

HOSEA 1-6; 10-14

1:1

Hosea was a prophet, a contemporary of Isaiah. His name is derived from the same Hebrew root used in the names Joshua and Jesus. It means “salvation” or “Jehovah saves.” Later verses mentioning Hosea’s children’s names will demonstrate that personal names in the Old Testament are often symbolically significant in their meaning.

Hosea’s ministry, approximately 760 to 720 BC, spanned the reigns of several kings, beginning with the reign of Jeroboam II. This was a period of a divided monarchy, with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Although Hosea mentioned the “kings of Judah” in verse 1, his ministry appears to have been in Israel because in Hosea 7:5, he referred to the King of Israel as “our king.”

1:2

Hosea dealt with an unusual family situation. The Lord instructed him to marry an adulterous woman. Through Hosea, the Lord set up a metaphor: “For the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.” In this metaphor, Hosea represents the Lord, and his wife (who eventually divorced Hosea) represents the covenant people of Israel.

1:3-5

Hosea’s wife was named Gomer. They eventually had a son together. Through further instruction from the Lord, they were to name this son Jezreel. His name means “God shall sow (scatter).” The commentary to verse 1 mentions that Hebrew personal names often had symbolic significance. Because of King Jehu’s prior bloody purge of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel (Valley of Megiddo in northern Israel; see 2 Kings

10:19–24), the people of Israel were scattered. Jezreel’s name alludes to that scattering. The “bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel,” would be broken (verse 5). The bow here represents the military power of Israel. In the past, many military battles were won by the powerful Israel in that valley. However, as God’s retribution for the massacre that took place there, He would take away Israel’s power by breaking its “bow.” Powerless Israel would truly be scattered.

1:6–7

Hosea’s wife bore another child, a daughter. The Lord again instructed Hosea what to name his child: Lo-ruhamah (“no mercy”). This name continued the metaphor, teaching that the Lord “[would] no more have mercy upon the [unfaithful] house of Israel.” However, the Lord, and the Lord alone, would spare the house of Judah—not by sword or battle but through His mercy.

1:8–11

A third child was born, a son named Lo-ammi, meaning “not my people.” The metaphor continued. The Lord would not let northern Israel’s wickedness prevail, “for ye are not my people.” But hope would be in the future “in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.” God would gather and reunite the people of Judah and of Israel: “The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea.”

2:1–5

The relationship between Hosea and Gomer was broken; Gomer was guilty of adultery. In Hosea’s analogy, the people of Israel were similarly guilty of idolatry (the words *adultery* and *idolatry* come from the same root). The covenant relationship between God and Israel was likewise broken. Just as Gomer offered herself to others outside of her marriage covenant, the people of Israel offered themselves to other gods or idols, breaking their covenant with God. These idolators believed that their idols gave them bread and water, wool and flax, oil and drink, when in reality it was God who gave them these things. But unless Israel repented, these blessings would be taken away: “[I will] make her as a wilderness.”

2:6–8

To help Israel repent, God would “hedge up” her paths with thorns and a wall to keep her on the correct path. As Israel attempted to step off the correct path, it would hurt to the point that it would be better to return to God (Israel’s first husband in the analogy). Israel was insolent about the fact that it was God (not her idols) that was providing her with food and goods.

2:9–13

God would judge Israel for her idolatries. Baal was one of her idols. (Baalim is the Hebrew plural form of the word.) Since Israel had forgotten God and was practicing Baal worship and not recognizing God's blessings upon her, He would take away those blessings. Israel's joviality and even her solemn feasts would cease.

2:14–18

God would appeal to Israel by restoring her true blessings. He would transform the Valley of Achor (literally "the valley of trouble") into a "door of hope." Israel would then no longer call the Lord "Baali" (my master) but would call Him "Ishi." "Ishi" here has one of two possible meanings: "my husband" or "salvation." "My husband" fits well, as there would be a relationship of love and safety rather than a relationship with a lack of control, as encountered with idol worship. Idol worship comes in many forms. Whether one worships a golden calf, a bronze statue, or any false image of God, this behavior is worshipping an idol. An idol is anything that is deemed more important than God—it is a substitute for the true God. It can include overrated status, an abundance of money, great possessions, substance abuse, and so forth. These things can take control of our lives and often turn us away from God. Turning away from God creates a void. Idols can fill that void and rule over us.

