

PROPHET HOSEA

Hosea was a prophet who lived and prophesied just before the destruction of Israel in 722 BC. He preached to the northern kingdom. He is known as the prophet of divine love.

Conditions of Israel - Outwardly there was prosperity. Syria and Moab had been conquered; commerce had greatly increased; the borders of the land had been extended and the temple offerings were ample. Inwardly there was decay. Gross immoralities were being introduced; worship was being polluted and the masses of the people crushed, while the Assyrian Empire was advancing and ready to crush Israel, whom, because of her sins, God had abandoned to her fate.

They countenanced oppression, murder, lying, stealing, swearing, etc. They had forgotten the law and their covenant to keep it and had substituted the worship of Baal for that of Jehovah, thereby becoming idolaters. They no longer looked to God in their distress but turned to Egypt and Assyria for help, and thereby put security and prosperity on a basis of human strength and wisdom instead of resting them upon a hope of divine favor.

Under these strained and trying circumstances, Hosea performed his mission as a spokesman for Yahweh. The first part of Hosea records the tragic story of the prophet's unhappy marital experiences. Hosea's wife, Gomer, whom he married in good faith, proved to be an adulterous woman. The three children that would be born (Hos 1:3, 4, 6, 8, 9). Jezreel was the first son. Then came Lo-ruhamah, a daughter, and finally a second son, Lo-ammi. Although all three children were born after Hosea married Gomar, he was the father of only the first: Jezreel. The names of the three children are significant, Jezreel means "God sows." Lo-ruhamah means "not having obtained mercy." Lo-ammi means "not my people or kinsmen," indicating a disowned experience. Because of Gomer's unfaithfulness, the prophet divorced his wife and lived apart from her. Following her separation from the home, Gomer continued her adulterous life and eventually was scarcely different from an ordinary slave. But Hosea still loved her in spite of her unfaithfulness. To rescue her from her lovers, he sought her out and purchased her freedom.

Understanding that his own relationship to Gomer parallels the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, he realizes that Yahweh used this lesson to communicate his will and purpose to those who claim to be his people. From this point of view, we can understand Hosea's statement that Yahweh instructed him to marry an adulterous woman and later directed him to make provisions for her moral restoration.

Hosea was to manifest God's patience and love. His marriage (1:2-3:5) to the unfaithful wife is to be an example of God's relationship with the unfaithful nation of Israel. He was prepared for his work through the lessons which he learned from the sins of his unfaithful wife.

(1) Through the suffering which he endured because of her sins, he understood how God was grieved at the wickedness of Israel and how her sins were not only against God's law but an insult to divine love.

(2) In love and at great cost he restored his wayward wife and in that act saw a hope of the restoration and forgiveness of Israel. His ministry extended over more than sixty years and was perhaps the longest of any on record. It continued 786-726 B. C., covering the last few years of the reign of Jereboam II.

Significance of these events

It is possible to see the destruction of Israel in human terms as simply the result of internal social and economic collapse, combined with invasion from strong forces outside. But the scriptural authors want the readers to have a full understanding of their teaching that it was really God working through human history, who caused the end of Israel. The reasons given for the final destruction of Israel are all religious. The people had followed the gods and religious rites of the surrounding nations, in particular the Canaanite Baal and Asherah cults, instead of obeying and worshipping only Yaweh. This was seen as the root of all their other problems by the writers.

Reflection:

1. Have we been like Israel sometimes? Have we forsaken the one true God for other gods, other sources of attraction (pleasure, wealth)?
2. Do you feel God is pleading (like a hurt lover or like a loving mother) with you to return to him?