

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY

HOSEA

The prophet Hosea was contemporary with Isaiah 1:1. Under the reigns of the same kings of Judah he exercised his ministry as did Isaiah. At the time Jeroboam was king of Israel. Of course this was Jeroboam II., one of the most powerful monarchs that ruled over the ten tribes. In opening this first book of the Minor Prophets we must retrace our steps in Israel's history, and keep in mind that he antedates Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel at least one hundred and fifty years.

Hosea gives us a vivid picture of the times in which he lived, and of the political and moral state of the people. His style is very concise, terse and abrupt, abounding in figures and metaphors that sometimes are intermingled. The transitions from one topic to another are frequent and sudden.

In consequence the book is a difficult one to interpret, but patient study, relying on the guidance of the Spirit of God who alone is the competent interpreter of the Scriptures, will open rich mines of truth. One says he "exhibits the appearance of very remote antiquity." Another compares him to a bee flying from flower to flower, swift and restless, but always gathering and always laden.

The title, 1:1 indicates the time of his prophecy, and is at the same time the authentication of the book. The second verse of the first chapter is somewhat peculiar both for its language and its aim, "**The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.**"

What is the beginning here mentioned? It cannot mean that Hosea was the first of the prophets by whom God made known His will to Israel, or the first of the Minor Prophets, for both Jonah and Joel, it is believed, preceded him. The meaning seems to be, the beginning of the prophecies which Hosea was commissioned to make known.

The first verse is the heading for the whole book, and its authentication; the second verse is the special heading of the first section of the book which extends to the end of the third chapter.

The book may be divided into two parts.

Part 1, chaps, 1-3. God's judgment as to the state of the people, with intimations of repudiation and restoration.

Part II, chaps, 4-14, in which Israel's sins are described, warnings and threatenings are announced, expostulations and appeals are made, and promises of final recovery. Topically, the book may be summarized thus:

1. The relation which God formed between Himself and Israel originally; it was like that of marriage.
2. Israel's unfaithfulness in this relation.
3. Divorcement of the people from the Lord announced.
4. The people's guilt.
5. Punishment certain, captivity predicted.
6. Remonstrances with the guilty people, and entreaties to repent and reform.
7. Promise of a final and genuine repentance and restoration.

It is hardly needful to remind the reader that Hosea addressed particularly the kingdom of Israel.

He designates them in various ways, as Israel, Ephraim, Samaria, Jacob. Ephraim is specified because the largest of the ten tribes that separated from the house of David, and because it was the leader in rebellion and apostasy.

The first king of the Northern Kingdom was Jeroboam, an Ephrathite, who organized apostasy, for he established for political reasons idolatrous sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel. It was one chief aim of the ministry of Hosea to recover Israel from idolatry and to restore them to obedience to God. To effect this end, he painted with no feeble or faltering hand the horrors of their sin, proclaimed the judgments of God against them, and appealed to them with the most passionate entreaties to repent. To what extent his ministry was successful we have no means of knowing. Some, no doubt, heard and heeded the warning voice; but on the nation as such no permanent impression was made. In God's economies, however, no waste is permitted. What appears often to us to be failure, what may have seemed to Hosea to be such, was with God success, for the prophet accomplished precisely what it was intended he should.

Some details of the book may be pointed out.

I. Hosea's marriage with Gomer, 1:3.

Was it real, or only symbolic? This is the "vexed question" of the book. The ancient writers held quite generally that no literal union with her was formed by the prophet. Augustine's rule for such passages of the Bible as this is wise: If the language of Scripture taken literally would involve something incongruous or morally wrong, the figurative sense must be preferred.

There is something so unnatural and revolting in the thought that a prophet of God should be divinely ordered to marry an impure woman, and the whole transaction is so dishonoring to God, that it is not surprising that men should seek to relieve the record of all literality, and should interpret it as a vision.

Yet the language is so explicit, the names of the parties being given, with the absence of any intimation of its being an allegory or a parable, that we seem to be shut up to the belief that some sort of transaction really took place whereby Hosea and Gomer were brought together as husband and wife.

Pusey's words are worthy of serious consideration:

“There is no ground to justify our taking as a parable what Holy Scripture relates as a fact. There is no instance in which it can be shown that Holy Scripture relates that a thing was done, and that with the names of persons, and yet that God did not intend it to be taken as literally true. There would then be left no test of what was real, what imaginary; and the histories of holy Scripture would be left to be a prey to individual caprice, to be explained away as parables when men disliked them.”

The view which commends itself to us is this: Hosea really married Gomer.