2:19–23

The Lord would have mercy upon Israel forever. No longer would the expressions of "no mercy" and "not my people" prevail (see Hosea 1:6, 9). "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (2:23).

3:1–5

Though Hosea 1 was written in the third person, Hosea used the first person several times in these verses; for example: "Then said the Lord unto me" (verse 1), "And I said unto her" (verse 3). The Lord urged Hosea to resume the relationship with his wife, Gomer, even though she was an adulterer. Again, an analogy is used to compare Hosea and Gomer's relationship with the resumption of the relationship between God and the children of Israel, even though they were idolators. Hosea got his wife back, though he had to purchase her. They renewed their marriage covenant: "Thou shalt abide for me many days. . . . So will I also be for thee" (verse 3). The analogy continues. Israel shall return to the Lord: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days" (verse 5).

4:1–5

The Lord had something important to say to the children of Israel, and they needed to listen. Through Hosea, the Lord accused them of shunning truth, mercy, and a knowledge of God. Rejecting these things contributed to their apostasy. A knowledge of God was crucial. Without it, how could the children of Israel recognize God's mercy in their lives or even know how to show mercy? How could they recognize and accept truth? Without God in their lives, the people of Israel showed little restraint: they swore, lied, killed, robbed, and committed adultery.

Punishment for the above deeds included sorrow and a wasting away of the person, of the land, of the beasts, of the fowl, and of the fishes. The people of Israel deserved the punishment because they did not listen to the Lord or even to the priests who attempted to teach a knowledge of God. Instead of accepting truth and mercy, the people strove, or contended, against it. Because of that, the people fell (stumbled, erred).

4:6–11

Because the people rejected the knowledge of God, God would in turn reject them. It appears that even some of the priests, responsible for teaching about God, failed to properly instruct the people. Therefore, addressing His people, God said, "Thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of God."

God attempted to bless the priests with increase, but they and the children of Israel nevertheless sinned against Him. The priests took advantage of those sins: "They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity." The priests became like the general population: wicked. Just because they were priests did not mean that they would escape punishment for their doings. Punishment included not having increase and not having enough to eat. Their sins would "take away [enslave]" the heart.

4:12–14

Israel continued to fall and err because they rejected God. They did not understand truth. They continued to practice idolatry and commit adultery. God would hand out judgment and punishment to all that participated in those sins.

4:15–19

Although Israel was the land that was following the path of sin, God admonished Judah (the Southern Kingdom) not to follow that path: "Come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven." The two locations mentioned were centers of idolatry in Israel. However, according to scholars, there was no place in Israel called Beth-aven. Instead of using the placename of Bethel (a real location), Hosea chose to use Beth-aven, which literally means "house of deceit."

The land of Israel was compared to “a backsliding” heifer. Backsliding in the scriptures refers to the act of moving away from God after having known Him. Backsliders make unrighteous choices because of losing that knowledge of God. The Northern Kingdom of Israel (often called Ephraim, the largest tribe in Israel) was involved with idol worship, sacrifices, corruption, and whoredoms. So, God would “let [Israel] alone” to fend for itself. God would not protect Israel from its enemies. Because of its sins, Israel had “bound” (constrained) itself.

5:1–5

One cannot completely blame the common people of Israel for its sins. Much of the blame lay with its leaders. Through Hosea, the Lord warned the spiritual leaders (the priests) and the political leaders (the house of the king) of the consequences of their evil deeds. God’s judgment was to be upon them. Mizpah and Tabor (mountain locations to the east and to the west, respectively, of the political rulers of Israel) were both strongholds of idolatry and other sins. Both locations acted as snares and nets in attracting the people to sinful deeds.

