

HOSEA - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What picture of God would you have if you had only Hosea? Only the Old Testament so far? What were the circumstances of Hosea's writing? What relationship is there between the first three chapters and the rest of the book? (Compare Ezekiel 16) How many children did Hosea have? (Hosea 1:3-4) How many did his wife have? (Hosea 1:3-9) Why would God go to such lengths to represent himself to the people? What was your general reaction to Hosea? If you had been Hosea's neighbor, would you try to pretend you didn't know him? Would you be embarrassed to discuss his story with your children? If you had only the book of Hosea to tell you about God, could you anticipate what God would do with his rebellious people?

"In the English Bible, the last twelve books of the Old Testament are known as the Minor Prophets because of their brevity. In the Hebrew Old Testament these twelve prophetic books are considered one, and the compilation is appropriately designated "The Twelve."

"The name of the author '**Hosea**', related to that of Joshua or Jesus, means "salvation." Aside from his calamitous marriage, little is known of the personal life of the prophet. He is simply identified as "the son of Beer" (Hosea 1:1). That Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom of Israel rather than the southern kingdom of Judah is supported by the following:

- (1) the localities mentioned in the book are almost without exception in the north;
- (2) Hosea speaks of Israel's king as "our king" in Hosea 7:5; and
- (3) Hosea's cognizance of the internal corruption and external intrigue of the northern kingdom bears the mark of a citizen rather than an alien.

"The period of Hosea's prophetic activity is dated according to the reigns of four kings in Judah mentioned in Hosea 1:1—Uzziah (792–740 B.C.), Jotham (750–731 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (729–686 B.C.)—and the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 B.C.) in Israel. Also on the throne during Hosea's ministry were the last six kings of Israel following Jeroboam II—Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea—although they are not listed in Hosea 1:1. A dating which satisfies all the demands of the historical notation in Hosea 1:1 is 755–725 B.C., the darkest period of Israel's history.

"Following the death of Jeroboam II, the nation was in a state of political anarchy. Of the last six kings of Israel, four (**Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah**) were assassinated, and the other two (**Menahem and Hoshea**) ascended the throne via assassinations. Morally speaking, Israel was bankrupt. Blatant immoralities were practiced openly and unashamedly. The religious life of the people was idolatrous and degenerate. Hosea was an eyewitness to the inward deterioration which eventually led to the collapse of the nation in 722 B.C., at which time Samaria, the capital, fell to the Assyrians. Hosea's ministry overlapped those of **Isaiah** and **Micah** in Judah and of **Amos** in Israel (cf. Isaiah 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1). **These four prophets of the eighth century constituted the high mark of Hebrew prophecy.**

"The theme of the Book of Hosea is God's redeeming love for Israel, which is uniquely expressed by the Hebrew word *hesed* (Hosea 2:19; Hos. 4:1; Hos. 6:4-6; Hos. 10:12; Hos. 12:6), meaning loyal love, steadfastness, and faithfulness. When used with respect to God's

relationship to Israel, the word denotes a binding “covenant love.” Hosea’s demonstration of faithful love toward Gomer becomes a visible symbol of God’s steadfast love for Israel, in spite of Israel’s unfaithfulness to that love. When Hosea stated that God would cease to love them (Hosea 9:15), he was speaking of a different Hebrew word for love, *<ahav*, which conveys the idea of affection, tenderness or even passionate love. When God judges He is not showing *<ahav*, but He is still faithful in His covenant love toward His people. Perhaps no other Old Testament figure gained as clear a picture of the love of God as did Hosea.

