



## Hosea - Chapter One

### Summary of 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).

## I Hosea 1:1-3:5 - Biographical: Hosea's Family

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.

### I.a Hosea 1:1 - Introduction

The prophet identifies himself and the period when he lived and prophesied.

<sup>1</sup> The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri, in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel.

#### Hosea 1:1

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri. The name Hosea comes from the same verb as Joshua and Jesus, meaning 'salvation,' 'to save,' or 'to deliver,' Hebrew *yasha*'. Hosea was a prophet. He spoke forth the word of the Lord, and applied that word to his life, and to the people and circumstances around him. Hosea was a man, but he was a man God used to speak through.

Throughout the book, Hosea reveals that salvation is found in turning to the Lord and away from sin in much the same way as John the Baptist: <<In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judaea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'>> (Matthew 3:1-2).

Son of Beeri. This reveals the name of Hosea's father. It is also known that he had a wife named Gomer (v.3), and two sons and a daughter (vv.4-9). Hosea is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible except for a direct quote by Paul: <<As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call "my people", and her who was not beloved I will call "beloved"'>> (Romans 9:25).

Kings of Judah, king of Israel. Hosea's ministry spanned the years 760 to 720 BC during the days of the divided monarchy. This was after the days of David and Solomon, when the people of God separated in a civil war, creating two nations: Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. This is some 250 years after the time of King David, and some 500-650 years after Israel came into the Promised Land.

Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. Hosea's ministry was in the northern kingdom of Israel. This is established in Hosea 7:5 where he calls the king of Israel 'our king', and because his ministry is focused towards the northern

kingdom of Israel and its capital city Samaria. However, for the benefit of his readers in the southern kingdom of Judah, Hosea gives them a reference point for the days of his ministry according to the kings of Judah.

**King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel.** Hosea began his ministry in the days of Jeroboam II. From a political and economic standpoint Jeroboam II was a successful and good king; refer to 2 Kings 14:23-29. Israel prospered politically and materially under his reign, but it was a time of significant spiritual and moral decay. The terrible result of this decay would not become evident until the days of Jeroboam II were finished.

A dramatic example of this is seen in the lives of the six kings that followed Jeroboam II during the time of Hosea’s ministry. Of those six kings, four were violently overthrown and one died as a conquered exile in Assyria. Hosea began his ministry at a time when things were so politically successful and economically prosperous that people just did not look to the Lord in the way that they should have. The seeds of idolatry, spiritual failure, and moral corruption sown in days of Jeroboam II produced a tragic harvest in the following years. Significantly, Jeroboam I was the first king of a divided Israel, leading a popular revolt against the high taxation of Rehoboam, son of Solomon (1 Kings Chapter 12). Jeroboam II followed in the wicked footsteps of Jeroboam I.

***Kings of Israel during the Ministry of Hosea, 760 to 720 B.C.***

<b>Dynasty of Jehu</b>		
Jeroboam II	793-752 B.C.	Gave throne to his son
Zechariah	753-752 B.C.	Assassinated
<b>Dynasty of Shallum</b>		
Shallum	752 B.C. (one month)	Assassinated
<b>Dynasty of Menahem</b>		
Menahem	752-742 B.C.	Gave throne to his son
Pekahiah	724-740 B.C.	Overthrown in coup d’etat
<b>Dynasty of Pekah</b>		
Pekah	752-732 B.C.	Assassinated
<b>Dynasty of Hoshea</b>		
Hoshea	732-722 B.C.	Died in exile

**I.b Hosea 1:2-9 - The Family of Hosea**

God instructs Hosea to marry, but foretells that his wife’s unfaithfulness will be an image for Israel’s unfaithfulness. Hosea’s wife bears children, and God gives them prophetic names.

<sup>2</sup> When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.’

### Hosea 1:2

The Lord said to Hosea. God’s first word to Hosea was something for his own life. This is how God almost always works. Hosea probably would have preferred it if God had given him a word for someone else. However, before the prophet can speak to the nation, he first has to hear from God for himself and then act obediently on what he has been told.

Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom. Some have supposed that God commands Hosea to marry a prostitute, but this does not suit the words. The word translated ‘whoredom’ throughout the book is a broad term for various kinds of sexual misconduct, and only in certain contexts does it refer to prostitution. In Hosea it generally refers to a married woman being unfaithful to her husband, which is why it serves as a metaphor for Israel’s unfaithfulness to the Lord, her husband: for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord; as is seen in the next Chapter: <<*For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink’*>> (Hosea 2:5).

