

Hosea 1:1-10

The Covenant Love of God and the Idolatry of His People

I. Introduction

A. Brief review of background. **What are some of the major historical events that help us understand the context of Hosea?**

1. Divided Kingdom (922)
2. A time of prosperity in the land
3. Yahweh is dealing with Israel on the basis of the Mosaic Covenant (conditional). We do need to acknowledge the fact that a discussion on covenant is much greater than we have time for here.
4. Hosea is writing to Israel directly, but we should understand that Judah is a second-hand beneficiary.

II. 1:2-3 Hosea takes a wife

A. **1:2 - Was she a prostitute before they were married? Would God really ask Hosea to do something like this? What is meant by prostitute? Is it proleptic? Is it literal? Is it metaphorical?**

1. Duane Garrett works through 8 possible options for this verse. With ideas that range from, this is all a vision, to her prostitution is proleptic, to her prostitution having to do with her being in Israel (who were all prostituting themselves with idols). It's surprising how many work to find a different interpretation of this verse than what it communicates on the surface. Here are a couple points to work through...¹
 - a) **Are the marriage and the births literal?** The marriage and the births are all literal. **If those are literal, how should we understand her prostitution?** Consequently, it makes the most sense that her prostituting herself is also literal. This rules out ideas of her being metaphorically a prostitute because of her being an Israelite.
 - b) One of the motives for trying to find a different answer than the obvious is because Leviticus 21:14 says that a priest cannot marry a prostitute. **Is Hosea a priest?** As Garrett observes, there is no indication that Hosea is a priest.² Thus, there is no reason to argue differently.
 - c) *Some purpose that the woman in chapter 3 is different from Gomer in chapter 1. The key word in 3:1 is "again." As Garrett explains, this implies continuity to the previous women mentioned in the book. Add to that, the women in chapter 3 is unnamed, while Gomer is named in chapter 1. Thus, if they were two different*

¹ If you want more information on this, I would be happy to provide you with a larger explanation of the reasoning here.

² Garrett, 46.

women, there would most likely be two women named. The term “again” also indicates that what transpires in chapter 3 came after chapter 1.³

- d) It seems odd to think that Hosea would be asked to find a wife who will one day be promiscuous, because, how would he know who to choose?
 - e) It makes the most sense to take this to mean that God called Hosea to literally marry someone who was promiscuous (which could entail being a prostitute). It makes better sense in the Text and better sense in light of the parallel it is supposed to represent with Yahweh and Israel.
- B. **“Whoredom”** = A prostitute who sought gifts from sex with her lovers.⁴ We can’t let our 21st century mindset be read into the ancient culture before us. Women were rarely just promiscuous, they had to provide for themselves, so the end goal was always to seek gifts or provisions for their sexual favor.
- C. **“Children of Whoredom”** = The best way to understand this is as Garrett writes, “Hosea’s children bore the stigma of immorality, but the people were *themselves* promiscuous and were in that sense *just like their mother*, Israel.”⁵
- D. **Why does Yahweh call him to this kind of obedience?** “for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” There is emphasis in this passage on whoredom, thus it is great whoredom.
- E. With that understanding in mind, consider the what this tells us about Hosea. Yahweh has given what would seem to be His first command to Hosea, a command to do something that would have been very difficult. Hosea responds with unquestioning obedience and does as Yahweh has asked.
- F. We know nothing more about Gomer other than what is said here.

III. 1:4-5 - Jezreel

- A. **1:4 -To get a better picture of what’s happening here, turn to 2 Kings 9-10.** 2 Kings 9-10 provides the historical context to the reign of Jehu. In 9:6-10 Elijah the prophet sends a servant to anoint Jehu King of Israel, and commands him to essentially wipe out the entire family of Ahab. The story explains how this takes place in the valley of Jezreel, when he killed Joram (the son of Ahab and Jezebel), Ahaziah King of Judah, and Jezebel queen of Israel. Jehu went on to wipe out all of Ahab’s family, and all the people who worshiped Baal. In 10:30 Yahweh says this, ““Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.””
- B. **Based on that passage, how do you think God viewed the actions of Jehu?**
- C. **In light of what we have just read, let’s look again at Hosea 1:4?**

³ Ibid, 48.

⁴ Ibid, 51.

⁵ Ibid, 53.