God rebuked both the leaders and the common people for their wickedness. However, they did not listen to the rebuke. They revolted. They preferred to be steeped in their sinful ways. The prideful people of Israel refused to recognize God; they turned instead to their idols. Therefore, Israel would fall (stumble) because of iniquity. Even though Judah (the Southern Kingdom) was not considered to be as wicked as their northern neighbor, many in Judah still led a sinful life, so they would stumble as well. Given that, we must remember that it was not the stumbling that destroyed Israel but their prideful refusal to listen to God—to learn of Him, to hear Him, and to follow in His ways rather than the ways of mortals.

5:6–7

The people of Israel would be “left alone” (see Hosea 4:17). The Lord “hath withdrawn himself from them” (5:6). However, the people would eventually be tired of the wickedness surrounding them and attempt to “seek the Lord.” But since they had already rejected the Lord, had pushed the Lord away, and had “dealt treacherously against the Lord,” it would be difficult to find Him. Their prideful dependence on the arm of flesh and their sinful ways would “devour them” as time progressed.

5:8–11

The cities of Gibeah and Ramah were located within the tribe of Benjamin. Their behavior was compared to Sodom. Beth-aven (“house of deceit”) was also mentioned. The people of these locations were to hear a warning concerning their evil ways. If they continued to rebuke God and to follow the ways of mortals, Ephraim would become desolate and God’s wrath would also be poured out on the Kingdom of Judah.

5:12–15

Ephraim (Israel) and Judah would suffer if they continued in their evil doings. To lessen their suffering, they went to an Assyrian (King Jareb, an unknown king). They still did not know their God; instead, they attempted to put their trust in flesh, with no benefit. The king could not heal Israel. God, and perhaps others, could help Israel, but God allowed that “none shall rescue [Israel and Judah].” Israel and Judah needed to repent and to recognize their unrighteous ways. They needed to immediately seek God.

Hosea presented a great lesson here. We all seem to quickly seek God when we are in trouble or otherwise afflicted. However, we should not wait for problems in our lives to occur before seeking God. We need to seek God always, not only during times of grief.

6:1–3

In his message, Hosea called Israel to “return unto the Lord” (verse 1). He reminded Israel that despite the Lord’s chastisement, the Lord would “heal us . . . and he will bind us up. . . . [And] he will revive us: . . . he will raise us up” (verses 1–2). We can see a prophecy in the words concerning Jesus’s being “smitten and torn” on the cross and of His resurrection: “In the third day he would rise us up.” The Lord would be aware of them. The Lord was prepared to help them if they did their part in acknowledging Him in their lives.

6:4–7

The Lord understood that both Israel (Ephraim) and Judah were not completely faithless, but like the early dew, their faith quickly dissipated. Therefore, through prophets, the Lord needed to chastise them because of their covenant breaking and their worldly and idolatrous ways of performing sacrifices and making burnt offerings. The Lord would rather have witnessed them demonstrating mercy, having a knowledge of Him, and acting more respectfully toward Him (see verse 7).

6:8–11

God identified Gilead as a sinful city that had been defiled by blood. Priests had been participating in that bloodshed by performing pagan sacrifices. Their idolatry and whoredoms defiled the house of Israel.

The Lord seemed to add an aside in verse 11 concerning Judah. Judah was not considered to be as wicked as the people of Israel to the north were. Therefore, after God’s people returned from their captivity in exile, a substantial number (“a harvest”) returned to Judah to the south, under God’s direction.

10:1–4

Hemlock is a poisonous plant with a hollow stem. It is considered a weed. Weeds tend to grow in wasted areas. Thus, Israel was described as “an empty vine” growing “as hemlock in the furrows of the field”

(verse 4). Furrows are trenches dug into fields for planting. Some scholars understand the term “furrow” as Israel’s guilt or iniquity. Israel was guilty of using the Lord’s blessings for its own benefit by worshipping idols instead of trusting in the Lord. Because of this divided loyalty (making covenants with God on the one hand and worshipping idols on the other) Israel was found at fault. God would destroy their altars and images used for idol worship. Even their king would be destroyed (Assyria would eventually overrun Israel).

