

## The Message of Hosea

During the forty year reign of Jeroboam II, the prophet Hosea was called by God to come to the forefront of the nation's collective conscience and bring a message from Him. The message brought by Hosea would be one with which he was intimately familiar: as Israel had played the harlot toward God, Hosea was to take to himself a wife of harlotry so that he might understand more fully the actions of Israel (Hosea 1:2).

By the time Hosea appeared on the scene, the degeneracy of Israel, the Northern kingdom, was almost complete. Following the death of Jeroboam II, there would be only six more kings of Israel before the Assyrians would carry the nation captive (2 Kings 17:20-24). Collectively, these last six kings (Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea) would reign less than 30 years, whereas the reign of Jeroboam II encompassed some 40 years (Walton 31). If we were to place the time of Hosea's prophecy at the most unlikely time of Jeroboam II's ascension to the throne, Hosea's prophecy about the overthrowing of the nation would be just about 60 years in the future. Truly, the message of Hosea was a last-gasp effort from the Husband of Israel to turn His wandering wife back to Himself.

The naming of Hosea's children (chapter 1) also served as a commentary upon the nation of Israel. The name Jezreel ("God will scatter") indicated the nation was going to be judged and ended. One particular happening was referred to in the naming of this child—the bloodshed of Jezreel. Ahab and Jezebel, formerly king and queen of Israel, had Naboth ruthlessly murdered in the city of Jezreel so that they could obtain his vineyard. Such perversion of justice and righteousness was typical for the Northern kingdom (cf. Amos 3:9-10) and aroused the indignation of God, leading to the destruction of the nation. The name of the second child, Lo-Ruhamah ("no mercy"), was a testament to the exhaustion of God's patience. Time and again God had sent prophets to Israel, only to have the nation reject the message from God (Amos 2:11-12). Because of this rejection, God's mercy was expended at the nation would now be taken away (Hosea 1:6; Amos 4:12). The name of the final child, Lo-Ammi ("not my people"), revealed the extent to which Israel had removed herself from God. A nation which started out with such hope (Exodus 19:5-6), had now been removed from God (Isaiah 59:1-2).

God's charges and actions are never haphazard. Whenever He acts, that action is born from a just cause. What had occurred within the borders of the nation to lead them to the brink of captivity? Hosea answers this question, as well.

Chapters 4-13 in Hosea's book contain indictment after indictment against the nation. God was not going to inconsistently send judgment upon the nation; if judgment was to come, it would come for violations of His law. Fleeting faithfulness (Hosea 6:4), idolatry (Hosea 8:4-6), and deceitful speech (Hosea 10:4) were just a few of the many sins which found themselves planted firmly in the nation of Israel. However, I would like to submit to your consideration that the root problem in Israel was the very first issue raised by Hosea. As the indictments begin, Israel's fundamental flaw is immediately addressed- "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land... My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:1,6).

The lack of truth in the land was a snare. Repeatedly in the OT, God is represented variously as being the God of truth (Psalm 31:5) and the God possessing truth (Exodus 34:6). I take Hosea's indictment concerning the lack of truth in the nation to refer to the lack of a relationship between God and the nation. Repeatedly, Hosea will censure the Northern kingdom for their idolatry. One specific reference, Hosea 8:4-6, mentions the calf of Samaria (Hosea here uses the capital of the kingdom to refer to the kingdom at large). At the beginning of the existence of the Northern kingdom, Jeroboam I installed golden calves at the northern and southern extremities of the nation (2 Kings 12:28,29) in an effort to prevent his subjects from journeying to Jerusalem for proper worship. From the beginning of the nation until its bitter end, the Northern kingdom was continually beset by idolatry. There could be no truth in the land when the fountain of truth, God, was rejected.

The North was not going captive simply because she could not treat the Lord correctly, although that certainly would be reason enough. In addition to mistreating the Lord, the nation lacked mercy—she mistreated her fellow man. Hosea 4:2-3 provide details upon the lack of mercy within the land. Murder, theft, and illicit sexual activity were pervasive throughout the land. Couple Hosea's words in chapter 4 with the words of Amos (Amos 2:6-7), and we get a picture of a nation which abused and took advantage of its most vulnerable inhabitants. While the Lord was greatly concerned with the proper mode of worship (Hosea 13:1-3), we must never forget that He was (and still is) just as concerned with a proper treatment of humanity "made in the similitude of God" (James 3:9). The lack of mercy in the land was just as much an affront to the Holy God as a lack of truth.

The lack of mercy and the lack of truth, I am firmly convinced, sprang from a common cause—a lack of knowledge of God. When men and women turn their

hearts and minds away from God, they have turned themselves away from the repository of all things good and beneficial. When the nation of Israel decided to turn herself away from the hearing of the law of God, then what was left for the nation except to falter and eventually be overrun? And note, the lack of knowledge was not because God failed to tend to them; the lack of knowledge was because the nation had willingly “rejected knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). When the knowledge of God, the fountain of truth and storehouse of mercy, is openly and cognitively rejected, what is left for a people to do except devolve to carnality and futility?

There is one last point we need to recognize in studying the message of God through Hosea. In spite of the 200 years of wickedness within the Northern kingdom, God’s message through Hosea was not simply accusation after accusation. God ended His message through Hosea as He ends every message to lost humanity- come back to Me. Hosea 14 stands as a beacon of hope to a nation lost in the ocean of sin and self-deception. Though Israel had scorned and mistreated her God, He still sought her return (Hosea 14:1). God promised the nation to heal them and love if they would turn back to Him (Hosea 14:4). That message of love and healing is a message which still resonates today through the Son of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Acts 10:43).