

Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 1, Background and Hosea 1

© 2024 John Oswalt and Ted Hildebrandt

Thanks to the Francis Asbury Society (Wilmore, KY) and Dr. Oswalt for providing these videos to the public free of charge and granting permission for their transcription.

Well, what a delight it is to see each of you here. Thank you. Thank you for coming.

It really is hard to do this in an empty room. So, thank you. Thank you for your friendship.

Thank you for your interest. Thank you for your support. Someone asked me, when are you going to stop teaching? I said, when I die.

Karen said, well, if you stop making sense, I'll let you know. So, I hope that won't happen during this study. Hosea, God's Unchanging Love.

This book is addressed to the people of Israel, the northern kingdom, after the division when Solomon died. And it's there in the green, extending from the plains of Moab here in the south up to almost the foot of Mount Hermon, where Dan, the tribe of Dan, ultimately landed, and everything in between. So, it's about twice the size of Judah and about three times the gross national product.

This is 3 quarters of the people of Israel. We can easily forget that. We can say, oh, yeah, well, they got carried away in 722, but Judah was left.

Yeah. Not much of Judah was left, or not much of Israel was left. And some of you know that I've done a little work on Isaiah in the course of a misspent life.

And it struck me, many people want to say, well, the second part of the book is addressed to the people in exile. That couldn't have been any understanding or interest of the historic Isaiah, who lived in the 700s. Why not? He had watched three quarters of Israel go into exile.

He had sensed what they were feeling, what was going on. So, to think then about the horrible truth that the other quarter was going to go 150 years later, he was ready for it. Well, that's the place.

The political setting, and let's be sure we've got the right one up there, yes. According to what we have in verse 1, the book was apparently written between 755 and 725. And we'll talk more about that in a few minutes.

About a 30-year period there when a lot of things were going down. In the first 10 years of this period, they were experiencing a level of prosperity that neither of the nations, Judah or Israel, had enjoyed since Solomon. Assyria, the great empire up there to the, if you're looking at the map, up there to the northeast, where the Kurds live today.

The Kurds consider themselves to be the descendants of the Assyrians, and their neighbors agree with them. The Assyrians had pressed down in the previous 75 or 100 years and had caused a lot of difficulties. But now, for about 40 years, they had pulled back.

Can you say, Jonah? Now, the scholars don't want to admit that, but it makes perfect sense. It's the time of Jonah. And so, we had two Assyrian emperors, neither of whom was aggressive at all.

So, it's during that time, during that roughly 40 years from 795 to 755 years, 795 to 745, the pressure's off. And in the north is a king named Jeroboam II Jeroboam. The first king in the beginning was Jeroboam.

This is Jeroboam II. One time, I was teaching on this, and I said, Jeroboam the tooth. People laugh.

I didn't understand it, but Jeroboam II. And so, Israel expanded. They were able to regain former territories that had been taken away from them.

And it was, hey, it's the golden age. It's the day of the Lord. And an old curmudgeon named Amos came up from Judah and said, yeah, it's the day of the Lord, all right.

But let me tell you what the day of the Lord's going to be like. It's going to be like a man walking down a pathway, and suddenly, a lion jumps out at him. And he turns to run, and there's a bear.

He turns the other way and runs into his house and leans up against the wall, and a snake comes out of a crack and bites him. That's the day of the Lord. You can imagine he did not build a megachurch because in 745, it all changed.

A man came to the throne. We don't name our children much for him anymore. Tiglath-Pileser III.

We knew of a cat that was named Tiglath-Pileser once. Had about the same personality. This man was an aggressor.

This man is going to get back everything that his two knucklehead predecessors had lost. And he did. And he inaugurated 100 years of unbroken aggression, conquest, and oppression.

The ultimate prize that Assyria was aiming for was Egypt. Rich, wealthy, comfortable. And what Assyria wanted to do was to control the trade chain.

