

# Lesson 3

When we ended last week, we were looking, not at Hosea *the Book*, but rather at Hosea *the man*. As we saw, we don't know too much about Hosea beyond the names of some of his relatives. But we were able to discern from the text that he was likely a young man when he began to prophesy.

To wrap up our discussion of the Lesson 2 Handout from last week, let's look at one final "problem verse" before we move on:

**2 Kings 17:1** – In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years.

If we refer to our handout from Lesson 2, we can see that it disagrees with this verse. According to our handout, Hoshea began to reign just a few years after Ahaz began to reign, not 12 years after Ahaz as we just read in 2 Kings 17:1.

Now, if the only problem was that 2 Kings 17:1 disagreed with our handout, then our solution would be immediate! But 2 Kings 17:1 also seems to disagree with other verses in 2 Kings, and that is why 2 Kings 17:1 is listed in the problem category!

**2 Kings 15:30** – Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

**2 Kings 16:1** – In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign.

Those two verses tell us two things: First, that Ahaz began to reign in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Pekah, and second, that the first year of Hoshea is the same as the final (which was the 20<sup>th</sup>) year of Pekah. What that means is that the first year of Hoshea (in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Pekah) was the **third** year of Ahaz's reign (the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Pekah being three years after the start of Ahaz's reign in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of Pekah). And that is what our handout shows.

But 2 Kings 17:1 says that Hoshea began to reign in the **12<sup>th</sup> year** of Ahaz rather than the **third year** of Ahaz (as we deduced from 2 Kings 15:30 and 2 Kings 16:1). How do we explain that difference between 2 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 15–16?

One possible explanation is that, as we have discussed in other contexts, Hebrew numbers are notoriously difficult to copy. Vertical strokes are used for units, horizontal strokes are used for tens, and single strokes could easily be overlooked or miscopied. So, perhaps the number 12 in 2 Kings 17:1 was originally the number 2 or the number 3, and at some point it was miscopied.

Another possible explanation is that, once again, we have a co-regency – this time between Ahaz and his father, Jotham. This solution may be indicated by an oddity in the text about Hoshea. The verse we are looking at (2 Kings 17:1) says that Hoshea began to reign in 12<sup>th</sup> year of **Ahaz**, but that is not the only Judaeen time reference

we are given for Hoshea. We also have 2 Kings 15:30.

**2 Kings 15:30** – Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

Why are we given two Judaeen time references for Hoshea's reign – one to Jotham and one to Ahaz? Perhaps because they were both reigning at the same time.

And, in fact, we know for sure that they were both reigning for some overlapping period of time. How do we know that? Because of the verse we just read – 2 Kings 15:30.

That verse mentions the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Jotham, which is odd. Why is that odd? Because 2 Kings 15:33 tells us that Jotham reigned only 16 years. What that means is that for at least 4 years, Ahaz was running things while Jotham was still alive. Perhaps 2 Kings 17:1 tells us that this co-regency of Ahaz with his father Jotham started even earlier. (The handout for Lesson 2 shows the 4 year overlap, but does not show the possibly longer overlap.)

And there is another piece of evidence favoring a 10 year co-regency before the official reign of Ahaz began. 2 Kings 16:2 says that Ahaz was 20 years old when he began to reign. And, 2 Kings 18:2 says that his son, Hezekiah, was 25 years old when he began to reign. If the only reign of Ahaz was his 16 year official reign, then Ahaz was 36 when his son was 25 – which means that

Ahaz was a father at age 11. But if we include a 10 year co-regency, then Ahaz became a father at age 21 rather than age 11.

For this problem verse, I favor the explanation of a longer co-regency, but it is also possible that there was a miscopied number in 2 Kings 17:1.

And with that we end our dive into the deep end of the pool when it comes to the chronology of the kings! Again, there are additional resources available on the website if anyone wants to continue swimming in that pool!

## **North or South?**

Moving on, here is our next question about Hosea, and it is a question that we often ask here in Texas: was Hosea a northerner or a southerner?

While Hosea had a message for both the northern and southern kingdoms, he directed his strongest and most urgent words to the people of Israel in the north.

When Hosea talks about Judah in the south, Hosea's words reflect an optimism that they may be able to avoid what would soon happen to those in the north. That optimism may have been caused by the religious reforms of King Hezekiah in the south that we looked at last week.

Hosea's focus on the north might mean that he was likely from the north himself, perhaps taking refuge in the south at some point when the Assyrians arrived. But Amos was also focused on

the north – and Amos was from the south. So we need better evidence to conclude that Hosea was from the north.

That better evidence comes from Hosea's expertise about what was going on in the north. Hosea speaks as an eye witness.

**Hosea 4:13** – They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good.

**Hosea 13:2** – And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of them, "Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!"

