

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF HOSEA

FAME Thursday Night Bible Study

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Overview

Hosea is not an easy book. It begins with a prophet receiving a command to enact a drastic prophet act through his own family. At the beginning of Hosea ministry, The Lord told him to get married to a prostitute and announce that Hosea's chosen bride would be unfaithful to her marriage vows. Her adultery would vividly illustrate 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 received a symbolic name from the Lord. The firstborn son's name Jezreel was a reminder of the atrocities that had occurred in Jezreel. 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 severe disruption of the Lord's covenantal relationship with His people.

Because of Gomer's adulteries, the marriage disintegrated, and she eventually became the slave or concubine of another man. However, 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. This points to a future where faithfulness and a love relationship would be restored in Hosea's family and in God's relation to Israel.

Although Hosea is a difficult book, it is also a great book. Many of the themes and much of the vocabulary, of the great literary prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel originate in Hosea. The recurring metaphors used by the prophet in the book are marriage, sexuality, adultery, giving birth and prostitution. It is a book that jolts the reader. It does comfort the afflicted but it surely afflicts the comfortable. It is as arresting in its presentation of sin as it is surprising in its stubborn certainty of grace. It is as blunt as it is mysterious and enigmatic. It is a book to be experienced and the experience is with God.

Author

The author's name is stated in the first verse of the first chapter – Hosea. Little is known about the personal life of Hosea. All we know is the name of his father, who he married and his children. Hosea was the son of Beerī. Hosea was told by God to marry Gomer, a harlot and have children with her. Hosea is not mentioned outside of this book.

As the book testifies to Hosea was a prophet during the eighth century B.C. He ministered during the reigns of Uzziah, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah and during the reign of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. He ministered during the reign of the last six kings of Israel even though it is not mentioned in the book. These kings reigned during the time of the kings of Judah mentioned.

It is believed that Hosea was from Israel, based on his familiarity with the region in his book – 5:1; 6:8-9; 12:12; 14:6. He was God's messenger during prosperity of the nation and its decline. Hosea was a contemporary of Amos who was from Judah..

The profoundness of Hosea's message was that he experienced the rejection that God experienced with Israel. He experienced pursuing someone that was supposed to be committed to you but was more interested in sharing themselves with other men. In other words Hosea lived and experienced the message that God had for Israel.

Date

Hosea began his prophetic ministry during the reign of Israel's King Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C. Hosea was a prophet to Israel during the reign of the last six kings of Israel. Hosea delivered messages to Israel over 30 years, from 755 to 725 B.C. However some scholars such as Duane Garrett in The New American Commentary suggest that Hosea could have ministered for 50 years, from 760 to 710 B.C. It is believed that Hosea died before the destruction of Israel of the Assyrian in 722 BC. since he does not mention it. It is not known the exact dates that Hosea wrote this book. But many scholars believe it was around 725 B.C. at the end of his ministry.

Audience

Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom, Israel. The people were not being faithful to Jehovah. They were not keeping the covenant. They were participating in the rites of Baal.

Hosea used terms like “Israel” and “Ephraim” to let us know that he was speaking to the nation of Israel. He also used the term “you” which was a reference for the nation of Israel.

Hosea also spoke directly to specific groups in Israel. He spoke to the priests in 4:4-5; 5:1 and the royalty in 5:1 who promoted pagan worship. Hosea spoke to 2 cities – Samaria and Bethel.

Structure and Style of the Book

The structure and style of the book of Hosea is challenging. Some of the Hebrew is difficult to understand. Hosea used poetic as displayed by the formatting of a major portion of the book. Hosea used rhetorical techniques as displayed in the questions asked – 11:8, “*How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused*”. He also used a variety of metaphors as he presented a variety of themes. Some of the metaphors used for God include husband (2:2), father (11:1), physician (14:4), fowler (7:12), a lion or leopard (13:8), dew (14:5), a green tree (14:8). He also used imagery from nature, agriculture and unexpected place which the people of his day were very familiar. An example is 7:4-7 when he used the imagery that the nation was likened to a hot oven.

The structure of the book is a moment between passages declaring punishment and healing for God’s people. Basically the book can be divided into 3 categories – evidence, curses and blessings. The largest portion would fall into the evidence category.

