

The Door of Hope (Part I)

Chapter 15



The fourteen chapters of the Old Testament book of Hosea presents a unique picture of a troubled family--Hosea, his wife Gomer, and three children, a son Jezreel, a daughter Lo-Ruhama, and another son Lo-Ammi.

This chapter follows the development of this storied family, cites the rejection of the children, and then shows that, in the same location where the rejection of the children occurred, they are again accepted and restored to a unique destiny.

The Setting and Time of the Story

"The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." (Hosea 1:1 RSV)¹

The story is set in the 8th century B.C.--Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel,² prior to the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C. in which the ten-tribes were taken captive.

Hosea's period of ministry may have been from 38 years to more than 60 years--commentators vary on the time. What is clear is that Hosea's ministry continued during the reign of at least four Judean kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah) and one Israelite king (Jeroboam II), a total of five kings. Jeroboam II's reign, the Israelite king, is dated from 793-753 B.C. and Hezekiah's reign, the last Judean king cited, is dated from 715-686 B.C--at a minimum this would mean that Hosea ministered from at least 753 B.C., the end of Jeroboam II's reign, to 715 B.C., the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, a period of 38 years. It probably was longer as he also ministered during King Uzziah's reign which began in 792 B.C. and extended to 740 B.C. as well as King Jeroboam's reign which began in 793 B.C. It is to be particularly noted that King Hezekiah's reign ended in 686 B.C. Therefore the longest elapsed time period cited is from the beginning of King Jeroboam's reign to the end of King Hezekiah's reign which was a period of 107 years. The text

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simply indicates that Hosea ministered during the time of the reign of these five kings.

The Family of Hosea

"When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord.' So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the Lord said to him, 'Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for 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 1:2-4 RSV)

"She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him Call her name Not pitied, (Lo-Ruhamah) for I will no more have pity on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will deliver them by the Lord their God; I will not deliver them by bow, nor by sword, nor by war, not by horses, not by horsemen. When she had weaned Not pitied, (Lo-Rahumah) she conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said, 'Call his name Not my people, (Lo-Ammi) for you are not my people and I am not your God.'" (Hosea 1:5-8 RSV)

The story of Hosea, his profligate wife Gomer, and their three children has been variously touted as a literal family portrayal, while others have maintained the story is an allegory and metaphorical. What gives the story unique character is that God commanded that Hosea associate himself with Gomer, his profligate wife: "When the Lord spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord.'" (Hosea 1:2 RSV). Whether a literal story or an allegory, it is clear that Hosea's family episode was to serve as an example of the on-going relationship God was to maintain with a polytheistically-inclined Israel. The story illustrates the final restoration of this turbulent family to a wholesome and successful ending. The account forecasts the triumphant restoration of Israel.

To begin, the figure of Hosea presents a person of most unusual dedication--a person of perseverance and moral fortitude that goes far beyond the norm. The unfolding story depicts one of the most poignant love stories of recorded history. In an epic manner the story represents God's dealing with Israel--it is the romance drama of the ages encapsulated in Hosea's heroic living example.

The character, dedication, and moral perseverance of Hosea in dealing with his profligate wife Gomer has been recounted by the Reverend F. Gary Prichard, Senior Minister of the United Methodist Church. Reverend Prichard's accounting of his introduction to the story of Hosea is seen in his review which is presented in its entirety as follows:

"Hosea is one of the greatest love stories ever told. In this third chapter of this epic from the Old Testament Prophet comes the greatest verse in the Bible: Hosea 3:1, '...Go, love your wife again,' even-though she loves other men and continues to commit adultery. Likewise, the Lord loves the Israelites although they turn to other gods and love to offer 'raisin cakes to idols.'

Here the greatest theme in the Bible is expressed, the Cross. Here we find in the most poignant and concise form as found anywhere, the amazing Grace of God: '...buy Gomer, your wife back, now a slave, and take her as your wife.'

This amazing story was opened to me as I sat in a seminary class of about a dozen Master of Divinity students at Fuller Theological Seminary. Dr. Arthur Glasser was the Dean of Missions. He began after reading the first three chapters of Hosea, telling how Gomer had left Hosea, her husband, on numerous occasions to run after other men. She was quite charming at first and was with someone who 'drove a Cadillac' but after a while and losing ground, she was with someone who could only afford a 'Chevrolet.' She had little responsibilities and had left the three children for Hosea to raise, but she now is in great need (Hosea 2:3). But like Gomer, the lusts of the world play with us in deceiving ways. We can believe the joys and fun are found in the

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