Further, one should not think that Gomer was already promiscuous when Hosea married her. As the notes below will show, she seems to have been faithful to Hosea when giving birth to her first child (v.3), and under suspicion as to the fathers of her second and third children (v.6 and v.8). Thus the second and third children will be children of whoredom, where the word and in ‘and have children’ is taken in the sense of ‘that is’. This helps explain the legal proceedings in Chapter 2, and the specific word adulteress in 3:1. Hosea uses marriage and unfaithfulness as a prominent metaphor. Ezekiel Chapters 16 and 23 provide the extended version of the metaphor; elsewhere the idea is important, but not given extended treatment, for example: <<*How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her – but now murderers!*>> (Isaiah 1:21). The tragedy of Hosea is the tragedy of a marriage that began well but went bad. And so it was with the Lord and Israel: a good beginning soon went awry. The Book of Hosea refers to Israel’s cherished beginnings: <<*Therefore, I will now persuade her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt*>> (Hosea 2:14-15).

Through his command to Hosea, God brings to life a consistent picture used throughout the OT. In this picture, the Lord is the husband of Israel, and their passionate, chronic attraction for idols was like the lust of an adulterer. His people were as unfaithful as an adulterous wife. In this vivid picture, it can be seen how today's idolatry and rejection of the Lord Jesus feels to God. When people, especially Christians, put anything in front of the Lord, it hurts him like unfaithfulness hurts the victim of an adulterous marriage. By commanding Hosea to take a wife of whoredom, God will put Hosea in the place where he feels what God feels, and it will not feel good at all.

Many commentators press the idea that Gomer was not a prostitute when Hosea first met and married her, she only became like one later through her adultery and Hosea knew from the Lord that she would become that. This seems to be the case, but there remain those who believe she was a prostitute from the outset. The reader needs to make up their own mind.

<sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

### Hosea 1:3

So he went and took Gomer. Most would assume that Hosea would never marry a prostitute or a woman he knew would soon be unfaithful given the culture he lived in except by the commandment of the Lord. It showed a lot of obedience for him to actually carry out this difficult command. As will be made clear, when Hosea married Gomer, she either did not give up her career as a prostitute or she soon became an adulteress. It was not that Hosea found a fallen woman and through love and kindness restored her to virtue. He married a woman, no doubt hoping she would give up her sinful nature and be devoted only to him, but she did not. No doubt, this happened after the pattern of human nature. When Hosea and Gomer first married, she probably promised eternal love and devotion. She probably showed every sign of being committed to Hosea. But after a while, and in difficult circumstances, she fell back into her sinful ways. Perhaps it was out of boredom. Perhaps it was out of a feeling of neglect. Perhaps it was out of a sense of need. Sadly, people today share the same inexcusable reasons for their idolatry, when they prefer another god to the Lord God.

Some commentators believe this never really happened, and that Hosea is only telling a vivid story. They think it could never have happened because God would never have a prophet marry a prostitute or a woman he knew would deceive him so openly. However, James Boice rightly observes, "If Hosea's story cannot be real (because 'God could not ask a man to marry an unfaithful woman'), then neither is the story of salvation real, because that is precisely what Christ has done for us."

**Bore him a son.** The first child, Jezreel, is explicitly said to be the son of Hosea. With Gomer's other children, any mention of Hosea's paternity is conspicuously absent. Unlike Jezreel, those children are called 'her children' and 'children of whoredom' as in Hosea 2:4, 4:6 and 5:7.

<sup>4</sup> And the Lord said to him, 'Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

#### **Hosea 1:4**

**Name him Jezreel.** The first son born to Hosea and Gomer was 'Jezreel' and the name spoke of two things. First, Jezreel means scattered and Israel would soon be scattered in exile by an conquering Assyrian army. Second, Jezreel refers to the Valley of Jezreel, where Jehu, the founder of the dynasty that put Jeroboam II on the throne, massacred all the descendants of Ahab, thus establishing his throne; refer to 2 Kings 10:11. God directed Hosea to name his son Jezreel to confirm his promise to avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel by judging the house of Jehu. Obviously, this was not good news to Jeroboam II. It said that his dynasty, the dynasty of Jehu, was coming to an end. In fact, after the death of Jeroboam II in 752 BC his son Zechariah barely reigned only six months before being assassinated (2 Kings 15:8-10), and that was the end of **the house of Jehu**; see the comments made below. Hosea, like Isaiah, uses children as signs and symbols for prophetic pronouncements: <<*Then the Lord said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field*>> (Isaiah 7:3), and: <<*See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion*>> (Isaiah 8:18).

