
The Book of Hosea

Part 3 by: Ronald L. Dart

Unfortunately, the Biblical prophets don't write their story like history. I say 'unfortunately' but that's strictly from a 21st. century point of view. It's probably because we aren't really quite on the right wave length, but instead, the prophets write poetry, calling up verbal imaginary to add weight to what they're saying. In fact, what it is they're adding is an emotional content which, if they just told us what happened and when it happens, it would not be there. They actually lend themselves remarkably well to the oratorio style of Recitatif, Aria, something like Mendelssohn's Elijah or Handel's Messiah.

One of the truly great prophets, his name was Elisha, who had a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, as hard as that could be to imagine. He was called before king Jehoram of Israel, the son of the infamous Ahab, also the son of the equally infamous Jezebel. The king of Israel and the king of Judah had managed to get themselves in trouble and they really needed to consult a prophet. They had heard from all the prophets that Jehoram had around him, who, if we judged by whom his mother was, would have been prophets of Baal. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was not in the least, comfortable with this, and he wanted to know if there was a prophet of Jehovah here that He could inquire of God by him.

The Prophecy Of Elisha

You'll find this story in 2nd Kings Chapter 3. One of the kings of Israel's servants said in verse 11, "Well, there's Elisha, the son of Shaphat, and he was the man that poured water on the hands of Elijah." {12} "Jehoshaphat said, "I know him, the word of the LORD is with him." So, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat went down to see him. {13} And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, "What do I have to do with you? Get the prophets of your father, and the prophets of your mother." And the king of Israel said to him, "No: for the LORD has called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab, and we need help." {14} And Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely, if it were not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you, or even see you, {15} But now bring me a minstrel." And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him."

Now think about that, Elisha is sitting there and wants to prophesy but he can't prophesy until he gets a minstrel, a musician to play for him. Now you need to keep this in mind when you read the prophets, because reading them like you would a history text just doesn't work very well. They are deliberately symbolic as everyone knows.

Now Hosea's story, which is really what we're studying right now, would make a fine oratorio and as far as I know no composer has ever done it. It has a very strong emotional element to it. Try to remember this when your reading the prophets, they are adding an emotional element to the prophecy.

Now you know how this works, you can take the words of some aria out of Handel's Messiah or one of the great choruses and you just read the words and they carry a certain amount of emotional content but you put those words in the mouths of a great choir, being well lead, with an orchestra behind them, and they carry an impact that transcends that by a long way. So, it would be when you read these, you need to understand, the whole objective is to let us know that there is emotion, and there is feeling behind the words of the prophet.

Consider for example the way Hosea Chapter three begins, "Jehovah said to me, go show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulterer, love her as Jehovah loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisins cakes", some pagan custom or practice.

Does God Have Emotions?

Now it's not easy for us to understand the emotional impact of betrayal if we have never experience it ourselves. I recall a friend of mine who is a psychologist who made this statement once, he said; "If you think marriage is hard, wait till you try divorce."

I think we are apt to think of God as remote, detached and unemotional. He can't possibly be touched by the kind of feelings we as human beings have.

One scholar said this and it's interesting the way he put it, he said; "From the dawn of the pietistic period, Christian theology has held as axiomatic that God is impassable, that is, He does not undergo emotional changes of state and so cannot suffer." He's went on to say, "There has been a sea change in the past century and many Christian theologians no longer believe that," but I don't know if it's the majority but it's almost that. Now I suspect the reason why, is that people keep coming up against passages like this one in Hosea which really doesn't give us room to think that God cannot be touched. God can be betrayed and His response to betrayal is to love anyway in spite of the pain.

The Drama of Hosea and His Wife

Hosea gets the doubtful privilege of portraying the husband in the drama of God's relationship with Israel. When you understand this story, it is high drama, and the idea that God was aloof from it, untouched by it and had no feelings about it whatsoever, just doesn't work. When you are reading the Bible as it is written you have to accept the Scriptures for what they say.

