

Hosea

Introduction

The book of Hosea presents some difficult challenges that must be dealt with prior to looking at the contents of the book. The difficulty lies in God's request to Hosea regarding the wife that he is to marry. Some have gone so far as to make that part of the book a parable, but that would take away its most powerful aspect. The passage in question:

When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the Lord." 3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Hos 1:2-3

Since the passage is clearly literal, there is no need to follow that path. So why would God ask Hosea to marry such a woman? Perhaps a more important question is how would Hosea find such a woman? The reality of the conditions in which Hosea lived is that he would have no problem with this since they were all daughters of whoredom.

*'Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. 12 My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, And their staff informs them. For **the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, And they have played the harlot against their God.** 13 They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, And burn incense on the hills, Under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, Because their shade is good. **Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, And your brides commit adultery.** 14 **I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, Nor your brides when they commit adultery; For the men themselves go apart with harlots, And offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot.** Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled. Hos 4:11-14*

The consequences of their idolatrous practices had led the daughters to become harlots at their idolatrous festivals. Therefore after they married they continued the practices. God said he would not punish them any differently than the men since they too were looking for such women. This is the age of Hosea. Instead of looking hard for such a woman, it would be hard not to find one. Perhaps the woman he had already chosen but had held back was now what God has asked him to do. There is just too much we don't know. But there is no evidence at all to charge God foolishly.

Purpose

Although this is a terrible ordeal for anyone to endure, there was an important reason. God sought for a man who would understand His own pain in enduring the idolatry of His people. We see idolatry as a sin and a wicked practice, while God saw it as adultery. We need to blend both of these to truly understand God's feelings.

*"Son of man, there were **two women**, The **daughters of one mother**. 3 They **committed harlotry in Egypt**, They **committed harlotry in their youth**; Their breasts were there embraced, Their virgin bosom was there pressed. 4 Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; They were Mine, And they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, **Samaria is Oholah**, and **Jerusalem is Oholibah**. 5 "Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; And she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians, Ezek. 23:2-5*

***She has never given up her harlotry brought from Egypt**, For in her youth they had lain with her, Pressed her virgin bosom, And poured out their immorality upon her. Ezek. 23:8*

*'Thus **I will make you cease your lewdness and your harlotry Brought from the land of Egypt**, So that you will not lift your eyes to them, Nor remember Egypt anymore.' Ezek. 23:27*

This is but one of many graphic and disgusting passages (Ezek. 16:1-39) outlining the terrible way that God saw what they were doing. He pictures the marriage as occurring at Mt Sinai, and long before that marriage Israel had been committing harlotry with idols. He uses Hosea and later Jeremiah and Ezekiel to make this clear. Jeremiah used the adultery of Israel to condemn Judah:

"Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. 7 And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return

to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. 9 So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the Lord.... 20 Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the Lord. Jer. 3:6-10, 20

Hosea's Children & God's Children

After the marriage the rest of the first chapter records the birth of three children. Each name was chosen by God and the reason for that name was listed.

Jezreel

The firstborn was a son and God instructed Hosea to name him Jezreel. This is the name of the city where Ahab had his palace and also the place of Naboth's vineyard. This was also the place where Jezebel did her terrible deeds. But it was not these reasons why God chose that name. He chose it in memory of some of the acts of Jehu which had been wrong. This has perplexed many. God had told Jehu to do what he did and later commended him for doing it. It was not a general commendation: "Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart."

However Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin, that is, from the golden calves that were at Bethel and Dan. 30 And the Lord said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation."

Since God was so pleased with what Jehu had done, why does God ask Hosea to name his son Jezreel?

"Call his name Jezreel, For in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 It shall come to pass in that day That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." Hos. 1:4-5

Several answers have been suggested, but none of them are completely satisfying.

(1) Jehu did exactly what God wanted done, but his heart was not right while he did it. He had an additional motive for doing God's will. This is obvious when we read the final words about Jehu.