10:5–8

The calves of Beth-aven (see my commentary for Hosea 4:15–19 for an explanation for this place-name) would be carried off to Assyria as a gift to King Jareb (an unknown king). Because of that act, the people and their leaders would mourn. The calf images would lose their glory. The gift of calves would bring shame to Israel. The Samarian king would be deposed (would disappear, as foam floats down a stream). Beth-aven would be destroyed, along with its altars. The people would say to the mountains, “Cover us,” and to the hills, “Fall on us,” as if wishing they could be hidden from God’s wrath.

10:9–11

The reference to “the days of Gibeah” (see verse 9) seems to refer to the time of atrocity, corruption, and subsequent civil war that almost overtook the city of Gibeah as mentioned in Judges 19:22–30; 20:1–48. Israel was about to receive similar chastisement. The “children of iniquity” would be punished and bound by Assyria because of their “two furrows” (possibly referring to the two sins of idolatry and adultery). However, just as an unruly young cow must be taught, Ephraim, Judah, and Jacob would eventually be guided and controlled by the Lord, as if having a yoke about their necks.

10:12–15

Hosea called upon Israel to seek the Lord, to do righteousness, to show mercy, and to make their land useful and productive, saying, “Break up your fallow ground.” This land had once been useful but was now hard and full of weeds (see verse 4). Israel needed to prepare the land for sowing the seed of righteousness and to put off the ways of man and trust in the Lord until the Lord came. Because Israel reaped the seed of iniquity, they would soon have to reap the judgment of the Lord. The city of Bethel, because of their wickedness, would be destroyed, just as the unknown city of Beth-Arbel was destroyed by Shalman (perhaps Shalmaneser, king of Assyria).

11:1–2

In a similitude of the Lord who was taken to Egypt as a child and later returned out of Egypt (because God loved Him), the Lord spoke of the people of Israel escaping from Egypt (because God loved the people) during the time of Moses. However, Israel immediately began to worship idols, particularly Baal. (Baal

was a Canaanite and Phoenician deity. Baalim is the plural form of the word, taken to mean that the Israelites worshipped many idols.)

11:3–4

Again, using the similitude of a child, the Lord mentioned that He taught Ephraim (Israel), but they did not recognize His help. He had lovingly drawn the people to Him, treating and guiding them with tenderness, but they did not recognize this. We can compare “cords of a man” in verse 4 to a loving father leading and guiding his child who may tend to wander off.

11:5–7

Referring to Israel’s captivity in Egypt, the Lord assured the people of Israel that they would not have to endure Egyptian captivity again. However, after their return from Egyptian bondage and their falling into idol worship, a punishment was necessary. Because they had not returned to God, they would now fall into Assyrian captivity. They ended up backsliding, depending on their own ways, and worshipping idols. Even though they might have called on the most High, they did not exalt or extol Him. Therefore, as punishment their cities and land would be destroyed by the Assyrians.

11:8–9

The two cities of Admah and Zeboim suffered the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah anciently and were destroyed. God really did not want Israel to suffer a similar fate because He had compassion for His people. However, Israel had to be chastised because of their wickedness. Unlike humans, who often cannot control their anger, God is in control and would not completely destroy Israel.

11:10–11

Israel would be restored. They would hear the Lord. Hosea said that the Lord would “roar like a lion.” This phrase describes the fact that the Lord would call loudly enough that the people would listen and hear; they would tremble. Even those in Egypt and Assyria would hear, and they would come out of captivity and return to their homes.

11:12

At the time that Hosea wrote this verse, Israel, full of lies and deceit, was much more wicked than Judah. Many faithful people of Judah still looked to God. By the time we read Hosea 12:2, we can see that that had perhaps changed. We can see that God “[had] a controversy with Judah.”

12:1

The wind referenced in this verse is an analogy that Israel existed on vain hopes (wind has no substance) and followed after destruction (an east wind, typically vicious, symbolizes destruction). Instead of looking to God for protection, Israel made a covenant with Assyria. At the same time, Israel paid a tribute to Egypt, hoping for their protection.

