

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 45 – Part 2

The Fall of Israel: The Prophet's Cry (Hosea)

Our daughter Rebecca had a “Game of Life” project due this week in her math class. The teacher had handed out sheets that described chores for the students to work and then compile into a PowerPoint for presenting to the class. The chores included choosing a career and determining the amount of money that one would typically make beginning that career. From this amount, the students were to subtract taxes, requiring them to first discover the appropriate tax-rate. They were to subtract for a lost computer, suitable living expenses, a car payment, car insurance, and even student loans.

Rebecca asked me for help, and boy was I excited! Now, I was little help on gathering the information. She had already done that before coming to me for assistance. I suggested taking the data and giving her a drafted PowerPoint, since that was something I really enjoy doing (and where I have a good deal of practice). Rebecca replied that she had already prepared a PowerPoint.

“What exactly do you need my help with?” I asked. After all, if she already had her data, already did her PowerPoint, what help could she possibly need? She replied that she simply wanted me to look over her materials and tell her if I caught any mistakes. I was a proofreader! (*Not* my strength, I might add!)

I was interested in looking over her presentation. She had chosen to be a marine biologist living in Miami, Florida. The income for a beginning marine biologist seemed surprisingly high to me (although the Internet revealed she was right). Her apartment in Miami seemed unusually cheap to me (until I realized she was living with a roommate from her class and they shared the rental together).

I applauded her fine work and then set out to make a few PowerPoint slides, *just in case*. Regrettably, she did not choose to use my slides. It seems they were a bit over the top. “Too entertaining” was the phrase she used. She said, “Dad, this is math class. I am not supposed to make people laugh.” That did not sit right with me.

At any rate, I can remember that I was about her age (14) when I started thinking seriously about what I wanted to do in life. I never considered being a marine biologist. My ideas always rotated between a lawyer, a preacher, or a politician. Neither Rebecca nor I ever expressed a desire to be a prophet! This lesson we study the book of Hosea. This book validates our “avoid the job of a prophet” mentality. Hosea lived in a very tough time and had a very tough message. It

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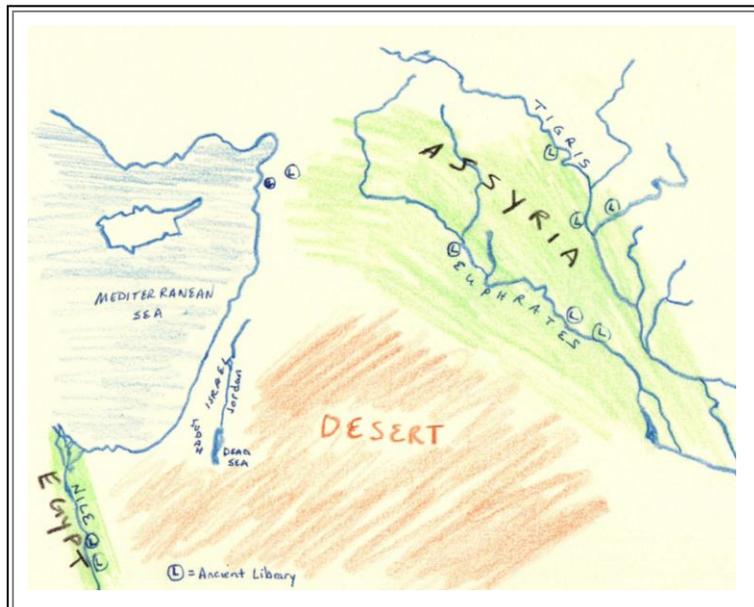
took its toll on him and his family, even as it spoke to Israel. Its message to Israel fell at first upon deaf ears. Over the centuries since, however, it is a message that spoke to many Jews as well as to many in the church. We study that message today mainly in the confines of its historical pronouncement. Within that historical context, this lesson continues our study of the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

THE SETTING

Last week we began our study of the fall of Israel looking at the human perspective of Israel's precarious situation. We considered the geography, geology, internal and international politics, and the military issues of Israel and Assyria. After considering the human perspective, we then began our study of the divine perspective behind Israel's fall. God had placed Israel and Judah in a position where it was smaller in size, population, and resources than the northern superpower Assyria or the southern superpower Egypt. Still, both Israel and Judah were important as thoroughfares for trade, strategically positioned between the desert and the Mediterranean Sea. For trade and traffic to flow to and from north and south, or to and from the eastern tribes/peoples and the sea, it had to flow through routes in Israel, primarily, and Judah secondarily.