They already had Babylon over here, and the trade chain over here, and the trade route ran up along the Euphrates, out across the desert to Palmyra or Tadmor, down to Damascus, and down along the coast to Egypt. So they had 2 thirds of it already, and they're on their way. But here in front of them stand these little countries, 8 of them all together.

Syria up in the north, then the Phoenicians or Tyre and Sidon over to the west, Ammon, Israel, Judah, the Edomites, Moab, and the Philistines. No one of them was able to stand in the way of Assyria. And Assyria, if they were to reach Egypt, had to have Syria, Israel, and the Phoenicians.

They could afford to lay back a bit on Judah, because Judah wasn't on the road. And they could afford to lay back a bit on Tyre and Sidon, because they're not on the road either. But the 3, Syria, Israel, and the Philistines, they had to have.

So, what does Hosea have to say to people who are clearly on the edge of destruction? They're clearly on the way to the end. And so, in the 30 years between 753 and 722, Israel had 5 different ruling dynasties and 6 different kings. Only one king had a son succeed him, and he lasted about six months.

Zechariah is the son of Jeroboam. He lasted six months. He was murdered by a man named Shalom.

Shalom had a long reign of one month before he was murdered by a man named Manahem. Manahem ruled for 10 years. But all that time, he had a rival king over on the other side of the Jordan who was also playing king.

Manahem was a very ruthless fellow. Let's see. I didn't spell that right.

Very ruthless. On his way to kill Shalom, a town tried to stop him, and he slaughtered everybody. Nice guy.

He was replaced, so he ruled for 10 years. But as I say, while Pekah over here was also ruling for 10 years. He had a son named Elah.

Excuse me. No, Pekahiah. Yeah, I think that's right.

He again ruled for about three months before Pekah came in and took the whole ball of wax. And Pekah ruled for another 10 years before he was killed by the last king, Hoshea. Now, that marker is dying, I think, and that one's purple.

Hoshea made it for about nine years. What's happening here? What's happening is a nation is collapsing under the horrible pressure of the monster from the north. Almost certainly, what you've got going on here is what we see to an unfortunate extent in our own country.

You've got the pro-Assyrians, the anti-Assyrians, the pro-Assyrians, the anti-Assyrians, and the pro-Assyrians before he became anti. And the pro-Assyrians are the ones who are going to die. So, let's throw the bums out.

We don't have any pros and antis here, do we? Moving right along. That's the political setting. That's the situation in which Hosea is writing.

Those are the people that Hosea is writing to. He has two purposes, I think. One is the possible purpose of repentance.

It's interesting. The Bible says that because of the sins of Manasseh, who was the worst king Judah ever had, Judah was fated to go into exile. Well, Manasseh lived about 50 years before Jeremiah.

And here's Jeremiah calling on the people to repent. Those of you who've been with me for a while, we've talked a lot about the fact that the Bible does not believe in fate. The Bible believes in historical responsibility.

And God can say you will never fall again. And there have been about three falls since He said that. Uh-huh.

If you will live the way you're supposed to. If you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself, you will never fall. At the same time, He can say that because of the sins that this man committed and ingrained in people's lives, exile is inescapable.

Unless you repent, so, I say, Hosea has one purpose. And that's to call them to repentance.

It's not too late. It's not too late. You've got to be nuts, Hosea.

Look at Assyria. It's not too late. Look at God.

But his other purpose is, and if it comes, some truths will be ingrained in you so that you will not become part of the imperial culture. You will be a separate person. And the exile will not destroy you.

It will, in fact, purify you. So, two purposes. Repentance.

It's not too late. But if you don't repent, then I want those who do go into captivity to know who our God really is. Okay, let's talk about the religious setting.

I'm getting carried away and losing that thing. Since the very beginning, Israel had been idolatrous. Jeroboam, I had a serious problem.

The covenant called for every male to go to Jerusalem three times a year. Think about that. Here you are, you're Jefferson Davis.

Every male in the confederacy is supposed to go to Washington, D.C., three times a year. And that's exactly what Jeroboam said. He said, if they do that, they'll go back to the son of David.

