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C0928 – July 29, 2009 – Hosea 1:1-2 – Go Marry A Prostitute

Tonight we want to introduce the Book of Hosea and to start let's review the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Remember the Hebrew OT isn't divided like the English OT. Gentile men in the early church decided they didn't like the Hebrew divisions and changed it. Men who didn't have as clear a grasp of the OT as the Jewish men who wrote and compiled it. If you think about it it's somewhat arrogant to say we Gentiles have a better way of dividing your Scriptures. Personally I prefer the Hebrew divisions, the Lord Jesus recognized these divisions and I think it's easier to learn the OT by these divisions. Now, the three divisions they made were the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Why they did it that way was because it classified for them the three basic emphases in the OT; Law obviously emphasizes what? Law, its legal literature, very technical literature detailing the standard of God, the first five books; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, they call Torah.

The second division is the Prophets or Nabiim. The prophet, in the Hebrew mind is not exactly what the Gentile mind is accustomed to thinking. The Gentile things the prophet is basically the guy who tells the future. Basically that's not true. They did do that but they're real interest is history not the future. Besides, telling the future is simply telling us what? History in advance. So the dominant characteristic of the prophet is he's a historian. They were the first historians in the world. Contrary to what you hear on the university campus that the first historians were the Greeks, Thucydides and Herodotus, these men did write history but they wrote it from within the historical flow of events, they interpreted from within the flow. And this is what is so frustrating about the various philosophies of history that you will encounter in your studies, that all of the theories of history that you ever study are products written by men who themselves are trapped in the flow of

history; they can never get outside of history to look at the big picture. The Hebrew prophets, by means of special work of God in their lives, did get out of history momentarily and into the divine counsels to get a look from the outside in. And so they record a perspective of history that is utterly unique. So the first characteristic of the Hebrew prophet is he's basically the first historian. But why were they interested in writing history? This is the second thing. Why write history? Because they were interested in divine view point analysis of history, not just a human view point analysis. So always remember when you discuss the origins of history with someone that the worlds first historians were Hebrew prophets and they gave a divine analysis of history.

Now, it's true that there were men who were chroniclers, they wrote down this fact and that fact and this event happened in this year and that event happened in that year and so on, you can read about it in the Assyrian annals or the Egyptian cuneiform, but chronicling is different than writing history, it's just a record of fact after fact after fact. History writing gives an analysis of those facts, it only gathers certain facts, it's more interested in the relationships of those facts to one another and how they play into where history is going. And so when you begin to analyze history you're not talking about a chronicle, you're talking about history and the Hebrew was the first to do that in history.

For the Hebrew people the section of Scripture called the Prophets started with Joshua, they would say Moses was a prophet of course, but his literature they categorized as Law. Joshua they categorized as historical analysis, Judges, historical analysis, Samuel and Kings, we've emphasized in our framework those are historical reflections, they dig through all the chronicles of these kings and filter out what they want and put a divine interpretation on it. Then you have the guys you normally think of as the prophets; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, interestingly Daniel's not included, Daniel is over here in the Writings, the writings emphasize wisdom, skill in living and Daniel was seen as having skill in political administration. He imported Hebrew wisdom into a series of Babylonian administrations. And then you come to the Twelve Minor Prophets. Twelve small scrolls they eventually rolled into one scroll, they also are basically historians. Hosea is the first in the Hebrew order and in the English order; you'll find it after Daniel. Just because these are called Minor Prophets today doesn't mean they are minor in importance; it just

means that less of their writings have been preserved. As we'll see Hosea ministered for about 50 years and he ministered under a number of different dynasties and yet we have preserved for us only a very small, small, small fraction of Hosea's total work. God preserves only a fraction of the revelation for future generations to enjoy.

