

Lesson 4

Who else was prophesying at the same time as Hosea?

The prophet Hosea overlaps with several other Old Testament prophets.

In fact, the first verse of **Isaiah** looks very similar to the first verse of Hosea.

Isaiah 1:1 – The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of **Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah**, kings of Judah.

Amos also mentions two of the same kings that we see in Hosea 1:1.

Amos 1:1 – The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of **Uzziah** king of Judah and in the days of **Jeroboam** the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Micah also mentions kings that we find in Hosea 1:1.

Micah 1:1 – The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of **Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah**, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Those three prophets – Isaiah, Amos, and Micah – were prophesying at the same time as Hosea, but there are some significant differences between those prophets and Hosea.

First, Isaiah, Micah, and Amos were all from the south, unlike Hosea, who was from the north. In fact, Hosea appears to have been the only Old Testament prophet who was from the northern kingdom and whose message was directed to the northern kingdom. (Jonah, as we see in 2 Kings 14:25, was from the north, but his message was directed elsewhere.)

Second, Isaiah and Micah were sent to the southern kingdom, unlike Hosea, who was sent to the north. Amos, like Hosea, preached to the north, but, as we said, Amos, unlike Hosea, was from the south. Perhaps the people were more likely to listen to one of their own – and that was Hosea!

Third, as for Hosea and Amos, the two prophets in the north, their messages were different. Amos was focused on the social injustice that he saw all around him, while Hosea was focused on the spiritual infidelity that he saw all around him. Amos declared that the people were **unjust**, while Hosea declared that the people were **unfaithful**.

Finally, although they did not overlap in time, there is some similarity between Hosea and Jeremiah.

Jeremiah warned the people of the southern kingdom that they would soon go into captivity, and he lived to see it. Hosea likewise warned the northern kingdom that they would be going into Assyrian captivity, and he lived to see it.

Hosea has been called the “death-bed prophet of Israel” because he was the last to prophesy

before the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, and likewise Jeremiah was the last voice sent to Judah before its captivity.

We should mention two other prophets before we move on: Jonah and Nahum. Those two prophets were directed, not to Israel or to Judah, but rather to their oppressor – the Assyrian city of Nineveh, which was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire from 701 BC until its destruction in 612 BC by the Babylonians. And, as we said, Jonah, like Hosea, was from the north.

What is the structure of the book of Hosea?

With some books that question is easy, while with other books that question is hard. Hosea falls squarely in the second category. This is a hard question.

Here is how one commentary describes it:

The analysis of the structure of Hosea seems to be one of the great pitfalls of Old Testament study. It has produced little unity or consensus, and the various proposals have little in common besides noting that there is an apparent break between 3:5 and 4:1.

Some commentators come up with a structure and then try their best to fit the book of Hosea into that structure by removing verses and rearranging verses in the book at their whim. I like how one commentary describes such approaches – “fanciful arrogance.” If the book of Hosea does not fit with our proposed structure, then we need to

change our proposed structure rather than change the book of Hosea!

And many structures have been proposed. But rather than look at all of them, let's look at one proposed structure that, in my opinion, seems to work the best. The real test of whether it works will be whether it makes sense as we move through the book, but I think it is a good place to start.

Why do I like this particular proposal? **Because it closely ties the first three chapters of Hosea into the remainder of the book.** Yes, there is a clear break between chapter 3 and chapter 4, but perhaps that break is not quite as stark as some commentators seem to believe.

And wouldn't that make sense? Wouldn't we expect the opening chapters of the book to set the stage for the remaining chapters? Wouldn't we expect Hosea's marriage and his three children to be tied closely to the message of the entire book? Why did God command Hosea to marry in chapter 1 if God was planning to immediately change the subject in chapter 4? And if we would be asking that question, I'm sure Hosea would have really been asking that question!

I think we can make a comparison here with the book of Revelation. In that book, we find seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor in chapters 2 and 3, and then we find a vision beginning in chapter 4. Wouldn't we expect there to be a relation between the two, or do we think (as surprisingly many commentators appear to think)

that the letters in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation have no relation to the vision that follows? If our view of Revelation 4–22 leaves us wondering why we have chapters 2 and 3, then our view of Revelation 4–22 is almost certainly wrong. Likewise, if our view of Hosea 4–14 leaves us wondering why we have Hosea 1–3, then our view of Hosea 4–14 is almost certainly wrong. It all sounds very simple – which makes it doubly surprising why so many commentaries take the opposite approach!

So what is the relation between Hosea 1–3 and Hosea 4–14? Let’s start with three observations.

First, the first chapter of Hosea is dominated by Hosea’s marriage and the births of three children, and these three children are given names that are symbols of Israel's future.