So, how are we going to stop that? Well, we're going to put a big golden bull right at Bethel, six miles north of Jerusalem. And another one up at Dan in the far north. And I'm going to say to folks, you don't have to struggle all the way to Jerusalem, especially you people up in the north.

Now, almost certainly, he understood these to be Yahweh. The Bible calls them golden calves. I think that's almost certainly mockery.

Oh, yeah, go to Bethel and worship your Kathy. I don't think it was a calf. It was a full-grown bull in all his power.

Before they sold the farm, on Frankfurt Ford Road, I drove by every morning. I like to look at, I call them George and Louie. Two big bulls in that field.

And they just sort of stood there, looked around. That's called authority. That's what we're going to worship.

That's Yahweh. That's Yahweh's authority. Now, again, we've talked about this before, but as I've told you, repetition is the soul of education.

Have I told you that? Repetition is the soul of education. If you didn't get it, repetition is the soul of education. Now, what was it I was going to repeat? Oh, yes.

What's the problem with making a bull of Yahweh? Only one problem. You have made him part of this created world that you can manipulate through this world.

That's the problem. That's the problem because God is not part of this world.

And you cannot make him do anything by what you do in this world. We have a hard time believing that. God, I have not missed morning and evening church in six months.

Come on, God. If you don't, this next Sunday, I'm going to sleep in. Yeah.

We have a hard time with a God whom we cannot manipulate. To whom you can only surrender in trust. Oh, my goodness.

When our friend, the snake, tells us, you can't trust him. So, that was the situation. And it progressed.

They brought in more gods and more idols. Finally, it got bad enough that there was even the danger of their abandoning Yahweh altogether. And moving over to worship the God of the storm, Baal.

Wow. And that, of course, is what the whole ministry of Elijah and Elisha was about. I've, again, for my sins, been writing a commentary on Kings.

I got the edited manuscript back from the editor this week, and they want it back in two weeks. One of the fascinating things is that you've got 22 chapters on Elijah and Elisha covering a total of 90 years.

In inductive Bible study, there's a principle called the law of proportion. How important, how important are those 90 years? Important. Awfully important.

Are we going to give up the worship of Yahweh? As our lovely Queen Jezebel invites us. And worship Baal. No, no.

As a matter of fact, we're not. But it was so, so close. We have this guy named Jehu.

He is the patron saint of all preachers. Lo, he driveth furiously. And he got rid of the dynasty of Omri, who was the father of Ahab.

And Ahab had a son named Joram. Jehu came in and wiped out that whole family. But he did not destroy the bulls.

Now again, you think about what would that mean if he had? Are they going to go to Jerusalem now? And we don't know the answer to that. But he should have. And he didn't.

He had the opportunity. He got rid of the Baal cult. That's for sure.

He got rid of that. But, so God says, I'll tell you what, Jehu, I'll give you four generations on the throne. But that's all.

But in these years, that happened about 841, about 90 years after Solomon. And his children, he and his children, Jehu, and his children, ruled for about another hundred years. In those years, God poured out his love on the Hebrew people by sending them prophets.

More prophets, as best we can tell, were given to Israel than were given to Judah. Now, when you read the prophets, I suspect I know the feeling you have. Oh man, I got to read the prophets.

All this darkness. All this judgment. Guess what? It's God's love.

It's God's love. No, no. They did not say, God is a great grandpa in the sky who's kind of blind and he always says, I forgive.

No, because that's not reality. But they said, if you stop this if you turn around if you quit oppressing the poor if you quit worshiping your idols if you turn back to God, the future is wide open.

If you quit, Hosea and Amos are the last two. They were contemporaries, more or less.

Ultimately, the Mosaic covenant called for two things. Those of you who are in the Sunday school class you're going to get a double dose here. Two things.

Just two things. Absolute loyalty to Yahweh. He is God alone.

He is my God, and I will not worship another. That's number one. Number two, self-denying care for others.

