

Hosea - Introduction & Background

Title

Following the pattern of most OT books, the work is named after its central character. The Hebrew title *Hoshea* means "salvation" or "deliverance." This title is appropriate considering the book's contents of offering deliverance from the imminent 722 BC judgment should Israel manifest covenant repentance. The book also promises the nation ultimate millennial deliverance. Interestingly, the last northern king also shares the name Hosea. Furthermore, the names Hoshea (1:1), Joshua (Num 23:16), and Jesus (Matt 1:21) are all derived from the same root. While Hoshea means "salvation," Joshua and Jesus mean "Yahweh is salvation." Both the LXX and the Vulgate following the Hebrew title name the book Osee. The English title drops the second "h" in an attempt to distinguish the prophet from the last king of the Northern Kingdom.

Authorship

On the basis of 1:1, most have understood Hosea to be the author of the entire book. Chisholm responds to the contention that the work is instead the product of later editors and redactors. First, "Hosea's parallels to Deuteronomy cannot be labeled later additions if Deuteronomy is correctly dated before, not after, Hosea." Second, the book's references to Judah do not argue for a late date if it is understood that his original message included both the northern and southern kingdoms. Third, the mixture of judgment and salvation passages do not suggest a later date since this combination is common in prophetic writings.

As far as Hosea's biography is concerned, Hosea was the "son of Beershi" (1:1), the husband of Gomer who was the daughter of Diblaim (1:2-3), and the father of three children. These children consisted of two boys and one girl. Some argue that Hosea was the natural father of the first child while the remaining two were conceived as a result of the promiscuity of his wife Gomer (1:4-9). Hosea's familiarity with the circumstances and topography of the Northern Kingdom (5:1; 6:8-9; 12:12; 14:6) and his reference to the king of Israel as "our king" (7:5) both argue that Hosea was originally from the north. Thus, Hosea and Jonah (2 Kings 14:25; Jonah 1:1; Joshua 19:10,13) are the only two writing prophets whose place of origin was the Northern Kingdom. Both Hosea's origin and ministry centered upon the Northern Kingdom. Therefore, Hosea is different from Amos who originally came from the south to prophecy to the north. Other than the scant pieces of biographical information about him found in his book, nothing else is known of Hosea. His specific place of birth, ancestry, occupation, and place of birth remain a mystery.

Scope and Date

The scope of the book is given in the book's opening verse, which refers to both the southern and northern kings that were in power during Hosea's ministry. The southern kings include Uzziah (792–740 BC), Jotham (750–732 BC), Ahaz (735–715 BC), and Hezekiah (727–686 BC). Jeroboam son of Joash was the northern king (746–722 BC). It is improbable that Hosea's ministry extended beyond 722 BC. since he fails to mention the north's fall during that year despite mentioning Assyria several times (5:13; 8:9; 12:1). Although the establishment of an exact precision is difficult, Hosea probably prophesied for a 30-year period between 755 to 725 BC. The book itself was likely composed shortly thereafter. According to this chronology, Hosea was a younger prophetic contemporary of Amos in the Northern Kingdom. Isaiah and Micah were therefore Hosea's southern prophetic contemporaries.

Given the information found in 1:1, Hosea's ministry also covered the last six northern kingships of Zechariah (746 BC), Shallum (746 BC), Menahem (746–742 BC), Pekah (746–732 BC), Pekiah (742–740 BC), and Hoshea (732–722 BC). Constable offers an explanation as to why the book's opening verse fails to mention these northern kings.

It seems unusual that Hosea would mention four Judean kings and only one Israelite king, especially since he ministered primarily to the Northern Kingdom. He may have done this because the six Israelite kings named above were less significant in Israel's history than the other kings Hosea did mention. Another possibility is that Hosea did this because he regarded the Judean kings as Israel's legitimate kings in contrast to those of the North. He may have mentioned Jeroboam II because he was the primary king of the Northern Kingdom during his ministry or because he was the strongest king of that kingdom during that period.

