

EXEGETICAL PAPER ON HOSEA

(FOCUS ON HOSEA 11:1-11)

STUDIES IN THE PROPHETS

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### **Brief Background on the Person and Book of Hosea**

Right at the beginning of the book, Hosea is identified as the son of Beeri. Due to his fathers name many assert that he may be from the tribe of Rueben. Non the less, as there is no substantial evidence to support this. The book was probably, written out in Judah, when the prophet had been sent away. It is undoubtable that Hosea was a citizen of the Northern Kingdom, as we find him very acquainted with the historical conditions of the land and the foreign interest of the North.<sup>1</sup>

Understanding the message of Hosea consist of understanding the Sinai covenant that God had made with the Israelites. Hosea depicts this by announcing a series of blessing and cures by God, each cures or blessing based on the Mosaic law. Hosea's task was mainly to warn the people that Yahweh intended to enforce the terms of his contract. Due to the nature of the state of the northern kingdom (their continued cycle of covenant-breaking), it was evident that Gods word to them could have hardly been positive. The book contains hope to the faithful that someday God would again bring prosperity to Israel. But the majority of the book contains oracles of woes against the nation for breaking the covenant.<sup>2</sup>

Though various dates are submitted for various reasons by various scholars, most agree to the dates 785-745 BC, the chronological dates of Jeroboam II. The names of the kings listed in the first verse of the first chapter suggest that Hosea's mission continued to commence through

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<sup>1</sup> S. R. Driver, A Plummer, C.A Briggs, eds., *The International Critical Commentary: Hosea* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark LTD., 1979) cxl.

<sup>2</sup> David Hybbard, Glenn Barke, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea – Jonah* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1987) 6-7.

Hezekiah's reign (715 BC) and spanned about forty years. Hosea's ministry must have began at or before the time of his marriage, when he was probably eighteen or twenty years of age.<sup>3</sup>

### **Identity of Gomer**

In the general study of this book, many have devoted special attention to the identify of Hosea's wife, Gomer, the nature of her adultery, whether or not she was the same person in the first few chapters.<sup>4</sup> Concerning the text, several questions about Gomer arose; Was the women in chapter one the same as the woman mentioned in chapter three? Did Hosea marry an ordinary Israelite woman who later became an adulteress and a prostitute? Was she a prostitute or adulterer?<sup>5</sup>

First, we find that there is a sudden switch from the third person in chapter one to first person in chapter three, many credit this to the editorial process that may have occurred. Non the less, this switch does not substantiate any evidence that the woman in chapter one was not the same woman in chapter three. Thus one must keep in mind the sequential patterned idea in which the writer or writers had in mind. The details of chapter three do seem to agree with the patterned idea that the author had in mind. The writer (s) here assume that the readers would follow his logical sequence, and thus makes no reference to the woman's name in chapter 3. Frankly, any other reading would break the analogy which carries the basic message of this section. Which is that, the lord would judge Israel for her idolatry and afterwards renew his relationship with her.

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<sup>3</sup> D. J Wiseman, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, Hosea by David Hubbard, (Downers Grove: Inter-varsity Press, 1989), 22-3.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Hosea by Mary Evans, (Grad Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 308.

<sup>5</sup> Wiseman, 54.

Consequently, to introduce a second woman would derail the entire train of thought and make wreck the hope which the prophet would convey to Israel.<sup>6</sup>

Most scholars believe the reading of chapter 2:1 “a wife of harlotry”, describes what Gomer would become and not what she was at the time Hosea married her.<sup>7</sup> Most scholars agree that Gomer is not a literal prostitute but an adulterous and promiscuous wife. Others would still assert that there remains a conflict on whether the phrase “a woman of prostitution” actually means a prostitute or simply a promiscuous or adulterous woman. One scholar asserts that Hosea 1-3 brings into play several negative presuppositions. First, that it gives all social and private power to the husband without considering the value of the woman, who obviously attracts many affluent suitors. “She is autonomous in that she chooses to go away or stay; her presence evokes such desire that a man [God] is willing to resort to cruelty, lawlessness, perhaps even self-humiliation.” Teresa Hornsey, obviously writing from a feministic view, has a point, but misses the central idea of God’s relentless love for his wayward wife.<sup>8</sup>

### Scriptural Context

#### *Book Context*

This passage (Hosea 11:1-11) as it relates to the overall theme of the book, speaks thus. Hosea is a prophet of Judgment to Israel for their unfaithfulness to God’s covenant with them, and the over all message to this point has been Judgment on Israel. In this passage we see a shift, the theme changes from Israel’s punishment to Gods love in spite of Israel’s persistent apostasy.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 53-4; L. O. Dorn, “Is Gomer the Woman....?” *The Bible Translator* 51 (October 2000), :424-30.

<sup>7</sup> Wiseman, 54.

<sup>8</sup> Teresa Hornsby, “Israel has become a Worthless Thing: Re-reading Gomer in Hosea 1-3,” *Journal of the Study of Old Testament* 82 (March 1999): 117-19.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Gaebelin, ed., *The Exposition Bible Commentary, Vol. 7, Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, by Leon Wood. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 212.

The passage depicts Yahweh's unquenchable Love for Israel, which is likened to that of a father for his child or even for a wayward child.<sup>10</sup>

### *Immediate Context*

The context *before* Hosea 11:1-11 is the continuation of the message of God's judgment over Israel. Ephraim is referred to as a trained heifer (as verse to a stubborn one)<sup>11</sup> that God would pursue. Hosea in this context also urges them to sow righteousness and in turn reap kindness, there is a call to righteousness. Yet the passage ends with God promising to punish them for their great wickedness.

The context *after* the Hosea 11:1-11 reverts to the main theme of the book which is Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Hosea ends with a note that Israel should have humbled themselves and turned back, but instead Israel has "bitterly provoked him to anger" through her extensive sin. Hence, the Lord would leave Ephraim in their guilt, and punishment would surely come.<sup>12</sup>

### **Theme of Hosea 11:1-11**

The central theme of this passage is God's persistent love in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness, it depicts God yearning for His people.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Henry Gehman, *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 408; Richard Patterson, "Parent's Love as a Metaphor for Divine Human Love," *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society* 46 (June 2003): 208-9.

<sup>11</sup> Wiseman, 180.

<sup>12</sup> Gaebelien, 216 & 218.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

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