

Lesson 1b- Hosea 1 - 3: “Israel’s Adultery”

I. Hosea and Gomer, 1:1 – 2:1

The Facts

The book begins with the *authoritative stamp* of inspiration upon it, v.1a. The words within the book are not those of Hosea, but God’s. This is true of any true prophet that the Lord utilizes, cf. Deut.18:18-19. As was stated in the introduction, all that is really known about Hosea is encapsulated in the first two verses:

- 1) He was the son of Beeri (of which nothing further is known);
- 2) He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah;
- 3) And Jereboam II of Israel- since his reign does not overlap all of the listed kings of Judah, a safe date for the work would probably be about **750 B.C.** (likely about five years after Amos and eventually overlapping both Isaiah and Micah); and,
- 4) He was told by God to “*Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.*” (for additional information regarding whether this was literal or figurative, refer back to the Lesson 1a, pp.1-3 for comments there).

These facts constitute what is known, and the rest is speculative at best. But as seen with other prophetic studies, having a complete *resume* of the prophet is neither essential to his usage by God, nor to our understanding and benefiting from his work. Such it is with Hosea. Whether he was of the priestly order, as some assume, or lived in the northern kingdom, as most presume, is really not all that important. What is important is that **God sent a message to Israel** (and all generations since) **through Him**.

The message sent through Hosea is truly unique on the biblical landscape. I recall none other that has required the prophet to so dramatically change his *physical circumstance* relative to family life. God’s first instruction to Hosea changed his whole *frame of reference*, which was surely the point. The marriage to a “*wife of harlotry*” would parallel God’s experience with Israel. Whether Gomer was a prostitute at the time of their marriage, or not (cf. Rom.4:17), is really not important to the overall point. God wanted Hosea to truly understand how He felt about His *wife of harlotry*, Israel. So, through this *real life experience*, Hosea would be prepared to make God’s case against Israel.

The Development of the Case

Of *Gomer* and her father *Diblaim*, nothing more than what is learned in the first three chapters is known, and there seems to be no special significance attached to their names. But after Hosea has taken Gomer as his wife, vv.3-4 tell us that she bore him a son whom the Lord commanded that they name “*Jezreel*.” The attachment of this name is explained in v.4 as relating and correlating to the sin of Jehu, which he committed at Jezreel. This refers back to the former king of Israel who had Ahab’s seventy sons

killed, cf. 2Kings 10:1-11,17. The slaughter of the house of Ahab had been by divine decree, cf. 2Kings 9:1-10, so this was not the sin itself. Indeed, Jehu was even commended by God for his obedience, 2Kings 10:30. So what “sin” is being attributed to Jehu?

Some think that although Jehu killed Ahab’s house by the command of God, he did so for **his own selfish reasons**- to gain power and position. This seems unlikely since Jehu had been anointed “King” before the slaughter began, cf. 2Kings 9:1-13. Others think that it was the violent way in which Ahab’s sons were slain that is the sin (cf. 2Kings 10:5-11). This too seems unlikely given that God had, through Elijah, predicted the savage death of Jezebel, 2Kings 9:36 (see also 1Kings 21:21-24). What then is the sin of Jehu being remembered through the naming of Hosea’s first son? It is difficult to say, but here is another possibility.

Jehu did kill the house of Ahab (king of Israel) as God commanded him at his anointing. But notice who else Jehu killed:

- 1) **Joram**, king of Israel, 2Kings 9:21-26; this is likely not “the sin of Jehu” since Joram was a son of Ahab.
- 2) **Baal worshippers**, 2Kings 10:18-28; but this is surely not Jehu’s sin!
- 3) **Ahaziah**, the king of Judah, 2Kings 9:21,27-28. This may be the sin of Jehu.

