

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

# Hosea

Hosea the prophet lived and preached around 750 B.C., the same time as Isaiah, Amos, and Micah. His 14 chapters, between Daniel and Amos, equal Zechariah for most chapters by a minor prophet.

Hosea's written words are passionate cries and rebukes against the house of Israel and, to a lesser extent, Judah (Jerusalem is not mentioned). The northern ten tribes of Israel are called Ephraim (37 times), after Judah's leading tribe, and Samaria (6 times), after its capital city. Vacillating between loyalty to Egypt (13 mentions) and Assyria (8 mentions), the house of Israel will soon fall to Assyria, while the house of Judah will be miraculously spared (1:6, 7; 11:12).

Hosea's theme is the lovingkindness and tender mercies of God. The prophet uses the motif of marriage to illustrate this theme, as well as Israel's sin. Israel is the wife who strays from her faithful husband, Yahweh, to "play the harlot." Her unfaithfulness to God is seen in Hosea's immoral wife, Gomer, some of whose children were fathered by other men (1:2; 2:4; 3:1). This was a sin against love.

Israel's basic responsibility in covenant with God was to "know" Him (2:20; 4:6; 5:4; 6:3; 8:2; 13:4, 5). This word, used elsewhere of marital intimacy (Gen. 4:1, 17, 25), means a love relationship deeper than mental knowledge. As repeated sexual unfaithfulness can mean the end of a marriage covenant, so continual worship of other gods — "spiritual adultery" — broke Israel's covenant with Yahweh (6:7; 8:1; 10:4; 2:23b). Thus, God could bring "charges" against His people (4:1; 12:2).

**Idolatry** was a constant problem for Israel. The northern kingdom erected its own calf-gods at Beth Aven, followed after Baals, built pagan altars under green trees in high places, and trusted Egypt and Assyria (2:8, 13, 17; 4:13, 15, 17; 5:8; 8:4, 5, 6; 9:10; 10:10:1, 2, 5; 11:2; 13:1, 2). This is spiritual adultery, leading to the equivalents of miscarriage and abortion (4:10-19; 5:3-7; 6:9, 10; 7:4; 8:9; 9:1, 10-16; 13:16).

General idolatry brought specific sins in Israel: swearing, lying, killing, stealing, religious hypocrisy, wine and women, deceit and pride (4:2, 11; 5:5; 7:1-5, 14-16; 11:7; 12:7, 8). The priests were doubly guilty by poor leadership (4:4-10). Israel's rebellion and God's chastening became like a "desert storm" (2:3; 4:19; 5:9; 8:7; 10:8; 12:1; 13:3, 15).

But the valley of trouble would become a door of hope (2:15). The compassionate God suffered long with His beloved, wayward people and called them to repent (2:19, 20; 3:1; 5:15; 6:1-3; 11:8, 9; 12:6; 14:1-4): "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, till He comes and rains righteousness on you" (10:12).

**God's constant mercy** to unfaithful Israel was dramatically shown as Hosea married Gomer and received her back after her harlotry (1:2; 3:1ff). Israel and

Judah's later captivity in Assyria and Babylon may have "cured" them of idolatry (3:3-5; 14:4).

Hosea's firstborn was named Jezreel (1:3-5), meaning "God sows." He was a symbol of God's promise to re-plant and restore Israel (sounds like Jezreel) to fruitfulness in her own land (1:10, 11; 2:1, 21-23; 6:11; 10:12; 14:5-8). Gomer's second and third children (fathers unknown) were called "no mercy" and "not my people" (1:6-9), for obvious reasons. But they could obtain mercy, become God's people, and receive a new name (2:1, 23).

Threats of punishment run throughout Hosea (2:9-13; 5:8-14; 7:11-16; 8:1-14; 9:1-16; 10:13-15, etc.), but they are interwoven with a golden strand of the Lord's deep mercy and love. Despite disappointment with His sinning, straying people, God pictures a bright future and promises to "heal their backslidings" (1:10, 11; 2:14-23; 3:5; 14:4-9).

Hosea's love of animals and nature: (2:18-22; 4:3, 16; 5:6; 6:3; 7:11, 12; 8:1, 9; 10:1, 4, 8, 11-13; 14:5-7). Like destruction of moth, lion, bear, and leopard will the Lord deal with Israel (5:12, 14; 13:7, 8).

Gilgal, Gilead, Gibeah: Places infamous by the people's rebellion (4:15; 5:8; 6:8; 9:9, 15; 10:9; 12:11)

**Hosea in the New Testament**

- 1:10 - in Romans 9:26; 1 Peter 2:10
- 6:2 - in Luke 24:46\*
- 6:6 - in Matthew 9:13; 12:7
- 11:1 - in Matthew 2:15
- 13:14 - in 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55\*

\*Speaks of the Resurrection

**Hosea in a sentence:** Even as his adulterous wife can be loved and forgiven by the prophet, so idolatrous Israel is loved by her God and will be received and blest as she returns to Him.