

1. A Survey Study of Hosea. ("God's Covenant Love")

a. An overview:

Hosea prophesied in Israel during the eighth century BC, the time of the last generation of the northern kingdom. This view and the view that all of the book ascribed to him came from his own hand (or mouth!) have not remained uncontested. The claims against Hosea are three-fold:

1) chapters 1-3 originally were separate from the rest of the book, perhaps even having been written by a different and unknown Hosea;

2) the passages of hope (1:1--2:1; 1:14-23; 3:5; 11:8-11) do not suit Hosea's style and, since they seem to reflect the exilic or post-exilic age, were probably not written by him;

3) true, the book of Hosea was written mainly by a northern prophet, but it was later revised by a Judean editor or editors to make Judah appear more favorable when compared with Israel.

In response to these questions: It seems clear that an accurate understanding of chapters 1-3 is necessary to comprehend chapters 4-14. It is difficult to see why, in this case, these sections of the book would have circulated separately. There is no tradition that they ever did. To invent an unknown prophet coincidentally named Hosea as a "real" author of chapters 1-3 is to do so without good reason. It is true that considering the rest of the book's content, the passages of hope might not be expected. But there is no evidence that Hosea's understanding of Israel's relationship with God precluded hope. This argument seems merely to be a dogmatic assertion based on a desire for complete unity of style and content. And the question of Judean editorial activity is more reasonable, but there are still questions. Why, if Judah is glorified, are eight of the twelve references to Judah negative and condemnatory? It also seems highly unlikely that Hosea would have allowed such changes during his lifetime. And since Samaria fell in 722 BC (probably shortly after Hosea's death), proving Judah's superiority to Israel, why would such editors have bothered to change his work?

Hosea's ministry began at some point between 767 BC when Uzziah began his reign and 754 BC when Jeroboam II, last of the dynasty of Jehu, died. He prophesied until at least 729 BC when Hezekiah's reign began, but probably ended his ministry (or died) before the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. Mention of relations with Egypt (7:11; 9:6; 12:2) probably refer to the reign of Hoshea, last king of Israel (732-722 BC).

Hosea, incidentally, is poetry except for chapters 1 and 3.

Consider the following outlines

- I. Hosea's life 1-3
- II. Hosea's Message 4-14

and this one may be a bit more satisfying:

- I. God and Israel illustrated 1-3
- II. Condemnation of pride, idolatry and corruption 4-8
- III. Warning of coming judgment 9-10
- IV. Promise of Ultimate Mercy 11:1-11
- V. Condemnation of Israel's adultery 11:12-13:16
- VI. Future restoration 14

For your general purposes the first of these is probably adequate.