While Jehu was commissioned by God to destroy the house of Ahab (and certainly eradicating Baal worshippers was not sinful, cf. 1Kings 18:40), **Ahaziah** was a descendant of David and king of Judah! **Perhaps it was Jehu’s attack on the house of David that was the sin.** Notice also the difference in how the bodies of Joram and Ahaziah were treated. Joram’s corpse was thrown onto the field of Naboth, 2Kings 9:25-26; while Ahaziah’s remains were taken to Jerusalem, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David, v.28. While this proves nothing of itself, it seems to support the notion that although Jehu was justified in killing Joram and the other sons of Ahab, he went too far when he attacked the house of David. **This seems to be the “sin” to which Hosea 1:4 refers along with his obvious failure to remove the idols of Jereboam I in making Israel sin, cf.2Kings 10:31.**

What has all this to do with “Jezreel” being the name that Hosea was told to give to his first son? “Jezreel” was the general area in which most of the violence of Jehu took place. But additionally, the name “Jezreel” has an interesting meaning. It means either, “*God will scatter*” or “*God will sow.*” In the naming of this first *offspring of harlotry*, there is a warning that God will “*scatter*” Israel for her harlotry to her husband, Jehovah. So *scattered* would Israel be that God would “*put to an end...the house of Israel*” v.4.

Furthermore, v.5 adds to this that God would “*break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.*” “*In that day*” of the verse refers not to the end of Jehu, but of Israel’s end. God would also break the *military might* of Israel. Jehu had flexed a lot of military muscle, but God would destroy all of Israel’s ability to defend or protect. “*In the valley of*

Jezreel” is probably referring to the *valley of scattering* in a figurative way rather than stating that Israel’s destruction would happen at that particular place.

A second child is born, **v.6**. Although it is apparent that the first child, *Jezreel*, was his own, it is equally obvious that some doubt exists about Hosea being the father of the second child. In **v.3**, it is stated of Jezreel that Gomer “*bore him* (Hosea) *a son*.” However, in **v.6** it is stated simply that she “*conceived again and gave birth to a daughter*.” Thus, this could be Hosea’s child, or it could be someone else’s. The text is not specific enough to say for sure. The child is to be named “*Lo-ruhamah*” meaning “*no pity*” or “*no mercy*.” This indicates that the house of Israel will no longer receive *pity* or *mercy* from God. He would no longer hear their cries for help and deliverance from their enemies, but He was still willing to be merciful to the house of Judah, **v.7**.

There was surety in the paternity of *Jezreel*. And there is some doubt with regard to the father of *Lo-ruhamah*. But there is again certainty that “*Lo-ammi*” is **not** Hosea’s child, **vv.8-9**. What else is to be understood from the name “*Lo-ammi*” which means “not my people”? Surely the *symbolic side* of this particular name being commanded refers to Israel no longer being God’s people! But what about the *physical side* of the parallel—does not the analogy break down if this child was Hosea’s? *Lo-ammi* was not Hosea’s child as **Israel is being declared by God to no longer be His!**

The Prophetic Glimmer of Hope

There is a notable shift in context and tone that occurs in **vv.10-11**. Jehovah has just declared, through the naming of *Lo-ammi*, that Israel is no longer considered by Him to be *His people*. Now in these two verses, there is a prophetic *glimmer of hope* given. Where it has just been said that Israel would be destroyed (**v.4**), that they would receive *no mercy* (**v.6**), and would even no longer be *His people* (**v.9**), now God seems to be saying that they would again be in number “*like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered*,” **v.10**; and that they would again be “*sons of the living God*.” How can these things be so? In answering that question, ask a few more:

- 1) **When** will this rejuvenation occur?
- 2) **To whom** will it occur?
- 3) **Where** will it occur?

Start with the last question first, that of **where**. The answer is found in **v.11** where “*Jezreel*” is again mentioned. Remember that there was a dual meaning to the name— it means both to *scatter* and to *sow*. Where God sows, He also *reaps a harvest*. Where God had *sown/scattered* the sons of Israel, He would *reap* a people “*for His own possession*.” Again, the literal valley of Jezreel is not so much intended as the name is being utilized to represent a figurative place where God brought forth a harvest as He had brought about destruction.

