

Hosea

The Authorship and Dating

Internal evidence claims Hosea the Son of Beeri as the book's writer (1:1,2). The historical Hosea is confessed by liberal critics as well (excepting 11:8-11 and 14:2-9 which are predictive).¹ Those who believe in a God who can predict the future have no problem confessing Hosea as the author. Nothing is known about Hosea other than what is provided in the text.²

Concerning the book's dating the book itself indicates that Hosea was written during the reigns of Uzziah, Ahaz and Hezekiah. The book was written during times of general prosperity and safety.³ Although some date the book after the Samaritan conquest of Israel in 722, they do so in spite of the book's testimony of an earlier date (1:1; 4:15-19).⁴ Referring to the birth of Jezreel (1:4), Merrill states the following.

"...a son was born whose name, Jezreel, signified, that the dynasty of Jehu was about to come to an end. This actually came to pass with the murder of Zechariah by Shallum in 753. Since Zechariah is not mentioned by Hosea, the prediction must have been uttered while Jeroboam was still living."⁵

Given the evidence 750 B.C. is a reasonable date for this prophecy.⁶

The Recipients

The message is directed to both Judah and Israel (1:4-7; 4:1; 5:10-14 etc), with most directed toward the northern tribes.

The Purpose

Hosea wrote to expose the adulterous rebellion of Israel against their covenant God. Through the recent years prophets like Elijah and Elisha had preached against Israel's sins. Now the Lord raised up Hosea to pronounce coming judgment on a hardened nation. Hosea's message has as its background covenant infidelity on the part of Israel. The Lord had entered into a relational covenant with Israel (Deut. 28-30). Through that passage God promised blessing upon Israel if they continued in worship of Him. In the same passage He also promised cursing for their disobedience. Hosea's message serves as a warning to Judah and Israel for their covenantal disobedience. "This prophecy was God's last voice to the Northern Kingdom of Israel before its destruction. It was a gracious attempt to rescue individuals out of the doomed nation."⁷

¹ Gleason L. Jr. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*(Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). 357.

² Paul N. Benware, *The Essential Bible Survey of the Old Testament*(Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003).

³ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. Ronald B. Allen Earl D. Radmacher, H. Wayne House(Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999). 1025.

⁴ I notice that although the Ryrie study notes indicate that the author ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II (782-753), the author still recommends a dating of Isaiah to 710B.C. which is subsequent to the fall. However, there is no clear explanation for this difference. While it is understood that Ryrie is a conservative writer, I have yet to understand why this date is advocated within his notes. Concerning 4:15-19 there is a warning given to not go up to Ephraim due to their sinfulness and their coming judgment. This indicates that the book itself would have been written prior to the judgment.

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). 423.

⁶ Benware. 208.

⁷ Ibid. 209.

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The Message

Hosea is not an easy book to outline.⁸ However, the main idea of the book is easily grasped. Israel had grievously sinned against their covenant God. The book does so in shocking language: “the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord” (1:2).⁹ In order to explain Hosea’s relationship to this point I have included two lengthy quotes.

Each of the literary forms (or prophetic speech types) employed by Hosea in his prophetic book is typical of those found in the covenant enforcement documents of the preexilic prophets of the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries... Hosea’s oracles of salvation and restoration are messages of hope based on God’s faithfulness to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15: 17; 22) and to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89)... The prophet’s message of divine judgment was based on stipulations in the covenant made at Mount Sinai, and reiterated by Moses to the second generation of Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land. Hosea concluded five of his six major sections on judgment with Yahweh’s promise to restore a future righteous remnant to covenant privilege, prosperity, and blessings (1:1-11; 2:14-23; 3:5; 5:15b; 11:8-11; 14:4-8).¹⁰

By contrast, it is impossible to analyze Hosea without a thorough reckoning with his allusions to the Torah and to Israelite history. Hosea stood squarely within the traditions of Israel as he addressed the crises facing his generation. In particular, the stories of Genesis and the exodus event dominate the Book of Hosea. To Genesis, for example, Hosea makes among others the following allusions.

HOSEA TEXT	GENESIS REFERENCE
1:10	22:17, blessing on Abraham
2:18	1:20–25, creation of wild animals
4:3	1:20–25, creation of wild animals
6:7	3:6, sin of Adam
6:9	34:1–31, destruction of Shechem
9:6	47:29, burial in Egypt
9:14	49:25, blessings of the breasts and of the womb
11:8	14:2 (and Gen 19), destruction of cities of the plain
12:2–5	25:19–35:15, story of Jacob
12:12–13	30:25–31:16, Jacob’s sheep
13:15	41:2,18, pharaoh’s dream

⁸ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament a Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*(Grand Raids: Baker Academic, 1999). 265,272.

