

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Lesson 04, Chapters 1 and 2

Symbolism is at the heart of this Book of Hosea. At times trying to reconcile the biblical concepts of symbolic versus literal can be daunting; and all too often in the academic world (and even at the personal Bible study level) one concept is regularly set against the other as though they are opponents; of this there is no need. Symbolism is God's way of helping humans to understand deeply divine concepts for which there is practically no adequate vocabulary. Symbolism is also a way to transport these concepts across cultural boundaries and through the great expanse of time. Symbolism is not merely a clever way of story-telling; it is meant to impart God-principles that can be more easily remembered, understood and then applied on a wider scale. This is especially important in the books of prophecy because symbolism is invariably employed in all of them, although in some it is more subtle, while in others (like Hosea) it is a dominant feature.

So, in the case of biblical symbolism, the issue of literalness has to be applied in the sense of translating those words accurately and understanding them verbatim within the culture and context of the times they were penned as opposed to manipulating the words to make what seems to make more sense of them today. In the case of the Book of Hosea to take the words literally we must recognize that the literary devices used are largely symbolism and, to make matters more complicated, this symbolism is often presented to us using ancient Hebrew poetry. As we all probably know, a poet will often choose words not as much for their exactness as for their ability to rhyme and to fit within the meter and structure of poem. Poetry is an excellent way in all ages to create something memorable and to conjure up elegant word pictures of thoughts and emotions; poetry is inherently human and thus an excellent means of communicating among humans.

We left off at chapter 1 verse 7 of Hosea so let's re-read some of Hosea.

RE-READ HOSEA CHAPTER 1:6 – 9

Depending on your Bible version, chapter 1 of the Book of Hosea may not end at verse 9 and instead go through verse 11. So, for the Bibles that end at verse 9, those 2 more verses appear as the opening verses of chapter 2. Why is it that way? The Hebrew Bible structures Hosea to end chapter 1 with the words of verse 9, while the English structures it to continue through verse 11. Nonetheless, all the verses and words are there regardless of your version. It is all the more reason that I urge people to disregard chapter and verse markings in our Bibles because these numberings and divisions were never there in the original. They were added by editors a thousand years after the Bible as we know it was created and the canon closed. While these numberings and divisions were meant to be helpful, chapter divisions (especially) can often give us the wrong impression that one narrative has closed and a new one begun, or that a location has changed, or that a circumstance has shifted when none of these situations are necessarily the case.

There's a couple of things for us to briefly review from our previous lesson. First is that Hosea's prophecy is ONLY meant to apply to the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel, which consisted of 10 of the tribes of Israel. Verse 7 specifically tells us that the 2 other tribes of Israel that form the Southern Kingdom of Judah are not going to suffer (at least not for now) alongside their Israelite brothers to the North. Second is that at this point Hosea has carried out God's command to marry Gomer and by now she has given him 2 children: a boy and a girl. The boy was named Jezreel and the girl Lo Ruchamah. These Hebrew names, when translated to English, mean "God sows" and "unpitied" or "no mercy". These names are meant symbolically, but they were also the actual names of those 2 children.

Verse 8 tells us that Gomer now provided Hosea with another son; their 3rd child. How spread out were the births of these children? Probably 5 – 10 years from the birth of the first to the birth of the third because the weaning process lasted anywhere from 2 to as much as 4 or even 5 years in that era, often depending on the circumstances such as how mobile a family was, or the availability of food, and to an extent the current custom.

In verse 9 we read that Adonai said to name the 3rd child Lo Ammi. Some Bibles will say that "God said" to name the child with that name. In fact, God isn't

directly mentioned here. Rather the male gender is used in the grammar of the opening word to the verse, and so some Bible versions more accurately and literally read: "Then **He** said". Who is "He"? Most translators assume the "He" means God and so they simply insert the word "God". But what did we learn about verse 1 that begins in the Hebrew "***Dabbar Yehoveh asher haya'el Hoshe***" or in English "***The Word of Yehoveh came to Hosea***". Recall that "The Word" as used here doesn't mean "speech". It doesn't mean syllables and sentences. The Word is a name for a manifestation of God; a living divine entity. He is one of the "persons" or living attributes of God. In fact, it was some manifestation of The Word that appeared on earth as Yeshua.