Thus, in addition to issues related to legitimacy (13:10–11; Gen 49:10), only Jeroboam II is mentioned in 1:1 for the following reasons: he was the last northern king by divine appointment who reigned for a substantial duration, God promised Jehu (2 Kings 10:30; 15:12) that his descendants would enjoy a four generation reign (Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah), Zechariah was assassinated only after a mere six month reign, and the remaining kings were all usurpers (8:4).

Recipients

Although the book contains 15 references to Judah (1:1, 7, 11; 4:15, 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 14; 6:4, 11; 8:4; 10:11; 11:12; 12:12), it is primarily directed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (5:1). Other indicators that the book is directed primarily at the north include the previously mentioned reference to the northern king as "our king" (7:5) and the book's aramaisms. The existence of these aramaisms indicate that the Aramaic speaking state of Syria to the north of Israel had an influence upon the book. The north is referred to as Ephraim 37x throughout the book probably on account of the fact that Ephraim was the north's largest and most influential tribe. Furthermore, the north's first king, Jeroboam I, was an

Ephraimite (1 Kings 11:26). Thus, Geisler concludes, "Hosea is clearly directed to the northern ten tribes of Israel (1:1; 5:1). They are often referred to as 'Ephraim' (Cf. 5:3,5,11,13; 12:1; 13:1)."

Place of Writing

There is no internal indication that Hosea himself was taken into captivity to Assyria. Many believe that because Hosea was from the north and the book makes many northern references (1:4-6; 4:1; 5:1; 7:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1) that his book was written from this locale. However, others have suggested that Hosea wrote the book in the south subsequent to the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. This position is buttressed by the fact that the book is primarily dated through the reigns of the southern kings (1:1).

Structure

The book of Hosea has two basic sections, which are delineated on the following chart:

Hosea 1–3	Hosea's marriage	Personal	Adulterous wife and faithful husband
Hosea 4–14	Hosea's message	National	Idolatrous Israel and faithful God

The second major section (4–14) represents a message arising from the prophet's personal circumstances that are described in the book's opening section (1–3). The second section takes the form of a covenant lawsuit that God files against Israel due to her numerous covenant violations.

The second section, although loosely structured, contains three parts (4–7; 8–10; 11–14) with each part harking back to an event that transpired in the first section. Here is how these parts fit together. Gomer's adultery (1) represents the sins of Israel that are dealt with in Hosea 4–7. The degradation of Gomer (2) represents the judgment of Israel, which is dealt with in Hosea 8–10. Hosea's redemption of Gomer (3) represents the restoration of Israel, which is dealt with in Hosea 11–14.

The three parts of the book's second section reveal different aspects of God's character. The first part reveals His holiness (4–7). The second part reveals His justice (8–10). The third part reveals His mercy (11–14).

Historical Background

The background of the Book of Hosea is found in 2 Kings 14–17 and 2 Chronicles 26–32. Hosea began his ministry toward the end of the Northern Kingdom. His ministry was inaugurated under the politically and economically prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). However, the influence of three Assyrian kings caused the decline of the Northern Kingdom.

First, Tiglath Pileser (745–727 BC) or Pul (1 Kings 15:19; 2 Chr 5:26) invaded the land of Israel two times. The first occasion transpired during the days of Menahem when Israel became a vassal to Assyria thereby forcing the covenanted nation into a tributary

relationship (1 Kings 15:19). The second occasion transpired during the reign of Pekah. Here, Israel lost some of its territory as many of its citizens were taken into captivity. Second, Shalmanesar V (727–722 BC) beset Samaria for three years. These events were precipitated by Hoshea's rebellion against Assyria through his refusal to pay tribute and his intended alliance with Egypt against Assyria (2 Kings 17:1-6; 18:9). Third, Sargon II (722–705 BC) completed the job begun by Shalmanesar V. He completed the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.

