

HOSEA – unfortunate in marriage

We discover from the first verse that **Hosea** lived in the same period as Isaiah. Unlike that prophet, however, his work was not with the people of Judah, but with the northern 10-tribe kingdom, during the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam the Second. The prophet was specifically instructed from the outset to marry a woman of loose morals. If this seems harsh and unnatural, it reminds us how much these faithful messengers from God suffered to bring home a lesson to God's people. Isaiah with his girdle, Jeremiah in his dungeon and Daniel in the lion's den likewise sacrificed their health and comfort. The reason for this strange request was given straight away:

"... the LORD said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.'" Hosea 1:2.

Over the following years, Hosea was to act out in his relationship with his wife **Gomer**, the feelings of God Himself as His beloved people broke their vow to serve Him, and went off to worship idols.

Things began well as their marriage was blessed with a baby boy. Hosea was instructed to call him **'Jezreel'**, or 'Scattering', for God's people were soon to be scattered. Before long Gomer showed her true colours. She became pregnant again, but not by her husband. This time it was a daughter, **'Loruhamah'** or 'No mercy'. Then came another child, again not Hosea's, named **'Lo Ammi'** which means 'Not my People'. Imagine the prophet standing on the doorstep and calling his children in for dinner - "Scattering, No Mercy, Not my People". What a sad message for

everyone who was in earshot! And how they must have mocked the prophet for his big 'mistake' in marrying Gomer. God speaks through the prophet, hurt and angry. His people deserved to be exposed and divorced for their 'adultery' in worshipping false gods. He would reject them as no longer His people, and no longer have mercy on them. He would scatter them to the winds.

And yet, so profound was God's love for the nation He had brought out of Egypt, He could not bear to leave them in misery forever. He would make a new start:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor [the route Joshua took from Jericho to the Promised Land] a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. . . . And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. . . . and I will 'Sow' [the Hebrew for 'scatter' also means 'to sow'] her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on 'No Mercy', and I will say to 'Not My People', 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'" Hosea 2:14-23.

Next the unfortunate prophet was instructed to give his erring wife money to stay away from her lovers for many days, simulating the long time of Israel's exile from the land, with no king, and no idols. But *"afterwards the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD*

their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days". Hosea 3:5.

The prophet continues in this way, spotlighting the empty worship of a people that had no heart for God, and the inevitable judgment that would follow. Chapter 11 speaks poignantly of the heartache God felt as He looked down on the baby nation He had brought out of Egypt, and taught to walk, and tenderly fed, only to find (as many parents do) that His sweet little son turned his back when he grew up.

Yet such is His love, He cannot bring Himself to reject them. He vows to restore them, once they have been punished. It is in this abiding mercy of God, "*slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*" as Moses was taught on Sinai, that we all have hope.

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