**I will punish the house of Jehu.** Jeroboam II was the fourth king of the dynasty begun by Jehu in 841 BC. This dynasty was the longest in the history of the northern kingdom.

Many suppose that **the blood of Jezreel** refers to the shedding of blood of the house of Ahab and Ahaziah when Jehu usurped the throne (2 Kings 9:21-28), however, this proposal suffers from serious difficulties. First, the kingdom of Israel did not come to an end with Jehu's dynasty. Israel survived for 30 years after Zechariah, the last king of that dynasty. Second, God commanded Jehu to exterminate Ahab's dynasty, and commended his work; refer to 2 Kings 9:1-10 and 10:30, and 2 Chronicles 22:7. It seems unlikely that the Lord would punish someone for carrying out his command. It is better to take the phrase **the house of Jehu** as parallel to **the house of Israel**, and thus another name for Israel. By this reading **the blood of Jezreel** refers to 1 Kings Chapter 21: Ahab, who promoted Baalism as the national religion of Israel, permitted the murder of Naboth, a man loyal to the Lord, in order to seize his vineyard in Jezreel. Appropriately, this verse

sets the tenor of the rest of the book: the ongoing confrontation between Baal and the God of Israel.

**I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.** Whether the terms for both houses are intended to be separate or parallels then, just as **the house of Jehu** would fall, so would the whole kingdom of Israel. Before the prophetic ministry of Hosea was finished, Israel was defeated, destroyed, and taken captive by the mighty Assyrian Empire: *<<The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had banished them from his presence. When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them commit great sin. The people of Israel continued in all the sins that Jeroboam committed; they did not depart from them until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had foretold through all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day>>* (2 Kings 17:20-23).

<sup>5</sup> On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.’

#### **Hosea 1:5**

The promise to **break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel** signified the defeat of Baalism at the same place where Baal had seemingly triumphed over the Lord (v.4). To break a soldier’s bow is a symbol for defeating him. Israel will be judged at the place where they sinned. That the blood of Ahab was licked up by dogs there should have served as an ominous sign of the Lord’s future judgement on followers of Baal; refer to 1 Kings 21:19. The judgement at Jezreel joined poetic justice with divine justice.

<sup>6</sup> She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them.

#### **Hosea 1:6**

The wording here differs from v.3, in that it does not say she bore him the daughter; this suggests that Hosea was not the father, and the name **Lo-ruhamah**, meaning ‘no pity,’ ‘not loved,’ or ‘no mercy,’ is Hosea’s denial of fatherhood. Hosea does not have the natural affection that a father has for his own children: *<<Upon her children also I will have no pity>>* (Hosea 2:4a), as a father shows mercy to his children: *<<As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him>>* (Psalm 103:13). Every call to this child with the unfortunate name would remind Hosea and everyone else of coming judgement and exile.

<sup>7</sup> But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen.'

### Hosea 1:7

The Lord will save Judah, but not by conventional means, i.e. he will achieve it without the use of national military prowess: <<*For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me*>> (Psalm 44:6), <<*Because you have raged against me and your arrogance has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth; I will turn you back on the way by which you came*>> (Isaiah 37:29), and: <<*He said to me, 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts*>> (Zechariah 4:6). The army of Assyria that destroyed Israel also attacked Judah, but they did not conquer them. Instead, God miraculously fought on behalf of Judah against Assyria when the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 soldiers in the camp of Assyria in one night; refer to 2 Kings 19:35.

The fact that God would show no mercy to Israel but had mercy towards Judah shows two things. First, it is true that Judah and her kings were more faithful unto the Lord during these years, as exemplified by King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:1-8. Second, it does not really matter if Judah was more worthy of mercy than Israel was because, by its very nature, mercy is mercy. If one deserves leniency, then leniency is a matter of justice, not mercy. Mercy is only shown to the guilty. Therefore it is within the wise and loving heart of God to show mercy to whom he will show mercy (Romans 9:15). However, no one is ever unfair for not showing mercy.

<sup>8</sup> When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son.  
<sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said, 'Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God.'

### Hosea 1:8-9

The birth and naming of another child by Gomer reinforces what was seen with regards to the preceding birth. The name Lo-ammi or not my people makes it explicit: he is not Hosea's son but <<*they are children of whoredom*>> (Hosea 2:4b). Every call to this unfortunately named child reminded Hosea and everyone else that the people of Israel had pushed away the Lord God, and should no longer be considered his people.

Since Gomer did not give up her prostitution or adulterous nature, there may have been a cruel irony in the name Lo-Ammi. Perhaps this son really was not the son of Hosea, but of another man. Perhaps the appearance of the child

made this evident. The message God had to deliver to Israel through Hosea was hard enough, but God also made Hosea live with it.

