

Hosea Introduction and Overview

When was the last time that you remember reading the book of Hosea?

Hosea is difficult to read in English, and some would say it has the most difficult Hebrew in the entire OT (others might argue that Job does). Information that doesn't really motivate us to want to read it more.

Why should we study Hosea?

- I. **All Scripture is Inspired** - 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." This is a key verse as we think of some of the more difficult to understand books of the OT. What is more, is what Paul says just before this: 15 "how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." **Here's a question for you, what are these "sacred writings" referring to?**¹ We often just assume that they refer to the Bible that we have, and that is generally true, because of the self-authentication of the NT. However, this is more precisely referring to the OT, because it is likely the Scriptures that Timothy would have had. The point I am trying to make is that the OT should continue to have a significant role in our study of the Word (see also Luke 24:13-35). Somewhere/somewhat Hosea fits into this grand book as being profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. It is our intention in this quarter to understand it and then apply it to our lives.
- II. **Though it is written to a specific group of people** in a specific time in history (which was roughly 2700 years ago), because it is "God-breathed" its applications can reach to this side of the cross. So we first seek to understand it in its original historical context, and then to see how it bridges to us today.

Historical Context: Verse 1:1, "The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, 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."

The first verse of Hosea offers us several elements that we need to consider to better understand the historical context of Hosea.

I. **Who is Hosea and his father? Generally speaking, we know nothing about Hosea or his father Beeri.**

II. **When did these kings reign? (Hosea likely was on duty from 760-710 B. C.)**

- A. Judah (Southern Kingdom)
 1. Uzziah (ca. 792-740 B.C.)
 2. Jotham (ca. 750-731 B.C.)
 3. Ahaz (ca. 735-715 B.C.)
 4. Hezekiah (ca. 716-686 B.C.)²
- B. Israel (Northern Kingdom)
 1. Jeroboam II (ca. 793-753 B.C.)

¹ 1 Timothy was likely written in the 60's. Matthew around 70. Mark in the 60s. Luke 70's. John in the 80's. Galatians is around 48 (Carson, Intro to NT).

² Chisholm, 21. See also McComiskey, 1.

III. Historical setting:

- A. To begin with, we need to know that Israel and Judah divided in 922 B. C.³
- B. Jeroboam II is the only king listed to represent the northern Kingdom. Jeroboam's reign does not span the extent of the four kings of Judah (792-686 B. C.). Consequently, it seems odd that Hosea would not mention the six other kings of Israel that reigned until its fall in 722. It is possible (as Garrett would argue) that the reason is because the following six kings earned their right to the throne through assassination⁴ (see **2 Kings 15:8-17:6**), or were generally wicked men.⁵
- C. It was during the reign of Jeroboam II that Israel saw a renewed time of prosperity. This will become important to remember as we explore the pages of Hosea. We will see that Israel did not rightly understand where their prosperity came from, and they certainly abused it.
- D. **Important dates to keep in mind. The Northern kingdom falls to Assyria in 722 B.C. The Southern kingdom falls in 586 B.C. Hosea's ministry was likely from 760-710.**⁶

IV. Who was Hosea's audience?

- A. We've already noted that the majority of the kings are from Judah, while there is only one king mentioned from Israel. Though this would seem to indicate the message was directed toward Judah, Israel is repeated 40 times and Ephraim 36 times (both terms are used synonymously). Judah however is only mentioned 16 times. It is clear throughout the text that Israel is the main audience of these oracles, **however Judah certainly is a second-hand beneficiary of the message of Hosea.**

Message of the book:

- I. **The covenant love of God and the idolatry of His people** — As we consider the character of God on display in the OT, and in particular, Hosea, we are met with a God of grace and compassion that desires to see His people repent and turn to Him (their provider). Through this story we come to grips with the character of God, but also with the reality that sin demands judgment. Israel had broken the covenant with Yahweh and were going to face the consequences. Even through that God continued to offer his promises to them, promises of future blessing. This blessing we see most clearly articulated in the person of Jesus Christ.

³ The kingdom divided because of Rehoboam's (Solomon's son) folly. See 1 Kings 12.

⁴ Garrett, 43.

⁵ Hubbard adds this, "the dynastic instability that plagued Israel after Jeroboam's death and saw six kings toppled in thirty years, three of whom ruled two years or less and four of whom were assassinated (2 Kgs 15; Hos. 7:7; 8:4; 10:3; 13:9-11), while the fifth was deposed (2 Kgs 17:4-5)." 27.