1. On the surface the meaning of the verse is that the house of Jehu (**of which Jeroboam was part**) would be avenged for the blood that Jehu shed in the valley of Jezreel. This is what every translation says is the case except one (that I've seen). A hermeneutical tool that is important for us to consider is that Scripture helps us interpret Scripture. These more obscure texts can be made easier to understand by those that are clearer.
 2. **How do we resolve the tension that Jehu will be punished for the slaughter in the valley of Jezreel, when Yahweh so clearly commends him for his actions?**
 3. The answer lies in the word "punish" or in Hebrew *paqad* and how it is meant to be translated. Most translate this word as "punish" though it could be translated "visit upon." One translation could be "And I will bring the bloodshed of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu."⁶
 4. Holman is the only translation to state it with this understanding: 4 "Then the Lord said to him: Name him Jezreel, for in a little while I will bring the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu and put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel."
 - a) **SIDE NOTE:** It is important for all of us to realize that every translation is someone's interpretation of the original text. Overtime commentators will push back against translations like this one, and eventually translations will change (e.g. Hebrews, Guthrie. Bruce Ware may have done similar in Phil 2).
 5. **What is Hosea then trying to say?** That Israel will experience the same judgment and fate that those who were killed in Jezreel did (that Jehu administered), because they failed to learn from their mistake.⁷
- D. 1:5 - The "bow of Israel" refers to their military power. We are generally unsure about when this event will take place, but one commentator states that it's not hard to see that a battle in the valley of Jezreel with the Assyrian army could have taken place.⁸

IV. 1:6-7 - *Lo-ruhama*: "No Mercy"

- A. Here comes child number 2. Some infer from the text that because it is not as explicit that the baby is coming from Hosea, that this child is born out of Gomer's prostitution. While this could be the case, the Text doesn't actually say that it is. In other words, I'm not going to put too much weight on that point.
- B. In light of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, Yahweh reveals to them that He is no longer going to have mercy on Israel.
- C. There is a textual difficulty at the end of verse 6.
 1. Some translate it like the ESV: I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.

⁶ Ibid, 57.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ McComiskey, 22.

2. McComiskey translates it: I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel, but will surely take them away.⁹
 3. Garrett translates it: Call her name Not-loved Thus I shall no longer let it happen That I should love the house of Israel. But I shall completely forgive them.
- D. My personal view is that it means, “but will surely take them away.” I think McComiskey is right in seeing the parallel between Israel and Judah, and how Israel is the antithesis of Judah. One is shown no mercy, the other is shown mercy. One is taken away, and one is saved. So it makes sense contextually. However, there are some really good arguments for the other perspectives as well, this is just where I land on the issue.
- E. **What is incredible is the contrast between Israel and Judah.** Remember, Judah is not perfect, they will eventually fall as well. The statement of there being no mercy shown to Israel is heightened in the contrast. Turn to 2 Kings 17.
1. Israel falls to Assyria in 722 B.C. This is clear in 17:6.
 - a) Note the clear explanation for why Israel fell (17:7-ff)
 2. Assyria later makes an attempt on Judah (18:13)
 3. Through Yahweh’s divine plan, Isaiah tells King Hezekiah that Assyria will not defeat him. This is what happens...(2 Kings 19:35-37)
- F. A clear fulfillment of Hosea 1:7. Judah did not have to fight. Yahweh used Assyria to crush Israel but spared Judah.

V. 1:8-9 - *Lo-ammi*: “Not my People”

- A. For an Israelite, this was very significant. *Exodus 6:7*, “**I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians**” (Lev 26:12). To say that Yahweh would no longer be their God would be a reversal of the covenant. He is pronouncing the covenant “null and void.”¹⁰
- B. Ortlund points out that this statement is the equivalent to a divorce.¹¹
- C. Again, the Text does not tell us whether this was Hosea’s biological child or not.

VI. 1:10-11 - The reversal

- A. Yahweh promises them future blessing, that they will be His people again. There is no transition to this verse. Hosea continues writing into this surprising result without indicating so. That they would be like the sand of the sea points all the way back to Yahweh’s promise with Abraham (Gen 15).
- B. There is coming a time when the divided kingdom would be reunited under one head — that is Christ.

⁹ McComiskey, 25.

¹⁰ Garrett, 69.

¹¹ Raymond C. Ortlund JR, *God’s Unfaithful Wife*, 54.

- C. Hosea pulls back in the term “jezreel.” Jezreel means “God sows,” and so has significance in this verse. The idea at the end of verse 11 is that they will be sown in the land and will grow up in it (like a plant). In other words, their population will grow.¹²

VII.Application

- A. What does this passage teach us about God?
1. That he desires His people to be true to the covenant
 2. That He wants all of us. This is as much true now as it was then, that God wants all of you, not just part. He wants you to be fully committed to Him, not partially (Phil 1:21; Gal 2:20; Rom 6)
- B. What does this passage teach us about man?
1. The central issue and problem has never changed. Israel sought after all the gods of the land and thereby rejected Yahweh. We chose to make and serve idols rather than God. We place our desires and wants above God in many ways today.
- C. The beauty of this passage is that we can clearly see the tension between the covenant love of God and the idolatry of his people. We see the wrath of God and the love of God on display. The wrath that needs to be poured out on those who have rejected Him, and the Love that will eventually be given to the same. What is so incredible, is that this divine tension was satisfied on the cross. Jesus, at the same time, satisfied the divine wrath and the divine love. This is the hope in which we live.

¹² “up from the land” does not seem to mean go up from the land of Israel to foreign territory, for that doesn’t make sense. The “land” is often seen in reference to the promise land. So it make sense that they rose up from the land like a plant, because of the connection to Jezreel. See Garret and McComiskey.