

Place: Lurgan Baptist 27:1:2015

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Hosea 1:1-11

29. THE BOOK OF HOSEA

It was a quiet house on a quiet street, in Houston, Texas, quiet because no one was there. The Lockshin family, father, mother, daughter, son had left for Russia. Recently filled prescription bottles still stood in bathroom cabinets on that day in 1986 when Arnold Lockshin's mother in law discovered the family's absence. Books on Marxism still occupied their place on bookshelves. Bicycles still leaned against the garage wall where Michael and Jennifer had hoped after a neighbourhood ride. Lauren and Arnold's wedding album was left behind too, along with the children's drawings and Arnold's old scientific publications. *This was defection, only it wasn't America's freedom that was being sought, but the Communist regime of Russia.* This was unfathomable to most Americans.

As unfathomable as another kind of defection is too many Christians, defection from the Lord Jesus Christ. *How, after tasting the fruits of freedom in the United States, could anyone want to eat the butterless bread of a Communist government ?* And likewise, how, after experiencing the freedom of Christ's love, could anyone willingly hold out their wrists to sin's shackles ? Yet Christian defections and backsliding happen all the time.

Now Hosea is pre-eminently a book for the backslider. For here Hosea pictures God as a loving Husband yearning for the return of His wayward wife. Why the Lord says in this very book " *My people are bent to backsliding from me.* " (11:7) Do you recall the charge the Lord of the Lampstands brings against the church at Ephesus ? " *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.* " (Rev 2:4) Spiritual decline and defection was evident in the nation of Israel (Ps 78 :10) it was evident in the disciples (Matt 26:56 Jn 6:66) in the churches in the New Testament (Gal 4:9) and it was also evident in individuals. People like Samson, David, Solomon, Jonah, Peter, and Demas. Indeed of how many of us can it be said, " *Gray hairs are here and there upon him yet he knoweth it not.*" (7:9) I wonder do William Cowper's lines sum up your spiritual condition this ?

*Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord, Where
is the soul refreshing view Of
Jesus and His Word*

)Now Hosea is the first of the twelve " minor prophets," of the Old Testament. They are called minor, not because their message is unimportant but simply due to the length of their content. They were minor prophet's preaching a major message. Now as we come to Hosea let's think about,

THE PERSON:

His name means " *salvation.* " It is interesting to observe

that the name Joshua (Num 13:16) and Jesus (Matt 1:21) are derived from the same Hebrew root as Hosea. We know very little about Hosea's background except that he was " *the son of Beeri,*" (1:1) yet there is a sense in which we know him at a deeper level than any of the other Minor Prophets. He has been called " *The Prophet of the Sorrowing Heart,*" and that title fits him well, for Hosea's message sprang from the depths of his own domestic tragedy. So much for the person, what about,

THE PLACE:

Well, Hosea addresses the northern kingdom of the ten tribes as " *Israel,*" " *Samaria,*" " *Jacob,*" and " *Ephraim.*" The name " *Ephraim,*" is used because that tribe was the largest of the ten. So here is Hosea and he is preaching to the Northern Kingdom before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. That's brings us to

THE PERIOD:

And we get that in (1:1) Now did you notice the mention of Hezekiah here ? That Hosea was still ministering at the time when Hezekiah reigned in Judah settles it that he lived on through on through the fifty years or so in Israel between the death of Jeroboam the Second and the Assyrian invasion for that invasion took place when Hezekiah reigned in Judah. (Is 36:19) Although Hosea mentions only one king of Israel, the reference to the four kings of Judah places his ministry during the reigns of the last seven kings to rule over

Israel. (750-710 B.C.) That is, from King Jeroboam the Second to King Hoshea. (2 Kings 14:23-29 17:1-4) Now what kind of period was is ? Well, to understand the book we need to put ourselves in the day and age in which he lived. The prophet Amos had completed his ministry and soon Isaiah and Micah would begin to preach. But they would be preaching to the southern kingdom and it was up to Hosea to pick up the mantle of Amos and concentrate on the apostate nation of Israel. In the words of Sidlow Baxter " *this period from Jeroboam the Second on to the captivity was the 'awful last lap,' of iniquity in Israel's downward drive.*" Loyalty to the throne was extinct. The land was filled with murder and bloodshed, adultery and sexual perversion, drunkenness was widespread, accompanied by utter indifference to the Lord. There was no settled foreign policy. Those in power vacillated between alliance with Egypt and appeasement of Assyria.