This precarious positioning meant that Israel could be an influencer of many people, or many people could influence it. The story of Israel was one of being seduced by foreign powers, opportunities, and attractions, rather than holding firm to Yahweh

and his commands and worship. This self-determined course took Israel into the sin, depravation, and misguided decisions that made it destined to fall. It was just a matter of time. In order to navigate the tightrope required by its position in the world, Israel was compelled to adhere closely to the plans of God. Any other course would not suffice.



There are more historical facts that are relevant to the prophecies of Hosea, but we will remind the readers of those as we approach relevant parts of Hosea.¹

The book of Hosea contains the prophecies of an Israelite from the Northern Kingdom named Hosea. We know little of him, learning only what we can glean from the verses of his prophecies. These verses, however, tell us some key information that is worth noting before we plunge into the book.

Some scholars call Hosea the “death-bed prophet of Israel.” Hosea is the last prophet of the Northern Kingdom that we know spoke God’s words of impending doom and warning prior to the destruction and fall of Samaria in 722/721 BC. His book is very difficult to read in Hebrew² (and parts of it difficult in English!). There are words, and grammatical structures that confound scholars and lead to some different interpretations among today’s translators.³ Those details are beyond the scope of this lesson, but a recent commentary on Hosea by Fuller’s J. Andrew Dearman provides a substantial and thorough up-to-date analysis of this.⁴

We also reference Dearman’s commentary for its full consideration of a number of different views and interpretations of Hosea.⁵ Because of the critical timing of this prophecy within the history of Israel, and because of its difficult style, content, and meaning, it has drawn a lot of scholastic attention. A full survey of the range of ideas on the book would extend this lesson into hundreds of pages. The book was analyzed by the Ginzv scholars of the early 20th century who hacked the book into pieces and reorganized it into their perceived notions of what it “originally said.”

¹ Because the oral presentation in this series did not reach the written portion of Hosea, much of that material is repeated here, although reworked and more fully developed. All older lessons are available for downloading in video, writing, or audio at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

² One reasonable explanation offered for the particularly challenging Hebrew is that Hosea was a prophet of the Northern country. One would expect that his dialect would carry different permutations of the core Hebrew in use in that area of the globe. This is a rare writing among the Old Testament Scriptures in arising out of that time period in “northern speak” as opposed to the many writings we have from the longer lasting southern kingdom of Judah.

³ Not just among today’s scholars. 4th century scholar Saint Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, producing the Vulgate, which served the Western church as its authoritative text for over a millennium, began his commentary saying, “If in the interpretation of all the prophets we stand in need of the intervention of the Holy Spirit...how much more should the Lord be invoked in interpreting Hosea.” Quoted by A.A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, (T&T Clark 1997), at 53.

⁴ Dearman, J. Andrew, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Hosea* (Eerdmans 2010).

⁵ Hosea is rich in word play and puns. While Dearman covers these well, more detailed analysis is found in Morris, Gerald, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea*, (T&T Clark 1996).

Then, there was a host of scholars who decided that the book is an integrated whole, likely recorded by a scribe or scribes, but as a faithful reproduction of real prophecies by a real Hosea. Many other scholars have written their permutations of these extremes with authorship ranging from the internally attested time at the end of Israel's possession of the Northern Kingdom, or, for some scholars, much later. Having read through an exhaustive set of opinions, I will center this lessons on the interpretation that seems most likely to me!

The final note for the setting of Hosea is the later pronouncement of the Prophet Historian writing Kings. Kings explained the fall of Israel from a faith position:

And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God... and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced... And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this." (2 Kings 17:7-12).

Kings emphasized that Israel was not without warning. God had sent Hosea (among others):

Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets." (2 Kings 17:13).

Israel's reaction was not what it should have been. Rather than turning from sin, Israel turned deeper into sin.

But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them... And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger (2 Kings 17:14-17).

This brought the judgment of the Lord and the fall of Israel:

Therefore, the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only (2 Kings 17:18).

With Kings in mind, we turn to consider the warning God gave through Hosea.

