

The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

LESSON
ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO
HOSEA



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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

Lesson One

An Introduction to Hosea

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever known someone who just won't listen to wise counsel? They foolishly reject what others say and, as a result, they stumble again and again. In many ways, this is what happened during the ministry of the prophet Hosea. Hosea brought God's word to his people over several decades. And even though his prophecies proved to be true every step along the way, God's people suffered time and again because they refused to listen to him. Still, Hosea didn't give up. Toward the end of his life, the Holy Spirit led Hosea to create a collection of his prophecies that we now call the book of Hosea. He designed his book to give God's people wisdom for the challenges they faced in their day. And as a divinely inspired book, the book of Hosea also imparts wisdom to God's people in every age, including our own.

This is the first lesson in our series on *The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea*, and we've entitled it, "An Introduction to Hosea." In this lesson, we'll explore a number of introductory issues related to Hosea's ministry and the book that now bears his name.

Our introduction to Hosea will divide into two main parts. We'll look first at the background of the prophet Hosea and his book. Then we'll introduce an overview of the basic content and structure of the book. Let's begin by exploring several dimensions of the background of Hosea.

BACKGROUND

Hosea's prophecies were inspired by the Holy Spirit, so they have unquestionable authority over God's people throughout history. But his prophecies *first* addressed ancient Israelites and the circumstances that they faced. As we'll see in this lesson, Hosea's ministry spanned several decades. So, the more we understand the background of Hosea's developing circumstances, the better we'll be able to grasp and apply his prophecies to our own day.

Before we approach these matters, we need to distinguish two interconnected historical settings, two "worlds" as it were. The first setting, which we'll call "that world," covers the decades of Hosea's prophetic ministry in which he received and delivered revelations from God. But the second historical setting, which we'll call "their world," takes place later in Hosea's life. In this second setting, Hosea selected and wrote down some of his prophecies to impact the lives of those who first received his book.

We'll approach this twofold background in two steps. First, we'll explore "that world," or the full range of the prophet Hosea's ministry. And second, we'll examine "their world," or the setting in which the book of Hosea was written. Let's begin with the ministry of the prophet Hosea.

PROPHET

Around the time of Hosea's prophetic ministry, a number of nations played important roles in the history of God's people. In 930 B.C., the united kingdom of David and Solomon divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south. Both of these kingdoms figured prominently in Hosea's prophetic service. At that time, God's people also interacted with other nations like Syria and Egypt. But above all, Hosea focused his ministry on events involving the Assyrian Empire. In Hosea's day, Assyria became a powerful empire that extended its influence in every direction, including the lands of Israel and Judah. As we're about to see, Hosea's ministry began in the northern kingdom of Israel, nearly two hundred years after Israel had separated from Judah.

Living in northern Israel during this period of history was difficult for anyone who sought to be faithful to God. And this was especially true for a man like Hosea — a man God had called to be his prophet. Hosea witnessed firsthand how Israel's leaders had turned their kingdom away from the Lord and trusted in alliances with other nations and their false gods. The priests of Israel mixed the worship of God with drunken, lascivious fertility rituals associated with idolatry. The rich grew very rich, but the poor were so poor that they often had to devote their wives and daughters to temple prostitution just to earn enough to eat. And as Hosea faced these heartbreaking conditions in northern Israel, God called him to prophesy — to bring a message from Israel's divine King that very few wanted to hear. God was about to pour out curses on the kingdom of Israel through the Assyrian Empire.

As we consider the ministry of the prophet Hosea, we'll look at four interrelated issues: the time of his ministry, its location, Hosea's changing circumstances, and the purpose or goal of his prophetic ministry. Let's begin by focusing on the time when Hosea served as God's prophet.

Time

Similar to a number of other Old Testament prophetic books, Hosea's opening verse, in 1:1, introduces us to the time of Hosea's ministry. Listen to how the book begins:

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beer, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel (Hosea 1:1).

This list of kings gives us an orientation toward the beginning and the end of Hosea's ministry. On the one side, it tells us that Hosea's service began in the days of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. This Jeroboam is usually referred to as Jeroboam II, in distinction from the earlier first king of northern Israel, Jeroboam I.

Uzziah — or Azariah as he was also called — ruled in Judah from around 792 to 740 B.C. And Jeroboam II reigned from approximately 793 until 753 B.C. Most

interpreters rightly suggest that the circumstances mentioned in Hosea's earliest prophecies reflect conditions in Israel during the last decade of Jeroboam II's reign. So, it's fair to say that Hosea's ministry began sometime near 760 B.C. This makes Hosea one of the earliest prophets, if not *the* earliest prophet, with a biblical book devoted to his ministry.

On the other side, the list of kings in 1:1 also gives us an orientation toward the end of Hosea's prophetic service. Hosea ministered throughout the reigns of Judah's kings Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz, and he ended his ministry during the reign of Hezekiah.

After a period of co-regency with his father, Hezekiah was the sole regent of Judah from around 715 B.C. to 686 B.C. Now, we can't be sure how long Hosea lived into Hezekiah's reign, but if he began his ministry near 760 B.C. at 20 years old, then he would have been 94 years old in 686 B.C. So, it's likely that the end of Hosea's ministry occurred sometime before 686 B.C.

With this time of the prophet Hosea's ministry in mind, let's turn to the location where he served as God's prophet.

Location

The opening verse of Hosea gives us an important clue as to where our prophet ministered when it notes that Hosea served during the reign of Jeroboam II. The mention of Jeroboam II reveals two factors about Hosea's location. On the one side, it indicates that Hosea's ministry began in the kingdom of Israel, rather than in Judah.

We can tell that the prophet Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel through various ways and passages in the book itself. For instance, in the superscription of the book, in 1:1, we read the list of kings contemporary with Hosea when the word of the Lord came to him during their reigns. One of them was king Jeroboam the son of Joash, or Jeroboam II, who was one of the kings of Israel. This shows that the ministry of Hosea was associated with the kingdom of Israel. Also, throughout the book we see the Lord directly addressing Israel. He talks about the coming judgment against Israel, and exposes the deeds of the people of Israel because of their sins. For example, in 1:4, God said that he would put an end to the kingdom of Israel. So, the direct speech or message from the Lord to Israel, in addition to mentioning King Jeroboam, king of Israel, are indications to show that Hosea's ministry was associated with the northern kingdom of Israel.

— Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

This orientation toward the northern kingdom appears in many ways in the book of Hosea, but we should mention two important factors. First, the Hebrew dialect of our book strongly suggests that Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom. A number of

recent studies have noted similarities between the Hebrew grammar of Hosea and Phoenician — a west-Semitic dialect spoken primarily in the northern coastal regions.

Second, it's especially telling that the majority of prophecies in the book of Hosea focus on Israel rather than on Judah. The book explicitly refers to the northern kingdom around 81 times, using terms like "Israel," "the Israelites," — literally "sons of Israel" — and "Ephraim," a name Hosea often used to refer to the kingdom of Israel. By contrast, our book mentions Judah by name only 15 times. Hosea was especially concerned with events that took place in the northern kingdom.

On the other side, we can learn another feature of the location of Hosea's ministry when we note that 1:1 only mentions Jeroboam II and omits six other kings of northern Israel who reigned within Hosea's lifetime.

Following Jeroboam II, kings Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea reigned in rapid succession until Israel's capital city of Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. It's likely that these kings were omitted from the opening verse of our book because Hosea migrated to Judah near the end of Jeroboam II's reign in 753 B.C. Of course, it's possible that Hosea travelled back at times to the northern kingdom to deliver some of his prophecies. It's also possible that Hosea's disciples or friends delivered his prophecies in the north on his behalf. But whatever the case, the lack of recognition for Israel's other kings in 1:1 supports the view that Hosea himself resided in northern Israel only until late in the reign of Jeroboam II. Then, either because of political upheavals or because of resistance to his prophecies, he took up a new residence in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Now that we've looked at the time and location of the prophet Hosea's ministry, we should touch on some of the circumstances that he addressed through the decades that he served as God's prophet.

