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A Survey of the Book of Hosea, Part 2

Hosea 1:2-11, "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." 3 So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

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

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. 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."

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."

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."

The working of God is altogether foreign to carnal understanding.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8a, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom*, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood..."

One commentator wrote concerning this...

God's wisdom is a kind of paradox. In human thinking, strength is strength, weakness is weakness, and intelligence is intelligence. But in God's economy some of the seemingly strongest things are the weakest, some of the seemingly weakest things are the strongest, and some of the seemingly wisest things are the most foolish. The paradox is not by accident but by God's design. (MacArthur, November 8, 1994, p. 50)

That is exactly what we read in Scripture.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29a, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are..."

The pattern in the book of Hosea is judgment followed by a declaration of blessing; a blessing which reverses the judgment! Just as the flood preserved the covenant work of God on this earth, so also the judgments referenced in Hosea ALL end in blessing. This pattern is found throughout the prophecy, and we are going to examine the first one under the heading, "The Twist of Grace." It is most wonderful.

The Twist of Grace

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea [his name means, "salvation"], the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and *have* children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord." (Hosea 1:2). It is clear that when Hosea was called to marry Gomer, she was not a practicing prostitute. In fact, this is borne out by the parallel expressions, "go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and *have* children of harlotry.: Regardless of what you might say about Hosea's call in relation to Gomer, the second call clearly was written looking back. Hosea's children were not born as harlots (spiritual adulterers). This is something they would become later on account of their mother. Yet looking back, Hosea understood that the children

born to him would eventually fall away from God, AND SO HE WROTE.

This is the case when it came to his wife. God called the prophet to a marriage which involved a betrothal (Hosea 2:19-21) and a courtship (Hosea 2:14-15). This process would have interwoven his heart with that of Gomer. Then sometime after their marriage, Gomer chose the life of a prostitute. And yet she would be no ordinary prostitute. Rather, she most likely would be a vestal virgin in the ritual worship services of Baal.

Now this bears some explaining. There is no question that Gomer would not have been an official cult prostitute of Baal.¹ If such were the case, she would have been removed from her house. Yet because Canaanite worship took over Israel at this time, we know that there were not enough “professional” cult prostitutes to service the needs of God’s people. As such, local Jewish prostitutes were employed to serve in the same capacity (cf. Hosea 9:1). It was to this service that Gomer was drawn soon after her marriage to Hosea. No doubt it was this that held great appeal to Gomer; the power, prestige, and privilege of such a priestess. These things drew her again, and again, and again!

Yet this was of God for Hosea’s marriage was to be a living metaphor to indict the people of God. Why so? God tells us that “Because,...the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.” It is noteworthy that God doesn’t say, “For Israel has committed flagrant harlotry” but rather says, “the land commits flagrant harlotry.”

Any familiar with the Old Testament Covenant Promises, you know that the promise of “land” was quite significant! It was THE gift that God gave His people that they might serve Him free of external constraint. Yet what had Israel done with this land? They used it to serve their own sinful and selfish desires as Gomer did with her marriage!

This was an epic misuse of the provision of God! What was to be a land flowing with milk and honey became a land flowing with sin and rebellion! This stench required Divine cleansing! So Hosea was called to marry a prostitute and have children of prostitution as a sign to Israel! What a bitter calling. Yet not surprisingly Hosea obeyed God immediately.

Hosea’s Submission

Hosea 1:3, 6, 8, “3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim [this most likely is the name of her father, not her home town], and she conceived and bore him a son... 6 Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter... 8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son.”

Hosea did as he was commanded. He married a woman who later would become a primary worker in the religion of Baal. Along the way she would give him three children; two sons and a daughter. Now it is noteworthy that there is a shift in language between the announcement of Gomer’s first child and the announcement of the last two. Notice this shift:

Hosea 1:3, "So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore HIM a son."

Hosea 1:6, 8, "6 Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter... 8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son."

Do you see the distinction that is being made here? With their first born son the text reads, "Gomer bore Hosea a son!" But with the remaining two there is ambiguity. Gomer simply had two more children. Were they Hosea's? You be the judge, yet the text clearly makes a distinction! Based on the parallel of Hosea 2:5 in reference to Israel, I think the latter two children were not Hosea's, but the product of Gomer's harlotry! If this is correct, the loyalty and faithfulness of Hosea is shown to be that much more amazing!

Regardless, don't miss the focus of this verse. Hosea suffered-long in his marriage. At the first sign of trouble, he did not forsake his wife. Rather, he endured and genuinely loved her as God has done with His people throughout the ages.

Hosea 11:1-4, "When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. The more they called them, the more they went from them; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols. Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; and I bent down *and* fed them."

