

The Prophets of Israel

Hosea

Hosea 11:1-4

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Hosea, whose name means *"Yahweh has Saved"* was the last prophet to Israel.

His book only mentions Jeroboam II in Israel, but also mentions Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah. This helps us to date his ministry to roughly a 35-year span – from 760 to 725 BC - before Israel was destroyed by Assyria.

As we know, under Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom was wealthy and prosperous. But below the surface, the cancer of greed, injustice, oppression of the poor, materialism, flagrant dishonesty, bloodshed, gross immorality and a corrupted religious system had become malignant and after Jeroboam II died in 753 BC, the nation sank into near anarchy, going through 6 kings in about 30 years.

Against this flood of iniquity, Hosea was called to reveal BOTH God's hatred of sin AND his desperate and unchanging love for the people who did not love Him back.

The book is made up of 3 sections:

- Israel as God's adulterous wife (1-3)
- God's legal case against Israel (4-10)
- Israel as God's rebellious son (11-14)

- Israel as God's adulterous wife (1-3) -

The key theme of the book is God's steadfast love for his people and his desire for an intimate relationship with them and the 1st section encapsulates this message. Hosea wasn't just called to preach a few sermons; he was called to become an object lesson - to give insight into God's pain regarding the broken relationship with his people.

They had gone after other lovers, but he still wanted them. He still longed for them to return to him.

Hosea 1:2 - *When Yahweh began to speak through Hosea, He said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from Me."*

Hosea chose Gomer, whose name means, *"perfection"*. He married her and she bore him 3 children - the 1st a son:

- He was named Jezreel – "God Will Scatter"

Then a daughter:

- She was named Lo-Ruhamah – "No Mercy"

Then another son:

- He was named Lo-Ammi – "Not My People"

Because of her adultery, Yahweh had a legal case against Israel, so Hosea was told to bring a covenant lawsuit against his wife. She was called to immediately remove all outward evidence of her adultery. If she refused, she would face public exposure (see Ezekiel 16:35-37 and 23:28-30). From an historical perspective this meant the land would be stripped and the people taken into exile.

A reality that Sargon II of Assyria takes credit for..... *"[The Sa]marians, who had come to an agreement with a [hostile?] king not to do service or to render tribute to me, did battle. In the strength of the great gods, my lords, I fought with them; 27,280 people, together with [their] char[iots] and the gods in whom they trust, I counted as spoil...I organized a royal contingent from among them and the rest of them I settled in Assyria. I resettled Samaria more (densely) than before (and) brought there people from the lands of my conquest." (The Nimrud Prism of Sargon II)*

To support his case, God used her own words against her, *she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.'*

Based on the evidence, God declared 2 formal sentences against Israel – the 1st an attempt to bring her back to him:

"Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.' She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold-- which they used for Baal."

The 2nd the result if she refused to return:

"Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days-- all her appointed feasts. I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares Yahweh.

It was God who delivered Israel out of Egypt. It was God who sustained and walked with her in the desert. It was God who brought her into the land He had promised. He had shown tender love and faithfulness toward Israel and expected undivided affection and faithfulness in return.

However, God knows that when it comes to love, there is no advantage in being "all powerful". You cannot 'make' the object of YOUR affection love you back - anything less than free choice in love is not love.

Israel had chosen to enter into a covenant relationship with God and had promised to be faithful to it,

Exodus 24:3 - *When Moses went and told the people all Yahweh's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything Yahweh has said we will do."*

Joshua 24:24 - *And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve Yahweh our God and obey him."*

but she was habitually unfaithful. She chased after other lovers all the while expecting God to remain faithful to her and hold up his side of the covenant.

Israel has abandoned God = the marriage was over AND YET Yahweh was unwilling to give up on His beloved. Defying all logic, instead of walking away, God chose to woo her, "I will win her back once again".

- I will lead her out into the desert and speak tenderly to her.
- In that day you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'
- I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked.
- I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love, compassion and faithfulness, and you will acknowledge Me.
- I will plant her for myself in the land;
- I will show love to the one I called 'not my loved one' and will say to those called 'not my people', 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'.

