

Session 1: The Prophet Hosea

B. An Event in Time

So the first thing we learn from this verse is the priority of God's word. The second is what the word of the Lord is seen to be. It is AN EVENT IN TIME. It is "the word of the Lord that came". Not a piece of writing in a book that we can refer to at any time, but something that HAPPENED at a particular time and place.

To understand this we have to think ourselves out of the book-culture we are so familiar with and imagine a culture where only a very few people could read and write, where virtually all communication took place by word of mouth. In that culture, the word of the Lord was not primarily something that could be recorded and studied at leisure. It was primarily an event with an immediate impact and only secondarily the record of that event in written words.

Not only is the word of the Lord an event that happens at a particular place and time. The word of the Lord acts as THE CAUSE OF OTHER EVENTS. Compare these texts from elsewhere in the Bible:

Genesis 1:3

Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.

Isaiah 55:10-11

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

In both of these texts, the word of the Lord functions as a cause in historical time. In Genesis, God creates the world by speaking. In Isaiah, he foresees that his word will accomplish his purpose. In Genesis, God's word interrupts the chain of natural causation; in Isaiah, it enters the chain of historical cause and effect. In both cases, it introduces something new which would not have happened without it.

The Jews were and are very conscious of history and of the purpose of God in history. Genesis 12:1-3 records a key promise made to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

This is a promise to be fulfilled in an unspecified time to come. Again it is a "word" from the Lord, setting in train a chain of events. In this case, the realization of the promise depends on Abraham's co-operation. This word of the Lord was given at a specific time and place, but then remembered and interpreted. Thus, the word of the Lord does not reveal its secrets all at once. Like the events it sets in motion, it unfolds gradually over time.