CJB John 1:1-5 ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not suppressed it.***

So, the "He" who told Hosea to name the 3rd child Lo Ammi was The Word, which was God; but He was God in the same way as we say the Holy Spirit or The Son is God. Because understanding what the term "The Word" means is critical (so far as is possible for us), I need to say something at this point about The Word and what the Apostle John had to say about Yeshua. The general implication among Christian church doctrine is that the meaning of Jesus being The Word in the flesh inherently means that all of whatever The Word was at one time, it transformed into Jesus. Thus, The Word for 30 or so years existed only as, and entirely as, a Jewish man in the Galilee. Further, this would also necessarily mean that whatever form Jesus is now in Heaven is as a singular form that sits next to God on His own throne in a waiting mode with basically nothing else to do until the Father sends Him back. I think none of this is reflective of what the Bible actually says, but rather is something that manmade doctrine has created, and so we read into the Bible something that isn't there.

To help us through this let's think on the Holy Spirit for a moment. While we can speak of the Holy Spirit in the singular... that is, as a singular divine entity.... it is also an entity that lives within all Believers. So, is the Holy Spirit divided up among millions of Believers, each receiving only a portion? Or perhaps He

multiplies Himself to make countless Holy Spirits? If we reject the notion of many Holy Spirits or a divided-up Holy Spirit then we also must ask if the Holy Spirit only exists, today, in a certain identifiable, singular location: planet earth. This is because His place of residence is said by the Church to be only within Believing human beings and therefore logic says He cannot exist any longer in Heaven (or anywhere else for that matter). However, we don't really believe that do we? So, we tend not to have a lot of problem with the concept of the Holy Spirit, in some mysterious way, having no singular, identifiable location; the same singular Holy Spirit exists in many places at once...even in a different dimension... possibly with no limit. Nor when confronted with the notion do we think of the Holy Spirit as having completely transformed into something that He never was before the occasion of Pentecost. It is helpful, then, to think of...to mentally picture...the divine "The Word" in a similar way. The Word still exists as He has from the beginning; He hasn't changed. So, while Jesus was (in John's sense of it) The Word when He was present on earth, Jesus the human Jewish man didn't represent all that The Word was or is or as the only place or form that The Word then existed. Or to put it another way, the **entirety** of The Word was not removed from one location and somehow transferred in total into Mary's womb as a Jewish fetus.

Mysterious? Very hard to conceive of? Perhaps troubling? Most certainly. But think upon those first few words of John's Gospel: CJB **John 1:1 *In the beginning was The Word, and The Word was with God, and The Word was God.*** How do we reconcile The Word being WITH God (that is, in a certain sense identifiably separate from God) and yet also simultaneously BEING God? Ladies, you can't be both WITH your husband and at the same time BE your husband. And so how do we reconcile this attribute or person of God called The Word becoming flesh? And yet at the same time remaining as God? Therefore, we are never meant to think that for a while the entirety of the attribute or person called "The Word" was completely reformulated into Yeshua of Nazareth and existed in no other way or place. In other words, The Word exists and works similarly as with the Holy Spirit, but apparently with different functions.

Strangely, this matter of the existence of The Word is rarely talked about in Christian circles except in New Testament exploration and in the context of Jesus Christ. So, we must be careful now that we understand that The Word, as a

divine living spiritual entity, was speaking to Hosea and other prophets hundreds of years prior to the birth of Yeshua. Unlike what the implication within Christianity would say, it was NOT the person of Jesus speaking into the ear of Hosea... it was The Word. The Word existed long before the man, Yeshua, was born. Jesus, if you would, is a product of The Word who in some way possessed characteristics of The Word. Jesus (Yeshua) was the name of a living, **fleshly** human being that was subject to all the ravages of time and needs of life that we all are. A living human being who could only be in one place at one time, lived for a finite amount of time and then died, but now is alive in another and entirely different form in Heaven that is also mysterious. That's probably enough to think about so let's move on.

