

Purpose

Hosea writes to bring Israel back to the knowledge of the Lord and to find restoration in Him.

Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but he will bandage us. (Hosea 6:1)

Theme

The primary theme of Hosea is the compassion and love of God towards the nation of Israel as illustrated in Hosea's marriage to Gomer.

Then the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." (Hosea 3:1)

The Illustration of Israel's Infidelity (Chapters 1-3)

The Marriage

Hosea's marriage to Gomer

In 1:2, God commands Hosea to marry a prostitute. There is much conjecture as to the details of this marriage (i.e. who was Gomer, what kind of prostitute, etc.). All we know for certain is that Hosea took an unfaithful wife as God commanded so God could use his marriage as a living illustration of God's relationship with Israel.

We do not know much of Hosea, the man either. But we do know that mere association with a prostitute, let alone marriage, would have alienated him from society. Not only was Hosea's reputation in jeopardy, but his happiness as a husband and father. He entered this marriage knowing that Gomer would betray him, and knowing that he would not have a happy marriage.

Why would God ask Hosea to do this? Why would God require this man of God to give up hope of a happy marriage, give up a favorable reputation in the community, and require him to suffer in the unfaithfulness of a spouse? Does this not seem to go against God's?

First, God never asks Hosea to do anything wrong. It is not a sin to marry a wife of prostitution. Only priests were prohibited from such a marriage². Secondly, we often have the mistaken notion that God would never ask us to do something which might jeopardize our happiness or our reputation. Often following after God requires us to give up comforts, reputation, and even our very life. Jesus reiterates this in Matthew 17:24 when he states, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." A life which seeks after God is willing to give up the surface happiness for a peace and joy which surpasses all understanding.

God's marriage to Israel

Hosea's marriage is a type of God's relationship with the nation Israel. God describes his relationship not as a master and slave, but husband and wife in 2:16. In chapter 11 God describes Israel as his child whom he loved and cared for. Like Gomer, however, Israel was a wife of prostitution. God knew that his chosen people would betray Him. Yet He chose them and loved them anyway.

Compare this to Romans 5:8, where the apostle Paul states that even while we were bitter enemies of God, He still gave the ultimate sacrifice, Christ, to die on the cross.

² Leon J. Wood. "Hosea." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998.)

The Divorce

Chapter 2 describes the divorce of God and Israel. This description matches the Mosaic law found in Deuteronomy 24:1. Here, when a man finds that his wife is unclean (literally *naked*), he writes a certificate of divorce and sends her out of the house. God is writing his certificate of divorce for the nation Israel. We will examine the charges against more Israel in more detail below.

The Restoration

Chapters 2 and 3 illustrate God's truly unconditional love. Even after the adultery of Israel, God pursues her and takes the initiative to restore a relationship with her. In 2:14 He says, "I will allure her." Hosea again is commanded by God to illustrate this to the nation Israel by taking back his adulterous wife, Gomer. Gomer is not the one seeking reconciliation. It is Hosea, the offended party, who takes the initiative. He woos her back, buying her back for 15 shekels. Imagine Gomer's response to Hosea's wooing. She must have considered Hosea to be a fool.

This is a very clear picture of God's unconditional love. Even when we are not seeking Him, and are actively rebelling against Him, God is reaching out for reconciliation. He is eager to forgive and shower us with mercy. He is courting us, wooing us, back into a relationship with Him. And the divorce, or the judgment, is His discipline designed to bring us back to a relationship with Him.

The Charges Against Israel

Israel's Infidelity

Baalism described

Baalism had been eradicated by King Jehu, four generations prior to King Jeroboam II. However, by the time of Hosea, the worship of Baal had returned to Israel. The worship of Baal was characterized by temple prostitution and sexual rites.

"Baal was the Canaanite god of fertility. He was responsible for the blossoms of the almonds in February, and for sending out the barley shoots in March; he was responsible for the ewes casting their lambs and the cows their calves in March and April.

Baal produced this kind of fertility in the same way that fertility was produced on the human or animal level- by sexual intercourse. There was a goddess, Anat, who was considered to be Baal's consort, and it was believed that when he copulated with her, fertility would result in the land. In order to be sure that Baal would engage in the comic act of intercourse, these degenerate Israelites and Canaanites practiced a kind of imitative magic... So if they wanted to assure green growth, abundant fruit and well-stocked herds, they practiced religious prostitution."³

The rites of Baal condemned

God condemns Israel, through Hosea, for the abhorrent religious rites that they perform. Divination (4:12), sacrifices (4:13), religious prostitution (4:13b-14), feasts (2:11).

The analogy of marriage fits here again as idolatry is viewed as a form of spiritual adultery. Certainly this is true as Israel has left her husband, Yahweh, for another. But also, in a more straight-

³ David Allan Hubbard. *With Bands of Love: Lessons from the Book of Hosea*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 46.

forward manner, the sexual nature of the Baal worship is a very specific and obvious form of sexual immorality or prostitution. While Hosea's wife was a prostitute, the people of Israel were literal prostitutes, performing "religious" sexual acts so that they might receive a bountiful harvest.