Her loose character is given her in the chapter by anticipation; she was not a fallen woman (or at least was conducting herself properly) when the prophet took her to wife, although God foresaw and announced what she would do after her marriage. Had she been a harlot at the time of her union with Hosea, she would not have served as a type or symbol of Israel at all. It was only as a wife who proved unfaithful to marriage covenant that she became the living example of Israel's infidelity and apostasy from God.

To them were born three children and names were given them significant of the fate of the people. Afterward, Gomer like Israel became unfaithful and left the prophet's home, and became the paramour of another man. She seems to have sunk so low into vice and degradation that her position was that of a slave, for the prophet bought her back at one-half of the price of a female slave in money, and a portion of barley, 3.

That the woman spoken of in chapter three is to be identified with Gomer appears from the following considerations:

- (1) The analogy requires it. It was Israel that stood in the relation of wife to the Lord; no other nation was admitted to such relation.
- (2) The woman is the one already married, but unfaithful, which was precisely the case with Israel.
- (3) If she had not been the prophet's wife, and had gone away from him, there would be no point in comparing his love for her with that of the Lord for His erring people.
- (4) A command to love another man's wife to whom he was still attached would be repugnant to every idea of justice and propriety.

Either the woman of chapter three was Gomer, or the whole scene is a vision. The word is, not “take,” but “love,” i. e., renew thy kindness to her, and receive her back into thy house (so Henderson). But she was to live apart from her husband (and he from her) for many days, 3:3; so Israel was to remain for many days a spoiled and subject people.

The prophetic action in this singular case indicated in a striking way the apostasy of the ten tribes, God's repudiation of them, their captivity and final recovery.

2. *Israel's state morally in Hosea's time.*

It was as bad as it could well be. The idolatry inaugurated by Jeroboam had now continued for more than 150 years, and had diffused every form of vice among the people.

Chap, 4:2, gives a summary of the crimes that filled the land; swearing, lying, murder, theft, adultery—an awful brood.

- The king and princes were drunken profligates, 7:3-7.
- The idolatrous priests spread their shameful festivals and deceitful oracles over all the land, 4:12-14; 10:12, 13:2;
- They even waylaid and murdered those who were passing on their way to Jerusalem, 6:9.
- The people were ignorant, debased, dishonest and incorrigible, 4:6, 10:12-14, 17; 11:7; 12:7.
- The nation had forsaken the Lord and relied on human help.

Sometimes it was Assyria, sometimes Egypt, they turned to, never really to God, 5:13; 7, 8-12; 8:9, 10. A listless security blinded their minds, 5:4; 12, 8. Spasmodic repentance in a moment of danger was professed, 6:4; 7:16. The root of all the evil was, they had broken covenant with God, and He and His word were ignored and forgotten, 6:7; 4:1-6; 8:12.

It is a frightful indictment which God by the mouth of His servant Hosea brings against Ephraim.

3. *God's compassion toward His unfaithful people.*

It is very remarkable; it is like Him.

We see it in the strange narrative of Gomer; in the names Lo-ruhamah, *unpitied*, and Lo-ammi, *not my people*, changed into Ruhamah, *pitied*, and Ammi, *my people*, 2:1.

We see it in the touching expostulations and tender appeals as in 11, 8; 14:1-5.

Nothing can exceed the earnestness and love with which the Lord entreats Ephraim to return to Him. Look at 11:8, and see how Mercy interposes her four "hows," as if the great and good God could not possibly give them up. Many an eye has filled at the nameless advertisement which sometimes appears in the public press: "Come home and all will be forgiven: we wait for you."

But God names Ephraim and Himself, and writes it down in His book that all may read:

"O, Ephraim, thou hast destroyed thyself; but come home again, come home."

It is grace abounding, love exceeding.

4. *Messianic predictions.*

These are not numerous in Hosea, but some there are. In 3:5, Israel's return under a second David is announced (comp. Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23, 25, etc.). That the David here mentioned is Messiah is evident from the other passages cited above.

As Messiah is David's son and heir He is often called by David's name. Twice our Lord quotes 6:6, "**I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,**" Matthew 9:13; 12:17. In His use of the passage it is clear that He is the speaker in it.

Hosea 11:1 is quoted in Matthew 2:15, and applied to the flight into Egypt. Israel was the Messianic nation, and its history presaged and adumbrated the earthly life of our Lord Jesus, 13:14, seems to be referred to in I Corinthians 15:55, and is applied to the resurrection of the saints when the Lord comes again.

5. *Promises of Israel's restoration,* 1:10, 11; 2:16-20, 23; 3:4, 5; 14.

It is the concurrent testimony of all the prophets. We may spiritualize these and similar texts if we will, and apply them to the revival of the Church, but beneath our uses of them there is still God's unchangeable promise to the chosen people. Delitzsch's fine word is worth remembering:

"Interpretation is one;
Application is manifold."

~ end of chapter 30 ~

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