The book clearly divides into two parts, chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-14. We'll be focusing on chapters 1-3. I advise you to read through the Book of Hosea, try a modern translation and read it through in that, actually Hosea is one of the most difficult books in the entire Hebrew canon, partly because it has been very poorly preserved, it's arguably the worst preserved OT document we have, Job and Samuel run a close second and third. So this makes for some very difficult readings, and because of this English translations differ significantly and are often more interpretations of what Hosea was saying rather than translations, so keep that in mind, a lot of what you're reading will get the general idea across but a lot of it will be an interpretive spin put on it by a Bible translation team. So this adds work for us, we'll have to go in at these places and try to make sense, my approach will be to leave the text alone as much as possible and presume that Hosea was a little rough with his speech but we can get his meaning out. But still read through it in your translation just to get a feel for the book it's definitely in two parts; the first three chapters are talking about one thing, chapters 4-14 another.

Therefore obviously we begin with this first section, chapters 1-3. We can summarize the thought of these first three chapters in the following statement: *God establishes a historic parallel between His relationship with Israel and Hosea's relationship with his wife.* So on one hand God and Israel, and on the other Hosea and his wife. Her name's Gomer, a real lady. And God is in parallel with Hosea and Israel is in parallel with Gomer. The parallelism is very, very critical because through this parallelism is revealed something that has not yet in the progress of divine revelation in history yet been revealed up to this point. Next time someone comes up to you and tells you, well, the God of the OT is a God of wrath and the God of the NT is a God of love and never the twain shall meet. They show you they have not studied the OT well at all, because Hosea is one of the strongest, if not the strongest book on the love of God in the whole word of God!

And so the theme of Hosea will be the love of God. As God loved Israel so Hosea was to love his wife and he had a hard time loving his wife because of certain sins she did that were really gross. And so Hosea on a finite scale gets to go through what God has to go through being married to a hardcore sinner. And it's very frustrating, it hurts, there's deep pain to all this you want to realize. Yet God puts up with it, God is longsuffering and God maintains His loyal love despite Israel's failure. And so we get an almost incomprehensible picture of the grace of God toward sinners, and had it not been for the parallel of Hosea and Gomer we would have very little comprehension of the grace of God toward sinners. So you want to watch because this is one of the most intimate looks at the personality of God in all Scripture. We often get a view of God that He sits there in heaven like a Greek statue, totally unconcerned. This book challenges that. God is personal and He responds to history in a personal way. Most of us have such a religious view of God if we saw Him crack a smile we wouldn't recognize Him as God. God is not like that. Hopefully you've picked up through the teaching here that God does have quite a sense of humor. God laughs, that's taught directly in Ps 2. It's implied by such passages where God gives the Philistines hemorrhoids. And it's hard to get across to people that God laughs, that God has a personality, but He does and we all need to relax some and just realize that God is a real person. He's not just a list of attributes in an open box and once I memorize those I know God. God responds.

And the way He responds in the Book of Hosea is with deep hurt. You're going to get the opportunity to sit in Hosea's shoes and walk through the mess that he has to walk through. And unless you get out of your mind this idea that God is a statue that never moves you'll never grasp the personality of God. So maybe you know that God is sovereign and God is righteous and just and loving and omniscient and all this but if you're God isn't personal you're God isn't big enough and He isn't the God of the Bible. Hosea is written to correct that so you come to realize God is a deeply personal Being. You may not like it that God can laugh at you, you may not like it that God can get mad at you, but think about it, if He can laugh at you or get mad at you what's that an indication of? That you as a person are significant enough for Him to respond to. So take it as a compliment, a fantastic compliment by God that you have significance and you're life has significance. .

