

Isagogical Study of the Book of Hosea

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Introduction

The book of Hosea is an extremely sharp rebuke against the northern Kingdom of Israel because of its apostasy from the Covenant and its total corruption in both public and private morals. By word of mouth and in his own personal life Hosea tried desperately, though unsuccessfully, to convince his fellow countrymen that they must repent and return in contrition to their patient and ever-loving covenant God, Jehovah. Failure to do so would mean certain and final destruction. His ministry, however, covered that period in the history of Israel when the moral and spiritual decay was so advanced that no human effort could prevent her destruction. Hosea spoke most earnestly to a nation of people he loved dearly. But they would not listen. This may well explain the overall spirit of sadness in Hosea's message. One can certainly appreciate why Hosea is called "The Weeping Prophet" in Israel.

We know very little about the man Hosea. Early Jewish historians identify him with the ancient tribe of Reuben. The name Hosea means salvation. He is, of course, not to be confused with the last king of the northern kingdom, who bore the same name. Hosea's familiarity with the topography and history of Israel, his profound sympathy and concern for the nation of Israel and his intimate knowledge of the political and social affairs of Israel, would indicate that he was a northern born Israelite. Except for this, we know little or nothing about Hosea's personal history and family background.

We may not agree with all the figures and dates shown in the illustration on the previous page. However, the illustration will help to refresh our memories on the period of time when Hosea ministered and prophesied in Israel. Hosea indicates in the title (Chapter 1:1) that he lived and preached during the brilliant and very successful reign of Jeroboam II, King of Israel. However, the fact that he also mentions several kings who ruled in Judah would lead one to believe that he must have borne the burden of his difficult office for many years perhaps as many as 60-65 years. Some historians believe that Hosea lived to see Israel plunge itself headlong toward destruction during those turbulent and hectic years following the death of Jeroboam II. Whether Hosea saw the people of Israel carried away as captives into Assyria is questionable.

Let's briefly take a look at the social/political conditions in Israel at that time. Prior to the reign of Joash (Judah) and Jeroboam II (Israel) the political and social strength of both kingdoms was non-existent. For nearly 150 years their national strength was drained by intertribal warfare and oppression. If Israel and Judah were not busy destroying each other, they were being oppressed by foreign powers, especially the Philistines and Syria. This, however, changed quite dramatically when King Uzziah appeared on the scene in the south and Jehoash followed by Jeroboam II ruled in the north. Together they strengthened their borders, rebuilt their armies, revived agriculture and stabilized their economies. Both the north and the south enjoyed peace and prosperity. When Hosea appeared on the scene, all of Israel/Judah enjoyed an unusually high level of prosperity. There were few if any signs or indications on the political and social horizon that a tragic end of the northern kingdom was so rapidly approaching.

How about religious conditions in Israel at the time? With the advent of peace and prosperity came a rapid decline in spiritual values. The high level of prosperity was accompanied by an even higher level of immorality. The worship of idols (calf-worship) was a common

practice. This was, of course, not new for the people at the time when Hosea lived. Remember, King Solomon had built altars for the various idols of his heathen wives, and even worshiped at these altars himself. But it was Jeroboam I who made idol worship the official worship in Israel. Like king, like people. Soon altars and high places were built in large numbers throughout all the land of Israel. The worship of Baal and Ashteroth became commonplace. It was this worship that resulted in the practice of “sacred” prostitution among the Israelites—a hideous form of immorality. It was this form of worship which King Ahab and Jezebel made the official religion in all of Israel. When Hosea began his ministry in Israel, countless numbers of God’s chosen people, often under the guise of Jehovah worship, worshiped at the altar of Baal.