Hosea knows the conditions in the north, he knows the history of the north, he knows the traditions of the north, and he knows the geography of the north. And Hosea calls the King of Israel "our king" in Hosea 7:5.

Some have surmised from his frequent references to Moses and Deuteronomy that Hosea was a Levite who lived in the north.

One thing we know for sure about Hosea is that he was faithful and obedient to God whatever the cost. And in Hosea's case, that cost was deep personal sacrifice and bitter sorrow.

As always, God chose exactly the right person through which to breathe his word. As one commentary described it:

Nothing less than the combination of Hosea's background steeped in covenant truth, of the tragic marital experience which put him in touch with God's own heart, and of his recognition that God not Baal was the source of all power and love, could have produced this book which by its story and oracles transposed Israel's knowledge of God into the real intimacy of a true marriage.

And another:

Molded by this crucible of domestic tragedy, Hosea was particularly equipped to give his listeners a glimpse of the pain that God felt when Israel rejected His love and went "a whoring" after other gods. Israel was a harlot in every sphere of life: religiously, in seeking after other gods; socially, in creating a society of adulterers; and politically, in searching for the protection of foreign nations rather than Almighty God.

God wanted Hosea to know how he felt, and so God put Hosea into a situation that would cause Hosea to know how God felt. And so when we hear the message of Hosea, we are hearing the inspired word of God proclaimed from someone who knew how God felt. How? Because Hosea felt the same way.

We will learn much more about Hosea the man as we move verse by verse through Hosea the book.

## **What are the key themes in Hosea?**

The best way to identify the themes of a book is to study the book, and that is what we will do as we work through each verse of Hosea. As we do that, we will be on the lookout for themes that

we have already identified as well as new themes that we may not have spotted yet.

Below are 10 key themes that I think we will see in Hosea.

Why so many themes? First, some of these themes are more prominent in the book than others. Second, although Hosea is a minor prophet, his prophesy is one of the longer books from the minor prophets. And third, Hosea jumps around a lot!

### **Theme #1: The Love of God**

This theme, of course, is a theme of the entire Bible, but we see God's love on display in the book of Hosea in a way that is (perhaps) very different from how we are shown God's love in other books. If we ever wonder how God could love us so much that, while we rebellious sinners, God sent his only son to die for us, then we can turn back to the book of Hosea for an answer.

And we can look at the strange marriage between Hosea and Gomer. As we know, in the New Testament, Christ's love for the church is described as a marriage.

**Ephesians 5:25** – Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

But that is not only a New Testament concept. That is what Hosea tells us. We see that same description of God's love here in Hosea. God loves his people in Hosea as a husband loves his wife – as Christ loves his church.

And here is a question I want us to ask ourselves as we study this book of Hosea: we know that God loves his people, **but did Hosea love Gomer?** Or did Hosea spend each day of his marriage wishing he had married someone else? Was Hosea ever glad he had married Gomer? Let's keep that question in mind as we study this book.

So, our first theme is the love of God.

## **Theme #2: Spiritual Adultery**

This second theme is related to the first – the marriage between God and his people is not always a happy marriage. Instead, God's people reject God and turn instead to someone else – to false gods and to foreign alliances. They become guilty of spiritual adultery.

A primary way that this theme is shown to us in the book of Hosea is through the life of Hosea himself. God wanted Hosea to experience what God himself was experiencing. And so, Hosea married Gomer, the prostitute, who, perhaps not unexpectedly, seems to have soon turned back to her old way of life.

**Hosea 3:1** – And the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress...



We will need to be on the lookout for this theme of spiritual adultery all throughout the book, both in the relation between God and his people, and also in the relation between Hosea and Gomer, which is intended to teach us about God's relation with his people.

### **Theme #3: The Grace of God**

Why didn't God just forget about his people when they forgot about him? Why didn't Hosea forget about Gomer when she wandered off to her old life of sin? We could ask the same question about ourselves! And the answer would be the same: grace!

**Ephesians 2:4-7** – But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Can we find a foretaste of that grace in the Old Testament? Yes, we can. And one place we can find it is right here in the book of Hosea.

**Hosea 14:4-7** – I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

No one looking at the state of the people in Hosea's day would ever have expected a happy ending to this book, but the book of Hosea does have a happy ending. Why? Because of the grace of God.

#### **Theme #4: Reconciliation**

A central theme of the book of Hosea is that God wants his family back.

God's want his loving wife to return to him, and God wants his children to love him and obey him. In short, God wants a reconciliation, and again we see a theme here in Hosea that is also a theme of the entire Bible. In fact, in some ways, reconciliation is THE theme of the Bible!

**2 Corinthians 5:18-19** – All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

A central theme of Hosea is reconciliation. That reconciliation is needed, and that reconciliation is possible.

#### **Theme #5: The Children of God**

The theme of God's people as God's bride is not the only way that God's people are described in Hosea. God's people are also described as God's children. And, in fact, that is the description we find in one of the most famous verses of the book.

