

Thinking About God - 4

God Revealed in Hosea

Hosea is the first of the ‘minor prophets’, so called simply because their books are shorter than the ‘major prophets’.

It is very different from other written prophecies in the Bible. It is intensely personal, telling us in the first three chapters much about the life of Hosea and his family. The remaining eleven chapters show how Hosea’s feelings for his family were a reflection of God’s feelings for His people, the nation of Israel. When Israel went astray, He felt it acutely and this book gives us a real insight into God’s response.

As the events unfold, we see that Hosea’s family were an enacted picture of Israel’s future.

The prophecy was written in about 700 BC. By this time the nation of Israel had been split into two parts, Judah in the south, and Israel in the north. Hosea’s work was directed at the northern kingdom, which was ruled by a succession of godless kings. This part of the nation was in terminal decline, only 20 years from its final invasion and defeat by Assyria.

Named to Show God’s Distress

As the book begins, God tells Hosea to marry a woman who had been a prostitute, and to have children by her. This must have been a terribly distasteful thing for a godly man like Hosea, though he obviously loved her as time went on. He married Gomer, described as the daughter of Diblaim, and had a son by her. He was called Jezreel, which means “God sows” or “God scatters”. There was a reason for this.

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. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel” (Hosea 1:4-5).

Later Gomer had a daughter. The account does not suggest this time that Hosea is the father. This daughter is called Lo-Ruhamah, meaning “She has not received mercy” or “Not beloved”. Again the reason is given:

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” (1:6).



Hosea's family builds up as a picture of God's thoughts towards Israel. Having weaned Lo-Ruhamah (when she was possibly as old as 2 or 3) Gomer had another son, called Lo-Ammi, meaning "Not my people":

And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God" (1:9).

This dramatically portrays God's disappointment and anger towards His people.

Desire for Reconciliation

However, the Lord reminds Israel of His earlier promises in Genesis 22:

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" (1:10).

This was still God's purpose, so Hosea talks of the way God would restore them. God would to punish His people to bring them to their senses, but this was a prelude to restoration. So Hosea's second chapter opens with two of the children being renamed.

Say to your brothers, "You are my people", and to your sisters, "You have received mercy" (2:1).

So Lo-Ruhamah became Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi became Ammi. Hosea was then to do all he could to prevent his wife from continuing to misbehave:

Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against

her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now" (2:6-7).



God would take His people out of their land in order to woo the nation back to him once more.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her... And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD (2:14, 19-20).

Making His Feelings Clear

Reading these earlier chapters of Hosea it becomes obvious that this is not just a record of one family, but it is about the Lord God and His family, the people of Israel. The later chapters echo this. God lays out the charge:

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the

land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed (4:1-2).

God had brought Israel out of Egypt and through Moses had given them the Law, to regulate their conduct and properly order their personal and national lives. But they had often ignored it and they had gone their own way. So there was a call for Israel to return to God.

Come, let us return to the LORD; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him (6:1-2).

There are hints here of the resurrection of Jesus on the third day, as God muses on the waywardness of His people.

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away (6:4).

As the sun rises so the dew evaporates, and Israel's love for God had been just as temporary.



Divine Gentleness

Later in the prophecy Hosea spells out God's feelings for Israel even more clearly. *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (11:1).*

These words applied firstly to Israel coming out of Egypt. The expression also has an application to the early life of the Lord Jesus, when Joseph and Mary took him there to escape Herod, and subsequently returned to Israel.

The tender language of Hosea's prophecy helps us to see that the concept of God in the Old Testament as only a fierce God of retribution is an incomplete picture. He is also a God of affectionate compassion, with great care for the needs of His people. He feels distress when they are unfaithful to Him, is sad when they suffer and really desires to be close to them.

Hosea concludes his prophecy like this:

Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity... Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (14:1, 9).

This appeal from the Lord God is still active today; He wants us all to know Him and His ways, to walk with Him and to be close to Him.

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Bible Quotations from the English Standard Version