31 But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin. 2 Kings 10:29-31

God did exactly the same thing with Assyria:

"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hand is My indignation. 6 I will send him against an ungodly nation, And against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, To seize the spoil, to take the prey, And to tread them down like the mire of the streets. 7 Yet he does not mean so, Nor does his heart think so; But it is in his heart to destroy, And cut off not a few nations." ... 12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks." Isa 10:5-7, 12

(2) If Jehu did not kill all these people out of a love for the Lord, then there were other motives. Jehu did what he wanted to do, not what God wanted of him. Why would he do this? Several motives have been suggested. One suggests: "gain the kingdom, increase his power, and satiate his tyranny and lust; Lust for power, (Gill). Another "when he is not simply carrying out the Lord's will as the servant of God, but suffers himself to be actuated by evil and selfish motives, that is to say, when he abuses the divine command, and makes it the mere cloak for the lusts of his own evil heart. ... "as Calvin has very correctly affirmed, was a crime so far as Jehu was concerned, but with God it was righteous vengeance." Even if Jehu did not make use of the divine command as a mere pretext for carrying out the plans of his own ambitious heart." (Keil and Delitzsch)

(3) Although Jehu did exactly what God asked him to do with Ahab, he went far beyond it when he killed those from the house of David who had come to visit. He killed Joram (2Kings 9:24), Ahaziah, king of Judah(2 Kings 9:27-28), and Ahaziah's relatives(2Kings 10:12-14). He also massacred all those who worshiped Baal without a trial or an opportunity to repent. (2Kings 10:18-28). Yet most of these things did not occur at Jezreel, so it doesn't fit perfectly.

The second reason he was to be named Jezreel pertained not to the past, but to the future. At Jezreel Israel would lose a great battle.

Lo-Ruhamah,

The second child born by Gomer was a girl, and God again instructed Hosea to give a name. The name is a prophecy of the future. Through this name, God was revealing to Israel the condition they would soon bring upon themselves. If they did not repent and turn from their present path of sin, God would be taking away His mercy.

And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: "Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, But I will utterly take them away. 7 Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, Will save them by the Lord their God, And will not save them by bow, Nor by sword or battle, By horses or horsemen." Hos. 1:6-7

It is not unusual for God to have his prophets name their children. God told Abraham to name his son Isaac(laugh).

Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. Gen 17:19-20

The names of most of God's people are based on circumstances of their birth. As Rachel was dying, she named her son "Ben(son) Oni(of sorrow)" but Jacob renamed him "Ben(son) jamin(of right hand)"

Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." 18 And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. Gen 35:17-19

The idea behind Lo-Ruhamah is a terrible judgement on the ten tribes. especially when God promised to continue to give it to Judah.

Lo-Ammi

The final child is a son, and God once again commands Hosea to name the son as the continuation of the prophesy. Not only will the ten tribes of Israel no longer receive any mercy from God but they will no longer even be considered His people.

Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then God said: "Call his name Lo-Ammi, For you are not My people, And I will not be your God. Hos. 1:8-9

One of Lot's children on the other hand was named just the opposite. "Ben(son of) -Ammi(my people)."

And the younger, she also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the people of Ammon to this day. Gen 19:38

As these children grew up and people asked for the reason for the name, Hosea would be prepared with this powerful answers. Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi were all names of judgment on the wicked nation of Israel.

Prophecy

Although doom and judgment were only decades away, God knew their restoration would not occur for about 750 years(captivity in 722 then recalled after 33AD). Although these words are placed here in the book written years later, it is doubtful they were preached in the same sermon as

judgment and condemnation. These words are for later. After they are in captivity and they are in need of hope and comfort. God is so merciful that compassionate that He wants them to have this comfort at that time.

'Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.' 11 *Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel Shall be gathered together, And appoint for themselves one head; And they shall come up out of the land, For great will be the day of Jezreel!* 2:1 *Say to your brethren, 'My people,' And to your sisters, 'Mercy is shown.'* Hos 1:10-11

So this was not a complete judgment. It is similar to the words Isaiah was saying to Judah at about the same time.