Now, God is going to respond to the nation Israel in this book and Hosea is going to respond to his wife the way God responds to the nation Israel so we learn something about God's love and His grace and His mercy. Amos didn't show much of that, Amos showed God's righteousness and His justice and His holiness and the nation failed to measure up so God's going to whip and whip and whip until the nation gets into shape. But Hosea is the other dimension, it's about the love and the mercy and the grace of God in putting up with sinners. So you're going to see this dimension more clearly than before, you'll see some from the other side too. You'll read God getting really angry at the nations sin and I'm going to smash you and smash you and smash you into oblivion. That anger is coming out of His holiness and righteousness and justice and then you'll see I love you so much, you're My people forever, I'll never forsake you. And that love is coming out of His grace and mercy. So you'll see this tension, often in the same verse, God says, "I will cast you off forever; I will make you My people forever." And people have pointed this out and said there seems to be an unresolved tension in the Book of Hosea. God can't make up His mind or something. But all you're really seeing is that these two attributes of God are equally potent, you can't elevate one to the exclusion of the other, they're equally infinite. And so you can see the love of God real strong in one verse and you can see the anger of God real strong in the next verse. They're both true. And so there is sort of an unresolved tension, at least until the cross work of Christ 800 years later where the anger of God is unleashed on Christ, but at the same time where do you find greater love than the cross of Christ.

So again, the theme of the first three chapters, *God establishes a historic parallel between His relationship with Israel and Hosea's relationship with his wife*. Let's go to verse 1, verse 1 is the historical background for the book, actually verse 1 is the title in the Hebrew and the first words of Hosea are given in v 2. We'll look at vv 1-2 tonight.

The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. So right away we deal with the phrase **The word of the Lord** which signals we're dealing with a prophet, a prophetic work. Now the **word of the Lord** is not something you experience, it's not something I experience. Nobody has experienced this since John the Apostle penned the Book of Revelation in AD96. So this isn't I had a feeling or something guided me. This is God talked

to Hosea in the Hebrew language so if we were Hosea we could have recorded it and we could have played it back over and over and over. This kind of revelation occurs only when the canon is open and this was a time when the canon was open; this was a time when historic revelation was occurring. It doesn't occur all the time. It comes in spurts in history. Take for example the period of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, God spoke to these men for the writing of sections of Genesis but then you have a 400 year silence between Joseph and Moses. 400 years the Jews tell us, God never spoke a word. Then God begins to speak. Then we have another 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testament. God didn't say a thing. The Book of Maccabees, written in the intertestamental period reports that no prophet was living; God had turned the loudspeaker off until the time of Christ. So it's not true that God is talking to every generation in an audible voice, yes in the word of God, but like this to Hosea, no, the normal pattern laid down in history is God talks for awhile and then He stops talking and He says remember what I said.

But at this time the Lord was talking and **The word of the Lord...came to Hosea**, in other words, Hosea didn't dream this up, Hosea didn't pick himself to be a prophet, the word of the Lord came to him, God chose him. The profession of a prophet wasn't like the profession of an engineer. I can say I want to study to be an engineer but I can't say I want to study to be a prophet. God decides who's a prophet. And God sovereignly decided to speak **to Hosea the son of Beer**, we don't know anything about **Beer** but we know Hosea's name is Ho-shea, what's that sound like? Another OT character...Ho-shea...Joshua, same name, in fact same name is used in the NT too, Yeshua...Jesus. Meaning: "the Lord saves," Ya- shortened form of YHWH, -shua, saves, salvation, YHWH is salvation.

Now why did God speak to Hosea? We don't know why? I'm sure Hosea wondered why, especially after we see what God said to him. "Go marry a prostitute!" Me God, why me? Can't you pick someone else? See, everyone wants to have their own little private revelation but when you really get into the prophetic office, which of us really wants to be one of these guys. These guys had to do strange things, how would you like to be the prophet Ahijah who had to go up to Jeroboam with his brand new clothes on, rip them off and tear them into twelve pieces. If someone did that today they'd be thrown in

the loony bin. These guys were weird. Read Ezekiel if you want some real weird stuff. Hosea's weird stuff has to do with marrying a prostitute.