Such were the religious and spiritual conditions in Israel when Hosea began preaching repentance and prophesied the doom of Israel. We will attempt to show and underscore on the following pages that Hosea’s message is one long and vehement protest against a nation which “went after false gods and became false.” By way of a very severe example Hosea presented his bitter indictment against Israel and her spiritual harlotry. For God called upon Hosea to enact in his own personal life, yes, in his marriage, the heart-ache and agony experienced by a faithful and loving God as he watches the defiant ingratitude and shameless apostasy of his chosen people. There is no question about it, Hosea experienced in his own heart and life the price it costs love to forgive, to seek, to admonish and to restore. When we begin to appreciate the heartfelt anguish Hosea experienced in his marriage and family life, we begin to appreciate the agony divine love experiences in the face of his children’s sins.

Hosea’s Marriage: A Symbol Of God’s Relation To Israel Ch. 1:1-3:5

Like other prophets, Hosea declares that his message is “The Word of The Lord” which came to him. The Lord took possession of him—filled Hosea with a burning desire to do God’s will in all things; to say what God wanted him to say and to do what God wanted him to do. In studying the prophecy of Hosea one is immediately confronted with a difficult problem. God spoke a command to Hosea which was certainly unusual, to say the least. The Lord, in fact, imposed upon Hosea an almost impossible task, or assignment. God said: “Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness.” (NIV) A harlotrous wife? children of whoredom? Is that what God ordered? Is this what we are to understand by these words of Hosea? Our first reaction to a literal interpretation of these words may be that God was asking Hosea to do something that is wrong. A more thorough study of this book, however, will lead us to the conclusion that we must indeed understand these words in their literal sense. Although many, many pages have been written by scholars in an effort to solve the so-called problem, the fact is that any other interpretation than a literal interpretation of God’s command to Hosea would destroy the entire setting of Hosea’s message and rob the text of its intended purpose, namely, to lead men to repentance and back to a merciful God who loved his chosen people so dearly.

Yes, God imposed upon Hosea a very difficult assignment. And the reason for this strange command is stated at once by the Lord: “Because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.” Ch. 1:2b These words in verse 2 are the key to the first three chapters of this book. The marriage of Hosea took place at God’s command. The marriage was to serve as a mirror of the history of God’s unfaithful people. Hosea’s sad experience in marriage and in his family life was to reflect God’s own experience with his covenant people. Gomer’s unfaithfulness to her loving and faithful husband was intended to impress upon all of Israel their faithlessness to their ever faithful and loving divine spouse. From this human example, this true

to life experience which occurred right before their very eyes, Israel could have and should have learned to understand and appreciate the meaning of her own spiritual adultery. The covenant relation between God and Israel is frequently compared in the Scriptures to that of a husband and wife. The symbol and parallel was certainly not strange to the Israelites. God had intended this relation to be one of mutual love and esteem. God had promised his grace and every blessing to his people; and Israel had vowed allegiance and willing obedience to her covenant God and Lord (Exodus 19:8, Exodus 24:3-11).

Sadly, from the beginning, Israel played the role of a harlot, a prostitute; a harlot which proved to be totally corrupt and disloyal to her divine spouse. Through this strange symbolic marriage, God wanted Hosea to impress upon Israel the seriousness of her offense. That is why the term “harlotry” is a key word used by Hosea in describing Israel’s apostacy. So the picture is simply this: Hosea was placed by God into a position where he became a symbol or type of God. And Gomer his wife typified the nation, Israel, whom God had taken to be his own special people. Sadly, the wife chose to desert her divine Spouse. It was her choice to live in spiritual adultery. Not only did she worship idols, but she even participated in the frightful fertility rituals of Baal worship; then claimed this was part of her worship of Jehovah.

Verse three states: “So he (Hosea) married Gomer.” As stated before, many pages have been written on chapter 1:2-3 offering all sorts of explanations and commentary on the meaning of these words. Do we take these words of our Lord in the literal sense? Or does the Lord speak here as he would in a parable, or allegory? Some argue that Hosea’s marriage would have been immoral if Gomer had been a harlot at the time of her marriage. Others offer all sorts of explanations, each one attempting to satisfy the problem of the moral issue. The arguments are too numerous to identify here. Let it suffice to say that we follow the conservative position that God’s word is here to be taken literally. Whether Gomer was a common street-walking prostitute, as we would think of one, cannot be ascertained. Gomer was, in God’s own description of her, a wife of harlotry. If not a street walker, like most other Israelites, Gomer participated in the licentious fertility cult of Baal, in which sacral prostitution played a vital role. She represented well an adulterous, harlotrous and godless nation, the chosen people of Israel.