Unless the Lord of hosts Had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah. Isa 1:9; See also Rom. 9:22-33

God would leave a remnant, both in Israel and in Judah. The punishment would be severe, but it would not be a full end. The children of Abraham would still have the opportunity to receive the blessings promised to him because of his faithfulness.

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. Rom 11:28-32

God promised that the judgment upon these fathers would not remove the promise given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The children of Israel would again become like the sands of the sea!

blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Gen. 22:17-18

Then, those who had been called "not my people" will return and be restored. Both Paul and Peter quote this passage and thought.

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 **who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*** 1Pet. 2:9-10

*What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, **not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." 26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ' You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."*** Rom. 9:22-26

Yet God was not content to only call back the wicked of Israel and Judah whom He had scattered, he would also recall the Gentiles. Since the time of Abraham, Israel had been God's chosen people, but after they were cast off and became like the Gentiles, God could call everyone back on equal footing.

Jezreel

God used a play on words. While Jezreel can mean "God scatters" it also means "God sows" and thus God gathers. Hence the scattering will be overturned and a great sowing and gathering will occur. Both the scattering and the gathering had been prophesied even in the times of Moses.

*And **the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the***

nations where the Lord will drive you. Deut 4:27-28

But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. 30 When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice 31 (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them. Deut 4:29-31

"Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, Deut 28:64

Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, 2 and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, 3 that **the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.** 4 If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Deut 30:1-4

A Second Gathering

Yet far more to the point of Hosea's words are similar words again spoken about the same time by Isaiah. The first gathering would bring the captives of Judah back. But there will be a second gathering in which any who were left of Judah and all who had been a part of Israel would be gathered.

"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious." 11 It shall come to pass in that day That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea. 12 He will set up a banner for the nations, And will assemble the outcasts of Israel, And gather together the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth. Isa. 11:10-12

Charges Against Israel(your Mother)

This future, God planned for His people, will be great, but it is so far in the future that it could bring little comfort to those living in that day. Hosea now returns to adulterous Israel and continued to reveal why God was just to punish and nearly destroy her. The first half of the second chapter brings all the charges against Israel.

"Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, And her adulteries from between her breasts; Hos 2:2

Just as the previous chapter, God again offered hope to the future generations after these people had been punished.

Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; Then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!'" Hos 2:23

Charges Against Gomer

As in the first chapter so here, Hosea's own circumstances so closely mirror what God sees in Israel, that the two blend together. With the term "just like" God makes it clear that there is a direct parallel between what Hosea must do and what God is doing.

Then the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." Hos 4:1

Hosea's wife is now in some dire circumstance where she needs to be bought. Somehow her

adulterous ways have brought her into some form of slavery or imprisonment. She had left Hosea for adulterous activities and was now paying the price for her sin. While many would simply say “you are reaping what you sowed” and leave them in their misery, neither God nor his prophet have such an attitude.

So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. 3 And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man — so, too, will I be toward you." Hos 4:2

Yet the marriage is not fully restored. Hosea has bought her out of all her misery and placed her in a place of safety. But she is to remain chaste. She is to have no man. They will stay together, but it will not be in a husband and wife relationship yet. They are together and he is caring for her, but she will not have a man (even Hosea), and he will be the same to her (he will not have a woman). So the relationship is partially restored, but not fully.

The reason is then given. The same thing will occur with God and Israel. He will care for them, but they will not be restored for many days. They will have no king and no sacrifice for God. They will also have no idols. It will not be until God again decides to give them a new opportunity to become His again in the latter days that the relationship will be fully restored.

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or Teraphim. 5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days. Hos 4:1-3

Conclusion

This concludes the personal life of Hosea. We learn nothing more of him or what happened to his relationship with his wife. Did they reconcile and become happy, or did Gomer continue her treacherous ways? The rest of his book contains only God’s message to Israel.

Several of these passages give us insight into God’s true character, revealing not only God’s anger and wrath, but also His sorrow and frustration.

