

## **Gospel Doctrine**

### **Lesson: Hosea**

#### **Reading: Hosea 1-3, 11, 13-14**

PDF Version of Notes

## **I. Approach**

These represent the notes I made during my reading of the scriptural text for this lesson. It is not a lesson outline or a lesson plan but really notes about issues and questions that struck me as interesting during my reading. Consequently, the notes do not have a conclusion and very little mention of application. I like to let those things arise while I teach.

## **II. Background**

### **A. Hosea: An Israelite Prophet**

Hosea was an Israelite (the Northern Kingdom) prophet. This makes the book of Hosea kind of unique. We have many writings from Judean prophets but not many from Northern prophets.

### **B. When did Hosea Prophecy?**

Gene Tucker in his commentary on Hosea explains the timeline of Hosea's prophetic career:<sup>1</sup>

Both the general period of the prophet's activity and a number of his speeches can be dated with some precision. The book's superscription (1:1) locates Hosea in the reigns of certain kings in the eighth century B.C. Moreover, the book contains allusions to international affairs, some of which can be identified with events known from extrabiblical sources. Other such allusions remain obscure because the names of Kings are not given. Hosea clearly began his work while the dynasty of Jehu was still on the throne, that is, before the death of Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.) Consequently, he emerged around 750 B.C. and was active right up to the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. One of his latest speeches (13:16) anticipates, but does not attest to, the fall of the city at the hands of an Assyrian army.

Thus Hosea probably prophesied from about 750 BCE to 721 BCE (so either roughly contemporary with or a little later than Amos<sup>2</sup>). During that time period Israel (the Northern Kingdom) experienced seven different kings:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tucker, Gene M., 2000, "Hosea" in *Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, Harper & Row, 635.

<sup>2</sup>Francis I. Andersen "Amos, The Book of" *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds. Oxford University Press Inc. 1993.

<sup>3</sup>Day, John, 2001, "Hosea" in *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 571.

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1. Jeroboam II	787-747
2. Zechariah - Reigned 6 months and killed by Shallum	747-746
3. Shallum - Killed after a 1 month reign	746
4. Menahem - Paid tribute to Assyria	746-737
5. Pekahiah - son of Menahem	737-736
6. Pekah - Pekahiah's captain, killed Pekahiah (Hosea 6:7-9) - Made alliance with Syria so he could attack Jerusalem - Assassinated by Hoshea	736-731
7. Hoshea - Last King of Israel - Initially pro-Assyrian - Later paid tribute to Egypt - Result: Assyria invades Israel & Hoshea captured	731-722

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*i. Describe the political situation during Hosea's time?*

- How would you characterize the political situation?
- Israel political life seems to be much more turbulent than the kingdom of Judah. Can you think of some possible reasons why this might be the case?

*ii. Differences: Israel and Judah*

Consider the following backdrop:<sup>4</sup>

Judah in the south was relatively isolated; Israel was more open to foreign trade and other contacts and thus more cosmopolitan. Israel's land was more fertile than the hill country of Judah."

- Given this backdrop, what issues might have been more problematic for Israel relative to Judah?

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<sup>4</sup>Tucker, Gene M., 2000, "Hosea" in *Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, Harper & Row, 635.

- Does this backdrop suggest that we might be able to learn a lot from the the problems and issues that Israel faced in terms of remaining true to their covenants with the Lord?

### III. Background: Hosea and Israel

Read Hosea 4:1-3:

Hear the word of the Lord, You children of Israel, For the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. 2 By swearing and lying, Killing and stealing and committing adultery, They break all restraint, With bloodshed upon bloodshed. 3 Therefore the land will mourn; And everyone who dwells there will waste away With the beasts of the field And the birds of the air; Even the fish of the sea will be taken away.

- What is Hosea’s message to Israel?
- What do you think is meant by the phrase, “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land?”
- Are “truth, mercy and knowledge of God” particularly important given the backdrop of a covenant relationship with God?