In Chapter 1:4-9 Hosea speaks of Gomer’s three children: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi. They were “children of unfaithfulness.” God himself supplied the names of these three children. (ch. 1:4,6,9) he also states the reason for his choice of names. The names of these children are prophetic, and declare the consequences of Israel’s apostacy. Jezreel (vv. 4-5) was the first born, a son. He symbolized the Lord’s overthrow of the Jehu dynasty. His is the name of the city where King Ahab perpetrated his treacherous murder of Naboth. This was followed by Jehu’s bloody coup; also the site of the extermination of his entire family. Lo-Ruhamah (vv6-7) means “is not pitied.” The name of Gomer’s daughter symbolized Jehovah’s departing grace and mercy from his northern kingdom of Israel.

The name declared loud and clear: **THE LORD WILL HAVE NO MORE MERCY UPON HER.** Yes, Judah would be spared; not because she was wholly faithful to her covenant. Judah was spared by a gracious and merciful Lord for the sake of the promise he had made to Abraham—“I will multiply your descendents.” Lo-Ammi (vv 8-9) means “not my people.” The name of Gomer’s third child, a son, proclaimed a message to Israel that spoke a very sobering call to repentance. You are not my people. Every time the name Lo-Ammi was spoken, the name should have reminded the people of God’s final withdrawal of his grace and mercy from his chosen people Israel. Lo-Ammi symbolized God’s final rejection of Israel. As he states in verse 9: “you are not my people, and I am not your God.” Because Israel had persistently

refused to fulfill the primary condition of her covenant with Jehovah, namely, obedience to God and his word (Exodus 19:5), she became a nation rejected by God, disowned by Jehovah, repudiated forever. The drama of this account certainly conveys a strong message to all of us. So many forces of evil seduce us in life. There are so many gods to follow. Were it not for another drama—the sacrifice of God’s Son on the cross at Calvary, we would still be “not my people”. But Christ died for us, and rose again. Through faith in him we are God’s people and heirs of eternal life. An ever loving and faithful God and Lord has assured us that he who was delivered for our offenses was raised again for our justification.

Like the drama of a play, the scene changes in chapter 1:10-2:1. God did not want man to conclude that the name of Israel would perish from the face of the earth. The unchanging God and Lord did not nullify or set aside the promises he had made to the patriarchs. God’s promises never fail. His chosen people proved to be faithless to their God, but God is ever faithful. Writing under the inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit, the prophet Hosea focuses our thoughts on this truth when he writes: “Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them ‘you are not my people’ they will be called sons of the living God.” What a marvelous and much needed word of encouragement this must have been for the few faithful believers that remained in Israel. They were assured God’s promises will live on. The Lord will graciously awaken children unto Abraham. By his almighty grace and goodness, the Lord will call people into the light of his forgiving love. He will claim them as his true spiritual Israel. Numbered among them will be the masses of Gentile nations. This is what Hosea sees through the eyes of prophecy: countless numbers of people, Jews and Gentiles alike, being received into God’s spiritual family by the grace of God and through his redeeming love. They will be one people under Christ, who is the “head” of the body, the church. Hosea saw this. And he says, they will “appoint themselves one head.” Their King will be of the seed of Abraham, of the house of David, Jesus of Nazareth.

Under the leadership of this one head “they will come up out of the land.” Coming from all directions and from all nations, they will be united in faith under Christ. Spiritual Israel will become a part of that spiritual kingdom, The Holy Christian Church, The Communion of Saints, which knows no bounds or limits. What a contrast to these rejected faithless Israelites of old! Spiritual Israel will, as Isaiah sees them, come with songs and everlasting joy upon their head (Is. 35:8-10). And in the words of an inspired N.T. writer whom we know so well “and their citizenship is in heaven” (Phil.3:20).