HOSEA'S PROPHECIES

Hosea begins with information that speaks to both the timing of his ministry, and also the politics of his day:

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beerī, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." (Hosea 1:1-2)⁶

Thinking back through the history of the Northern Kingdom illustrates some interesting political commentary on the wording of Hosea here. Hosea is first called into his prophetic ministry when, we can presume, as a relatively young man living under the reign of King Jeroboam II, he is charged with marrying a prostitute. Jeroboam II reigned until approximately 751 BC, so Hosea's call into marriage began before that date. Hosea's prophetic ministry then lasts through the Judean kings of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, a period spanning from at least 735⁷ to 715 BC. As Hosea grew up under the reign of Jeroboam II, he grew up during what history shows to be the Indian⁸ summer days of Israel. The kingdom prospered in the sunny warmth of an expanding and safe country under Jeroboam II. Prosperity was at its all-time high, and no one seemed to be expecting the strong and destructive winter that was right around the corner.

With the death of Jeroboam, Israel passed from a monarchy into anarchy. Jeroboam's son Zechariah took the throne, but only for a matter of months before his assassination. The killer Shallum held the throne a month before his assassination. His killer, Menahem, kept the throne for a decade, but he was never anointed king by Yahweh, as was the dynasty of Jeroboam II. Hosea never comments on any of these follow-up kings as "kings" in name. Later in Hosea 8:4 he explained speaking on behalf of the LORD,

They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.

⁶ We should add that this specific command to Hosea is certainly not the normative marriage instruction for God's people. No one should get hung up on God so ordering Hosea, for God has a higher purpose at work here. It is God's instruction and God's purpose at work.

⁷ This is the likely date that Jotham died and Ahaz began reigning as co-regent on Judah's throne. Uzziah the leper king reigned as co-regent with his son Jotham until Jotham's death. Uzziah then reigned briefly as co-regent with his grandson Ahaz, before finally dying after reigning 52 years (2 Kings 15:2).

⁸ The term "Indian Summer" was used by Garrett in: Garret, D. A., *The New American Commentary: Hosea. Joel*, (Holman 1997), at 23.

With a nice parallel structure, Hosea equates the “kings” on the throne as similar to the silver and gold idols—something invented by man with no blessing or authority from God Almighty.

If political scientists term “anarchy” as an absence of authoritative government, then anarchy is Hosea’s view of the situation. Hosea makes his message clear by leaving out any reference to a true king by name during the post-Jeroboam years.

From there, the first three chapters of Hosea take us through the turmoil of his personal home-life.

So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just 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 (Hosea 1:3-4).

After God told Hosea to take “a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom” (Hos. 1:2), Hosea married the adulterous Gomer. Their first child was named “Jezreel,” the name of the town where Jehu slew Israel’s and Judah’s king along with other royal family members. This name prophesied God putting an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel (Hos. 1:4). It was at Jezreel where Jehu, the General anointed by Elisha to be king, went beyond his authority and killed many more than necessary while taking the throne. This “house” or dynasty in Israel was the last one that had produced three generations later Jeroboam II.

Gomer then gave birth to a second child, a daughter named “Lo-Ruhamah,” which meant in Hebrew, “No Mercy.” This was because the time was coming where God would “no longer have mercy on the house of Israel,” even though he would show mercy on the house of Judah (Hos. 1:6-7).⁹ A third child followed, a son named Lo-Ammi, Hebrew for “Not My People.”

Hosea’s life was a prophetic parallel to the nation of Israel. When Israel entered into the Sinai covenant, the process was one akin to marriage. The procedure itself mimicked the process of a marriage in that day. The people were the bride and Yahweh was the Bridegroom. The covenant was “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Ex. 6:7). In a sense, God was actually doing the

⁹ We note that there are terms used for the northern and southern kingdoms that sometimes confuse some modern readers and so we underscore them here. After Israel divided into two nations following Solomon’s death, the Northern Kingdom is often referred to simply as “Israel.” After Samaria became its capital under Omri, it was also referred to as “Samaria.” Occasionally, “Israel” was still used as a term for both the Northern and Southern kingdoms. More often, however, the Southern Kingdom was termed simply “Judah.” It is from Judah and its people that the term “Jew” comes into parlance. “Jew” is considered an anachronism if used for the Northern Israelites.

very thing illustrated in the home life of Hosea. With God's instruction to "take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom" came the reason, "for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord" (Hos. 1:2). God had taken a people with an adulterous heart who would persistently desert him for other lovers. The Israelites started such adultery with the golden calf while Moses was on Sinai and it persisted on and off throughout Israel's existence.¹⁰

Israel abused God and his gifts as an adulterous wife does her husband. God pronounced his judgment upon Israel in the experience of Hosea and in the declaration over Gomer's children. Yet, God does not leave that judgment without offering his promise of a later redemption. Chapter one ends with God's promise of some level of restoration. The way it is worded, is a bit peculiar, however:

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or 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." And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel (Hos. 1:10-11).

