

# Hosea 1-3: Hosea and Gomer

## Introduction

It is generally thought that Hosea served as a priest in the Northern Kingdom. His name means “salvation” in the ancient Hebrew, and he has been long noted as a prophet who teaches us about the grace and mercy of God. It has been suggested that Hosea is a shortened form of a longer Hebrew name which means “God is Help.” Hosea was a contemporary of Amos and lived during the prosperous eighth century B.C. Writing from his native land, Hosea’s life is one of interest. Was his wife really a harlot? Why the odd names for his children? Was Hosea’s marriage to Gomer ever reconciled? We know nothing of the early life of Hosea or what city he called home. From this book we do learn that he was a devoted servant of God who sought to impress upon the people the immense hurt and betrayal God felt at the conduct of the Israelites’ addiction to idolatry.

Hosea’s ministry began during the reign of Jeroboam II and most likely ended sometime before the northern tribes were destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C. We know he was active in ministry before the end of the Jehu dynasty because he speaks of its punishment in Hosea 1:4. Hosea mentions four Judean kings as ruling during his time: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah all ruled during the latter part of the eighth century B.C. Why does Hosea mention only one king of Israel? An exact answer is unknown, but the kings that came after Jeroboam II in Israel experienced short-lived reigns and became increasingly weak. Hosea’s silence on the annihilation of the north suggests that his ministry ended before 722 B.C.

Hosea had a distinct purpose in his ministry. Hosea 1:2 tells us that the prophet was directed to *take a wife of harlotry* and have children of harlotry. Was she “chaste” at the time of marriage? Most likely. Hailey points out that Gomer was most like a “woman of the age” who would have been brought up under the influence of idolatry and immorality. After the marriage ensued, she entered adulterous relationships allowing Hosea to personally relate to the hurt and betrayal God felt as His people committed spiritual adultery by worshipping idols. Hosea and Gomer had three children: Jezreel, Loruhamah, and Lo-ammi. What must his family life have been like?

## The times of Hosea

While the ministries of Hosea and Amos overlap somewhat, it appears that much of Hosea’s ministry came in the period after Amos was directed to go back to Judah by Amaziah, Amos 7:10-17. Much of the book is said to reflect the times after Tiglath-pileser took away much of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 15:29) leaving Ephraim as the primary tribe of those that remained. Religiously, things continued to deteriorate. While they may have worshipped the Lord in pretense, their main concern was with idolatry. Knowledge of God had been lost; corruption and ignorance of the laws of God were prevalent. Worship to Baal had fully permeated the society and contributed to gross immorality. The people had completely rejected God. Socially and morally the nation found itself in a cesspool. Chapters four, six, and thirteen

describe some of the conditions of the day. In a land of people who were told to be separate, distinct, and set apart from the other nations around them, Israel now had completely fallen away from God.

These were also times of great political upheaval. After the long, stable, and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, things quickly changed. Jeroboam II's son, Zechariah took over the throne, but reigned only six months before being assassinated by Shallum, 2 Kings 15:8-12. Shallum could only maintain power for one month before being taken out by Menahem, 2 Kings 15:13. Menahem was most likely in charge of the troops in Tirzah, one of the king's residences. Hearing of Zechariah's murder, he traveled to Samaria and killed Shallum. Menahem quickly sought to establish his power and dominance over the nation by striking the cities that refused loyalty to him. He attacked Tiphshah, *ripping up all its women who were with child*, 2 Kings 15:16. He ruled ten years in Samaria. While Menahem is ruling, Tiglath-pileser (Pul) from Assyria begins to assert his dominance. (Tiglath-pileser was the name Pul took when he became the king of Assyria.) Assyria exacted a heavy tariff on the people to keep from being destroyed. This must have had a crippling effect on the rich of society as the good times they enjoyed in the previous decades had quickly come to an end, 2 Kings 15:19-20.

