

Hosea

Introduction

Hosea



Why read this book?

This book tells a story as contemporary as today's talk shows—that of a man's love for his unfaithful spouse. But the story of the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer illustrates another love story—that God loves us, even when our sins have broken his heart. Here is a picture of a God who longs to forgive us when we turn to him.

Who wrote this book?

Hosea, a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel.

To whom was it written?

Hosea originally delivered his prophecies to the northern kingdom of Israel. After Assyria conquered Israel, the words were transcribed to scrolls as a record of prophecy fulfilled and as a warning—possibly to the remnant left behind in Israel, or possibly to the people of Judah.

When was it written?

Approximately 715 B.C. But Hosea first prophesied around 753 B.C. and continued to speak to the people until Samaria and the northern kingdom fell in 722 B.C.

What was happening at this time?

Jeroboam II was a wicked king whose leadership had produced a materialistic, immoral, unjust society. Six kings ruled Israel within 25 years. *This* was the twilight of the northern kingdom.

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What to look for in Hosea:

Don't be shocked by the prostitution, unfaithfulness, and sorrow in this book. Notice the stark consequences of sin as God states his case against his people. But then, look beyond Hosea's suffering (and God's pain) to see an example of love that will not quit— first, in God's love for his people Israel, and second, in God's love for us. Look for ways that Hosea loved his undeserving wife and consider how God does the same for us.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*



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Leader's Guide

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The world's greatest love story

Hosea may be the strangest story of "one who speaks for God." Israel's desperate situation is encapsulated for the nation in the marriage of Hosea and Gomer. Hosea is told to go and buy his wife back from the state of prostitution she has entered. This becomes a parable of Israel's faithless relationship with God. Yet God is willing to love her back to a position of being faithful. God is not silent! He still speaks to us today. This study from the Book of Hosea will look at God's passionate love for his people.

Scripture: **Hosea**

Based On: **"The Minor Prophets: God Still Speaks to Us Today," by Tom Cowan**



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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Hosea had a long period of ministry, perhaps 50 or 60 years, which spanned the reigns of four successive kings in the southern kingdom and Jeroboam in the northern kingdom. Prior to Hosea's ministry, Israel had suffered defeat and humiliation. But under the strong leadership of several kings, such as Jehoash and then his son Jeroboam, Israel began to enjoy a period of recovery. Because of this, those of Hosea's time, living at the close of Jeroboam's reign and also following it, knew of oppression and defeat only through the memory of their fathers. They were beginning to enjoy a period of recovery and military peace, bringing economic prosperity.

Some signs of this: the land was again producing abundantly because farmers were able to work it in peace (2 Chron. 26:10); many people were becoming wealthy; luxuries were becoming common; new building and construction was taking place (Hos. 8:14).

This created a widespread feeling of pride. People were pleased with what was going on. Yet as is often the case, this did not create spiritual growth. Prosperity seldom produces spirituality. In fact, it often produces the opposite, and this is exactly what was happening in Israel.

The pagan cult of Baal had introduced many ideas that were counter to the kind of covenant relationship that Israel should have kept with Jehovah. Apparently sacred prostitution, which was common in the fertility rites of the Baal cult, was still being practiced (see Hosea 4:10–18). Amos had preached against this kind of practice, but it seems that few had paid attention to his word, so now it was the turn of Hosea to speak for God. He spoke out against the evils of his day.

[Q] What do you know of the Minor Prophets? What sticks out to you when you think of these 12 books?

[Q] Who speaks prophetically to us today?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: God's love for his people is that of a faithful husband.

You will see that the first three chapters tell us how God asked Hosea to do a very difficult thing: "When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, 'Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.' So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim . . ." (1:2–3). Read Hosea 1–3.



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Leader's Note: *Since that's a lot of reading, you may want to break the group into three smaller groups. Ask each group to read one chapter and summarize it for everyone else.*

This instruction from God to Hosea has created a lot of discussion. Are we to regard this as a real marriage, or was this just a parable?