“HOSEA’S MARRIAGE:

“God commands Hosea to take a “wife of harlotry” to illustrate Israel’s unfaithfulness toward God (Hosea 1:2). Four basic points should be made regarding Hosea’s marriage: (1) Hosea’s marriage is to be taken literally; there is nothing in the text to indicate that his experience was a vision, dream, parable, or allegory. (2) Gomer was chaste at the time of marriage; the command in Hosea 1:2 to marry a “wife of harlotry” is to be interpreted proleptically (cf. Hosea 1:2). The text indicates that the first child was Hosea’s (Hos. 1:3); whereas regarding the second (Hos. 1:6) and third (Hos. 1:8), no specification is made. (3) The woman in Hosea 3:1 is to be identified as Gomer; insuperable interpretative difficulties arise if the woman is identified as anyone else. (4) Hosea’s marriage played an important part in his prophetic ministry; through the crucible of his own marital tragedy, Hosea came to understand the steadfast, faithful love of God for Israel.” (*Believer’s Study Bible*)

In this book God asks Hosea to act as a living parable to say something about God’s relationship to His people Israel. To understand what was going on in Israel (the northern kingdom) in the days of Hosea see 2 Kings 17:7-20. God portrays himself as the Husband of an unfaithful wife, just like Gomer, the wife of Hosea. (Compare Ezekiel 16; Jeremiah 31:27-34; Ephesians 5:21-33; Revelation 21:1-3)

Why would God represent himself as married to such an unfaithful wife? Is this perhaps the most graphic way he could find to try to help the people understand how he felt about them and at the same time how serious their condition really was?

God is incredibly gracious with his rebellious people in the book of Hosea. How can people resist a God who weeps and cries out as he watches his rebellious children leave him? Why do we prefer to portray God as an angry Judge to try to force people to do what is right?

Which is a greater motivator in your opinion: 1) The angry, threatening Judge who is ready to pour out his wrath on you? Or 2) the weeping, appealing husband who begs you to come back and even comes searching for you? Which One would you be more likely to love?

Biblical history shows that God has at times used “force” and “power” to get people to do what He asks them to, but this effect never lasts more than a short time. The experience at the foot of Sinai showed this very graphically. (Exodus 20:18-20; 32) Now God is trying a different approach. But it is clear from the rest of the book of Hosea and the historical facts that it did not lead to a great reformation or revival of godliness. In Hosea 11 God finally describes how He will feel as the people abandon Him finally.

Hosea 11:8,9. “How, oh how, can I **give you up** , Ephraim!

How, oh how, can I **hand you over**, Israel!

How can I turn you into a Sodom!

How can I treat you like a Gomorrah!

My heart recoils within me,
all my compassion is kindled.

I will not give vent to **my fierce anger--**

I will not destroy Ephraim again." (*Phillips*)

God doesn't seem to hesitate to use very graphic symbols to let us know where we stand with Him. We like to think we are embarrassed as we see some of these things taking place around us, but we need to remember that God sees everything that goes on all the time and thus has terrible and embarrassing things happening before His eyes constantly. When something like this happens is it better to speak plainly about it or try to pretend it didn't happen?

2. Do you think that God would ever ask a human being to marry a prostitute? Are we as Christians only allowed to marry perfect saints? Did God ask Hosea to violate the seventh commandment? Was it any worse than God asking Abraham to kill his son? (Genesis 22) Peter refused to "rise and eat" saying, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." (Acts 10:9-16) Should Hosea have done the same thing and refused to marry such a woman? Should God have abandoned Israel while they were still slaves in Egypt? Was God wrong in adopting Israel, considering how they were behaving?

Look carefully at the historical context for this book as recorded in 2 Kings 17:7-18 and Hosea 4:11-14. It is quite possible that virtually everyone in the city had become involved in these fertility cult practices and that when Hosea began looking for a wife, Gomer was the best he could find! That would fit better with the historical facts regarding Israel as a people as well. There was never a time when they were carefully following all that God instructed them to do, without any involvement with idols. They had hardly gotten out of Egypt when they built that golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai. So God chose them at a time when they were "spiritually prostitutes" as well. None of us have the privilege of marrying "perfect saints" because there are none available to marry!