Internally, these final years of the north's demise were marked by political chaos. Following the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, four of the subsequent six kings were murdered by their successors. Hosea alludes to this in 7:6-7 when he says, "they consume their rulers; all their kings have fallen." These murdered kings included Zechariah (2 Kings 15:10), Shallum (2 Kings 15:14), Pekiah (2 Kings 15:25), and Pekah (2 Kings 15:30). During this tumultuous time period, only one king was succeeded by his own son. Pekiah succeeded Menahem. The Assyrians captured the final northern king Hoshea. In sum, of the six kings that followed Jeroboam II, four were murdered and one was taken captive.

This international and domestic chaos was coupled with internal spiritual deterioration. Such disintegration is testified to not only through the writings of Hosea but also through the writings of Hosea's northern prophetic contemporary Amos. Not only were the priests leading the Israeli's into sin (4:6-9; 6:9), following rather than leading (4:9), and committing murder (6:9) and idolatry (10:5), but also the priests themselves were illegitimate. Because they were merely appointed by the first northern king Jeroboam I to officiate cultic activities at his rival religious centers (1 Kings 12:31), they were not from the tribe of Levi. The northern kings fared no better. In fact, the north never enjoyed a good king. Drunkenness and adulterous behavior characterized these kings (7:3-5). This era was also characterized by idolatry and temple prostitution (4:11-14), child sacrifice (1 Kings 16:34; 2 Kings 17:16-18), Baal worship, and calf worship.¹⁴

Message

God's heartache and one-sided love for Israel (and Judah) is analogized to Hosea's broken marital contract and restoration to his adulterous wife (1-3) thereby qualifying the prophet to be used by God to file a covenant lawsuit against His people (4-14) specifying the nation's sins (4-7), coming judgment (8-10), and eventual restoration (11-14).

Purposes

Hosea wrote his book in order to accomplish several purposes. First, Hosea wrote to use the unhappy experience of his own marriage in order to impress upon Israel the divine severity of covenant rebellion.

	Hosea and Gomer (1–3)	God and Israel (4–14)
Marriage	Hosea to Gomer	God to Israel
Binding document	Marriage contract	Mosaic Covenant
Unfaithfulness	Gomer's adultery	Israel's idolatry
Commitment	Hosea's unconditional love for	God's unconditional love for

	Gomer	Israel
Priority	Love>Law	Love>Law
Restoration	Hosea redeems Gomer	God restores Israel
Emotional pain	Hosea mourns over Gomer	God mourns over Israel

Second, Hosea wrote to reveal the problems in Israel's relationship with God by developing an analogy based upon Hosea's personal marital experience. Third, Hosea wrote to induce covenant obedience. Fourth, he wrote in order to induce hope in the midst of apostasy and covenant curses by unfolding God's national restorative agenda. The distinction of Hosea's purpose in comparison to that of Amos is captured on the following chart:

Hosea	Amos
Against Idolatry	Against injustice
Emphasis upon knowing God	Emphasis upon seeking God
Against religious and moral inequities	Against social inequities
Worship of God	Walk of God
Need to know God	Need for justice
Love	Justice
From Israel	From Judah

Theological Themes

Several theological themes recur throughout Hosea. First, the book expresses God's desire for healing (7:1, 13; 11:8, 14) and His loyal love (*hesed*) despite Israel's present covenant rebellion. Second, allusions to patriarchal and early Israelite history pervade the book (1:10; 2:23 and Gen 22:17; 2:19 and Gen 18:19). Third, the book routinely juxtaposes the nation's past Egyptian bondage (2:15; 9:3, 6; 11:1, 10–11; 12:1, 9, 13; 13:4) to her impending Assyrian captivity (8:9; 9:3; 10:6,11; 11; 12:1; 14:3). Fourth, the nation's eventual return from exile is explained in terms of a second exodus (1:11; 2:14–23; 11:10–11; 14:4–7).

Fifth, Hosea's marital pain gave him the ability to express God's heart of both severity and mercy toward His people. Sixth, the book condemns empty ritual absent covenant loyalty (4:6; 6:6). Seventh, the book focuses upon the outworking of God's covenant program. The Mosaic Covenant is featured through the book's emphasis upon the covenant curses. The Abrahamic Covenant is featured through the book's emphasis upon millennial glory. Eighth, the book highlights the consequences of sin by noting Gomer's bondage and Israel's imminent Assyrian captivity.