⁹ David Allan Hubbard William Sanford LaSor, Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey the Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, Second ed.(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996). 262.

¹⁰ Charles H. Silva, "Literary Features in the Book of Hosea," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164, no. (2007). 47.

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Examples of passing references to the exodus are at 7:13; 8:4–6; 9:10; 10:9–10; 11:1–4; 12:9–10; 13:4–6. Examples of allusions to other biblical texts could easily be multiplied. For example, Hos 2:9–10 alludes to the curses of Deuteronomy 28; and Hos 4:2 all but cites the Decalogue. Hosea 9:9 looks back to the bizarre history of Judges 19–21. Most significantly, the foundational metaphor of Hosea, Israel as an adulterous wife, is founded upon the Pentateuchal depiction of apostasy as whoredom.²⁴

In short, Hosea's critique of his generation is founded entirely upon the Pentateuch. Against this evidence it is difficult to resist the implication that the Pentateuch (including supposed P texts) preexisted the Book of Hosea. For our purposes, however, it is important to recognize that the interpretation of Hosea is impossible without reckoning with how he used the Torah as his canon.¹¹

Although the book is a difficult book to completely outline it should be noted that the whole message is built upon Hosea's relationship with Gomer (1-3). From this point the Lord pronounces sure judgment upon a privileged covenant nation which had completely given itself over to idolatry (4-14).

The Theme

God's Reaction to Israel's Spiritual Harlotry

¹¹ Duane Garet, "Hosea, Joel," in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997).

Outline

- I. Introduction 1:1**
- II. Israel's Harlotry Illustrated 1:2-3:5**
 - A. Hosea's Illustrative Marriage to Gomer 1:2-2:1**
 - 1. Hosea's Marriage to Adulterous Gomer 1:2
 - 2. Yahweh's Purposes Illustrated through their Children 1:3-2:1
 - B. Sin Stated and Restoration Promised 2:2-23**
 - C. Illustrative Reunion with Gomer 3:1-5**
 - 1. Hosea's Restoration with Gomer 3:1-3
 - 2. God's Promised Restoration with Israel 3:4-5
- III. Israel's Harlotry Addressed 4:1-14:19**
 - A. First Address 4:1-6:3**
 - 1. Message of Judgment 4:1-5:15
 - a. *Inhabitants of Land Lack Godliness 4:1-3¹²*
 - b. *Israel's Rebellion to Knowledge 4:6-11*
 - c. *Israel's Acceptance of Idols 4:12-19*
 - d. *Judgment Upon Israel and Judah 5:1-15*
 - 2. Message of Restoration 6:1-3
 - B. Second Address 6:4-11:12**
 - 1. Message of Judgment 6:4-10:15
 - a. *Israel's Deceit Toward God and Man 6:4-7:16*
 - b. *The Lord's Abandonment of Israel 8:1-7*
 - c. *Israel's Trust of Foreign Nations and gods 8:8-14*
 - d. *Israel's Removal to Egypt and Assyria 9:1-6*
 - e. *Israel's Rebellion 9:7-17*
 - f. *Israel's Coming Destruction before Assyria 10:1-8*
 - g. *Call to Repentance amidst Sure Destruction 10:9-15*
 - 1. Message of Restoration 11:1-12
 - C. Third Address 12:1-14:9**
 - 1. Message of Judgment 12:1-13:16
 - 2. Message of Restoration 14:1-9

¹² Working with a creation responsibility motif, Hosea charges that Israel has failed to properly represent Yahweh in the Land. They have failed to be faithful "אֱלֹהִים." That is they have worshipped Baal rather than Yahweh. They have failed to show covenantal "חַסְדִּים." That is they have failed to demonstrate mercy and kindness to their fellow man. They have failed to pursue knowledge (תְּדָרָה). They have failed to pursue through personal growth and desire a further understanding of their God. Hosea may be rebuking the Northern tribe as they abandoned the Davidic kingship.

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Questions for Hosea

1. What is the setting of Hosea?
2. How would you describe the overall theme of Hosea?
3. Do you believe that God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute in 1:2 or should we understand the word differently?
4. Describe God's use of names in 1:4-11.
5. What are some of the sins for which Ephraim is indicted?
6. Describe Egypt's as well as Assyria's relationship to the prophecy of Hosea.
7. Discuss the simile used in 7:4.
8. Discuss the statement in 4:17.
9. Describe Hosea's message of restoration.
10. How does Judah fit within the message of Hosea?

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