And yet against the background of Israel's unfaithfulness there stands the faithfulness of God. Now Bible scholars tell us that there is a key word that unlocks this whole prophecy. It's a great Hebrew word *chesed*. It's a key term ,in this book. (2:19 4:1 6:6, 10;12) It means lovingkindness, mercy, or loyal love. Yet that does not exhaust the word for it has no English equivalent. *It's a covenant word used to describe those with whom you have a covenant relationship.* It does mean love but it has a lot of the word loyalty in it also. You see, true love is not true love unless it is loyal. It means unswerving love and undying devotion, it means we are so committed to someone that we go on loving them whatever happens. I suppose the old English word " *troth,*" comes close to

what we are trying to say. Today, people enjoy love with someone for a while and then drop them for someone else. But that is not true love. That is not chesed. *That is not a stay with it love.* That's not the kind of love that is portrayed in this book. Rather the book of Hosea depicts the covenant love of God for his bride, the nation of Israel. You see, the Lord had to say through Hosea's messages, "*What's happened to our marriage ?*" He assured them of His loyal love but was certain He was receiving very little back. Now that brings us to,

THE PATTERN;

Of the book. As we can see from our outline the book divides into two unequal parts. The first three chapters belong together in contrast from those that follow. They are narrative, whereas the remainder are messages. So the first three chapters set before us a page of domestic history the *Tragedy of Hosea's Home Life*. The rest of the book is an exposition of this. For the domestic tragedy in which was Hosea was involved is the basis for a series of messages dealing with the *Tragedy of Hosea's Home Land*. You see, in order for Hosea to understand God's feelings the Lord took him through an extraordinary experience. Do you remember from the loneliness of not having a wife Jeremiah learned how God was feeling about Israel ? (Jer 16:5) Ezekiel was told that his wife would die but he must not weep for her, in order to show Judah that the Lord had been bereaved of His wife.

Now in the same way Hosea was taught how the Lord felt by obeying some unusual instructions with regard to his

marriage situation. So the first section of this book is **Personal**: the last section of the book is **National**: the first section is all about **Hosea's Marriage**, while the last section of the book is all about **Hosea's Message**.

(1) PERSONAL CH'S 1-3 The Faithless Wife & Her Faithful Husband HOSEA'S MARRIAGE

You see, these first three chapters give us the background to the story. Did you notice that it begins with,

(a) *THE STRANGE MARRIAGE:*

Perhaps you think that your marriage is strange. Years after a marriage a pastor met a former bridegroom. The pastor had been late that day and had kept everyone waiting. He said to the groom, "*That was some fright I gave you that day*" The groom replied, "*Yes and I've still got her*" But what a strange marriage this was. Hosea says, "*God told me to marry a prostitute.*" (1:2) Here we meet a bit of a problem because not every Bible scholar agrees on the kind of woman Hosea married. Hosea either married a pure woman who later became a prostitute or he married a prostitute who bore him children. The words "*Go take unto thee a wife of whoredoms,*" or "*take yourself a wife of harlotry*" can be understood prophetically that is looking to the future. So it seems best to see Gomer as chaste and pure at the time of marriage to Hosea, only later having become an immoral woman. (Lev 21:7) Now why would God instruct Hosea to do this, knowing that Gomer would turn out to be

immoral ? Well, by marrying someone who would turn out to be unfaithful Hosea could understand the anguish in God's heart over the Northern Kingdom. You see, God had often compared His relationship to Israel to that of a marriage (Is 62:5 2:19 Jer 3:14) but in Hosea's day His people were constantly committing spiritual fornication and adultery against Jehovah. His own marriage would become a walking and visible example of his message to Israel. My do you realise that sometimes God brings his choicest servants into the most puzzling of circumstances ? Some Christians have the idea that as long as we are committed, faithful and obedient that we will be free from stress and unaffected by the trials and perplexities that affect others. Nothing could be further from the truth. Do you recall Job ? He " *was perfect and upright and one that feared God and eschewed evil.*"