To whom would this happen? It is difficult to tell from this text alone, but with the inspired application of two New Testament passages the prophetic meaning becomes

clear. Note **Romans 9:19-26** where this passage is explained by the inspiration of the Spirit through Paul to refer to the bringing together of Jew and Gentile in Christ so that they all may be called “*sons of the living God.*” Peter makes a similar usage in **1Peter 2:4-10** where people who were previously shown *no mercy* “*have received mercy*” in being God’s people through Jesus Christ. Obviously, by these two inspired applications of Hosea’s prophecy, we come to understand that this *restoration of Israel* would be of God’s people in the Church- Christians are the fulfillment!

After exploring both the *where* and the *to whom* aspects of the prophecy, the **when** part is easy. This prophecy had its fulfillment beginning on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in **Acts 2**.

From all of this, one thing becomes blatantly obvious: **this prophecy of Hos.1:10-11 has a *spiritual* fulfillment in the advent of the Church of Jesus Christ- not the physical and political nation of Israel.** In that vein, please consider Gal.6:16 and Rom.9:6-9 in light of Gal.3:26ff.

Chapter 2 verse 1 should probably be included in chp.1 for the thought of this verse is the conclusion of the point being made in the previous ones- during *that* time (the Christian Dispensation), those who had previously not been the people of God would be able to say “*Ammi*” or “my people” again. And, those who had been excluded from the *mercy* of God could say “*Ruhamah*” or “*mercy*” for they will have been brought to this *restoration* by the blood of the Savior! This is the **Messianic Hope** as given through Hosea.

II. The Rebuke of Israel: Her Future *Conversion* and *Restoration*, 2:2-23

The prophetic *glimmer of hope* message of **1:10 – 2:1** is interrupted beginning immediately in **2:2**. After v.1 has predicted a time when those addressed will pronounce the blessings of God’s favor through “*Ammi*” (*my people*) and “*Ruhamah*” (*compassion/mercy*), v.2 immediately reverts back to the earlier condemnations of Israel as an *adulterous harlot*. This is really no different than what has earlier been said in chp.1, but something subtle has changed: *someone* apparently other than Hosea is being charged by God to “*contend with your mother, contend.*” There has been a change in the nature of the address beginning in v.1 in this regard. Now we are seeing a first person imperative being utilized which indicates that God is speaking directly to Israel Himself, rather than to or through Hosea (cf. vv.2, v.13b). In this form, the *children of the harlot* are commanded to rise up and “*contend with your mother.*” How could the *children of harlotry* condemn her for that from which they themselves have arisen? Surely this is directed to the faithful, or those who would become so, among the Israelites- that they wake up and condemn the idolatries of the nation.

Beginning with the latter part of v.2, God announces that He can no longer be the *Husband* of such a *wife* as Israel. And unless she renounces her sin and returns to Him, she will be:

(1) **stripped naked, v.3a**; Jehovah will remove from her all that He has given her since the beginning of her time as His spiritual bride, cf. vv.8ff.

(2) **slain with thirst, v.3b**; This likely is reflective of being devoid of God's presence, as in Amos 8:11-13.

Notice the distinction between "*her children*" in v.4 and those who are to "*contend with your mother*" in v.2. Both had been "*conceived*" (v.5) of the same source, and undoubtedly the overwhelming majority had *followed in mother's footsteps*, but some small minority evidently had not.

In v.5 we are given a more intimate portrait of the specific sins of Israel. Idolatry was the problem of course, but the *materialistic* prostituting of Israel for *bread, water, wool, flax, oil, and drink*- attributing these provisions **to the idols** she served when in reality God had provided them, was what boiled the wrath of Jehovah to overflowing against her.

But God is patient toward her still. In v.6 His plan is revealed. He will "*hedge up her way with thorns and build a wall against her*" so that she cannot continue to pursue her idolatrous lovers. Then, in frustration, she will return to Him- her first and true love, Jehovah, v.7.