- Do you understand the incredible love that God has for you this day?
- Do you understand that nothing can "separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39)?
- Furthermore, do you understand the true nature of the sin you and I so easily endure? It is...
 - Adultery plain and simple.
 - Infidelity in our walks.
 - Living in the shelter of God's love, protection, and care, and using that position to indulge our sinful lusts.

Now this is a serious thing to God. When the nation of Israel abused God's love, the Lord disowned them. Notice the threefold message begins with the message of "Jezreel."

The Message of Jezreel

Hosea 1:4-5, "and the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it will come about on that day, that I will break the bow of Israel [that is, its power] in the valley of Jezreel."

Each of the names of Hosea's children contained a message to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The first name is "Jezreel."

For the significance of this name we must go back in Biblical history to the time of Ahab. Recall that Ahab (along with his Canaanite wife, Jezebel), lead Israel into the worship of Baal. Along the way, they executed many of God's servants. Now this was an evil leaven which God deigned to root out of Israel following the death of Ahab. Accordingly, the Lord raised up Jehu unto this purpose (cf. 2 Kings 9:1-13). After he was anointed King of Israel, (cf. 2 Kings 9:6) Jehu set about the systematic execution of Jezebel and all of Ahab's remaining heirs.

- He first killed King Joram. Ahab's son who was reigning at the time over Israel in place of his father (2 Kings 9:21-26).
- He then executed the King of Judah, Ahaziah who was one of Ahab's grandsons (2 Kings 9:27-28).
- He then directed his attention to Jezebel who also was killed (2 Kings 9:28-37).
- Then, he turned his focus to the remaining heirs of Ahab's throne.

2 Kings 10:1, "Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters and sent *them* to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, the elders, and to the guardians of *the children of Ahab.*"

The message was simple, "Place Ahab's children on his throne and then prepare for battle, for I'm coming!" The guardians knowing the implication, immediately beheaded the sons of Ahab, placed their heads in a basket, and sent them to Jehu in the valley of Jezreel. When Jehu arrived, he was pleased by the beheadings. Yet this was just the beginning. In Jezreel, he proceeded to wipe out every relative of Ahab and his children. What ensued was a blood-bath of epic proportions! He then summoned every priest of Baal to a gathering in which he supposedly was going to worship Baal. All the priests came, and Jehu proceeded to execute them.

Now all of this took place in and around a place called "Jezreel." From this point onward, Jezreel would a name associated with a blood bath, a time of unmerciful hacking to pieces of the enemies of God. And that most likely is why Jehu in the end drew criticism from God for his actions. While God had called him to address Ahab's descendents, Jehu took pleasure not in doing the will of God, but in the massacre and so his rebellion.

The message of "Jezreel" was a sober message of the harshest of all judgments. A blood bath awaited Israel, a blood bath which would occur in little more than thirty years from the writing of this text. Yet Israel's hope and confidence in the past was the grace and mercy of God. Certainly when the time of judgment came, God once again would be merciful. That brings us to the second message.

The Message of "Lo-Ruhamah,"

Hosea 1:6, "Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the Lord said to him, 'Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I should ever forgive them'"

As referenced above, "compassion"/"pity" was a significant element of the Covenant relationship

that God had with His people. Because Israel was His people, God pitied them throughout their history such that

- Though they sinned again and again.
- Though they never gave up their sin.

Nevertheless God maintained the relationship out of compassion/pity and so withheld that which the nation deserved (cf. Psalm 106). In fact, the word used for “compassion” here is related to the words for “womb” and the “lower abdomen” denoting deep physical as well as emotional feelings.

Psalm 103:10-11, “Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are *but* dust.”

Shockingly and amazingly, this facet of God’s covenant dealings with His people was coming to an end. Through Hosea’s second child, Israel received the message that no longer would they receive the pity/compassion/forgiving grace of God! Do you see what God is doing here? He is divorcing the Northern Kingdom!

Hosea 1:7, “But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the Lord their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen [which evidently had become Israel’s hope and trust].”

As Hosea ministered amongst God’s people way beyond the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Hosea included a promise to the Southern Kingdom. Yes, Israel would perish; yet such would not be the case for Judah for the time being. There still was hope; yet they must turn from their sin unto God.

So the first message given through Hosea to Israel was that on account of their sin a blood bath awaited them. The second message was that when the blood bath came there would be no compassion! This brings us to the third message, the message of “Lo-Ammi.”

The Message of Lo-Ammi

Hosea 1: 8-9, “when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah [which gives us a time span of about 1 to 2 years], she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God.”