Misplaced credit

Hosea's primary charge against the nation Israel is their idolatry. Israel had embraced Baalism and other various cults in place of worshipping Yahweh. God, through Hosea, is upset particularly because the people are giving credit to Baal for good harvests and for fertile herds, when He is the one which has been providing for Israel.

(Hosea 2:5 NASB) "For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, Who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'"

(Hosea 2:8 NASB) "For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, And lavished on her silver and gold, Which they used for Baal."

God's punishment involves taking away the harvest and showing Israel that He is the one in control of fertility, not Baal (2:6,9)

Other Charges

Hosea's condemnation of Israel take a legal form in many parts of the book. We have already seen in chapter 2 how God issues a legal writ of divorce. In chapter 4, we see God's judgment as a covenant lawsuit⁴. Israel and God made a legal contract at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:1-8), and Israel was not living up to its side of the contract. So God presents his case in chapter 4. Compare the following charges against the Ten Commandments (recorded in Exodus 20).⁵

(Hosea 4:1-2 NASB) "Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land. [2] There is swearing ("You shall not take the name of the LORD you God in vain"), deception ("You shall not bear false witness"), murder ("You shall not murder"), stealing ("You shall not steal"), and adultery ("You shall not commit adultery"). They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed."

The Israelites had violated the sacred covenant with God, and in a very legal sounding argument, God has one by one shown the violations. Israel had broke its covenant with God, and so God is entitled to divorce himself from Israel.

God's Desire for an Intimate Relationship

They did not know God

But God's greatest charge against Israel is that they did not **know** Him.

(Hosea 4:1 NASB) "... there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land."

⁴ David B. Wyrzten. "The Theological Center of the Book of Hosea." *Bibliotheca Sacra*. (October-December 1984), 321.

⁵ Hubbard, 42.

(Hosea 4:6 NASB) "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

Hubbard states the importance of the "knowledge of God" this way:

"Although the knowledge of God was an intellectual concept for the Hebrews, it was not merely theoretical. The Old Testament makes no distinction between theory and practice, between idea or fact, or between thought and action. We talk about theories that do not work, about plans that miscarry, about advice that falls flat. And we say to ourselves as we brush our hands and move away from the wreck of some situation that we have created or contributed to, 'It was a good plan but it didn't work.'

"An Israelite could never make that distinction. The only way he knew a good plan was that it worked... The only way he knew that there was true knowledge was that this knowledge was productive in everyday experience."⁶

Israel had forgotten God. They may have still had intellectual knowledge, but their experiential knowledge of Yahweh had been forgotten.

Knowing God is the Key to Covenant

The lack of knowledge about God is also a violation of the covenant. Compare Hosea 13:4 with the first of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4). The Israelites were to **know** no other god but Yahweh. This is the first and most important of the commandments.

That is why whenever Hosea speaks of the broken covenant, this lack of knowledge is shown as the primary evidence.

(Hosea 6:6-7 NASB) "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. [7] But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me."

(Hosea 8:1-2 NASB) "Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the LORD, Because they have transgressed My covenant, And rebelled against My law. [2] They cry out to Me, "My God, we of Israel know Thee!""

Knowing God and Marriage

The Hebrew word used here in Hosea for *know* is the same word used throughout the Old Testament for marital relations. (Genesis 4:1 NASB) "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain."

Hosea, in his illustration of God as husband and Israel as wife, desires for His people to *know* Him to the same level of intimacy that a wife knows her husband. It is not just a theological knowledge of the character attributes of God. It is a personal relationship knowledge where you have experienced what God is like, understanding his nature, being able to predict His feelings about things, knowing and appreciating the things He loves and sharing His hatred of things He hates.

⁶ Hubbard, 81-82.

The Restoration of Israel (Chapters 11 – 14)

Restoration predicted

Even in the midst of God's condemnation of Israel, it is always followed with a prediction of Israel's future restoration. Israel will come to *know* Yahweh, and He will give them plentiful crops and fertile herds, and (Hosea 2:23 NASB) "I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'"

The Call for Israel to seek God

But this restoration will not come without the repentance of Israel. In a plea with his people, Hosea says, if Israel returns to the Lord, he will heal and bandage Israel and bring back the rains (Hosea 6:1, 3 NASB).

(Hosea 10:12 NASB) "Sow with a view to righteousness, Reap in accordance with kindness; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD Until He comes to rain righteousness on you."

God is the initiator of restoration. But it requires a response on our part. We must seek Him, pressing on to know Him. We become broken before Him. Then God will respond by revealing Himself to us. Then we will know Him.

The Conclusion

Chapter 14 concludes the book restating Hosea's plea to Israel to return to God. Hosea assures them that God is faithful, and will restore them, and Israel shall know their God.

(Hosea 14:4-7 NASB) " I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from them. [5] I will be like the dew to Israel; He will blossom like the lily, And he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. [6] His shoots will sprout, And his beauty will be like the olive tree, And his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. [7] Those who live in his shadow Will again raise grain, And they will blossom like the vine. His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon"

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