For you are not my people and I am not your God. The phrase my people is an expression of endearment. It appears seventeen times in the Book of Exodus alone. The naming of this son signifies a negation of the marital bond that God made with the nation at Sinai: <<*I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians*>> (Exodus 6:7), <<*And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people*>> (Leviticus 26:12). This is not so much of a sentence or a penalty, as it is a simple statement of fact. It is not as if the people really wanted to be the people of God, yet God will not have them. Instead, the people of Israel rejected God, and here the Lord simply recognises that fact. He will not play ‘let’s pretend’: ‘You pretend to be my people and I will pretend to be your God.’ The time for pretence is over.

#### I.c Hosea 1:10-2:1 - The Restoration of Israel

God does not intend repudiation to be the end of the story for his chosen people.

<sup>10</sup> Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people’, it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’

#### Hosea 1:10

In the same breath that the Lord uttered his detachment from physical Israel, he uses the language of the Abrahamic covenant to articulate the basis for restoration: the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea; refer to Genesis 22:17 and 32:12. The failure of Israel to live up to the demands of the covenant at Sinai could not nullify the promises made to Abraham, as Paul explains: <<*My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise*>> (Galatians 3:17). Israel’s salvation must be gained just as Abraham’s was: salvation by grace through faith and not by works of the law; refer to Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:1-3, and Galatians 3:6. However, although God has promised judgement, the days of judgement will not last forever. After judgement, there will come a day of prosperity, increase, and blessing.

In the place is not a geographical reference but a reference to the event when God and his people bonded at Sinai. The Lord will meet Israel at the same place he met with Israel before, i.e. under the same conditions. It is the place of repentance: <<*She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, ‘I will go and*

*return to my first husband, for it was better with me than than now'>> (Hosea 2:7), and: <<On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband', and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal'>> (Hosea 2:16). God will take Israel back to the desert and begin his work with them all over again.*

You are not my people; Children of the living God. God would fulfil the promise of Lo-Ammi (v.9), but the judgement would not last forever. One day Israel will return to the Lord, and once again be called Children of the living God: *<<I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God>> (Ezekiel 11:19-20), and: <<Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy>> (1 Peter 2:10).*

<sup>11</sup> The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

#### Hosea 1:11

The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together. The hostility between the people of Judah, the southern kingdom, and the people of Israel, the northern kingdom, had a protracted history beginning in 1 Kings 12:16-24 soon after the death of King Solomon.

Shall be gathered together is passive; a force outside of Judah and Israel is operative, i.e. God keeping his promises to Abraham. This did not happen in Hosea's time. The prophecy thus points forward, perhaps to a messianic age, when the people would be in such agreement that they shall appoint for themselves one head: *<<But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ>> (Ephesians 4:15), and: <<He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything>> (Colossians 1:18). Their reconciliation is depicted in their following the same leader. While it is not explicit here what form this reconciliation would take, the text views the judgement at Jezreel (v.5) as working toward that glorious experience, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.*

God promised a restoration so complete that the division caused by the civil war of Rehoboam and Jeroboam I, a division that stood for 170 years, would one day be erased. It can be said that one way this promise is fulfilled is in the church, where God brings together Israel, Judah, and even Gentiles, into one body: *<<For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has*

*abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it>> (Ephesians 2:14-16).*

For great shall be the day of Jezreel. The first child of Hosea and Gomer was named Jezreel as a sign of judgement. However, God promises a restoration so complete that Jezreel will once again be a name of greatness, not judgement: *<<He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, the hostility of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim>> (Isaiah 11:12-13).*

<sup>2:1</sup> Say to your brother, Ammi, and to your sister, Ruhamah.

### Hosea 2:1

Those addressed are Israelites who, the prophet hopes, will respond to his promise. The verse begins with an imperative say to your brother, as does the following verse. Both serve as an enticement for Israel to return to God. Israel is entreated to anticipate a change in names when unity is restored. No longer will they be ‘No Mercy’ and ‘Not My People.’

This shows that the redemption is complete. The child named Jezreel has his name redeemed, and now the next two children, Lo-Ruhamah, ‘No Mercy’ and Lo-Ammi, ‘Not My People’, have their name redeemed as Israel is once again regarded as ‘My People’ unto the Lord and ‘Mercy is shown’ unto them. What was a sign of judgement is now evidence of redemption: *<<He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant for ever. Holy and awesome is his name>> (Psalm 111:9), <<Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near>> (Luke 21:28), and: <<He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’>> (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).*