
The Book of Hosea

Part 1 by: Ronald L. Dart

Sometimes I wonder how much people actually read of the Old Testament. Time was, it was required to be considered educated. Some of the greatest leaders in the history of our nation were well versed in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and the King James Version at that.

I grew up with the old King James and it's a comfortable old friend to me. But it's kind of like a foreign language. I can read it, but I don't speak it very well, so I translate it in my head as I go. When I read aloud, what you will hear, is well, what I call the Dart Revised Version.

I can easily understand why young people these days don't want to struggle with the King James, fortunately they don't have to. There are some fine modern translations and they are the greatest help in the Old Testament.

Sometime ago, I happened to pick up the Living Bible and I read a passage in Jeremiah, I was really stunned, not only at the clarity and the power of the version, but how pointed it was to the situation I was living in. By the way the Living Bible is not really a translation, it is a paraphrase, and we call it a version.

So, if you're not of the King James generation, don't despair, the New International Version is becoming the dominate accepted version of our day and the Living Bible is still a great read. Only when you get ready to start some serious study is when you need to start giving attention to other versions and making comparisons between them.

What is the Purpose of Prophets?

The Old Testament prophets pose a singular problem for the reader. This is because they are prophets, not seers like Nostradamus. They aren't there to tell you when things are going to happen off in the future and in what order or what the signs are, so you will know what they're going to be. That's what Jesus' disciples asked Him for when He told them that "Jerusalem was going to be torn down and the Temple destroyed," and they asked him, "What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

Well that's not really what prophets are all about, they are there to tell you "where you are going and what's going to happen when you get there and what you can do to change the outcome." I get the feeling when I read some screeds, lengthy discourses, on prophecy that the writer thinks the prophets are fortune tellers. It never seems to occur to them to ask the question, "Why would

God bother to tell any of us what the future holds?" It isn't really necessarily a good thing to know what's in the future, a lot of the time. Now if God were to tell me the stock market was going to crash next Tuesday, and I owned a bunch of stock that would be news I could use, but it doesn't do that.

So, what is the purpose of sending a prophet? What is the purpose of sending a prophet to tell us; "Your nation is going to the dogs?" The answer is simplicity itself. God reveals the future to us so we can change it. You may have to sit and think about that for a while because it flies in the face of what you may think you know about God. God is not a time traveler who looks into the future, sees what is there and comes back and tells us. He doesn't need to. He can see where we're going far clearer than we can see where we're going. He can see the end that it's going to take us to and He doesn't have to travel in time to do it. It's right there in our lives right now.

The Only Time That Exists Is Now

You can't travel in time not even on a star ship because the future does not exist, neither does the past. The only time that exists is now. And time is a one-way street, never mind all the science fiction you read or watch on television, time is a one-way street. I can't go back and visit my father in time because he is not there any longer. He is in a grave in Houston Texas.

What exists in the now is a direction or a flight path, a course, that if we continue to follow, it may end in disaster. God can look at this and can see very clearly the end result of it all, and because He can make things happen, He can even name the man who will adversely affect our future.

So, what would you do if you were God and if you saw someone you cared about going down a road you know is a dead end? Would you tell them? Of course, you would and that is precisely what was happening when God spoke to the prophets.

Now we come to another question of some importance. Up until Amos, who was the first of the writing prophets, prophets just simply spoke to people. They either spoke to the king in person or they went down to the courthouse and began to speak there. They called it in the Bible, the gate. The gate was very much like the courthouse in one of our small towns today.

The Gate

The courthouse square was a gathering place, when I was growing up, and on Saturdays, when all the farmers in Boon County, Arkansas came to town. There was no television news and not very many of those farmers even had electricity and thus they didn't have a radio either. I remember when my granddad got his first radio. It was way down stream and the reason why it took him so long to get around to it was, the radio was battery powered. So finally, he was able to get himself a windmill that would charge his battery, and he had a car style battery on the floor hooked up to a battery powered radio. Until that time, he had no news from day to day. Unless some of the neighbors came by and said something about what they had learned when they went to town.

But every Saturday, he loaded up his produce and went into town and began to sell it and everybody went by the courthouse square to find out what was going on in the world and in our town and in our community. You know looking back it seems like another world to our generation. The courthouse, the courthouse steps, the courthouse square, this was where they caught up on the news.