3. Would God ever ask a human being to participate with Him in a "lived out" parable? (Job; Isaiah 7 & 8; Jeremiah 27 & 32; Ezekiel 5; 24:15-27) If this was an actual "lived out" parable, was it fair to the children involved? What about Job's children? Is it fair to talk about God's relationship with us as comparable to this marriage? This woman took Hosea's name and "blackened it." What about us, when we take God's name, what do we do to it? God takes all the risk here, we don't take any risk!

God has repeatedly used the lives of his prophets and their families as illustrations for His messages to the children of Abraham. The entire history of the children of Abraham is in effect a "lived-out parable". Whenever God asks any human being to accept the name of "Christian" he runs the risk that we will misrepresent that name before our fellow humans. There are many examples of "unfair" things that happened to people in Biblical times and in our times. We live in a world full of evil and that affects not just the sinners but all of us. God warned them that this would be true in Deuteronomy 29:19:

Make sure that there is no one here today who hears these solemn demands and yet convinces himself that all will be well with him, even if he stubbornly goes his own way. That would destroy all of you, good and evil alike. (*GNB*)

What the devil did to Job's first family was certainly not fair. The same could be said in our day about children who get cancer etc.

4. If this had been your story would you have followed through with the experience in Hosea 3? What if you saw your pastor wandering around in the "red light" district, entering bar after bar and brothel after brothel "looking for his wife?" What would you think? What if Hosea's wife had refused to go home? Do you think Hosea should then have tied her up and dragged her

home against her will, and locked her in the bedroom? As you understand God's character, is that what He would do?

Hosea 3 reminds us that times were different in those days! Culturally acceptable activities in our day would probably not include what Hosea did in Hosea 3! And what do we learn about God? We certainly cannot doubt his incredible willingness to go to almost any lengths to reach us and bring us home. (Compare Luke 15) But what if we don't agree to come home? God does not provide us with a parable to illustrate that, but he does describe how he feels when we don't respond—Hosea 11. God's respect for our freedom will not allow him to force us to come home no matter how much he would like us to come back.

5. Did God ask Hosea to violate everything that he had commanded previously about marriage? Do you think Hosea was a man of God and recognized as such in the community? Did people look up to him? In Christian marriages today, if people followed Hosea's example, would they be better off or worse off? Was Hosea living a playboy's life and encouraging other people to follow his example? What about Salmon marrying Rahab? (Joshua 2:1; 1 Chronicles 2:11; Ruth 4:21-22; Matthew 1:4-5; Luke 3:32)

When God asked Hosea to marry Gomer, He was not asking Hosea to live irresponsibly and commit adultery. It is even possible that Hosea married Gomer because she was the best wife available! Considering what others were doing at the time, Hosea's activities may have seemed rather commonplace. (See 2 Kings 17:7-18; Hosea 4:13-14) Do we know how Hosea felt about his wife? There are a number of examples in the Bible of people marrying other people without the best possible records! If we all were as loving and considerate as Hosea apparently was toward his wife, this world would be a better place.

6. When Hosea's wife left him, did he say, "now I have church grounds for divorce, let me go and find another wife or let me add to my harem?" What do you think his wife thought when Hosea appeared "downtown" to ask her to come home? Was she "owned" by a pimp and sold to Hosea who then had a right to "demand" that she come home with him? Is this the way that God relates to us?

I hope Gomer was at least embarrassed to see her husband in that place! Perhaps it made her think of what she had become. But dragging her home would not result in the kind of love and affection that God had in mind for the ideal marriage! God would never try to force us to love him. Love cannot be commanded or produced by force or authority. (DA 22) God only asks us to regard him as our Friend.

7. Which picture of God do you see in Hosea? (a) Jilted lover? (b) Angry bully? (c) Jealous husband? (d) Determined "dad?" (e) Frustrated father? (f) Disappointed but pleading and forgiving Bridegroom?

It is hard to image any more gracious picture than God crying out in Hosea 11 toward those who are apparently ready to abandon Him permanently. He weeps over those who refuse to come to Him. He is not "jilted", "angry" or "frustrated" in a human sense at all! He is "jealous" in the best possible sense, and as "determined" as He can be to get us to come back. But His respect for our freedom prevents Him from violating our rights.