Circumstances

Many students of Scripture are unfamiliar with the period of biblical history associated with Hosea's ministry. Of course, the historical books of Kings and Chronicles, prophetic books like Micah and Isaiah, and archeological discoveries tell us a great deal about this period. So, there are far too many events for us to mention them all here. But we can't move forward without a basic awareness of some of the more significant events that took place in Israel and Judah during the decades of Hosea's service.

Imagine for a moment that you are Hosea starting your ministry in the northern kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II. You trust in God, but everywhere you look, the king, the priests and the wealthy nobles of Israel have turned your nation into a nightmare. They worship the false gods of other nations. They fill the country with violence. They force the sons of the poor to serve their misguided military campaigns. And they pressure the wives and daughters of the poor to practice prostitution at their fertility worship centers. All the while, the leaders are still claiming to be faithful to God, and they point to their wealth and power as proof that God approves of all that they do.

Now, Hosea knew that long ago Moses had warned that God would not tolerate this kind of rebellion forever. He would send troubles to humble his people. Moses even warned that God would raise up cruel and wicked Gentile nations to discipline them. And God revealed to Hosea that this was precisely what he was about to do to Israel.

As troubling as it was for Hosea to learn these things about his homeland, later on he also faced similar circumstances in Judah. As the decades passed, the leaders of his adopted home in the southern kingdom fell into the same kind of rebellion as their northern neighbors. They formed alliances with other nations, treated others unjustly, compelled their young men to fight foolish wars, and encouraged idolatry, even in Jerusalem. And as Hosea witnessed these things, God revealed to him that the people of Judah would be brought to their knees as well.

Broadly speaking, we can refer to the troubles that Hosea predicted as the period of the “Assyrian judgment.” During this time, the primary instrument of God’s discipline was the Assyrian Empire. Assyria began to play this role in biblical history when the great emperor Tiglath-Pileser III rose to his throne in 744 B.C. And, in one way or another, the Assyrians remained a significant factor in the history of God’s people until Nineveh — Assyria’s capital city — fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C.

Towards the end or just after Jeroboam II’s reign ... Tiglath-Pileser III became the king of Assyria. Now, Assyria was the superpower in those days that was threatening the existence of Judah and Israel and Syria, which was to the north of Israel. And so the prophecies in Hosea that prophesied cursings and subjugation to Israel because of its disobedience, Tiglath-Pileser III was the executor. And also after Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser was the next king, and these two men, Tiglath-Pileser III and Shalmaneser, became the rod of God's justice in which, or by which, he executed his punishments on Israel as he had promised he would do in Hosea.

— Dr. Larry Trotter

As we’ll see in this lesson, the content of Hosea’s book orients his prophetic ministry toward three major events that took place during the period of Assyrian judgment. The earliest prophecies in Hosea’s book are about the first event: Assyria’s rise to prominence when Tiglath-Pileser III became emperor in 744 B.C. Hosea also recorded prophecies about Assyria’s invasion of Israel in 732 B.C. And beyond this, Hosea included prophecies about Assyria’s invasion of Israel ten years later in 722 B.C., when the Assyrians utterly destroyed the kingdom of Israel. Let’s unpack the circumstances Hosea faced as he prophesied about all three of these events. We’ll start with the first phase of Hosea’s ministry when he received prophecies about Assyria’s rise to prominence in 744 B.C.

As we’ve just said, 744 B.C. was the year that Tiglath-Pileser III became king of Assyria and asserted his authority over Israel and Judah. Hosea lived in the northern kingdom of Israel prior to this time, and he witnessed how king Jeroboam II brought Israel to the zenith of its prosperity. But he also saw how the king, priests and other

leaders proved to be disloyal to God by promoting idolatry and injustice. And as a result, Hosea warned of curses from God that would come through the Assyrian Empire.

During this same period, according to the books of Kings and Chronicles, the kingdom of Judah also came under the rule of Tiglath-Pileser III. But, unlike Israel's leaders, Uzziah king of Judah ruled as a righteous king in one very important way. While many of the people in Judah practiced idolatry, Uzziah himself worshiped only the Lord and exclusively promoted the worship of the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem. So, as far as we know, God revealed no accusations against Judah to Hosea at this time and gave no warnings of curses against Judah.

The next phase of Hosea's ministry focused on Assyria's invasion of Israel in 732 B.C. When Hosea delivered his earlier prophecies about this invasion, Tiglath-Pileser III continued to exert political control over the kingdom of Israel. Kings Menahem and Pekahiah promoted idolatry and injustice and relied on their alliance with Assyria for security. Now, like most political alliances in ancient times, this relationship also entailed acknowledging the gods of their Assyrian overlords. And as a result of these disloyalties to God, Hosea warned that God would pour out curses on Israel through the impending Assyrian aggression of 732 B.C.

The book of Kings tells us that at this time Uzziah and his son Jotham ruled Judah as righteous kings. Many people continued to worship other gods at the high places, but Uzziah and Jotham neither practiced nor endorsed idolatry. So, during this time, Hosea still offered no warnings of curses against Judah.

Now, when Hosea received his later prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C., conditions in Israel had only grown worse. King Pekah continued in idolatry and injustice. He submitted to Assyrian control, but when Tiglath-Pileser III was preoccupied with troubles elsewhere, Pekah tried to free himself from paying heavy tributes to Assyria. He formed an alliance with Syria and Syria's gods — an alliance often called the "Syrian-Israelite coalition." And Pekah and his Syrian counterpart invaded Judah in an attempt to force Judah to join their rebellion against Assyria. As you can imagine, Hosea prophesied that God would bring curses against Israel for this aggression. And a short time later, in 732 B.C., Tiglath-Pileser III destroyed the kingdom of Syria and subjugated the kingdom of Israel.

Sadly, as this invasion grew near, a critical change took place in Judah. Just before the Syrian-Israelite coalition attacked Judah, Ahaz rose to the throne. Unlike his grandfather and father, Ahaz rejected God and promoted idolatry and injustice. Judah endured attacks from the Syrian-Israelite coalition and from the Edomites and the Philistines. But rather than turning to the Lord for help, Ahaz sought protection by reaffirming Judah's alliance with the Assyrians and their gods. And because of Ahaz' rebellion against God, Hosea prophesied that God's curses were coming against Judah as well.

This brings us to the time in Hosea's ministry when he prophesied about Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C. — the invasion that led to the fall of Israel's capital city of Samaria and the exile of most of the population of Israel. Hosea's earlier prophecies about 722 B.C. focused on events in Israel during the early reign of Hoshea, the king that Assyria had placed on Israel's throne. Hoshea perpetuated idolatry and injustice in Israel and was faithful to his alliance with the Assyrians and their gods for a time. In response,

Hosea warned that new curses were coming to Israel through a second major Assyrian invasion — the invasion in 722 B.C.

Meanwhile in Judah, Ahaz continued to violate God's covenant by promoting idolatry and injustice. He still refused to rely on the Lord, and sought safety from his enemies by trusting in his alliance with Assyria and Assyria's gods. And as a result, Hosea warned again that great curses from God were also coming against Judah.