12:2–4

The Lord had a controversy with Israel and Judah. Jacob here refers to all the tribes of Israel (ten tribes in the north, two tribes in the south). In other words, the Lord would punish both Israel and Judah and would punish them according to the level of their respective wickedness.

Verse 3 makes a reference to the birth of Jacob and his twin brother, Esau. Genesis 25:24–26 tells us that after Esau was born, Jacob came out “and his hand took hold on Esau’s heel; and his name was called Jacob.” Some Hebrew scholars point out that in ancient Israel a “heel catcher” (as Jacob was) was someone who tried to obtain a goal by trickery. Jacob had caught hold of Esau’s heel and in time, by trickery, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage.

With that birthright came power from God, leading to righteousness on Jacob’s part. Verse 4 says that Jacob even had power over “the angel.” Bible scholars believe that the angel was God, who came down in the form of a man and confronted Jacob face to face (see Genesis 32:30). Jacob had wrestled with God (the angel) in order to supplicate Him for needed blessings. God had also appeared to Jacob in Beth-el (see Genesis 35). There, God renewed the promise that Jacob (or rather, Jacob’s posterity) would become a great nation.

12:5

God is referred to in verse 5 as “the Lord God of hosts.” That name appears many times throughout the Bible. The Hebrew word rendered as “hosts” here can also be rendered as “armies.” Whatever the rendering, we know God to be all-powerful. He is often referred to as “the God Almighty.”

Hosea went on to write, “The Lord is his memorial.” In Exodus 3:15 we also read, “And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

12:6

As Jacob returned to God, so should all God's children, the people of Israel, turn to God and wait on Him (trust Him, serve Him, and live the gospel).

12:7–8

As in all of his writings, after writing about returning to God and receiving blessings, Hosea reverted to writing about Israel's wickedness. Here he compared Israel to a corrupt merchant who was full of deceit. Israel boasted of her riches despite having broken covenants with God. Israel recognized blessings received from God; therefore, Israel believed that they were not sinning if they were blessed.

12:9–10

The Lord had anciently brought the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, which resulted in celebration and feasting. The Lord now promised to do the same for Israel if they would repent. It was sure to happen, as the prophets had spoken through prophecy, visions, and similitudes (see verse 10).

The term "tabernacle" in verse 9 can also be rendered as "tent, or a place of protection."

12:11

Hosea 6:8 describes Gilead as a city of iniquity. The people there were wicked, they made sacrifices to idols; Gilgal was notorious for idol worship. As a punishment, Hosea prophesied destruction (resulting in piles of stones—"heaps in the furrows"). Israel would end up in exile as asserted in Hosea 12:9.

12:12

Jacob fled to Syria to find himself a wife. He found a wife and served her father for fourteen years raising sheep (see Genesis 29). Hosea compared Israel's pending exile to the exile of Jacob of old.

12:13–14

God had brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage, but they still did not listen to the prophets or to God. Israel provoked God to anger; therefore, Israel had to be reprimanded. Destruction was to come upon them because of their guilt.

13:1–3

When Ephraim (Israel) spoke, the people listened and feared. They had respected Israel at one time. Israel was a powerful nation. However, when Israel began worshipping idols, Israel grew weak. They continued to sin by participating in idol worship.

Sacrifice, even human sacrifice, was associated with “calf-kissing” (verse 2). For example, the Israelites were known for worshipping a golden calf. While making sacrifices to it, kissing the calf was a form of paying homage to it (see 1 Kings 19:18; Exodus 32).

Using the comparison of the scattering of a cloud, of dew, of chaff, and of smoke, Hosea prophesied that Israel too, because of its idolatry, would be scattered.

13:4–8

In verse 4, the Lord reminded Israel how He had brought them out of bondage. Only He could have done that. The Lord laid out an extremely important piece of doctrine: “Thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me” (verse 4). That doctrine was so important, in fact, that other prophets have repeated it, including Isaiah. In Isaiah 43:11 we read, “I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour.”