(Job 1:1) yet the Lord called him to go through an ^{al}es sequence of material, physical and spiritual traumas.

Yet even Job's experiences pale into insignificance compared to that of the Lord Jesus who was absolutely perfect yet was " *despised and rejected of men a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*" (Is 53:3) So don't think it strange if the Lord allows some trial to cross your pathway for this story begins with (a) then,

(b) *THE SYMBOLIC CHILDREN:*

Are brought before us. For these children were symbols or representations of what was coming. You see, each child was given a name which carried with it prophetic meaning. The first child was called Jezreel. The name

means " *to be scattered.*" This name predicted two events, the setting aside of a northern king named Jehu who went too far in his bloodletting. (2 Kings 10:30) It also predicted the Assyrian invasion at which time the entire northern kingdom would be scattered. The second child was called Lo-Ruhamah. The name of this child means " *no more mercy*" indicating that God's judgment was just around the corner. Along with this baby, however came the promise that God would spare Judah, the Southern Kingdom of this coming Assyrian invasion.

(1:7) The third child a boy named Lo-ammi means " *Not my people.*" Look at (1:9) So what have we got here ? In the name of the first child, Jezreel we see the nation *Disciplined*. In the name of the second child Lo-Ruhamah we see the nation *Deprived*. In the name of the third child we see the nation *Disowned*.

For these children summarize how the Lord was dealing with the nation. The names of the children were important to the message, although I have not met any Christian parents who have used any of those three names. (a) (b)

(c) *THE SINFUL WIFE:*

Did you notice that in the case of Gomer's firstborn we are told that she " *bare him a son.*" (1:3) But in the case of the second child and in the case of the third child Hosea is not mentioned. Was Gomer already being unfaithful ? Was she beginning to fulfil the sad prediction that God had made when he told Hosea to marry her ? What a heartbreak it must have been to this young preacher as he heard the whispers that circulated about his wife. Perhaps

the children mentioned the men that came by the house when Daddy was away. One day Hosea came home and found a note from Gomer to say that she was leaving him to be with the man she really loved. (2:1-5) My can you imagine the emotions that tore the heart of Hosea apart ? I wonder do you know anything about these emotions ? Has your marriage fallen apart because of an unfaithful spouse ? Will, let me encourage you this the Lord knows how you feel. "*Jesus knows all about your struggles*," Can you see Gomer now ? She is disgraced, derelict, and destitute. Who knows how many men she had slept with ? Who knows what degradation she had plunged into ? But finally, word had reached Hosea that the woman he loved was to be sold in the slave market and do you know what God said to him ? Look at (3:1) Do you know what that is ? That is,

(d) THE STEADFAST HUSBAND:

I mean could you do what Hosea did ? He went to the slave market looking for his wife. Now remember slaves were sold naked. Can you see Hosea making his way among them, looking for Gomer and scarcely able to recognise this wretched woman with her sunken eyes and ravaged body ? My the going rate for a slave laid down in (Ex Ch 21) was 30 shekels of silver but Gomer was being sold at a discount. She was not just shop soiled or second hand she was a disgusting leftover. Nobody wanted her, whatever the asking price but Hosea bought her for 15 shekels of silver. He bought her back, he brought her home and assured of his forgiveness and love and we have every reason to believe that Gomer repented

of her sins and became a faithful wife. The 17th century preacher and writer John Bunyan said, " *I preached what did feel, what I smartingly did feel.* " My can you see that Hosea did the same ? For in the sorrowing, loving heart of Hosea we see a picture of the sorrowing, loving heart of God. In the unfaithfulness of Gomer we see the infidelity of Israel. Thus we move from (1) to the