Now if you can imagine a society being even more dependent on word of mouth than they were, and where the city gate was the courthouse, then you can understand how important the prophet was when he stood up to speak. Now if his message was purely for that time and place, that is all he had to do. All he had to do was to go down to the gate, stand up, preach his sermon, and everybody would stand there and listen. People would then tell other people what the prophet had to say, and news would spread just like it did for my granddad. If his message was purely for that time and place, why bother writing it down?

A Prophet's Message Was Written Down To Preserve It For The Future

Now I have a clue from the apostle Paul, in his writings to the Corinthian. He is talking about all the things that happened to Israel of old and he says in 1st Corinthian 10 Verse 11, if you want to look it up, "These things happened to them as examples: and they were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."

You know it's almost as though God became weary of sending a prophet over and over again with the same old message. He might as well xerox the message and send that instead. Seriously though, I believe in the divine inspiration of these prophets. For me that means; I think God directed them to write down what they had seen and heard to preserve it for future generations upon whom the end of the ages would come.

He would not need to send prophet after prophet, so we will write it down because humanity will make the same mistakes, and repeat the same history, over and over again. And this underlines one fundamental of reading the prophets; you can't understand them fully unless you understand the history of the time.

So, before you sit down to read the prophets, you need to read the books of Samuel and Kings. To make that easy for you we have created an album of past radio programs that goes verse by verse through 1st and 2nd Samuel and 1st and 2nd Kings and we lay out this history for you, so you can fit the prophets, the minor prophets, major prophets into that history.

Jeroboam and the House of Israel

Amos was a Judean prophet and was from Tekoa, a town about eight miles south of Jerusalem. Now as it happens, the very first prophet ever sent to the house of Israel, that is, the northern 10 tribes that had been given to Jeroboam, was also from Judea. It was not a time apparently for a prophet to speak up if he had to live in the north, it would have been worth his life. The story is told in some detail through the books of Kings.

Jeroboam was given the ten northern tribes of Israel because God was angry with Solomon for the way which he had allowed his pagan wives to introduce idolatry into the worship in Jerusalem. So, God divided the kingdom and from this time forward, there were two societies, one called the 'House of Israel' and the other was called the 'House of Judah.'

Jeroboam was handed a gift on a platter of the 'House of Israel,' all the tribes except Judah, Levi and Benjamin. Jeroboam though, once he got established up there, began to worry. You've probably heard the old statement, 'never take council of your fears.' Well, Jeroboam did, and his fear was unfounded. God had given him the kingdom, and God would have sustained him in that kingdom. When the House of Judah decided they were going to make war against him and come charging up there to, just like in our civil war to reunify the nation, God sent a prophet to the king of Judah and said, "Don't do it, this is from me" (1 Kings 12:24). Something very unusual happened, the king of Judah turned around and went home. So, Jeroboam's fear was totally unfounded, but what he did was, he broke with the Temple and with worship there, leaving the door open for leaving God altogether.

Jeroboam established two centers of worship, one in Dan and one in Bethel (1 Kings 12:33). And he told the Israelites, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem every year to worship, you can go to Dan or you can go to Bethel." Not only that, he also moved the festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, from its normal position on the 15th day of the 7th month to the 15th day of the 8th month. The whole thing was designed to get the House of Israel broken loose from the Temple, the worship there, and the Holy Days that were observed there, and as a result of that, it made possible for worship to be decentralized.

Jeroboam actually made priests, the scriptures tells us, of the lowest of the people and even presumed the office of a priest himself at the altar in Bethel. He's down there in Bethel making an offering and this is when the first prophet to that house shows up from Judea. God told him to go up there and to speak to Jeroboam and condemn that altar and pronounce against it, in which he did (1 Kings 13). As he was speaking against the altar, Jeroboam stuck his hand out and said; "Take that man" and his hand froze completely solid and he couldn't pull it back to himself again. He couldn't move, and he begged for forgiveness. The altar by the way was split in two and the ashes poured out of it while all of this was going on. And the priest, asked God on his behalf, and He gave him his arm back. Jeroboam said; "Stay with us tonight and come home with me." The prophet said; "I wouldn't go home with you if you offered me half of your kingdom. He that sent me up here to tell you this, said; "Don't spend the night there, don't eat or sleep, do nothing except get in there give your message and go back and don't even go home by way you came.""