8. Compare Revelation 13 & 14 with the book of Hosea. Had the children of Israel become irreligious at this time? (See 2 Kings 17; 2 Chron. 36:14-16) Is the whole world going to become irreligious at the end or is it rather a question of what kind of "God" they will worship? Does calling God by the right name guarantee that you are truly worshiping Him?

It is important to recognize that most of the “evils” that were going on in the days of Hosea were taking place in the name of religion. It will apparently be the same at the end of time. Satan will get world leaders and nations to declare a death sentence on God’s elect because they won’t cooperate in worshipping the Devil. (Revelation 13:15) Revelation 14 suggests that the contrast at the end will be over what kind of a God we really admire and worship.

9. Do you think we should read Hosea 4 literally or figuratively? Do you think the references to immorality throughout the book are literal or spiritual?

In the light of 2 Kings 17, it would appear that this chapter is literal. Ezekiel 16 is certainly not much better! It represents a period maybe 100 years later in the southern kingdom, but conditions were much the same as they had been earlier in the north. Putting the whole picture together we might most honestly be inclined to feel that the pictures are both literal and spiritual.

10. What if God had turned to the universe and said, “Do you see how much evil there is down on planet earth? It is not safe for Me to go down and associate with those people! I’m just going to leave them to the consequences of their own behavior!” Would the universe have understood and agreed with such an action? (RH, 07-17-1900 par. 4-7; ST, 08-27-1902, par. 3-4; cf. DA 37) What would be the best illustration God could give to the universe about how he was trying to bring back his erring people?

It is hard for us to know how the angels feel about our marriages since none of them have experienced just what we experience. But they must have very close relationships with fellow angels and perhaps they can understand our situation a bit in that light.

“Before Christ’s first advent, the sin of refusing to conform to God’s law had become widespread. Apparently Satan’s power was growing; his warfare against heaven was becoming more and more determined. A crisis had been reached. With intense interest God’s movements were watched by the heavenly angels. Would He come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity? Would He send fire or flood to destroy them? All heaven waited the bidding of their Commander to pour out the vials of wrath upon a rebellious world. One word from Him, one sign, and the world would have been destroyed. The worlds unfallen would have said, ‘Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because Thou hast exterminated rebellion.’” *The Signs of the Times*, August 27, 1902; RC 58; compare *The Youth’s Instructor*, July 29, 1897; TMK 19

Isn’t it clear from this passage that angels have a sense of “justice!”?

11. How do you relate this story to the later story of Ezra and Nehemiah who forcibly separated such marriages and sent the women and their children away? (Ezra 9 & 10; Nehemiah 13:1-3) Why were they doing such a thing? Can you imagine the enormous risk that God ran in associating with us—even coming, being born and living as one of us? Could you think of a more dramatic way for God to illustrate how he has related to the entire human race than this story? Haven’t we humans left him, not just once, but many times?

Ezra and Nehemiah recognized the risk of allowing these practices to continue. They brought down the wisest king that ever lived! (Nehemiah 13:26) We have misrepresented God on so many occasions and God knows how serious this is! (Romans 1:18) It seems

to be His number one sin. Jesus however, said that we should be prepared to forgive 490+ times, as he no doubt has done for many a human. Surely this story illustrates very graphically how we have abused God in our relationship with him.

12. Notice what is missing in the land because they don't know God very well—Hosea 4:1 and Hosea 6:6. What would the universe say about our world today?

What can God do with people who don't even "know" him? There could never be love or trust. How much love and trust is there in our world today? Do we have much of a basis for trusting one another in our setting? By contrast, there is every imaginable reason for trusting God.