Back to verse 9, the name given to Gomer's newest baby was Lo Ammi; it means "not My people". God emphasizes the meaning of the name by saying that being declared "not My people" automatically also entails Yehoveh no longer being Israel's God; those two things are organically linked. Here is where the majority of Bible scholars, in my opinion, go off the rails a little bit because they fail to grasp the wider context of what is happening. First let's talk about God saying He will no longer be their God.

God is going to exile those 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom to foreign lands (gentile nations) as a punishment for their faithlessness and idolatry. It was a given in the thought of the Hebrews (and virtually all the nations) that every nation had its own separate national god. This is part of the reason that King Jeroboam and the general population of the Northern Kingdom could seriously say that even though they worshipped Baal (in the form of a golden calf), they also worshipped Yehoveh; they saw no contradiction or problem with this. Baal and Yehoveh each served different functions in their way of thinking. This is because Yehoveh was the national god of Israel; but as the national god He didn't serve **every** function that people wanted and needed from their gods. There were (they believed) other gods; one that provided rain, another protection from disease and war, yet a different one gave fertility to the crops and to the women, etc. The point is that a national god was anchored to a piece of land; to a particular geographical location (a nation with its boundaries). If a person who worshipped that national god traveled outside of the boundaries of that god's territory, then he lost all contact with that god because he left that god's

jurisdiction. It was the god of the territory (the nation) he now found himself in that he'd have to acknowledge and worship. He'd have to switch gods until he returned to his former nation. The bottom line is this: in Hebrew thinking if Israel were to be expelled from their land and sent into different nations, they also would be leaving behind their god, Yehoveh, thus severing the relationship. So, in that way indeed Yehoveh would no longer be their God. I have no doubt that is the way Hosea understood this, and how those who heard Hosea's prophecy took it to mean (although that isn't exactly how God intended it). God meant it in a much more expansive way that dovetailed into what happened on Mt. Sinai some 500 years earlier. There we read this in Exodus:

CJB Exodus 6:7 I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am ADONAI your God, who freed you from the forced labor of the Egyptians.

So, in this statement in Hosea 1:9 God said that He was going to back away from Israel at this time, and in some ways reverse what was offered to Israel so long ago. An offer, by the way, that Israel... all 12 tribes... resoundingly accepted. Here is the thing we should immediately take from this: following God in a covenant relationship brings obligations upon us. Those obligations are expressed in the terms of the covenant. If we fail in our obligations, the result can be devastating. Although the language being used is expressed symbolically in marriage and family terms, what is being communicated as a universal God-principle is that rebellion against Him can bring with it a dissolving of our personal relationship with Him, and also the loss of any right to be protected under a covenant that we, in our wickedness, willfully broke. I would like for us to now read the 2nd chapter of Hosea and then I'll continue to speak about this breaking of covenant with God.

READ HOSEA CHAPTER 2 all

It is fascinating that in essence the last verse of chapter 1 speaks of consequences of breaking the covenant with God, and immediately the first verse of chapter 2 speaks of restoration. In a nutshell we see the true nature and character of God as a God who on the one hand demands obedience and will punish (curse) His own for their disobedience, but on the other hand such

punishment doesn't have to be the end of the story. He will, on His terms, restore us to Himself. What else is redemption except restoration? Redemption means a change of state. A change of what state? A change from disobedience and slavery to sin, to obedience and freedom from the power of sin. However, this not how these verses are usually explained.