Basically Hosea is ministering to the northern kingdom, but there are also some references to the southern kingdom. But the northern kingdom is the prime target; it was a real mess at the time. Hosea's going to minister to the nation during a time of political turmoil, intrigue, conspiracy and assassination, you can read all about it in 2 Kgs 14ff; a very unstable period in the northern kingdom.

And notice something strange in v 1, five kings are listed, four of them are kings of where? **Kings of Judah**. How many kings of Israel noted? One, only one. This immediately involves us with a problem. Why is it that only of the kings in the north is listed when that's his own nation, he's ministering to the north? And why are four kings listed from the south when he's not ministering there?

To review the history of this north/south division let me quickly summarize: Israel in 926BC split, two tribes stayed in the south, called Judah, and the other ten tribes in the north, called Israel. So now you had two Jewish nations, Judah in the south, Israel in the north. Israel from that point forward refers primarily to the north. In this book Israel is also called by another name which you ought to know, Ephraim. When you see Ephraim it's not just that one tribe referred to, it's a title for the whole northern kingdom, Ephraim happened to be the most populous tribe. So whether he says Israel or Ephraim it's the same thing, the northern kingdom. Now after 926BC you've got this problem, you have two nations with two dynasties, you're supposed to have one religion, centered in the south at Jerusalem, but the north said screw you, we're not doing that, we're going to make our own religion, and they went into apostasy.

Now, here's what happened. On the left side of this chart you have Judah in the south, and you have this list of Kings. Come down on the list to right here, Azariah, also called Uzziah, okay, first guy in Hosea's list, right, after him you have Jotham, after him you have Ahaz and after him Hezekiah, that's Hosea's list of guys that reigned in the south while he ministered in the north. Now look at the right side of the chart, this is the list of Israel's Kings in the north, what do you notice different about their chart? A column for

dynasties, just trace them on down, 1st dynasty, 2nd dynasty, 3rd dynasty, 4th dynasty, 5th dynasty, 6th dynasty, you notice Hosea ministering across the 5th, the 6th, the 7th, the 8th and the 9th. How come you didn't see all those dynasties in Judah? Because there's only one dynasty, the Davidic dynasty. All these guys on the right side that reigned in Judah are descendants of David. That shows political stability down south in Judah and political instability up north in Israel. Just trace for example the deterioration of this kingdom after Jeroboam II, the reigns get shorter and shorter toward the end, the chart doesn't do it justice, visually, if they wanted to depict it they'd all be crammed against one another, but you can at least see the length of their reigns in years in the far column. Jeroboam II, 41 years, now look at the drop, Zechariah follows him, six months on the throne and he got assassinated and a new dynasty took over, Shallum. Shallum survives one month, his dynasty is over. One month was the entire 6th dynasty. Menahem comes in, he reigns 10 years, not bad, then his son Pekahiah, he got assassinated, then Pekah got the throne and he was assassinated, the end of that dynasty, and finally Hoshea, not the same as the author of this book, he was the guy who reigned until the exile in 722-721BC. Just look at the instability. How would you like to be living in that kind of political turmoil? It was chaos, no one knew who was going to be sitting on the throne next week, constantly someone was plotting a conspiracy and the average person suffered under this deterioration. But in the south, look at the contrast, political stability.

Why is this? What controls the political picture in the south that didn't control the political picture in the north? God's word, remember 2 Sam 7, the promise of the Davidic dynasty. God guaranteed that there would be a son of David on the throne forever, and the south can never have a man sitting on that throne who is not of the tribe of Judah and does not have the genes of David in him. Always the man who sits on Israel's throne must be a man with the genes of David. The Davidic covenant. They didn't have a Davidic covenant in the south. It was all up for grabs.