Israel’s Wordly Sorrow

First God expressed His feelings toward their “*worldly sorrow*.” After a time of prosperity, some form of disaster occurred which leads them to evaluate the reason. Because God had always been so merciful and compassionate, they presume that if they showed token repentance, they would soon return to their former prosperity. Their service to God was not based on love and devotion but on greed and selfishness. Their words sounded so sincere as we read them even today.

Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. 2 After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight. 3 Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth. Hos 6:1-3

Yet God shattered this illusion. Both Ephraim (10 tribes) and Judah had the same problem. Their faithfulness to Him was like the early cloud that burns away without rain, or the early dew that looks like it has watered the ground, but disappears as soon as the sun warms the earth. Their words of repentance lose all meaning as soon as prosperity and success warm their hearts. This left God with only one alternative. To rebuke them with the prophets and to slay them with both His words and the judgments that would bring desolation.

"O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away. 5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; And your judgments are like light that goes forth. Hos 6:1-5

How Will I Give you Up?

In one of the clearest passages, God expressed the hopes He held for Israel when he was still a child in Egypt. But those hopes were dashed by their stubborn rebellion. The more God sent judges

and prophets to call them the further away they went. Although it was God who always saved them and removed the yoke from their neck, they refused to know or see it.

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. 2 As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images. 3 "I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. 4 I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them. Hos 11:1-4

They left God no choice but to send him back into captivity and slavery. But they would not go back to Egypt but into Assyria. Yet before that captivity, there would be terrible consequences. God would allow Assyria to be their king, but this was a king with no mercy. They would be slashed, devoured and consumed.

5 "He shall not return to the land of Egypt; But the Assyrian shall be his king, Because they refused to repent. 6 And the sword shall slash in his cities, Devour his districts, And consume them, Because of their own counsels.

God then returned to their shallow repentance. They were bent on backsliding, and even when they did call on Him it was not to exalt or honor Him. So through their own decisions, God was now preparing this terrible punishment.

7 My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt Him.

Yet the emotions churning in God's heart are not at all what we might have expected. Instead of a satisfied wrath and a sense of righteous fulfillment that made all equal again, God felt the same way any of us would if it were one of our own children who had brought such terrible consequences down upon themselves.

Although there is nothing left to do, like all other parents, we look for one more thing. We just can't let go. They deserved everything they were going to receive, but God has no satisfaction or happiness. His heart churns, His sympathy stirs, His mercy intervenes.

8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.

They should be made like Admah and Zeboiim. These were two cities closely joined with Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed along with them. The wickedness of Israel was similar to theirs.

'The whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger and His wrath.' Deut 29:23

Yet as Isaiah had noted, God had left them a remnant. So the circumstances were not the same.

Unless the Lord of hosts Had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah. Isa 1:9; See also Rom. 9:22-33

Since the circumstances were different because of the promises to the fathers, God would not do to Israel as He did to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim. He would not pour out the anger as it deserved, but would hold it back. This did not mean they would not be destroyed as Sodom and the rest. But that there would not be a full end. There would be that piece of an ear, or two legs.

There would be a second chance for Israel. He would call for them again and they will return.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror. 10 "They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, Then His sons shall come trembling from the west; 11 They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, Like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses," Says the Lord. Hos 11:1-11

A King: Given in Anger and Removed in Wrath

God reminded them of exactly where the problem that led to this began. Though Israel is now destroyed, God had always been their help. God had always been their king and there was no other

who could help and save them as He could. God then quotes their own words to Samuel.

*Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now **make us a king to judge us like all the nations.**" 1Sam. 8:4-5*

*And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, **but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.** 8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, 1Sam. 8:7-8*

*Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but **we will have a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.**" 1Sam. 8:19-20*

This event now led them to this. The kings failed God miserably. First Saul, then Solomon, and then Jeroboam. Now God will destroy the ten tribes and their king He had given them in His anger and would now take away in His wrath.

"O Israel, you are destroyed, But your help is from Me. 10 I will be your King; Where is any other, That he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, 'Give me a king and princes'? 11 I gave you a king in My anger, And took him away in My wrath. Hos 13:9-11