

# Hosea

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## Section 1 of: **The Minor Prophets**

(Ed. W. Kelly, Allan, 1870.)

Hosea prophesied in the prospect of the breaking up of the kingdom of the ten tribes, and near the end of the house of Jehu. He is full of the thought of the ruin that was at hand; but he anticipates scenes of restoration and glory beyond it. As I may express it, the death and resurrection of Israel is contemplated by him, and announced under different figures, in a very abrupt and vivid style.

At the opening of the book, the prophet is directed by the Lord to take to him a wife and children. And he might say of them, as Isaiah did of his two sons, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders." (Hosea 1)

The first child is "Jezreel" — the sign of the doom, both of the house of Jehu, and of the house of Israel. The second child is "Lo-ruhamah" — the sign that God would withdraw His mercy from the house of Israel. The third is "Lo-ammi" — the sign that He would disclaim Israel, so that they should be no more His people. But all this is, followed by a promise of final re-gathering, called "the day of Jezreel," when the very same nation, now cast off, should be restored. The strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire, pass by to do their appointed service; but the still, small voice closes the history.

Hosea 2 then gives us a more expanded view of this guilt and misery of Israel, and of their final blessedness. The beautiful description of the covenant made by the Lord for Israel, as between them and the beasts of the earth, after He has taken them into covenant with Himself, and the sight we get of the Lord at one end of a magnificent system of blessing and Israel at the other, after wilderness. days, are exquisite indeed. "The valley of Achor" is also declared to be "a door of hope!" — that is, judgment ending in victory or glory, tribulation in joy. (Joshua 7) All these things bespeak the death and resurrection of the nation.

Then, in Hosea 3, the prophet is directed to take a second wife. These marriages are emblematic actions, reminding us of many things in Ezekiel, of Jeremiah going to the Euphrates to hide his girdle there, and of Agabus in the Acts of the Apostles, taking Paul's girdle and binding his own hands with it. All these were actions emblematically or typically fitted to give intimation of coming events.

The instruction of the Prophet's first marriage is about the casting off of Israel as a nation, and their return to blessedness in the last days. The instruction conveyed to us by his second marriage is about the political and religious history of the people; and this may well strike us as marvellous; for with our eyes we see this anticipation of the prophet verified and exhibited to the very life. They are, at this moment, without a king, without a sacrifice, without teraphim. They have no political standing, and they are neither a sanctified nor an idolatrous people. They are not in the knowledge and worship of God, nor in the service of idols, as their fathers were. Our own eyes do indeed see all this. But they are to revive politically and religiously. As the prophet goes on to tell us: "They shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." Surely this is again their present death and coming resurrection.

Then, after these first three chapters, we get, in the great body of the prophecy, details of the sins which had provoked this judgment. "There is a sin unto death," as we read in St. John. Israel, as a

nation, I may say, committed it. All the prophets, I may also say, tell us this. "This iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die," says Isaiah to them. But Ezekiel's valley of dry bones is the leading and the best-known scripture on this mystery. And the Divine Prophet Himself talks to the Jews of His day of the Lord God miserably destroying them as the wicked husbandmen; and says also to them, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." And surely it is a death-stricken land and people we see in them and their country at this moment. Surely it all tells us, "There is a sin unto death." They are as a nation in Ezekiel's valley, or in Hosea's graveyard.

But this death shall be triumphed over. The nation of the Jews shall have a resurrection, as the bodies of the saints shall have a resurrection. And then, as the saints in their glories shall fill and adorn the heavens, so Israel shall blossom, and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. "What shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?"

In spirit, as well as in circumstances, there shall be revival, moral as well as national recovery, conversion as well as restoration. Hosea's last chapter lets us see this, and all the prophets. Micah, whose prophecy we may consider in another place, gives us this subject in a very vivid way, delineating the exercises of the soul very strikingly in his last two chapters.

Very various and broken are the notices which our prophet gives us of those iniquities which were leading the people to their graves, or to the judgment of death.

The land was to mourn — the people were to languish. The Lord would be to Ephraim as a moth, to the house of Judah as a worm; as the fowls of the heaven He would bring them down. They should be swallowed up; Memphis was to bury them; their children should be brought forth to the murderer; they should use the words prepared for the day of utter excision, "mountains cover us, hills fall on us."

