

Lesson 1a- Introduction to Hosea: “*Salvation*”

I. **Writer and Date**

Writer

“Hosea”, like many Hebrew names, has both general and specific meanings. These meanings may or may not be indicative of the character of the individual. Obviously, God sometimes changed the names of certain individuals to better suit the *purpose* or *vocation* He had in mind for them (e.g. *Simon Bar-jonah* became *Peter*, et al). “Hosea” specifically means *salvation*; but in more general terms refers to *deliverance* and *help*. It seems to be an alternate spelling of and has the same basic meaning as “Hoshea.” The interesting thing about this particular name is that it was the given name of one of the *spies* sent on a reconissance mission into Canaan, Num.13:8, but “*Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua,*” Num.13:16. “Joshua” more specifically means “salvation is from Jehovah.” But let’s get back to the prophet of our study.

Origins

Hosea is another of the men chosen by God for the specific task of prophesying to His people. But like several other prophets God selected and utilized, very little was known prior to, or even after, their recorded service. It is evident from the text itself that Hosea was a native of the northern part of Israel, perhaps Samaria itself. His speech toward, and especially the emotional ties of his heart to, the northern kingdom are fairly evident. Aside from this, nothing else is known of earlier life or native home. It is apparent, however, that he has first-hand knowledge of the religious, political, and social climates of which he spoke and wrote, cf. 5:1; 6:8-9; 12:12; 14:6; also 1:2 and 7:5.

Occupation

Again, in this regard, speculation is about the best that can be done. Some have concluded that he was of the priesthood from his apparent high estimation of their duties and obligations. Whether this is true or not, it is obvious that Hosea understood much of the blame for Israel’s deplorable spiritual and moral condition was due the dereliction of their duties by the priests. For this negligence, both God and he held them accountable.

His Personal Life

While we know practically nothing of his life prior to “*The word of the Lord which came to Hosea the son Beeri,*” we are given one of the most intimate views of his life during his prophetic period of all the Minor Prophets. Apparently Hosea was not married when God first began to deal with him, for the first command he received from the Lord was to “*Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry;*” 1:2. There has been much debate in scholarly writings as to whether this command was *literal*-meaning that Hosea’s wife was a prostitute when he attained her, or *figurative*-indicating that Hosea was to take a wife from among the *spiritual harlots/adulterers* of Israel. Still a third position taken by some is that Gomer was not a literal prostitute when taken from the spiritual idolaters of Israel, but because of the moral bankruptcy of her background, she became one after marrying Hosea and bearing him children.

Although it is perhaps impossible to know absolutely which of these is correct, if any, there seems to be little reason to attempt to make more out of the text than it plainly says, **“Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord,”** 1:2.

Here are some *food for thought* considerations in this regard. The life and relationship of Hosea is being used to demonstrate a spiritual truth, almost like a *living* parable. In these kinds of analogies, the *physical* is that which is known and is utilized to explain the *spiritual*, or that which may be slightly more difficult to comprehend. The concrete is therefore used to manifest more clearly the abstract. In this case, Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was the *concrete* with Israel’s unfaithfulness to God being the *abstract* or *spiritual*. Therefore, it seems more likely that the marriage was real rather just allegorical (*parables* consisted of events that either were real and commonly understood, or could easily have been so).

Some say that Gomer must not have been unchaste at the time of their marriage because:

- 1) **If she were an adulterer, by the Law she should would have been put to death, Deut.22:22.** But remember, Israel is no longer following the Law in many respects- surely including this one.
- 2) **It makes it appear that God commanded Hosea to do something improper; i.e. marry a lewd woman.** First, what is the best thing that can happen to a lewd woman? Is it not that she marry a man of God? Furthermore, even granting the objection, certainly it was for the *greater good* and is not a singular instance of God requiring questionable activities of His servants the prophets, cf. Isa.20:1-4 and Ezk.4:1 – 5:4.
- 3) **To make the parallel with Israel fit, Israel then must have been unfaithful to God from the inception of their relationship.** In this regard, when did “Israel” become God’s spiritual bride? When a nation came out of Egypt? They brought the idols of their captors with them. With the Law at Sinai? They were making a Golden Calf as the Law was being given. As they journeyed toward the Promised Land? They carried idols with them then too, cf. Amos 5:25-26. As they prepared to settle Canaan? Not according to the words of Joshua in Josh.24. The point? With the possible exception of father Abraham (cf. Gen.31:19, 34-35) with whom the nation originated, it seems to have been *impure* from the beginning!
- 4) **It says further “and have children of harlotry” which would mean Gomer had no illegitimate children at the time of their marriage- thus the harlotry was only figurative of Israel’s spiritual decayed condition.** First, “have” is an insertion by the translators of some modern texts. Notice the reading from Young’s Literal Translation:

“2 The commencement of Jehovah’s speaking by Hosea. And Jehovah saith unto Hosea, ‘Go, take to thee a woman of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms, for utterly go a-whoring doth the land from after Jehovah.’”