There is no consensus on the meaning of this prophetic passage. I suggest the following: The Israelites will not be destroyed, but will continue to live and flourish ("like the sand of the sea"). They will be "gathered together" under "one head," which is what happened even as the Israelites were taken into Assyrian captivity. Many of the people fled south to Judah and took up residence there, living again in a united monarchy under the Judean King.

As in many prophetic passages, there is another level of meaning here. Those who were "not my people" were people who were living outside the covenant of God. They were not his people and were the equivalent of Gentiles, worshipping and practicing alien and pagan deities and religions. Paul, therefore, takes this passage and applies it to Gentiles in Romans 9:22-25:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea,

¹⁰ Some scholars believe that the references in Hosea to Gomer, his wife, are references to the leadership, culture, and institutions of Israel. The references to the children are then interpreted as analogous to the common people of Israel. See, e.g., Garret, at 38-39.

"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"¹¹

Peter also seized upon this language of Hosea seeing in it a fulfillment of God's calling his people in Christ:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Hosea chapter two seems to see an about-face in God's declared judgment. As the first daughter was named "No Mercy," so in chapter two we read that God will "have mercy" on "the sisters." Similarly as Gomer's second son was named "not my people," Hosea is told to tell "the brothers" that they are God's people! Scholars puzzle over this meaning, and the most that can affirmatively be said is that it seems to continue the thought from the end of chapter one, that a time would come when God would reverse his judgment. The unnamed "brothers" and "sisters" could be a reference to future offspring, the unnumbered children yet to come!

In a chiasmic fashion,¹² Hosea explained,

Plead with your mother...that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst. Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom. For their mother

¹¹ We should reiterate that a great number of word plays occur in Hosea. In this passage, such a play may be at work in the final statement, "And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel." "Jezreel" can reference a city, a region, or the actual meaning of the name: that "God sows." If the meaning is used here in pun counterpoint to the passage of Jezreel as the place of Jehu's bloody coup, then Hosea is proclaiming that Yahweh will increase the number of Israelites as a sower does seed. And great will be the day! Tying that in to Paul's quotation usage in Romans 9:22-25, it makes the day "great" indeed!

¹² "Chiasm" refers to an ancient way of writing and speaking where patterns are born out in the form of the Greek *chi* (χ). In a simple form as here, there is one thought (we can call it "Thought A") and then a second thought ("B"). The second thought is then expressed again ("B"), followed by the first thought ("A"). In Hosea, we see this initially as God judges in verses 1:4-9 ("A"), then God restores in verses 1:10-11 ("B"). Hosea then writes again of God's restoring work in 2:1 ("B"), followed by re-pronouncing God's judgment in 2:2-13 ("A").

has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully (Hos. 2:2-5).

Hosea's life has taken metaphorical status for Israel's treatment of God. In chapter three, we see the metaphor also expressing the behavior of God for his people. God instructs Hosea to return to Gomer and love her in spite of her adultery and prostitution, just as God loves Israel in spite of her rampant and adulterous idolatry. While we should always be careful when dealing with the Bible's anthropomorphisms of God (referencing God in human terms, e.g., God's "hands" or "face," or the ascription of human emotions to God, etc.), we must appreciate them where they are present. Here Hosea's name even takes on important meaning. Hosea means "Salvation." It is a root in the name of Jesus, which in its Hebrew form is the "Yah" of Yahweh, followed by the same root of Hosea. Hosea was the salvation of Gomer in chapter three, expressing the heart and ultimately actions of God in buying back his people through Jesus, "Yahweh's Hosea."

Chapters four through eight illustrate the depths of God's love that it continued even through Israel's sin, where there was,

...no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land (Hos. 4:1).

Instead there was,

...swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; [while] they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed (Hos. 4:2).