Of the three warnings, this is the most devastating! Do you remember when God entered into the national covenant with Israel at the time of Moses? Moses asked, “Who shall I say sent me?” Recall God’s response.

Exodus 3:14, “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

This was an important statement. The word used in this context in the Hebrew is the “to be” verb, **הָיָה** (*hāyâ*). It is from this verb that the divine name is believed to have derived, “Yahweh.” Regardless, the title came to be seen as the foundation upon which God would redeem His people, take them into the wilderness, enter into a national covenant, and so commit Himself to the protection and care of the nation! It is important to note that Israel’s relationship with God at the time of Moses took on dual status. As the sons and daughters of the Covenant, God’s people individually enjoyed a unilateral, one-sided relationship with God whereby they’d always be His people- regardless of what they did. We still relate to God on the bases of this unconditional grace (cf. Galatians 3:6ff)! Yet under Moses they entered as a nation into a bi-lateral, conditional relationship in which God promised His protection and care if the nation in turn faithfully served Him. Accordingly we read such warnings as those found in Leviticus.

Leviticus 26:14-17, (see the entire passage vv. 14-43): “But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you [as a nation] reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up. And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you.” (cf. also Deuteronomy 28:15).

Truly, if the nation proved faithful to the covenant, they would remain and endure. But if the nation rebelled against God, it would be cut off! Now this relationship was begun at the time of Moses with the glorious promise of “I Am!” God told Moses, “Because I am, the nation will be mine!”

It is in this context that we behold the name of Hosea’s third child, “Lo-ammi” which means, “Not my people!” Clearly the covenant which God established with Israel as a nation in the days of Moses was coming to an end! In fact notice the explanation God gave Hosea.

Hosea 1:9b, “...for you are not My people and I am not your God”: translated literally, this reads, “I am not ‘I am’ to you.”

Do you understand the implication here? The covenant agreement by which Israel as a nation related to and so was protected by God had been severed! No longer would God treat them as His people! Now again, this didn’t mean that as individual children of the covenant, God’s people of the Northern Kingdom would be disowned by the Lord. Again, Hosea is addressing them as a nation!

Taken as a whole, God’s message given through Hosea to Israel at the time of the writing of this prophecy was threefold. In the future a bloodbath of epic proportions awaited them. When it comes, there would be no compassion for they no longer were His people! So that’s it; Israel was finished! They had broken the covenant one too many times. Justice demanded their destruction.

Yet the story doesn't end here, for at this moment we are introduced to an incredible twist.

The Surprising Promise

The book of Hosea contains a series of judgment/promise declarations from the Lord. Hosea 1:10-11 is the culmination of the first one.

Hosea, 1:10-11, "Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered..."

This promise hearkens back beyond Moses' covenant to the Abrahamic covenant where God promised Abraham and his children.

Genesis 22:17, "I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies."

It is so easy to read over a passage like this. Yet this promise became THE foundation of hope and comfort to God's people in subsequent redemptive history. When they were facing a difficult future, they were comforted with this promise.² What is the significance of the restating of this promise?

Recall in Song of Solomon 5 that the bride in her selfishness rebuffed her husband who then left. But then she felt sorry that she rejected him and so ran out to meet him but could not find him. After a frantic search, she finally caught up to him in the garden where she asked for his forgiveness. His response was the epitome of grace and love. He recited the very words he told her on their wedding night (SS. 6:4ff)!

In other words, he said, "My love for you has not changed. As I assured you on our wedding night so I assure you now: You are lovely and you are mine!" This in essence is the significance of this promise in Hosea and elsewhere in God's word. By reciting the promise that God gave to His children on their wedding night, God essentially said here, "In spite of the bitter providence that waits you, know that My love for you has not changed. As I assured you on our wedding night so I assure you now: you are lovely and you are mine!"

Hosea 1:10b, "...and it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' it will be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God.'"

Truly, God disowned the nation of Israel on account of their infidelity, but not its people! How many nations mocked and ridiculed the northern refugees when in 722 BC they were transported to the furthest regions of the earth?

- *You who once boasted in God, where is your God now?*
- *You aren't the people of God; He has disowned you!*

Now from the perspective of the nation, the accusations were true. Yet as it related to them individually, as a covenant people saved by grace, the accusation was false! Accordingly God's plan, in spite of the horror that awaited Israel, was to gather His remnant together and so continue to be their God! And this has never changed, the promise remains today for all God's children!

Hosea 1:10c-11, "And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together. And they will appoint for themselves one leader, and they will go up from the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel."