Jesus said it in the so-called Sermon on the Mount. The whole law and prophets is summed up in this. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

The whole thing? Well, Paul agreed with Jesus, which is encouraging. Said the whole law is summed up in this. Love your neighbor.

My goodness. That's not so hard, is it? Is it? I don't think so. And the best expression of that is marriage.

God wants intimate fellowship with us. Does He want these? Oh, absolutely. But they are an indication of this.

That I know Him. That He knows me. And that walk will be a walk that reflects His character, His goodness, His truth, His rightness, His faithfulness, His purity, His justice, His love.

And the best metaphor is marriage, which is why the devil hates it so violently. Actually, I'm amazed that so many non-Christian marriages make it. And I'm grieved that so many Christian marriages don't.

But what this book is about is about love. Love forfeited. Love missed.

Love denied. And yet love continued. Going on.

Oh, my. Okay. That's background.

Let's see. Let's talk about outline. Chapters one to three are the lived out parable with chapter two in the middle sort of explaining the parable on either side.

Then there are three parts. Now, again, if you look at commentaries on Hosea, there'll be a lot of different suggestions for outline because Hosea tends to repeat himself, tends to say similar things over and over again. And so it's not easy to see a nice progressive outline there.

But you do have the three places in the book where you have an explicit call to repentance. The first one is in chapter six, verses one to three. The next one is in chapter 11, verses one to 11.

And then the last one is chapter 14. So that provides a convenient way of breaking it up into sections. Also, though it's not exclusive, these three Hebrew words, which are in many ways, the summation of faith in God, occur in these units, not exclusively.

You've got some occurring in the other ones and so forth. But it's still possible to see a little bit of emphasis changing. The first one is Yadah, to know.

They don't know me. Now, remember, what's the word for the sexual embrace? To know. To know.

They don't know me. Hased is the second one. I don't think I need to talk to you too much about that one.

God's unfailing love is given by a superior to an inferior, especially when undeserved. And then the last. It's also the word that can be translated truth.

We've talked about this before. We'll talk about it again. In the Old Testament, truth is not an objective concept.

It is to be true to someone as God has been true to us. Now, if that's so, if the sole creator of the universe is true, then we can expect that in his world, in his universe, there are things that are so, whether I like it or not. So, objective truth is a necessary implication from God's truth.

But he's not so interested in propagating truths as he is in propagating truth. And again, this is marriage. Are you true to your spouse in your heart? And that, of course, is where Jesus comes in the first portion of the Sermon on the Mount.

Big deal. So, you've never been in bed with another woman than your wife. But how many women have you mentally undressed on the street? That's what it's talking about.

Oh, my goodness. All right. Let's talk about chapter 1. Hosea does a very funny thing.

He is an Israelite prophet. Yet, he dates his book largely on the basis of Judean kings. He says the word of the Lord came to Hosea, son of Beri, during the reigns of Uzziah and his son Jotham and his son Ahaz and his son Hezekiah.

So, we know that Uzziah died in 739. These dates are pretty well pinned down by this time. So he began to write sometime before 739.

It's almost certain; you can get an argument here, almost certain that Hezekiah became a co-regent with his father Ahaz, again, pro and anti-Assyrian, in 726, something like that. And Jotham and Ahaz are in between here. So, that's where I get the book, which was written between about 755, maybe that early, and 725.

But the question is, why does he use the kings of Judah? And here's the one that is really not answerable. He only dates his book to one northern king who died in 742. Why not all the rest of these guys? They were all alive.

Does anybody have a thought? If you don't think about it, I'll have to. I think he thought those northern kings were all illegitimate. They're all a bunch of murderers.

I think he's thinking Jeroboam is really the last legitimate king. Now, his son Zechariah succeeded him. But as I said, he only lived a short time before he was murdered.

I think that's what's going on. I think he's saying, I can't date my book by all these guys who have been alive for a while now. So, I've got to do it on the basis of the kings of Judah.

Now, you say, can you prove that? Nope. But I think that's probably what's going on there. Yes.