After the reign of Menahem, his son Pekahiah ruled in his place for two years. That is about all we are told concerning his reign. He was murdered by Pekah who succeeded him to the throne. In writing about Pekahiah Josephus notes: He followed the barbarity of his father, and so ruled but two years only, after which he was slain by his friends at a feast, by the treachery of one Pekah, the general of his horse, and the son of Remaliah who laid snares for him.<sup>1</sup>

During Pekah's reign, 2 Kings 15:29 says that Tiglath-pileser began carrying off the northern parts of the kingdom as captives. Ephraim, Issachar, and half of Manasseh were all that were left in the Northern Kingdom. To fight back the Assyrians, Pekah and Rezin (the ruler of Syria), formed an alliance. They implored Ahaz, king of Judah, to join them to which he refused, Isaiah 7. After his refusal, Israel and Syria declared war on Judah. They inflicted heavy casualties on Judah. Israel even carried the Judeans into slavery, 2 Chronicles 28:8. Things were so bad for Ahaz that he allied himself with Assyria, who responded by attacking Syria and killing Rezin, 2 Kings 16:9.

2 Kings 15:30 says that Hoshea conspired against Pekah, killed him, and ruled in his place. This conspiracy was at the hands of Assyria. In official Assyrian writing Tiglath-pileser said, "Pekah I slew, Hoshea I appointed over them."<sup>2</sup> Hoshea would be the last king of the Northern Kingdom. He would "reign" for nine years. Six years into his reign, he was found guilty of conspiring against the Assyrians and placed into prison. Beginning in 725 B.C., Assyria began what would become a three-year siege of Samaria. Hoshea is not mentioned again. The Northern Kingdom finally fell in December, 722 B.C.

The above paragraphs demonstrate the times of Hosea. Picture a nation in chaos, dark clouds of uncertainty rising with the onslaught of Assyrian aggression, murder and conspiracy, and no thought given to God or His power. It is an extremely sad ending to what had been a glorious nation just a few centuries before.

## Hosea presents a contrast with Amos

Throughout Hosea a consistent theme is portrayed showing God's love for those who turn their back on Him. Hosea is known as a preacher of mercy who stresses God's special relationship with Israel. Through his own personal hurt, caused by the infidelity of Gomer, Hosea relates the hurt God experienced because of the treachery of idolatry and trusting in human alliances. Despite the unfaithfulness of God's people, God still loved them and desired to see them do right. This stands in stark contrast to Amos who prophesied to the Northern Kingdom in the 750's B.C. Amos stressed God's wrath was going to be poured out because of violence, idolatry, and immorality. Amos seems to indicate that God had reached a point where the mercy and longsuffering of God would reach an end, removing His presence from them, Amos 8:11-14. There was a place for both men. Both served the purposes of God. These two books give us a glimpse of the nature of God—His goodness and severity, His love and His justice.

## Hosea's family life

In Hosea 1:2, God commands Hosea to take a *wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD*. What is a *wife of harlotry*? Most likely, she was not a harlot when Hosea married her, but became one later. This makes sense if one keeps in mind the parallel between Hosea and Gomer and the Lord and Israel. Israel did not start out in harlotry, but soon moved to it after entering a covenant with God. His wife would have been someone who grew up in the Israelite culture of the day—influenced by idolatry and loose morals. Abandoning the covenant, she made with her husband would not have been that serious in her eyes.

Hosea went out God directed and found a wife. Gomer was the daughter of Diblaim. After their marriage, Hosea and Gomer have a child: Jezreel. "Jezreel" means *God scatters*. The name can also mean God sows. Smith notes that "in Hebrew the name Jezreel sounds very much like the name Israel." "Israel" which means "Prince of God" would become "Jezreel," scattered by God.<sup>3</sup> The house of Jehu mentioned in 1:4 is the dynasty of four kings that was mentioned in 2 Kings 10:30-31; 15:12. It would be destroyed because of the bloodshed of Jezreel. This is a reference back to Jehu's destruction on the house of Ahab, something God had sanctioned in 2 Kings 9:1-10. While Jehu moved according to God's will to destroy the ruling family of Ahab, it was not with God-glorifying motives. Jehu's conquest was particularly bloody. See 2 Kings 9:21-28, 30-37; 10:1-10. Not only would the house of Jehu be broken, but the entire nation would come to an end. Their armies would be defeated in the Valley of Jezreel. This was a valley where many famous battles took place.

Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter: Lo-ruhamah, 1:6-7. The name "Lo-ruhamah" means "no mercy." God would no longer have mercy on His people. God would no longer overlook their extreme rebelliousness and disregard for the law of God. There has been some question on whether Lo-ruhamah could call Hosea her father. Is this child by another man? We are not told for sure. Hosea 1:7 tells us of God's compassion on Judah, at least at this point. They would not be destroyed by the Assyrian aggression. The only way Judah was not destroyed was through the power of God, not through its own military or political capability.

After Lo-ruhamah was weaned, Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a son. God commanded Hosea to name the son Lo-ammi which means “not My people.” God had cut Himself off from the people. Israel had violated the covenant relationship for so long that finally God had endured enough. The relationship He had with them was over.

After a period of punishment and exile, there would come a time when God would reestablish a remnant. This is what is under discussion in Hosea 1:10-2:1. It is important to note that verse one of chapter two is best understood in the context at the end of chapter one. In these verses God reasserts that even though the nation of Israel was about to be destroyed, the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would still be carried out. This has come to pass with the establishment of the church and the preaching of the gospel to all nations. Peter and Paul spoke extensively of the blessings that came to both Jew and Gentile through Jesus Christ. This was a direct fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. Israel and Judah and all men would be brought together as one—through Jesus Christ. These are those who would receive and be benefactors of the mercy of God, 2:1. “Ruhamah” speaks of those who have obtained mercy. This mercy is possible because of the blood shed by Jesus.

## Spiritual adultery

A prominent theme in Hosea is that idolatry is the same as spiritual adultery. In 2:2-7 God turns His attention to the nation of Israel. What Hosea dealt with in experiencing the betrayal of Gomer, so God was dealing with the same betrayal by Israel. In this metaphor God is pictured as the husband and Israel the unfaithful bride. God is ending His relationship with Israel because of their unfaithfulness. Because of Israel’s treachery, there was no basis to continue the relationship. God warns that if the nation did not put away (its) *harlotry* that He would *strip her naked*. Smith writes, “Some evidence suggests that women who broke marriage vows were first stripped naked before they were executed.”<sup>4</sup> She (Israel) would find herself back in the same condition before God found her, took her in, and cared for her. All the physical blessings they took for granted would be removed. God was going to make it impossible for them to restore their physical blessings once they lost them. The phrase *she will pursue her lovers* is particularly interesting. As Assyria moved in on the nation, Israel would pursue worship to idols even more calling upon them for deliverance. Unable to find satisfaction and realizing their desperate situation they would seek to return to God, *For it was better for me then than now*, 2:7. Only this time God would not be there for He would remove His presence from them, Amos 8:10-14.

## Israel forgot the source of her blessings

God is the one who bestowed the rich physical blessings on Israel. The grain, fresh wine, oil, silver and gold all came from God. Perhaps the ultimate insult was that Israel took these very same blessings and used them in the advancement of idolatry. God says that He is going to take away these blessings, Hosea 2:9. Their great dependence upon the Lord was going to be realized—only this time it would be too late. Even if Israel sought assistance from its allies, there would be no help: *no one will rescue her out of My hand*, 2:10. All the festivities that Hosea witnessed as he prophesied would come to a crushing end. God would put an end to *all her gaiety, Her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, And all her festal assemblies*, 2:11. The devastation would be so complete that there would be nothing for anyone to celebrate. No

happiness would be in the land. Everything that the people trusted in—their idols, prosperity, social and political status—would be taken away. It is important to stress that these things were not for some far off generation long after Hosea—what he prophesied about took place within a few decades. How hard it must have been for the people to imagine that the fertile land which grew their crops would become a forest and the beasts of the field will [would] devour them, 2:12. As Hosea preached, how many cast him off as preaching the unthinkable?

## A reason to hope

At the conclusion of chapter one God alludes to a future time when a remnant would be blessed by God. As Hosea brings chapter two to a close, he speaks of a future time when God would seek to win His people back to Him. In these verses we get a glimpse of God's great love and mercy. Time and time again God has had an opportunity to give up on mankind, but He continues to return, offering an opportunity to be reconciled, hoping for the best. Hosea 2:14-23 looks ahead to a future time when the remnant would be led out of captivity and return to their homeland. Ultimately, there are some applications in these verses that would be fulfilled during the "church age."

