

Profit from

The Minor Prophets

5: Hosea

We know nothing about Hosea apart from what is recorded in the book that contains his prophecies. The son of Beerī, he was the only prophet who actually came from the northern kingdom of Israel. He has been called 'The Prophet of the Sorrowing Heart' and it will not be hard to see why — we cannot read this prophecy without tears in our eyes and an ache in our hearts.

When Did Hosea Prophecy?

“The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beerī, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.”

Hosea 1:1

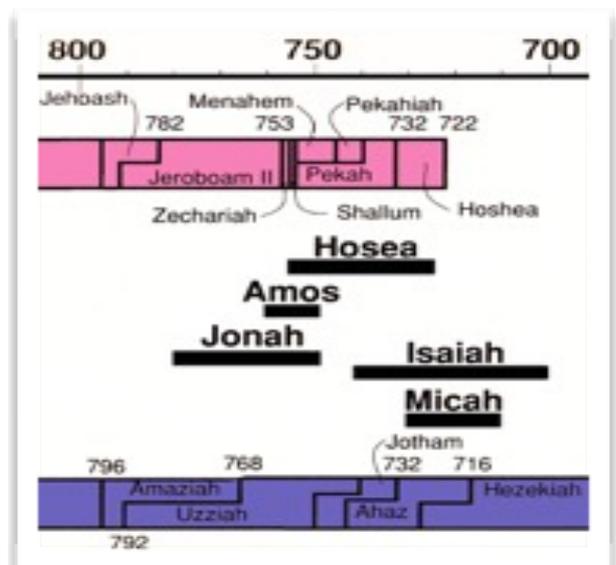
The reigns of the five kings mentioned in verse 1 ran from 793 to 686BC. It is likely that Hosea's ministry extended over at least 50 of those years — a long time compared to some of the Minor Prophets.

Hosea's prophecies overlapped and continued after those of Amos and Jonah, so we already know about the economic, political and religious state of affairs in Israel in those days. Jeroboam II's reign was a time of great prosperity but Hosea saw Israel's moral and spiritual integrity decline rapidly in spite of — perhaps because of — that prosperity.

“The more they increased,
The more they sinned against Me”
Hosea 4:7

Government was corrupt. The strong took advantage of the weak. There was still a pretence of religion but the Israel's worship was polluted with ritual prostitution, which was rife, and idol worship. Calf worship was centred at Bethel and Dan and the people “built high” places and set up images and Asherah poles “on every high hill and under every green tree” (2 Kings 17:7 – 12).

During the years after the death of Jeroboam II, Assyria grew in power and began to expand westward. To ward of the threat of invasion King Menahem paid tribute to Assyria (2 Kings 15:19 – 20) but it was not long before Israel collapsed. It was finally wiped out in 722BC



Outline

Hosea's marriage 1:1–3:5

- Children as signs 1:1–2:1
- The punishment and restoration of God's wife 2:2–23
- Hosea's illustration of God's love 3:1–5

An unfaithful nation and a faithful God 4:1–14:9

- God's formal charges against Israel 4:1–6:3
- Israel's punishment 6:4–10:15
- The Lord's faithful love 11:1–14:9

Hosea's Message

The book begins dramatically with the Lord instructing Hosea to

“Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry
And children of harlotry,
For the land has committed great harlotry
By departing from the Lord.

Hosea 1:2

Her behaviour was to be a vivid illustration of Israel's unfaithfulness to her covenant Lord.

Hosea chose Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, as his wife and they had three children, each of whom was given a symbolic name from the Lord. The firstborn son's name Jezreel was a reminder of the atrocities that had occurred at Jezreel (2 Kings 9 and 10). God would soon judge Israel for these sins through a military defeat at the same city. Their daughter Lo-Ruhamah's name, meaning “Not Loved,” announced that the Lord would temporarily withdraw His love from Israel. The third child's name Lo-Ammi, meaning “Not My People,” anticipated the disruption of the Lord's relationship with His people.

Because of Gomer's adultery, the marriage fell apart and she became the slave or concubine of another man, but the Lord instructed Hosea to buy back his wife. Hosea's act of mercy toward his wife was a striking picture of the Lord's great love for Israel.

Three things illustrated by this deeply moving story — Israel's terrible unfaithfulness, God's amazing love, and God's call to genuine repentance — are taken up and developed in the series of vivid and provocative images that makes up remainder of the book.

The Book of Hosea fluctuates between severe warnings of judgment and words of hope. Each section begins on a sour note but ends with a reminder of God's commitment to His people and the expectation that He will restore them. So Hosea gives us a balanced picture. God loves His people and longs for an intimate and lively relationship with them but He is jealous of their affections and tolerates no rivals. He will allow nothing to ruin the relationship He has established and will do whatever is needed to preserve it but in the end, His love and mercy will win out: His true people will come to their senses, giving Him the love He desires.

Hosea's message is summarised for us in chapter 14

“O Israel, return to the Lord your God,
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity;
Take words with you, and return to the Lord. Say to Him,
“Take away all iniquity;
Receive us graciously,
“I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,

Hosea 14:1 – 4

Questions For Discussion

- Some think the first three chapters of Hosea do not record something that actually happened. They say they describe a vision God gave to Hosea so he could use it as an illustration. Others say Hosea did marry Gomer but she was not an actual harlot; she was 'spiritually unfaithful.' Some think Gomer became adulterous after her marriage to Hosea and others say she was already a prostitute before they married. What do you think and why?
- What event, recorded in the Bible does Hosea 1:3 refer to?
- What event, recorded in the Bible does Hosea 1:7 refer to?
- It has been said that Hosea 3 is the greatest chapter in the Bible because it portrays the greatest story in the Bible. Why do you think that is said of it?
- How would you respond to someone who says that the judgements threatened by God in the book of Hosea seem harsh?
- It could be said that the book of Hosea is repetitive. Do you agree and if you do, why might that be?
- How does the message of the book of Hosea apply to you?

In Preparation For Next Week

Next week we will look at the book of Micah. Read the whole book In preparation for that.