After the Exodus, the Lord took great care of Israel. However, after being blessed, Israel ended up forgetting God. Nevertheless, God would bring Israel back, albeit forcefully. He fed them well in the wilderness but would now cause that Israel be devoured (humbled, destroyed). Hosea used images of wild beasts to demonstrate how forcefully God would carry out His will upon Israel.

13:9–11

Israel, because of its wickedness, would bring destruction upon itself. The Lord, as divine King, had been there to bless Israel, but those blessings were ignored. The Lord still desired to be Israel’s King. In fact, there was no other king or leader that could save Israel. However, since they had ignored the Lord’s true kingship and blessings, Israel’s destruction was to be the result.

13:12–16

Verse 12 is similar to what was written in Job 14:17: “My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity.” The Lord’s memory of Israel’s iniquities was also “bound” or stored away—to be unbound when judgment came upon Israel.

Verse 13 reminds us of the words of Isaiah: “And they said unto him, Thus saith [King] Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth” (Isaiah 37:3). The image of a travailing woman in labor was often used in the scriptures to represent pain or calamity. Israel here was like a child about to be born but unwisely chose not to be born. Under the Abrahamic covenant, God promised Israel a life of plenty, but instead Israel hastily headed for destruction by rebelling, choosing evil, and ignoring God’s covenant. The destructive force—the Assyrians—would soon be upon Israel.

Verses 14–16 described that destruction. Despite Israel’s richness and fruitfulness, the Lord would be as an east wind (a destructive storm; in this case, through the Assyrians). The land, including the capital, Samaria, would become desolate. The people, including women and children, would fall by the sword.

Verse 14 also reminds us that the Lord would be their Redeemer—and ours. However, in Hosea’s time, Israel turned away from God and rejected His plan of redemption from death. They refused to repent. Therefore, the Lord would feel no pity or compassion concerning consequent death or the grave: “O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance [compassion] shall be hid from mine eyes.”

The New Testament made note of that ransom from death: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). In this case in Hosea, the Lord will ransom the people from the grave and from death, but because of the people’s rejection of His plan, the Lord will have little compassion for them.

14:1–3

Despite the Lord’s warning to Israel concerning their evil doings and deserved destruction, He implored Israel to return to Him. He pleaded with Israel to come to Him with words—words of confession and words begging for mercy. Instead of sacrificial calves, the Lord suggested that Israel sacrifice their pride by offering with their lips words of contrition.

Verse 3 makes a reference to Asshur. This was the ancient name of the first capital of Assyria. The name Assyria is derived from that name. So, Hosea was saying that a mighty force of the world (Assyria, with all their horses) could not save Israel. Neither could their own works and false gods save them. Hosea said that Israel was now like an orphan and only the Lord could offer the mercy to save them in that condition.

14:4–7

If Israel offered up the suggested words of contrition and returned to the Lord, then He would heal them; He would fully love them; He would turn away his anger towards them; He would fulfill His part of the ancient covenant to bless Israel. Using metaphors such as the beautiful and aromatic plants of Lebanon, the Lord explained that He would be as living waters that would nourish and revive Israel, just as water nourishes plants. Israel would receive the blessings promised to them long ago; these blessings would branch out and be felt by others.

14:8–9

If Israel indeed returned to God, they would not be concerned with idol worship anymore. No longer would Israel seek the fruit of idolatry or of pridefulness. They would find their bounty in God and in God

alone. Because of God's gospel fruit, Israel would be strong, like a healthy fir tree (such as the strong cypress trees of Lebanon, as implied in verses 5–7).

Whoever is wise to the ways of God will understand what Hosea had been saying in his book. Those who transgress God's laws will surely fall, and as Hosea wrote, will occasionally be destroyed. God will bless those who walk in His ways—even those who have sinned but have returned to God. The book of Hosea shows us that despite God's occasional anger towards humankind, God is exceptionally merciful; there is hope after wrongdoing. Hosea skillfully shows us through the narrative and prophecies that only God's way is right.

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