Second, Hosea describes his domestic life in **two parts**, with the first part in chapter 1 being in the **third** person (e.g., “And the LORD said to **him**” in verse 3), and the second part in chapter 3 being in the **first** person (e.g., “And the LORD said to **me**” in verse 1).

Third, the three opening chapters of Hosea portray Israel as an adulterous woman who must undergo exile and deprivation but who will eventually experience restoration.

When we turn to Hosea 4–14, what will we find? What we will find are these same three features that, in turn, are based on Hosea’s three

children! In fact, the number three occurs again and again in chapters 4–14.

- The first general accusation in Hosea 4 is threefold.
- Hosea then indicts three specific groups of people (religious leaders, common people, and women).
- The text then gives three extended warnings to Israel and Judah, followed by a threefold call to repent.
- In Hosea 5, the text addresses three groups: the priests, the house of Israel, and the house of the king.
- Signals then ring out at three places: Gibeah, Ramah, and Beth Aven.

And there are other examples we could give. Why do we see the number three so often in chapters 4–14? I think Hosea is pointing us back to the three children in chapters 1–3.

And why are there **three** children? We have already looked at one possible reason – there were **three** kingdoms!

As we saw earlier, for 12 years shortly after Hosea began to preach there were **two** kingdoms in the north – a pro-Assyrian kingdom under Menahem and Pekahiah, and an anti-Assyrian kingdom under Pekah. Combining those two northern kingdoms with Judah gives us **three** kingdoms, which is the same as the number of Hosea’s children.

Likewise, we see a similarity between chapters 8–14 and chapters 1–3. In chapters 8–14, the text moves back and forth between **first** person (God

speaking, as in 8:1 – “they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law”) and third person (Hosea speaking, as in 9:9 – “he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins”).

A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that it echoes the pattern established in chapters 1–3 where the account of Hosea's marriage is given both in the third person (chapter 1, “And the LORD said to him”) and in the first person (chapter 3, “And the LORD said to me”).

And again, in chapters 8–14, we see the emphasis on the number three, beginning at the top level with three main sections.

- First, in chapters 8–10, the book confronts the false security and the false prosperity of Israel.
- Second, in chapters 11–13, we see that God has determined and Hosea has affirmed that Israel must be severely punished.
- Finally, in chapter 14, there is a call to repentance and grace.

So here then is a proposed structure for Hosea:

- First, a linkage is established between God and Hosea in the account of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, and the major themes of apostasy, judgment, and restoration are developed.
- Second, using the three children of Hosea, the book presents a series of accusations dominated by the number three, ending with a threefold call to repent.

- Third, in three series of proclamations, Hosea presents God as being torn over what to do with his people and finally determining that exile is the solution.
- Finally, there is a final, more optimistic, call to repent.

This structure is shown in more detail on the handout. The test of any proposed structure is whether (a) it makes sense from the text, and (b) whether it helps us to understand the text. Let's put this proposal to the test as we work through the book.

Hosea 1:1

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beerī, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

On the surface, verse 1 seems very straightforward, but verse 1 is anything but straightforward! In fact, verse 1 raises some big questions for us.

First, if Hosea's prophecies are directed primarily at the **northern** kingdom, then why are four of the five kings listed in verse 1 kings of the **southern** kingdom?

Second, if Hosea is both from the north and speaking to the north, then why do we find **any** southern kings named in verse 1?

So our first two questions are: (1) why **four** southern kings?, and (2) why **any** southern kings?

Third, if Hosea lived to see Hezekiah (as verse 1 tells us), then that means Hosea not only saw the northern king, Jeroboam II (who is named in verse 1), but Hosea must also have seen the six northern kings who followed Jeroboam: Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea. Why aren't those six kings listed in verse 1? Why instead do we see only Jeroboam II from the list of northern kings?

So we are only one verse into the book of Hosea, and we already have three puzzling questions! And, I think that when we answer those questions we are going to see that Hosea hid a deep theological message in the first verse of the book!

Before we look at those questions and before we uncover the deep theological message lurking in verse 1, let's quickly remind ourselves who these kings are and what they did. And let's start with the four southern kings.

Uzziah

The first southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Uzziah.

The reign of Uzziah is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:1 (where he is called Azariah) and 2 Chronicles 26:1.

2 Kings 15:3 tells us that Uzziah did what was **right** in the eyes of the Lord. But, as the next

verse tells us, the high places were not taken way.

What are these “high places”? Well, as with many false religious practices, they started off with the best of intentions.

1 Kings 3:2 – The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD.

And, as with all departures from the word of God (even those with the best of intentions), this departure quickly moved further and further away from what was right.

1 Kings 11:6–8 – So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.

1 Kings 12:31 – He [Jeroboam I] also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites.

1 Kings 14:23 – For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree.

The exile of Judah occurred, in part, because of these high places.