The first stage of implementation of this plan (of vv.6-7) is spelled out in vv.8-13:

- The *indictment* is again specified and elaborated in v.8;
- The *retraction* by God's spurned provisions follows in v.9;
- The *ugliness* of Israel will be manifested to prevent *her lovers* from trying to help her, v.10;
- The *feasting* and *gaiety* will also be removed so that she will be well-aware that *the party* of idolatry is over, v.11; and
- The *payments* of *vine and fig trees* that she (falsely) claimed were from her lovers will be turned into a *forest* in which the animals will devour them, v.12.

In these ways, God will both punish and seek to return her to her former glory with Him, v.13. In this verse, it seems that we see both the vengeful wrath God has for her idolatrous ways as well as the immense love that He has for her. We also hear the hurt in His voice as He laments that she has *forgotten Him*.

But then in v.14, we begin to discern His broken heart being turned into hope for Israel- that she will, because of the afore-outlined plan, see her error and return to Him. The *alluring* of her, and the *kind words* spoken to her, are demonstrative signals that God still loves her and longs for her return. Indeed, His love and mercy are beyond merit! How can this be, given the apparent **finality** of His pronouncements in 1:4,5,6,9?

The answer to this question lays in the application of the verses that follow from **2:15** to the end of the chapter (v.23). What must be realized about this section is this: **God has reference to *spiritual*, not *physical* Israel.** If we understand that God *is* going to destroy *physical* Israel through the Assyrians- which He did in 722 B.C., then we must allow that this prophecy concerns *spiritual* Israel. This is not *far-fetched* at all. Remember that the same distinction has already been made earlier as the chapter began. *Spiritual* Israel (at that time, those remaining faithful to God in the midst of *national* idolatry) was commanded to “*contend with your mother*” in v.2. Their “*mother*” was the idolatrous *physical nation* of Israel, and *her children*, vv.4-5! Thus, the prophecy of restoration **must necessarily apply to *spiritual* Israel- it is the only “Israel” which will remain!** These distinctions being made and understood, the prophecy’s fulfillment is made easily comprehensible.

Note that in v.15, a reference is made to “*the valley of Achor.*” It is alluded to as a “*door of hope.*” This is significant. The valley of Achor was the ancient place northwest of Jericho where Achan and his family were put to death for taking of things under the ban in the siege of Jericho (cf. Joshua 6-7). As the *first-fruits* of their possession of Canaan, the spoils of Jericho were to be God’s alone. But Achan took and hid some of these things in the floor of his tent. Unbeknownst to Joshua and Israel, they proceeded to go up against the much smaller city of Ai next. Because of Achan’s “*sin in the camp,*” Israel was soundly defeated. The solution? God said that Israel must stone Achan and his family that they might be purged and returned to the Lord. **This was done in the valley of Achor!** The reference here draws upon that history. *Physical* Israel will be similarly “stoned” in Assyrian captivity that *spiritual Israel* might be purged of the sin of idolatry and returned to her true husband, God! Such is the specific language of v.16 when the term “*Ishi*” is used. It means “*my husband*”! Thus, it is through the punishment and destruction of the nation of Israel that a “*door of hope*” will be opened to allow the *people of God* to return and reap the blessings of *spiritual wedded union* with Him! The blessings of this union are outlined in vv.17-23:

- Idolatry will be removed from her, v.17;
- A *new covenant* would characterize a spirit of peace between God and his Bride; the animals, which previously are mentioned as punishing agents of God (v.12), would become peaceful again, cf. Isa.11:1-11; and the *bow, sword, and war* will be removed from the land so that they may *lie down in safety*, v.18;
- She will be *betrothed* to and *know God forever*, vv.19-20; and
- God will *respond* to her through the *heavens, the earth, grain, oil, and wine* so that her every need is met in this restoration, vv.21-22a!

Thus, the *scattering* of physical Israel will ultimately result in the *sowing of spiritual* Israel- which is a play on the word “Jezreel”- which means both, cp.1:4-5 and 2:22b-23!

That this section of verses is to be interpreted and applied in this way, to *spiritual* rather than *physical* Israel, is made abundantly sure by inspired New Testament application.

