

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Hosea

Scripture: Hosea

Code: MSB28

Title

The title is derived from the main character and author of the book. The meaning of his name, “salvation,” is the same as that of Joshua (cf. Num. 13:8,16) and Jesus (Matt. 1:21). Hosea is the first of the 12 Minor Prophets. “Minor” refers to the brevity of the prophecies, as compared to the length of the works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Author and Date

The book of Hosea is the sole source of information about the author. Little is known about him, and even less about his father, Beerli (1:1). Hosea was probably a native of the northern kingdom of Israel, since he shows familiarity with the history, circumstances, and topography of the north (cf. 4:15; 5:1,13; 6:8,9; 10:5; 12:11,12; 14:6). This would make him and Jonah the only writing prophets from the northern kingdom. Although he addressed both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom), he identified the king of Israel as “our king” (7:5).

Hosea had a lengthy period of ministry, prophesying ca. 755–710 B.C., during the reigns of Uzziah (790–739 B.C.), Jotham (750–731 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715–686 B.C.) in Judah, and Jeroboam II (793–753 B.C.) in Israel (1:1). His long career spanned the last 6 kings of Israel from Zechariah (753–752 B.C.) to Hoshea (732–722 B.C.). The overthrow of Zechariah (the last of the dynasty of Jehu) in 752 B.C. is depicted as yet future (1:4). Thus he followed Amos’ preaching in the north, and was a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah as well, both of whom prophesied in Judah. Second Kings 14–20 and 2 Chronicles 26–32 record the historical period of Hosea’s ministry.

Background and Setting

Hosea began his ministry to Israel (also called Ephraim, after its largest tribe) during the final days of Jeroboam II, under whose guidance Israel was enjoying both political peace and material prosperity as well as moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy. Upon Jeroboam II’s death (753 B.C.), however, anarchy prevailed and Israel declined rapidly. Until her overthrow by Assyria 20 years later, 4 of Israel’s 6 kings were assassinated by their successors. Prophesying during the days surrounding the fall of Samaria, Hosea focuses on Israel’s moral waywardness (cf. the book of Amos) and her breach of the covenantal relationship with the Lord, announcing that judgment was imminent.

Circumstances were not much better in the southern kingdom. Usurping the priestly function, Uzziah had been struck with leprosy (2 Chr. 26:16–21); Jotham condoned idolatrous practices, opening the way for Ahaz to encourage Baal worship (2 Chr. 27:1–28:4). Hezekiah’s revival served only to slow Judah’s acceleration toward a fate similar to that of her northern sister. Weak kings on both sides of the border repeatedly sought out alliances with their heathen neighbors (7:11; cf. 2 Kin. 15:19; 16:7)

rather than seeking the Lord's help.

Historical and Theological Themes

The theme of Hosea is God's loyal love for His covenant people, Israel, in spite of their idolatry. Thus Hosea has been called the St. John (the apostle of love) of the OT. The Lord's true love for His people is unending and will tolerate no rival. Hosea's message contains much condemnation, both national and individual, but at the same time, he poignantly portrays the love of God toward His people with passionate emotion. Hosea was instructed by God to marry a certain woman, and experience with her a domestic life which was a dramatization of the sin and unfaithfulness of Israel. The marital life of Hosea and his wife, Gomer, provide the rich metaphor which clarifies the themes of the book: sin, judgment, and forgiving love.

Interpretive Challenges

That the faithless wife, Gomer, is symbolic of faithless Israel is without doubt; but questions remain. First, some suggest that the marital scenes in chaps. 1–3 should be taken only as allegory. However, there is nothing in the narrative, presented in simple prose, which would even question its literal occurrence. Much of its impact would be lost if not literal. When non-literal elements within the book are introduced, they are prefaced with "saw" (5:13; 9:10,13), the normal Hebraic means of introducing non-literal scenes. Furthermore, there is no account of a prophet ever making himself the subject of an allegory or parable.

Second, what are the moral implications of God's command for Hosea to marry a prostitute? It appears best to see Gomer as chaste at the time of marriage to Hosea, only later having become an immoral woman. The words "take yourself a wife of harlotry" are to be understood proleptically, i.e., looking to the future. An immoral woman could not serve as a picture of Israel coming out of Egypt (2:15; 9:10), who then later wandered away from God (11:1). Chapter 3 describes Hosea taking back his wife, who had been rejected because of adultery, a rejection that was unjustifiable if Hosea had married a prostitute with full knowledge of her character.

A third question arises concerning the relationship between chap. 1 and chap. 3 and whether the woman of chap. 3 is Gomer or another woman. There are a number of factors which suggest that the woman of chap. 3 is Gomer. In 1:2, God's command is to "Go, take;" in 3:1, however, His command is to "Go again, love," suggesting that Hosea's love was to be renewed to the same woman. Furthermore, within the analogy of chap. 1, Gomer represents Israel. As God renews His love toward faithless Israel, so Hosea is to renew his love toward faithless Gomer. For Hos. 3 to denote a different woman would confuse the analogy.

Outline

I. Adulterous Wife and Faithful Husband (1:1–3:5)

A. Hosea and Gomer (1:1–11)

B. God and Israel (2:1–23)

C. Both Parties Reconciled (3:1–5)

II. Adulterous Israel and Faithful Lord (4:1–14:9)

A. Adulterous Israel Found Guilty (4:1–6:3)

B. Adulterous Israel Put Away (6:4–10:15)

C. Adulterous Israel Restored to the Lord (11:1–14:9)

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