:10-11) and foreign affairs (e.g., 7:8-12; 12:1).

The text also reflects Samaria's shifting loyalties between Egypt and Assyria (5:13; 7:11; 8:9-10; 9:3; 11:5; 12:1).

Hosea's ethical commentary explained why God would allow his people's destruction at the hand of enemies. Israel was in spiritual and moral decline. Her ancient faith, which Hosea described so beautifully using the analogy of marital love (2:14-23), had been polluted by elements of the Canaanite fertility religion, notably sexual rites that included prostitution and drunken orgies (4:10-13).

Hosea's commentary, whether political or ethical, focused on Israel's breaches of covenant that gave rise to God's judgment. Nevertheless, Hosea balanced this message of doom with the proclamation of God's enduring love for his people and the promise of restoration after a period of exile (e.g., 1:10-2:1; 2:21-23).

Purpose

To explain that the turmoil of the northern kingdom was God's judgment leading to exile and to assure God's people that a great restoration would take place after the exile.

Finding Christ in Hosea

Hosea reveals Christ in at least four ways.

First, the theme of Israel's impending judgment at the hands of the Assyrians anticipated the judgment that would and will yet come in Christ. Jesus' earthly ministry distinguished the faithful in Israel from the unfaithful. Jesus pronounced judgment on the covenant people who fragrantly violated their relationship with God (Mt. 23:13-39).

Second, Hosea balanced his message of judgment with assurance of restoration after exile. This theme pointed even more directly to Christ. Hosea declared after an exile, in "the last days" (3:5), God would forgive his people (14:1-3), renew his covenant with them (2:1) and grant them many blessings (14:4-7). Paul

and Peter both cited Hosea 1:9-10 as having being fulfilled in Christ, through the incorporation of Gentiles, who had been under the curse of exile (Ro. 9:25-26; 1 Pet. 2:10), into the people of God alongside Jews.

Third, Hosea's experience of marriage, divorce and remarriage (chs. 1-3) anticipated Christ by paralleling God's experience with his covenant people. Israel's portrayal as the Lord's bride is the background against which the apostle Paul referred to the church as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-32; cf. Rev. 19:7). The church stands in the same covenant relationship with God in which Israel stood. The blessings, judgments, privileges and responsibilities of ancient Israel anticipated what, was, is and will be realized in Christ.

Fourth, as a minor theme Hosea included the reestablishment of David's throne in his vision of the restoration after exile (1:10-11; 3:5). The New Testament teaches that Jesus fulfilled this hope; he is the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Ti. 6:15; Rev. 19:16).

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HOSEA

A Lifestyle Parable

One of the most unusual characteristics of Hosea's ministry was that God called him to a live out a real life parable intended to express the spiritual truths of God's message to his people through Hosea's day to day life. As we shall see, God is very direct about the type of person Hosea is to marry, what Hosea will name his children, and how ultimately Hosea responds to his wife.

It is best to see the actions as representing general, broad truths rather than to insist on overly concrete correlations (e.g. the names of the children convey the message; the fact that Hosea has 3 of them does not).

Prophet?! Prophet?! We don't need no stinking prophets!

So if from the nation's view things were going well, then why is God sending Hosea? What is God so concerned about that he needs to send a prophet to the Northern Kingdom and then insist that the guy not just deliver, but live out the message?

God's chief accusation is simple, and also profoundly troubling. The Northern Kingdom has made a lifestyle habit of breaking the covenant made with them at Mt. Sinai during the Exodus.

1 "Put the trumpet to your lips!

An eagle is over the house of the LORD
because the people have broken my covenant
and rebelled against my law.

(Hosea 8:1)

In short, as matter of habitual lifestyle, Israel disregarded the very first commandment of the Law: 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before [a] me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:2-6).

The State of Israel: Hosea's Lifestyle Parable

The Unfaithful Wife

Hosea's prophetic ministry begins with this pronouncement from YHWH:

2 When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD." 3 So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. (Hosea 1:2-3)

And so Hosea, man of God, prophet of God is instructed to take to himself a "wife of whoredom" (ESV), Gomer. It is debated rather or not Gomer was actually a prostitute by trade when Hosea takes her to be his wife, however, her moral character was not in doubt and certainly by the end of the story she has become a full fledged prostitute. She is the kind of woman that no man in his right mind, let alone a man of God, would ever marry.

Wounding God's Soul

Thus Hosea's marriage provides a living symbol of God's relationship with his people. God loves his people (including use) in the same way we love our spouses. He thinks of us as his bride.