**Hosea 1:10** – Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or 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.”

And, of course, we see this theme on display as well in the life of Hosea himself – Hosea has a wife, and Hosea has three children.

Why do we have both metaphors? Why are we shown God’s people as a wife and also as children? Let’s keep that question in mind as we work through the text. As we look for this theme, let’s see if we can figure out why it is being used.

#### **Theme #6: Repentance**

The word “turn” or “return” or “repent” is used 22 times in Hosea in various ways, both to describe the turning of God’s people and also to describe the turning of God to judgment or God turning away in his anger.

**Hosea 11:5** – They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.

**Hosea 14:4** – I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.

Yes, Hosea has a stern message for the people of God who have turned away from God to follow another. And yes, Hosea has a hopeful message for the people of God about the day to come when they would once again be called the children of God. But between the stern message and the

hopeful message stands repentance, and that is a key theme of the book of Hosea.

### **Theme #7: Divine Sovereignty**

Again, we see a key theme in Hosea that is also a key theme in the entire Bible – God reigns supreme over all.

We saw that theme in our study of Daniel, and, as we recall, it was a theme that the great Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way!

**Daniel 4:32** – And you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”

We see that theme in Hosea as well.

**Hosea 8:4** – They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not.

**Hosea 13:11** – I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.

The people thought they were in charge, making kings and princes as they wished. But those very same kings are described in Hosea as a judgment by God.

It has been rightly said that people generally get the leaders they deserve, and perhaps we have seen that in our own recent history, but we see it for sure here in Hosea and in the line of

worthless kings who reigned over the northern kingdom during the days of Hosea.

“The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” That is a theme of the book of Hosea.

### **Theme #8: Prosperity leads to self-reliance**

When Hosea began to preach during the days of Jeroboam, the people were at peace and were prospering. A theme of Hosea is that the people were misinterpreting their prosperity. They thought it came from Baal instead of from God!

**Hosea 2:8** – And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.

And the tragic irony is that their great blessings from God became the reason for their apostasy.

**Hosea 13:6** – But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.

Paul would later teach about this same issue.

**Philippians 4:12** – I know how to be brought low, and I know how to **abound**. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, **abundance** and need.

In Hosea’s day, the people had not learned that secret of facing abundance! And we see that sad result.

As we study Hosea, we need to remember something that James 1:23 tells us about God's word – it is a mirror! As we look into the mirror of Hosea, we need to ask ourselves what we see. Do we also see a people who have yet to learn the secret of facing plenty?

That is a key theme in the book of Hosea.

**Theme #9: We must learn from our history.**

Hosea is full of references to Israel's history, from recent events all the way back to the patriarchs. In fact, as we will see in the first chapter, a driving factor in the book of Hosea is an event in the life of Jehu that happened 50 years earlier. But that is not all – we will also see references to Jacob, Abraham, and even Adam. (Hosea is the only prophet who mentions Adam!)

Why is this history important?

One reason is that this history highlights the horror of Israel's infidelity by showing how God has always been so good to Israel all throughout its history.

Another reason is that the history shows how often the people had been warned by God about the events that were very soon going to befall them. Another way to describe this theme is with the phrase "I told you so!"

And a third reason is that the history in Hosea gives the people hope that perhaps once again God will rescue them from the results of their own disobedience.

One commentator describes the theme this way:

Hosea's whole preaching is rooted in the saving history. It might almost be said that he only feels safe when he can base his arguments in history.

Another commentator suggests that central to Hosea's message is the outworking of the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy, and that central to understanding the message of Hosea is an understanding of the Sinai covenant.

In short, the book of Hosea is steeped in history from beginning to end. In fact, in the very first verse we find five kings!

The conclusion is obvious – we need to study that history to understand this book. And we need to heed that history ourselves if we are to learn the lessons that are here for us from our schoolmaster, the Old Testament! (Galatians 3:24)

### **Theme #10: The church of Christ**

This theme may seem to some like an unexpected theme for the book of Hosea, but it should not be. In fact, this theme of the church of Christ is central to understanding the book of Hosea. Why?

Because for the people of Hosea's day there would not be a happy ending. Assyria was coming and would kill or carry off most of Hosea's listeners. And yet, the book of Hosea has a happy ending. How can we explain that? We can explain it in only one way – that promised happy ending

in Hosea finds its fulfillment only in Christ and in the church of Christ.

**1 Peter 2:9-10** – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 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.

And how is that theme shown in Hosea?

**Hosea 1:10-11** – Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or 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.” And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

**Hosea 2:18-20** – And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

I think we will find in this book of Hosea some of the most beautiful prophecies in the Bible about Christ and about the kingdom of Christ. Let's be on the lookout for them!



Those are 10 themes that I think we will see in Hosea, but let's be on the lookout for others as well!