**(2) NATIONAL CH'S 4-14
The Faithless Nation & the Faithful Lord
HOSEA'S MESSAGE**

You see as Raymond Brown says " **his grief became his gospel.**" His message grew out of his marriage. No doubt all the neighbours talked about Gomer's sins and pointed an accusing finger at her. But now Hosea points a finger at them and reveals their sins. For do you see that he talks about,

(a) THE NATIONAL SIN:

His message reads like today's newspaper. At the outset the Lord told Hosea that " *Israel commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.* " (1:2) Later God says to them, " *Thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*," (9:1) Spiritual unfaithfulness is compared to sexual impurity and God hates both. Look if you will at (4:1-2) Swearing, lying, drunkenness, murder, treachery, adultery, idolatry, these sins and many more were rampant in the nation. To make matters worse, the nation tried to cover her sins with a shallow " *religious revival.* " (6:1-6) Hosea is a master preacher for do you see how he pictures

the spiritual condition of the nation ? He talks about,

1. THE MORNING CLOUD:

Look if you will at (6:4) Their love for the Lord was like a morning cloud and dew. Early in the morning the dew looks like sparkling jewels, but as soon as the sun comes up, the dew is gone. Israel's devotion to the Lord was temporary, but not lasting. Where we used to live in Belfast, was a place called the Rocky Road. It was a steep incline ascending up from the main carriage way that goes from Shaw's Bridge to Knock. *Our home was the last house on the way up, which meant we had a panoramic view over most of the city.* Often as I looked over the city, in the early morning I could not recognise one landmark for a blanket of fog, had come down. But you know, by noon, that fog had gone, and the city was lying before me, in all of its glory.

God says that Israel's love was just like the morning fog, shallow, superficial, transient, temporary. Now they possessed all the trappings of a thriving religion, the sacrifices were regularly offered (4:15, 5:6,) But this was the outward cloak that hid infidelity, a religious veneer which only fools the undiscerning. Appearances were kept up, when actualities had ceased. I wonder is your devotion like the morning cloud ? Could the Risen Lord say to us, what He said to Sardis ? " *Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead ?*" (Rev 3:1) How much reality is behind your profession, how much life is behind your façade ? Are you living off yesterday's spiritual momentum ? Are you doctrinally sound but inwardly

dead ? Isn't it so easy to come and sing His praise, and seek His face, and share His Word, so easy to go through all the mechanics of worship and our hearts are far from Him ? (a)

2. THE HALF BAKED CAKE:

Look if you will at (7:8) What housewife has not had the Immiliating experience of a cake cooked on the outside, but half done inside ? The cake referred to here was cooked on a griddle, and not having been turned, it was burned on one side and uncooked on the other. *This spelt out Israel's condition, overdone on ritual, underdone on righteousness, overdone on sacrifices, underdone on sanctification, overdone on the external, underdone on the internal.* Is this not the same with us ? Overdeveloped in some respects, underdeveloped in others. All of us are only partially sanctified because we have not turned some parts of our lives to the fire of the Holy Spirit. Some are strong in Bible knowledge, but weak in spiritual grace. Some are generous in nature, but violent in temper. Some are strong for the fundamentals but weak in Christian ,love. One sided development is true of us all.