Political Historical Setting (Background)

Hosea began his ministry in Israel during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II. They had been able to extend their boundaries to where it had been under the reign of King Solomon. They were not being bothered by the larger powers of Egypt and Assyria since they were dealing with problems closer to home. Israel and Judah were both at their economic and political peak since the reign of King Solomon. (II Kings 14:25, 28) The nation regarded their prosperity as confirmation that God was pleased with what they were doing. Needless to say they were not pleased when Hosea told them that God was not pleased.

After the death of Jeroboam II anarchy and confusion was the norm. Four of the last kings of Israel were assassinated early in their reign.

- Jeroboam was succeeded by his son Zechariah 753 B.C. He was assassinated by Shallum almost immediately after taking office. This was the end of the longest dynasty of Israel – Jehu dynasty
- Shallum was assassinated by Menahem a month after assuming the role of king.
- Menahem reigned a little longer 752 – 742 B.C. He enlisted the support of Assyria by sending thousand relents of silver to their king, Tiglatj-pileser (Pul).
- Pekahiah succeeded his father Menahem. But he only reigned for two years before being assassinated by Pekah, a high ranking military officer.
- Pekah reigned until about 732 B.C. There is much discussion among scholars as to the chronology reign of Pekah according to The New American Commentary because of II Kings 15:27. Pekah was hostile to the Assyrian Empire. He was assassinated by Hoshea.
- Hoshea was able to save Samaria from destruction for two years by pretending to submit to Assyria. However he was holding secret meetings with Egypt for their support against Assyria. When Assyria discovered this treachery they destroyed Samaria in 722 B.C. and deported many of the Israelites. This was the end of the Northern Kingdom/Israel.

Social Historical Setting (Background)

The covenant lends itself to more of an equal sharing of the wealth than having a monarchy. It provided for the care of the poor and widows. The prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II had widened the gap between the wealthy and the poor. The oppression of the poor by the wealthy became the norm instead of the except.

Religious Historical Setting (Background)

Keeping the Mosaic covenant and Ten Commandments were not the norm of the day. They were the exceptions.

The worship of Jehovah had been diluted by combining it with the workshop of Baal. Baal was the religion of the Canaanites and like most religions in the ancient world connected gods and goddess with natural forces. It was believed that nature and natural forces could be influenced by devotion and rituals of worshippers. It was also believed that sexual relations between gods and goddesses were responsible for some of the initial and continuing processes in nature (Preacher's Commentary). Therefore it was thought they could influence the gods and goddess through sexual intercourse with cult prostitutes at the shrines.

The Lord had grown tired of the people's disobedience. He sent the prophets to encourage them to return unto Him.

Hosea was sent to Israel to preach to them to repent. But they did not want to listen. Hosea could feel some of the pain that the Lord felt. He too had been rejected by his wife who had gone after other men. He too had pursued her to return to him to no avail. Their children also testified to rejection as did the children of Israel.

Purpose

The Book of Hosea was written to denounce the breaking of the covenant that the Lord had established with the Israel, the Northern Kingdom. The Lord wanted His chosen people, His chosen bride/wife to repent and return to Him. Failure to repent would result in judgment. But even through judgment the Lord would continue to pursue His bride.

The Lord called Hosea to deliver this message to Israel. So that the prophet could readily identify with the message He directed Hosea to marry the harlot, Gomer. She was unfaithful to Hosea as the Israelites were to their Lord.

God demonstrated His love for His people even though He promised judgment if they did not repent. God loved Israel and wanted an intimate and vibrant relationship with them as a married couple. He pursued His people by sending the prophets. He pursued His people by bring judgment if necessary. Judgment would not be abandonment forever.

Message

We are not left to guess about the person of God in Hosea. Yahweh introduces himself in words that feature his uniqueness and sovereignty (12:9; 13:4) it is Israel's failure to make proper response to these introductions that prompted the divine judgment and Hosea's preaching of it.

God's unique sovereignty had two massive ramifications for Israel's common life.