God's response is, in part, that the people were suffering from "a lack of knowledge." This lack was not, however, from an unavailability to get knowledge. A remarkable thing about Hosea, which many scholars agree is a book coming out of the Northern Kingdom experiences of an 8th century prophet, is that the book shows awareness of the Torah as well as the books of Joshua and Judges (cf., Hos. 9:9 and Judges 19-21). For example, in Hosea 12:3ff, we read of Jacob taking Esau by the heel in the womb, of Jacob wrestling with the angel, Jacob's dreaming encounter with God at Bethel, and more. Repeatedly, Hosea references God delivering the Israelites from Egypt and the Exodus story. Hosea even speaks of Adam's original sin (Hos. 6:7). It was not that knowledge of God was *unavailable*; it was rejected and forgotten!

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children (Hos. 4:6).

Instead of seeking God's will in his revelation, they were seeking it from sticks! This was trading their holy covenantal relation with God in a way no different than a spouse trading their marriage covenant and becoming a prostitute!

My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore (Hos. 4:12).

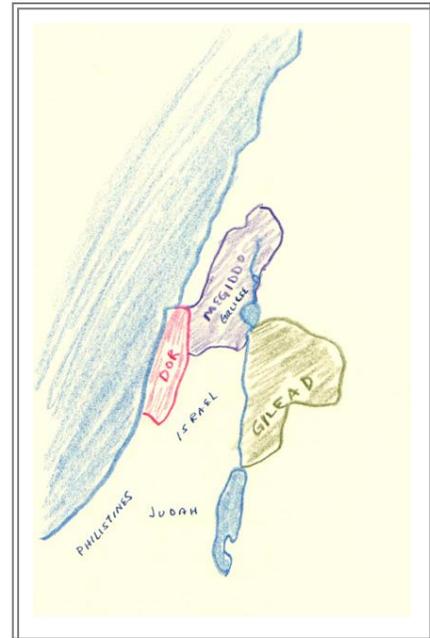
Hosea echoed Amos's dire prediction,

They shall not remain in the land of the LORD...they shall eat unclean food in Assyria... My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations (Hos. 9:3, 17).

Hosea saw this already happening, even before the final fall of Samaria:

Israel is swallowed up; already they are among the nations as a useless vessel. For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild donkey wandering alone; Ephraim has hired lovers (Hos. 8:8-9).

This passage could refer to the payment of Menahem of 75,000 pounds of silver to Tiglath-Pileser III (2 Kings 16:17-22), or the incursion of Tiglath-Pileser into the northern part of Israel. When T-P first conquered northern portions of Israel, he divided his new territories into three provinces. The province that was the way to the sea he called "Dor." The northernmost province including Galilee he called "Megiddo." The province east of the Jordan was called "Gilead." These provinces are referred to in Isaiah 9 as land that "in the latter time" God would make glorious. Isaiah called the three provinces, "the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1).



In chapter 11, Hosea expresses the love of the Lord for Israel, and for Ephraim, the major section of Israel yet untouched by Assyria. Joel Chernoff recorded in the name of his 1970's group "Lamb" a song "Ephraim" from Hosea 11:1-11. His song expresses the lyric and emotion of the touching poetry marvelously. Unabashedly advertising on his behalf, I urge anyone computer literate to go online (iTunes is an easy place) and buy the song! The first verse of this loving and moving passage the apostle Matthew related to the childhood move of Jesus and family from Bethlehem to Egypt. Hosea 11:1 reads,

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

This joins Exodus 4:22-23 as the only passages in the Old Testament that refer to Israel as the “son” of God.¹³ Matthew explained Hosea’s language as a typology for Christ writing,

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet [Hosea], "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Mt. 2:13-15).

Hosea’s cry was a warning, one that Israel ignored to its own detriment. The last verse of Hosea contains the prophet’s final plea,

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (Hos. 14:9).

History shows that Israel took the road of transgressor, ignoring the words of Hosea, and, in the words of Kings,

...the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet... but they would not listen, but were stubborn (2 Kings 17:12-13).

CONCLUSION

In the Game of Life, I think I would follow Rebecca and sooner be a marine biologist than a prophet of God. Hosea the prophet started life in what Israel would know as the “good old days,” when the country was strong and life seemed good, at least for the leisure class. But the country was perched precariously on a cliff, even though it did not realize it. Hosea was sent with a message validated by his very life—a message of Israel’s unfaithfulness to the Lord.

Rather than responding in contrition and an about-face, Israel continued with political machinations that hurried it over the edge and into the depths of destruction. This could make the actions of Hosea seem almost wasted. Why bother going through all the personal tragedy when Israel dimly ignored his warning?