We tend to cultivate our strong points and neglect our weak points. The reassuring fact for us is that the fire under the cake still burn's, and it's up to us to turn the unfinished, imperfect part of our characters to the fire of the Holy Spirit and allow him to bring balance into our lives. (Jn 1:14) (a) b)

3. THE SILLY DOVE:

Look at (7:11) In another place the Lord says, "*Ephraim is joined to idols let him alone.*" (4:17) Israel's privilege had been to dwell alone (Deut 33:28) but she snatched at every opportunity to make alliances with the surrounding nations, imbibing in ever increasing manner, the spirit and worship of their gods (4:17) "*Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.*" The warning is plain, the examples are numerous. Do you remember Lot who "*pitched his tent toward Sodom ?*" (Gen 13:12) Do you recall Solomon who "*loved many strange women,*" who "*turned away his heart after other gods.*" (1 Kings 11:1) What about Peter, warming his hands with the enemies of Christ ? (Lk 22:54) What about Demas ? Who "*loved this present world.*" (2 Tim 4:10) You see, worldliness shows itself in a lifestyle conformed to the spirit and standard of the age. And Satan wants us to become "*conformed to this world.*" (Rom 12:2)

The nineteenth century Scottish divine Thomas Guthrie wrote these searching words.

If you find yourself loving any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than the Bible, any house better than the house of God, any table better than the Lord's table, any person better than Christ, and any indulgence better than the hope of heaven, take alarm.

4. THE GREY HAIRS:

Look if you will at (7:9) Ephraim's deterioration began with an unholy alliance (7:8) that led to idolatry (4:12)

that in turn led to immorality (4:2) Do you see what was happening ? The whole fabric of the nation was weakening. Israel was becoming senile and the tragedy was they did not know it. (7:9) What do "*grey hairs,*" speak of ? Do they not speak of the decline of life ? I heard about a lady one time and one day her husband came home from work she was sitting crying. He said, "*Dear, what's wrong, why are you so upset.*" She said, "*I found a grey hair today. I am going grey. Will you still love me ?*" "*Oh,*" he said "*Darling don't worry about that. I loved you when you were black-headed, and I loved when you were blonde-headed, and I loved when you were red-headed, and I will love you now you are grey-headed.*"

Those grey hairs come unfelt, unknown. Few go grey overnight. Is it not the same spiritually ? Backsliding never begins with a bang. It begins quietly, slowly and subtly. Donald Grey Barnhouse says "*Withering is a low process, barely perceptible at first either to the one who is being withered or to those who look on.*" George Sweeting says, "*Collapse in the Christian life is rarely a blow out, it's usually a slow leak.*" Theodore Epp of Back to the Bible says, "*Backsliding starts in such a subtle way that most of us, are not aware of it, many of us may be backslidden and may not realize it.*"

My are you taking it for granted that you're still walking with God ? Joseph and Mary lost a whole day of fellowship with Jesus because they "*supposed him to be in the company*" (Lk 2:44) They took for granted something of which they should have made sure. We

should be at pains to discover whether we are going grey spiritually. My when was the last time you had a spiritual check up ? When last did you look searchingly at yourself in the mirror of the Word of God ? When last did you measure yourself by the divine standard ? The tragedy of your condition might be that you might be grey spiritually and not know it. Do you recall what was said of Samson ? *"And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him."* (Jud 16:20)

5. THE DECEITFUL BOW:

For Hosea says, *" they return but not to the most High they are like a deceitful bow."* (7:16) That is you could not depend on them. What a picture of the nation's sin ? I wonder is this a picture of your sin ? Like Hosea's wife God's people had played the harlot, (2:5) and judgment was to be swift and sure. For here we see not only (a) but,

(b) *THE NATIONAL SUFFERING:*

For Hosea tells them that suffering is coming in at least three areas. In the words of David Pawson there is going to be,

Barrenness: Hosea says there will be miscarriages, and some women will not be able to conceive. Others will lose their lose their babies when they are born. (9:11-14)

Bloodshed: An enemy will attack and kill many of them and God will not defend them. (10: 14-15)

Banishment: for ultimately this enemy will be victorious and evict them from the land. (10:6)