However, as the husband to his people, God is in the same position as Hosea—married to a wife who is constantly wandering away from her "marriage" vow. The nation's spiritual adultery (whoredom—ESV) consisted in her breaking the covenant made at Sinai by mean of idolatry: When we honor and cherish and seek after and trust our idols more than God, he wants us to know this feels the same to him as it would to us if our spouse was committing adultery.

The Walking Billboard Children

Once married, over the next roughly six years a series of children (a boy, a girl, and another boy) are born to Gomer. The text says that the first boy is Hosea's, but hints at the fact that the 2nd and 3rd child are not.

In order that God's message of just judgment is made clear in Hosea's lifestyle parable God instructs Hosea to name his children with descriptive names so that they serve as a constant reminder to the people of their calamitous spiritual state. (Cf. 1:3-9).

Jezreel, aka "Decisive Judgment," "Armageddon"

Jezreel is both a valley and a city in Israel, both associated with the oppressive abuse of royal power and bloodshed. I Kings 21, there is the story of how Jezebel had Naboth murdered to take over his vineyard in the Jezreel valley and II Kings 9-10 records how the reforming king Jehu executed the Ahab's royal line in and around the city of Jezreel. It would have been odd sounding, like calling a kid today "Armageddon" or "Gettysburg."

Lo-Ruhama, aka “No-Mercy”

The message in the name of the second child is a bit more straightforward—the time has come for YHWH to stop showing mercy to the northern kingdom (Israel, Ephraim). Their sins have caused the necessity of their judgment.

The text leaves open the possibility that the daughter was, in fact, not fathered by Hosea. We see then a dependent, baby girl, born into a world that prized sons and under the suspicion that she is not legitimate. If any child needs mercy and protection it is this one, yet her name is to be No-Mercy.

Lo-Ammi, aka “Not-My-People,” “Nobody”

Perhaps the most disturbing appellation for the children is given to the second son, “No-My-People.” This pronouncement takes an ax to the roots of the tree of Israel’s relationship with God. Since the exodus event the nation had been formed around the principal of being “God’s people.” Rescued, protected, provided for and given God’s word because they among all the rest of the nations were God’s chosen people.

The name takes on added significance in light of the context—God had just described himself as Israel’s husband. Now it becomes clear that as a result of their idolatry, their spiritual-adultery, God will no longer consider them his wife, no longer consider them his people.

The fact that the nation had acted in such a way to merit being decisively judged, shown no mercy or love, and being cut off from God, he indicates in 1:10-2:1 that he will continue to be their God and restore them.

The Judgment of Israel: A Wife Justly Condemned

Starting in Chapter 2 we have sort of a rhetorical courtroom scene: God as the husband of the nation lays out his case against his unfaithful wife detailing both her wrong doing and the just sentence which should be pronounced on her actions. There is an emotional sharpness to the sins as God describes his “wife” and her actions:

- She has had children fathered by other men (2:4) and take many other lovers (2:5, 7, 10, 13)
- She had lusted after other lovers and the things that they would provide for her (2:5, 13)
- She has ignored the fact that her husband has faithfully cared for her all along and has taken these provisions used them to worship Baal (2:8, 13).
- She has taken “payment” for her affection from her lovers (2:12).

Likewise the punishments which are appropriate to these actions are both shocking and heart rending. As the nations’ “husband” God is justified in:

- Stripping her naked as a sign of the disgrace she has brought on their relationship and to emphasize her utter poverty (2:3,9).

- Removing all affection for her and her children (2:3-4).
- Cutting her off and isolating her from all of her other lovers (2:6-7).
- Showing her utter lewdness to her other lovers so that they no longer want her (2:10-11).
- Taking away all blessing she had attributed to other gods (2:12-13).

The Salvation of Israel: A Wife Lavishly Redeemed

This is an open and shut case. The charges are clear. The evidence is overwhelming. The punishment is just.

We are sitting at the town's gate waiting, watching. Everyone knows that the punishment for adultery is death; and there can be little doubt that she is an adulteress. The jury, the city elders and a priest or two, who have scarcely left, return scowling at the man's wife and shaking their heads. She, however, does not see this because she is hunched over on a small stool, unable to look at anything other than the ground. A careful observer would notice that she is slowly convulsing with silent sobs. The husband sits staring off into the distance at nothing in particular, his eyes unfocused. The spokesman stands and announces, "We are prepared to offer a verdict in this case of divorce..." when the husband, still starring off into the distance says in a quiet, hoarse, but firm voice, "No. No."

Rising to his feet he comes over to his wife and stands before her looking down at her. He calls her name, tenderly, gently, lovingly, and yet she still will look no place other than at her feet watching the tears run down her cheeks and then drop unto the ground. And so her husband, undoubtedly wronged, disgraced by her actions publicly, crouches down and slowly takes the hands which have caressed other lovers into his own again, And in words barely audible, which are so choked with emotion that he can barely speak them, he says...