### IV. A Wife of Harlotry

#### A. *Hosea Takes a Wife*

Read Hosea 1:1-3

(1) The word of the Lord that came unto 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. (2) The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord. (3) So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son

- What happened? What did the LORD and Hosea do?
- How is this event central to Hosea’s message to Israel?
- Hosea is best known for his metaphors. His metaphors are often drawn from the natural world: agriculture and kinship structures (Israel as the LORD’s Wife and Israel as the LORD’s Son).

- Did the LORD command and did Hosea really marry a “a wife of harlotry” or “a promiscuous woman?”

### ***B. Did the LORD Command and Did Hosea Really Marry a "A Wife of Harlotry?"***

This is a much debated question historically. What are the possibilities?

1. Literal command
2. Allegorical or visionary understanding
3. A later reflection by Hosea
4. Others?

#### *i. Allegorical or Visionary Understanding*

A favorite view of Apostolic Fathers and Jewish commentators in the middle ages.<sup>5</sup> What are the problems with viewing this as an allegory or a vision?

I would say the biggest problem of viewing it as an allegory or vision is that it doesn't read like one at all. The motive for viewing it as an allegory or vision seems to stem largely from a general discomfort with the notion tha God would command Hosea to take a wife of harlotry.

Second, commentators also suggest that Gomer (name of Hosea's wife) has no obvious symbolic signficance.

- Actually, is that true? Gomer means “complete” in Hebrew.<sup>6</sup> Could this have symbolic significance?

One Possibility: The relationship between the LORD and Israel is complete. There is no need for any other (for example, there is no need or room for Baal).

- What about Diblaim (father of the bride) which means “two cakes?” Read Hosea 3:1:

(1) Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

Note: chapter 3 seems to parallel chapter 1 but it is written in the first person.

Well, nothing about cakes but let's read some other translations:

<sup>5</sup>Day, John, 2001, “Hosea” in *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 571 .

<sup>6</sup>“Gomer” *A Dictionary of First Names*. Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle, and Flavia Hodges.

(1) The Lord said to me again, “Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” (NRSV)

(1) The Lord said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.” (NIV)

(1) The Lord said to me, “Go, show love to your wife again, even though she loves another man and continually commits adultery. Likewise, the Lord loves the Israelites although they turn to other gods and love to offer raisin cakes to idols.” (NET Bible)

- Raisin cakes are often associated with illicit worship (Isa 16:7, Jer 7:18, 44:19.) They are also associated with proper worship of the LORD: David and his coronation (2 Samuel 6:19). Thus we can think of things in terms of two competing cakes.
- So one can see the names here as symbolic (although, I am not sure how well the symbol names fit) but I think it is harder to overcome the first objection to an allegorical reading.

### *ii. Literal Command*

The LORD actually commanded Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman. The biggest problem for many is that they don't think they God would act this way: it's inconsistent with the nature of God. God wouldn't ask Hosea to do that. Hosea, for example, would lose his moral authority<sup>7</sup>

- Does LDS canon specifically accept and embrace the idea that sometimes the LORD will command normally unacceptable things if the situation is desperate enough?
- Could we see this situation as similar to what the Lord commanded Nephi to do?

### *iii. A later reflection by Hosea*

Gomer was initially good but later become a wife of whoredoms. This makes Hosea's metaphor a reflection on the past and what he learned from his wife's issue's.

- What do you think of this possibility? What do you like about it? Do you think it is a likely explanation?
- What is the biggest problem with this hypothesis?
- Is the biggest problem the way Hosea writes about the Lord's instruction to marry?

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<sup>7</sup>In Mormonism this objection goes back at least to Sidney Sperry (See the *Old Testament Institute manual* covering the book of Hosea).

*iv. Final Thoughts*

- Ultimately, does it matter whether we view it as allegory, literal, or a later reflection?

