

INTRODUCTION TO 28TH BIBLEBOOK

HOSEA (754-714 B.C.)(4th)

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A. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

Hosea is the first of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name Hosea means *salvation*. Because Hosea speaks of the northern ten tribes as ‘the land’ (1:2) and he calls the king of Israel ‘our king’ (7:5), he was most probably *a citizen of the northern kingdom of Israel*, during the height of its kingdom under king Jeroboam II. Hosea worked in the northern kingdom of Israel and his prophecies were mainly directed to them. However, as prophet of the Lord, his prophecies at times were also directed against the southern kingdom of Judah (3:4-5).

Hosea began his prophesying probably during the last part of the reign of Jeroboam II (783-743 B.C.) and must have prophesied during the reign of the other kings of the northern kingdom. The reason why Hosea refrained from mentioning the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel was probably because they were *usurpers, illegitimate kings*. Instead he mentioned the legitimate kings of the house of David: Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz, who ruled in Judah. Hosea probably witnessed the exile of the northern kingdom to Assyria in 721 B.C., just as Jeremiah witnessed the exile of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C. He probably prophesied till the beginning of the reign of Hezekiah. Thus, Hosea probably prophesied in the period 754-714 B.C.

The book of Hosea consists of a collection of many prophecies made over a long period of time. They are arranged chronologically in more or less four periods of time.

B. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

The book of Hosea may be given the title, *“Israel’s sin, punishment and restoration.”*
Their restoration is dependent on ‘admitting their guilt and seeking the LORD’s face earnestly’ (5:15)

It has four cyclical parts:

1. The first cycle. Hosea 1:1 to 3:5. (During the reign of Jeroboam II)(782-743 B.C.)

The theme is the marriage relationship between the LORD and Israel. Israel’s unfaithfulness is restored by the LORD’s faithful love.

- Sin. Gomer was unfaithful to her husband (1:2-9).
- Punishment: Gomer was stripped naked, her lewdness was exposed before the eyes of her lovers and she was deserted by her lovers (2:2-13). For many days Israel will live in exile without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, but also without their idols (3:4).
- Restoration: Gomer would be bought back by her husband (1:10 to 2:1, 2:14-23 and 3:1-5). After the return from exile, Israel will again seek the LORD their God and David their king (3:5).

Fulfilment. God’s covenant promise¹ would again be fulfilled during the return from exile. The edict of Cyrus² and the edict of Artaxerxes³ include all the Israelites who wish to return. Those who returned from exile regarded themselves as the representatives of the twelve tribes⁴.

2. The second cycle. Hosea 4:1 to 6:3. (After the fall of dynasty of Jehu)(after 743 B.C.)

The emphasis is on those who sin, who will be punished and who will be healed.

- Sin. A degenerated nation, degenerated priests and degenerated worship (4:1-14).
- Punishment. Both Israel and Judah will fall. The day of reckoning is close (4:15 to 5:9).
- Restoration. Assyria is not able to heal Ephraim, but when they admit their guilt and seek God’s face earnestly, he will heal them (5:10 to 6:3).

3. The third cycle. Hosea 6:4 to 11:11. (During the reign of Pekah and Hoshea)(736-732 B.C. and 731-723 B.C.)

The emphasis is on the sins, punishments and restoration of Israel.

- Sin: Israel is in league with criminals, murderers, foreign nations, and breakers of God’s covenant (6:4 to 8:14).
- Punishment. Israel will not remain in the land, but will be carried away in exile to Egypt and Assyria, become childless (no conception, pregnancy or birth)(9:11) and be completely destroyed (9:1 to 10:15).

¹ Genesis 22:1

² Ezra 1:1-4

³ Ezra 7:13

⁴ Ezra 6:17; 8:35

- **Restoration.** God's love does not give his people up. (11:1-11). *"Yes, I was the one who taught Israel to walk. I took my people up in my arms, but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them. I drew them to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them"* (11:3-4)(Good News Bible)

4. The fourth cycle. Hosea 11:12 to 14:9. (During the reign of Hoshea)(731-723 B.C.)

The emphasis is on the grievous character of sins, the severity of the punishments and the grace of restoration.

