

The life and marriage of hosea religion essay



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Hosea was a prophet who lived and prophesied just before the destruction of Israel in about 722 BC. During this time, the prophet Hosea was preaching in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He began his work as a prophet after Amos. This was probably before the end of Jeroboam II's reign. It is believed that he continued to reign until after the Assyrian had captured Samaria in around 721 BC. It was the troubled times before the fall of Samaria.

The writer says that, during this dangerous period, Hosea seemed to ignore threats that the Assyrians had imposed. Instead he was very much concerned on what he sees as root causes of Israelite's problems. He further says that 'Hosea loved the land, he loved his people and he was sure that God loved them too' (Drane, 1987: 126). It seems as if he was especially concerned about the idolatry of the people and their faithfulness towards God.

THE MARRIAGE OF HOSEA

If we read Hosea 1: 2f, we see how the Lord first spoke to the nation of Israel through the prophet Hosea. God gave Hosea the message that was seen through a personal tragedy in his own life. The message that he received from God was that he should go and get married to a woman called Gomer. He was also told that his wife would be unfaithful. But Matthews argues that, was Hosea a Levite? If he were a Levite, it would mean that he was not going to do the duties or perform in the Northern Kingdom as a priest due to the sins of Jeroboam that would exclude him from the cult. (the sins of Jeroboam were the actions taken by King Jeroboam I to establish a separate identity for

the northern kingdom. These sins became the hallmark of an 'evil king') (2001: 182).

Nevertheless, Matthew asks a question in his book whether Gomer was a prostitute before Hosea married her. He argues that if 'Gomer was a prostitute, then the tension between his prophetic role and his priestly background would be heightened, since a Levite would have been forbidden by law to marry a prostitute according to Leviticus 21: 14-15'. He does not agree that Hosea was a Levite for the metaphor to work. However, the writer argues that Hosea's dysfunctional marriage was serving as a metaphor for Yahweh's bad relationship with Israel (2001: 75).

Some scholars believed that Hosea's wife Gomer was a temple prostitute that the prophet would marry. This was according to his own understanding of God's relationship with his people Israel. However, scholars believe that her sexual behaviour was quite unexpected.

There after Hosea married Gomer as a wife, the daughter of Diblaim. Hosea bears three children to his wife, however, in chapter 1: 3, the Bible states that Hosea went and took Gomer and she conceived and bore him a son. We therefore see that the bible says that she bore him the first son, but the rest of the children are not clear. It seem as if Gomer got the other two children out of prostitution as seen in other scholars like Wellhausen, who argues that when Hosea was marrying his wife, he did not realize that the wife was unfaithful till after the birth of the children (Bentzen, 1959: 131). These three children were given symbolic names that would convey a message about the ruin of the nation.

In 2 Kings 9: 15-26, the first-born was called Jezreel. He was given this name as a reminder about the strategic valley where Jehu had defeated the son of Ahab. This simply meant that the King who was there during that time was a descendant of Jehu, who owed his power to Yahweh. And Yahweh could easily get his power. It is believed that this valley was the most fertile place of Israel. Moreover, in Hosea 2: 9, Yahweh says that He will take back all his gifts. This name Jezreel was like a warning that the covenant between God and Israel will be dissolved. In fact the name Jezreel was a prophecy name following the destruction of the dynasty.

The second born was given a name called unloved. The second child symbolizes that Yahweh would not have pity and have no mercy after the unfaithful. This was a declaration that the people of Israel seemed to have gone beyond the love and forgiveness of God. In Hosea 1: 6, it clearly shows that Yahweh lost his patience with his people. It was during this time that Hosea was condemning the social injustices of his time.

The other was called not my people. The Israelites identity as Yahweh's people was cancelled. Israelites were very proud of themselves as God's chosen nation. According to Hosea 2: 8-9, we see how God had made a promise with the Israelites that He would give them land and children. It was the covenant that God had made with the people of Israel. However, the people of Israel had destroyed the covenant by been unfaithful to Yahweh. For them to have abundant harvest, they started to worship other god called Baal.