The usual explanation is that we are witnessing a dissolution of the Covenant of Moses. Or in the symbolic marriage terms being used, a divorce is occurring... God is divorcing Israel. I'm here to tell you emphatically that this is incorrect. Let's start with a couple of basics. The comparison between human family dynamics that are being used symbolically and what God is doing with Israel have sufficient similarities so as to provide a good illustration for us. However, they are not exactly the same. Divorce can be, indeed, a means of dealing with the unfaithfulness of a marriage partner. However, God cursing His chosen people for their unfaithfulness is not the exact equivalent. Further, God's covenant with Israel (the Covenant of Moses) had built-in repercussions for disobedience as well as happy rewards for obedience. These are called the curses and the blessings of The Law. What God was pronouncing on Israel through Hosea was the curses of the covenant for breaking it; but not breaking it in the sense of the abolishment of the covenant. Let me give you a simple illustration using modern terms.

The law of your town is if you run a red light and you hit another car, there will be a corresponding penalty that includes anything from a fine, to time in jail, to reparations for the damaged car, to all of the above. But, did such breaking of that law against running a red light include dissolving the law itself, or even the entire law code of which it was part? Of course not. Therefore, if as is usually claimed, the Covenant of Moses was hereby abolished by God in response to Israel's unfaithfulness, then what of poor Judah? Was the covenant that they were also a party to now gone because of what Ephraim/Israel had done? And, since we already know that Judah would not suffer, just yet, a similar fate as their northern brothers, then we understand something interesting about the nature and terms of the Covenant of Moses; it is relevant to entire nations, corporately, and it is simultaneously relevant to individuals.

Another interesting feature (I'll demonstrate it as we go along) is that the proceeding we just read about in chapter 2 was not a divorce proceeding; it was an adultery proceeding. Further, the nature of it was not to facilitate a divorce but rather to persuade the offending party Gomer (symbolically representing the 10 tribes of the north) to repent and change her ways. The proceeding had the hope of reconciliation in mind; not dissolution. To be clear: God was not divorcing Israel nor was He abrogating the Covenant of Moses. Rather He was charting a path to restoration as He was enforcing the terms of the covenant. The covenant remained fully intact.

So: we have been presented with 3 characterizations of the condition of Ephraim/Israel as God sees it, as we enter chapter 2. 1) Israel will be deservedly afflicted by God (God sows), 2) God will not show mercy to Israel, and 3) Israel will lose their national God because they are going to be sent away from their land, this because God is going to curse them with the negative consequences of breaking the terms of His covenant with them. Once more, breaking the covenant no more means "ending the covenant" than does our breaking of a local law mean the ending of the local law code. Immediately Yehoveh, through The Word, offers hope.

CJB Hosea 2:1 ***"Nevertheless, the people of Isra'el will number as many as the grains of sand by the sea, which cannot be measured or counted; so that the time will come when, instead of being told, 'You are not my people,' it will be said to them, 'You are the children of the living God.'***

In direct contrast to the curses issued that the 10 tribes would be rejected by God, in time He would take them back. In fact, this speaks of a future time when Israel would thrive more than ever. There is little in the biblical era to better describe abundance than a population explosion and that is what is meant by the sons of Israel being too innumerable to count, like the sands of the seas. The "sands of the seas" is an idiom that we see used from time to time in the Bible and it always means the same thing: a number that is impossible to count.

Now, why would God do this? Why this promise of reversal? Is it because Israel would repent and become righteous and faithful again? No. So often we see God do something that has little to do with a present circumstance. Rather it is done

in order to keep a promise that He made a long time ago, and so He acts to keep His own good name holy, not necessarily for the sake of those who might benefit. Yehoveh promised the Patriarchs, beginning with Abraham, that what He has just said regarding Israel He would do.

CJB Genesis 13:11-16 ***¹¹ So Lot chose all the plain of the Yarden for himself, and Lot traveled eastward; thus, they separated themselves from each other. ¹² Avram lived in the land of Kena'an; and Lot lived in the cities of the plain, setting up his tent near S'dom. ¹³ Now the men of S'dom were evil, committing great sins against ADONAI. ¹⁴ ADONAI said to Avram, after Lot had moved away from him, "Look all around you from where you are, to the north, the south, the east and the west. ¹⁵ All the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever, ¹⁶ and I will make your descendants as numerous as the specks of dust on the earth - so that if a person can count the specks of dust on the earth, then your descendants can be counted.***

So, the eventual bringing of the 10 tribes home would have nothing to do with them returning to covenant faithfulness in order to merit it. It would have to do with God's mercy that is centered around promises He had made to the Patriarchs of Israel. God has just given hope to the same people whom He has chastised and told that they are about to lose everything. There is nothing they can do to stop the inevitable curses they are about to suffer, and likewise it won't be on their account that they are shown mercy, returned to the Land, and their prosperity rejuvenated.