What courage and strength this wonderful truth must have provided for Hosea through those many difficult years when he served in the Lord’s ministry. By the redeeming grace of an ever-loving God this beautiful change was mirrored in the transformation of the word Jezreel. Even as Hosea states: “Great shall be the day of Jezreel” (v.11).

The Punishment of Israel 2:2-13

Hosea now returns to the reality of his own day. Verse 2 declares: “Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife and I am not her husband.” Hosea’s experience in marriage was a sad experience. It was the picture of a faithful husband and a faithless wife. Though the wife was disciplined, it was not the action of blind fury and rage. The loving spouse had one purpose, namely to hopefully restore his wayward wife. Hosea’s manner in dealing with his wife and family reflected perfectly the purpose and goal of Israel’s ever-loving God in his dealings with his chosen people of old. Look at the history of Israel and what do you see? For many years

the Lord was prepared to block every move and way of his wayward spouse, except that way which would lead her back to her waiting husband.

Speaking to the remaining faithful children of God; the Lord urged them to chide and rebuke their mother, the nation of Israel. His word to them was—try to lead her to repentance. For she has become a harlot. Her eyes burn with the fire of sensual love. Her breasts glow with jewels, which symbolizes her idol worship. Oh yes, she calls herself a wife. But her very appearance betrays her true character. Speak to her. Plead with her, so that she will return in faithful worship and loving service to her Lord who loves her so dearly. If she fails to repent, if she will not listen, she will be rejected forever. Out of her own mouth will be judged. “I will go after my lovers” she dared to boast. With envy in her eyes Israel looked at and regarded the surrounding heathen nations, Phoenicia, Egypt, Assyria, and others. Although they worshiped idols, they enjoyed greater political, social and economic power and prestige in the world than Israel. What a temptation this was for a harlotrous spouse! By contrast, Israel’s religious, social and political life was totally governed and controlled by the Lord’s moral law. Israel refused to accept the fact that these laws had been given to her by a loving heavenly Father for a wise and gracious purpose. His faithless and often defiant spouse just did not see it that way. Harlotrous Israel did not see Jehovah as a loving and faithful God. She regarded the Lord as a harsh and unreasonable task master. So she cast about for lovers—at heathen temples and altars. And when Jeroboam II provided Israel with an unusually high level of prosperity and freedom, the adulterous wife considered herself fully justified for her conduct. Openly and defiantly she served her idols. But her covenant God, her creator, her Redeemer, her covenant Lord was forgotten.

What was the reaction of her faithful spouse? Although saddened and tormented by the behavior of his renegade wife, he did not reject her, not immediately. He blocked her path. He hindered her pursuit after lovers. He took from her the gifts she had enjoyed, not to destroy her but to discipline her and to restore their relation once again. (vv 9-13) She was driven into the same position as the prodigal son, as described for us in Luke 15. Then she would cry out to her lovers for help, but none would respond. She would be compelled to recall those good days of the past when her ever-loving husband was at her side to help, to protect and care for her. Then she would cry out in distress: “I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.”

The faithful husband takes back his estranged wife vv. 14-23

Now what? Will the wayward wife be received back? Verse 14 begins with the word “therefore”. One could also say “behold”. The point is that an important announcement is about to be made. The loving, forgiving and ever-faithful husband declares: “I will allure her.” (v. 14) My wife will be forgiven. She will be restored to full benefits of my covenant. She will enjoy a wonderful future—new hope. The content of her new hope is pictured in three passages, each one beginning with the words “in that day.” *In that day* (vv. 16-17) Israel will be given a new heart. She will no longer combine and confuse the worship of her Jehovah God with the worship of Baal as she had done in the past.