¹³ There are passages that refer to Israel as God’s “children” or his “sons and daughters,” but nowhere else are they simply his “son.”

This is the difficulty of a prophet! God called his prophets and set his Spirit upon them to live and communicate his truth as God chose. Hosea was one in a long line of prophets that were ignored and even persecuted for the sake of the message. Yet his message did not go out and fail to return. Hosea is often called “the Foundation Prophet,” for Hosea’s words and themes found expression in the subsequent works of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Moreover, Hosea is repeatedly quoted in the New Testament, and his experience forms a basis for better understanding the ultimate act in history, the crucifixion of Christ.

Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 in Matthew 9:13¹⁴,

Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus also invoked the judgment language of Hosea 10:8 (“The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us.") on the last day of his life. As he was walking to Calvary, he told the following weeping women about the difficult days coming:

For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' (Lk 23:29-30)

As noted in the lesson, Paul quoted from Hosea in Romans. He also quoted from Hosea 13:14 (“Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?”) in writing to the Corinthians:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

Thank God for an obedient Hosea, even in the midst of a disobedient people.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “...*they would not listen*” (2 Kings 17:14).

¹⁴ See also quote in Matt. 12:7.

Hosea issued a cry of warning, “Whoever is wise, let him understand these things” (Hos. 14:9), yet the people did not listen. They had ears, to be sure. They had eyes and could see the life of Hosea, even as he spoke of its significance to them. Yet their eyes did not see truly, just as their ears did not hear truly. As Kings says, “...they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God.” Stubbornness and lack of faith/belief was the downfall of the people. This is likely their lack of knowledge as well (“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me” Hos. 4:6).

John in Revelation echoed the warning of Christ to the churches in his day, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22). Let us take this to heart and practice. Commit anew to regularly read the word, to meditate upon it prayerfully asking God’s Spirit to speak through His Word into your life and heart. Then with boldness and faith, step out in obedience and live for the Father who speaks!

2. *“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings”* (Hos. 6:6).

Chew on this verse for a bit. As you consider it, remember the role that parallelism plays in poetic passages like this. The second part of this verse gives a nuanced meaning in relation to the first part. God desires steadfast love over a sacrifice. That first part sets up the second, that God wants knowledge of him over burnt offerings. A key here returns to Hosea 4:6 referenced in the first point for home: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” “Knowledge” is a bit different from our word today in both the Old Testament Hebrew as well as the New Testament Greek. For the Biblical languages, “knowledge” intones an intimate relationship. We get this in the Old King James where it notes “Adam knew Eve” and produced offspring.

God is not interested in deeds of service or sacrifice that proceed from anything other than from a relationship with him. Jesus even said his coming was so that we would “know” God. This is again a reference to an intimate relationship with God.

Too often, we equate this “knowing” or “relationship” simply with a saving faith in Christ. Now that does bring one into a relationship with the Father, but these passages speak beyond salvation. We are to know in a sense of growing in our walk with the Lord. This is a relationship that is ongoing, not a simple legal contract we have executed to “get us eternity.” Think this through. Then make decisions on how you can live your life to better grow in relationship with the Lord. Get to “know him” better!

3. *“And the Lord said to me, ‘Go again’... SO I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver...”* (Hos. 3:1-2).

God’s orders to Hosea reflected God’s love and actions for his own people. God was never content to let his people wander under condemnation. He promised and showed his character as one who loves even an unfaithful people. He would give of himself to buy back that which wrongfully yet willfully left him.

This puts a very human spin on the love of God. How powerful is the love that takes back an unfaithful mate, at great personal cost? What kind of love yearns to restore a healthy relationship of trust, where trust has been destroyed? What a love and what a God that loves like that!

This is the true good news, the “gospel” as Paul termed it. “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you... that Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:1). Is it any wonder that as Paul drew out the implications of this sacrificial “buy back” (another word for “buy back” is “redemption”) quoting from Hosea, that now death has no sting? How can we do anything but love in return as we respond to this amazing love and sacrifice!

WANT MORE?

We continue to work our way through the conquering of Israel, so still time to read up on Tiglath-Pileser and Sennacherib! Isaiah is a long book, but consider reading some portions of it. At least work through chapter 7 and consider the Messianic prophecy in the midst of the judgment announced against Israel and Judah!

Email us your thoughts and questions at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com.