Hosea's later prophecies about the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C. concentrated on Hoshea's continuing promotion of idolatry and injustice in Israel. Now, when Tiglath-Pileser III died, Hoshea saw a chance to be free of paying tributes to Assyria. But rather than turning to God for protection, he made an alliance with Egypt and Egypt's gods. Hosea predicted that these sins would soon bring God's curses. And, in fulfillment of these prophecies, Tiglath-Pileser's son, Shalmaneser V, took control of Samaria and forced Hoshea to pay heavy tributes. Just a few years later, in 722 B.C., the Assyrian king, Sargon II, brought about the complete destruction of Samaria and drove most of the population of Israel into exile.

During these years, in Judah kings Ahaz and Hezekiah were co-regents. Early on, Hezekiah continued his father's alliance with Assyria and its gods. But he soon broke with Assyria. Unfortunately, Hezekiah relied on the strength of his army, his fortified cities and an alliance with Egypt for protection against Assyria, rather than trusting in the Lord. And as a result, Hosea warned, once again, that God would bring curses on Judah, curses that came many years later through Assyrian aggression.

Unless you've spent a lot of time studying this period of biblical history, it's easy to be confused by all of these names and dates. But knowing that these events took place during Hosea's ministry is crucial to understanding the book of Hosea. So, as difficult as it may be, it's very important to distinguish Hosea's prophecies about Assyria's rise to prominence in 744 B.C., from prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C., as well as from prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C. As we make these distinctions, we'll be able to see how Hosea spent decades of ministry addressing the challenges that God's people faced in each of these periods.

Having touched on the time, location and changing circumstances associated with the ministry of the prophet Hosea, we should consider Hosea's purpose. As a prophet, what did he try to accomplish by declaring God's revelations?

Purpose

We've looked at this question in more detail in other series, but in general terms, God called Hosea — just as he calls all of his people in every age — to do his part in spreading God's kingdom to the ends of the earth. And as Hosea knew, God administered the spread of his kingdom by the policies he established in his covenants. Hosea was well aware that God had already ratified his kingdom policies in five major covenants, beginning with all nations in Adam and Noah, and then in special covenants with Abraham, Moses and David. Each of these covenants had particular emphases, but every successive covenant incorporated and built on the policies of the previous covenants.

Like other prophets, Hosea had the special role of serving as God's emissary or ambassador who announced how God was going to implement these covenant policies.

All of God's covenants established three basic dynamics of God's interactions with his people that shaped the contours of Hosea's ministry. For our purposes here, we'll just give a brief overview. First, in one way or another all of God's covenants were initiated and sustained by divine benevolence, or displays of God's goodness and kindness. Second, all of God's covenants clarified the kinds of human loyalty that God required from his people in grateful response to his benevolence. And third, all divine covenants entailed two kinds of consequences that his people should expect: blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

So, God wanted Israelites to remain faithful in the covenant with him. And he promised that if they would stay faithful in the covenant with God, things would go well with them. But if they violate his covenant, something wrong will happen to them. This is the same even in our lives. If we remain faithful to God's covenant, God will be with us, will lead us, and will continue to work in us.

— Pastor Micah Ngussa

As a prophetic emissary of God's covenants, Hosea received revelations of how God had determined to direct these covenant dynamics. Then he delivered these revelations to God's people. If we consider Hosea in terms of events that took place during his years of ministry, we could define his prophetic purpose in this way: Hosea's purpose was to declare how God intended to implement the covenant dynamics of divine benevolence, human loyalty and the consequences of blessings and curses in relation to Assyria's rise in 744 B.C., the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C. and the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C.

Now that we've looked at the background of the *prophet* Hosea, we're ready to turn to the background of the *book* of Hosea.

BOOK

Hosea and his disciples may very well have written down a lot of his prophecies throughout the decades of his ministry. But it was near the end of his life, during Hezekiah's reign, when Hosea finally collected and arranged his prophecies into the book that we now call Hosea. When we keep this in view, we gain many insights into the book itself.

So far, we've concentrated on what we've called "that world" — the various times during the Assyrian judgment when Hosea received revelations from God for both Israel and Judah. At this point, we'll turn to "their world" — the time when Hosea chose and arranged these prophecies into the book of Hosea to provide Judah's leaders with wisdom for what was ahead.

This distinction between that world and their world is crucial for understanding the book of Hosea because Hosea actually composed his book *after* the kingdom of Israel was destroyed in 722 B.C. So, even though Hosea's book had important implications for the survivors of northern Israel, he primarily wrote it for the leaders of Judah. As we'll see, Hosea wrote down prophecies from throughout his ministry to give Hezekiah and Judah's other leaders a path of wisdom to follow as they faced the crisis of Assyria's invasion of Judah in 701 B.C.

To see how this is true, we'll follow our previous discussion and look at four background features of the book of Hosea: the time of its composition, the location where it was written, the circumstances surrounding its composition, and the purpose of the book. Let's begin with the time when our book was written.

Time

From the outset, we should mention that critical scholars typically believe that the book of Hosea went through a number of major redactions that ended very late — either late into the Babylonian exile or even after the Babylonian exile. As a result, most critical interpreters believe that only some portions of our book actually came from Hosea himself. Instead, they argue that redactors or editors added much of their own material to the book long after Hosea's death. But we have to remember that critical interpreters come to these conclusions in large part because they deny that Hosea received supernatural revelations from God about the future.

By contrast, evangelicals believe in the supernatural inspiration of Hosea's prophecy. So, we affirm that the entire book of Hosea actually represents what Hosea himself received from God. And for this reason, evangelicals usually settle on a much earlier date for the book's completion.

From an evangelical point of view, 1:1 establishes the earliest possible date for the completion of our book when it mentions Hezekiah, king of Judah. It's obvious that Hezekiah would not have been included in this list of kings had he not already been king by the time our book was written. So, it's safe to say that the earliest possible date for the completion of the book of Hosea was sometime during Hezekiah's sole regency which began in 715 B.C. and ended in 686 B.C.

We can't be absolutely sure as to when Hosea finally composed his book, or brought it to its final form as we now have it in the Bible. But there is an event in Hosea's life, toward the end of his life, in fact, during the reign of the last king under whom he served, and that king's name was Hezekiah... Now, Hezekiah is known for all kinds of things, but in biblical history, perhaps the most important thing, or the most noted thing that he experienced, was the invasion of the Assyrian Sennacherib. Sennacherib literally destroyed Judah. People ran for their lives, and you can read about it in Micah 1, the devastation that he brought to the land of Judah. But he went further than that. He actually surrounded and laid siege to Jerusalem... The

invasion of Sennacherib in Judah and the surrounding of Jerusalem, laying siege to the city of God, the City of David, the capital of the world, was of such great importance that it brought everything to a climax in Judah's history at that moment. Everything was at stake. Was Jerusalem going to fall? Well, Isaiah prophesied during that time, and Hosea probably wrote his book during that time as well, because the last king that's mentioned in the book of Hosea, at the very first verse — 1:1 — is Hezekiah.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

We can also set the latest possible date for the final composition of Hosea before Hosea's death, most likely late in Hezekiah's reign. Now, critical interpreters are right to point out that Hosea probably employed his disciples to help compose his book. Here and there we find evidence that Hosea relied on his disciples, much like Jeremiah relied on his disciple Baruch in Jeremiah 36:4.

Consider, for instance, that Hosea 1:2-9 is biographical. It describes Hosea's actions in the third person: "*Hosea* said this." "*He* did that." But 3:1-3 is autobiographical. Hosea's actions are described in the first person: "*I* did this." "The Lord said to *me*." This shift from biography to autobiography probably reflects the fact that Hosea's disciples were involved in the composition of his book.

But contrary to what critical interpreters have assumed, there's no positive evidence in the Scriptures that disciples edited Hosea's words or added new materials after his death. And even if Hosea's disciples did, in fact, finish Hosea's book after his death, they didn't deviate from the revelations that God had actually given to Hosea. The title of the book, in 1:1, plainly states that the entire book contains, "The word of the Lord that came to Hosea."