Boy does that ever say volumes about the circumstances in the House of Israel already at this early date.

Well, Jeroboam made the break. Again, and again in the book of Kings, we read the formula concerning his successors, quote: "He departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin and caused all Israel to sin." How did he do that? By making the break from the Temple and the Feasts of God. The core element of all of this is the change in the festivals. In fact, what he did was to cut Israel off from the way back to God.

Kings of the House of Judah and the House of Israel

I remember once I was reading an early edition of Halley's Bible Handbook, which by the way, is an excellent handbook for people who are, beginning readers of the Bible and are not trying to go too deep, but who want to understand the background of what they're reading. Halley's Handbook had a listing of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah and what kind of kings they were.

You would read down the list of the kings of Judah and it would say, "bad, bad, good, bad, better" and you'd have this layout. When it comes to the kings of Israel, all you get are "bad, bad, worse, the worse, bad." In fact, in order for a reform of any kind to take place in the northern kingdom it just moved away from the worse to bad. Why? How come it was that way? Because there were revivals in Judah, which never happened in the House of Israel.

Well the reason is simple, the Holy Days of God served to draw the people back to God and back to one another, which is precisely what Jeroboam was worried about. You see when Jeroboam closed that door, the bridge back was burned with terrible consequences for the people, there was never really a way back to God.

The House of Judah and the Book of the Law

In Judea, on one occasion for example, they were doing repairs in the Temple and they found the 'Book of the Law' in the Temple and they brought it to the king (2 Kings 22-23). The king saw they were supposed to be keeping the Passover, so he rent his garments and commanded the people to fast and turned all this around, and had a major revival in Judah, and it focused on the Passover.

They had moved completely away from all that in the House of Israel.

At long last, another Jeroboam became king in northern Israel. We call him Jeroboam the 2nd. Many years had passed and in his reign the prophet Amos appears on the scene along about BC 765. Some say that Amos was there for about 15 years and I expect his departure was greeted with considerable relief in some quarters. He was replaced by a home-grown prophet; his name was Hosea. Someone said of Amos and Hosea, "Both prophets preached judgment, Amos with a lion's roar and Hosea with a broken heart."

Prophets Are Real People

You know this is one of the things that fascinates me about the prophets, they are real people with real feelings and they are all different, every one of them is unique. And unless you sit down and read them with this in mind, you may lose this entirely. If you sit down to read them, watch for this. They are as real as you are, if you cut them, they bleed. If they are wounded in spirit, they weep, and they cared deeply about what they were doing.

The Beginning Of The Prophecy Of Hosea

Hosea dates himself with some precision right in the first verse. He serves late in the reign of Jeroboam the 2nd, the king of the House of Israel, which is, of course, just after Amos, and this falls in parallel with four kings of Judah. Jeroboam had a very long reign. In fact, this places Hosea right in parallel with Isaiah, who was at the same time prophesying in the House of Judah.

Here is how Hosea begins his prophecy. {2} "The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea, and the LORD said to Hosea, "Go take you a wife of whoredoms and the children of whoredoms, for the land has committed a great whoredom in departing from the LORD."

Frankly no one really seems to know for sure how to take this; I take it as a very good reason not to aspire to be a prophet.

All too often the prophets had to endure the pain of acting out their prophecy, they actually had to do things that were signs to the people. The things they were called upon to do, were more often than not, quite painful.

Now notice that the great whoredom that is spoken of here is that they departed from Yehovah. This is the end result of what Jeroboam did in cutting the people off from Temple worship. He did not have to do that. God would have been with him and He would have preserved his kingdom, but what he did was to deliberately cut the ties to the worship of Yehovah in Jerusalem.

Some sources say that Hosea took a cult prostitute to be his wife, but the Hebrew rather seems to say; "Take to yourself an adulterous wife," and this is suggestive of a woman who may have been put away by a previous husband for adultery. Deuteronomy Chapter 24 has an interesting discussion which permits this. The New International Version goes on to render this; "Do this because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD." They didn't just depart from God, they were joined to another god, to Baal.

Now bear in mind as you read through Hosea that the marriage analogy is just that, it is an analogy, the reason it is used is because marriage is a covenant and Israel had broken covenant with God. It's not literally that God was Israel's husband but metaphorically He was and in metaphor they had just abandoned Him.

