

Jeroboam II (790-746)

In 746 Jeroboam II was succeeded by his son, Zechariah.

He was assassinated by Shallum,

who was assassinated by Menahem in 745.

Menahem (745-738) decided on a policy of submission to Assyria (see 2Kings 15:19). This involved the paying of a hefty tribute, which was resented by the landowners.

When Menahem died in 738 his son, Pekahiah continued his father's policies, but the opposition rallied to Pekah who murdered the young king and cancelled the tribute.

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In 734 Tiglath-pileser III conquered Philistia and annexed the area of Israel that bordered the Mediterranean.

In 733 he took Gilead on the east of the Jordan, as well as Galilee, including the Valley of Jezreel.

Pekah was assassinated in 732 by Hoshea (732-724) who reverted to paying tribute to Assyria.

In 724 Hoshea decided to turn to Egypt and stop paying the tribute. Shalmaneser V invaded Ephraim. Hoshea was taken prisoner, and the Assyrian forces besieged the capital, Samaria. Samaria valiantly resisted for three years, but was finally forced to surrender by Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II in 721.

This marked the end of the northern kingdom.

Hosea 1:1

The word of YHWH that came to Hosea son of Beeri, in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel.

Uzziah (785-734)

Jotham (regent 749-734; king 734)

Ahaz (734-727)

Hezekiah (under guardian 727-715)
king 715-699

Jeroboam II (Israel)
788-748

(frequent coups d'état)

Hoshea (730-722)

Hosea's picture of God was, as we should expect, shaped by his own experiences. He married a woman (Gomer) who is called a 'whore' (1:2). She may have been involved in the sexual rituals that were part of the Canaanite cult, encounters that were understood to influence the harvest. The relationship with Gomer appears to have broken down when she committed adultery. However, in spite of her infidelity, Hosea sought her out and paid to have her back as his wife. It was these experiences that led Hosea to picture YHWH as a husband, and Israel as YHWH's unfaithful bride. He speaks of YHWH's hurt and anger, but also of his fidelity and unconditional and passionate love for his people.

Hosea's tragic message reached the point where, in YHWH's name, he declared that it was too late for Israel to change. They had rejected YHWH's constant offer of love. Now is the time when YHWH must issue a divorce (1:9; 2:4). Israel must go back to 'Egypt' (8:13; 9:3,6). Hosea saw (and he was proved right – hence the preserving of his oracles) that there was no way of avoiding the annihilation and enslavement of Israel.

However, as a true prophet, his focus is primarily on YHWH. Throughout the scroll, and especially at the end, he declares that Israel's sin, even their obstinate refusal to heed YHWH's warnings, could not stop YHWH's passionate love. Their infidelity could not stop God's fidelity to his choice and to his covenant commitments.

The suffering he witnessed, and in a special way the sufferings he experienced in his own personal life, gave him an insight into the suffering of God at what was happening to his people. He felt the pain of YHWH's heart at the destruction of Israel (see 6:1-6; 11:1-9). It is here, perhaps, that we find Hosea's most inspiring contribution to our knowledge of God.

Hosea has a lot to teach those of us who say we believe in God, but for whom God is an abstract figure, scarcely acknowledged in our day to day lives except, perhaps, when life gets hard. To live like this is to fail to know God (see 4:1). For Hosea, YHWH is passionately involved in our lives, determined that we should live, and hurt when we do not respond to his love. Not to know God's love and purpose for us is to court destruction (see 4:6).

When Hosea looked back over the history of Israel he saw a constant story of infidelity, but he saw also the constant call to authenticity. However faithful or unfaithful we might be, Hosea was convinced that God remains faithful. Punishment is necessary, but it is in view of repentance (2:7, 14). Man of the heart that he is, Hosea knows that real repentance must come from the heart (7:10, 14). Religious cult is no substitute for a genuine seeking of YHWH (see 2:11; 6:6; 8:11; 9:4; 10:1-2, 12; 12:6). God cannot impose love. If we are to receive God's love we must open our hearts to God's inspiration and be faithful to the traditions of obedience that have come down to us from those who listened to God in the past (see 10:12; 12:6).

Hosea 1:2-5

When YHWH first spoke through Hosea, YHWH said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking YHWH.”

1. Metaphor : she worshipped a pagan god
2. Literal : involved in sexual rites (sympathetic magic)

So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

And YHWH said to him, “Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.”

Jeroboam II: the last of Jehu’s dynasty (exterminated Omri’s family)

2Kings 10:30

Hosea 1:6-9

She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then YHWH said to him, “Name her **Lo-ruhamah**, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel. I will withdraw it from them.

But I will have pity on the house of Judah,
and I will save them by YHWH their God. (a gloss added after 701?)
I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses,
or by horsemen.”

When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then YHWH said, “Name him **Lo-ammi**, for you are not my people and I, I am not your I AM.” (a formal act of divorce)

Hosea 1:10 – 2:1

God's fidelity transcends our infidelity

Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea (Genesis 32:12), which can be neither measured nor 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.”

The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Say to your brother, ‘Ammi’, and to your sister, ‘Ruhamah’.