For these reasons, we can rightly conclude that our book was composed during the reign of Hezekiah. And this means that the book of Hosea was likely completed sometime before 686 B.C. or so, when Hosea had almost certainly died.

Along with establishing this range of time for the book of Hosea's completion, we should also specify the location where it was written.

Location

As we've already mentioned, it's likely that Hosea migrated to Judah sometime near the end of Jeroboam II's reign. And knowing that he lived into the reign of Hezekiah, after the kingdom of Israel had fallen in 722 B.C., we can be confident that Hosea composed his book in Judah.

The book of Hosea itself acknowledges as much in 1:1. This verse lists Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah — kings of Judah — before it names Jeroboam II of the kingdom of Israel. By listing Judah's kings first, Hosea deliberately acknowledged that he wrote his book under the authority of David's dynasty in Judah. So, although Hosea's

prophecies focus primarily on the northern kingdom of Israel, Hosea wrote his *book* in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Now that we've looked at the time and location of the book of Hosea's composition, let's turn to the circumstances facing Hosea and those in Judah who first received his book.

Circumstances

As we mentioned earlier, when Hosea composed his book, his adopted homeland in the kingdom of Judah was dealing with its own threat from Assyria. In 701 B.C., during the reign of Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria invaded Judah. So, although most of Hosea's prophecies were about Assyrian judgment against northern Israel, Hosea devoted his *book* to guiding Judah as Assyrian judgment came upon them. For this reason, we need to be familiar with events surrounding Sennacherib's invasion.

The historical records of Kings and Chronicles, as well as the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah, form a complex picture of Hezekiah's reign. Early on, Hezekiah led reforms in Judah and also fortified Judah so that when Sennacherib, the new king of Assyria, took his throne, Hezekiah refused to pay tribute. But as the threat of Assyrian reprisal grew, Hezekiah failed to rely on God. Rather, he sought protection through an alliance with Egypt and Egypt's gods. But his efforts were in vain. Sennacherib invaded Judah, destroying many cities, towns and villages, and even laid siege to Jerusalem. But just when it seemed that Jerusalem would fall, Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, and the prophet Isaiah reassured him of God's deliverance. As we read in 2 Kings 19:33-34:

By the way that [Sennacherib] came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David (2 Kings 19:33-34).

Mercifully, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. God miraculously delivered Jerusalem from Sennacherib.

One of the most important historical events to happen in the history of Israel was when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came to defeat Hezekiah, king of Judah... He comes against Judah, and he takes basically all of the cities of Judah. There's really one city left, and that's Jerusalem. And what he does is he basically says, "Your God is like every other god. I will take out the Lord God of Israel just like I took out all the other gods." He talks in a very arrogant way against the Lord God of Heaven, and God says, "I will show Sennacherib my power." And so, what he does is he supernaturally delivers Israel, and what he does is he smites the Assyrian army and 185,000 Assyrian troops will die. He will hear a report of, probably, a rebellion going on back in his land, and he'll have to go back to Assyria. And we know,

even from Assyrian annals, that they'll talk about caging up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage, but they never say they defeat him. Now remember, in Assyrian literature, it's pure propaganda. They never admit defeat at all, so by just saying they have him caged up like a bird, they are really admitting they did not defeat him. So, even the Assyrian records, they admit this.

— Dr. Russell T. Fuller

It would be difficult to overstate how much Jerusalem's deliverance demonstrated God's favor toward the kingdom of Judah. But as wonderful as it was, Hezekiah's troubles weren't over. After Sennacherib returned home, Hezekiah still feared further aggression from Assyria. Sadly, rather than relying on God, Hezekiah returned to his old ways and sought another alliance, not with Egypt, but with the rising kingdom of Babylon. Hezekiah's refusal to trust God after the great deliverance of Jerusalem displayed a profound disloyalty to God. And the prophet Isaiah immediately threatened that the royal treasures of Judah would be taken to Babylon. Listen to Isaiah's words in 2 Kings 20:17-18:

Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 20:17-18).

Unfortunately, when Hezekiah heard these words from Isaiah, he didn't repent of his disloyalty to God. Rather, he simply responded with relief that this judgment against Judah would not come in his own day.

Hezekiah's failures to be loyal to God before and after Jerusalem's deliverance in 701 B.C. were so momentous that they were likely to have motivated Hosea to compose his book. On the one side, it's possible that Hosea wrote his book sometime before Jerusalem's deliverance from Sennacherib. Sennacherib's attacks and his siege on Jerusalem witnessed a flurry of prophetic activity. And it's quite possible that God called Hosea to write his book during this time to address Hezekiah's failures as Sennacherib advanced and laid siege to Jerusalem.

On the other side, it's also possible that Hosea composed his book soon after Jerusalem's deliverance. As we mentioned, even though God had delivered Jerusalem, Hezekiah failed to remain faithful to God, and instead sought after an alliance with Babylon. And Hezekiah's disloyalty to God jeopardized the future of Judah. So, it's very likely that Hosea wrote his book either to address the crisis before or the crisis after Jerusalem's deliverance from Sennacherib.

With the time, location and circumstances of the final composition of the book of Hosea in mind, it's not difficult to understand the book's overarching purpose. Happily, we're not left to speculate because Hosea himself explicitly revealed the goal he had in mind.

Purpose

In Hosea 14:9, the last verse in our book, Hosea summarized his purpose in this way:

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right; and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (Hosea 14:9).

This verse stands apart from the verses that precede it, and it closes the entire book with final instructions for those who first received it. Hosea called for his original audience in Judah to become “wise” and “discerning” by believing that “the ways of the Lord are right.” In other words, Hosea hoped that Judah would gain wisdom from his collection of prophecies. He wanted them to view their circumstances in light of the fact that “the upright” — those who receive God’s blessings — walk in the Lord’s ways. But “transgressors” — those who receive God’s judgment — foolishly “stumble in them.”

Although elements of Israel’s wisdom traditions appear in the writings of other prophetic books, Hosea’s bold call to wisdom is unusual. But Hosea’s attention to wisdom fits well with the days of Hezekiah. We know from Scripture that Hezekiah associated himself with men who were well versed in Israel’s wisdom traditions. In fact, Proverbs 25:1 introduces chapters 25–29 of Proverbs as the “proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied.” Apparently, these “men of Hezekiah” were a highly respected company of wise men associated with Hezekiah’s court. And it’s quite possible that Hosea’s closing call for wisdom appealed directly to Hezekiah and the wise men of his court. In this light, we can summarize the purpose of Hosea’s book in this way:

The book of Hosea called the leaders of Judah to gain wisdom from what God had revealed throughout Hosea’s ministry as they faced the challenges of Sennacherib’s invasion.

As this summary suggests, our book was not designed primarily to make specific predictions of future events. Rather, Hosea composed his book to call the leaders of Judah to follow the path of wisdom in Hezekiah’s day. Hezekiah and his court were to learn from what God had revealed throughout Hosea’s ministry and lead Judah through the challenges of Sennacherib’s invasion. Both before and just after Jerusalem’s deliverance from Sennacherib, the leaders of Judah desperately needed instruction in wisdom, and Hosea’s book provided it for them.

So far in our introduction to Hosea, we’ve looked at the background of the prophet and his book. Now, let’s turn to an overview of the content and structure of the book of Hosea.