It's kind of a sad story. Some sources say that they think Hosea actually took a cult prostitute, a temple prostitute, to be his wife in this situation and some people think the whole thing is a metaphor. It doesn't read that way and the character of this man goes along with it. I think it fits the fact he married a woman, who was a loose woman and she actually got involved with another man and was divorced from somebody else. She was an adulteress and God said, "That's what I want you to have for a wife, so you'll know what it feels like for me."

Hosea and his Wife Gomer

So, verse 3 of Hosea 1, "Hosea went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; she conceived and bore him a son. {4} And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu and I will cause to cease the

kingdom of the house of Israel. {5} And it shall come to pass in that day; I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.""

The imaginary that's coming out of this is, there will come a time when with all your military might and all of your prowess, I'm going to take your bow and I'm going to break it over my knee, I'm going to disarm you. It seems that Jehu was one of the bloodiest of the kings of Israel. He was supposed to do something, but he went way beyond anything that God had intended for him to do. He killed a lot of people in the valley of Jezreel. 'Jezreel' basically means, 'God will sow' in the sense of scattering seed all over the place.

Gomer Bore Hosea a Daughter named Loruhamah

Continuing in Hosea 1, Hosea's wife , {6} "Gomer conceived again, and bore him a daughter. And God said to him, call her name Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel."

Here's this poor little girl named, "no mercy." "I'm not going to have mercy anymore on the house of Israel; I am going to utterly take them away. {7} But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah and will save them by the LORD their God and I will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen."

Now what came to pass as a result of all this, was the invasion of the Assyrians, who finally did cause the kingdom of the House of Israel to cease completely. All of them were carried away into captivity except for the refugees that ran down into Judah. And He said, "I'm going to save Judah," the Assyrian came in and they besieged Jerusalem, but they never took it. God cut them off and sent them back home.

Gomer Bore Hosea another Son named Loammi

"Now," verse 8 of Hosea 1, "when Gomer had weaned this girl, no mercy, she conceived, and bore a son. {9} And God said, "Call his name Loammi: for you are not my people, and I will not be your God.""

This theme which comes again and again in the Bible is estrangement. Now I think people don't understand this. They seem to think that sin is when we make God angry with us and God reaches down and smacks us.

God certainly is capable of doing that, but that's not the point. The point is that whenever we estrange or alienate ourselves from God, for whatever reason we do it, we cut ourselves off from His protection and from His help, from being heard in prayer. We begin to make our own steps toward divorcing ourselves from God, and it was disastrous. That's precisely what Jeroboam did to Israel and they all just followed him like a bunch of dumb sheep in going that direction.

And God said,{10} "Yet the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, that cannot be measured nor numbered." In spite of everything they will still be in huge numbers.

"And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said to them, "You're not my people, there it shall be said to them, you are the sons of the living God.""

Now it's hard to know, because our prophet doesn't really give us much in the way of clues here, so I guess we read this and here's what we get. The prophet goes to them and says, "I named this son of mine Loammi, God told me to do this because you're not my people and I'm not going to be your God anymore. I've had it with you people," and yet, way off in the future somewhere, He said, "It's going to come to pass that in the place where it was said to them you are not my people." Right there, it shall be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God," and that seems to be reaching way out into the future.

The House of Israel and the House of Judah Will Be Joined Together

"Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, appoint themselves one head, and come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (Hosea 1:11).

When? How? I think a lot of people think that the return of Israel into the land from Babylon sort of fulfilled that particular event, but I don't think so. This is too big for that, not only that, as you read on through the prophecy, you will find that this is too permanent for that. I think the apostle Paul may have had this in mind when he wrote that great 11th Chapter of the book of Romans where he says; "And so all Israel shall be saved."

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think many Christians neglect to read the Old Testament?
2. How important is the Old Testament to you?
3. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question: "What is the purpose of prophets?"
4. Do you think God is confined by time?
5. What are your thoughts about Jeroboam?
6. Have you ever studied the chronology of the Kings of Judah compared to the Kings of Israel?

7. What are your thoughts about Hosea?
8. Have you ever considered how he felt about his wife?
9. Do you think his marriage is kind of an analogy of Christ's "marriage" with Israel?
10. How do you think God will rejoin the House of Israel and the House of Judah?