

4. Hosea

I. Background and Context

- A. Hosea wrote during the time of the Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel (often referred to as Ephraim) somewhere between 753 B.C. and 687 B.C.
- B. As with many prophets, the book of Hosea makes it clear that his authority rests on the word of God alone (cf. 1.1 & 1.2).
- C. Hosea depicts Israel's unfaithfulness using a number of analogies, including "a promiscuous wife, an indifferent mother, an illegitimate child, an ungrateful son, a stubborn heifer, a silly dove, a luxuriant vine, and grapes in the wilderness."¹
- D. Hosea wrote in the time of the neo-Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III, who was followed by "several capable kings who extended Assyrian dominance."² The stability and power of the Assyrian empire was contrasted by the "unparalleled political upheaval and instability"³ of Israel had six kings in a period of 30 years, several of which were assassinated (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, Pekah).
- E. The idol worship of Baal, weather-god of Syria-Palestine, was prevalent in Hosea's time, along with ritual prostitution and sexual intimacy at the pagan shrines that corresponded to "fertile seed and rain for a good crop."⁴ It should not be surprising then that Hosea reminds the Israelites that they have been joined to the Lord as his bride and that idol worship is the equivalent of "transgression against the marriage between the Lord and Israel (cf. Ex. 34.11-16; Lev. 17.7; 20.4-6; Deut. 31.16)."⁵ The Israelites are actually quite zealous in their religion (2.11, 4.13, 8.13), but this is not honorable to the Lord (6.6)!
- F. Like Amos, Hosea notes that the prosperity of Israel has led the Israelites to greater and deeper idolatry (10.1, 13.6).

II. Outline

- A. Ch. 1-3 is a "biographical sketch that enhances the message"⁶ of God's mercy for his people. Ch. 4-14 "expands and applies the essential message of God's mercy for his people."⁷
 1. Biographical: Hosea's Family (1.1-3.5)
 - a) Hosea's commission (1.1)
 - b) Hosea's wife and children (1.2-7)
 - c) Promise to gather Israel (1.10-11)
 - d) Israel's unfaithfulness (2.1-13)
 - e) The Lord's mercy on Israel, demonstrated by his mercy on Hosea's children (2.14-23)
 - f) Hosea redeems Gomer (3.1-4)
 - g) Israel's restoration (3.5)
 2. Hosea Spells Out His Parable with Accusations, Warnings, and Promises (4.1-14.9)
 - a) Legal proceedings continued (4.1-19)
 - b) Adultery in high places (5.1-14)
 - c) Appeal: return and be raised (5.15-6.3)
 - d) Transgressors of the covenant (6.4-7.3)

¹ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1619.

² *ESV Study Bible*, 1619.

³ *ESV Study Bible*, 1619.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, 1620.

⁵ *ESV Study Bible*, 1620.

⁶ *ESV Study Bible*, 1619.

⁷ *ESV Study Bible*, 1619.

- e) Four similes for unfaithful Israel: oven, cake, dove, treacherous bow (7.4-16)
- f) Israel's hypocrisy (8.1-14)
- g) Warnings: no worship in a foreign land (9.1-9)
- h) More similes for unfaithful Israel: grapes, vine, calf, toddler (9.10-11.11)
- i) Dependence on alliances (11.12-12.1)
- j) Further indictment based on historical review (12.2-14)
- k) Worship of man-made gods (13.1-8)
- l) Rejecting the only hope they have (13.9-16)
- m) Closing appeals (14.1-9)

III. Key Passages

A. Biographical: Hosea's Family

	God's Word	Hosea's Example	Israel's History
Israel's Sin	Israel betrayed her husband and chased after lovers (2.5, 7), scorning the gifts of God's covenant blessings (2.8).	Hosea is commanded to take a "wife of whoredom," (Gomer) symbolizing the idolatrous nature of Israel as a nation and of their Baalism particularly (1.2).	Israel had embraced Baal worship, with its cult prostitution rituals at the altars.
God's Righteous Judgment	God promises to reveal Israel's sin (2.3, 10) and remove his blessings (2.9, 12-13), ultimately as a way of putting an end to Israel's idolatrous practices (2.11). But there is healing in the revealing of sin (7.1)!	Hosea's children are named Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My People (1.4-11).	Israel was divided into two kingdoms and would soon be invaded by Assyria.
Promised Redemption	The children of Israel will be gathered together and will be called "Children of the living God" (1.10-11). God will "hedge up her way" to prevent Israel from backsliding (2.6).	God will have mercy on No Mercy and will call Not My People his people (2.14-23). Hosea serves as a redeemer for Gomer (3.1-5).	A symbolic David was promised, pointing forward to the future arrival of a Messianic king (3.5).

- B. **Henry**, The state of Israel ruined by their own sin did not look so black and dismal in the former part of the chapter, but that the state of Israel, restrained by the divine grace, looks as bright and pleasant here in the latter part of the chapter, and the more surprisingly so as the promises follow thus close upon the threatenings; nay, which is very strange, they are by a note of connexion joined to, and inferred from, that declaration of their sinfulness upon which the threatenings of their ruin are grounded: She went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord; therefore I will allure her. Fitly therefore is that *therefore* which is the note of connexion immediately followed with a note of admiration: Behold I will allure her! When it was said, She forgot me, one would think it should have followed, "Therefore I will abandon her, I will forget her, I will never look after her more." No, Therefore I will allure her. Note, God's thoughts and ways of mercy are infinitely above ours; his reasons are all fetched from within himself, and not from any thing in us; nay, his goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious.⁸
- C. Despite the clear judgment against Israel and the weight of punishment it carries in chapters 4-10, yet God makes it clear that his love for Israel will cause him to redeem his beloved (11.3-9). He knows the wilderness will be sanctifying for Israel (2.14, 12.9), but it will not be a full end for Israel (11.8-9).
- D. The book ends with a promise of redemption (14.4-9). The fruit God demands of Israel (14.5-6) is in God himself, the True Vine (cf. 14.7-8, Jn. 15.1-4).

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2014, www.biblestudytools.com.