Hosea likens the upcoming punishment and destruction to a journey of going back to Egypt, which represented slavery and bondage. Metaphorically, God would once again lead His people out of Egypt into the wilderness giving His people a new chance to experience His blessings and grace. God longed for a true relationship with them as symbolized by calling Him Ishi or "my husband." No longer would her allegiance be to Baal, as symbolized in 2:16. In this time Israel would totally cut off her desire to worship Baal.

In that time in 2:18 looks ahead to the covenant God made with His people through Jesus Christ. Much in 2:18 parallels Isaiah's writing in Isaiah 11:1-11. The peace here is that which comes through Christ. As we mentioned in lesson three, Old Testament terms are being used to describe New Testament concepts. During the church age God's people are crowned in righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, and compassion. It will be a time marked by spiritual Israel's faithfulness to God.

In these verses we note the desire of God to have a relationship with His creation: mankind. In verse 2:8 know is used in the New American Standard Version for the first of many times in this book. Israel lacked an intimate relationship with God, and this caused them to be ignorant of the fact that God had showered them with many blessings. In speaking of a future time (specifically 2:20-23) a close, personal, and intimate relationship is foreseen. This is what God has desired all along. God would hear the prayers of His people and shower them with wonderful spiritual blessings. God would show *compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people! And they will say, 'You are my God!* In that time, God would have fellowship with both Jew and Gentile. And that relationship would be one that is touching, special, and intimate.

## Hosea takes Gomer back

After looking ahead to a future time, we move back to eighth century Israel in the beginning part of chapter three. Hosea is commanded by God to go back to a woman *who is loved by her husband, yet an*

*adulteress*. Many think the “woman” in 3:1 is Gomer. Perhaps Gomer had been cast out of the home by Hosea for her unfaithfulness. Could she have become a temple prostitute? Whatever the case, at the end of verse one the comparison is made to God who continued to love His people despite their ungodliness and rebellion. Raisin cakes (3:1) were most likely used in idol worship.

After moving out of Hosea’s family, Gomer must have worn out her attractiveness as a prostitute and found herself mired in slavery. Hosea bought her back for *fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley*, 3:2. Upon bringing her home Hosea laid down specific expectations. Gomer was not to have sexual relations with anyone – including Hosea. A period of discipline is in view here. It was to be temporary in nature with an end view of full restoration of all the rights and privileges of the relationship in the future. “*Stay* (NASU) or *abide* (ASV) are used in other places to describe the period of waiting for purification after childbirth, Leviticus 12:4-5.”<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Israel would have to suffer through a discipline period without a king or the ability to practice religion of any kind—true worship or idol worship. Because of this period of discipline, Hosea looks forward to a time when Israel would *return and seek the LORD... and come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days*, 3:5. This period of discipline would finally break them of the idolatry that had plagued their existence since the beginning.

The message of the first three chapters of this book cannot be underemphasized. The physical relationship and problems between Hosea and Gomer symbolized the spiritual relationship and problems between God and Israel. Israel had committed spiritual adultery and would be destroyed. For a period, they would experience discipline and chastening. But there would come a time when they would be restored to experience many spiritual blessings in *the last days*.

## For discussion

1. Hosea’s name means what? He was from:
2. When did Hosea’s ministry begin?
3. Describe the religious and social conditions of Hosea’s day.
4. Describe the political condition of Hosea’s day.

5. Are there any constant themes running through the book of Hosea?
  
6. Hosea and Amos were contemporaries. Show how the two books are similar:  
Show how the two books are different:
  
7. Who was Hosea's wife and what character trait is she most known for?
  
8. Name the three children Gomer gave birth to. What do their names mean?
  
9. Do you believe Hosea was the father of all three children? Why or why not?
  
10. Who gave Israel all she had? Did Israel remember this?
  
11. After a period of discipline, what would happen to Israel?
  
12. Describe the blessings to come in the last days as detailed by Hosea.
  
13. What are some spiritual lessons we can learn from Hosea 1-3?

(Endnotes)

- 1 Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, p. 294.
- 2 *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)
- 3 Smith, James E., *The Minor Prophets*, p. 211
- 4 Smith, James E., *The Minor Prophets*, p. 214
- 5 Hubbard, David Allan, *Hosea*, p. 93.