

Session 2: The Message of Hosea

Summary of Session 1

In the first session of this course we have discovered:

1. The main focus of the book of Hosea is the "word of the Lord". This is primarily an event. The book tells us that it "came" to Hosea, but it doesn't explain how or what his experience was.
2. Hosea's call came in the form of God's command to marry a shrine prostitute. Thus, his message sprung from his whole life.
3. This message was to insist on exclusive faithfulness to Yahweh against the prevailing culture in which polytheism, the worship of several gods, was accepted as the norm. Hosea protested against Israel's tendency to treat Yahweh in the same way as her other gods, as someone who needed to be appeased and manipulated. Israel, he says, has no "knowledge" of Yahweh; they don't understand him or act rightly.
4. He sees the relationship between Israel and Yahweh as like that of an unfaithful wife with her husband. Yahweh's response is to plead with her to return. By bringing judgement on her, he hopes to change her mind. Her eventual exile is to be a wilderness experience in which she will renew her faithfulness.
5. This image was derived from Canaanite religion, in which the relationship between Baal and the ground was conceived as a sexual one and sexual intercourses was part of the fertility rituals that took place in the shrines of the local fertility gods. Hosea daringly took over this image, comparing Yahweh to a husband. But rather than "baal" or "lord" he wants to be known as "husband".
6. This message drew from the experience of his own unhappy marriage: his love for his wife, his anger and despair at her unfaithfulness and his persistence in trying to bring her to love him.

This is not the whole of Hosea's message. In this session we look at some other passages, in which Hosea draws on the history of Israel to hold up for the people of his time an image of their relationship with God.