14 "Therefore I am now going to allure her;

I will lead her into the desert
and speak tenderly to her.

15 There I will give her back her vineyards,
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she will sing as in the days of her youth,
as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

16 "In that day," declares the LORD,
"you will call me 'my husband';
you will no longer call me 'my master.'"

17 I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips;
no longer will their names be invoked.

18 In that day I will make a covenant for them
with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air
and the creatures that move along the ground.
Bow and sword and battle

I will abolish from the land,
so that all may lie down in safety.

19 I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.

20 I will betroth you in faithfulness,
and you will acknowledge the LORD.

21 "In that day I will respond,"
declares the LORD—
"I will respond to the skies,
and they will respond to the earth;
22 and the earth will respond to the grain,
the new wine and oil,
and they will respond to Jezreel.
23 I will plant her for myself in the land;
I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.'
I will say to those called 'Not my people,'
'You are my people';
and they will say, 'You are my God.' "
(Hosea 2:14-23)

Having shown his intentions to his people, YHWH now commands Hosea:

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."
(Hosea 3:1)

The necessity of this becomes clear as we pick up the plot of Hosea's life again. Remember that the text hinted that not all of the children born to Gomer Hosea's. The reason for this is now clear—during this 6 year period she has been recklessly cheating on Hosea. In fact, by the time we get to Chapter 3 the situation has become so desperate that after the 3rd child, Gomer has seem to left Hosea and become entangled with another man, perhaps even now working professionally as a prostitute. However, God commands Hosea to go to Gomer and bring her home again, to make her his wife, just as YHWH himself will do for his bride, his people, who have been committing spiritual adultery.

And so we come to the climax of Hosea's relationship with Gomer, with God's relationship with us. Hosea again exercises great faith and mercy in order to communicate God's love for his people:

2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels ¹of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. 3 Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."

4 For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. 5 Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.
(Hosea 3:2-5).

Redeemed. Restored. Radical love for radical sin.

A WORD ABOUT JUDGMENT IN THE PROPHETS

One of the first things most people say to me when they start seriously reading the prophets is that they have a hard time sticking with it because the prophecies are so “negative.” It always seems like God’s judgment is about to be poured out on someone.

As people who stand on the far side of the cross, reading about these passages of judgment can be a bit unsettling, especially if we have started slipping into an impoverished view of who God is. The theme of God’s judgment is a common feature in the Old Testament (and the New though we don’t often think of it this way). This is especially true in the prophetic books because the prophets were being sent by God into situations where he was being disobeyed or ignored.

Throughout the history of doctrine this has led to a false dichotomy of thinking of God as “The God of Wrath” in the Old Testament and “The God of Love” in the New Testament.

The Danger We Face

One thing that we must be crystal clear about, and must force ourselves to bring to mind if need be, is that in scripture we have God’s self revelation of himself. The things that we are going to read in the minor prophets, are not Hosea’s view of God or Joel’s view of God, but God himself revealing to us, his creatures, what he is like through his judgment and action.

To ignore, or minimize, the descriptions of God that we don’t care for leads to an intentionally distorted view of God. As we will see, a lot of the time this is where God’s people were coming under judgment.

E.g’s:

- Israel and their false view of God or worshiping idols;
- Jesus’ confrontations with the Pharisees who did not understand the himself was being revealed to them as God;
- Paul and John writing against the false teachers in the early church who said that either there was no sin, or that the Law had to be obeyed first before you could be saved.

In each case, as less than full appreciation of who God has declared himself to be was at the root of these things.

There is nothing more dangerous than relating to God on the basis of who we imagine him to be instead of on the basis of who he has revealed himself to be. God’s judgment on sin is a self revelation of God and his holiness and justice. To ignore this is foolish at best and tragic at worst.

Finding Blessing in Cursing

Passages which show God's judgment of sin are a blessing to me when...

They function similarly to the pedagogical¹ use of the Law.

Just as the Law drives us to Christ by showing what God in his perfection requires of us and our total inability to meet these standards, so passages where God pronounces judgment should drive us to Christ. In most instances, the root of the sin that God is punishing in others is the same root as the sins in our lives. We may not devour our neighbors as the Assyrians do, but like them, we are proud and tend to believe that our success in life flows from our strengths and abilities rather than God's protection and blessing.

In a very real sense we are no different than any of these people who are being condemned, though we are very prone to forget it since our sins probably are not as overt as theirs are. Seeing them spelled out at their worst, should cause us to cling more tightly to the cross, knowing that without it, we too are subject to the same punishments that are being met out in these passages.