Oh, it's normal. Yeah, the prophets typically date themselves by the kings under whom they served. Well, I think he can't use those guys.

So, he's got to have another dating method. I think that's what's going on. The Lord began to speak through Hosea, and the Lord said to him, go marry a prostitute and have children with her.

Now, what about that? What about that? Does a pure God command His pure servant to do something that is at least tinged with immorality? What do you think? He used Hosea as an example of Israel. How Israel had done to him. He was a God.

He was their father. Yeah, he is using Hosea as an example of himself and Gomer as an example of Israel. How badly does God want to convey his point? Deeply.

And Hosea is willing to do it. I'm sure glad he didn't ask me to do that. But it is an indication of how far God is willing to go to try to reach people and how far God's man is willing to go in obedience to God's directions.

For like an adulterous wife, this land is guilty of unfaithfulness and untruth. Basically, every time you see faithful in the Old Testament, the word behind it is truth or true. So, he married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim.

And she conceived and bore a son. The question is, is this Hosea's son? Probably not. The Lord said to Hosea, call him Jezreel because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I'll put an end to the kingdom of Israel.

Now, hold the phone! Jehu was obeying God when Jehu destroyed Omri, his dynasty. He actually killed Jehoram. Omri's grandson.

When Jehu killed them, he was obeying God, and God rewarded him with four generations on the throne for doing it. Now, he's going to punish and he did it at the summer capital of Jezreel. Powerful, powerful story.

Jezebel, who by this time is probably about 80 years old, put on all her makeup and her finest clothes, leaned out the window, and said, hi, Zimri. Zimri was the guy who killed Omri's predecessor. And Jehu said, anybody up there on our side? One of the eunuchs leaned out and said, yeah, throw her out.

They did. And the dogs ate her body. What's going on here? Well, when you read the story in 2 Kings 10, it looks as though Jehu kind of exceeded his warrant.

He not only killed the family of Omri and Ahab, but he also killed everybody associated with Ahab. I think what this is saying is you can do God's will in the wrong way. You can do God's will in a self-serving way.

I think Jehu really enjoyed himself. And God says I don't forget that. Yeah, I'm doing God's will.

How? For him or for yourself? Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. The Lord said to Hosea, call her Lo-ruhamah, which means no compassion, for I will no longer show compassion to Israel that I should at all forgive them.

When does God stop having compassion on you? Well, I don't know the answer to that. But this tells me it's possible. And it's something that ought to give every one of us the shivers.

Now, the NIV here has the word love, but it's compassion. Which is interestingly, in Colossians, it's the first thing that the person who is put off, the old man, is to now put on. Compassion.

The ability to feel with others. God says I'm done. I'm done.

Now, before you go accusing God of being short-tempered, 700 years, it took 700 years for God's compassion to run out. Praise his name.

Now, that's no reason for us to say, oh, well, I got 700 years. No, no, no, no. But there comes a point.

There comes a point. Yet, I will show compassion to Judah. And I will save them not by bow, sword, or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the Lord their God, will save them.

Remember what happened in Judah in 701? Sennacherib, the Assyrian emperor, had taken every one of their fortified villages, 46 of them. Rakesh, the guard on the road up from the southwest toward Egypt, is about to fall, and Jerusalem's all that's left. And Isaiah says to Hezekiah, trust God.

And Hezekiah says, Now, in all fairness, that's about all that was left to Hezekiah. You know, as they say, when all else fails, try prayer. He did.

And one night, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died. And Sennacherib thought he had pressing business back at home. Sometime between 750 and 725, I will save Judah, not by bow, sword, or battle, or by horses and horsemen.

I, the Lord their God, will save them. He knew what he was talking about. After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son.

The Lord said, call him Lo-Ruhamah. Lo-Ruhamah, which means not my people. Probably another father and not Hosea.

You're not my people, and I'm not your God. All the previous 40 or 50 years, oh, man, God is coming through. Look at the money we got.