CONTENT & STRUCTURE

Unfortunately, many evangelicals tend to overlook the historical setting in which Hosea first received his prophecies. They also tend to focus on smaller units of the book, as if they stand apart from each other. To be sure, these ahistorical and atomistic approaches have yielded many insights into the book of Hosea. But to add to these insights, we'll pursue a different strategy. We'll see that the historical settings of Hosea's ministry are crucial to understanding his prophecies. And rather than focusing on smaller units in isolation from each other, we'll explore the logical connections among larger units throughout Hosea's book. This strategy will help us to see more clearly how Hosea designed his book to give wisdom to those in Judah who first received it. And it will also help us to see how we are to learn wisdom from the book of Hosea today.

Put yourself in Hosea's place again. Unlike some other prophets who had relatively short ministries, Hosea received revelations from God for more than 60 years or so — from the last decade of Jeroboam II's reign to the reign of Hezekiah. Over these decades, God disclosed many things to him, probably much more than what appears in the fourteen short chapters of his book.

To understand how Hosea formed his book, we must keep in mind that God didn't reveal all of Hosea's prophecies at the same time. As we've already explained, God gave Hosea revelations as the kingdom of Israel faced Assyria's rise to power in 744 B.C., Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. and Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C. If we fail to keep these different historical settings in mind, it will appear that Hosea contradicted himself on a number of occasions, especially in his prophecies about Judah. But in reality, we'll see that Hosea's prophetic outlooks changed over time because he addressed changing circumstances.

Now, as important as it is to recognize the chronological arrangement of the book of Hosea, we must also note that Hosea arranged his prophecies topically. We saw earlier in this lesson that 1:1 is the title of our book and was designed to introduce the full timeline of Hosea's ministry. And 14:9 ends our book with a closure that summarizes Hosea's overarching purpose of calling God's people to gain wisdom from his book. The content of these bookends indicates that they were created as Hosea put his book together around the time of Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C. But between these bookends, the main body of Hosea consists of three large divisions that have topical emphases.

The first division, in 1:2–3:5, emphasizes judgment and hope from God. These first chapters present the earliest prophecies that Hosea received during the reign of Jeroboam II — prophecies that addressed Assyria's rise in 744 B.C. Hosea carefully chose and arranged these early prophecies to present balanced outlooks of the curses God had determined to pour out on his people and the blessings they would receive in the future.

The second division, in 4:1–9:9, emphasizes unfolding judgment from God. Unlike the first division, these prophecies come from later stages of Hosea's ministry, when Hosea received revelations about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. and Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C. These chapters focus exclusively on the topic of God's judgment. And they highlight how God's judgments increased in severity throughout these phases of Hosea's ministry.

The third division, in 9:10–14:8, focuses especially on unfolding hope from God. This last major division also consists of revelations that Hosea received in anticipation of Assyria’s invasion in 732 B.C. and Assyria’s invasion in 722 B.C. But this division gives special attention to the topic of hope, the hope that God revealed for the future of his people throughout these phases of Hosea’s ministry.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of these historical and topical arrangements for the interpretation of the book of Hosea. In many respects, they are like keys that unlock the wisdom Hosea sought to impart to those who first received his book during the reign of Hezekiah.

We’ll look more closely at Hosea’s wisdom in our next lesson, but for now it will be helpful to introduce the content and structure of each major division of our book. Let’s begin with the first division on judgment and hope from God in 1:2–3:5. These early chapters in our book carefully balance a focus on the curses coming to God’s people with the blessings of God that will follow.

JUDGMENT AND HOPE (1:2–3:5)

As we’ve already mentioned, these opening chapters represent Hosea’s ministry in the days of Jeroboam II, when Hosea received prophecies about Assyria’s rise to prominence in 744 B.C. But how do we know that this is when Hosea received these revelations? Well, 1:2 says as much when it tells us that these chapters represent the time “when the Lord first spoke through Hosea.”

Other content of this division also confirms this early historical setting. In the first place, Hosea drew attention to the fact that as Israel enjoyed a time of great prosperity, they had fallen into idolatry and injustice. He also indicated that God had determined to bring curses through Assyrian dominance over Israel. These facts are consistent with the earliest phase of Hosea’s ministry.

In the second place, Hosea’s attention to Judah in this division also confirms that he received these prophecies in the first phase of his ministry. You’ll recall that during this period, Uzziah ruled as a righteous king in Judah. So, as we would expect, these chapters threaten no curses against the southern kingdom. On the contrary, this first division speaks of Judah very positively several times. For instance, listen to 1:6-7, where God drew a sharp contrast between Israel and Judah. Here God said:

I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God (Hosea 1:6-7).

Although the northern kingdom was about to suffer at the hands of the Assyrians, this passage makes it clear that, at this time, God would have mercy and save Judah. Hosea also mentioned Judah positively in 1:11 when he said:

The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head (Hosea 1:11).

Here Hosea indicated that, as Israel endured the Assyrian judgment, their hope for God's blessings came from reunion with Judah under one king. In a similar way, in 3:5, Hosea said:

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:5).

This direct reference to “David their king” clearly reflects a favorable view of Judah because Judah was ruled by David’s royal house. Hosea’s thoroughly positive outlooks on Judah in the first division of his book confirm that he received these prophecies at the beginning of his ministry, when Uzziah led Judah in the ways of God.

With this orientation toward the first division of Hosea in mind, let’s briefly illustrate how these chapters emphasize the topic of judgment and hope from God. Hosea arranged these chapters into three main sections. The first section describes his earlier family experiences in 1:2–2:1.

Earlier Family Experiences (1:2–2:1)

This section divides into two main parts. The first part, in 1:2-9, relates a family narrative. It begins with God commanding Hosea to marry a woman named Gomer who practiced worship prostitution. When their children were born, Hosea was told to give them names that symbolized God’s impending judgments against Israel. This narrative drew attention to the trials that were coming to Israel through Assyria.

But in balance with this focus on God’s judgment, Hosea added a second part consisting of his hopeful prophetic reflections in 1:10–2:1. As just one example, in 1:10, Hosea revealed this:

The number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea ... And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God” (Hosea 1:10).

Although God was about to begin a time of judgment against Israel, Hosea added that there was still going to be a future of blessings for the descendants of the tribes of Israel.

The second section of judgment and hope from God focuses on God’s first lawsuit in the book of Hosea, in 2:2-23.

God’s Lawsuit (2:2-23)

These verses shift attention away from Hosea’s family experiences on earth to an inspired account of legal proceedings in the court of heaven. Now, in the Old Testament,

God frequently revealed his plans for the future by granting his prophets knowledge of legal deliberations that took place in his heavenly court. We speak of some of these revelations as “lawsuits” because they give rather full descriptions of the proceedings of God’s court. They often portray God on his throne, describe his summons of participants to court, report accusations against and interactions with the guilty, and declare pronouncements of judgment.

A number of the prophetic judgment speeches could be said to take the form of a covenant lawsuit. The idea of a covenant lawsuit is based on international diplomacy, and our best exemplars of it are in Hittite diplomatic letters that we have, where a Hittite diplomat goes to the vassal nation and prosecutes the terms of the treaty that was signed unto by the vassal king but is now being violated. The prophet assumes that sort of role. And there is a number of key passages that have a fuller exemplification of those elements. In its fullness, those elements would include a summons to the defendants and witnesses... Then there would be an element that follows that gives a history of the covenant relationship between the suzerain, the great king, and the vassal king, followed by an indictment of the vassal for violating the treaty, which in turn would be followed by either a threat or a sentence for that violation of the treaty.

— Dr. Douglas Gropp

This first heavenly lawsuit in the book of Hosea begins in 2:2 with God’s summons of Israel to court using these words:

Rebuke your mother, rebuke her (Hosea 2:2, NIV).

To modern audiences, this may seem like an odd summons to court. But the word “rebuke” here translates the Hebrew verb “*rib*” (רִיב.) This term was often used in prophetic books for a “legal contention” or “lawsuit” in the court of heaven. The “mother” in view was Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel where Israel’s leaders resided. So, in effect, God summoned the people of Israel to enter a heavenly lawsuit against their leaders living in Samaria — a lawsuit over which God himself would preside.