God operates in these strange dualities. He will use fire to purify, or to destroy. He will use water to purify, or to destroy. He will use blood to sanctify, or to make unclean. One of those strange dualities is demonstrated here. God promises that in the same exact place that the Israelites rebelled and so He expelled them from that place declaring that "You are not My people", a time will come when He will return them to that same exact place and declare that they are "sons of the Living God". Nothing like this has happened to any other nation of people... ever... except to Israel. 2700 years after this prophecy... 27 centuries after expelling Israel from the Land... God kept His promise to Abraham and returned Israel to the same exact spot from which they had left. Did they deserve it? Had they changed very much? No. Truly, the first thing I think of as my plane nears Ben

Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, is the astounding miracle that God has done. I always choose a window seat because I want to be able to gaze to the horizon where I see nothing but lush fields and endless new buildings. Highways jammed with cars. Shopping malls and restaurants. Hospitals and schools. Universities and Hi-Tech companies. I don't ever want to become calloused to it. The rebirth of Israel didn't happen because of human efforts; it happened because God always keeps His promises.

CJB Hosea 2:2 *Then the people of Y'hudah and the people of Isra'el will be gathered together; they will appoint for themselves one leader; and they will go up out of the land; for that will be a great day, [the day] of Yizre'el.*

Verse 2 speaks of a future time when the people of the Kingdom of Judah (2 tribes) and the people of the Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) will be reunited. They will agree on one leader; this much is rather easy to take from this verse. But what does it mean to "go up out of the land"? Other Bible versions like the NAS and RSV say "go up **from** the land". There have been a few different attempts to discern what this means including leaving the lands where they have been scattered in the various exiles Israel suffered. However, since Mt. Sinai the term "to go up" nearly always meant to go to Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. And once the Temple was built, it meant to go up to the Temple in Jerusalem. Why up? Because, first of all, Jerusalem sits at an altitude of around 2500 feet; the highest place in Judah. Also, because God is always seen as living "up" in Heaven. In nearly all god systems, shrines and altars were built on high places... hills and mountain tops... to get closest to the gods. Therefore, I think that this statement about the reunited people of Israel going up is about them returning, together, to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. And, we must always remember that when there was no Temple, or Israel was away from their Temple, there was no way to atone for sins through animal sacrifices. So, it was a pretty serious problem for them and constantly on their minds.

The day (or better, era) that this restoration comes to fruition is called the Day of Jezreel. Notice that once again we encounter a dualism. Jezreel, as the name of Hosea's first child, was first symbolically meant as a negative thing. It means God sows in both cases. However, in chapter 1 it meant that God sowed destruction in Israel. Now the same term is used to say that God will sow

restoration and abundance in Israel at some future point. The concept being spoken of in this verse is also spoken of in the Prophet Ezekiel's book. This important prophecy in Ezekiel is worth reading as it works hand in glove with this one from Hosea.

READ EZEKIEL CHAPTER 37 all

Between the words of Hosea and Ezekiel we get a rather robust picture of something that is already in progress. This is not pie-in-the-sky... it is currently happening. Judah and Israel are making their way back to the reborn nation of Israel. Although the non-gentile people of Israel are called Jews, that is in some ways misleading and a misnomer. The exiles of Judah, and those who lived in the Roman province of Judea, were called Jews. However more correctly those folks were only from the 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin. This doesn't speak of the 10 tribes of the North, that were known by the dual names of Ephraim and Israel. Hosea and Ezekiel speak of a day when the people of Judah AND the people of Israel would reunite in their own land. This is happening as I speak to you. The happy reunion is underway. This ought to send shivers down your spine. We are literally eye witnesses to the fulfillment of prophecy. I have personally witnessed people arriving at Ben Gurion Airport who were immigrating to Israel from the tribe of Manasseh (one of the 10 tribes of Israel). Of course, the prophecy isn't completed. Messiah has to return (the king from the House of David) before this prophecy is fully completed. But this might be a clue that we aren't far at all from Yeshua's return.

