

Question: Who was the prophet Hosea?

Answer: Prophets of the Old Testament were voices speaking counter to the actions of the people. The prophets came to tell Israel what they were doing wrong. Their intention was to bring them back into the light of God's favor and grace. Never was being a prophet easy. Since they were speaking in a countercultural way, their words often fell on deaf ears. Those that heard the words of the prophets oftentimes resorted to violence instead of compliance. The people who the prophets lashed out against were unable to feel the coming wrath that God was going to bring. Fortunately for the sinners, the prophets *could* feel the coming wrath of God and rushed to the people telling them of their faults so that they could repent of their actions. Prophets did not choose to become prophets, instead, God chose them. The call to be a prophet was sometimes one of hesitancy. Those called to be prophets knew that their job would bring much tribulation. The difficulty of getting their message across often led the prophets to be labeled as abnormal and madmen, "They hate him who reproves in the gate, They abhor him who speaks the truth." (Amos 5:10) Being a prophet meant living a life of disconnect to the people they ministered to. No one but God himself understood the plight of the prophet's position. (*The Prophets*, Heschel, 21) Even with knowing the difficulties and adversity they would face, the prophets accepted the missions that God gave them.

The prophet Hosea is generally believed to have been a prophet from 750 – 725 BC. God first spoke through Hosea by telling him to go and take a wife. (Hosea 1:2) An odd request at first, but we learn for Hosea to truly understand the difficulty of God's decision to destroy or save his people, he must experience what God is experiencing: the infidelity of a spouse. Hosea is called to be a prophet at a time when God is justified in his anger towards Israel. The Israelites had begun to worship other people's gods as their own. When He gave them the covenant God told them that, "I am the LORD your God, you shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:1-2) Instead of following the covenant promise, Israel began to embrace the gods of the Canaanites, particularly Baal and Ashtoreth. In the eyes of God this is blatant adultery, "Do not rejoice, O Israel! Do not exult as other nations do; for you have played the whore, departing from your God." (Hosea 9:1) Hosea's job was to inform the people Israel that they had best forget about the gods of the Canaanites and worship the One God who saves. For, "I have been the LORD your God ever since the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior." (Hosea 13:4) When reading these verses we must be mindful of how difficult it would have been for Hosea to have spoken these words that God commanded him to speak. Hosea was Jewish himself, and loved the people Israel, yet he saw their faults and knew God's wrath towards the errors they were knowingly committing. As a messenger of God, Hosea is not to mince words. Instead, he must be as forthcoming as possible because Israel is on the edge of doom. Hosea warns them how God shall carry out his systematic destruction, "I (God) will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will tear open their breast, And there I will devour them like a lion, As a wild beast would rend them." (Hosea 13:8)

We find out early in the text that Hosea's wife is an adulteress. Hosea and his wife Gomer have three children together. Happy for a time, Hosea finds out that she has not been faithful to him (much like the Israelites' unfaithfulness to God). Disgusted with her infidelity, Hosea can no longer keep Gomer as his wife and due to her acts, has her sent away. The state of Hosea's life very much parallels the state of Israel. We see that Israel herself is on the edge of destruction for her infidelity towards God and that it is Hosea's job to proclaim this coming destruction. With their infidelity, Israel has "deeply corrupted themselves." (Hosea 9:9) Fortunately for Israel and Gomer, the story does not end here. Gomer is the bride of Hosea, and Israel the bride of God. Through Hosea's own experiences of infidelity from his wife, he is able to understand the difficult decision God faces. (*The Prophets*, Heschel, 69) Hosea's answer to his own wife's infidelity is that he has her shipped off, perhaps even put into slavery. Is God to do the same thing with Israel? No. God has sympathy for his people. He loves them, and asks that they abandon their harlotry to attach and commit themselves to Him. (*The Prophets*, Heschel, 73) Like God's amazing forgiveness for his people, He also asks that Hosea forgive his own wife and bring her back to his house. God tells Hosea that he must, "Go, love a woman (Gomer) who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people Israel." (Hosea 3:1) Thus, Hosea is made to understand the mind of God in that now he can empathize with God on the difficult decision He has made for his disobedient people and the radical forgiveness that He has given them, "I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them." (Hosea 14:4)