

THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE

THE MINOR PROPHETS:

THE PROPHECY OF HOSEA, PT. 2

REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Review

The Author of the Book of Hebrews wrote: ^{ESV} **Hebrews 1:1-2:** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, ***God spoke to our fathers by the prophets***, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The study of the prophetic word to our fathers through *The Twelve*, ultimately prepares the Church to understand better the final Prophetic Word of the Son. The message is the same for both the prophets and the Son, but the Son is the culmination and eschatological realization of all the words of the prophets.

Christ is the Prophet, but he is also the message of the prophets (cf. Luke 24:24ff; 24:44ff). *The Book of the Twelve* prepares us for the final word of the Son, who is heir of all things, and Creator of the world (Heb. 1:2).

Date: 8th century B.C. /Historical Background to Hosea

Date of Hosea's Prophecy (1): Hosea preached or prophesied from about 755 to 722 B.C. (roughly about 30 years of ministry) shortly after the ministry of the Prophet Amos and overlapping with Micah and Isaiah in Judah.

Historical Background of Hosea's Prophecy

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had enjoyed a period of great economic success, prosperity and respectful political power under King Jeroboam II (ca. 786-746 B.C.). ***In this time of prosperity there was great political corruption and religious decay.*** The people became high-minded and proud, and prosperity and peace became their curse.

The great Empire of Assyria had been troubled with internal problems for some years and had made possible the peace and prosperity in Israel. But with Assyria's new king and military commander **Tiglath-pileser III** (745-727 B.C.- "Pul" in 2 Kings 15:19; cf. 2 Chron. 28:20) there was a new interest in the western expansion of the Assyrian Empire and this involved Israel and Samaria again (2).

Tiglath-pileser III is known as the founder of the **Neo-Assyrian Empire**, and was one of the great military leaders in world history, rivaling Alexander the Great in his conquest of the world of his time.

King Menahem, who reigned over Israel and Samaria for 10 years, was forced to pay Assyria a heavy tribute of 1000 talents of silver to avoid invasion and captivity (This shows Tiglath-pileser's great power and how Israel was slowly becoming a vassal state to Assyrian, once again under foreign oppression and slavery like in Egypt):

2 Kings 15:19: Pul the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power.

At the same time of this external military threat from Assyria, Israel with the northern monarchy was internally unraveling because they were in the throes of a bloody dissolution (factions), and becoming more unfaithful to God. Furthermore, they were not kings or rulers who ruled after God's own heart as they were supposed to do in Israel:

^{ESV} **Hosea 7:7** All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All **their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me.**

^{ESV} **Hosea 8:4** **[Israel] made kings, but not through me.** They set up princes, **but I knew it not.** With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.

With the political anarchy in Israel came a corruption of the people. Great social chaos and moral decay contaminated society in Israel:

^{ESV} **Hosea 4:2** *there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*

The City of Samaria fell finally to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and the Northern Kingdom came to an end as part of God's judgment upon unfaithful Israel (3).

The majority of Israel's population (the ten northern tribes) was deported and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. Peoples from other parts under Assyria's domination were brought into Israel's former territories and thus this was the beginning of the "half-breed" "half-Jewish people known as the "Samaritans".

Against this historical background, Hosea is called to preach and married Gomer a prostitute to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness and practice of prostitution against her God (4).

Israel was betrothed to one Husband, Her Redeemer YHWH, but she unfaithfully would also love other gods and commit spiritual idolatry leading her to become a spiritual harlot. As a picture of this great spiritual crime against the living God, Hosea was to marry Gomer a prostitute to show what spiritual idolatry and harlotry looked like in God's eyes- -in order to bring God's elect in Israel to repentance.

Message of Hosea

Main Message of Hosea's Prophetic Ministry: Although God had chosen the people and made a formal covenant with them, the Israelites had always struggled with unfaithfulness and idolatry.

The entire Old Testament is a testimony witness to God's covenant faithfulness, and Israel's constant unfaithfulness as God's people. Israel failed the terms of the bilateral Mosaic covenant to "do this and live" (Exodus 24:1-8) and so they were to be focused on the unilateral covenant God had made with Abraham that was to be received by faith.

