

## **Amos and Hosea**

### Class 4 — Study Guide

#### *1. Historical Setting*

Hosea's analysis of the situation of the northern kingdom forms the background for the two texts we will study in this class. Hosea uses a variety of terms to refer to the nation and the people. In the second text, for example, he refers to the people as Israel and as Ephraim. Ephraim was largest and most powerful of the ten tribes that made up the northern kingdom. As we have seen, Hosea sees that the people of the northern kingdom have abandoned the covenant with Yahweh as the true source of the life of the community and instead have turned to the Canaanite gods like Baal and Asherah, either directly by worshipping these gods or indirectly by allowing Canaanite practices and beliefs to infiltrate the worship of Yahweh. Again, as we have seen, these Canaanite gods are simply manifestations for the people's self-idolatry, their unrelenting efforts to exploit the land and the poor to accumulate wealth and power to protect themselves from the uncertainties of life rather than relying on God to care for them. For Hosea, Israel must return to the beginning. Israel's beginning was the exodus from Egypt and the time in the wilderness. To return to the beginning means that Israel will go into exile, but this time to Assyria (in the text referred to as Asshur).

#### *2. The first text — The Sign of the Ransomed Bride*

The first text records another prophetic sign. Yahweh orders Hosea to love an adulteress, so Hosea ransoms the woman. But instead of consummating the marriage immediately, Hosea imposes a period of sexual abstinence on the woman (and on himself!) to see if she can be a faithful wife. We do not know if she passed the test or not because the chief concern of the text is to affirm what Yahweh intends to do for Israel. Even though Israel has been unfaithful, God still loves Israel and wants to begin again. For there to be a covenant, though, there have to be two willing covenant partners just as for there to be a real marriage there have to be two willing marriage partners. God still loves, but the question is whether Israel can again fall in love with God. God intends to find out by imposing a discipline on Israel symbolized by the period of enforced abstinence which stands for the loss of the land and the coming exile. Many people want to see the woman of Chapter 3 as Gomer, the woman of Chapter 1. However, the woman in Chapter 3 is not named; and, again, the reason may be that the sign is more about God and Israel than it is about Hosea and his wife or wives. In any case, whether the woman in Chapter 3 and the woman in Chapter 1 are the same or two different women, we are dealing with two different marriages because the symbol of the marriage differs in the two chapters. In Chapter 1 the consummation of the marriage continues to symbolize the judgment theme because the names of the children describe the destruction of the dynasty and the nation as well as the rejection of the people as God's people. In Chapter 3 the consummation of the marriage symbolizes the renewal of the covenant, not judgment. So the two chapters recount two marriages of Hosea, whether to the same woman (Gomer) or two different women. This passage raises fundamental questions for all of us about faith and our relationship with God. For Hosea, faith stands at the heart of human life. Faith is about finding a place to stand in the rich,

complex, and at times confusing experience of human life. Hosea powerfully raises the questions — “Where do we stand?” and “Where do I stand?” The two questions lead further. Do I stand with God? If I stand with God, do I accept God’s moral will? What is my relationship with the physical universe? Are the goods of the physical universe mine to control and exploit? Or are they gifts from God that God wants me to enjoy with gratitude to God because they come from God? What is my relationship with other human beings? Do I interact with others from out of covenant love or do I have other motivations? For Hosea, the only secure place to stand is to stand in God and that means accepting God’s view of the universe and the human community. What kind of community does God want?

### *3. The second text — Father and Son*

In the first three chapters Hosea explored in a profound series of texts the husband-wife metaphor as a way to communicate God’s word to Israel. In the second text we will consider Hosea’s equally profound use of the father-child metaphor to probe the same reality. The poem has four parts. Part I summarizes again Hosea’s view of Israel’s response to God, but this time under the father-child metaphor. God called his child out of Egypt, but the child wandered away from God after the Baals. Probe the description of God as father. It continues to unfold throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament (see, for example, Luke 10:21-24). What does the father metaphor tell us about God? What aspects of God’s transcendent being does it shed light on? Part II announces the judgment. Israel will go into exile to Assyria. They will call to Baal, but Baal is impotent to raise them up. Part III discloses the inner life of God. It contains one of the most profound insights into God’s inner being. What does it tell us? How does the insight it gives alter the way we understand God and live our lives? Part IV gives the outcome. Israel will survive. From your reading of Hosea, what will the new community look like?

### *4. Further work*

You might want to read further in the Book of Hosea. If you have questions, feel free to contact me at any time by phone. If I am not at home, leave a message with your phone number; and I will return your call.

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