



## Hosea

The book begins with God's command to Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife and the first few chapters describe what happened when he did so.

Chapter 4 onwards contains a range of messages from God via Hosea, first to the people of Israel (4-11) and then to the people of Israel and Judah (11-14), about the anger God felt because of their betrayal of him through injustice, corruption and their worship of other gods. Woven between these messages of doom are some messages of hope, pointing to what God's people can look forward to beyond the times of trouble.



### How long will it take?

**Reading time:** 30 mins  
**Short of time?** Just read 1.1-3.5; 11.1-11; 14.5-9



### Genre

Prophecy



### Anything tricky?

Many people find the violence in Hosea quite difficult. God says he will punish his people, violently, for breaking their covenant with him.

Hosea also appears to condone violence towards women in response to infidelity, indeed even to hold it up as the right thing to do.

It will be important to reflect on how you react to this and what response you might like to give to it as an issue.



### Inspiring quotes

Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

*(Hosea 6.3)*

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

*(Hosea 6.6)*

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

<sup>2</sup> The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.

<sup>3</sup> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them.

<sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

*(Hosea 11.1-4)*



## About the Author

The author is announced as Hosea in verses 1.1-2. He was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Hosea, in Hebrew, means salvation but Hosea is popularly termed 'the prophet of doom'.

### *What do we know about him?*

We know next to nothing about Hosea. He is not mentioned in any other book of the Old Testament; all we know about him comes from the book of Hosea. What we do know from the book, however, is startlingly personal. God told him to marry

'a wife of whoredom' (or another similar phrase depending on your translation) which could either mean someone already engaged in extra-marital intercourse, possibly prostitution, or someone who, after marriage, would turn to such practices. Some people suggest that Gomer was a temple prostitute.

We discover that Hosea married Gomer. Together they had three children, whom God declared should be called Jezreel (after the valley of Jezreel), Lo-Ruhamah (or not pitied) and Lo-Ammi (or not my people).



## About the times

The prophecies of Hosea were written sometime between 750 and 722 bc, just before Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was destroyed by the Assyrian empire.

The second half of the eighth century bc were unsettled times for Israel and Judah. In 745 bc Tiglath-Pileser III seized the Assyrian throne, in Nineveh which is in Northern Iraq, in a coup. He strengthened (the already strong) army and began a policy of military subjugation of the Ancient Near East. The leaders of Hosea's day seem to have coped with this by assimilating to the religious practices of Assyria; much of Hosea's criticism is aimed at their poor leadership: those who should have lead the people to God instead lead them in worship of other gods.

At the same time Israel, which had been previously prosperous, began to suffer economically. This led the rich to hold onto their money and ignore the needs of the poor.

### *What were people feeling?*

The book of Hosea indicates that the people were feeling self-satisfied and confident. They were sleepwalking towards disaster and had no idea of the catastrophe that was looming.

### *Other books set around this time*

Amos, Micah and (parts of) Isaiah



## What kind of Book is it?

Most of Hosea is made up of prophecies from God to his people.

Where the book is unusual – though not unique – are its symbolic prophecies. Hosea's marriage to Gomer in Hosea 1-3 symbolizes the relationship between God and his people – her infidelity is seen as Israel's infidelity; Hosea's hurt and anger at this to be God's hurt and anger.



## How is it structured?

Introduction

1.2-3.5 Hosea's marriage as a metaphor for the covenant between God and his people

4.1-11.11 God's lawsuit against Israel, ending with a prophecy of hope

11.12-14.19 God's lawsuit against Israel and Judah ending with a prophecy of hope



## Look out for...

Notice the dual strands of love and anger that flow through the book. Reflect on how you feel about this. What is your reaction to the theme of punishment that also runs through the book?

Hosea's message is enacted through his marriage, as well as proclaimed. What do you think of this kind of prophecy? Is it powerful or over-the-top? Notice how you feel about it as you read.

In the midst of the prophecies of doom there are a few glimmers of hope; what difference does this make to your reading of the book?



## What could this mean for me?

Is there any way in which you feel Hosea is a message for our times? As you read ask yourself, if Hosea were prophesying today what would he say?



## Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- One of the more disturbing aspects of Hosea is its attitude to 'faithless' women and the assumption that they should be punished. What did you make of this? How would you explain it to someone who was upset by the theme?
- Also difficult in this book is the theme of divine violence and the assumption that violence is an appropriate response to judgment. What are your reflections on this kind of portrayal of the violence of God?
- Among the many messages of punishment are some messages of hope. Spend some time discussing them. Did you find them helpful or out of place? What difference, if any, do they make to the overall book? Which message of hope spoke most powerfully to you?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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