Throughout this lawsuit, God alluded to ways in which Israel behaved like Hosea’s wife Gomer. Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea and brought trials on her children. And the leaders of Israel were unfaithful to God and brought trials to the kingdom of Israel. But in this lawsuit, Hosea didn’t simply report that God sentenced the kingdom of Israel to suffer the curses of his covenant. He *also* reported that God would one day woo Israel back to himself. After a time of judgment, God would restore Israel to himself and have mercy on the northern tribes.

Following this account of the heavenly court, Hosea ended his focus on divine judgment and hope with a description of his later family experiences in 3:1-5.

Later Family Experiences (3:1-5)

In parallel with the account of his earlier family experiences, Hosea began with an autobiographical family narrative in 3:1-3. His wife had returned to her former way of life as a worship prostitute, but God commanded Hosea to show love to her again. So, Hosea purchased Gomer and brought her home.

This brief narrative is then followed by Hosea's second set of hopeful prophetic reflections in 3:4, 5. In these verses, Hosea explained that the kingdom of Israel would endure troubles from God for a period of time. But a day would come in the future when Israel's relationship with God would result in great blessings for Israel.

In this analogy, Hosea, a prophet honored among his people, represents God. Of course, God is much greater than Hosea, but it's a metaphor. On the other hand, the adulterous woman represents the people of Israel... They committed adultery by leaving the Lord and worshipping other gods. So, God asked Hosea to reflect his story — “Although the people of Israel were far from me, worshipping other gods, living in sin while they were in Egypt, yet I went to them and married them while they were still far away and living in adultery. I saved them while they were far away. It's not because they were good that I saved them, but because of my grace that I saved them.”

What is stranger is that God told Hosea that, after marrying this woman, she would go back to adultery. But he told Hosea to go and bring her back to him. This is exactly what our Lord did with the people of Israel. Not only did the Lord save the people of Israel and raise them up, although they were living in adultery in Egypt, but also, after the people were saved and entered into a covenant relationship with God, they returned back to commit adultery with other gods. And although God punished and disciplined the people, yet in his grace, just like Hosea restored his adulterous wife, God went to his “wife” — that is the people who had committed adultery after marriage — and restored them to himself.

— Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

On the whole then, by collecting and arranging some of the revelations he received in the earliest phase of his ministry, Hosea presented a carefully balanced point of view to Judah's leaders in Hezekiah's day.

At the time of our book, the judgment God threatened had already been fulfilled with the fall of the northern kingdom. But God's people weren't to lose hope. This time of judgment would lead to a future time when Israel would receive great blessings from God.

After the first division's balanced presentation of judgment and hope from God, the second division shifts attention to unfolding judgment from God in 4:1-9:9.

UNFOLDING JUDGMENT (4:1–9:9)

We've entitled this portion of Hosea "unfolding" because it contains revelations that Hosea received over a long period of time. And we speak of it as "judgment" because it focuses exclusively on the ways God directed his covenant curses against Israel and Judah during these decades of Hosea's ministry.

Broadly speaking, these chapters on unfolding judgment divide into two main parts: more of God's lawsuits, in 4:1–5:7, and then God's calls for alarm, in 5:8–9:9. Consider first God's lawsuits.

God's Lawsuits (4:1–5:7)

God's earlier lawsuit in this division appears in 4:1-19. Once again, God revealed his plans to Hosea by granting him knowledge of legal deliberations in the heavenly court. Listen to the summons in 4:1:

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring (Hosea 4:1).

As this opening verse indicates, God summoned Israel to court because he had "a charge to bring" against them. Here, the term "charge" translates the Hebrew term we learned earlier, "*rib*" (רִיב,) the technical term for a lawsuit.

The placement of this earlier lawsuit immediately after the first division, as well as its content, strongly suggests that it was one of Hosea's earlier prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. As you'll recall, during this period in Israel, Menahem and Pekahiah continued to promote idolatry and injustice. And when Menahem suffered a brief incursion from Assyria, instead of finding security in God, he and Pekahiah after him, reaffirmed their alliance with Assyria and Assyria's gods.

Throughout this lawsuit, God accused Israel precisely of these sorts of sins. And not surprisingly, God announced that he would bring curses on Israel in the form of severe Assyrian aggression — most likely referring to the invasion of 732 B.C. The strongest evidence for this historical setting is the one thing Hosea said about Judah in this earlier lawsuit. Listen to what Hosea wrote in 4:15:

Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty (Hosea 4:15).

As we can see here, at this time, God drew a sharp contrast between conditions in Israel and conditions in Judah. Israel was guilty of being unfaithful to God. But God merely warned Judah not to become like northern Israel. This contrast between Israel and Judah reminds us of the conditions in Judah when Uzziah and Jotham ruled as righteous kings. So, before the invasion of 732 B.C., God declared no curses against Judah.

This brings us to God's later lawsuit in 5:1-7. Here we see another scene of the heavenly court. Listen to the way 5:1 summons the accused to court:

Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, O royal house! This judgment is against you (Hosea 5:1, NIV).

Although this passage doesn't use the technical term "*rib*" (רִיב,) we see here that God summoned the guilty to court — the "priests," the "Israelites," and the "royal house" — and announced that the purpose of this summons was "judgment" — or *mishpat* (מִשְׁפָּט) in Hebrew. Like the word *rib* (רִיב,) this term refers to legal deliberations in the court of heaven.

The content of this later lawsuit indicates that it originated when Hosea received and delivered later prophecies as Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. grew closer. Hosea 5:1 points to this historical orientation when it mentions that Israel's nobles oppressed the people at "Mizpah and Tabor." This is important because archeological evidence indicates that these sites remained under Israel's control only until 732 B.C. when Tiglath-Pileser III invaded Israel and annexed them. It's also notable that, in 5:13, God accused Israel of vainly appealing for help from Tiglath-Pileser III, or "the great king," as he's called in this verse.

You'll remember that in Israel at this time, King Pekah continued in idolatry and injustice. He also formed an alliance with Syria — the Syrian-Israelite coalition — to resist paying tributes to Assyria. So, God's later lawsuit warned that curses against Israel were coming through a decimating Assyrian attack.

Once again, the most important evidence for this historical setting is Hosea's attention to Judah. As we mentioned earlier in this lesson, Ahaz became king of Judah just before the Syrian-Israelite coalition. But unlike his father and grandfather, Ahaz promoted idolatry and injustice in Judah. He also made an alliance with the Assyrians and their gods for protection against his foes. And as a result, in this later lawsuit, God threatened curses against Judah for the first time. Listen to the way 5:5 addresses Judah:

The Israelites ... stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them (Hosea 5:5, NIV).

Notice the contrast here with God's earlier lawsuit. In 4:15, God simply warned Judah not to become sinful like Israel. But as this verse indicates, by the time of this later lawsuit, Judah had become guilty before God along with Israel because Ahaz had led them astray.

Syria and Israel, that coalition, actually attacked Judah in the days of Ahaz and tried to force Judah to join them in that coalition to resist Assyria. Now, the result of that was predictable. The Assyrians didn't like it, and as a result the Assyrians came in, just years later, and absolutely decimated Syria and brought Israel to its knees, and made them vassals that owed great tribute to the kingdom of Assyria. And in fact, the southern kingdom itself suffered because not only were they attacked by this coalition, but they submitted themselves for protection to the empire of Assyria. The prophet Isaiah had actually told Ahaz, "Don't do that. You seek help from the Lord, and he will

protect you from this great coalition that’s attacking you.” But Ahaz refused. He said, “No, I need help from something that I can see, and that’s the Assyrian Empire.” So at that time, then, Judah itself became a vassal nation of the empire of Assyria.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Following God’s lawsuits, Hosea’s prophecies about unfolding judgment turn to God’s calls for alarm in 5:8–9:9.