Jeremiah 17:1–4 – The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on

the horns of their altars, while their children remember their altars and their Asherim, beside every green tree and on the high hills, on the mountains in the open country. Your wealth and all your treasures I will give for spoil as the price of your high places for sin throughout all your territory. You shall loosen your hand from your heritage that I gave to you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.

So, although Uzziah did what was right, he failed to remove those high places. (Later we will meet a king who did remove them.)

Finally, we should note that Uzziah's reign did not end well.

2 Chronicles 26:16 – But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.

Because of that sin, King Uzziah was afflicted with leprosy for the remainder of his life. This disease explains the significant overlap between the reign of Uzziah and the reign of his son, Jotham.

Jotham

The second southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Jotham.

The reign of Jotham is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:32 and 2 Chronicles 27:1.

2 Kings 15:34 tells us that Jotham did what **right** in the eyes of the Lord. But again, as the

next verse tells us, the high places were not removed.

The most significant event in the reign of Jotham was his defeat of the Ammonites in 2 Chronicles 27. And, as a result, we are told:

2 Chronicles 27:6 – So Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God.

As we discussed last week, Jotham reigned only 16 years (2 Kings 15:33), but we are told of an event in his 20th year (2 Kings 15:30). What that means is that Ahaz took over prior to Jotham's death, and (based on 2 Kings 17:1) that co-regency may have been in place for a decade.

Ahaz

The third southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Ahaz.

The reign of Ahaz is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 16:1 and 2 Chronicles 28:1. We also find a description of Ahaz's reign in Isaiah 7.

Unlike his father and his grandfather, 2 Kings 16:2 tells us that Ahaz did **not** do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. And that is quite the understatement!

2 Kings 16:2-4 – And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. **He even burned his son as an offering**, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out

before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.

So, yes, Hezekiah (the next king after Ahaz) had a brother, and yes, Hezekiah's brother was burned alive by their father Ahaz in his worship of a false god! And not only did Ahaz not remove the high places, but Ahaz sacrificed at every high place he could find!

It was during the reign of King Ahaz that King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel wanted Judah to join them as an ally in their fight against Assyria. And when Ahaz refused, Rezin and Pekah attacked Judah, with the goal of replacing Ahaz with a puppet king (not from the line of David!).

Isaiah then came to Ahaz and brought him an assurance of protection from God. God offered to provide Ahaz with any sign he wanted, but Ahaz refused. He did not want any sign from God. Instead, Ahaz turned to Assyria for help.

2 Kings 16:7 – So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.”

Assyria destroyed the enemies of Ahaz, but Judah then became a vassal of Assyria.

And Assyria soon called upon its vassals to meet with it in Damascus. While he was there, Ahaz saw pagan altars and was so impressed with them that he brought them back with him to Judah. Soon the

land of Judah was filled with the same idolatrous shrines he had seen in Damascus, all sanctioned by the king himself.

And because Ahaz chose Assyria over God, God tells Ahaz in Isaiah 8 that Assyria would soon overflow the land, coming not to help him, but to overcome him. Ahaz was a corrupt king of a corrupt people, and both would be brought to ruin.

Was there any hope? Would things ever get better? Isaiah answered that question with one of the most wonderful prophecies in the Bible.

Isaiah 9:6-7 – For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Isaiah saw a new king in Judah's future -- a very different king from the evil King Ahaz, the king they now had. In fact, this coming King would be different from every king who had ever ruled or ever would rule or ever could rule!

Hezekiah

The fourth southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Hezekiah.

The reign of Hezekiah is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 18:1 and 2 Chronicles 29:1. We also find a description of Hezekiah's reign in Isaiah 36-39.

2 Kings 18:3 tells us that Hezekiah did what **right** in the eyes of the Lord. And, unlike Uzziah and Jotham (who also did what was right), the next verse tells us that Hezekiah removed the high places!

Hezekiah was the exact opposite of his father, Ahaz. And I sometimes wonder if that fact about Hezekiah had something to do with the death of Hezekiah's brother, who was burned alive to a false Canaanite god by his father, Ahaz.

Hezekiah had witnessed Ahaz's evil first hand, and Hezekiah tried to undo the great damage that had been done by his father. How did he do that?

First, as we said, unlike even the good kings who had preceded him, Hezekiah removed the high places.

2 Kings 18:4 – He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).

That reference to the bronze serpent in a very intriguing detail! The creation of that serpent in Numbers 21 had occurred seven centuries earlier, and it had been created for a good reason – but the people had hung onto it for

centuries and had turned it into an idol. There's a sermon there for another day!

The second thing that Hezekiah did to undo the damage done by Ahaz was that he cleansed the temple and restored proper worship in the temple.

2 Chronicles 29:3-6 – In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east and said to them, “Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs.

And Hezekiah called the entire land, both those in the south and those who remained in the north, to come and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 30:5 – So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed.