

SESSION TWO

HOSEA

A Synthesis of the Book

I. INTRODUCTION

Hosea's message is aimed primarily at the Northern Kingdom as a warning prior to their fall to Assyria in 722 BC. The dating of the book can be ascertained from details within. In light of Hosea 9:3,17, the nation had not yet experienced exile. There are also indications that the book was written prior to Samaria's destruction in 722 BC (Hos 10:5-7; 13:16). Yet it appears to have been written at least by the time that Shalmaneser V (r. 727-722 BC) came to the throne (Hos 5:13; 10:14). Hence, we can conclude that the book was written sometime during the period 727-722 BC.

As judgment was about to fall, God wanted them to be fully aware *why* this was taking place. The book must be seen against the background of the Mosaic Covenant. God had previously foretold that unfaithfulness to His covenant demands would result in curses (discipline for disobedience). Hosea confronts the Northern Kingdom, pointing out specific ways in which the covenant demands had not been kept. However, Hosea goes beyond the "confrontation" motif to hold out the hope of restoration based on an acceptable repentance. Wyrzten points out that Hosea's purpose is to present an intensely personal divine restorative confrontation with Israel. "Nullifying the Mosaic Covenant because of Israel's habitual disobedience, God will establish a New Covenant with them based on the gracious promises to the patriarchs and David."¹

The book is structured around five judgment-salvation cycles. Within each cycle, a judgment section is followed by a salvation section in which the hope of restoration is held out. In chapters 1–3, this proceeds under the symbol of an unfaithful marriage, while in chapters 4–14 we find the symbol of a covenant lawsuit against Israel. The book climaxes in 14:1-2 with a plea for God's *grace* to allow for a renewed relationship with Him.

II. LESSONS FROM HOSEA'S MARRIAGE (1:1–3:5)

The focus of this section is to use Hosea's marriage to convey an allegory to the nation of Israel about her covenant unfaithfulness to the LORD.

A. Cycle One: Symbolism of Hosea's Family (1:2–2:1)

The major themes of the book are set forth in this section: Israel's unfaithfulness, the certainty of judgment and the ultimate restoration of the nation. The Northern Kingdom has violated the Mosaic Covenant, and hence must receive the curses as promised in Deuteronomy 28–29. Yet the Lord takes no pleasure in this, and hence uses a very vivid illustration to convey His regret and hurt.

¹David B. Wyrzten, "The Theological Center of the Book of Hosea," *BSac* 141 (Oct-Dec 1984): 315.

1. Judgment Aspect Seen in the Symbolic Names (1:2-9)

The shameful marriage of Hosea and Gomer is meant to portray Israel's covenant unfaithfulness to her husband Yahweh. "The expression 'adulterous wife' (lit., 'wife of adultery') does not describe her condition at the time of marriage, but anticipates what she proved to be, a wife characterized by unfaithfulness."² The point is that Hosea was to take a wife who would prove to be unfaithful. In a similar manner, the "children of unfaithfulness" need not mean that Hosea was not their father; they were simply born in the context of Gomer's infidelity.

Jezeel. The significance of the first child's name is not found in the meaning of the name itself, but in its association with a significant place. Jezeel had been the site at which Jehu had carried out God's judgment on the house of Ahab (2 Kgs 9). However, he seems to have gone too far by also attacking the house of David. Consequently, God decided to terminate the dynasty of Jehu. This was fulfilled in 752 BC when Shallum assassinated Zechariah. Shortly to follow would be the judgment on the Northern Kingdom itself, when her strength would be broken at Jezreel. In the years 734-722 BC, the Assyrians overran Israel and reduced her to a province within their empire (the Jezreel plain itself was apparently conquered by Tiglath-Pileser III in 733 BC).

Lo-Ruhamah. But Jehu's lack of regard for God's commands was but a small reflection of that same attitude on the part of the nation as a whole. Israel's blatant disregard for the covenant had brought her to a point where the Lord was no longer willing to have compassion on her (hence, *Lo-Ruhamah* = "no compassion"). He had held back discipline long enough; judgment was overdue. In contrast, the Southern Kingdom had been more responsive to the covenant and accordingly would be given longer life. Compassion for Judah soon followed Israel's demise when God supernaturally annihilated 185,000 Assyrians in 701 BC (2 Kgs 19:32-36).

Lo-Ammi. The word means "not my people" and was reminiscent of the covenant: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people" (Lev 26:12). The last phrase of Hosea 1:9 literally says, "and I am not I AM to you." The point here is that the Northern Kingdom would no longer enjoy the benefits of being in covenant relationship with the one true God, Yahweh. Though God would never totally cut off the Jews because of the Abrahamic Covenant, He was free to sever His relationship with any particular unfaithful generation.

2. Salvation Aspect: A Future Restoration of the Covenant Relationship (1:10–2:1)

The opening words of this section recall God's irrevocable promises to Abraham. Indeed, the judgment falling on the Northern Kingdom in this generation in no way means that God has called off His program with the Jewish people. According to vs 11, restoration will not only be realized, but will also be accompanied by a reuniting with Judah. The fulfillment for this is the time when they have "one leader," a reference to the promise concerning the ideal Davidic Ruler who will have an everlasting throne (2 Sam 7)—to be fulfilled after the Tribulation when Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. In that day a segment of the restored nation will once again be "My People" having God's "compassion" (2:1). This will be a final fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30, a time also foreseen by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:25-32.

²Robert B. Chisholm, "Hosea," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary (OT)*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1379.

B. Cycle Two: Though presently rejected, the Lord will eventually be sought again and consequently restore His people (2:2-23)

Like the preceding section, this one also progresses from judgment (2:2-13) to salvation (2:14-23).

1. Judgment aspect: Israel's unfaithfulness will result in punishment and withholding of God's blessings (2:2-13)

This section opens with an accusation against Israel for her covenant unfaithfulness. This covenant relationship between YHWH God and Israel is expressed by the figure of a marriage, in which the LORD is the husband and Israel is the unfaithful wife. The call to "contend" is the Hebrew word *riḇ* (רִיב), which speaks of a formal legal accusation (cf. Isa 1). The noun form is used in 4:1 ("a case"). The legal accusation arises from the fact that the relationship has deteriorated severely, so that the LORD says, "She is not my wife, and I am not her husband." Since the LORD goes on to point out a restoration in the future, this probably does not mean a termination of the relationship (a divorce). Derek Kidner suggests that this acknowledgement was meant to convey the thought that "no reality remained in the relationship."³ Despite this, the LORD does not exercise His prerogative of having His unfaithful wife executed (as the Law allowed for), but calls for her repentance (2:2c, d).

The LORD does, however, threaten to "strip her naked," i.e., to make her an object of shame and ridicule. "She who had exposed her nakedness to her lovers would be exposed publicly for all to see."⁴

Furthermore, the LORD would deprive Israel of her lovers (particularly the Baals), because she attributed her good fortune (her agricultural and economic prosperity) to them rather than the LORD. The mention in 2:8-9 of the blessings of grain, new wine and oil calls to mind the covenant blessings promised in Deuteronomy 28. These would be withdrawn, to be replaced by the curses for disobedience. The phrases "No one will rescue her out of My hand," "I will destroy," and "I will punish" underscored that the nation's troubles were not simply coincidental; God was controlling Israel's misfortune.

2. Salvation Aspect: God will eventually restore the nation and reinstate the covenant blessings (2:14-23).

The nation is destined for future restoration, in which the relationship will be renewed and God will once again be to them "Ishi" (אִשִּׁי), i.e., "my husband." The promises in 2:18 are very similar to what Isaiah had foretold (Isa 11:6-8), indicating that the day of fulfillment will be in the millennial kingdom. The covenant blessings of Deuteronomy 28 will also be restored (Hos 2:21-22). God's compassion will go out to them once more!

C. The Restoration of the Marriage (3:1-5)

The focus shifts back once again to the prophet's marriage with his harlot wife. She is to be taken back, an object lesson to the nation that God would one day take back His covenant people and restore the relationship.