In that day (vv.18-19) the Lord will make a new beginning for Israel. The harlot will be forgiven; her sins will be forgotten. Her faithful husband will give her bridal gifts in expression of his covenant love “I will be your God and you will be my people.” her husband will declare in joy and gladness: “I will betroth you to me forever—in righteousness, in justice, in love and compassion.” One can only react to such forgiving love as St. John did: “Behold, what manner of

love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God.” *In that day* (vv. 21-23) the Lord will pour out upon his chosen bride his grace and every temporal blessing. In joy he will cry out to those who had been called “not my people,” “You are my people.” And they will respond: “You are my God.”

Hosea’s reconciliation with his unfaithful but penitent wife: chapter 3:1-5

In chapter 3:1-3 we return to Hosea’s symbolic marriage. We note the fact that the story of his marriage, symbolizing the Lord’s relationship to his people Israel is told twice. In chapter 1 Hosea tells the story in the third person. He emphasizes the discipline which is exerted upon the unfaithful wife with the view of winning her back. The parallel paints the beautiful picture of God’s unchanging and enduring love for his people Israel despite their rejection of him. This is apparent when we read chapter 3:1 “Go, show your love to your wife again...love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods.” The supposition of some that the woman spoken of in chapter 3:1 is a different woman, other than Gomer, is not acceptable. The very thought that Hosea divorced Gomer and now married another woman, destroys the symbol of God’s relationship with Israel. No! In obedience to God’s command, Hosea continued to love Gomer, a woman involved with illicit lovers. His love was not a love that simply overlooked her wickedness and adulterous behavior. It was a love which resembled God’s enduring love for Israel. It was a faithful and, at the same time, a disciplinary love. And what this symbolic action expressed was translated into the literal terms of Israel’s history.

The parallel and application to Israel is clearly defined in chapter 3:4-5. The Lord would deprive his people of everything that had contributed toward their spiritual decline. She would be deprived of the legitimate forms of worship which had been so shamefully abused for so long. She would be deprived of her national existence. And the result of this very sharp discipline would be encouraging (verse 5). Israel would “come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days.” The chastisements of the Lord would have its cleansing effect.

II.

God’s three-fold charge against his covenant people: chapters 4 to 13

The following chapters of Hosea constitute a long commentary on the unfaithfulness of Israel. The Prophet denounces the unfaithfulness of his people. He traces its history and threatens a dire consequence unless there is a change of heart. Consider briefly God’s 1st charge against Israel: her lack and rejection of knowledge 4:1 to 6:3.

The wickedness of rejecting the knowledge of God must and will be punished (4:1-10). The corruption of God’s covenant people was nationwide. Hosea lays the responsibility for this moral and spiritual corruption at the doorsteps of the irreverent, negligent and greedy priests. From Mount Sinai to the days of Hosea the history of Israel was one long and sad story of a nation that was rebellious toward God and always inclined toward idolatry. Israel’s lack of saving knowledge of Jehovah is largely due to a corrupt spiritual leadership. Hosea very emphatically places the responsibility for this lack of knowledge on Israel’s priesthood. The fault was not God’s fault. The fault was Israel’s, because she had rejected the true priests of God. Consequently God will deprive Israel of his priesthood (v.6). God had revealed his word, both law and gospel, to his people, and blessed them in every way with his favor. But his truth was rejected. In chapter 4:8-10 Hosea speaks of “the sin of my people.” The word sin denotes the sin-offering. The sin-offerings at Dan and Bethel were totally unacceptable to the Lord. They were not offered at the divinely appointed place nor by the divinely appointed priests (1 Kings

12:26-33). God declares through Hosea: “Like people, like priests.” One was no better than the other. One was as guilty as the other. Both stood condemned by God (vv.11-19). And Judah (v.15) is warned not to follow in the footsteps of Israel. Israel’s apostasy should serve as a warning to Judah.

“Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites” (5:1). In the verses that follow the prophet charges that Israel’s moral and spiritual corruption is evident in every phase of life. The priests addressed are those involved in the illegal and idolatrous priesthood instituted by Jeroboam I. Hosea’s stern warning reaches beyond the priesthood. All functionaries of the kingdom are included. All stand guilty before the holy and righteous God. All are in grave danger. For all lack true knowledge of their covenant God. The fact is, they have rejected the God of their salvation, and have persistently perpetuated idolatry and immorality. These so-called guardians of God’s grace, the priests, who should have been protecting their people from evil, have rather entrapped the people in sin and shame. What is more, they are proud of their religious deeds. They zealously pursue the spirit of prostitution. Hosea declares most earnestly—How can there be any escape from divine justice. The people have rejected the one true God, their covenant God who alone lives to either save them or destroy them.

We take note that in chapter 5:8-15 Hosea appears to address himself to Judah as well as Israel. For Judah is mentioned no less than six times in these verses. The truth is, that both Israel and Judah were guilty of deserting the Lord, their God. Historically, Hosea’s reference is to the Syro-Ephraimite war (735-734) in which Judah fought with Assyria against Israel and Syria. It was a costly and destructive war which was won by no one. You will recall that Israel was stripped of her land and independence, and Judah became a vassal state of Assyria. Both Judah and Israel stood guilty before God, because both sought the cure for their problems through an alliance with their heathen neighbors rather than relying on the helping and protecting hand of their Lord and God. Both nations forsook their God. And like it or not, both will have Jehovah for their judge---- as both would soon learn through bitter experience (v-14). Verse 15 and chapter 6:1-3 remind us of Luke 15 and the story of the prodigal son. The Lord is pictured here also as the ever-loving Father who anxiously waits and watches for his wayward child. God says: “I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt.”

We should not lose sight of the fact also, that Hosea loved his people very much. He was deeply distressed by their conduct. Any sign or indication that Israel might change her ways was a source of encouragement to him. Yes, there were times when Israel found herself in especially difficult circumstances, that she did express a desire to return to the Lord. In chapter 6:1-3 Israel expresses this thought: “Come, let us return to the Lord. He will heat us; he will revive us; he will restore us.” The truth is that Israel never did truly repent. She never acknowledged guilt and sorrow over her sins. There was never an expression of desire to change her sinful ways. That is why the Lord responded to her fickle expression of repentance: “What shall I do with you Ephraim...Judah, your love is like the morning mist that disappears.” God’s chosen people imagined that an outward show of piety would assure them of God’s forgiveness. We think of Jesus’ words concerning the Jews of his day: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouths and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” It’s a most common sin among mortal man; to picture God as a weak, indulgent father who can easily be conned into letting the sinner have his way. However, Israel learned to her sad dismay, that such a glib confession can only rob the sinner of the rich blessings which do in fact accompany true repentance.

Consider then, the Lord's 2nd charge against Israel: your rebellious spirit has been of longstanding ch. 6:4 to 11:11. Israel's insincerity, her hypocrisy has made it impossible for the Lord to show mercy on her. As soon as a crisis or special need has passed, her love is also gone. As we read this rather lengthy section of the book of Hosea, we find that Hosea's description of the Lord's 2nd indictment against Israel reads like a courtroom scene. In chapters 6, 7 and 8 Hosea declares in effect: you have seen exhibit number one. The defendant has proven herself to be totally insincere. Her love is false. Her entire history is one of false piety and rank hypocrisy. Now let me show you exhibit number two. Her government is morally corrupt; her foreign policy is faithless and godless (7:8-16). Like a faithful and concerned Physician, the Lord tried over and over again to heal his pitifully diseased patient. But his every effort through the years only proved how incurably ill his patient was. In their social life dishonesty and violence was the order of the day. On the political front conditions were no better. Kings were assassinated. Treachery and intrigue were found everywhere. Instead of putting their trust in the Lord who had given them the land in which they lived, Israel insisted on casting her lots with heathen neighbors, more powerful than herself, whoever it might be. And as Israel bounced from one politically and socially powerful nation to another through her varied alliances, she lost both her national honor and identity. Who could possibly recognize Israel as the chosen people of Jehovah, as she aligned herself with one heathen nation after another. And while doing so she persistently integrated the cultures and religious beliefs of these heathen nations into her own culture, such as it was. Sadly, all this time poor Israel was oblivious to the tragic course she had set for herself. So total and complete was her open disavowal of Jehovah and his worship, so blatant was the defiance she demonstrated toward her covenant God, that even the heathen nations were dismayed by her religious conduct and despised her for her hypocrisy (cf. verse 16).