13. **Do you understand clearly what God's wrath is? What does God do when He "pours out His wrath and anger?" (Compare Revelation 14:10) What happens to people on whom it is poured? Where would you look in the Bible to get a clear definition of God's wrath?** As a suggestion read through Romans 1 carefully and try to notice how Paul discusses God's wrath. What does God's wrath (Rom. 1:18) have to do with the "Good News" of which Paul is so proud (Rom 1:16)? What does God actually do when "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven"? (Romans 1:18) What is implied by Romans 1:24-28? (Compare Hosea 4:16-17; Hos. 11:1-12) Then you must ask yourself, "Has God ever fully and finally given anyone up?" What would that mean? How would God "do" such a thing? What about the story of Adam and Eve and the original sin? God said, "If you eat of the tree (sin) you will die." (Genesis 2:17) Does this suggest that if God gives someone up, they will die? (Compare Romans 6:23) **If God is the source of life, and someone is "separated" from that source what is the result? Is there any verse in the Bible that specifically states what happens when someone is given up by God? Hasn't God stated what would happen, but in His usual consummate way, hasn't He also fully demonstrated it? See Romans 4:25. Compare Matthew 27:46. How was God involved in the death of His Son? What was the actual cause of Jesus' death?**

Understanding God's anger or wrath, and how it is very different than human anger/wrath is one of the major lessons we need to learn from Scripture. The key is to understand what God **does** when He pours out His wrath. (Revelation 14:9-11) See **Judges - A Teacher's Guide #9**. All through Scripture similar sentiments are expressed. Hosea 11:1-8 (*Phillips*) is particularly exemplary. When God allows us to exercise our freedom, we may even seek to kill Him! Putting together Romans 1, Hosea 11, Romans 4:25 and Matthew 27:46 should make it clear that God is not demanding his pound of flesh! God does not get carried away with his "emotions!" But when, in recognition of our rights and freedom, God finally admits that we have lived rebellious lives for so long that we are "bent" on rebellion and nothing he can do will bring us back, then God weeps as we go our own way.

Some think that if God just gives us up, that can't be too serious! Jesus was given up on Calvary. Did He think it was serious? When Jesus was "given up" by the Father it was the most incredible thing that ever happened to them. Jesus died a human death. It is what the Bible describes as the death of sinners (Isaiah 53:4-9; 2 Corinthians 5:21), also known as the second death. (Revelation 2:11; Rev. 20:6,14; Rev. 21:8) It was the death of separation.

God does not torture or persecute the wicked in the end, He simply leaves them to reap the consequences of their own sins. (Galatians 6:7) "God's wrath is best described as His turning away in loving disappointment from those who don't want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their

own rebellious choices.” (Graham Maxwell) God never “gives up” on His children until there is literally nothing more that He could do for them. Even at that point, as demonstrated here in Hosea 11, He weeps over them as they leave Him.

14. Was God’s statement to Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:17) the equivalent of “either love and obey Me, or I’ll kill you?” Has God ever said such a thing?

Nowhere in the Bible is such a statement made or implied. This idea comes from pagan backgrounds and has worked its way into Christianity through the Greek notion of an immortal soul. If the soul is immortal then sinners must go somewhere if God cannot convince them to live righteous lives. Therefore, it is assumed that people will be “thrown into hell” where they will burn forever (because they are immortal). Then it is suggested that the way to avoid being thrown into hell is to be “forgiven” and “justified”. The implication is that if God will forgive us and “justify” us, then He won’t have to “burn” us. This implies terrible things about our relationship with God and perhaps even worse things about his character.

15. What about the sad names of the three children of Hosea, how must those children have felt, with names like those? (Hosea 1:3-9)

There are many things in the Bible that are not “fair”. What about the treatment of Job’s first family? (See Job 1) Isaiah also had sons whose names had prophetic meanings. (See Isaiah 8) How soon in their lives did the children of Gomer realize the significance of their names?

What we forget at times is that we call ourselves Christians. What are we doing to God’s name as we bear it? Almost everything in life has associations and hidden meanings based on past or future events and we carry around with us our own personal and group identities. Thus in a real sense each of us carries a name or names that might not be the best. Are we always proud to carry the name of our church?