God’s Calls for Alarm (5:8–9:9)

In ancient Israel, armies were often called into battle by blowing a hollowed ram’s horn — *shophar* (שׁוֹפָר) in Hebrew — or a silver trumpet — *chatsotsrah* (חֲצֹצְרָה) in Hebrew. And on a number of occasions, God himself announced or recalled battles by referring to this practice. In this section, we find two such calls.

First Call for Alarm (5:8–7:16). The first call for alarm appears in 5:8–7:16. It begins in 5:8 with the words: “Blow the horn” — *shophar* (שׁוֹפָר) — “in Gibeah, the trumpet” — *chatsotsrah* (חֲצֹצְרָה) — “in Ramah.” When we examine the content of this first call for alarm, it appears that it originated with Hosea’s earlier prophecies about Assyria’s invasion in 722 B.C. As evidence, two passages allude to Assyria’s previous invasion in 732 B.C. Hosea 5:11 mentions how the Assyrians had already “oppressed” and “crushed” Israel. Hosea 6:1 notes that Israel had been “torn” and “struck.” In addition, in 7:11 God accused Israel of “calling to Egypt, going to Assyria” — a reference to Israel’s shifting international alliances at this time.

As we know, the Assyrians had established Hoshea as the king of Israel after their victory over Israel in 732 B.C. Hoshea continued in idolatry and injustice and, for a period of time, he enthusiastically maintained his alliance with Assyria. But he later sought freedom from Assyrian domination by turning to Egypt for protection. Hosea exposed the dire consequences of these sins by warning that more curses were coming from God — curses that arrived in the form of Assyria’s devastating invasion in 722 B.C.

The historical setting is also supported by the special attention these chapters give to the kingdom of Judah. At this time, Ahaz ruled in Judah and led Judah into idolatry and injustice. And, rather than trusting in God, Ahaz sought protection from his foes through an alliance with Assyria and its gods. As a result, these chapters give a lot of attention to God’s curses against Judah. Listen to 5:10-14 where Hosea delivered these words:

The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water... I am ... like dry rot to the house of Judah... Judah [will see] his wound ... I will be ... like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue (Hosea 5:10-14).

And in 6:4, God expressed his frustration with Ahaz and Judah saying:

What shall I do with you, O Judah? (Hosea 6:4).

And then in verse 11, God exclaimed:

For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed (Hosea 6:11).

Here God declared that a harvest had been appointed for Judah along with the kingdom of Israel. Now, we should note that the second half of this verse speaks of the restoration of God's people. But as a number of interpreters, and some modern translations have indicated, the second half of verse 11 actually belongs with the prophecy that follows in 7:1. So, in this view, the appointed "harvest" was Judah's devastation at the hands of Assyria.

Second Call for Alarm (8:1–9:9). God's second call for alarm appears in 8:1–9:9. It begins in 8:1 with the command to "set the trumpet" — or shophar (שׁוֹפָר) — "to your lips!" The content of this second call for alarm strongly suggests that it was among the later prophecies Hosea delivered as Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C. drew near. At this time, King Hoshea of Israel continued to promote idolatry and injustice. He also continued to rely on his alliance with Egypt. And as a result, Hosea warned of God's impending curses. He announced in 9:3 that, "they shall eat unclean food in Assyria." Soon after, Shalmaneser V subjugated Samaria. And in 722 B.C., Assyria's new king, Sargon II, destroyed Samaria and brought an end to the kingdom of Israel.

One question that can leave many people perplexed is, "How is it that God would allow his own people to fall into the hands of pagans like the Assyrians?" Well, Hosea means to respond to this question by showing that the judgments were deserved. God had warned his people time and again. God had sent prophets. God had told them that there would be consequences for their disobedience, for their unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, they didn't want to repent of their unfaithfulness to the covenant, as Hosea shows graphically in his book. So Hosea writes to tell them that, "You all who are suffering, it was well earned. God warned you and you did not want to repent." So there was no other remedy than to carry out the judgment that God had warned about much earlier.

— Dr. David Correa, translation

This historical setting is also confirmed by what this passage says about Judah. During these last years of Israel's existence, Ahaz and Hezekiah were co-regents in Judah. Hezekiah began to turn Judah away from Ahaz' idolatry and injustice. And in this regard, he was a true reformer. But Hezekiah also trusted in his own strength to resist Assyria by fortifying Judah against attack. And he sought an alliance with Egypt and

Egypt's gods, rather than turning to God. These actions led God to announce that Judah was going to face even more curses through Assyria. As God put it in 8:14:

Judah has multiplied fortified cities; so I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour her strongholds (Hosea 8:14).

This prophecy was fulfilled approximately two decades later in 701 B.C. when Sennacherib invaded Judah, destroying most of its cities and laying siege to Jerusalem.

As you can imagine, all of these prophecies of judgment had many implications for Israel and Judah when Hosea first received them. At every step, they warned of approaching judgment and called for repentance. But later on, when Hosea formed these prophecies into the second division of his book, these threats of judgment had already been fulfilled. Israel had fallen to Assyria in 722 B.C., and Assyria had attacked and destroyed much of Judah during Hezekiah's reign. Still, these prophecies had an abundance of wisdom to teach Judah's leaders in Hezekiah's day. They not only explained in some detail why God had destroyed the kingdom of Israel, but they also explained why God had sent Assyria with such devastating force against Judah as well.

Now that we've seen how the structure and content of the first division of Hosea focuses on judgment and hope from God, and how the second division deals with God's unfolding judgment, we should turn to the third major division of our book: Hosea's prophecies about unfolding hope from God in 9:10–14:8.

UNFOLDING HOPE (9:10–14:8)

We speak of this division as “unfolding” because Hosea drew, once again, from prophecies he'd received over many years. And we speak of it as “hope” because it emphasizes how God's people could continue to have hope for God's blessings even after they'd suffered so severely under his judgment.

In the second division of his book, Hosea dealt almost exclusively with God's judgment against Israel and Judah. If Hosea had stopped his book there, crucial questions would have gone unanswered. Did the troubles Israel and Judah faced mean that God would no longer bless his people in the future? Were God's people to be lost forever? Hosea wrote the third division of his book to answer these kinds of questions. Here, he revealed to Judah's leaders in the days of Hezekiah why they should still hope for God's blessings in the future.

The third division of Hosea is the most complex portion of our book because Hosea combined a number of prophecies, and even snippets of prophecies, together. But on a large scale, we can say with confidence that it divides into five main sections, each of which is introduced by a comparison God made with Israel.

God compared Israel with fruit in 9:10-12; with a planted palm in 9:13-17; with a luxuriant vine in 10:1-10; with a trained calf in 10:11-15; and finally with a beloved child or son in 11:1–14:8. These sections elaborate on these comparisons in multiple ways, and we'll look into these elaborations more in our next lesson. But in this introductory lesson, time will only allow us to point out a simple pattern of hope that appears at the beginning of each section.

As we approach this division of Hosea, it's important to identify, as much as possible, *when* Hosea first received the revelations of each of these sections. Some of these historical contexts are more easily identified than others. But on the whole, Hosea retraced the same historical periods that he covered in the second division of his book. As we've seen, Hosea focused the second division on God's judgments during Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. and Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C. But in the third division of our book, rather than focusing on judgment, this section represents God's words of hope over the same stretch of time.

Let's see how this is true by turning first to God's comparison of Israel to fruit in 9:10-12.

