

Session 1: The Prophet Hosea

I. The Prophet's Words

I2. A Legal Setting

For the message, Hosea (or Yahweh) uses the setting of a law-court in which a husband is suing for divorce. He begins with an appeal to the children to join him in "pleading", "rebuking" or "accusing" her (the Hebrew word could mean all of these). The image for Israel's relationship with Yahweh is drawn from Hosea's life. The wife is Israel corporately, the children are individual Israelites. Hosea is appealing to them as individuals to recognize their corporate sins.

I3. The Accusation

Their FAULT is that they have failed to recognize Yahweh as the giver of fertility. Verses 5, 8 and 9 list "bread and water, wool and flax, oil and drink, silver and gold". Between them these cover basic necessities of life, clothing and the luxuries of the good life. All, says the prophet, are given by Yahweh, Israel's God and not by the "lovers", the local Canaanite Baals and other fertility gods. See Psalm 104:14-15:

Psalm 104:14-15

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.

Because Israel does not recognize the Lord as the giver of all these good things, he is going to take them away. It was a husband's duty to provide his wife with food and clothing, but in this case the husband will take them away. He will "strip her naked" (verse 3), with obvious sexual overtones (verse 9 and 10). He will "make her a wilderness" (verse 3) and "hedge her way with thorns" (verse 6) to prevent her from finding her lovers. In other words, he will make the land infertile so that recourse to Baal will be unproductive. He will take away the silver and gold used in the worship of Baal (verse 8) and the finery used in religious festivals (verse 13). Since it is the Lord whose blessing makes the land productive, he will withdraw his blessing and the land will become unproductive and fertile fields will be replaced by thorns.

I4. The Desired Outcome

But YAHWEH'S PURPOSE is not punishment but a CHANGE OF HEART. His intention is that by withdrawing the fertility of the land, Israel will be forced to think again about the effectiveness of Baal worship. When Hosea uses the word "wilderness" in verses 3 and 14, his

words point beyond the loss of fertility to the wilderness experience, the period of Israel's history when they wandered in the wilderness before entering the land.

Hosea 2:14-15

Therefore, I will now persuade her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

From there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

Hosea presents this time as a period of faithfulness. It was before Israel adopted an agricultural life-style and thus before her religious life was polluted with Baal-worship. The wilderness may stand for defeat and exile, in which Israel would be forced to leave the land once again. Once in the wilderness, says Hosea, Yahweh will woo her once again.

The word "persuade" could mean also "entice" or "allure". It is used for the seduction of a virgin in Exodus 22:16 and divine constraint in Jeremiah 20:7:

Jeremiah 20:7

O Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.

So this is a very strong form of persuasion.

The words "speak tenderly" are words for courtship, the same words used of Hamor's courtship of Dinah in Genesis 34:3.

Genesis 34:3

And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her.

The Valley of Achor was the Israel's route into the Promised Land in the time of Joshua. It was called "Trouble Valley" because of the sin of Achan, who coveted some of the wealth of the land and took it for himself instead of giving it to the Lord. Hosea is speaking of a new entry into the Promised Land.

Although the threat is divorce, the intention is to bring Israel to her senses, to make her receptive to a second courtship and bring about a change of heart. He wants to see Israel "respond", and this is the word for the response of a lover.