The Mosaic covenant was simply to reveal the people's sinful inability to accomplish their own righteousness or salvation, and thus find their hope in God's promises of grace alone (cf. Gal. 3:19ff; How long did it take after ratifying the Mosaic Covenant before the people bowed their knee to the golden calf?).

What is a "covenant lawsuit"? The prophets acted as YHWH's prosecuting attorneys to convict them of covenantal unfaithfulness. The prophet was sent by God to act as prosecuting attorney against covenantal disobedience and unfaithfulness to the covenant Israel had made with YHWH. It is important to understand the background of this in the ancient Near East.

ESV Hosea 1:1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

The historical setting is in the prosperous days of King Jeroboam II of Israel (the son of Joash).

² When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."

Some interpreters balk at taking this passage literally. Usually those who discount that Hosea really married a prostitute use Leviticus 21:14 as a reason why a prophet could not have been called by God to marry one like this (Lev. 21:14 teaches that *priests* are not to have prostitutes for wives!).

However, the plain meaning of this text (as hard as this may be for us to fathom God's mysterious will here) is that God called Hosea the Prophet to do something unusual; this was not merely a dream or vision of Hosea- -this was a reality in his life. I believe firmly that Hosea married Gomer who was sexually involved with other men before and after her marriage to Hosea and seems to have continued to receive payment for her sexual favors as we read in Hosea 2:5:

ESV Hosea 2:5 For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'

The people of Israel had forsaken God who had shown his covenantal love toward them and committed spiritual fornication against God. In light of this (4), Hosea was to perform a gospel parable with his very own life by taking to himself a wife of adultery (or a whore/harlot) to show the people the heart and character of their covenant God that they might be full of godly sorrow and repent.

God's love is sovereign and beyond our comprehension, yet God stoops to accommodate his people by showing his love through us in the Prophet Hosea (5). Hosea's ministry is to reveal what God's love is like; Hosea's life is a living illustration of God's love.

You could call Hosea's prophetic ministry a "gospel life-parable" of God's love for his people. God's love is unconditional toward his elect in Jesus Christ. He loved us when we were enemies and very unlovable (see Romans 3:10ff; 5:6-11).

In gospel life-parables like the life of Hosea, his life or experience is an important part of his message. God loves his people is the simple message of Hosea's experience. Hosea is a glimpse at the incarnation as the love of God is manifested through one who experiences love for someone else, but through great pain.

The Israel of Hosea's time was much different from the time of Sinai in which God had rescued his covenant people and given his law to them and made a covenant with them (Exodus 19-24). By Hosea's time the 10 tribes of Israel had grown wicked and unfaithful to God's Law and covenant, worshipping and serving foreign gods. Israel had broken the covenant and could only expect the curses of Deuteronomy 27-28.

Like Hosea, God had a wife of adultery and unfaithfulness.

God loved a whore. God loved someone (Israel) who did not love him back (like Gomer). Israel's sin is like the act of prostitution. Israel is engaged in covenantal prostitution (6).

All sinners are like prostitutes such as Gomer. We are unlovely and unfaithful. God's grace is revealed to prostitute-sinners in that he loves them in spite of their sins and God calls them to love him alone by His grace.

Like prostitution, sin is rejecting one's covenant partner because of a lack of personal knowledge and intimacy of that person; Israel is prostituting herself against God her covenant partner (Husband) because she does not know God personally and intimately as she should.

There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land- Hosea 4:1b

A covenant between God and His people requires exclusivity and ultimate allegiance to God alone, and Israel is loving and serving God *and idols*. God shows to us the importance of our relationship to him by using the marriage image or bond (as in

Ephesians 5:22-32). Sin is like adultery; covenant breaking and disobedience to God is like playing a harlot or selling oneself to another for sex (to put it starkly).

Yet God's covenant love is so strong and powerful that he still loves despite the fact that he is betrayed with unfaithfulness. God loves and forgives even though she continues to betray him:

^{ESV} Hosea 3:1-3: And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. ³ And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

Israel worships YHWH externally with her lips but her heart is far from him. Their worship has become merely external going through the motions, while internally they are not faithful and have no knowledge of the True and Living God.