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Lo-ammi (1:9)

↑
Lo-ruhamah (1:6)

Hosea 2:2-5

Accuse your mother, accuse – for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband – that she put away her whoring
from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts,
or I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and turn her into a parched land, and kill her with thirst.

Upon her children also I will have no pity, because they are children
of whoredom. For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.

For she said, “I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread
and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”

Presuppose a thriving economy in Israel

Hosea 2:6-8

Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, “I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.”

She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal.

Hosea 2:9-13

Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. Now I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. I will put an end to all her mirth, her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals. I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, “These are my pay, which my lovers have given me.” I will make them a forest, and the wild animals shall devour them. I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered the smoke of her sacrifices to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says YHWH

Hosea 2:14-17

God's fidelity transcends our infidelity

Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart. From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor (border between Judah and Benjamin) a door of hope.

There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

On that day, says YHWH, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal (Lord)."

For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more.

Hosea 2:18-20

I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals,
the birds of the air, 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 take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in
justice and in just judgment, in covenant love, and in mercy. I will
take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know YHWH.

Hosea 2:21-23

On that day I will answer, says YHWH,
I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth;
and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him for myself in the land.
And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah,
and I will say to Lo-ammi, “You are my people”;
and he shall say, “You are my God.”

Hosea 3:1

YHWH said to me again, “Go, love a woman (Gomer?) who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as YHWH loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”

‘The women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven’(Jeremiah 7:18)

Astarte, consort of Ba‘al

Hosea refers to Israel’s infidelity

Did he experience infidelity from Gomer?

Was it his longing to have Gomer back that inspired him to picture YHWH as a husband, and Israel as YHWH’s unfaithful bride.

He speaks of YHWH’s hurt and anger, but also of his fidelity and unconditional and passionate love for his people.

Hosea 3:2-5

So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine. And I said to her, “You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you.”

For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar (cult symbol of Asherah), without ephod (held the dice) or teraphim (figurines of household gods).

Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek YHWH their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to YHWH and to his goodness in the latter days.

Hosea 4:1-3

Hear the word of YHWH, O people of Israel;
for YHWH has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or covenant love (see 2:19),
and no knowledge of God in the land.
Swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery break out;
bloodshed follows bloodshed. (coups d'état?)
Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish;
together with the wild animals and the birds of the air;
even the fish of the sea are perishing.

Hosea 4:4-10

Yet let not anyone contend, and let not anyone accuse, for my contention is with you, O priest. You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night, and I will destroy your mother. My people perish for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you as my priest. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their glory for shame. They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity. And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways, and repay them for their deeds. They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply; because they have forsaken YHWH to devote themselves to whoredom.

Hosea 4:11-13

New wine takes away understanding (leb: 'heart') from my people. They consult a piece of wood, and their divining rod gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have played the whore, forsaking their God. They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and make offerings upon the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery.

'Understanding' ('heart') refers to our deepest centre where we think, decide and experience profound emotions. This failure of 'understanding' is exemplified in their irrational behaviour. Instead of guiding the people to the Torah, the priests are complicit in their 'playing the whore, forsaking their God. Verse 13 describes the communion sacrifices that take place in the groves of the cult sites situated high in the mountains (compare Deuteronomy 12:2), as well as the sexual rites.

Hosea 4:14-15

I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for these men (priests) themselves go aside with whores, and sacrifice with cult prostitutes; thus a people without understanding comes to ruin. Though you play the whore, O Israel, do not let Judah become guilty. Do not enter into Gilgal, or go up to Beth-aven, and do not swear, “As YHWH lives.”

Hosea lays the blame for these rites, not on the women, but on the priests. Deuteronomy, too, refers to ‘cult prostitutes’ (23:18). Once again we hear a lament over ‘a people without understanding’. The priests are to blame because of their negligence and bad example.

Gilgal was the first camp established after the crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 4:19)

Hosea 4:16-19

Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can YHWH now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture? Ephraim is joined to idols – let him alone. When their drinking is ended, they indulge in sexual orgies; they love the dishonour of the shame. A spirit has wrapped them in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their altars.

Hosea has been especially blaming the priests. Here he speaks of Ephraim's stubbornness as well as their preference for the dishonour of the shameful sexual rites' (Bethel is in Ephraim).

The 'spirit' (rūah), called earlier 'the spirit of whoredom' which 'has led them astray'(4:12), has seized them like a whirlwind. The people must suffer the shame they have brought on themselves.

Hosea 5:1-7

Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For you are responsible for passing just judgments. Indeed, you have been a snare for Mizpah, a net spread upon Tabor, a pit dug deep in Shittim. I will punish all of you. I know Ephraim, Israel is not hidden from me. Because you, O Ephraim, have played the whore, Israel is defiled. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is at work in their midst, so that they do not know YHWH. Israel's pride testifies against him; Ephraim stumbles over his guilt. Judah also stumbles with them. With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek YHWH, but they will not find him. He has withdrawn from them. They have dealt faithlessly with YHWH, for they have borne illegitimate children. The new moon will see their fields devoured.