

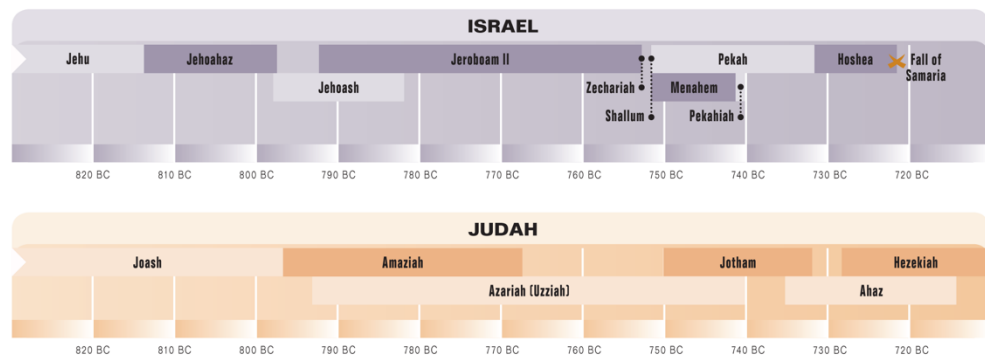
SPENDING TIME WITH THE PROPHETS

the book of Hosea

Setting of the book:

The dynasty of Jehu presented an opportunity to reset the spiritual condition of Israel. After the kingdom divided the northern tribes quickly left the ways of God, first with Jeroboam's golden calves (1Kings 12.25-33) and then with the rampant worship of Baal introduced by Ahab and Jezebel (1Kings 16.29-33). God commissioned Jehu to exterminate the family of Ahab and the worship of Baal in Israel (2Kings 9.6-10). Jehu faithfully kept the Lord's charge, but since he continued in the sins of Jeroboam his dynasty would last only 4 generations (2Kings 10.28-33).

During the days of Jehoahaz and Jehoash, Israel was brought very low by their neighbors to the north, Syria (2Kings 13.7). However, when Jeroboam II came to the throne



Israel's rivals had grown weak allowing Israel to expand (2Kings 14.25). However, as we noted in our study of Amos, this improvement in Israel's fortunes did not improve their spiritual condition. In fact, the spiritual condition of God's people only worsened as even the worship of Baal was reintroduced and became rampant once more.

According to the opening verse of Hosea's prophecy, the prophet was active during this time of Israelite expansion, but he would also witness the rapid decline and destruction of the northern kingdom. "The latter days of the eighth century b.c. witnessed the rise of the neo-Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (745-727). He was followed by several capable kings who extended Assyrian dominance over the entire ancient Near East (eventually including Egypt) for more than a century. Particularly relevant to Hosea were at least six incursions into Palestine and its neighbors by an unstoppable Assyrian army during the prophet's lifetime. Conquest and exile were the most dreaded fate in biblical times. This perennial threat hanging over Israel (specifically the northern kingdom) came with a time of unparalleled political upheaval and instability. The nation had six kings within about 30 years, a period filled with intrigue and violence. Zechariah (753 b.c.) was murdered after only six months in power. The usurper,



Shallum, was assassinated one month later. The next king, Menahem (752–742 b.c.) survived for a decade only by paying a burdensome tribute to Tiglath-pileser. His son, Pekahiah (742–740 b.c.), was assassinated by an army officer, Pekah (740–732), after only two years’ reign. Subsequently, Pekah was disposed of by Hoshea, whose rebellion against the Assyrians led to the end of the northern kingdom (732–722 b.c.).”¹

In describing the fall of Israel, 2Kings 17.13-14 states, “the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all the prophets and every seer... However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their

God.” Hosea was one of the prophets who warned Israel of God’s impending wrath and pleaded for their return. And as we will see from the book, God’s wrath against Israel was certainly warranted.