- **Sin.** In spite of God's faithfulness, Israel has become unfaithful. In spite of God's revelation to Jacob at Bethel, Israel worships idols at Bethel. In spite of God's leading Israel out of Egypt, Israel copies the morals of Egypt (11:12 to 12:14).
- **Punishment.** God's punishment will be swift as early dew disappears. It will be terrible as wild animals like a leopard lurking by the path, like a bear robbed of her cubs rip them open, and like a lion tearing them apart. It will be relentless without compassion. "The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God" (13:1-16).
- **Restoration.** "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction (13:14)?" "I will heal their backslidings and love them freely" (14:1-9).

C. THE VIEW ABOUT TAKING AN ADULTEROUS WIFE.

1. The liberal realistic view.

The LORD instructs Hosea to marry a woman who later commits adultery. The liberal realistic view is unlikely. If Hosea discovered her unfaithfulness before the children were born, why did he give them these symbolic names? And if he discovered her unfaithfulness after the children were born, why did he keep her until the third child was born?

2. The strict realistic view.

The LORD instructs Hosea to marry a known prostitute. The fact that Isaiah had children with symbolic names, does not mean that Hosea had children that really existed. The fact that the LORD instructed Jeremiah to 'take the cup from the hand of the LORD' is not intended to be realistic. It was visionary. The strict realistic view is unlikely, because the holy Lord who condemns adultery in both the Old Testament and the New Testament would not command his prophet to commit an act of adultery. Moreover, the stories in chapter 1 and chapter 3 are realistically too different. Then it would mean that Hosea had two instead of one such marriage.

2. The figurative view.

Examples of figurative stories in the Bible:

- Judges 9:8-15 about which tree should be anointed as king of all the trees.
- 2 Samuel 12:1-4 about a rich man who sacrificed the lamb of a poor man to prepare a meal for a traveller.
- Isaiah 5:1-7 about the good vineyard that yielded only bad fruit.

Examples of allegories in the Bible:

- Ezekiel 17:1-10 about the great eagle (Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon) and another great eagle (Hophra of Egypt) and what was done with the spreading vine (Zedekia).
- Ezekiel 23 about the Lord's relationship with Oholah (Israel/Samaria) and Oholibah (Judah/Jerusalem).
- Hosea 1 and 3 are more like allegories in which the prophet himself played a role as in prophetic actions.

The figurative view is questionable, because the Lord's words to the prophet Hosea in chapter 1 and 3 would then not have really been spoken.

3. The visionary view.

The best view is a view between the realistic and the figurative view. The stories in chapter 1 and chapter 3 are descriptions of allegorical visions. They are stories with symbolic intent, kind of parables. Hosea describes an imagined or envisioned reality, something he experiences only in his spirit, not in his body. God's speaking to Hosea is as real in a vision as hearing it in reality with his ears. What is explained in chapter 2 is confirmed in the vision in chapter 3.

The things experienced in the vision is not bound to reality. For example, the cows and even the heads of grain in Pharaoh's visions do not really swallow up one another.⁵ Nevertheless, figuratively the seven lean years of drought can swallow up the seven fat years of great harvests. Experiencing an imagined reality in a vision in his spirit is morally not the same as experiencing the reality in his physical body. Morally there can be no objection to the visionary view.

⁵ Genesis 41:1-7

D. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

The theme of Hosea: *“God’s love for Israel.”*

1. Hosea’s bitter experience dramatically portrays the Lord’s relationship to Israel.

In a vision the LORD told Hosea to marry a certain woman called Gomer. She was an adulterous wife, *a prostitute*. She went after other lovers and conceived *children of prostitution*.

- The first child was a boy and was named ‘Jezreel’. Just as God destroyed the royal house of the wicked king Ahab at Jezreel⁶, likewise he would again avenge the wickedness and unfaithfulness of the present kings of Israel.
- The second child was a girl and was named ‘Lo-Ruhamah’, which means, *not pitied, not shown mercy*. Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, God would no longer show mercy to Israel.
- The third child was a boy and was named ‘Lo-Ammi’, which means *not my people. Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, God would no longer be Israel’s God and Israel would no longer be God’s people*⁷.

If the woman, who was called an adulteress in chapter 3:1 was Gomer, then instead of rejecting her totally, Hosea bought her back for himself and restored her former position of honour. Although chapters 1 and 3 are presented as actual history, they nevertheless have symbolic significance. They are allegorical stories, imagined reality in a vision and experienced in his spirit. *Just as Hosea in a vision had married Gomer, so the Lord had become Israel’s ‘Husband’*⁸. *Just as Gomer had become unfaithful to Hosea, so Israel had become unfaithful to the Lord. Just as Gomer was enslaved by her lovers, so Israel would be enslaved by the very nations in which she had put her trust. Just as Hosea restored Gomer as his honourable wife, so the Lord would restore Israel’s chosen and believing remnant as his true people*⁹. *Just as Hosea redeemed Gomer with the price of silver and barley, so Jesus Christ would redeem the true Israel with the price of his own precious blood*¹⁰.

2. Gomer’s sin, punishment and restoration serve as a symbol of Israel’s sin, punishment and restoration.

Because each of the four parts of the book Hosea covers the same themes, ‘sin’, ‘punishment’ and ‘restoration’, the book has a *cyclical or parallel arrangement*, just as the first letter of John and the book of Revelation in the New Testament.

<u>Cyclical arrangement in 1 John.</u>	<u>Cyclical arrangement in Revelation.</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction. Eternal life revealed in Christ (1:1-4).2. The life of fellowship with God (1:5 -2:29).<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1:5 – 2:9. Tested by righteousness.• 2:7-17. Tested by love.• 2:18-29. Tested by belief.3. The life of the children of God (3:1 – 4:6).<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3:1-10. Tested by righteousness.• 3:11-24. Tested by love.• 4:1-6. Tested by belief.4. The Source of love (4:7-21).5. The triumph of righteousness (5:1-5).6. The grounds of belief (5:6-12).7. Conclusion. Christian certainties (5:13-21).	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. 1:1 – 3:22. The establishment of the Church in the world (7 letters).2. 4:1 – 7:17. The persecution of the Church by the world. (7 seals).3. 8:1 – 11:19. God’s preliminary judgements as warnings to repent (7 trumpets).4. 12:1- 14:20. The triumph of Jesus Christ and his Church over the Satan and his helpers.5. 15:1 – 16: 21. God’s final judgements on people who persist in their unbelief (7 scales).6. 17:1 – 19:21. God’s inescapable judgement of the great prostitute, the beast and the false prophet.7. 20:1 – 22:19. God’s Kingdom in its present and future phase.

3. The main theme of Hosea’s preaching is the tender, yearning love of God for his own people.

Note some translations of Hosea 2:14.

- NIV. “I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.”
- Good News Bible. So I am going to take her into the desert again; there *I will win her back with words of love*.
- New Living Translation. “But then I will win her back once again. I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there.

Note some translations of Hosea 11:3-4.

- NIV. “It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realise it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.”
- Good News Bible. “Yes, I was the one who taught Israel to walk. *I took my people up in my arms*, but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them. *I drew them to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them.*”

⁶ 2 Kings 9-10

⁷ Romans 9:6

⁸ Isaiah 54:5

⁹ Isaiah 1:9; 10:20-23

¹⁰ 1 Peter 1:18-19

- New Living Translation. “I myself taught Israel how to walk, leading them along by the hand. But he doesn’t know or even care that it was I who took care of him. I led Israel along with my ropes of kindness and love. I lifted the yoke from his neck, and I myself stooped to feed him.”

Note some translations of Hosea 14:4.

- NIV. “I will heal their backsliding and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them”
- Good News Bible. “I will bring my people back to me. I will love them with all my heart; *no longer am I angry with them.*”
- New Living Translation. “Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever.”

D. ISRAEL IN THE BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS

**The Biblical point of view is:
‘Israel’ is the community that serves the God
who reveals himself in the Bible and in Jesus Christ.**

Both the Old Testament prophets, Jesus and the New Testament apostles regarded their own people, the natural or national nation of Israel, primarily NOT as a national identity, but as a spiritual identity!

a. The *natural* nation of Israel in the Old Testament is regarded as God’s theocratic and covenant people.

During the Old Testament period the national or natural people of Israel was *the theocratic kingdom of God*. In order to realise his plan of salvation for believers in the whole world¹¹, *God reigned as King over Israel through prophets, priests, judges and kings*¹².

*In the Old Testament theocracy believers were mixed with unbelievers*¹³, just as they are mixed in the Kingdom of God in the New Testament¹⁴.

During the Old Testament period the national or natural people of Israel were also the people with whom God had made a covenant. *But Israel would only remain ‘the holy covenant people of God’ if they fulfilled the prerequisite of faith and obedience*¹⁵. Then God would bless Israel¹⁶. But if Israel would become disobedient to God and his covenant, then God would curse and destroy Israel¹⁷!

