

Book of Hosea

Hosea's prophecy gave Israel a tangible example of its spiritual idolatry, yet portrayed God's love for Israel in spite of her spiritual infidelity.

It constituted a national call to repentance.

Title:

The title is derived from the main character and author of the book.

The meaning of his name, "salvation," is the same as that of Joshua (compare Num. 13:8, 16), and Jesus (Matt. 1:21).

Hosea is the first of the 12 Minor Prophets.

"Minor" refers to the brevity of the prophecies as compared to the length of the works of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Author – Date:

This prophecy provides the sole source of information concerning the author, "Hosea the son of Beeri" (1:1).

Nothing is known of Beeri, "Expounder," although a different man by the same name is mentioned (in Genesis 26:34).

In the course of the prophecy he was commanded to marry Gomer who bore two sons and a daughter (1:3b-11).

Many believe her lover sired one or more children.

Throughout the prophecy the prophet's personal history was made to be symbolic of the relationship between the Lord and Israel.

Because of the tragic details of his personal life, Hosea has been known as the broken hearted prophet.

His sorrow provides a good illustration of the broken hearted Lord in His relationship with sinful mankind.

Hosea was probably a native of the northern kingdom of Israel, since he shows familiarity with the history, circumstances and topography of the north (4:15; 5:1, 13; 6:8-9; 10:5, 12:11-12; 14:6).

This would make him and Jonah the only writing prophets from the northern kingdom.

Although he addressed both Israel (the northern kingdom), and Judah (the southern kingdom), he identified the king of Israel as “our king” (7:5).

Hosea had a lengthy period of ministry, prophesying (ca. 755-710 B.C.), during the reigns of Uzziah (790-739 B.C.), Jotham (750-731 B.C.); Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.), in Judah, and Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.), in Israel (1:1).

His long career spanned the last 6 kings of Israel from Zechariah (753-752 B.C.) to Hoshea (732-722 B.C.).

The overthrow of Zechariah (the last of the dynasty of Jehu in 752 B.C.), is depicted as yet future (1:4).

Thus, he followed Amos’ preaching in the north, and was a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah as well, both of whom prophesied in Judah.

2 Kings Chapters 14-20 and 2 Chronicles Chapters 26-32, record the historical period of Hosea’s ministry.

Historical Setting:

The prophecy is characterized by intense emotion as the prophet’s personal tragedy (Chapters 1-3), is transferred and applied to the nation (Chapters 4-14).

Hosea was to the northern kingdom what Jeremiah was to the southern kingdom, a weeping prophet.

Hosea looked forward to the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom, just as Jeremiah looked forward to the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom.

Hosea’s prophecy is closely related to that of Amos.

Amos was very severe in his prophecy and his ministry was somewhat like a James or John the Baptist of the Old Testament.

Both Amos and Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom, although Amos was a native of the southern kingdom and Hosea of the northern kingdom.

Hosea was the younger contemporary of Amos, and because their ministries overlap, there is much similarity in the sins they condemn.

In Amos, the prophetic discourses are very pronounced, while in Hosea, because of the intense personal involvement of the prophet, they are not very distinctly defined from one another, a fact that makes the book difficult to outline.

Hosea dates his prophecy” in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel” (1:1).

Hosea’s ministry extended from about (770 to 725 B.C.).

Thus, his active ministry ceased a few years before Assyria carried the northern kingdom into captivity (in 722 B.C.).

Hosea was a citizen of the northern kingdom and his personal experience was designed by God to be an example to his nation.

Circumstances were not much better in the southern kingdom.

Usurping the priestly function, Uzziah had been struck with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21); Jotham condoned idolatrous practices, opening the way for Ahaz to encourage Baal worship (2 Chron. 27:1 – 28:4).

Hezekiah’s revival served only to slow Judah’s acceleration toward a fate similar to that of her northern sister.

Weak kings on both sides of the border repeatedly sought out alliances with their heathen neighbors (7:11; compare 2 Kings 15:19; 16:7), rather than seeking the Lord’s help.

Background – Setting:

Hosea began his ministry to Israel (also called Ephraim, after its largest tribe), during the final days of Jeroboam II.

Under whose guidance Israel was enjoying both political peace and material prosperity as well as moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy.

Upon Jeroboam II’s death (753 B.C.) however, anarchy prevailed and Israel declined rapidly.

Until her overthrow by Assyria 30 years later, four of Israel’s six kings were assassinated by their successors.

Prophesying during the days surrounding the fall of Samaria, Hosea focuses on Israel's moral waywardness (compare the book of Amos), and her breach of the covenantal relationship with the Lord, announcing that judgment was imminent.

Historical – Theological Settings:

The theme of Hosea is God's loyal love for His covenant people, Israel, in spite of their idolatry.

Thus, Hosea has been called John (the apostle of love) of the Old Testament.

The Lord's true love from His people is unending and will tolerate no rival.

Hosea's message contains much condemnation, both national and individual, but at the same time, he poignantly portrays the love of God toward His people with passionate emotion.

Hosea was instructed by God to marry a certain woman and experience with her a domestic life which was a dramatization of the sin and unfaithfulness of Israel.

The marital life of Hosea and his wife, Gomer, provide the rich metaphor which clarifies the themes of the book; sin, judgment and forgiving love.