



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Hosea

Chapters 1-14

*When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.
--Hosea 1:2-3*

God's Covenant Love

The prophet Hosea's ministry was during the period divided monarchy and kingdom. Hosea was primarily directed to preach and write concerning the spiritual adultery of the Northern tribes Israel/Ephraim. But his message has warning and hope for Judah in the South as well. His prophetic ministry spanned a 40 year period of time leading up to the fall of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, to the Assyrians in 722 BC.

For the people of Israel, the book serves as a way of helping the people of the Northern Kingdom understand God's continuing and steadfast covenant love for them in the face of his severe judgment for their sin. It holds out hope for reunification with the Lord and Judah with repentance.

For the people of Judah, the book of Hosea serves as a severe lesson and warning not to abandon their first love, YHWH. It is to Judah that the LORD says, "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (6:6). Judah is following in the same course as their northern brothers. The call is to stay faithful to YHWH and rely on him alone. Judah must "sow righteousness", "reap steadfast love"... and "seek the Lord" (10:12).

So, Hosea's prophetic ministry was directed north but his prophetic message was not so subtly directed to the South. Judah would be wise and discerning to take heed (14:9). They are children from the same father: Jacob/Israel.

Literary Structure

The Prophet Hosea

Prologue: The Prophet's Wife of Unfaithfulness	1:1-3:5
The Indictment on Israel: The Spirit of Whoredom	4:1-6:3
Fatherly Concern, Love and Discipline: What shall I do with you Israel and Judah?	6:4-12:1
The Indictment on Judah: Learn the Lesson of Jacob	12:2-14:9



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The Prophet's Wife and Children of Unfaithfulness (1:1-3:5)

The call of Hosea was to experience the broken heart of God personally. His call was to take a wife, Gomer, who would become unfaithful and yet remain bound to her in covenant faithfulness. It would seem that the first child she bore was in faithfulness. His name was to be called Jezreel as a sign of the judgment on King Jehu for taking his role as an instrument of Judgment too far.

The second two children were children born in unfaithfulness, "Lo-ruhama (No Mercy) and Lo-Ammi (Not My People).

She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. ⁷ But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

⁸ When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."¹¹ And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. --Hosea 1:10-11

The children's names convey YHWH's concern for Israel's spiritual adultery. The people have broken covenant faithfulness with YHWH and worshiped and served foreign gods and lords in Baal and placed their hope in foreign alliances and kings. Because of their spiritual adultery, they have given birth to judgment (no mercy) and divorce (not my people).

However, in spite of the people's unfaithfulness and the coming judgment for their sin, YHWH will remain faithful to them. He restore and reunite his people (Hosea 1:10-11). God will redeem his marriage: "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.'" (2:16)



But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10

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The apostles and prophets of the New Testament will reflect on these verses in two ways. First, Jesus is the faithful husband to the unfaithful Samaritan bride (See John 2:1-12; 3:29; 4:1-45). The marriage theme is prominent in Ephesians 5:25-27 and Revelation 21-22.

Also, Paul and Peter surprisingly apply the renaming of "not my people" to "my people" to the inclusion of the Gentiles with the people of Israel in salvation under the Messiah (see Romans 9:25-26; 11:25-32; 1 Peter 2:10).

Hosea sees Israel and Judah's destiny as being bound together. While Israel is now under judgment in the latter days there will be restoration under a Davidic messiah.

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. Hos. 3:4-5

The Indictment on Israel: The Spirit of Whoredom (4:1-6:3)

In verses 4:1-6:3, Hosea records his strong indictment on the Northern tribes; they have broken covenant with God and transgressed the stipulations in the Law of Moses. Essentially, they are breaking the Ten Commandments:

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; ² there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. 4:1-2



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Hosea continues with a withering prophetic lawsuit (often called a 'rib') against his people who have been led astray by a "spirit of whoredom" (4:12-14). The prophet is clearly concerned not only for Israel, but also for Judah (4:15). They have engaged in sexually immoral cultic practices. Baal worship required temple prostitution (4:14). They have also looked to foreign kings and alliances (5:13). But the Lord's desire is that they would repent of their unfaithfulness to the covenant and return back to him. Though, he punishes them, the LORD desires their return (5:15-6:3):

*I will return again to my place,
until they acknowledge their guilt and seek
my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.*

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
--1 Cor. 15:3-6*

Israel's song of return will be one of resurrection. The writers of the New Testament saw this scripture fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Luke 24:46; 1 Cor. 15:4).

*⁶ "Come, let us return to the LORD;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.
² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
³ Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth."*

Fatherly Concern, Love and Discipline: What shall I do with you Israel and Judah? (6:4-12:1)

In chapter 6 the covenantal relationship is compared more to that of a father to a disobedient child. Hosea's prophecy continues with an expression of Fatherly concern for all of his people, both Israel and Judah. The Lord asks, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?" (6:4)



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The problems manifest in Israel are also in the heart of Judah. The root of the problem is a lack of love for the Lord (6:4-6).

*Your love is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes early away.
5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgment goes forth as the light.
6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt
offerings.7 But like Adam they transgressed the
covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with
me. -- Hos. 6:4-7*

Israel is compared to a rebellious immature child. The Lord desires to heal, but they continue to reject him (7:1). They are prideful (7:10) and foolish in their immaturity (7:11). So the LORD will discipline them (7:12). They throw temper tantrums in rebellion (7:14) even though the Lord trained them to behave otherwise (7:15). Therefore, they will be punished.

Judah must learn the lesson from its immature northern brothers and stay focused on working for righteousness. Judah must plow, sow and reap:

*Sow for yourselves righteousness;
reap steadfast love;
break up your fallow ground,
for it is the time to seek the LORD,
that he may come and rain righteousness
upon you. --Hos. 10:12*

This section concludes with a recounting of YHWH's fatherly love and tender mercy in spite of rebellion. The Lord called his people of Israel "my son" (11:1). The heart of YHWH is that of a father who loves deeply his rebellious prodigal son. Even though they are hell bent (11:7), the LORD cannot bring himself to destroy his child (11:8-9) He will call to his rebellious children and they will come back to their father (11:10-11).



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Ephraim is currently in a state of rebellion (11:12-12:1), but Judah is still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One (11:12):

*Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,
and the house of Israel with deceit,
but Judah still walks with God
and is faithful to the Holy One. Hos. 11:12*

The question is: Will Judah stay faithful? Hosea's last section is really directed at Judah.

The Indictment on Judah: Learn the Lesson of Jacob (12:2-14:9)

The northern and southern tribes are descendants of the same father Jacob--to whom the name Israel was given. So the last section is directed to Judah with a call to learn the lessons from the northern tribes rebellion and judgment.

*The Lord has an indictment against Judah
and will punish Jacob according to his ways;
he will repay him according to his deeds. 12:2*

Hosea concludes his prophetic book recounting the story of Jacob who was not perfect but wrestled with God and was redeemed. Samaria and Israel are fighting with God right now. The Lord is will discipline them and prevail over them. Ultimately, he will heal Jacob/Israel and love them freely.

*I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them. 14:4*

The question for those in Judah who read Hosea's prophecy is whether they will be wise and learn the lessons from Israel (14:9)

*Whoever is wise, let him
understand these things;
whoever is
discerning, let him know
them;
for the ways of the LORD
are right,
and the upright walk
in them,
but transgressors
stumble in them.
Hosea 14:9*