**C. Symbolic Acts by Prophets**

Other prophets, in addition to Hosea, engage in symbolic acts. Consider, for example, Isaiah 20:1-4:

1 In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it; 2 At the same time spake the Lord by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. 3 And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; 4 So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

- Does walking around naked and barefoot for three years seem somehow beneath a prophet?
- Does the willingness of Old Testament prophets to engage in these symbolic actions reveal anything important about these prophets? Can we, today as modern readers, learn anything from these acts?
- Can you think of any reasons why the Lord would want prophets to engage in symbolic acts like walking around naked for a while?
- Why might this have been a more effective way to deliver a prophetic message than the usual method?
- It appears that often these symbol acts demanded great personal sacrifice. Does that enhance the message in this case?

**D. The Metaphor**

*i. Likes and Dislikes*

- Why the husband/wife metaphor? Why compare God to a husband and Israel to a wife?
- What do you like about the metaphor? Does it resonant with you? Does it help you understand your relationship with the LORD better?

I like that it underscores closeness and intimacy between the LORD and his people.

- What do you dislike about the metaphor? Is the metaphor flawed or does it make you uncomfortable? Do the negatives of the metaphor to you, as a modern reader, outway the postives?
- Gene Tucker in his commentary on Hosea writes the following about the metaphor: <sup>8</sup>

It is quite remarkable for the prophet to refer to the Lord as “husband” of Israel, resorting to the human experience as a way of describing the depth and intimacy of the love between God and people. But such language also includes polemic: Israel will call Yahweh “my husband” (‘ishi) and not “My Baal” (ba’li) which also can mean my “husband.”

- Does the backdrop of “Baal” add anything to your understanding of the metaphor?
- What do you think of the notion that the relation between God and humans is quite an equal and that hampers the usefulness of the metaphor?

ii. *Is it uncomfortable?*

Does some of the language in Hosea make you uncomfortable? For example, Read Hosea 2:2-4:

(2) Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; (3) Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. (4) And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms.

Why compare idoltary to adultery? Perhaps there is an even more direct connection. Read Hosea 4:12-14:

(12) people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God. (13) They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery. (14) I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall.

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<sup>8</sup>Tucker, Gene M., 2000, “Hosea” in *Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, Harper & Row, 635.

- What are these verses describing?
- Is the link between idolatry and adultery purely metaphorical? Some commentators believe Gomer may have been a cultic prostitute which really intertwines the adultery and Idolatry.

## V. The Children

### A. *The First Child: Jezreel*

Read Hosea 1:3-5:

(3) So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. (4) And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. (5) And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

- Why does the LORD have Hosea name the child Jezreel? What happened in Jezreel?  
This is the site where Jehu's (Jeroboam II was the last of the house) bloody coup began. Although the coup was supported by Elisha at the time. Hosea seems to be condemning it.
- Jezreel means (from Jim F's notes) "I will sow" What does this name tell us? Does the name have positive or negative connotations? What does the Lord sow? Why doesn't God change her name when Gomer repents?  
I think it suggests that ultimately regardless of the state of the world God is still in control: "He sows." Also, that the LORD is active in the covenant relationship no matter how His partner acts.
- "Sows" also links things with Baal. A harvest and fertility god.

### B. *The Other Children*

Read Hosea 1:6-9:

(6) And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. (7) But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

(8) Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. (9) Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

- Is text hinting that these two children might not be Hosea's?
- Jim F, in his notes, points out that Lo-ruhamah means “no mercy” or “no commpassion.”
- Why does the LORD emphasize mercy and compassion?
- Lo-ammi means “not my people” (NET Bible). Why would the Lord deny kinship?

## VI. Hope

Read Hosea 1:10-2:1

(10) Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. (11) Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel. (1) Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah.

- What is the LORD saying here? How do these verses contrast with the rest of chapter 1?
- How is verse 1 of chapter 2 connected to verses 10 and 11?
- Why are the names changed? Why are the negative prefixes dropped?

I think this is even more beautiful in Hosea 2:21:-23

(21) And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; (22) And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. (23) And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

- Why the mention of the natural world?