Unique Characteristics

The Book of Hosea boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, the book is replete with references to Israel's history. Second, the book's second major section is loosely structured and therefore difficult to outline. Third, along with Jonah, Hosea is the only writing prophet to have originated from the north. Fourth, the book is structured around passages describing both punishment and healing. Fifth, the book is unique in how it uses the personal marital experience of its author as an analogy for God's view of His people's violation of the Mosaic Covenant.

Sixth, Hosea's status is unique as the last prophet of the Northern Kingdom. In this sense, Hosea is similar to Jeremiah who was the last prophet of the southern kingdom. Other similarities between the two prophets include their final call for repentance before final judgment, their use of the divorce motif (2:2-7; Jer 3:8), and their focus upon the future messianic age (1:11; 14:1; Jer 31:31). Seventh, "Hosea utters about 150 statements concerning the sins of Israel, and more than half deal specifically with idolatry."

Eighth, although Hosea's name is mentioned only one time in the pages of the New Testament (Rom 9:25), his book is either quoted or alluded to multiple times in the New Testament. Examples include 1:10 (Rom 9:25-27; 2 Cor 6:18), 2:23 (Rom 9:25-26; 1 Peter 2:10), 6:6 (Matt 9:13; 12:7), 10:8 (Luke 23:30; Rev 6:16), 11:1 (Matt 2:14-15), 13:14 (1 Cor 15:55), and 14:2 (Heb 13:15). Ninth, although Hosea is referred to frequently in the New Testament, Hosea is not quoted or mentioned in the rest of the OT. Tenth, Hosea enjoys the distinction of being the longest of the Minor Prophets. Eleventh, the book uses Ephraim as a synonym for the Northern Kingdom of Israel 37x. Twelfth, the book makes use of a plethora of figures of speech as well as vivid imagery.

Christ in Hosea

Many have seen in Hosea's redemption of Gomer from the slave market of sin a type of Christ's redemptive work on behalf of sinful humanity. Matthew also uses the royal family's return from Egypt (11:1) to show how Christ's life fulfilled OT prophecy. However, a casual reading of Hosea 11:1 demonstrates that this verse represents a mere historical statement and is therefore not a direct messianic prophecy. Then in what sense was it fulfilled in Christ's life? One of the ways that Matthew identifies Christ as Messiah to his Jewish audience is to show how Christ's life is a successful recapitulation of Israel's past failures. In other words, because Christ succeeded in every area where Israel failed, the identity of Christ should have been clear to the nation. Thus, when Matthew indicates that 11:1 was fulfilled in the life of Christ, he is actually saying that Christ succeeded in every area where Israel failed. It is in this sense that this prophecy is said to be fulfilled in Him.

<u>Israel's History</u>	<u>Christ's Life</u>	<u>Point of Comparison/Contrast</u>
Israel called from Egypt as a child (Hos 11:1)	Christ called from Egypt as a child (Matt 2:15)	Israel disobeyed and Christ obeyed (Hos 11:2-5)
Israel was "baptized" as a nation in the Red Sea (Exod 14; 1 Cor 10:1-2)	Christ was baptized by John the Baptist (Matt 3)	Israel disobeyed within three days (Exod 15:22-26) and Christ obeyed
		(Matt 3:17)
Israel tempted in the wilderness for forty years (Exod-Num)	Christ tempted in the wilderness for forty days (Matt 4)	Israel failed her temptation and Christ succeeded
Israel went to Mt. Sinai to receive the Law (Exod 19ff)	Christ "went up on a mountainside" and explained the Law (Matt 5-7)	Israel quickly broke the Law (Exod 32) and Christ fulfilled the Law (Matt 5:17)
Israel was called to worship God (Exod 4:22-23)	Christ was called to worship God (Matt 26:30)	Israel worshipped Baals (Hos 11:1-2) and Christ reserved worship for Yahweh (Matt 4:10)