Note that the Holy Spirit, through both Paul and Peter, applied these verses to the *restoration* of God's people through Jesus Christ in the Church- the *bride of Christ*, **cf. Rom.9:25-26** and **1Pet.2:10!** Thus, the names of the three children mentioned in chp.1 are brought "full circle" to a final application in the Messianic Kingdom, 1:4-9 and 2:23.

III. Hosea's *Second* Marriage, 3:1-5

Chapter three can be confusing unless we keep a couple of things firmly in mind:

- 1) Hosea had been commanded to marry *a wife of harlotry*;
- 2) They had at least one child together;
- 3) Gomer had at least one, if not two, children through an adulterous relationship after marrying Hosea;
- 4) Thus, Gomer has "left" Hosea.

With that context, Hosea is again commanded to "*Go, again love a woman of who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes*" 3:1. This must refer to Gomer, or else the illustration to God and Israel fails.

So, Hosea *buys back* Gomer who was, in reality, already his, v.2. This matches perfectly with God's *redemption* of Israel just outlined in the previous verses. The price paid by Hosea may be symbolic or incidental. It was the price of a wounded slave, cf. Ex.21:32. It was also the *redemptive* price of a female, Lev.27:4. Apparently, the "*homer and a half of barley*" was the equivalent of fifteen shekels, making the combined total 30 shekels of silver.

V.3 indicates that although Hosea *bought* and *brought* Gomer back to his home, she was not immediately restored the *full position* of "wife." Note that the verse specifies that she would not have "*a man*." Literally translated, this refers to "husband." Thus, though returned, she would have no conjugal relations with any man- including Hosea, until she proved herself worthy. That this is the meaning there is little doubt left by v.4, where the parallel to God and Israel is again made. "*Israel*" would be "*many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols*."

After these things, *Israel* (*spiritual*, not *physical*) would return to God and to "*David their king*." This is a reference to Christ, as King and descendent of David. The time specified for these things is "*in the last days*" v.5b. The phrase is universally used by the prophets and applies to the time of the Messianic Kingdom. It began with the fulfillment of these things on Pentecost, A.D. 33 rather than some (still) yet future date!

Lesson 1b- Study Questions for “Israel’s Adultery,” Hosea 1 - 3

Chapter 1

1. Does it really matter whether or not we know anything about Hosea’s personal life *before* or *after* the portion detailed in the book? Why, or why not?
2. Does it really matter whether or not we know anything about Israel’s past, present, and then future history relative to understanding the book? Why, or why not?
3. What two meanings does the name “*Jezreel*” have? Why is this significant to our understanding of vv.4-5 and vv.10-11?
4. What does the name “*Lo-ruhamah*” mean, and why is this important?
5. What does the name “*Lo-ammi*” mean, and what is its implication?
6. *When, to whom, and where* were the prophecies of vv.10-11 fulfilled?

Chapter 2

7. Why are “*brothers*” and “*sisters*” both plural in v.1 since there were only one child each born to Gomer with the names specified?
8. Generally speaking, what *consequence* will *Gomer/Israel* pay for her unfaithfulness?
9. Who are *Gomer/Israel’s* “*lovers*,” cf.vv.5-7,10,12,13?

10. What is the connection, if any, between v.11 and Col.2:16-17?
11. How can we correlate the apparent *finality* of God's judgment and destruction upon *Gomer/Israel* of 1:9 with the *restoration* predicted in 2:14-23? (Hint: remember the *two meanings* of "*Jezreel*"!)

Chapter 3

12. What four *physical* things (the *earthly* part of the story) must realize/remember for v.1 to make sense?
13. To what *spiritual* conclusion did those four *physical* things (of the previous question) lead?
14. What does v.3 mean- both in *physical* terms for Gomer/Hosea, and *spiritual* terms for *Israel/God*?
15. Who is "*David their king*" in v.5?
16. When are "*the last days*" of v.5?
17. What do you think are the main *application points* of these first three chapters of Hosea for us today?