Now marriage works well as a metaphor in this case because marriage is a covenant, and if you take note, the relationship of God to Israel is not literally a marriage, it is literally a covenant and because marriage is also a covenant, the analogy suggests itself so easily and it makes a very fine way of explaining to people what Israel did and what God did.

The whole comparison is pointless, if God is unmoved and untouched by Israel's betrayal. He is presented to us in Holy Writ as a God who can be touched. We need to be aware of trusting in the God of our imagination because we have a habit of doing that, of creating God in the way we would like for Him to be or the way we imagine Him to be. Philosophers will go through great long lines of reasoning to explain God the way they think He ought to be. It's better to trust God who reveals Himself and to accept Him as He has revealed Himself. Allowing philosophy to redefine God is an exercise in futility and it will lead you down a very hurtful path.

Hosea Buys His Wife Back

Hosea being told to go get his wife back, says; "I bought her for 15 pieces of silver plus an omer and a half of barley, and I said to her, "You will abide with me many days, you will not play the harlot, and you shall not be for another man and so I will be for you.""

Now this is interesting, Hosea didn't just take her back, as if she were a free agent out there in the world and came wandering around one day and said;"Hey, you want to move back in together?" And she says, "Sure" and in she comes. No, Gomer was not free. She belonged to someone else, so Hosea had to buy her back. To some extent this is revealing the marriage customs of the day, which is so foreign to us, we can't even put them together sometimes.

We have all heard of the dowry, that is, the father of the bride gives a dowry to the happy pair to send them off on their way, so that a wealthy man, with his daughter, will give her to her husband along with a lot of money, which makes her very attractive to a lot of men. But what do you do if the girl is poor? Well in situations like that the custom was that the father of the groom would give a dowry to the family of the bride, and thus in effect, buy a wife for his son. In the Bible, you don't find particular laws about dowry where the bride's father is well to do, but you do find restrictive laws regarding what they can do, when the father is poor and can't afford a dowry for his daughter, but in turn gives her to be the wife of the son of a wealthy man. In those circumstances a dowry was paid by the groom's family, and this might well be the sort of thing that is happening with Gomer except in her situation, she's not a new bride, she's an old wife.

Gomer had sold herself, and she had to be bought back and Hosea actually had to pay money so that she would become his wife again. Beyond that it appears that Hosea was going to set her aside for a time after she came back. I can easily understand that, to become intimate with her again, shortly after she had been intimating with another man, no way, it would require a little time.

Now what was the point of this? Why did Hosea have to go through this? What on earth did it mean? So, what did Hosea's miserable home life mean?

Setting Israel Aside For Some Time

Why did Hosea have to go through this? What was it there to explain and to illustrate to the people? We are still in the third Chapter of Hosea and verse 4: "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice, without an image, and without an ephod and teraphim,"

All of their pagan images and idolatry were going to be swept off the table and they were going to have to basically do without them for a time.

Teraphim Idols

Teraphim were idols that they used as household gods for divination. Some scholars have understood ancient near eastern rights of inheritance being based on the possession of these images, these teraphim, as it has been shown in old inheritance documents. Teraphim, though, are related to divination. Prophetic literature and the Josiah reformation all condemned the possession and use of teraphim. So, Israel had gone chasing these idols and God said; "We're going to do without this now for a while." They were going to do without an ephod which was a priestly garment that was connected with seeking a word from God and used in the wrong way as an idol.

It's interesting, there are people who just have to have some word from God or they just can't budge, and God has said, "There are going to be times when you're just going to have to do without it."

Now where does that leave you and me today? Because we certainly seem to be without it, well we're not really, we've got the Bible. Now the idea seems to be that Israel would go a long time without any word from God, then what?

In verse 5, it says, "Afterward the children of Israel will return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days."

Now it is interesting to consider that a man might set the woman apart before restoring her to his home as his wife, so God seems to set Israel apart for a time for a similar reason. I can understand this. Getting her to move straight from idolatrous practices back into obedience to God is going to require some adjustment. How should we understand the idea that Israel would return to seek the LORD their God and David their king?

What Did Jeroboam Do?