Such words are used, such descriptions are given of them. But they were to revive, and of this we get abrupt witness also. The Lord was God and not man, and His heart would turn within Him — His repentings should be kindled; there should be no full and final destruction. Resurrection, as in the third day (a glance at the resurrection of the Lord of Israel Himself) is spoken of. The coming out from Egypt also, as a renewal of their history, as though they were beginning afresh, under the hand and grace of God, and Jacob's history, are likewise referred to, with the same intent. Birth from the womb, and resurrection from the grave, are also called forth to set forth, as in figures, the same story of this people. And, again, the blighting force of the east wind, and then afterwards the bloom and beauty of spring, tell us of the doom and the revival of the nation.

Such passages throughout the book give it its character. I read it as that which, under the Spirit of God, keeps the judgment and redemption, the death and resurrection, of Israel as a nation, constantly in view. The language of resurrection itself is so employed in Hosea 13, that the apostle can use it, when he is making literal resurrection his subject, in 1 Cor. 15. Here, however, it is the recovery of the nation. And standing, as Hosea was, in the full prospect of the Assyrian captivity, and in the near approach of the doom of the house of Jehu, it was natural and easy, so to speak, that the Spirit should lead him to see and speak of the death-stricken state of Israel as just about to begin.\*

\*In Hosea 13: 14 we get the thought of the apostle in Rom. 11: 29 — that divine mercy shall gather Israel at the end, because *God's gifts and calling are without repentance*.

Principally, again I say, we have a detail of those iniquities which were making such a process, judgment unto death, necessary. But I welcome and fully admit the instructions of another, that, in a passing way, we get a large view of truth in this book of Hosea.

In addition to the present casting-off of the Jews, and their future restoration, which, as we see,

constitutes the great subject, we get the grafting of the Gentile on the Jewish root, intimated in Hosea 1: 10, used to that end by the apostle in Rom. 9: 26. So the idea, the scriptural idea, of a remnant in Israel is conveyed in the "Ammi" and "Ruhamah" of Hosea 2: 1, and thus we do get notices of other points of truth beyond the leading ones. And, further still, as he has said again upon this prophecy, "nothing can be finer than the intermingling of the moral necessity for judgment, the just indignation of God at such sin, pleadings to induce Israel to forsake their evil way and seek the Lord, God's recurrence to the eternal counsels of His own grace, and, at the same time, the touching remembrance of former relationship with His beloved people; there is nothing more affecting than this mixture on God's part of reproaches, of loving-kindness, of appeal, of reference to happier moments, that touching mixture of affection and of judgment, which we find again and again in this prophet."\*

\*Hosea 6: 7 should be translated, we learn, "but they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." This tells us that Adam and the Jew were alike under law, and, therefore, became transgressors. This is as the teaching of Rom. 5.

In this way, we get variety of matter in Hosea, while, again I say, the death and resurrection of the nation of Israel constitutes the great theme.

The closing verse draws the moral. It tells us where wisdom, true and divine wisdom, wisdom in which the soul is concerned, and concerned for eternity, is to be found. And surely it is in this mystery of death and resurrection, judgment and redemption, sin and salvation, the mystery, as I may say, of Adam and of Christ, that the grand moral of the story of this ruined world of ours lies.

All that is to be brought back to God, all that is to stand in Christ, or under Christ, is to be in resurrection-character, in redemption from the judgment of death; and the Jew as well as everything else, the nation of Israel in the latter day, as Hosea, and the prophet and the apostle of the Gentiles himself teach us.

We might formally close with this reflection on the closing verse of our prophet, but I must add another word.

*Redemption leads to relationship.* This is God's way. He only satisfies His own nature by this. "God is love." Whom He redeems, He adopts. He puts His ransomed ones into relationship to Himself. It was thus among the patriarchs. Isaac followed Abraham. It was thus in Israel. God speaks to Israel and of Israel, as betrothed and adopted. I might refer to Isa. 54, Jer. 3, Ezek. 16, Zeph. 3, and a multitude of other scriptures, in proof of this. It is thus with us. We read this largely in the New Testament. Redemption from the *curse* of the law is followed by redemption from the *bondage* of it. In other words, the blessing of justification is waited on or followed by the Spirit of adoption. (Gal. 3, 4)

And among the scriptures which show us that the nation of Israel is to be in relationship as well as in redemption, Hosea may be very principally cited. For here, in the second chapter, the Lord, anticipating His people in the coming days of the kingdom, says to them by His prophet, "And it shall be at that day, that thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baali." Wonderful and precious! Restored and quickened Israel shall have communion with their Lord in the grace and freedom of conscious relationship of the dearest, nearest character! For thus again speaks the Lord by Jeremiah, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will, surely have mercy upon him." (Jer. 31: 20)

It is enough. Redemption leads to relationship, and so to glory; and in coming days, the heavens and the earth shall witness it, in its various, and excellent, and wondrous exhibition.