Now, to see the significance of Hosea only mentioning Jeroboam in the north turn to 2 Kgs 10:30. On the chart in the right column, tracing Israel now, you see a king here by the name of Jehu, Jehu was anointed by a prophet and he was the first king of the 5th dynasty. He has a son Jehoahaz who has a son Jehoash who has a son Jeroboam who has a son Zechariah; count how many

generations after Jehu. After Jehu there was one, two, three, four. Four guys from Jehu's line sat on the throne. Now look at 2 Kings 10:30, "The LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in executing what is right in My eyes, *and* have done to the house of Ahab according to all that *was* in My heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." In other words why do you have stability in this period up north? God's word. God said you Jehu are guaranteed down to the fourth generation, but no further; down to that fourth generation. Therefore, precisely in the fourth generation, which was the reign of Zechariah, you have an assassination occur and the dynasty is cut off. Significance, God's word always comes true. And from that point forward you have instability.

Next comes Shallum, he's not anointed by a prophet. God never authorized Shallum. He just took the throne by force of violence. These other guys, Menahem, Pekahiah, none of these guys were divinely authorized to sit on the throne; they're all wannabe's. Self appointed kings. God never recognized any of them from this point down to the destruction of the kingdom.

Now, turn back to Hos 1:1 and see if you can tell why Hosea mentions these four kings in the south but only Jeroboam II in the south. Anybody catch what Hosea's doing? Hosea is saying I only recognize the kings God recognizes. And during my prophetic ministry God recognized four kings in the south; Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. In the south, the last king of any significance God recognized was Jeroboam. So these are the only guys I recognize. See how in tune these guys were with the word of God, they didn't play footsy and say, oh well, I guess I'll recognize you, you do have a crown on your head. They didn't care about who man appointed as king, they cared if God appointed you as king and these guys were all usurpers.

Another thing we can see from the chart, look at some of Hosea's contemporary prophets. In the north you have Jonah and Amos, or about the same time, he quotes some of Amos so you can tell he ministers a lot longer than him. And in the south, contemporaries were Isaiah and Micah. So there were prophets during this time in both kingdoms.

And lastly from the chart, how long did Hosea minister for? This is a fairly accurate chart, he started to minister under Jeroboam II, the last authorized king. Jeroboam ruled for a long time, started in 793, ended in 753; probably

Hosea began his prophetic ministry around 760. If we come down to the bottom, he rules through all these administrations and even past 722BC, down to the reign of Hezekiah, about 710, so he lived to see the exile of the northern kingdom, for three years Samaria was under siege and we read in Amos the devastation, 90% casualties, the Assyrians were nasty. They had a policy that when they moved into an area they would strip you, spread eagle you on the ground, and then peel your skin from you with knives while you were alive. So Hosea probably went south during that. But in all how long did he minister? Probably from the end of Jeroboam in the north till the beginning of Hezekiah in the south, so ~760-710, that's 50 years. For 50 long years he warned the northern kingdom that destruction was coming but that God's love would eventually win out. And so what we read in Hosea is actually spread out over that 50 years, it wasn't compiled until later in his ministry. But the events of chapter 1-3 took place very early in his life, he was a young man, probably 20-25 years old, and that has significance for verse 2 so let's look at it.

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, and that's translated very accurately, it's saying this is the initiation of Hosea's prophetic ministry. And it's very precise, it doesn't say the Lord spoke *to* Hosea, the preposition is **through Hosea**, so we have a very precise picture of the prophet getting his first message that comes *through* him *to* the nation Israel, of course it came *to* him in one sense but the emphasis is on *through* him because Hosea's life is going to be a message *to* the nation Israel. **When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD."** ³**So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.** Now this is the call, next time you think God dealt you a bad hand just think of Hosea, "a wife of harlotry," except it's not "harlotry," in the Hebrew its harlotries, plural and when you take a noun and you make it a plural form it's called the plural of intensity. And it means that she is a professional harlot. This is how you'd indicate a profession, by making the noun into a plural. So she is a professional prostitute.