³Derek Kidner, *Love to the Loveless: The Message of Hosea* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981), 27.

⁴Chisholm, 1383.

Gomer's lengthy period of separation was a parallel to the nation's experience of exile. "Without king or prince" would indicate the loss of national sovereignty, and "without sacrifice or sacred pillar" would mean the cessation of formal religious activity.

Nevertheless, Israel is to have an "afterward." But when is this to be? It is conditioned on their repentance to "return and seek the LORD their God and David their king." This is in keeping with the principles in Deuteronomy 4:29-31 and 30:1ff, that Israel's restoration must be preceded by repentance. Hosea 3:5 tells us this will be "in the last days," an expression used by the eighth-century prophets as a technical indication of the time of Israel's restoration predicted by Moses (cf. Isa 2:2 and Micah 4:1). Although this may have a partial fulfillment after the exile, the complete fulfillment will be at the end of the Great Tribulation just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ (cf. Zech 12:10ff). In the days of Jeroboam, the Northern Kingdom turned away from the Davidic monarchy, but in this future day they will turn back to the Davidic monarchy in the person of David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ their king. Interestingly, even the Targum of Jonathan says regarding this verse that "This is the King Messiah."⁵ This theme is picked up again in 5:15.

III. HOSEA'S MESSAGE: GOD'S JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION OF ISRAEL (4:1–14:9)

In the previous section, Israel's restorative confrontation was seen through the figure of a divine divorce and remarriage. This new section continues the same theme, beginning with 4:1 which states the LORD has a "case" (נִדְוֶה) against Israel. This is a legal term, a divine lawsuit. Thus God now confronts the nation (with the ultimate goal of restoring them) under the symbol of a divine covenant lawsuit. The reason is stated in 4:1c,d: "Because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land." The nation is in the courtroom, being charged with breach of the Mosaic Covenant.

The structure of this section is similar to the first three chapters of the book. There are three major sections (4:1–6:3; 6:4–11:11; and 11:12–14:9). Each of these sections is composed of two primary subsections: a judgment section followed by a salvation section.

A. *The LORD's Case Against Israel (4:1–6:3)*

"The foundation of the lawsuit is that Israel had broken her covenant with the Lord ('They have violated the covenant,' 8:1) by disobeying the covenant stipulations ('and rebelled against My Law,' 8:1; cf. 4:6; 8:12)."⁶ In this scene, God is the aggrieved party presenting the accusations, while the verdict is that Israel has become guilty (13:1; cf. Lev 4:13, 22, 27) and must 'bear this guilt' (Hos 10:2; 13:10).

1. *Israel's Guilt Exposed (4:1-19)*

The general charge of unfaithfulness is clarified by specific details (e.g., vs 2). At least five of the Ten Commandments are mentioned here. The religious leadership as well as the people were corrupt. The Southern Kingdom of Judah is warned not to follow the example of Israel (4:15).

2. *Israel's Judgment Announced (5:1-15)*

The judgment section opens with a particular indictment against the leadership of the Northern Kingdom, the priests and the rulers (5:1). God will chastise them as well. Though the Northern

⁵Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 27.

⁶Wyrzten, 321.

Kingdom remains the primary target group, even the Southern Kingdom is brought within the scope of God's judgment (5:5, 8, 10, 13-14). In vs 13 it is said that Ephraim went to Assyria. Ephraim was the largest and most influential tribe of the Northern Kingdom, thus representative of the whole.

Chisholm suggests that this turning to Assyria was the Northern Kingdom's turning to the invader himself, Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria, as an act of political expediency to restore national stability. "This probably refers to Hoshea's alliance with Assyria (2 Kings 17:3) at the time he usurped the throne of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 15:30)."⁷ Rather than repenting and dealing with the sins of the nation (and seeking the LORD), this was their mistaken remedy for their problems. Though Assyria would be God's instrument of discipline, the LORD was the initiator and controller (5:14).

As in earlier portions of the book, restoration following judgment is expected. God will withdraw from the nation, and allow them to experience their deserved punishment (5:15). In the midst of their affliction, they will "seek Him." This verse looks far beyond the experience of the Assyrian devastation of Hosea's day. Elsewhere, Scripture portrays the time of restoration in conjunction with Messiah's reign (see esp. Isaiah). Other passages also predict a terrible time of trouble ("Jacob's distress" - Jer 30:7) for the nation just prior to the messianic age and the establishment of the New Covenant with Israel (cf. Dan 12:1). Hosea 5:15 will find its fulfillment at the close of the Great Tribulation, for it is in that situation that the nation will finally "seek Him" and turn at last to their Messiah Jesus (cf. Zech 12:10ff).

3. Israel's Restoration Envisioned (6:1-3)

Verses 6:1-3 are the words of that repentant generation that will eventually turn in faith to the LORD, prior to Messiah's advent. This will be the ultimate fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30:1ff, for in that passage, restoration was conditioned on repentance. Notice the two cycles of exhortation followed by promise, the first exhortation in 6:1a and the second in 6:3a. The promises find their fulfillment in the messianic age of blessing (cf. Deut 30:9). The restoration will include the regathering of the nation to the land of Israel, a dominant topic in Isaiah's prophecies. Isaiah 12 depicts the praise from the regathered remnant: "Then you will say on that day, 'I will give thanks to You, O Lord; for although You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me'" (Isa 12:1).

B. The Lord's Case Against Israel Expanded (6:4–11:11)

In this, the largest section of the book, the "case" against the Northern Kingdom is greatly expanded. The subunits are marked by a direct address (6:4; 9:1; 11:8). There are two judgment cycles (6:4–8:14 and 9:1–11:7) followed by a brief salvation section (11:8-11). Highlighting the nation's guilt is her ingratitude.

1. Judgment Cycle One (6:4–8:14)

Once again, covenant unfaithfulness is the key topic (6:7). In 6:4, both kingdoms are rebuked, for their "loyalty is like a morning cloud, and like the dew which goes away early." The term for loyalty is the Hebrew word "*hesed*" (חֶסֶד) which speaks of loving-loyalty, particularly in regard to the covenant relationship between God and Israel. On the nation's part, their "*hesed*" was transitory, in contrast to YHWH's which was unwavering. Rather than turning to YHWH in their troubles, they added insult to injury by turning to Egypt and Assyria for help (7:11).⁸ In all their sin and chastisement, however, they

⁷Chisholm, 1392.

⁸Chisholm notes, "Under Menahem (ca. 743 or 738 B.C.) Israel submitted to Assyrian suzerainty (2 Kings 15:19-20). Pekah (ca. 734 B.C.) joined a coalition against Assyria, which Tiglath-Pileser III violently crushed (2 Kings 15:29). Hoshea (ca.

have failed to truly return to the LORD and seek Him (the precondition for restoration and blessing - 7:10). Their hearts are not yet ready for repentance, though God would gladly redeem them if they did (7:13). Singled out for particular rebuke are the rulers who failed to call upon YHWH (7:7).

Chapter 8 opens with the announcement that the enemy is coming against the covenant people. They are not coming simply for the sake of political acquisition, but because the covenant people have transgressed YHWH's covenant and rebelled against His Law. In the Torah (the first 5 books of the OT), God described how He would deal with the nation by various cycles of discipline (e.g., Lev 26). Mild discipline would be followed by harsher forms of discipline if necessary. One of the culminating stages would be the invasion and devastation of the land by Israel's enemies, and if necessary even their exile from the land into captivity (cf. Deut 28:41, 64). Here in Hosea 8:1, the prophet is warning the people that God's words will prove true and they are dangerously close to being invaded and led away into captivity (cf. 8:8-10). They are near the severe stage! Idolatry reigns at Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom (8:5).