Do you remember in our study of 1 Samuel the significance of Ebenezer? It is the basis for the line in the hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, "Here I raise my Ebenezer..." (Trinity Hymnal, 1999, p. 457). Recall in 1 Samuel 4, God's people suffered a devastating loss to the Philistines in the Battle of Ebenezer in which the glory of God had departed from His people. Not only, had they lost the battle where thousands upon thousands of Israelite men were killed; including the priests, Hophni and Phinehas and their high priest, Eli, died on account of the shock and grief. BUT, most significantly, they lost the Ark of the Covenant to the Philistines! It was as if the gods of the Philistines were more powerful than Yahweh! From this point on, "Ebenezer" would be associated with horror and a weak God!

About a generation later recall that God's people repented of their sin and turned back to the Lord. During the ensuing worship service the Philistines attacked (the timing was awful, for Israel was most vulnerable). Yet God protected His people.

1 Samuel 7:10-11, "Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car."

Do you know what Samuel then did?

1 Samuel 7:12, "Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'"

God took Israel's greatest shame and transformed it into their greatest boast! From this point on, the name of Ebenezer would be associated with the glorious time when Almighty God defended His people when the greatest odds were against them!

God is doing the same thing with His people in Hosea! What is the significance of Jezreel? It referenced a blood bath, both in the time of Jehu and when the Northern Kingdom was brought into exile. Well guess what God someday would do with the name of "Jezreel"? He would make it part of our redemptive vocabulary!

Notice:

- The term “Jezreel” is a verb which means “to sow” as in farming. Heretofore it has been used of the consequence of sowing to sin- which is death. Yet when used of God, it denotes the sowing of a bumper crop of blessing and victory. That now is what Jezreel is to us!
- And yet it also is a name used in place of “Israel” (the two names are virtually identical in the Hebrew) which when read in this verse yields this idea...

Hosea 1:11b, “...for great will be the day of Israel.”

When would this promise come to pass? When would Israel have another great day?

There are no less than four events in Redemptive History which would qualify as a great day for Israel which coincide with the predictions of this passage.

1. When the exiles returned from captivity beginning in 539 B.C.! At this time the name “Israel” once again would be one people under a single leader (Hosea 11:10-11).
2. When Jesus came to the earth in His first advent. He came as a King who would “shepherd His people Israel” (Matthew 2:6).
3. When Christ rose from the dead and established His kingdom on this earth as the New Israel (Galatians 6:16; Romans 9:6ff).
4. When Christ returns to this earth at the consummation of the ages and so destroys once and for all the kingdom of Satan (Revelation 11:15; Romans 11:24, 26).

So which of these was in mind when God gave the promise of Hosea 1:11? All of them! Family of God, it should be obvious that truly, “Great has been and will be the day of Israel!” How do you apply a passage like this?

There are many ways to take this prophetic promise of judgment/blessing. Yet however we might seek to apply the text, we must remember that the judgments promised in this passage applied only to the Old Testament nation of Israel which fell in 722 B.C. Any other application will be derivative and so devotional.

Toward that end, let me give you one thought by way of encouragement. The positions we hold as servants of Christ are similar to the status Israel enjoyed before God as a nation. They are not merited, nor are they eternal. They are conditional and so able to be forfeited if we allow ourselves to indulge in sin. And so...

- Your marriage is a gift that easily could be forfeited by sin.
- Your jobs.
- Your positions and callings.
- Your being used as a vessel to encourage and build up the saints.

All of these and more can be and have been forfeited by God’s people on account of unrepentant sin and rebellion. Recall what Paul wrote speaking of his call to preach the gospel:

1 Corinthians 9:26-27, “Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way,

as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

Paul speaking of the glorious blessing which accompanies holiness:

2 Timothy 2:21, “Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, USEFUL TO THE MASTER, prepared for every good work.”

Truly most, if not all of the privileges we enjoy as servants of Christ could be forfeited on account of unrepentant sin. Think of Uzzah, Nadab and Abihu, David, Solomon, some of the Christians at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:30), the children of Ephesians 6:2-3; the rebellious Christians mentioned in James 4, and many of the churches of Revelation 2-3.

Yet hear the glorious message of this passage! While our positions and callings are conditional and so able to be lost, one thing will always remain in our lives; the unfailing love, devotion, and care of God. May this be the cause of our boasting, joy, and rejoicing this day! After David’s sin was discovered, God described the forfeited blessings:

2 Samuel 12:8-11, 13, “‘I also gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! ‘Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight?... Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house... Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household...’ Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.’”

And so God’s promise to the Southern Kingdom after a prophecy of judgment on account of their sin was this:

Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”

End Notes

¹ Some commentators argue to the contrary, cf. J. L. Mays *Hosea*, OTL, pp. 25-26.

² cf. Jacob, Genesis 32:11-12; Judah, Jeremiah 33:32.

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About the Preacher

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