You have to understand this in terms of what happened when Jeroboam the 1st broke with the house of Judah and established the kingdom in the north, the house of Israel. He set up two new centers of worship, one in Dan and one in Bethel. Bethel was right on the road going down to Jerusalem. This was like a barrier and his fear was that if the people continued to go up year after year to worship the LORD, to worship Jehovah in the Temple at Jerusalem, he said; "Their heart will return to the house of David and they will kill me, and they'll return and be restored to that kingdom."

Now we know what Jeroboam did, he cut the House of Israel off from Temple worship; he changed their holy days and almost turned them all over to Baal.

The alienation of the kingdom of Israel, that is the house of Israel, from God and if you understand that principle, the idea of a future time when they would return to the LORD their

God and to David their king, makes a certain amount of sense. It is looking ahead in the metaphor of Hosea's wife Gomer, a story with a happy ending is told, that somewhere out there, the house of Israel and the house of Judah will once again be one and will once again be one with God.

Prophecy Of What Is Coming

In the 4th Chapter of Hosea, verse 1, "Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel: for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. {2} By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood touches blood."

Man, that's some imaginary. The blood from one murder is running into the blood of another.

I can't help it when I read prophecy like this and I shudder a little because the description is so very close to what my own society is becoming. The swearing, the lying, the killing and stealing. Adultery is the defining sin of our generation. Israel was prosperous when this was written but it was not going to last. Society was being corrupted day by day and sooner or later it would come unstuck.

Verse 3, "Therefore God said, "Shall the land mourn, every one that dwells in it shall languish, with the beasts of the field, the fowls of heaven; the fish of the sea will be taken away.""

Now what follows then is kind of obscure but maybe as a challenge to our own generation it makes sense.

{4} "Let no man bring a charge; let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who will bring charges against a priest."

The whole idea was, I don't care how good a man is, you're the kind of people who would bring a charge against a good man.

{5} "You stumble day and night, the prophets stumble with you, so I'll destroy your mother."

I take it that the people were deeply divided, and the charges flew back and forth. It was bad, even a good man would have charges brought against him.

How About Our Society Today?

This also kind of comes close to home, people bring charges at the drop of a hat and lawsuits are the order of the day. You can't turn on the television; you can't watch the news without seeing somebody is charging someone else with a crime and political crimes being at the top of the list.

We also find our preachers stumbling with us.

It is as though in the words of one prophet; we are all groping for the wall like blind men, trying to find some boundary, something we can put our hands on, so we can have some relation to something else. We are groping around in the dark

God says in Hosea 4 verse 6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, seeing that you shall be no priest to me: seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children."

I would think anyone reading that, right now, in the modern world, in the society not just ours but other societies as well, that it would send a chill up your back. If there is one thing that is clear, it is that we as a society have forgotten the Law of our God.

Preachers Are Accountable

It seems to me sometimes that some of us Christian preachers have forgotten the Law of our God, not only in our practice, but in what we say to the people. Where on earth do we find standards of right and wrong that we can stand in front of a congregation and say this is what God says, you ought to be doing with your life and you are not doing it, and you people need to repent.

That's what the prophets did and I'm just not sure how many preachers now do that. Of course, if we who are standing before people to preach the Law of God and are breaking it ourselves, maybe then we have a hard time being as direct as we otherwise might be in talking to people about their sins. Do you suppose that's possible?

And so, we stumble along with our preachers. "Because you have forgotten the law of your God" and as a society, to what degree we have not forgot it, we are trying hard to forget it. There is a determined minority in this country who is trying all they can to be sure that we do forget it and that our children never know it in the first place.

"My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge." What kind of knowledge? We have all kinds of knowledge. We have more knowledge than we know what to do with. God is basically talking about the knowledge of right and wrong, that is revealed in the pages of His Law. That's what we rejected and that what's going to lead to God forgetting our children.

What About Prosperity?

You would think that prosperity would cause us to be grateful to God, to turn to God in greater numbers and say, "Look at what the Almighty has poured out upon us," but intuitively, I think you probably know that's not true.

Sure, enough the prophet comes along and tells us. Hosea 4 verse 7, "As they were increased, so they sinned against me."