It appears from the literal translation of the Hebrew verse that Gomer may have already had children before marrying Hosea. If so, this lends credibility to the notion that she may have also been a prostitute prior to their marriage and her bearing of additional children to Hosea.

Is any of this certain and sure? No. Does it really matter? Not to the overall point of the book of Hosea! There is no doubt that *real* prostitution was prevalent in the idol worship of Israel, and therefore common to the land. Certainly Gomer could have been an actual harlot. There is also no doubt that the nation of Israel was committing *spiritual harlotry* against Jehovah their husband. The point being made to Hosea and through him to Israel is that though God deeply loves Israel, they are being unfaithful to Him! He has, as Hosea will in the course of the book, *bought them back* from their harlotries time and time again. But, although God's love of Israel is never ending, His patience is not. He will not continue His *marriage* to Israel if they will not repent and return!

Date

The occurrence of the events of this book are located in the first verse as, “*during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jereboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.*” The reign of the kings listed from Judah spans roughly one hundred years from about 790 – 695 B.C. However, the reign of Jereboam II (son of Joash) reigned from around 793 – 753 B.C. Obviously, Jereboam's reign does not coincide with all of the kings in Judah because he died before some of them (namely, *Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah*) began to reign. This discrepancy leads some to place Hosea's work/writing from about 750 – 725 B.C. However, the later date seems unlikely since the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and there is no *historical* mention at all of this event in Hosea. A safe date is **750 B.C.** and some years following for the events of the book to have taken place. This would place Hosea's work probably soon after that of Amos (755 B.C.), and likely overlapping some time later with Isaiah and Micah.

II. The *Condition* of Israel and the Message of the Book

The Conditions

Though not much time has passed since the prophetic work of Amos, perhaps only five years, the degradation of *religious, civil, and moral* values in Israel have deteriorated even further. The overall indictment of Israel was aptly summarized in one word:

harlotry!

Realize that *harlotry* is worse than *adultery* in this regard: Israel had sold herself for a price to the idolatrous practices of those around her, cf. 2:12-13. With the *spiritual vacuum* created by the exodus of the faithful priests and people from the land at the initial advent of Jereboam I's insertion of idolatrous places of worship at Dan and Bethel (cf. 2Chron.11:13-17), the northern ten tribes had been without that faithful and restraining influence for some 200 years- obviously excluding prophets like Amos and others sent to them with a warning message of repentance. This had then necessarily evolved into a state of *spiritual ignorance*, 4:6,14 and 5:4. From the language of 8:12, Jehovah's exasperation becomes apparent at their complete ignorance of His laws.

Israel still paid ritualistic homage to Jehovah, but in truth their allegiance was to the calf-gods of Jereboam I, and the Baals so heavily emphasized by Ahab and Jezebel. These idolatries, and the moral degradation which inevitably came with them, brought about Hosea's most stinging rebukes, 4:11-13; 8:4; 9:10; 10:1-3; 13:1,2.

Morally, Israel was a nation in the clutches of decay. Their "religious service" either to Jehovah or idolatry had little impact toward producing any positive results in their lives with regard to basic morality. Lying, stealing, murder, adultery, drunkenness, cheating in business, violent crimes and the like were the norm, cf. 4:1-2, 11-12; 6:8-9; 13:1-2. The obvious mental connection to be made is that when Israel departed from the worship and true allegiance to Jehovah for the idols of Jereboam I and the Baals of Ahab, it directly correlates to moral morass in which we see them presented in Hosea. Simply put: a nation which does not know God and worship right, will not do right. This is an overriding lesson of the book.

