

INTRODUCTION
TO THE
OLD TESTAMENT

*with a comprehensive review of
Old Testament studies
and a special supplement on the Apocrypha*

by

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I. THE BOOK OF HOSEA

A. NAME AND OUTLINE

The prophecy was named after its attributive author הושיע, whose name in the Latin and Greek versions appeared as *Osee* (Ὀσηέ). One of the four great Hebrew prophets of the eighth century B.C., he was called to his ministry in the reign of Jeroboam II (782/81-753 B.C.). Although details of his personal life are rather scanty, it appears that his father was named Beeri (not the Reubenite prince of 1 Chron. 5:6). Hosea was unique among the literary prophets in that his childhood home was in the northern kingdom. His actual birthplace remains unknown, however, as does his occupation in life, though from the reference in Hosea 7:4ff. it has been assumed that he worked as a baker.⁴ From the various agricultural allusions in the book it could be maintained with equal seriousness that Hosea was a farmer. However, a peasant origin seems improbable in the light of his knowledge of history, his grasp of political affairs, and the elegant, well-chosen imagery with which his style abounds. His wife Gomer was described as the daughter of Diblaim, who is otherwise unknown, and was the mother of three children. Some scholars have seen in the expression בת רבלים a reference to her place of birth, and have located it in Gilead, but this is rather doubtful for lack of topographical evidence.

The prophecy of Hosea may be analyzed as follows:

- I. The Relations of Israel with God, Portrayed Against the Background of Hosea's Marital Experience, ch. 1-3
- II. Denunciations of Pride, Idolatry, and Corruption, ch. 4-8
- III. The Certainty of Approaching Punishment for the Northern Kingdom, ch. 9-10
- IV. A Parenthetical Utterance Dealing with the Triumph of Divine Love and Mercy, ch. 11:1-11
- V. Destruction as the Result of Israel's Infidelity and Rebellion, ch. 11:12-13:16
- VI. Future Mercies for a Penitent People, ch. 14

⁴ E.g. by G. A. F. Knight, *Hosea* (1960), p. 13.

B. THE DATE OF HOSEA'S MINISTRY

The work of Hosea is to be placed in the last generation of the history of the northern kingdom, which had been enjoying a revival of material prosperity under Jeroboam II. It is not easy to say precisely when the ministry of Hosea commenced, and as a consequence scholarly estimates of its length have varied considerably. The superscription in Hosea 1:1 furnished a twofold indication of date, one of which placed Hosea against a Judaeon background of chronology in the reigns of Uzziah (767-740/39 B.C.), Jotham (740/39-732/31 B.C.), Ahaz (732/31-716/15 B.C.), and Hezekiah (716/15-687/86 B.C.), while the other related him to the period of Jeroboam II (782/81-753 B.C.).⁵ The verse in part or in its entirety may, of course, constitute an editorial addition originating in Judah, since the mention of Judaeon kings takes precedence over that of the king who ruled in the area where the prophecies were actually given. On the other hand, such an arrangement may merely indicate that Hosea regarded the Davidic line alone as legitimate, and in that event the form of the superscription that gave Uzziah priority could well have originated with the prophet himself.

The reference in Hosea 1:4 to the house of Jehu points to a date before the death of Jeroboam II in 753 B.C., and if the allusion to Assyria in Hosea 8:9 is to the tribute paid by Menahem to Tiglathpileser III about 739 B.C. (cf. Hos. 5:13; 7:11f.; 10:5f.; 12:2), this would indicate a date of about 743 B.C. for the continuation of the prophetic ministry. If the reference in Hosea 5:8-6:6 is to the Syrian-Ephraimite war of 735-734 B.C., it would imply that the ministry of Hosea continued well beyond the death of Jeroboam II, while the mention of relations with Egypt in Hosea 7:11, 9:6 and 12:2 would seem to indicate the activity of Hoshea, the last king of Israel. The ministry of Hosea thus extended from about 753 B.C. to a time just before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Precisely what transpired in the life of the prophet at that point is unknown, but the fact that the superscription in Hosea 1:1 mentioned Judaeon kings as contemporaries might indicate that the message of the prophet, if not actually the personage of the man himself, was by no means unknown in the southern kingdom after the fall of Samaria. It is not outside the bounds of possibility that Hosea spent his latter days in Judah in retirement, though certainty on this particular point is lacking.⁶

⁵ For the chronology see W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, No. 100 (1945), pp. 21f.; E. R. Thiele, *JNES*, III (1944), pp. 176f.; K. A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, *NBD*, pp. 217ff.

⁶ Cf. H. Ewald, *Commentary on the Prophets of the OT* (1875), I, pp. 221ff. G. Hölscher, *Die Profeten*, pp. 205f., made him a Benjamite, while I. Engnell, *Svenskt Bibliskt Uppslagsverk* (1948), I, cols. 874f., regarded him as a native Judaeon.