He is saying there is a direct relationship between the degree of wealth of a people and their tendency to sin against God and to forget God.

A point of fact is when life is really working for you and everything is going your way, like you have golden fingers; when you reach out and touch something it turns to gold. When everything is working, you don't need God, you can get along just fine without God and so it's all too easy to forget Him. So often when people turn to God is when things turn to gravel in their lives and the gold is gone. There is an inverse relationship between the degree of wealth in a society and the degree of interest in obedience to, faith in, God. When we get richer, we sin all the more and forget God.

If You Were God

God says in Hosea 4 verse 7, "Therefore, I will change their glory into shame."

When you think about that for a moment, if you were God, and you're looking down here on earth, you would say, "Here are my people and they are getting stinking rich and look at what they're doing and the way they are messing up their lives." Now if you were God and you have all kinds of power, what would you do to correct that situation? Maybe another great depression? Maybe a terrorist act? God only knows, literally, what that would be.

It's something to think about when times are good, what's your attitudes toward God? How do you respond when your life is working? Are you grateful for the abundance of all things? Or do you start thinking, maybe, I did all this myself. Why do I owe anything to anyone else?

Whoredoms

Hosea 4 Verse 8, "These people eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. {9} And they will be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways and reward them for their doing. {10} They will eat and not have enough, they'll commit whoredom, and will not increase, because they have left off taking heed to Jehovah."

You know it is odd, this expression, "to commit whoredom," is a very good descriptive term for our times today, whereas fornication and adultery, are the defining sins of our generation. In spite of all the sex going on, our population is stabilizing and in danger of declining. It is really odd, sex is everywhere, all the time, and yet our population is stagnant. Of course, there have been 40 million abortions and that may have something to do with it also.

Have you noticed the increase in advertisements for Viagra and all other male enhancement drugs? Has it occurred to anyone that we have an epidemic of impotence in this country? ED is the new acronym, for erectile dysfunction, and it is becoming as common as a headache. Think about it, you're a drug company, are you going to spend millions of dollars on advertising, unless there is a demand or a need out there for your product? And why? It should be obvious to anyone, when the senses are overloaded long enough, they stop working. The chances are, if you spend a little time thinking about it, and you begin thinking of examples in your own life where that is true.

In fact, if you hear too much noise, too much loud noise, too long, you will eventually lose your hearing. So, it is when we suffer from too much sexual overload, we begin to lose our ability for sex and we have long since lost our ability to love.

In Verse 11, the prophet says, "Whoredom," that is sexual promiscuity, "and wine and new wine take away the heart." You lose the core of being; you lose the capacity to love because you just overload yourself with these things.

{12} "My people, they look for advice at a wooden idol, a stick declares to them and answers their questions. For the spirit of whoredoms has caused them to err and they have gone a whoring from under their God."

What a statement, a spirit of whoredoms, the defining characteristic of a people is what the Bible calls prostitution.

He says in verse 13, "They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, they burn incense on the hills and under the oaks and poplars and elms because the shade is good: therefore, your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery."

One of the more popular television shows has been "Desperate Housewives" and have you noticed, any of these films about "Spring Break," they're incredible, staggering. "Girls Gone Wild."

Then God says something really quite surprising in verse 14, "I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your spouse's when they commit adultery, for they themselves are separated with whores and they sacrifice with harlots. The people without understanding will fall."

"I will not punish." What God is saying is, "If that is where they are going, I will let them go."

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. Have you ever considered to pay attention to the emotional elements when reading the prophets?
2. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question: "Does God have emotions?"
3. Have you ever considered the feelings of the prophets when you read about them?

4. Do you think that this time is a fulfillment of God setting Israel aside for a time?
5. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question: "How about our society today?"
6. Is Christianity being destroyed because of "a lack of knowledge" in Go's truth and law?
7. Do you agree that "there is a direct relationship between the degree of wealth of a people and their tendency to sin against God and to forget God"?
8. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question What would you do if you were God?
9. When you read Hosea, does it seem like he is talking about our time today?
10. How can we make sure that we do not fall into the temptations of the world around us?