

The main themes in the prorhecy of hosea



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Following Amos, Hosea a Northern prophet covered a period of around twenty years from an estimated 750-720bc. The commencement of his ministry being the end period of Jeroboam, a period which had seen great prosperity, an increase of land, trade and economic growth, leading to the beginning of a new rise of the Assyrian Province leading to the capture of Samaria.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was having its problems " Hebrew co-existence with the Canaanite led to intermarriage and eventually the worship of the Canaanite gods (Jud 2: 11-15cf, Duet 7: 1-5)" 3 A point argued by Keel that conflicting religious ideologies fulfilled " identical functions and that they were interchangeable" 4 . Very little is known about the personal life of Hosea and it is extremely difficult for scholars to decipher his writing between his personal and theological status. 5 The book is widely acknowledged as being split into two parts.

The first part written in both biography and autobiography covers the same double theme, that is consisting of Hosea's relationship with his wife Gomer and the parable of God's relationship with Israel, chapters 1-3 inclusive. The Lord orders Hosea to " Go take yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord" 6(Hos 1: 2-3). The prophet complies taking Gomer as his wife, who bares him three children to whom Hosea gives symbolic names at Gods request. Jezreel referring to the city of Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah translated as not pitied and finally Lo ammi meaning not my people.

The entirety of chapter one outlines God's will to destroy Israel, save Judah and disown his people. This ends with the people of Judah and Israel rising together under one god. In Chapter 2 the theme is continued with the author pleading for his wife to stop her adultery and whoring, with the author explaining the results of her actions, divorcing her "for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband" (Hos 2: 2), further to this explaining his punishment "now I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers" (Hos 2: 10).

The author then reveals himself "and went after her lovers, and forgot me says the Lord" (Hos 2: 13) Finally the Lord says he will persuade her to return to him - offering hope and a return to the marriage, as it was with Israel before the worship of Baal ; "as at the time she came out of the land of Egypt, on that day, says the Lord you will call me 'my husband' no longer will you call me 'my baal'" (Hos 2 : 16).

The final chapter of this theme, chapter 3, is where the Lord speaks again to Hosea, this time ordering him to "Go love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes" (Hos 3: 2). Again the prophet complies, purchasing such a woman from a local market, he informs her she must remain as his, not play the whore, and refrain from intercourse with a man. The author parables this, with Israel remaining many days without King, prince, sacrifice or pillar, ephod or teraphim.

The chapter then concludes that Israel will finally return to the Lord and his goodness. (Hos 3: 1-5). This marriage theme leads to various interpretations.

Firstly that it is a hypothetical marriage, that it did not physically take place, simply a way to symbolise the Lord's feelings as a result of the Israeli nation's behaviour to God being likened to that of Gomer's behaviour with Hosea. Another interpretation is a literal one, that Gomer was a prostitute when she first married, and only after marrying did she become unfaithful and a whore, while another opinion is that she was a whore in the terms of worshipping Baal.

Further to this some scholars are led to believe these are two literal marriages, one to Gomer, the second to a completely different person. We the reader cannot be truly sure which theory is correct, if any. Henry McKeating states "we cannot be certain, indeed, that the prophet is describing real events at all" ⁸ while John Walton argues "The best of the interpretive options in our 'opinion' remains the view that holds to literal marriage for Hosea to a 'prostituting' woman named Gomer (with chapters 1 and 3 treating two separate events in the prophet's life) She was not only an unchaste bride, but also promiscuous as a wife.

Later on Hosea had to purchase her from a slave market, redeeming her from a life of indebtedness and prostitution and thus restoring her as a wife after a period of quarantine. "9G. W. Anderson argues" Hosea married Gomer in ignorance of her character. Hosea's aim was not to give a complete account of his own domestic tragedy but to tell as much of it as possible to convey his message about God and Israel. " ¹⁰ It is however extremely interesting to look at the author's use of terms within this theme.