Look at the power we've got. Oh, wow, we've prayed, we've believed, and God has come through. Oh, America, America.

But now look at verses 10, 11, and 2, 1. The monk who was putting in the chapter divisions, his donkey, evidently hit a pothole at this point. The chapter division really needs to begin at 2, 2. Yet, the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said of them, you are not my people, they will be called children of the living God.

The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together. They'll appoint one leader and will come up out of the land for great will be done. It will be the day of Jezreel.

Say of your brothers, my people, and of your sisters, my compassionate one. How do you square that? How do you put that together with what we've just said? You're not my people. I won't have compassion on you.

He remembered the covenant that he made with Abraham. He is a promise-keeping God. Now, these people, this generation, they're going to suffer, and they're going to suffer terribly.

But God is not going to give up on Israel. That's why I'm glad that Harry Truman had a partner in his haberdashery business who was Jewish. And in 1948, one day after Israel declared its nationhood, the United States recognized them.

Because of Harry Truman. God is not going to give up on Israel. Now, that does not mean that every Israelite is going to be saved.

The same thing is true of the church. God is not going to give up on the church. That doesn't mean that every one of us who are in the church is going to be saved.

But He's not going to give up. He's that kind of a God. And that, in many ways, this first chapter really sort of lays out the book.

When it happens, if it happens, remember, as you're being dragged away with a hook in your nose, perhaps wearing nothing but a loincloth, remember, remember, Israel will be like the sand of the seashore. That'll hold you in the dark. That'll hold you when it looks like everything is gone.

All your hopes, all your dreams. Israel will be like the sand on the seashore. That's what he said to father Abraham back there.

He hasn't changed his mind. We're not going to become good Babylonians. Again, forgive me, I've said this before, but you don't remember.

The whole purpose of exile was to destroy the culture, religion, the language of the subject people and make them part of the imperial culture. And God says, no, doesn't have to happen. That's what you see in Daniel.

And Daniel is a marvelous, marvelous example. He's not a mean guy. He's not walking around saying, you lousy Babylonians, I'm going to blow you up the first chance I get.

No. He's generous. He's going to help them when he can and how he can.

But he's not going to become one of them. That's our choice. Are we going to become one of the Babylonians? When things go badly for us? When we reap our harvest? One of the greatest themes of the Bible.

Don't forget. Don't forget. Remember.

So, I say, in this first chapter, we really see the book in many ways in a kind of a nutshell. Judgment is coming. You have sinned away God's compassion.

But God's not done. God's not done. Don't forget it.

Well, I've done all the talking tonight. It's not going to be that way next week. I hope.

Be ready with your homework. We'll do chapters two and three, and then we will have a two-week break. Karen and I will be away.

So, we'll be back. But next week, we're going to continue on with chapters two and three. Questions or comments before we go? Bonnie? It is Labor Day.

We're going to do it anyway. We're going to labor. Yeah, I didn't want to do just one and then call it off.

I'm going to get hooks in you before. Yes. Oh, yeah.

Yeah, I don't think. The point is God's not going to give up on them because of his ancient promises. But those ancient promises have to become real for them in order to experience God's compassion.

Yeah, but compassion is going to be available because of his ancient promises. But yes, absolutely. We've got to take.

Yes. Yes and no. I think we've got to be careful that we don't compartmentalize these promises.

I think it's very much like looking through a telescope. Things that are very far away and things that are near get compressed. So, I think the return from exile is here, but I don't think that's all it's about.

I think it does have those long-term future promises there, but that's not all it's about. Any other comments, questions? Yes, the handouts are back there on the table for next week. Let me pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you are the fulfillment of all the promises. Thank you for coming and demonstrating God's unending compassion for those who will receive it.

Help us to be those people, Lord. Help us to be people who choose to be absolutely loyal to you. Help us to be those people who, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, are enabled to deny ourselves for the sake of others.

Help us to be those people who love you intimately, dearly, and closely and who know you. In your name, we pray, Amen.