



Summary of Hosea

Introduction

During the 8th Century God gives Hosea instructions to marry an unfaithful woman and he obeys. His unfaithful wife Gomer leaves him and finds another man. Hosea is faithful; he finds her, redeems her and brings her back home to him: <<*And I said to her, 'You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you'*>> (Hosea 3:3). Thus, Hosea uses his own marriage to Gomer, her unfaithfulness, and their eventual restoration as a parable for the Lord's relationship to Israel.

In the rest of the book, Hosea goes into detail about the various aspects of Israel's life that constitute their unfaithfulness to the Lord, urges them to repent, and reveals to his audience God's powerful and passionate commitment to his people, in spite of their unfaithfulness. Throughout these chapters the prophet changes the subject abruptly, without an obvious plan. Perhaps this shows that the sections were once independent oracles that have been stitched together.

Hosea describes how Israel has been unfaithful to God. God wants Israel to repent and turn from their wickedness. He wants to restore Israel; however, they continue to disobey and follow their own ways: <<*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children*>> (Hosea 4:6).

Chapter One

God requests Hosea to marry an adulterous wife, and have children whose names bear Israel's sin. The marriage portrays Israel's unfaithfulness to God and the names of the children symbolise God's judgement.

The first son, Jezreel, may be named after a massacre at Jezreel, most likely that recorded in 2 Kings Chapter 10. Probably as a punishment for not learning from this massacre, God says he will put an end to the kingdom of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. The prophecy for the destruction of Israel was fulfilled in 735 BC, when Assyria attacked and conquered Israel (2 Kings 15:29).

The second child was a daughter's named Lo-Ruhamah, translated as 'No pity', 'Not loved', or most frequently as 'No mercy'. The implication of this name is that God will not show mercy and compassion to Israel and will allow it to be destroyed. The third child was a son, named Lo-Ammi, meaning 'Not my people'. Here God punishes Israel by redrawing his relationship with them.

To summarise, there are three things that God promises to withdraw from the Jews: the land, his mercy and special status as his people. This appears to be a reversal of his promises in Exodus 6:6-8 where he:

- a. Rescues Israel from under <<*the burdens of the Egyptians*>> and gives them the Promised Land.
- b. Shows mercy by redeeming them <<*with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement*>>.
- c. Establishes a relationship with Israel and calls them <<*my people*>>.

However, after punishing Israel for their unfaithfulness, God says he will restore Israel again where they will be <<*like the sand of the sea*>> and be called <<*children of the living God*>> (v.10).

Chapter Two

Israel is an adulterous wife and her children the children of whoredom. The Lord will hedge up her way with thorns, taking away his grain, wine, wool and linen. Her festival days will cease, and her vines and fig trees will be destroyed. Restoration is promised, however: the valley of Achor, i.e. the valley of trouble where Achan's sin was discovered and judged in Joshua 7:26, will become the door of hope. The Lord will be referred to as husband, not as master. The people of God will be restored, and the land will be fruitful.

Chapter Three

Hosea returns to his own marriage situation, which is still an image for God and Israel. Israel's hope, like Judah's, lies with the house of David.

Chapter Four

The Lord continues to prosecute his controversy against unfaithful Israel. He condemns both their lifestyle and their idol worship.

Chapter Five

Although all the people of Israel have sinned it is the rulers of Israel have led the way into unfaithfulness. It is they who must bear responsibility for the coming judgement on the whole nation.

Chapter Six

The people are called to know that it is only God who can heal them of their current ills but they must repent of their ways and return to him.

Both Israel and Judah are reminded that God had sent forth his prophets to warn them of what would befall them if they did not mend their ways. Yet they still chose idolatry over the Lord.

Chapter Seven

Israel thinks the Lord has forgotten their wickedness. Israel's heart is inflamed after idols, like the heat in a baker's oven yet they are only a half-baked cake. Israel has mixed itself with other peoples. Israel is like a silly dove, calling to Egypt yet flying to Assyria.

Chapter Eight

The people of Israel may claim to know and love the Lord, but their deeds prove otherwise.

Chapter Nine

God will punish Israel by sending her people away from the land, to a place where they will not be able to make sacrifices to the Lord. Hosea then uses the first of four more comparisons to describe Israel as grapes in the wilderness (vv.10-17). The remaining three comparisons come in Hosea 10:1-11:11.

Chapter Ten

The comparisons of Israel continue. This time they are described as a luxuriant vine that bears much fruit for they believe themselves to be a prosperous nation, and as a trained heifer that was free to work the land but wandered off, worshipping their golden calves and living like the other nations. They have forsaken God and will face judgement accordingly for their wickedness.

Chapter Eleven

The final analogy of the four is here describing Israel as God's young child whom he had brought up out of Egyptian slavery and into the Promised Land. God had done everything a loving parent could do for his son but the more he did the more they turned away from him until he had no other option than to

dismiss them from his sight. Yet his love remained and there would come a day when he would return them to their place.

Chapter Twelve

Hosea recounts incidents from Israel's past in order to display the Lord's enduring kindness and Israel's stubborn ingratitude.

Chapter Thirteen

God never blessed Israel when they worshipped Baal, but that did not stop them. They shall be as the morning cloud and the early dew that passes away. Like a lion, the Lord will tear Israel apart. The Lord is Israel's king - where is any other? The sorrows of a woman in childbirth shall come upon Ephraim. Dryness and barrenness is prophesied.

Chapter Fourteen

Hosea finishes his book with a series of moving appeals to the wayward northern kingdom to return to the Lord and find healing and covenant renewal.