2. Judgment Cycle Two (9:1–11:7)

These chapters intermingle the nation's guilt along with their expected punishment from the LORD. Exile to Assyria and Egypt is once again to be expected (9:3,17). Verse 9:15 is quite graphic. Their rebellion against YHWH was epitomized at Gilgal, with its fertility cult (cf. 4:15; 12:11). The expulsion from "My house" would be exile from the land of promise. The Hebrew term for "drive out" is ironic, for this term was used frequently of the conquest of Canaan, whereby the Lord gave Israel possession of His land (cf. Ex 23:28, 31; Deut 33:27). As Chisholm notes, "Now Israel was about to suffer the same fate as the Canaanites, whose practices it had assimilated."⁹

Ch 10 begins by establishing the fact that when Israel did experience past blessings, she attributed the prosperity to idols and false gods rather than giving YHWH the credit. Even greater prosperity meant more emphasis on false religion. Consequently, in bringing discipline on His people, the LORD will also tear down their false idols and altars. According to 10:10, their chastisement will come according to God's timetable. The nations will be brought against Israel, when they are bound for their "double guilt" (Feinberg takes this as a reference to the two idol centers at Bethel and Dan).¹⁰ Ch 11 opens with the ingratitude of Israel for all the good things God had done for them. It was out of a heart of love that God first called the nation as a son out of Egypt to go and possess the promised land. Although they turned out to be a disappointing son, God will raise up His greater Son who will proceed from Egypt to accomplish all God's will (cf. Ex 4:22). Matthew quotes the verse, in retrospect, in reference to Jesus.

3. Salvation Aspect: The LORD's compassion renewed (11:8-11)

As in the previous portions of the book, the judgment aspect is followed by a salvation section. God's judgment will be tempered by His compassion and ultimate restoration and regathering of His people.

732-722 B.C.), after acknowledging Assyrian rulership for a time, stopped tribute payments and sought an alliance with Egypt (2 Kings 17:3-4a). This act of rebellion led to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17:4b-6), the inevitable result of a foreign policy which for 20 years had been characterized by vacillating and expedient measures" (1395).

⁹Ibid., 1400.

¹⁰Feinberg, 52.

Chisholm comments, "These verses should not be understood as a decision to withhold the judgment threatened uncompromisingly throughout the book. Instead, the words are a divine response to Israel's suffering and exile."¹¹

C. The LORD's Case Against Israel Concluded (11:12–14:9)

1. Judgment Aspect: A Concluding Indictment (11:12–13:16)

Hosea 11:12 returns to the unfaithfulness of Israel, but once again comment is made about Judah who is also unruly. The Southern Kingdom is only little better than the Northern, and the judgment and exile on the one should alert the other to what God will do to His people (cf. 12:2). In the midst of condemnation, however, the call for repentance is still being offered (12:5-6).

In 13:4, the harlotry theme surfaces again, for the covenant people "were not to know any god except Me." Unfortunately, periods of blessing brought contentment, which led in turn to false pride (attributing the success to themselves), and consequently a forgetting of God (13:6).

2. Salvation Aspect: A Concluding Exhortation (14:1-9)

The call for repentance opens this section. The nation's only hope for restoration is to "return to the LORD." Ultimately, the nation will do just that, but it will be in the midst of Tribulation that they do. Though the present generation will decline, this will become the model for the future repentant generation. The latter part of vs 2 is interesting: "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Restoration will not come until these words (and the attitude they characterize) occur. But notice that the repentant words are for a relationship based on GRACE. This looks forward to the effecting of the New Covenant (cf. Jer 31) with the nation. Unlike the Mosaic Covenant (under which the nation desperately failed), the New Covenant will be based on grace. Then the blessings will be returned to them (14:4ff).

The book closes out with a lesson for the discerning: be faithful to God's righteous covenant demands, for destruction (stumbling) is the direct result of disobedience.

A Lesson for our Life

Consider 13:6 again for a moment. Blessings and comfort in this life have potential danger, for we may forget that they come from God and attribute our status to ourselves. Then we even forget Him. Hardship and suffering are good for us, because they keep us humble and having a sense of need/dependency on God.

¹¹Chisholm, 1403.