Leader's Note: *There are four main lines of thought:*

1) A Hypothetical Marriage: *This takes the position that the marriage never really happened, but is more like an allegory, in which God describes how Israel has been unfaithful;*

2) A Literal Marriage—Gomer Unchaste: *This takes the position that this was a real marriage, and Gomer was already a temple prostitute. This seems to be the most natural way to understand 1:2. While priests were forbidden to marry someone who was unchaste, Hosea was a prophet, and so that law would not specifically apply to him;*

3) Spiritual Infidelity: *This view, not as widely held, sees the situation as one of spiritual rather than physical infidelity. It says that Gomer became unchaste because, like many of the Israelites in Hosea's day, she became a worshiper of false gods;*

4) Literal Marriage—Gomer Chaste: *This says that the marriage did occur, and that Gomer was faithful to Hosea before they were married. She later became adulterous, but Hosea was still committed to her and wanted to win her back.*

[Q] Why do you think Hosea was able to follow through with this instruction from God?

[Q] What do these chapters tell you about Hosea? Gomer?

Optional Activity: *If you would like to prepare for the next question, ask: Those of you who are parents, why did you choose your children's names? Or ask: Did you like the name your parents gave you? Why or why not?*

[Q] What message about Israel is being described in each child (1:3–10)?

[Q] What do these chapters tell you about the character of God?

[Q] Israel was charged with committing spiritual adultery. If Hosea were preaching today, what would he find as present day examples of spiritual adultery in the church? How have we as God's people repeated the mistake of Israel?



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Teaching Point Two: God is clear in what he demands from the people he loves.

Imagine yourself in a courtroom where God is the prosecuting attorney. Hosea 4:6 is a critical verse: “. . . my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. ‘Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.’”

Read chapters 4–7.

[Q] In 4:1–2, what is the charge or case that God brings against the people?

[Q] Hosea 4:6 says that the people are being destroyed because of a lack of knowledge. What knowledge were they lacking?

Leader's Note: *You can trace the theme of knowledge through the following verses: Hosea 6:3; 6:6; 13:4; Romans 1:18–21.*

[Q] Hosea 6:1–3 begins with a cry of repentance. Is it genuine? How does verse 4 reveal the quality of their repentance?

[Q] Hosea 7:4, 6–8, 11, and 16 give four images of Israel's less than genuine repentance. How is each image used?

[Q] What is God really looking for in the lives of his people (6:6; Ps. 51:16–17)?

[Q] Based on chapters 4–7, how would you summarize how God intends to judge the nation?

Teaching Point Three: God disciplines the people he loves.

It may help you to see the five movements of sin in Hosea 8: breaking of God's covenant (vv. 1–3); choosing kings and leaders without God's consent (v. 4); idolatry (vv. 4–6); forming alliances with the ungodly nation of Assyria (vv. 8–10); and building false altars (vv. 11–13). This is summed up in 8:14: “Israel has forgotten his Maker . . .”

Read Hosea 8–10.

[Q] How do Hosea 8:14 and Deuteronomy 8:11–18 relate to each other?

[Q] How would you summarize God's feelings in chapter 9?

[Q] What strikes you about the emotions of God so far in Hosea? What do they tell you about him?



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Teaching Point Four: God restores his beloved people.

You will see that in spite of God's anger, the story of Hosea is really a story about restorative love. Read Hosea 11.

[Q] How does this chapter describe what is in God's heart for his people?

In Hosea 14:1–7, we have another appeal to repentance. We must note how different this is from the false appeal that we saw in 6:1–3. The tone seems to be entirely different.

[Q] What do you think the difference is?

[Q] Does the difference lie with God, or with the people?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To worship the God who restores his beloved.*

Activity: *Reread Hosea 11. Write a letter to God in response to his emotional response to his people. Make it a letter of adoration, repentance, and thanksgiving. If you do this as a group, have each person write a line of the letter, folding it over so the next person can't see the previous entries. Pass the letter around the circle twice. Then, read the entire letter out loud to God as a prayer. You may be surprised that the sum is greater than its parts.*

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

A key theme in Hosea is our need to know the loving God (6:3, 6). We need to know the God whose love is like that of a faithful husband, who is clear in what he demands of his people, who disciplines the ones he loves, and who restores his beloved in light of true repentance.

[Q] What is the main aspect of God's character that you find in Hosea?

[Q] What do you see as the main lesson from Hosea for the church today? How are we unfaithful and guilty of spiritual adultery?

Action Point: **What makes the difference in our spiritual lives between times when our repentance is shallow and short-lived, and times when there is a real and permanent change? Read 2 Corinthians 11:2. Take 30 minutes or more this week to meditate upon this verse and ask the Holy Spirit to bring any issues of repentance to the surface. Use your time for confession, renunciation of sin, and repentance.**

—Study by Tom Cowan, with Kyle White