In chapter 8 Hosea tells us: now let us look at exhibit number three. "The people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law." These words of the Lord form the basis of his indictment and state the reason for his impending judgment upon Israel. The one word *false* could very well summarize this entire chapter. Israel has withdrawn from its covenant with the Lord. The nation has falsified its very life and being. Israel is living a lie. Her gods are false; her worship is false; her confession is false; her knowledge of God is false; her kings are false for they are not chosen by the will of God; her altars on which she offers sacrifices are false for they are "altars for sinning" (v.11); every phase of her worship is false (v. 12). Consequently her confidence is also false. For Israel has put her trust in the political powers of nations and in fortified cities (v.14). And tragically, her hopes for the eternal future are false hopes. The adulterous harlot is ripe for the harvest. The judgment of the holy and righteous God, her covenant Lord, is imminent.

God's sobering message to Israel as we find it recorded in chapter 9:1-17 can be summarized in these words: "Do not rejoice, O Israel! For you have played the harlot against your God." When Hosea spoke these words of the Lord, Israel was in all probability celebrating a harvest festival in heathen style. The people were rejoicing over their prosperity. They were really enjoying the good land in which they lived. But they had little cause to rejoice. For Israel would not remain in this land of the Lord much longer. Soon they will be expelled from the land of promise; the land where they perpetrated their shameless harlotry. The time of judgment is very near. "They will be wanderers among the nations." (v. 17) The verdict is clearly stated. It is harsh, it is severe, it is final.

Chapter 10:1-15—To continue the picture of a courtroom scene, the prosecution has nearly completed its testimony against the defendant. Israel's heart is false and she must bear her guilt. Like a vine planted by the Lord in a good land (vv.1-10) Israel has borne much fruit—bitter fruit indeed. The vine must be removed. The entire history of Israel, since the days of Gibeah in ancient times, is a history of rebellion, harlotry and ingratitude toward a God who has blessed this nation so richly. Israel's disgusting ingratitude is described by way of an analogy, verses 10-15. She is compared to a threshing heifer which was permitted to eat her fill while working on the threshing wheel. In a similar way Israel was blessed with a good and was permitted to eat her fill. Oh yes, Israel delighted in the good gifts. She enjoyed the blessings of being God's covenant people. But like an irrational beast she failed to acknowledge God as the Giver of all the good things she possessed and enjoyed. When the prophets of God called upon Israel to sow righteousness and seek the Lord (v. 12) she rather planted wickedness, cultivated lies and deception, and then ate the fruits of iniquity and spiritual harlotry. Now the harvest time has arrived. Israel will reap her just reward for her persistent ingratitude to God. She will face the horrors of war, captivity, exile, dispersion and No total annihilation as a nation.

In chapter 11:1-11 the prophet Hosea takes us back to the beginning of Israel's history. He testifies to the fact that from the very start, Israel's attitude toward her covenant was one of rebellion and defiance. In previous chapters we have already noted how the inspired writer traced that history back to those turbulent days of the judges (the reference to Gibeah); then to the time of Israel's entry into the promised land (Joshua 3) and to the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. In the next chapter, ch.12, he will trace Israel's history yet once more. And this time he will go all the way back to the patriarch Jacob from whom Israel received her name. Hosea tells us, here is a nation whose very existence was promised by God, given to her by God and continually blessed by God because of his covenant promise. For God's love for Israel was pure, unselfish and enduring. Hosea laments bitterly: and here is a nation which has been ungrateful and unfaithful to God from its very beginning. Hosea describes the Israelites as a nation who from generation to generation has rebelled against her God, revolted against his covenant and chose to walk the way of spiritual harlotry. And with sadness he acknowledges that the Jews of his own day were "filling up the measure of the sins of your fathers." What a tragic story Hosea unfolds before our eyes. What a sober warning he issues for nations today. What makes the tragedy of ingratitude and faithlessness even more painful is the fact that Israel's revolt against her covenant God was a rebellion against one who loved her so dearly. What a sad tragedy it is to turn a deaf ear to a loving Father who has been so patient and merciful; who was so eager to take them up into his everlasting arms of love. But the healer of all diseases has been thoroughly rejected. Israel's day of grace will soon be past.