Using such terminologies as whore, prostitute and adulteress The land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord"(Hos 1 : 2-3), " Do not exult as other nations do, for you have played the whore, departing from your God" (Hos 9 : 1), " Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they do not know the Lord(Hos 5 : 4) and " For the men themselves go aside with whores and sacrifice with temple prostitutes" (Hos 4 : 14). The author always seems to differentiate between his terminology of what is a whore and what is a prostitute, and leads me to regard his use of whore as a worshiper of Baal.

Whether these are indeed true events or not, whatever theory is correct with regard to Gomer it is clear that there is a direct parable between God's relationship with The Israeli nation and their worship of Baal and Hosea's relationship to Gomer and their children as the nation of Israel. It is of interest also to note that the Lord asks Hosea to take a wife in Chapter 1, however in Chapter 3 he does not mention marriage but rather " go love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress. " 11(Hos 3 : 1).

There is no actual mention of Hosea marrying this person with many scholars holding conflicting opinions. The next theme follows the line of the Lord's accusations against the Israeli people for the worship of Baal. " For the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land" (Hos 4 : 1), further to this his blame lies at the feet of his own priests , whom he holds responsible and the root of his people desertion from him to Baal. " For with you is my contention, O Priest" (Hos 4 : 4).

It is very visible that the Lord is not happy with his situation or his nations; his blaming of the priests is down to them not teaching the people. " My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge. " (Hos 4 : 6). He is furious and talks of punishing them for they have " forsaken the Lord to devote themselves to whoredom" (Hos 4: 10-11). It is again of interest to note that further to this " when their drinking is ended they indulge in sexual orgies" (Hos 4 : 18), the author again using different terminology other than whore with regard to sexual activities.

There is a clear difference here. It is hard to imagine someone devoting themselves to a life of prostitution thus forsaking the Lord, however if we swap whoredom for Baal worship it seems to fit a lot better. Hill and Walton argue " Canaanite worship of the storm god included human sacrifice and ritual prostitution (cf Ps 106 : 34 : 34 -41; Duet 23 : 17) these male and female were employed by the local shrines and were considered ' priests' and 'priestesses' of the gods. The people of Canaan engaged in sacred sexual intercourse with the cult prostitutes as part of Baal worship" 12.

This is an interesting contribution with regard to the authors use of grammar and of his intention by the word whore. It is therefore taken that the Lord is seriously disgruntled with the worship of Baal, and together with his priests behaviour he is seriously un-amused. The theme ends with God's warning of his punishment using a lion, (a ferocious wild animal), stating " I myself will tear and go away" (Hos 5 : 14) and concludes that he will not rest until " the people acknowledge their guilt and seek my face" (Hos 5 : 15).

The Lord then definitely wishing the people to return and worship him, and until this happens he will punish them. The next theme is based on God's disgust for his abandonment, explaining what he has done for the Israelite and more to the point what the Israelite's have done in return. " Israel has forgotten his maker" (Hos 8 : 14) and further to this " because they have broken my covenant and transgressed my law" (Hos 8 : 1)¹³. For in the beginning as far as the Lord is concerned " when Israel was a child, I loved him", (Hos 11 : 1), " it was I who fed you in the wilderness in the land of drought" (Hos 13 : 5).

The Lord is unhappy, his people have looked elsewhere for help in their time of trouble, " they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria" (Hos 7 : 11)", but the lord is upset they have not turned to him, again seeking to punish them . The final theme to discuss is a theme that we have seen throughout. This being that Hosea see's God as a person, not only that but as a father. " But Israel is God's son. " ¹⁴ Keating further discusses this explaining in terms of a father son relationship. It is impossible for God to abandon his son, to stop loving him. He argues that there is a definite parent /child relationship and the problems this ensues for God.

That God cannot abandon Israel. Within this God for Hosea holds the ability to love, to reason to hold anger and wrath, retribution and empathy. God holds the ability to punish as much as to teach, as much as to forgive. The theme concludes with a direction to knowledge, a point also noted by Kee, Mathers, Rogerson and Saldini, " Hosea ends with a plea to the people to return to God, even to the point of providing words with which to seek God's

mercy (14 : 2-3). An assurance that mercy will be forthcoming is concluded with a verse in the 'wisdom' tradition of Israel. " 15