First Idolatry was absolutely prohibited. God's uniqueness as the Holy One meant that all replicas were lifeless caricatures. For the prophets, worship was the center, the heart of the people's life. From the onset of his message as a result of Israel's compromise and corruption of worship, Hosea announced that 1) religious structures had to be put to an end (2:11;3:4); 2) enthusiasm without true understanding had led Israel from Yahweh into spiritual harlotry with the Baals(4:6-12); 3) so perverted were their worship that the shrines themselves were to be boycotted (4:15); 4) sacrifices were a sham when Yahweh's uniqueness was forgotten (5:6-7) ; 5) they had so failed to come to grips with that uniqueness that they actually kissed calves as an act of adulation (13:2) and 6) in consequence of all of this, the acts, centres and objects of worship were a prime target of judgment (4:19;5:7;8:6; 9:1-6;10:2,5-8)

Second, Yahweh's unique sovereignty meant that all of life was within his control, whether creation, history, politics, international affairs, social relationships and religious activities. In lifting up God's lordship of fertility, Hosea announced that Yahweh, not Baal is the source of all that sustains their lives. Hosea poses the question: whoever is responsible for fertility should therefore receive the worship and gratitude of the people. Hosea states that God has lordship of national life of Israel. It is this lordship that Hosea defines in person terms: Yahweh is husband and parent to the people: they are wayward spouse and stubborn child to him. It is a lordship built upon a relationship described as covenant love, faithfulness, utter reliability in word and deed and tender compassion like a mother for her child.

The wife and the child stand for all of the people. There is no evidence in the book apart from the prophet himself of any pious remnant standing free of the condemnations the dominate the speeches.

STUDY RESOURCES

Study Bibles

The Preacher's Commentary – Hosea/Joel/Amos/Obadiah/Jonah, Lloyd J. Ogilvie,
Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990

The New American Commentary – Hosea, Joel, Duane A. Garrett, B & H Publishers,
1997

Word Biblical Commentary Hosea-Jonah, Douglas Stuart, Thomas Nelson Publishers,
1987

Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Hosea, David Allan Hubbard, Inter-Varsity
Press 1989

Outline for The Book of Hosea

From

The Preacher's Commentary

- I. Title: The Word of Yahweh: 1:1**
- II. The Word of Yahweh to and Through Hosea: 1:2 – 14:8**
 - a. Yahweh's Word in Hosea's Family: 1:2 – 3:5**
 - i. Hosea's Family and Israel 1:2 – 2:23**
 - 1. Hosea's Wife and Naming and Renaming the Children: 1:2 – 2:1**
 - a. Hosea's Family – Omens of Judgment: 1:2 – 9**
 - b. Israel Restored: 1:10 – 2:1**
 - 2. Judgment and Restoration of Israel 2:2 – 23**
 - a. Yahweh's Exasperation with Israel 2:2 – 13**
 - b. Yahweh's New Marriage with Israel: 2:14 – 23**
 - ii. The Love of Yahweh and Hosea: 3:1 – 5**
 - b. Hosea's Prophecies: 4:1 – 14:8**
 - i. Yahweh's Charge Against All Israel 4:1 - 3**
 - ii. Yahweh's Charge Against All the Priests: 4:4 – 19**
 - iii. Israel's Leader's Leaders – A Snare: 5:1 – 7**
 - iv. Ephraim and Judah in Conflict: 5:8-15**
 - v. A Call to Return: 6:1-3**
 - vi. Yahweh's Desire for Loyalty: 6:4-6**
 - vii. Surrounded by Their Deeds: 6:7 – 7:2**
 - viii. Domestic Politics Without Yahweh: 7:3 – 7**
 - ix. International Politics Without Yahweh: 7:8 – 16**
 - x. Apostasy in Cult and Politics: 8:1 – 14**
 - xi. No More Festivals: 9:1 – 9**
 - xii. Rebels Rejected by Yahweh: 9:10 – 17**
 - xiii. No More Cult or King: 10:1 – 8**
 - xiv. Destroyed by War: 10:9 – 15**

- xv. **Yahweh's Compassion for the Rebellious Child, Israel: 11:1 – 11**
 - xvi. **Israel, the Habitual Deceiver: 11:12 – 12:14**
 - xvii. **Israel's Impending Destruction: 13:1 – 16**
 - xviii. **Yahweh's Healing after the Disaster: 14:1 – 8**
- III. **Conclusion: A Word to the Wise 14:9**