

Analysis of Hosea

General

Dillard and Longman believe that Hosea (4-14) contains some of the most “unintelligible passages” in the entire Hebrew Bible (p. 353). Childs notes that the text “is generally regarded as one of the poorest in the Old Testament” (p. 375).

Authorship

Authorship of the Minor Prophets seems to be straightforward. Since the book bears the prophet’s name, this analysis will side with tradition, which recognizes Hosea as the author of the book.

Date

Hosea was one of the earliest of the Minor Prophets, ministering in the eighth century. His ministry seemed to have been active between 750 and 715 B. C. (Dillard and Longman, p. 354).

Key Issues¹

Key issues in Hosea are: 1) to determine the moral standards of Gomer, Hosea’s wife. Was she a prostitute or simply promiscuous after her marriage to the prophet? 2) to harmonize God’s command to Hosea to marry a prostitute or one who would later become one, 3) to understand the significance of the Mosaic covenant to the message of the prophet, 4) to harmonize the chronology of the reigns of the various kings during Hosea’s ministry, 5) to recognize a future restoration of the people of God, 6) to understand the relationship between Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15, 7) to understand and appreciate the deep, abiding love God has for his people.

Subject/Purpose Statement²

The book of Hosea demonstrates through a tragic illustration of adultery what Israel had become before God. Just as Gomer had committed adultery and left her husband, Hosea, Israel had committed spiritual adultery by her disobedience and left God. Hosea’s message was meant to show the people in living color their sin and cause them to repent and return to God or else suffer his sure discipline. But even in the light of sin and discipline God would one day restore his people to himself.

¹ A key issue concerning the Minor Prophets in general is “whether the Twelve was edited to be one book or was collected as a logical way to read several short prophecies” (House, p. 346-7).

² I am indebted to Dr. Mark McGinniss for his thoughts and insights given throughout this O.T. study!

Outline of Hosea³

- I. Gomer's physical adultery illustrates Israel's spiritual adultery, which brings a word from God (1:1-2:1).
 - A. God's judgment on Israel for not acting like his people (1:2-9).
 - B. God's promise of future salvation in spite of their sin (1:10-2:1).
- II. God's contends with his adulterous people and offers a way back (2:2-3:5).
 - A. God's contends with his wayward wife, Israel (2:2-13).
 - B. God seeks after his wayward wife to bring her back to himself (2:14-3:5).
- III. God opens a lawsuit against Israel but there is hope (4:1-6:3).
 - A. The lawsuit charge: no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land (4:1-5:15)
 - B. God presents an opportunity to be restored (6:1-3).
- IV. God accuses Israel of not keeping the covenant from their hearts but he will keep his covenant (6:4-11:11).
 - A. Israel followed the rituals of the law but their hearts were far from God (6:4-11:7).
 - B. In spite of Israel's sin God will not give up on his people (11:8-11).
- V. Israel will suffer punishment because of their unfaithfulness but God will restore them when they turn from their sins (11:12-14:9).
 - A. Israel will suffer because of their unfaithfulness (11:12-13:16).
 - B. If Israel is wise, she will turn from her sin and avoid stumbling (14:1-9)

Theological Issues

Hosea contains the following theological areas of discussion: God's sovereignty, His love, grace and mercy, His judgment, His righteousness, His faithfulness; man's sin, selfishness, unfaithfulness, repentance, obedience, and commitment.

Theological Application

The historical time period of Hosea was one of expansion and prosperity (Dillard and Longman, p. 355). But the increased blessings of God did not result in increased obedience on the part of the people of God. As those who live in a time of unprecedented wealth and prosperity in the western world, Christians need to heed the message of Hosea.

³ Childs notes that there is a "lack of clear order within the book" (p. 374). Dillard and Longman assert that "any general outline of the book misses some of the rapid and subtle transitions of the prophecy..." but "everyone agrees that there is a major break between Hosea 1-3 and 4-14" (p. 359). Zuck proposes a 5 cycle outline for the book which I use for the overall structure of my outline.