

Old Testament Survey—Hosea

I love the Bible for many reasons, and here's one of them. The Bible is so honest, so straightforward in presenting the way "it really is in life." When you look at the lives of the Bible characters you quickly discover they were *real people*, just like us. Just like us they struggled with sin. And just like us they struggled when sinned against.

One of the most painful experiences one can endure is to be betrayed by one's marriage covenant partner. It happens all too frequently in our day, but it's not a new phenomenon. It happened almost 2,800 years ago in the life of a man of God, a prophet in fact, by the name of Hosea. Indeed, God revealed through the ministry of Hosea that what Hosea experienced in his marriage is what God Himself was experiencing in His relationship with His covenant people, Israel.

I'm grateful God included this wonderful, hope-giving book in the canon of Scripture. There's much we can glean from it, both in terms of counsel if we're facing difficult relationship challenges, but more significantly, insight into the person of God.

Discuss: What do you know about the book of Hosea?

Observations about the Book:

--this book heads the collection of the Minor Prophets (which in the Hebrew Bible are written on one scroll, and called "the Book of the Twelve").

--we know nothing about Hosea's life or upbringing, except that he was a son of Beerai (1:1), and he had a tragic marriage. The rest of the details we must reconstruct from the tone and contents of the book.

--his name means "to save"

Who wrote the book?

--Hosea, a prophet to the Northern Kingdom

Note: Hosea seems to have been a very tenderhearted person, and has been compared with Jeremiah in the OT and John in the NT (L.H.B., 331). God asked him to walk a path of grief and heartache, and in fact, felt and modeled the very heartbreak of God.

Note: Hosea had an outstanding knowledge of the political tensions of his own day. He knew what was going on in the world, and as a prophet, spoke in relevant terms. Like Isaiah, he was very sensitive to political currents and analyzed their implications shrewdly (L.H.B., 332).

When was the book written?

--760-715 B.C. (Hosea's ministry; Wood, p. 276)

See: 1:1 for the list of the kings; Hosea ministered at least 40 years (3rd longest ministry behind

Isaiah and Jeremiah); one of the earliest writing prophets

Note: Hosea ministered in the north (no mention of Jerusalem, but very familiar with geography of north), but dates himself by the kings in the south. Why? Possibly because he didn't recognize the renegade kings of the north.

Why was the book written?

The Conditions of the Day: Hosea prophesied during the prosperous days of Jeroboam II, yet also during the tragic days of the Assyrian invasion. The people were idolatrous and unfaithful to Yahweh. The people had assimilated Baalism with the worship of Yahweh. There was social and moral degradation. The strong took advantage of the weak. Justice was rare.

The rich got richer, and the poor poorer. The rich felt, "I worked hard to get where I am. Let the poor suffer the consequences."

Discuss: What kind of observations would Hosea make about our attitudes towards wealth in the USA?

The Purpose: The aim of the book is to convince the people of Israel that they need to repent and return to their everloving God (Archer, p. 328).

Hosea attacked two primary sins:

One, spiritual adultery (the people played the harlot with Baal; 2:13, 17; 9:1ff)

Two, idolatry (they made alliances with other pagan kings, thus breaking the Suzereignty Vassal treaty Yahweh established at Sinai--see 8:1; 12:1; 13:4)

He also accused the people of these sins: substituting national enthusiasm for knowledge of God (4:6), self-sufficiency which leads to pride (2:8; 5:5), the sin of instability (6:4 "like the morning mist"), worldliness (5:13; 7:11; 12:1), and corruption of religion, politics, and society (7:1-3; 12:7-8).

What is the outline of the book?

The book is difficult to outline, for chapters 4-14 are one long monologue broken by sobs. Hosea is a theology of the heart, not the head.

I. Israel's Infidelity Illustrated (ch 1-3)

II. Israel's Indictment, Punishment, and Restoration (ch 4-14)

A. Israel's Indictment (4-7)

B. Israel's Punishment (8-10)

C. Israel's Restoration (11-14)

(Wood, Hosea, p. 169)

Hosea's Marriage--Four Views:

1. It did not happen. It was a literary device. If Hosea was married to a harlot, he could not have had such a ministry (Lev 21:7-14).
2. It did happen. Gomer was a harlot when Hosea married her, and may have been a temple prostitute. His desire was to reform her.
3. Gomer's immorality was not moral but spiritual (idolatry).
4. Gomer was pure when Hosea married her, but later became a harlot. This is the proleptic/prophetic view (held by most conservatives) (taken from class notes, Leon Rowland).

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

The book of Hosea gives us a picture of God's heart, and reveals the love He has for His people.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. *Hosea teaches us about the changeless love of God.*

See: 11:8

Yahweh's relationship with Israel is portrayed as a marriage contract. Hosea represents God, and Gomer Israel. The two children represent what happened to Israel (Lo-Ruhamah, not loved, 1:6; Lo-Ammi, not my people, 1:9).

In the NT, the marriage analogy is used to depict the Lord's relationship with His Church (Eph 5:25).

2. *Hosea points out that a nation declines rapidly when its leaders become corrupt.*

Sin becomes contagious.

See: 4:1, 4-5, 6-9

3. *Hosea warns us of the danger of mere religion.*

In his day the spiritual leaders were caught up in activity, and missed the real thing. The priests were sacrificing more animals than ever, but the meaning was gone. Religious activity is no substitute for genuine knowledge of God.

See: 6:6 "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice..." (also 8:13)

Note: The cry (creed) of the people did not match their conduct.

--Their cry (8:2 "O our God, we acknowledge you!")

--Their conduct (8:3-6; idols, impurity)

Observations about Christianity today: More Christian publishing than ever; more books, more Christian radio and TV, but what's missing?