Chapter 3 tells us the rest of Hosea and Gomer's story – a story that will find its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus:

Hosea 3:1-5 - *Yahweh said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as I love the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." So I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and about a homer and a ½ of barley. Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you." For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek Yahweh their God and David their king. They will come trembling to Yahweh and to his blessings in the last days.*

- God's legal case against Israel (4-10) -

Yahweh has a charge to bring against you who live in the land:

- There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God. There is only cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery; you stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you.
- My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge,
- The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful. They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.... As the priests go, so go the people.
- I will punish them for their ways --- Because they have deserted Yahweh to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away their understanding. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to Me. They offer sacrifices on mountaintops and burn incense on the hills. Your daughters have become prostitutes and new brides commit adultery.

Hosea 4:16-19 - *The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can Yahweh pasture them like lambs in a meadow? Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone! Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways. A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.*

Israel prostituted itself in every possible way: Physically. Politically. Spiritually. ONLY when they began to experience the consequences of their choices did they even pause:

When you realized you were sick and wounded, did you come back to me? NO! You went to Assyria, but he cannot help you.... *"For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them."*

The consequences of your choices will cause you to seek my face and you will say, *"Come, let us return to Yahweh. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge Yahweh; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."*

But God knew they didn't really mean it. Their words were empty - hoping to avert judgment – but their hearts / actions had not changed ... and God cried despairingly: *"What am I going to do with the both of you? Your love is like the morning mist that disappears when it gets hot. Therefore, I am going to tear you to pieces through my prophets and kill you with the words of my mouth. My judgments will flash like lightning upon you. I desire mercy NOT sacrifice and an acknowledgment of Me NOT burnt offerings!"* (see Hebrews 4:12)

You never consider the fact that I know all about your wickedness because you do it right in front of my face!

You are so arrogant that even the painful consequences of your choices do not cause you to return to me!! You're like a silly dove, fluttering first to Egypt than to Assyria. Destruction is coming because you have rebelled against me.

I LONG to heal you, but you tell people lies about me. Your heart does not long for transformation, you just lie on your beds and cry because of the consequences. You continue to go to pagan festivals and turn away from me. It was I who trained you and gave you strength, but you have turned against Me.

You say, "We know you", but you reject what is good. You have set up kings that I did not choose.....

Sow righteousness and reap the fruit of unfailing love. It is time to seek Yahweh until He comes and showers righteousness on you, but instead, you have planted wickedness and reap evil. You eat the fruit of deception. You depend on your own strength and your many warriors, but the roar of battle will rise against you and your fortresses will be destroyed.

- Israel as God's rebellious son (11-14) -

In the book of Hosea, God is depicted both as a husband and a father.

In the final section, God turns to his prodigal son: *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. "Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath*

Ephraim said, *"I have become rich and have found wealth all by myself. There is nothing I have done that I can be punished for!" But I have been your God since I brought you from the Land of Egypt and I will make you live in tents again. I have spoken through the prophets and given many visions and parables through them. Ephraim's bloodguilt will remain on him!*

Ephraim, you were great... once, but now you sin more and more. You make molten images of silver and you encourage the people to worship the calves!! Therefore:

- You will be like mist – like dew that soon disappears. Like chaff that is blown away. Like smoke from a chimney.
- I have been your God since Egypt. You were not to know any god except Me because there is no savior besides Me.
- I cared for you in the wilderness, but when you came into the Land, you became satisfied and then your heart became proud and you forgot all about Me. Now your iniquity has been stored up.
- Shall I ransom you from the power of the grave? Shall I redeem you from death? Death, where are your thorns? O grave, where is your sting? (see 1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

Israel was guilty, yet God still pleaded with her to come back to Him. In a remarkable turn of events, He even gave her the words to say: *"Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion."* **And he promised to love her freely in return.**

Hosea concludes with these words:

Hosea 14:9 – *"Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of Yahweh are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."*

Can you see the AND/BOTH? God was rightly angry because of what HIS PEOPLE were doing to themselves and each other AND His heart was breaking as the refused to return to him and be healed.

Hosea bore God's last message to the Northern Kingdom, but unrepentant and unchanged the people held to their rebellious course of action until they were carried into Assyrian bondage in 722 BC.

Until Next Time.....