(Matthews 2001: 75). By so doing, the people of Israel believed that they would become prosperous and have bumper harvest by observing the fertility rites of Baal worship. In addition, these same rituals took part in the very same sexual indulgence that had badly damaged Hosea's marriage life.

As Gomer says in Hosea 2: 5, the people of Israel would say that, ' I will go to my lovers - they give me food and water, wool and linen, olive oil and wine.' This was how the people of Israel who had turned away from God were thinking about their ' god' Baal. They had turned away from God and start worshipping other ' gods' like Baal because of what they could get out of him e. g. things like prostitution and the love of money. Even though things were like that, the prophet Hosea had known that it was Israelites own God Yahweh who all the things as seen in Hosea 2: 8.

From the above passage mentioned above, we see that during this time, the people of Israel were acknowledging Yahweh only with their lips while their hearts were far from God. A lot of people were practicing syncretism during this period because they worshipped both Yahweh and Baal at the same time. These people involved themselves in different activities that were against God as mentioned above. It was at this particular time that the Israelites had lost their spiritual faiths.

WHAT DOES HOSEA'S MARRIAGE SYMBOLISE?

In this narrative I hold the view that this was historical. The narrative actually reflects Hosea's experience in his life. This was a story that would portray a teaching. This was so because if Hosea had married a prostitute, most people would have condemned Hosea for marrying a prostitute. Moreover,

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some scholars suggest that Gomer became a prostitute after marriage (Hosea 1: 2). However, Pfeiffer states that the first wife that Hosea had married was not a prostitute but she was a foreign woman, Gomer from Diblataim in Moab. He further argued that the woman in chapter 3 was a second wife. This was the one who was a real prostitute. He says that the first marriage shows the failure of Israelites with the national God El eljon in Jerusalem, while the second shows the failure with the tribal God Yahweh. He assumes that the two chapters speak of different women, and says that a second woman was a common 'streetwalker' who was purchased by Hosea at the price of an ordinary slave. The woman was kept privately for a long time as a symbol of Israel's impending loss of kings, prince and cultic implements, he said. Pfeiffer mentions that the first two chapters did not mean that Gomer was a prostitute, he explains the word 'whoredoms' as religious apostasy as seen in 12, 4 and 6 cf 4, 12 and 5, 4b. According to him, the wife and children were involved in (religious) fornication because it was believed that the whole land was in such a state. Other scholars suggest that the chapters mentioned above, the Hebrew word prostitute means fornication while Hosea 1: 4 means adultery. This would suggest that the prophet did not marry a prostitute. They suggest that Gomer became a prostitute later. Some scholars still would suggest that Gomer was not a commercial prostitute but a Temple prostitute. Therefore she was not immoral character. The story portrays that Hosea's marriage was a symbol of the relationship of Yahweh and his people Israel. This gives us a clear picture as a symbol to the Israelites of their adultery against their husband, God.

In Hosea 1: 4; 2: 1 is about the message of Hosea. We read how Gomer had left her husband and went after men. When Gomer left, Hosea was annoyed with her, but later she was forgiven. Hosea 3: 1f states how Gomer was brought back from slavery and Hosea accepted her as his wife. Here we see how much love Hosea had for his wife and would not let her go. In the same manner, Yahweh has much love for his people, no wonder why it was his wish to bring the people and redeem them.

From the message above, it shows that Hosea used his marriage to show the love of God to his people. The bible tells us that God loved the Israelites despite their sins against God. I therefore agree with some scholars who say that Gomer became a prostitute after the marriage. This is so because God would not commend his servant to marry a prostitute woman. Von Rad suggests that if a woman is adulterous, it does not necessarily mean that she is a prostitute. He further says that a woman took part in Canaanite fertility rites.

CONCLUSION

Hosea is believed to have lived after the fall of Samaria in 721. His main message was probably due to the perplexed period when Jehu's dynasty came to an end ca. 745. He says though the Israelites were unfaithful to Yahweh, He never rejected them. From the story above Hosea used his marriage to show God's love to his people. His marriage portrays that it was a symbol of the relationship between Yahweh and his people.