Thanks be to God! The Lord's love for sinners shall endure. His covenant promise has not been removed. True spiritual Israel will not be forsaken. The time will come, Hosea declares, when Jehobah's covenant promise will be fulfilled. The God of love will call his son out of Egypt and will restore him to the "land of Israel." The reference is to Matthew 2:21. The covenant God will roar like a lion. His Word, law and gospel, will be preached and taught. And when he roars (v. 10), his true spiritual children will hear him and will come trembling from the west. As we all know, that roar was ultimately heard at Calvary, where from the cross "It is finished" our Lord Jesus Christ declared our redemption accomplished. Since then the history of his N.T. Church, true spiritual Israel, has continued to tell the story of God's people coming home to a merciful and loving Father in heaven.

We will now consider the Lord's 3rd and final charge against Israel. Israel has been utterly faithless, chapters 12:1 to 13:16. Hosea declares in chapter 14:1-3 that the road back to repentance is often a difficult one. For there are some basic characteristics to repentance which are necessary for true repentance. In chapters 12 and 13 Hosea states the reasons why Israel will not find the way back. First, the entire life of Israel has been a lie. Her religious life was drowned in deceit. Many Jews worshiped the Lord in theory, but in reality were worshippers of Baal. Israel's political life, as we have already described it, was steeped in falsehood and lies. In her social life Israel was corrupt and dishonest. As we have also noted, violence was a way of life for all of Israel. Secondly, idolatry was the most formidable roadblock standing in the way that would lead to repentance. Hosea charged: "They make idols...from their silver, and kiss the calf idol. Ephraim has bitterly provoked God to anger." His bitter complaint is that from the land of Egypt to his own time, Baal, molten calves and idols were the objects of devotion and the focus point of their loyalty. The Lord, their covenant God was forgotten. Thirdly, because Israel was now enjoying a very high level of prosperity, she has become proud, arrogant and self-reliant. She imagined that her wealth gave her the legitimate right to autonomy. She dared to argue that her wealth testified to the correctness of her religious beliefs and her entire life-style. Hosea's charge against his people was that Israel deliberately forgot the Lord who fed them (13:6). However, let Israel not be deceived, Hosea pleads. Neither her idols nor her kings will be able to save her nation which is doomed to destruction.(vv.7-9). The Lord is their only helper. He always has been.

Hosea's final appeal to the nation of Israel, Ch. 14:1-9

In this chapter Hosea makes one final, yet futile, appeal to the people and nation he loved so sincerely. "Turn, O Israel, to the Lord, your God." He was so eager that the people listen to him and obey him that Hosea put words of repentance into the mouths of his people. "Take away completely our guilt and receive us graciously. For in Thee the fatherless finds compassion." (vv.2-3) Return to the Lord, Hosea pleads. For there is a marvelous promise of life and salvation waiting for true spiritual Israel (vv.4-9). With a father's love the Lord will embrace his penitent children. Like a physician he will heal them of all their diseases. He will cure them of the cancer of harlotry. He will pour out upon his true children his very choicest blessings.

But Israel did not hear the voice of God's faithful prophet, Hosea. The people refused to learn from the example Hosea tried to show them from his own experience in life. Defiantly Israel closed the door to the one and only way that leads to rebirth and a new life—the way of repentance. Israel's response to Hosea and his urgent pleas to repentance is reminiscent of the Jews' response to Jesus in his day. Our Lord summarized it all in these well-known, sad words spoken on the Mt. of Olives: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." (Matt. 23:37)

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