The Message of Hosea:

The basic meaning of the word *baal* is “lord”, suggesting the preeminence of Baal in Canaanite religion. “Not only was Baal exalted as a chief deity, but he also functioned specifically as the Canaanite storm god, the ‘rider of the clouds.’ The birth of healthy offspring and the staving off of famine were major concerns in the ancient Near East, and consequently fertility took on religious significance. For Israel - an agrarian society situated in a dry climate - the veneration of a god who could send rain proved to be an irresistible enticement.”²

It is clear from Hosea’s prophecy that Israel had forsaken Jehovah God for Baal. They erected numerous shrines to the idol (Hosea 2.13,17), engaged in sexual immorality in order to procure his blessings (Hosea 4.14), credited him for their prosperity (Hosea 2.5,8) and even identified Baal with Jehovah (Hosea 2.16-17).

Hosea’s prophecy is best known to us because of God’s charge to the prophet that he marry a “wife of harlotry” (Hosea 1.2). Hosea’s marriage to a woman who would repeatedly be unfaithful was an apt representation of Israel’s unfaithfulness to her covenant with God. They had rejected the true God in favor of an idol. God’s message to Israel through Hosea would reveal the extent of Israel’s treachery, God’s righteous indignation with her, but also His remarkable mercy in His willingness to redeem His unfaithful people.

¹ Crossway Bibles. *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008.

² Archaeological Study Bible.

1. Hosea's Marriage - A Picture of God's Broken Covenant With Israel (Hosea 1-3)
 - a. Hosea marries a wife of harlotry; her children (chapter 1)
 - b. Israel's condemnation, but covenant would be reestablished (chapter 2)
 - c. Remarriage of Hosea & Gomer; of God and "Israel" (chapter 3)
2. Details of God's Broken Covenant with Israel (Hosea 4-14)
 - a. God's case against Israel (chapter 4)
 - b. Israel's harlotry (chapter 5)
 - c. Israel's insincere desire to return (chapter 6)
 - d. Israel's persistent harlotry (chapter 7)
 - e. Israel's punishment (chapters 8-10)
 - i. For her hypocrisy (ch. 8)
 - ii. For her idolatry (ch. 9)
 - iii. Destruction of Israel and her king (ch. 10)
 - f. The Lord longs for His people (chapter 11)
 - g. The Lord contends with Israel and Judah (chapter 12)
 - h. Israel's destruction was coming (chapter 13)
 - i. Call for Israel to return (chapter 14)

Application:

1. Violation of our covenant is adultery. Nothing else damages the marriage covenant like unfaithfulness. Hosea's marriage to Gomer was plagued by her unfaithfulness, as was God's marriage to Israel. Hosea 11.1-4 paints a tragic picture of the Lord caring for Israel and calling out for her when she strayed. How did Israel respond? By continuing in her unfaithfulness! This kind of treachery is revolting to us and should be a call for us to remember that our unfaithfulness to our covenant with God is also adultery. We are betrothed to Christ (2Cor. 11.2), the church is His bride (Eph. 5.23-24; Rev. 21.2). Let us be faithful.
2. God's judgment against the unfaithful is justified. If someone is unfaithful to their spouse we would say they are deserving of any repercussions that resulted from their adultery. In leaving Jehovah God, Israel had "rejected the good" (Hosea 8.3). In other words, they had rejected the One who is inherently good and all of the good that comes from a relationship with Him. What kind of repercussions should Israel expect for their unfaithfulness? Destruction (Hosea 13.1-7, 15-16). God's punishment of unfaithful Israel was fully justified, as will be His punishment of those who reject the good today (Hebrews 10.26-27).
3. Our God is willing to redeem the unfaithful. The most poignant picture in Hosea is when the prophet is commanded by the Lord to go and love his adulterous wife. Hosea obeys by buying her back for himself, because she had sold herself in harlotry (Hosea 3.1-2). Why was the prophet commanded to do this? Because it pictured what God would do for Israel (Hosea 2.14-23; 14.4-9). It pictures what God has done for us (Romans 9.22-26; cf. Hosea 1.10; 2.23).