

Hosea

Introduction

Hosea has "some of the most moving language about God and his relationship to his people" (IOT 353).

1A. Historical Background

Amos - anticipates destruction by Assyria about 40 years before it occurs
 Jonah - about the same time as Amos, Jonah preaches in the Assyrian capital
 Isaiah - lived through the Assyrian captivity and anticipates Babylon
 Hosea - anticipates and overlaps the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians
 Micah - contemporaneous with Isaiah, Micah prophesies both captivities

Hosea conducted his prophetic ministry from the days Jereboam II in the north to early in the reign of Hezekiah in the south.

The prophet Hosea anticipates and overlaps the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians under Shalmaneser in 722 because of the contents of the book that indicates the coming of God's judgment (2:11; 8:7, 14; 9:17 My God will reject them; 11:5, Assyria will rule over them).

His message throughout the book is basically directed to Israel (1:4 I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel; 5:1, pay attention you Israelites; 13:16, the people of Samaria must bear their guilt).

The focus of Hosea brings up the question of the dating formula of the opening verse which only lists one northern king and four southern kings.

1) This simply confirms the fact that the north has become "not my people" (1:8); Hosea speaks to Israel as if they had no king, as if there is no northern kingdom, no order, no defenses. This is what shall soon transpire and they will all no longer exist as the people of God.

2) On the other hand, kings of Judah are mentioned because for now Judah will be spared (1:7).

3) Mentioning them in this context regarding Israel is a subtle warning to the south to not follow the path of disobedience.

2A. Main problem of the book

Hosea is commanded by God to marry a prostitute (1:2). Should this be read as a symbolic event or as a vision as many feel because of the difficult notion of God telling a prophet to marry a whore? There is nothing in the text to indicate anything other than actual marriage to a prostitute.

God commanded this in order to symbolize his relationship with Israel (note 1:2 and 3:1). God continues to love Israel, like Hosea continues to love his adulterous wife.

The immoral context expresses the dual notions of "disgust with and love for" the people who were brought up from Egypt as God's son (11:1) but who have been unfaithful to their God (4:12) and must now bear their guilt (13:16).

3A. Theme

Israel will be rejected by God (9:17): "you are not my people, and I am not your God" (1:8) but there is hope because the unlovely and adulterous wife of Yahweh is still loved (3:1 with 2:23).

In the place where it is said of them you are not my people there you will be called sons of the living God (1:10). This blessing will include Judah (cf. the subtle warning) who will be reunited with Israel. They will be brought back *from being the nations* (not my people) to become the children of God.

Key implication: *When they return, their return is the return of the nations to childship to God, to restoration in His image. In this way, the covenant keeping God fulfills His promise to bless Abraham and his descendents and through his descendents He fulfills His promise to bless all nations of the earth, even if this comes about through the judgment of his descendents.*

4A. Message for us

1) The church is the new Israel

This is precisely how the NT alludes to this Hosea 1:10 text (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:9-10; Rom. 9:25; cf. the 12 disciples that constituted the nucleus of the new covenant people of God).

2) Captivity/restoration points beyond itself

Finally, we can again see how captivity and restoration in the history of Israel unfolds in cycles that reach the NT and beyond it. This is gospel good news.

The captivity represents mankind lost in the world, no longer His son, now His prodigal (Hos. 6:7, Adam or at least, mankind in general as covenant breakers, fallen and in need of restoration).

The restoration reaches beyond the days of Cyrus to the greater Cyrus/deliverer, the Lord Jesus who will include resurrection of the body in his restoration of fallen man (Hos. 14:5-6; 13:14; I Cor. 15:55).

Thus, restoration includes the rest in Eden through resurrection (rest is reached via redemption through the conquest over death by the Lord Jesus). Then the great goal of history will be reached; God will do as He promised from the beginning.

3) Our duty is to be covenant keepers (6:7)

We are instructed to walk in the way of the Lord (14:9) while we wait for the purposes of God to be realized in history and beyond it.

This means to keep his law (8:1) and to abstain from prostituting ourselves in the worship and service of the creature rather than the creator.

4) Take comfort in God's love

You shall be called sons of the living God! (1:10).