CJB Hosea 2:3 *"Say to your brothers, 'Ammi [My People]!' and to your sisters, 'Ruchamah [Pitied]!'"*

This is a statement meaning that God acknowledges that the curse from Israel breaking the Law has been lifted and reversed. Restoration has happened. God has re-accepted His people (My people) and shown them mercy (pitied). No divorce ever occurred; but there was a long period of estrangement.

One of the things that I find fascinating about this reunification is that the tribal days of Israel ended before Christ was born. Not since the Babylonian Exile of the 6th century B.C. has Israel segregated themselves or their land according to

tribe and tribal territory. When I look at pre-WWII commentaries on Hosea and Ezekiel the general thought is that speaking of the return of the tribes at some future time was merely an anachronistic way of speaking. That is, by the time this reunion would occur, any vestige of tribalism would be long gone and the people really wouldn't even know what tribes their very ancient ancestors might have belonged to. Yet in one sense one could say that the tribes have returned. Against all odds, these long-lost Israelites do have a memory of the tribes they came from so very long ago. In fact, one of the more known groups of people to migrate to Israel were given the nickname of The Black Jews of Ethiopia. There have been a couple of popular films and documentaries made about this event and the daring rescue that began a rather large migration of these Ethiopians to modern Israel. But in fact, these Ethiopians are not from the tribes of Judah or Benjamin. They will explain to you that they are from the tribe of Dan; 1 of the 10 Northern tribes of Ephraim Israel. It's only that many of them adopted the religion of Judaism as an expression of their Hebrew faith and so in that way have been labeled Jews. But tribally speaking, they are Danites.

As often as I've spoken on the subject of prophecy I've stated that in my view the primary problem with understanding biblical prophecy is that we tend to not take it literally enough. We try to make it fit with the world as it is currently and so we twist and turn its meaning and teach it that way. When we do that we tend to miss it when a prophecy is actually being fulfilled. Let's vow not to do the same as the prophecies of the End Times begin to happen in rapid succession exactly as they are written that they will happen.

Restoration is such a beautiful thing. Israel blundered and sinned its way into God's curse upon them all the while self-assured that their invention of a hybridized religious system was pleasing to Him, in complete disregard of the Covenant of Moses and numerous other warnings that had been given to obey Yehoveh and to worship ONLY Him. What God asked of Israel, and is asking of us, is to wait in faith and in faithfulness for what He has promised to come about.

After giving Hosea a panoramic understanding of how this is all going to play out for Israel, the symbolic complaint of God towards Israel continues in verse 4.

CJB Hosea 2:4 *Rebuke your mother, rebuke her; for she isn't my wife, and I'm not her husband. She must remove her whoring from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts*

A better English word to begin this verse than rebuke is “accuse”. This is because a legal proceeding against adultery is being envisioned. The complaint that “she isn’t my wife and I’m not her husband” isn’t meant as a point of legal fact; it is what the essence of Gomer’s whoredom amounts to in the eyes of the husband. That is, since she is not behaving as a loyal wife, thus she must not want Hosea as her husband. Once more: do not take this illustration that is given in family symbolism too far. Israel was NOT God’s legal wife, and God was NOT Israel’s legal husband, even though there are similarities in the relationship that are useful to help us understand God’s point of view. In fact, it is only in the pagan religions that a god such as Baal would be believed to have an actual legal wife (a female god like Ashtoreth). However, to be clear: in this symbolic picture, it is meant to depict God in the role as the husband and Israel in the role as the unfaithful wife.

We’ll stop here and continue in Hosea chapter 2 next time.