⁶ Garrett, 22.

- II. **Covenants** — What will help us better understand this is to wrap our minds around the covenants that God made with Israel in the OT. **Can you name the different covenants? What is the biggest difference between each of these covenants?**
- A. Abrahamic Covenant (Unconditional)
 - B. Mosaic Covenant (Conditional)
 - 1. Suzerain/vassal (Mosaic) covenant = “The suzerain covenants were granted by independent and powerful overlords to dependent and weaker vassals, guaranteeing them certain benefits including protection. In return, the vassal was obligated to keep specific stipulations certifying loyalty to the suzerain alone.”⁷
 - 2. Exodus 19-24 (see 24:7)⁸
 - C. Davidic Covenant (Unconditional)
 - D. New Covenant (Unconditional)
- III. When we look at Yahweh and Israel being metaphorically married in Hosea, we should keep in mind the Mosaic Covenant that they made with each other on Mount Sinai (Ex 19-24). Thus Israel’s unfaithfulness to their husband Yahweh is that they committed idolatry. They broke the covenant by not being faithful to the one true God.
- IV. Consequently, Israel will face judgment because of their sin, but as we will see throughout the book, there is also a promise of future blessing.

Structure of the Book:

- I. 1-3 Marriage Metaphor
- II. 4-14 Message of Judgment and Blessing
 - A. 4:1-6:3: Evidence of ignorance of God and statement of hope
 - B. 6:4-11:11: Evidence of disloyalty to God and statement of hope
 - C. 11:12-14:9: Evidence of faithlessness to God and statement of hope

What’s most helpful about this structure is how it serves the main point of the book. We see the idolatry of God’s people in all the accusations against them, but they are coupled with the covenant love of God and His desire to restore His people.

Significance of the book — If I was given the chance I could probably write the book of Hosea in 10 words or less. It’s basic message is very clear. Yet, God uses a significant metaphor and many poetic images and similes to express His love for His people and his disdain for their idolatry. Though at times it will be very difficult to understand specific statements (see 11:12), it is crucial that we understand the purpose behind it. Through the metaphor and the poetry God is able to draw us in so that we can understand how seriously He takes idolatry.

⁷ Hill & Walton, OT Survey, 63.

⁸ This is in contrast to the Royal Grant treaty, in which the Suzerain would bestow a gift upon the people without any expectation from them.

For example, can anyone in here understand what it would be like to not have your people worship you as much as they should? Let me change the question. Can anyone in here understand what it might be like to have your unfaithful wife leave you for other lovers?

This is where Hosea comes in. We are able to get in touch with the significance of idolatry from God's eyes.

Conclusion

I. Identifying our idols⁹

A. What is fundamentally wrong with the human heart?

1. Romans 1:21, 25 — “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”
2. The fundamental issue with the human heart is idolatry, or in other words, worship. Tim Keller writes, “*idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong.*”¹⁰

B. Evaluation questions

1. What do you enjoy daydreaming about? What occupies your mind when you have nothing else to think about? Do you develop potential scenarios about career advancement? Or material goods such as a dream home? Or a relationship with a particular person?
2. How do you spend your money? “Your money flows most effortlessly toward your heart’s greatest love.” Your pattern of spending reveals the idols of your hearts
3. What is your real, daily functional salvation? To find this out, how do you respond to unanswered prayers and frustrated hopes?
4. Look for uncontrollable emotions...
 - a) If anger, “Is there something here too important to me, something I must have at all costs?”
 - b) If afraid or fearful, “Am I so scared, because something in my life is being threatened that I think is a necessity when it is not? Am I so down on myself because I have lost or failed at something that I think is a necessity when it is not?”

II. Replacing our idols

A. We, like the Israelites, need to remember that God is the true provider of all that is good, and He is the only Person who actually knows what is good for us. We must believe this is true in the times when our idols tempt us to run to them instead of God. **The good that I am seeking, is the good that can truly satisfy, which is the good that God can only give for He is its maker.**

⁹ Thankful to Tim Keller for helping me to identify and replace idols. Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*.

¹⁰ Keller, 165-166.

- B. Colossians 3:1-7. Instead of turning to worship our idols, we need to direct our gaze upward, to the right hand of God, setting our minds on things that are above. As Keller writes, “Jesus must become more beautiful to your imagination, more attractive to your heart, than your idol.”¹¹
- C. You must direct your worship to God rather than your idol. Keller reminds us all, that spiritual disciplines of prayer and reading the Word are essential for this to take place.

¹¹ Keller, 172.