Outline

I. Wayward wife and faithful husband (Hosea 1:1—3:5)

(1) Historical setting (1:1)

(A) Prophet (1:1a)

(B) Time (1:1b-c)

(a) Southern kings (1:1b)

(b) Northern king (1:1c)

(2) Hosea's family (1:2-9)

(A) His wife Gomer (1:2-3)

(B) His children (1:4-9)

(a) Jezreel = God scatters (1:4-5)

(b) Lo-ruhamah = no compassion (1:6-7)

(c) Lo-ammi = not my people (1:8-9)

(3) Israel's eventual restoration (1:10-11)

(A) Nation to become innumerable (1:10a)

(B) Nation to again become sons of God (1:10b)

(C) United kingdom (1:11a)

(D) United leadership (1:11b)

(E) Occupation of her land (1:11c)

(F) Future blessing (1:11d)

(4) God's dealings with Israel analogized to Hosea's relationship with Gomer (Hosea 2:1—3:5)

(A) Judgment (2:1-13)

(a) Gomer's unfaithfulness (2:1-5)

(b) God's judgment upon Israel (2:6-13)

- (i) Loss of lovers (2:6-8)
 - (ii) Loss of material support (2:9-13)
- (B) Restoration (Hosea 2:14—3:5)
 - (a) God's restoration of Israel (2:14-23)
 - (i) Courtship (2:14-15)
 - (ii) Marriage (2:16-20)
 - (a) Intimacy (2:16)
 - (b) Absence of idolatry (2:17)
 - (c) Absence of war (2:18)
 - (d) Betrothal (2:19-20)
 - (iii) Future national restoration (2:21-23)
 - (a) Restored land (2:21-22)
 - (b) Restored people (2:23)
 - (b) Hosea redeems Gomer (3:1-5)
 - (i) Gomer's restoration (3:1-3)
 - (ii) Analogy to Israel's restoration (3:4-5)
- II. Wayward nation and faithful God (Hosea 4:1—14:9)
 - (1) Israel's adulterous unfaithfulness (Hosea 4:1—7:16)
 - (A) Inauguration of the covenant lawsuit identifying Israel's sins (4:1-3)
 - (B) Priests' sins (4:4-10)
 - (C) People's sins (4:11-19)
 - (D) Sins of people, priests, and king (5:1-7)
 - (E) Coming Assyrian destruction of Judah and Ephraim (5:8-15)
 - (F) Ephraim and Judah's external religiosity (6:1-11)
 - (a) Israel's plea: remorseful but unrepentant (6:1-3)
 - (b) God's reply: condemnation of religiosity absent covenant obedience (6:4-11)
 - (G) Condemnation of Israel's rebellion (7:1-16)
 - (a) From the rulers: domestic rebellion (7:1-7)
 - (b) From the nation: international rebellion (7:8-16)
 - (2) Israel's coming judgment due to her idolatry (Hosea 8:1—10:15)
 - (A) Condemnation for puppet kings and idols (8:1-14)
 - (B) Condemnation for religious harlotry (9:1-17)
 - (C) Condemnation for general rebellion (10:1-14)
 - (3) Israel's restoration due to God's faithfulness (Hosea 11:1—14:9)
 - (A) God's paternal love for his wayward son (11:1-11)
 - (a) Past love shown (11:1-4)
 - (b) Present love scorned (11:5-7)

- (c) Future position secure (11:8-11)
 - (i) Divine promise not to destroy Israel (11:8-9)
 - (ii) National regathering to the land (11:10-11)
- (B) Israel's unfaithfulness and resulting discipline (Hosea 11:12—13:16)
 - (a) Past unfaithfulness and discipline (11:12—12:14)
 - (b) Present unfaithfulness and discipline (13:1-16)
- (C) Israel's repentance and restoration (14:1-9)
 - (a) Repentance as a prerequisite for restoration (14:1-3)
 - (b) Benefits of restoration (14:4-7)
 - (c) God is the source of restoration (14:8)
 - (d) Concluding exhortation to honor God's covenant (14:9)