^{ESV} Hosea 6:6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

³ So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

Hosea obediently married Gomer a harlot and she had a son. Hosea was the father of the son of a harlot; this was his first son. Think of Hosea's experience. Hosea was able to understand the pain that God felt when his people rejected him.

God called Hosea to experience pain of loving someone and being rejected so that he could preach to the people this same message from his broken heart of experience. Hosea was able to communicate God's grace and mercy to a people who were loved by God but who did not deserve it.

⁴ And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel."

Hosea was to name him Jezreel because God was to put an end to the Kingdom of Israel because of the sins of their leaders as well as the people. The name would indicate to Israel that "God would soon punish" Israel for her sins. Jezreel was the fruitful plain on the north side of the Kishon and was the metropolis of Israel (Josh. 17:16). At the city of Jezreel King Ahab had murdered Naboth and as representative of Israel had become guilty of judgment and extermination:

^{ESV} 1 Kings 21:19 And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Have you killed and also taken possession?"' And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood."'

ESV 1 Kings 21:22 And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin.

The Valley of Jezreel was where Israel's King Jehu had shed the blood of innocent lives in order to solidify his own political power (2 Kings 9-10):

ESV 2 Kings 9:25-26: Jehu said to Bidkar his aide, "Take him up and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. For remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the LORD made this pronouncement against him: ²⁶ 'As surely as I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons- declares the LORD- I will repay you on this plot of ground.' Now therefore take him up and throw him on the plot of ground, in accordance with the word of the LORD."

What did Hosea's son Jezreel represent illustratively to Israel? (7) Hosea's son Jezreel was to be a reminder of the leaders of Israel and how they had caused the people to sin against God and that their destruction was nigh. ***Jezreel is a reminder to all of God's people of the wages and great consequences of sin against God! Sin always results in death and a reception of God's judgment.***

ESV Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As Calvin said: "The whole kingdom of Israel had degenerated from its first beginning, and could no longer be deemed the race of Abraham; rather than true Israelites, they are *Jezreelites*" (Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. XIII, *Hosea*, 49).

God said:

⁵ And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

As John Calvin noted: "[The Israelites] knew that they were well furnished with arms, and men, and money; in short, they thought themselves in every way unassailable. Hence the Prophet declares, that all this could not prevent God from punishing them. 'You are,' he says, 'inflated with pride; you set up your valor against God, thinking yourselves strong in arms and in power; and because you are military men, you think that God can do nothing; and yet your bows cannot restrain his hand from destroying you'" (pg. 53).

Thirty-five years later, this promise of God's judgment would come to pass when the army of Israel was defeated and taken in to exile by Assyria. God used the powerful Assyrian Empire to humble and punish his people.

⁶ She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.

It is worthy to note that in verses 6 and 8, the Scriptures teach that Gomer conceived and bore children, but absent is the fact that they were necessarily Hosea's. It is probably given the contrast with v. 3 "she bore him a son" that the other two children that Hosea

was commanded by God to raise were not his own. This would teach us even more about how Hosea must have learned about broken-heartedness as a result of sin.

What did Hosea's daughter Lo-Ruhamah represent illustratively to Israel? (8) Hosea's daughter was "No Mercy" or "Lo-Ruhamah" (לֹא רַחֲמָה) because God would no longer show mercy but punish with his wrath. Hosea has a daughter by the harlot Gomer and he called her "No Mercy" because God was to have mercy no longer on Israel: Judgment had come!

God would no longer show special favor or mercy to Israel for their idolatry and their sins; there will be no compassion or love for them. The Israelites at this time claim to have Abraham and the Patriarchs as their fathers, but God is saying that they were not born in the House of Abraham, but in a brothel through Hosea's Gospel-Parabolic message in naming his daughter "No Mercy".

⁷ ***But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.***

God does desire to show mercy to Judah perhaps to make Israel jealous and repent of their sins; to desire the mercy and compassion that he continues to show to Judah. This reminds us that God always preserves a remnant of his people regardless of how sinfully idolatrous and wicked the people have become. God makes an important distinction here between elect Israel and non-elect, unbelieving Israel that will be forsaken and no longer shown compassion and forgiveness (cf. v. 6).

⁸ ***When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."***

What did Hosea's other son "Not My People" (Lo-Ami) represent illustratively to Israel? (9). Hosea then had another son and he is to name him "Not My People" (לֹא עַמִּי) because the LORD is forsaking those who have failed to keep his covenant.