" Indeed I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just." Thomas Jefferson wrote those words about the U.S.A. and as the prophet Hosea survived the kingdom of Israel he would have agreed. Hosea could see Assyria coming upon the nation and taking it into captivity. He pictures this judgment as the coming of a swift eagle (8:1) the wrath of a whirlwind, (8:7) and the burning of a fire. (8:14) The nation is going to be scattered (8:8 9:17) and they will reap more than they have sown (10:12-15) Do you know something ? The backslider is always punished. The book of Proverbs says, *" The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways."* (14:14) *" The way of transgressors is hard."* (Pro 13:15) And this is what Israel was a backslider. For Hosea cries *"For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer. "* (4:16)

I am often reminded of those words *" Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, cost you more than you want to pay."* You see, the Christian who breaks his vows with the Lord does not lose his salvation, but he does lose his joy, his power and his usefulness. And he suffers from his sins and the discipline of God. David sowed one sin of lust and what a harvest of tears he reaped. Why did God permit Israel to be judged by wicked Assyria ? Because He loved His people. (Heb 12:1-13) You see, God can't let them off, but at the same time God can't let them go. Do you want to see something of the emotion of God ? (11:8)

What a powerful expression of the feelings of God. "*How shall I give thee up Ephraim ? How shall I deliver thee Israel ?*" Israel like Gomer had played the harlot and the Lord like Hosea, but infinitely more was deeply distressed. Did you ever think of the grief and hurt that an unfaithful wife or husband brings to their partner ? Then you have a glimpse of the sorrow that our sin brings to God. You see, your sin not only breaks His law, it breaks His heart. Backslider the Lord may chasten you but He loves you. He says " *Turn O backsliding children saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.*" (3:14) My do you need to return to the Lord ? Do you need to say with the Psalmist, "*For I will declare my iniquity I will be sorry for my sin.*" (Ps 38:18) Now the Book of Hosea does not end on a gloomy note for we see here not only (a) (b)

(c) **THE NATIONAL SALVATION:**

For in spite of their *persistence* (Ch 11) their *past* (Ch 12) and their *punishment* (Ch 13) they would be *pardoned* (Ch 14) You see, Hosea sees the future glory of the nation. Just as his wife was brought back from slavery and restored to his home and heart so the nation would one day be restored to her land and to her Lord. Of course this will happen when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to establish His kingdom and fulfil the promises made to the fathers. Yet while the ultimate fulfilment of these blessings in (Ch 14) must be millennial since Israel has not, nor will not repent in the manner of (14:2-3) until after the Tribulation (Zech 12:10-13) we nonetheless must not miss the personal message here. Do you know what it is ? Backsliders may return to the Lord and know

His *Forgiveness* (14:4) His *Freshness* (14:5) His *Fragrance* (14:7) and His *Fruitfulness*. (14:8) Do you remember when you really loved the Saviour ? Do you recall when it was spring time in your soul ? When you knew something of the freshness of first love ? My are those things just memories ? Have other things crowded out His place in your heart ? Have you gone back ? Not externally but in your heart ? Do you hear His voice " *0 return unto the Lord thy God.*"

(14:1) I remember well the first time I preached indoors. It was in Tommy Ryan's little Mission Hall in Scarva. Now the reason I was there that night, was because a friend of mine had taken ill and I was asked to go in his place. *That friend had been a great blessing to me spiritually.* A Christian who was consistent in his walk with God, in his interest in the meetings. Someone who had a genuine concern for the lost. Someone to whom I often turned for spiritual counsel and guidance. A preacher and singer of the Cross.

Then he defected and lost interest in the things of God. His paths and mine never seemed to cross until a few years ago. At his godly father's funeral, I gently prodded him spiritually. I encouraged him to " *return unto the Lord.*" As I walked to my car, his response brought an ache to my heart and a tear to my eye. " *Oh, the years of sinning wasted.*" Tell me, in all honesty, before the Lord, are you where he is ? Whatever the reason have you left your " *first love ?*" Do you need to take decisive steps to be alone with the Lord ? Will you take those steps right now ? (Matt 10:37-38)