I see how God's Law has been divinely and justly applied by God, because his Law reflects his true character.

God's condemnation of others reveals to us his true nature. Our God is a holy, just, powerful God and to ignore these attributes or subjugate them to his love, wisdom and mercy gives us a wrong view of who he is. In addition, these judgments are particularly revealing because they are divinely made. It isn't the case that the punishment didn't fit the crime because of human error.

We are prone to overlook parts of who God is because they make us uneasy, or because we know that we too stand condemned. These passages hold up the "mirror of the Law" to us and force us to realize God's character demands something from us that we cannot give due to our sinfulness. The gospel is only good news, when it has first been bad news. These passages of "bad news" are the divine embodiment of what happens when a sinful people meet a holy God.

I use them as an opportunity to reflect on God's goodness for not judging me in the same way because of Christ's payment of my sins.

Because we are sinful people, our appreciation of God's love for us and the gracious gift of Christ's death on the cross can easily grow cold in our lives. These passages help us to keep the fires of intimacy warm by standing as concrete examples of what would have been our just fate when we met God face to face if we did not have the mercy of the gospel covering us.

I am reminded of how much Christ had to pay for when he died on the cross.

When we read these passages we need to remind ourselves that all of the punishments they contain have been duly executed already. They have been poured out on the head of Christ so that God's people could be spared his just wrath. In Adam, I am just as guilty as an Israelite or Babylonian. But because I stand united to Christ, my Brother and my Sympathetic and Faithful High Priest, I am now free from their judgments. Not because I have been excused, but because their consequences have been paid in full.

These passages also remind us of the constant and regular nature of sin. Sin is more than just my deeds, it's my heart corruption which is the same as the corruption of others in these prophecies. Christ work in the cross was not just to pay for our sins, but to completely change our very natures. The whole "path" of humanity has been reshaped from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ" for those who embrace the gospel.

¹ There are 3 uses of the Law: the pedagogical, the civil (restraining evil through enforcing consequences for immoral behavior), and the moral (providing guidance regarding God's nature so that we can live lives that please him).

I see the folly and consequences of where my sin leads and I repent from it and receive by faith Christ's work.

Although our security before God rests solely on the finished work of Christ, we live a life where we perpetually wander away from God, seek for things that only he can give in our own idols, and murder and oppress people in our hearts if not always in our actions. These passages are reminders that for those who now have a right standing before God, our lives are to be characterized by his wisdom and goodness. Seeing other's folly and the punishment that it merits should help us to lives of continual repentance and rejoicing.

Finally, it's important to note that although God does still discipline us there is a vast, vast difference between the loving discipline that a Father applies to his sons and daughters in order to bring them closer to him and make them more like Christ and judgment that God executed against sin.

WHY IT MATTERS

A lot of people (including many Christians) have the idea that in the Old Testament, all we see is the "God of wrath."

How does the story and message of Hosea speak to this issue?

What, if anything, really stood out to you about Hosea's message?

In commanding Hosea to marry Gomer, God was making an intense statement about how it felt to him when his bride, Israel, committed adultery by worshiping other Gods.

What are some of the things that we learn about God, his holiness, his love, and our sin from this real life parable?

Is this usually how you think of God responding to your sin, especially when you look to or trust in things other than God to provide you with security, happiness, acceptance, control or approval? How does Hosea's message shift your understanding of this?

Picture a short, dwarfish man who looks like this:

- He has one leg of colorful women's hoes on his head, wearing it like a hat...
- He has big cheeky jowls...
- He is aiming a bow and arrow...
- He has a big, "bling-bling" type necklace on, with the letter "O" hanging from it...
- He has a tattoo of a big fish on his chest...
- He is wearing a thick leather belt around his waist with the letter "M" monogrammed on it...
- He has no hair on his legs above the knee...
- He has a frying pan that is hanging from his belt, just above knee level...
- He has very dirty knees...
- His lower legs are very hairy...
- He is wearing brand new, pristine white, "Zee-bock" running shoes...
- He is standing on a large, green stone.

	South/ Judah		Foreign		Post-Exilic
North				Captivity	
Hosea—Adultery (8th c.) 14 Chapters/Themes: Covenant unfaithfulness, repentance, Hosea marries prostitute Gomer, idolatry = 's spiritual adultery love, knowledge of God 1-3 Gomer unfaithful to Hosea; in love Hosea reclaims her 4-14 Israel unfaithful to God; in love God reclaims her. 11 Description of God's love for Israel.					

Time of Divided Kingdom

Babylonian Captivity

Restoration

922 B.C

1 Kings 12