Now, when the commentators hit this he gets a bit squeamish and in the commentary literature they hit grease. And there are all sorts of ways they've tried to get around this. So I'll take you through some of the squirming that's

happened. Everybody has a problem with this verse in Hosea. Would God command a prophet to go marry a prostitute? And so everybody's out to get around this one, lest we have what we think is an immorality.

Now, I want to give you the straight poop on the translation of this verse. I'm not going to deal with all the English translations because they all differ. What did I say earlier; in Hosea the translation teams do more interpreting than they do translating. Here's one of those places. So I give you a direct translation of the Hebrew. **Go, take for yourself a wife of harlotries and children of harlotries.** So, for example, if it says something like **and *have* children of harlotry**, you'll notice that *have* is in italics, which means it's not in the original. They put that in there and in this case it's leading you down a wrong path. If you take it just direct translation commentators say, that just can't be, it creates a moral dilemma, so they change the sense of the original text. That idea is not in the text, that idea came from outside the text. So this is the game where if the Bible doesn't fit what we think just change the Bible see, never change what we think.

So if we take our translation direct from the Hebrew, **Go, take for yourself a wife of harlotries and children of harlotries**, what this means is very straightforward. Hosea, I want you to march down to the red light district, pick up a hooker off the side of the street and marry her. And I want you to adopt her children that came from who knows where. I want you to marry the prostitute and adopt the children. That's the literal meaning of the Hebrew text. So how have commentators handled this and how are we going to avoid a moral dilemma?

The first way people have handles this is to say this is a vision or allegory. God showed or told Hosea a story that involved him marrying or being married to a woman who was or would be a prostitute. And by this they think they've avoided the moral problem because it was only a story and Hosea didn't really marry a prostitute. Now, that sounds great and all except for the fact that in v 3 Hosea obeyed and married a girl named Gomer. And Gomer had a father named Diblaim, and Hosea had a son by her in v 3 and two more kids by her in vv 4-9 and finally after she runs off again into prostitution, he's going to go pay a price for her, a price which is given in 3:2. So this hardly fits just a story God told Hosea. What would be the point? The point of chapters

1-3 is that Hosea's marriage to this Gomer was a real life example of God's marriage to Israel.

So, the second view of commentators who are squirmish about prostitution is that she was a spiritual prostitute not a sexual prostitute. Hosea went and married a spiritual harlot, she worshipped other gods. Now, she may have done that, she probably did do that, but is that all she did? These people have it in mind that spiritual prostitution isn't as bad as sexual prostitution. There's a girl in the Book of Joshua that challenges that assumption. Anyone remember who she was? Rahab. Rahab was a sexual prostitute but she got with it spiritually which should teach us all a lesson. Some big great immorality is not what God considers the most serious sin. Satan never committed an immorality, Saul didn't commit an immorality. David did commit an immorality and so did Rahab. Which ones came out in God's favor? We have to adjust the way we see things to the way God sees things. Not endorsing any sin of course, it's just to point out they haven't removed the dilemma.

Now the third view is by far the majority, we might call it the anticipatory view. This view is saying that Hosea would go and marry a virgin girl who would then *become* a prostitute later. So they're saying it doesn't mean "go marry a prostitute" but the girl you marry will be chaste and fair but then she will become a prostitute. Now, it's not impossible that the OT Hebrew speaks this way; there are times when the Hebrew grammar is to be understood as anticipatory of a future situation. However, in this case it creates more problems than it solves. For one, it doesn't really resolve the moral dilemma. If God knew that Gomer would become a harlot why would He command Hosea to marry her? So it doesn't really solve the moral problem. But, this view has bigger problems. For one, what about the 'quote' **children of harlotries** In v 2. Not only take a wife of harlotries but children of harlotries. Are these going to be Hosea's children? A result of their marriage? If so why are they called **children of harlotries**? **In v 3, Hosea and Gomer have a son**, "he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son." "Him" that's Hosea. In v 4 they name him Jezreel. He's a sign to the nation Israel. Then in v 6 they have a daughter, the Lord says name her "Lo-ruhamah," she's a sign to the nation Israel. And then in v 9 they have another son and in v 10 they name him "Lo-ammi," another sign to the nation Israel. So if you want to say v 2 means

