

Introduction to Hosea

Where is it in the Bible?

Hosea is the twenty-eighth book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Daniel and Joel. It is the first book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section; they are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles. “The reason why [Hosea] is placed first among the Minor Prophets lies in the statement in 1:2: ‘When the Lord first spoke through Hosea,’ which was taken by the rabbis to mean that Hosea was the first of the prophets through whom the Lord spoke.”¹

Who wrote it?

Hosea was a contemporary of Amos who also announced God’s anger and coming judgment in the northern kingdom of Israel. “Most of the messages in the book of Hosea were spoken by Hosea. We do not know if he wrote them down himself; his words were most probably collected by followers who were convinced that he spoke for God.”² These editors determined the final form of the messages and the way they are presented.

When was it written?

Most scholars feel that Hosea was active between 750 and 725 B.C., possibly all the way up to the fall of Israel in 722 B.C. The book was put together later in Judah, probably before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The text of Hosea is difficult and unclear in places, possibly because of an underlying northern dialect which scholars today do not completely understand.

What is it about?

The book of Hosea is about the covenant relationship between God and the people. Through the years, God had fulfilled God’s promises by providing land, descendants, and other blessings. But the people had turned their backs on God by worshiping idols, by relying on political solutions to problems instead of trusting God, and by failing to promote justice in society. In spite of this, God still loved them and wanted them to repent and the relationship to be restored.

How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. Hosea’s Family (1:2-3:5)
 - a. Marriage to Gomer and Naming of Children (1:2-11)
 - b. Interpretation of Hosea’s Marriage (2:1-23)
 - c. Command to Love an Adulteress (3:1-5)

¹John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 296.

²Rolf Jacobson at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=22>

- III. Prophetic Messages of Judgment (4:1-14:9)
- a. Opening Summary (4:1-3)
 - b. Charges of Infidelity (4:4-5:7)
 - c. Warning and Lament (5:8-6:6)
 - d. Accusations and Judgment (6:7-10:15)
 - e. God's Compassion (11:1-11)
 - f. Judgment Against Israel and Judah (11:12-13:16)
 - g. Call to Repentance and Promise of Salvation (14:1-9)

What are some things to look for?

- **Connection between Loving God and Others:** Hosea sees a connection between the command to love God and the command to love the neighbor. "Hosea taught that to love God is to love the neighbor and to refrain from doing evil. He also proclaimed that the love of gods other than the Lord led people to commit acts of injustice and oppression."³ When a person loves God, this is reflected in obedience and a godly lifestyle.
- **Failure of Leadership:** Hosea condemns Israel's leaders for their failure to lead the people faithfully. The religious leaders did not fulfill their responsibility to teach God's ways, and the people turned to idolatry as a result. The civil leaders are criticized for political intrigues and ungodly behavior including the oppression of the poor by the wealthy.
- **God's Anger and Judgment:** God's anger is not the opposite of God's love but a result of it. Because God loves God's people, God is angry with those who oppress them when they suffer. Similarly, God's judgment does not end the covenant but is a tool used to instruct the people and bring them back into the relationship. Sections of the book which pronounce judgment end with the promise of restoration, for example in 2:14-3:5.
- **Marriage Metaphor:** The first three chapters of the book use marriage as a metaphor for God's relationship with the people. Hosea's marriage to Gomer is a symbolic action which depicts a faithful husband (God) married to a faithless wife (Israel). The focus of this section is on the relationship between God and the people and should not be interpreted as showing how husbands should treat their wives or used to justify abuse of women and children.

3 Jacobson at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=22>