Alas, the Israelites became “unbelievers and disobedient”¹⁸. Israel “did not remain faithful to God’s covenant”¹⁹. The consequence was that the unbelievers within national Israel were no longer God’s theocratic people or God’s holy covenant people. They became “not my people”²⁰! God warned the Israelites time and again through his Spirit and his prophets. But they did not listen. Therefore God handed them over in the hands of other nations²¹. *Israel became “an example and warning”* for believers in the New Testament not to set their hearts on evil things²²!

Nevertheless, the chosen believers within the national people of Israel (the remnant²³) continued to belong to God’s covenant and theocracy until the first coming of Jesus Christ, when it continued in the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ as the King. With the first coming of Jesus Christ, the old testament covenant was superseded and replaced by the new covenant²⁴. The new covenant is founded on the better Mediator, Jesus Christ and the better promises:

- his law will be written in the hearts of believers instead of only in a Book²⁵
- believers will know and relate to God personally instead of only knowing him by hearsay²⁶
- God will forgive all their sins and never bring them into remembrance again²⁷.

b. The *spiritual* nation of Israel is God’s saved people during the Old and New Testament periods.

For the Old Testament prophets *‘Israel’ is the following:*

- The true Israel is the community of people who serve the LORD (Hebrew: *JaHWeH*) as God²⁸.

¹¹ John 4:22; Romans 9:4-5; 15:8-9

¹² Read Deuteronomy 17:14–18:22

¹³ 1 Kings 19:18; Isaiah 1:9; cf. Romans 11:4

¹⁴ Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

¹⁵ Exodus 19:3-6; Deuteronomy 7:6-8a; Deuteronomy 26:18; Hebrews 4:2,6

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 28:1-2

¹⁷ Read Deuteronomy 27:15 – 28:68

¹⁸ Hebrews 4:2,6

¹⁹ Hebrews 8:9

²⁰ Hosea 1:9

²¹ Nehemiah 9:7-38

²² 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, especially verse 6 and 11

²³ Isaiah 1:9; Romans 9:27,29; Romans 11:4-5

²⁴ Hebrews 8:6-13

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:3

²⁶ John 6:45

²⁷ Hebrews 10:17-18

²⁸ Exodus 3:14-15; Exodus 20:1-3

- The true Israel was “the 7000 whose knees have not bowed down to Baal”²⁹ or to the gods of other religions³⁰.
- The true Israel was “*the survivors, the remnant of the natural or national nation of Israel, those whom God allowed to remain*”³¹! This ‘remnant’ of Israel would one day be larger, but then only in a spiritual sense, by adding the believers from among the Gentile nations during the New Testament period³² to them.
- The true Israel is the community of people in every nation of the world who believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who have crucified the sinful world and who follow the rule of being a new creation³³.

The Old Testament prophets had ‘a veil’ that covered their eyes³⁴. They could not see what God had revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets. They could only see ‘God’s people’ in terms of God’s Old Testament people, Israel. They could not distinguish between ‘the national rebirth’ of the people of Israel when they returned from exile³⁵ and ‘the spiritual rebirth’ of the people when they (and uncountable believers from the Gentile nations) turned to the LORD³⁶. Due to this veil over their eyes, the spiritual rebirth of Israel without the national rebirth of Israel was unthinkable during the Old Testament period!

This remained ‘the mystery of Christ’ which was not made known to men in other generations. It was made known to his holy apostles and the New Testament prophets by the Spirit of Christ”³⁷. Through the gospel the (believing) Gentiles:

- *are heirs together with Israel*
- *are members together (with Jewish believers) of one Body (the Church)*
- *are sharers together (with Old Testament believers) in the promise in Christ Jesus³⁸*

²⁹ 1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:4

³⁰ Exodus 20:3

³¹ Isaiah 1:9; Isaiah 10:20-22; Hosea 1:10; Joel 2:32; Micah 2:12; see Romans 9:27,29; Romans 11:5

³² Hosea 2:1-3; Micah 2:12-13; see John 10:16

³³ Galatians 6:13-16

³⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:14-16

³⁵ Ezekiel 37

³⁶ Ezekiel 36:25-28,36-38

³⁷ Ephesians 3:2-6

³⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:20