C. HOSEA AND GOMER

The circumstances attending the marriage of Hosea and its implications for the meaning of the prophecy have been matters of perennial discussion among scholars.⁷ The primary sources are chapters 1 and 3, the first containing a third-person account of the marital relations of Hosea, and the second comprising a short selection of similar material written in the first person. In Hosea 1:2, the prophet was commanded to "take a woman of whoredom and children of whoredom," as a result of which he married Gomer, who subsequently bore three children. Each was given a symbolic name, the first of which, *Jezreel* (Hos. 1:4), implied that God would punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel. The second name, *Lo-ruhamah* or *Unpitied* (Hos. 1:6), signified a lack of divine compassion for the house of Israel, and the third, *Lo-ammi* or *Not-my-people* (Hos. 1:9), was an assurance of divine rejection. In the second of the primary sources (Hos. 3:1ff.), the prophet stated that God had commanded him to love a woman who was cherished by her paramour, and went on to relate how he purchased this adulteress and kept her under discipline for some time (Hos. 3:1-3), an act that was also given a symbolic meaning.

These two sources constitute a single unit, comprising biographical and autobiographical material linked by a sermon to Israel in the second chapter. This unity is characterized by the fact that chapters 1 to 3 employ the marriage-relationship to describe the bond between God and Israel and the reaction of the Chosen People to this situation in terms of the adultery of the wife. Because of the moral difficulties inherent in the marriage of a prophet of God with a prostitute, a number of views on the matter have commanded the attention of commentators. Medieval Jewish interpreters insisted that the entire story was symbolical, and had no relationship whatever to historical fact. Other expositors took the first chapter as historical but the third as allegorical, while a different view insisted that both were literal, and suggested that Gomer became a slave after her third child was born, being ultimately bought back by Hosea. Some scholars claimed that chapter three actually preserved a more intimate account of the marriage of Hosea and Gomer than chapter one, attributing the latter to the personal reminiscences of Hosea himself. Still other scholars raised the whole question as to the premarital sexual activity of Gomer. Regarding the type of material in chapters 1 to 3, it seems sufficient to recognize it as comprising biography, sermonic material, and autobiography, without invoking the three categories of

⁷ For a survey of the problems see H. H. Rowley, *BJRL*, XXXIX (1956-7), pp. 200ff., reprinted in *Men of God*, pp. 66ff.

material that Mowinckel entertained in the compilation of some of the prophetic books.⁸

In Hosea 1:2, Gomer was described by the term אִשַׁת זְנוּנִים or "woman of harlotries" instead of by the more common term for prostitute, and this difference was taken by Ehrlich as implying that Gomer was merely inclined towards harlotry.⁹ Yet in Hosea 3:1, the woman is referred to as an adulteress who was beloved of her paramour,¹⁰ and whom the prophet was commanded to love also. Some problems arise concerning the syntax of the Hebrew word עוֹר, "again," with Ehrlich and Pfeiffer maintaining that it should be construed with the words immediately preceding, that is, "The LORD said to me again, Go . . .,"¹¹ while other scholars have been influenced by the Massoretic minor accentuations of "to me" and "woman," which in effect joins up 'δλh with the subsequent words.

Even if the latter interpretation is adopted, as it is by most scholars, the word "again" could imply continuance of a process and be rendered, "Go on loving a woman . . .," in which case Gomer is clearly indicated. It could also denote repetition of an earlier action, that is, "Go again, love a woman . . .," which might or might not apply to Gomer. If Ehrlich and Pfeiffer are correct, the woman referred to could also be someone other than Gomer. For Pfeiffer the instructions were to be understood symbolically, with Gomer being regarded as a model of conjugal fidelity and the adultery of Hosea 1:2 typifying spiritual unfaithfulness to God.

The view that the rendering, "Go again, love a woman . . ." involved another woman can hardly be substantiated, since the comparison is only concerned with the love of God for Israel, not for any other nation. The LXX rendered the phrase in Hosea 3:1 as "loving evils and adultery," the active form of the participle being supported by the Syriac version. Ibn Ezra adopted the active form of the verb in his rendering of "loving another man," whereas Rashi followed the passive pointing of the Masorettes, and interpreted the word *rēa'* to mean "husband," as in the RV

⁸ S. Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (1914), pp. 17ff.; cf. IBOT, pp. 224ff.; T. H. Robinson, *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*, pp. 50ff.

⁹ A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel* (1912), V, pp. 163f., followed by T. O. Hall, *Review and Expositor*, LIV (1957), pp. 503ff.

¹⁰ For a cultic interpretation of this phrase see A. D. Tushingham, *JNES*, XII (1953), pp. 150ff.

¹¹ A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel*, V, pp. 170f. PIOT, p. 567. So also R. Gordis, *HUCA*, XXV (1952), pp. 29f. This view had been rejected earlier by K. Budde, *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, XCVI (1925), p. 57. The deletion of "again" was suggested by C. Steuernagel, *Lehrbuch der Einleitung in das AT*, p. 605; L. Gautier, *Introduction à l'Ancien Testament* (1939), I, p. 465n.; O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das AT*, p. 432; cf. ETOT, pp. 387f.; J. Lindblom, *Hosea literarisch untersucht* (1928), p. 17.