God will no longer say: ***"I will be your God and you will be my people"*** (cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 27:9) because the covenant has been broken, the people have committed spiritual adultery.

In the midst of God's impending judgment however, there is salvation to be found in the LORD! (10). God's ways are definitely not our ways- -his mercy and steadfast love toward his true people is sure!

¹⁰ ***Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."***¹¹ ***And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.***

God will bring hope and many children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea which is the realization of the covenant promises of God to Father Abraham (and the patriarchs, Gen. 22:17; 32:12). God's love is greater than all of our sins!

ESV Genesis 22:17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies...

ESV Genesis 32:12 But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

These people whom God calls will be called his children (Gal. 3:26-29) and Israel will be united under one head –Israel and Judah will once again be united under one great leader or king (rather than being split in two like in Hosea's day).

God's salvation of his people, their hope will be in God's promises, grace and power alone. God alone can make this come to pass.

In God's punishment and discipline of his people, there is still a promised hope to come. The people of God will see the devastating hand of the Lord in judgment, but will also rejoice in the day of salvation!

Hosea experienced the rejection and sense of pain that God feels when his people reject him and act like adulterers.

Calvin called us "idol factories" and we still struggle with idolatry in many different shapes and forms. Idols not only cause us to reject God in that we love something or someone more than him, but it causes us to lose interest in serving our neighbors.

When we sin against God, we reject him in a sense. When we sin, we act like prostitute-harlots rather than those who have truly been loved covenantally by God in Christ as his very own and dear children! Sin is an affront to a holy God who is our husband. Sin is forsaking our loyalty to God!

Is our love for God out of gratitude for what he has done for us in Christ, and is this love expressed in our faithful devotion and worship of God alone? Do you say you love God, or do you truly love him and keep his commandments? Jesus said that our love would be demonstrated by our obedience: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15; cf. 13:34-35).

God is faithful to his people. The Book of Hosea reveals the depths of God's love for his covenant people.

We are Gomer; we have been loved immensely, above and beyond our wildest imaginations- -yet we "cheat on God with other lovers". Despite calling God's people to repentance and preparing them for judgment because of their sins, there is great hope that is found in Hosea's prophecy.

Yet God will allure his people:

ESV Hosea 2:14 "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her."

God will restore his people to the covenant relationship with him as Husband:

ESV Hosea 2:19, 23: And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD...²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

God will grant to them a Messianic- Davidic King to rule over his people in righteousness:

ESV Hosea 3:5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Those who are not his people will be called sons of the Living God!

ESV Hosea 1:10-11: Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." ¹¹ And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

God's grace is always greater than the sins of his people! God's faithfulness is always greater than our unfaithfulness!

In the fullness of the times, God sent his son...

A True and Faithful Israelite and Son of Abraham, Son of Adam, and Son of God (see Luke's genealogy, chapter 3). Jesus was faithful to God; Jesus kept the covenant that all sinful mankind has broken!

In Jesus we find our hope as sons of the living God. In Jesus we realize our identity as God's people who are united as one church under one head, whether we are Jew or Gentile. As the Apostle Paul teaches in Galatians 3:

ESV Galatians 3:16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ....^{ESV} Galatians 3:26-29: for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in

Christ Jesus. ²⁹ *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

The Apostle Paul quotes this portion of Scripture in a passage on election in Romans 9:
^{ESV} **Romans 9:21-27:** Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory- ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ *As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" ²⁶ "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" ²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved...*

1 Peter 2:9-12: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* ¹¹ *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.* ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

In Jesus Christ, we who were not a people, have become God's people; we who once as sinners had not received mercy, have now received the mercy of God in Jesus. In light of this, we are to live obediently and faithful to God, giving our full allegiance and submission to Christ and His Kingdom. We are to live as married to one covenant partner- -Jesus our Bridegroom.

We are His Bride, let us be pure and spotless as he has made us in Him! We must remember that in God's eyes sin is like prostitution; sin is a destructive power and deadly force that can prevent us from growing in God's grace.

Let us live as those who are truly Christ's pure bride and who have been shown great compassion and mercy in Jesus Christ in the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

CRB

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