Hosea will marry a virgin girl who then has children by Hosea that are called children of harlotries, I think you have a big exegetical hurdle to answer. It doesn't fit. So this view requires that there be only one group of children in the prophecy, all the natural children of Hosea and Gomer and it requires that the children of harlotries in 1:2 are the three children of Hosea and Gomer in 1:3-9. This is the interpretation of certain versions like the NASB, RSV, NEB.

Now, the fourth view is the literal one. "Go take to yourself a wife of harlotries, and children of harlotries." The literal rendering commands Hosea to go marry a prostitute and adopt her children conceived through her prostitution. This view requires that there be two groups of children in the prophecy, those from Gomer's former promiscuity and those from Hosea inside the marriage. This view must then require that the children of promiscuity in 1:2 are not the children of Hosea and Gomer in 1:3-9. It requires no manipulation of the original Hebrew text.

This view fits well with 2:1 (2:3 in the Heb) where the command is given "Say to your brothers, "My people," and to your sisters, "Pity." Who are those who are to "Say" this? Say is in the plural so it is a group of people doing the saying, not Hosea and they're speaking to brothers and sisters. The prior referent is the three sign children of 1:3-9. And so Hosea and Gomer's children are being commanded to speak to Gomer's children of which we may say there were at least two sons and two daughters for they are addressed in the plural as brothers and sisters. Therefore they could not refer to Gomer and Hosea's children because while they had two sons they only had one daughter and the one daughter could not be referred to by the plural "sisters." So what we have is two groups of children, those Gomer already had by prostitution and those she had with Hosea, the three sign children. Notice also chapter 2:4 where it refers to her, that is Gomer's children. They're not Hosea's children and so it is presupposed throughout Hosea that she already had children when Hosea married her.

This view also fits well with 4:4-6 which must be drawn from Hosea's marriage arrangement. V 5 the "mother" is the nation and v 6 the "children" also represent the nation. The nation is not represented by Gomer alone but by Gomer and her children. The children here cannot be Hosea's children because they are "sign-children" who deliver the message to the nation.

The prostitute Gomer and her children of prostitution represent the nation Israel. The children of Hosea and Gomer are signs to the nation to convey to the nation a message of hope.

But still, what about the moral problem this involves. Neither the spiritual or allegorical interpretation deals with the details of the Hebrew text, they only mask the problem. The anticipation view must say in the end that though God knew in His omniscience the promiscuous heart of this woman and He still commanded Hosea to marry her. Has the problem really been solved?

But the real issue in the dilemma I think is this? What's the standard of measure? Is it according to what we consider immoral? Or according to the standard revealed in Hosea's day? What was the moral standard of Hosea's day? The Law of Moses. Turn to Lev 21:7. Was it illegal to marry a prostitute? Chapter 21 is all about the priests, priestly requirements, requirements for the tribe of Levi. Verse 7, "They [the priests] shall not take a woman who is profaned by harlotry, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for he is holy to his God." Now, you don't find this prohibition for the rest of the Israelites. Only for the priests, the priests had to live according to a higher standard of holiness than the rest of the nation. But nothing in the Law of Moses says that a non-priest could not marry a prostitute. It would not of course bode well for his reputation in society, but this was a part of the symbolic picture God was illustrating through this marriage. Did Israel's spiritual fornication bode well for His reputation? Of course not, and neither would it for Hosea.

And so we begin to see that Hosea is going to be brought into close association with the thoughts and emotions of God, "As the prophet loved a woman whose crudeness and brazenness must have hurt him deeply, so God's grace comes to his people in their unloveliness. Our spiritual condition is never so low that God cannot woo and receive us back to himself as Hosea received Gomer." (McComiskey, 17.)

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