16. What happens to people who worship idols? What does God do to people who insist on ignoring Him? (Hosea 7:13-14; Hos. 8:2-3,13; **Hos. 9:10; Hos. 4:17**; Compare 2 Chronicles 36:14-16; **Ps. 115:1-8**; Isaiah 44:9-20) What does He do with people who are very religious, take God’s name, but never really get to “know Him”? (Matthew 7:22-23)

See #13 above. If we insist on our own ways God will finally allow us to go. We will become like the thing that we worship and admire. It is a natural law of the mind that causes this to happen. (GC 555) Our children become like us in many ways because they watch us and copy what they see. In light of this it should not be surprising that people who worship idols are affected by it in an adverse way. The people in Hosea’s day seemed to think that they could claim to be worshipers of Yahweh and that this would protect them and allow them to reap the benefits of being a true worshiper of Yahweh and at the same time they were spending most of their time with the fertility cult religions that were so popular. As a result they lost the true knowledge of Yahweh and became “as disgusting as the gods they loved”. (Hosea 9:10, *GNB*)

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E G White Comments:

“To many these commands seem to be contrary to the spirit of love and mercy enjoined in other portions of the Bible, but they were in truth the dictates of infinite

wisdom and goodness. God was about to establish Israel in Canaan, to develop among them a nation and government that should be a manifestation of His kingdom upon the earth. They were not only to be inheritors of the true religion, but to disseminate its principles throughout the world. The Canaanites had abandoned themselves to the foulest and most debasing heathenism, and it was necessary that the land should be cleared of what would so surely prevent the fulfillment of God's gracious purposes.

"The inhabitants of Canaan had been granted ample opportunity for repentance. Forty years before, the opening of the Red Sea and the judgments upon Egypt had testified to the supreme power of the God of Israel. And now the overthrow of the kings of Midian, of Gilead and Bashan, had further shown that Jehovah was above all gods. The holiness of His character and His abhorrence of impurity had been evinced in the judgments visited upon Israel for their participation in the abominable rites of Baalpeor. All these events were known to the inhabitants of Jericho, and there were many who shared Rahab's conviction, though they refused to obey it, that Jehovah, the God of Israel, "is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath." Like the men before the Flood, the Canaanites lived only to blaspheme Heaven and defile the earth. And both love and justice demanded the prompt execution of these rebels against God and foes to man." *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 492 (1890)

- ii. "The Lord does not delight in vengeance, though he executes judgment upon the transgressors of his law. **He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. In order to save some, he must cut off those who have become hardened in sin.** Says the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act." [Isaiah 28:21] The work of wrath and destruction is indeed a strange, unwelcome work for Him who is infinite in love." *The Signs of the Times* August 24, 1882

Summary:

It should be clear from these passages that God granted the peoples of Canaan a period of probation amounting to 430 years. He sent them "missionaries"—His friends Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lot, Job and Melchizedek—but they continued to grow more and more wicked. At the end of their period of probation, because of their wickedness, God's plan was to drive them out or to hand them over to the Israelites.

In the same way, God gave the land to the Israelites for a period of about 600-700 years. They turned out to be just as wicked as their predecessors in the land. After 600 years, the northern kingdom of Israel was thus allowed to go into oblivion or death at the hands of the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah remained for about 130 years longer until they were conquered three times in a row by Nebuchadnezzar. Their land was totally destroyed and they were taken off to captivity. Later they came back, but only as a nation in subjection to the ruling powers.

Those who chose to come back were given another 500+ years to try to learn the lessons God wanted them to learn. At that point after rejecting Jesus and crucifying him, their nation was totally destroyed by the Romans. They have never again fully possessed the land.

- iii. How does God feel about this? Hosea 11:7,8

Hosea 11:8,9. "How, oh how, can I **give you up** , Ephraim!

How, oh how, can I **hand you over**, Israel!

How can I turn you into a Sodom!

How can I treat you like a Gomorrah!

My heart recoils within me,

all my compassion is kindled.

I will not give vent to **my fierce anger--**

I will not destroy Ephraim again." (*Phillips*)