Politically, after the death of Jereboam II, there was a fairly rapid succession of kings and assassinations beginning with Zechariah, the son of Jereboam II who reigned only six months before being killed by Shallum, who then reigned in his place (2Kings 15:8-12). Shallum ruled only one month before being killed by Menahem, who in turn was able to rule for about ten years (2Kings 15:13ff). It was during his (Menahem's) reign that the Assyrians began extracting heavy tribute from Israel. When Menahem died, his son Pekahiah ruled Israel for two years before being slain by his captain, Pekah, who then ruled in his place. During Pekah's reign the Assyrian aggression became more pronounced with the conquest of cities in Galilee as well as all of the territory of Naphtali, taking them captive, 2Kings 15:29. Likely prompted by this aggression, Pekah ultimately declared a civil war with Judah for not helping Israel and its ally, Syria, in an alliance against Assyria. Eventually, Hoshea conspired against Pekah and slew him hence becoming what would be the last king of Israel. Hoshea then conspired against Assyria by seeking help from Egypt. This so angered the Assyrian king that he laid siege against Samaria in 722 B.C. The point? It was during this *political* climate that Hosea was seeking to turn the hearts of Israel back to Jehovah. But Israel had passed the point of no return in regard to their spirituality through idolatry, and politically through murders, assassinations, and alliances with foreign governments. **In both cases, God was left out of their thoughts and practices!** This is obvious in two fundamental ways:

- 1) they rebelled against their own constituted leaders- assassinating most of them;
and
- 2) they depended upon foreign alliances for protection from their enemies instead of depending on God, cf. 10:13.

Hosea blames these failings on primarily two causes:

- a) the failures of corrupt priests in league with false prophets; and
- b) the corruption of the true worship of Jehovah.

In other words, the idolatrous introductions of Jereboam I and the added emphasis of Baal worship by Israel's King Ahab have come to full fruition. The nation of Israel had become so politically and spiritually bankrupt as to be unsalvageable.

Hosea's Message

Though longer than some of the other so-called *Minor Prophets*, Hosea's message is fairly clear:

God is love. The "*lovingkindness*" of Jehovah is a prevailing theme throughout the book being well illustrated through Hosea and Gomer. God had repeatedly demonstrated to Israel how He had loved and cared for her despite her unfaithfulness. And yet, God's love is not one that causes Him to be unrighteous, or to tolerate it forever from His "wife." His love for Israel will not end, but His protection and care will.

Israel is doomed. The first statement made to Hosea by God- other than concerning the taking of a wife of harlotry, contains God's warning message of doom for Israel, "*for yet in a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel,*" 1:4.

Though this message of doom is meant as a warning to arouse the spiritual conscious of Israel, it would go largely unheeded, and the prophecy would come to pass just as it was written. Hosea is a sad story with an unhappy ending. Our hearts are made to hurt for Hosea and Gomer in the same way as they are made to hurt for Jehovah and Israel. Such is the nature of the book.

III. Brief Outline of the Book

I. Israel's Adultery, chps.1-3

- A. Hosea and Gomer, 1:1 – 2:1
- B. Rebuke of Israel, her *Conversion* and final *Restoration*, 2:2-23
- C. Hosea's second marriage, chp.3

II. The Prophetic Discourses: Israel's Ungodliness and Punishment, chps.4-13.

- A. Jehovah's Controversy with Israel- *National Guilt*, chp.4
- B. Jehovah's Controversy with Israel- *Moral Corruption*, chp.5
- C. Jehovah's Controversy with Israel- *Political Corruption*, chps.7-8
- D. Jehovah's Controversy with Israel- *Religious Apostasy*, chps.9-11
- E. Jehovah's Controversy with Israel- *Israel's Overall Apostasy vs. God's Faithfulness*, chps.12-13

III. If Israel will Repent, God will Pardon, chp.14.

- A. Repent and Return to the Lord, vv.1-2
- B. Turn from Foreign Alliances and Idolatry, v.3
- C. Then, God will Forgive, Heal, and Bless, vv.4-8
- D. Otherwise, Doom is Inevitable, v.9

Lesson 1a- Study Questions for the Introduction to Hosea

General:

1. What are some advantages of *textual* over *topical* bible study?
2. What are some advantages of *topical* over *topical* bible study?
3. Why is it important to study *biblical history* generally, and the *Minor Prophets* specifically?
4. If what Hosea (or any other prophet) wrote is truly *inspired by God*, how or why is understanding the context important?

Introduction to Hosea:

5. **After reading through Hosea** (yes, the whole book!) at least once, what do you think are a few of its most relevant “take aways” for us today?
6. What does the name “*Hosea*” mean? Do you think this meaning is merely coincidental, or is it significant? Please explain your answer.
7. From your overall reading of the book, how did Hosea *feel* about Israel?
8. Likewise, from you overall reading of the book, on whom/what group(s) did he place *most* of the responsibility for Israel’s deplorable spiritual condition?
9. When did the *events* and *writing* of this book likely occur? Why is this significant?
10. What two previous (to Hosea) kings of Israel most influenced their spiritual decline, and how did they do so?
11. Why did God tell Hosea to “*Go, and take yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry,*” 1:2?