Fruit (9:10-12)

It's most likely that this first section was revealed to Hosea along with other earlier prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. The best evidence for this historical setting appears in 9:11. Because Israel's kings had turned from God, we read that "Ephraim's glory" — literally "their glory," or *kevodam* (כְּבוֹדָם) in Hebrew — "shall fly away like a bird." God was about to remove Israel's glory. The only other time in Hosea's book that God predicted this was in God's earlier lawsuit in 4:1-19 — a section associated with Hosea's earlier prophecies about the 732 B.C. invasion. In 4:7 God said, "I will change their glory into shame." This link strongly suggests that Hosea began the third division of his book as he began the second, with one of his earlier prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C.

This setting is confirmed by the fact that these verses make no reference to Judah. As you'll recall, Uzziah and Jotham ruled as righteous kings and God pronounced no curses on Judah during this time. With this historical orientation in mind, listen to what God said in 9:10:

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved (Hosea 9:10).

Clearly, God spoke of Israel's sins in this verse. But it's important to note that God *began* with a positive comparison of Israel with grapes and figs. So, even as God determined to bring judgment against Israel in 732 B.C., he still remembered Israel fondly as one remembers sweet fruits. And God's positive memory reassured God's people that there was still hope for them to return to his blessings in the future.

The second section, in 9:13-17, focuses on Israel as a planted palm and follows a similar pattern.

Planted Palm (9:13-17)

We can't be sure when Hosea first received this revelation. But on the whole, Hosea's description of Israel fits well with the conditions of Israel when Hosea received

prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. This historical orientation is supported by the fact that this passage does not mention Judah. So, it most likely came to Hosea before Ahaz turned Judah away from God. Listen to the opening of this section in 9:13:

**Ephraim, as I have seen, was like a young palm planted in a meadow;
but Ephraim must lead his children out to slaughter (Hosea 9:13).**

Here God threatened Israel with the slaughter of their children as they went out to battle against Assyrian invaders. But as terrible as this judgment was, in the first half of this verse God remembered how he cherished Israel "like a young palm planted in a meadow." God's fond memory of them revealed that there was still hope for God's blessings to come to Israel in the future.

After focusing on Israel as a planted palm, Hosea compared the kingdom of Israel to a luxuriant vine in 10:1-10.

Luxuriant Vine (10:1-10)

In all likelihood, this section also originated when Hosea received prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. Hosea 10:6 threatens that the wealth of Israel's worship centers will be carried off as "tribute to the great king" — the same king mentioned in 5:13. This "great king" was Tiglath-Pileser III who led the devastating invasion of 732 B.C. But it's important to note that Judah is not mentioned in this section. So, this may indicate that Ahaz had not yet led Judah into corruption. In this light, listen to what God said in 10:1:

Israel is a luxuriant vine ... The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built (Hosea 10:1).

Notice here that Hosea's prophecy focused again on judgment against Israel because the more they prospered, "the more altars [they] built." Israel had filled their tribal territories with altars to other gods, and they would suffer God's judgment for this rebellion. But, as before, Hosea introduced this threat of judgment with the fact that God remembered Israel as a delightful, luxuriant vine. This comparison offered hope for God's blessings on Israel in the future.

After likening Israel to a luxuriant vine, Hosea wrote about God's comparison of the kingdom of Israel to a trained calf in 10:11-15.

Trained Calf (10:11-15)

This section may have originated when Hosea received his earlier prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C. As we've seen, during this time, king Hoshea led Israel into idolatry and injustice. And early on, he relied on his alliance with Assyria and

its gods for his security instead of God. Because of this, God warned that curses were coming to Israel.

The most notable evidence for the historical setting of this section is that it mentions the sins of Judah. As we know, Ahaz, the king of Judah, had promoted idolatry and injustice throughout Judah. He also persisted in seeking help from his alliance with Assyria rather than from God. So, in 10:11, 12, God briefly threatened curses against Judah and announced that “Judah must plow [and] sow ... righteousness.” This entire section begins in 10:11 with these words:

Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck; but I will put Ephraim to the yoke (Hosea 10:11).

We see here that God threatened to put Ephraim to the yoke, a metaphor for the judgment of oppression by Assyria. But despite the judgment that was coming, God still remembered Israel fondly as “a trained calf that loved to thresh.” And God’s positive remembrance of Israel served as the basis of hope for the future.

This brings us to the last comparison in this division on unfolding hope from God, by far the longest section in the third division. In 11:1–14:8, God compared his people to something even more precious than a well-trained calf — a beloved child or son.

Beloved Child (11:1–14:8)

This lengthy section represents revelations Hosea received when he delivered his prophecies about Assyria’s invasion in 722 B.C. At this time, King Hoshea continued to lead Israel in idolatry and injustice. But later, he attempted to break free of Assyria by foolishly seeking an alliance with Egypt. God specifically addressed this alliance in 11:5 where he said that Israel will “not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king.”

This historical context is confirmed by the fact that in 11:12 and 12:2-6, Hosea also prophesied against Judah. As we read in 12:2, “The Lord has an indictment against Judah.” Despite the reforms that Hezekiah was able to achieve, Hezekiah relied on his own strength and turned to an alliance with Egypt rather than turning to the Lord. So, Judah suffered the judgment of God through Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 B.C. Now, listen to the opening of this section in 11:1-2:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols (Hosea 11:1-2).

These opening verses present Hosea’s pattern once again. Israel had sinned against God. Time and again, God called to them, but “they went away” and worshipped Baals and idols. And as a result, judgment was coming. But even as God pronounced judgment, verse 1 indicates that God still thought of Israel as his beloved son. And his love for his child, Israel, was the basis of hope for Israel’s future blessings.

Hosea 11:1 speaks of how God called Israel out of Egypt. The verses go on to say that God bent down and lovingly fed them and provided for his people. And yet, the more he called to his people through his servants the prophets, the further that they went from him. And so, God declares that he's going to send them away, only this time not to Egypt, but Assyria will be their king. But then the chapter goes on with God's voice breaking with his love for his people, and God declaring, "I will not execute my fierce judgment on Israel. I will call, and my sons will come trembling like birds from the land of Egypt, like doves from the land of Assyria. I will gather them again to this land, and I will again be their God and they will again be my people."

— Dr. Craig S. Keener

Now, there's much more to the third division of Hosea than our brief introduction reveals. And we'll look more closely at this part of our book in our next lesson. Still, we've seen enough to grasp the heart of the matter. Hosea composed this last division of his book to impart wisdom to Judah's leaders after Israel had fallen to Assyria and most of its citizens had been carried off into exile. And in these last chapters of his book, Hosea drew from prophecies he'd given throughout his ministry to strengthen Judah's hopes for what God had promised. Judgment was not the end of Israel's story because God had never forgotten how much he cherished them. The leaders of Judah could gain wisdom and hold firmly to the hope of blessings to come.

CONCLUSION

In this introduction to Hosea, we've explored the background of Hosea by distinguishing between the time, location, circumstances and purpose of the prophet's ministry and his book. We've also surveyed the content and structure of the book of Hosea by noting how the prophet gave those who first received his book wisdom by focusing on judgment and hope, unfolding judgment, and unfolding hope from God.

The book of Hosea was written to teach wisdom when Israel and Judah faced one of the most difficult times in their history — the crisis of Assyrian judgment. And his book gives insights that God's people need in every age, including our own as we look toward the future. Like Israel and Judah in the days of Hosea, followers of Christ must heed Hosea's call to pursue wisdom as we face the trials of this world. From his book we can see that no matter what difficulties we face, even when all seems lost, we can hold firmly to the hope for the future that we have in Christ. And we can be confident that one day God will pour out immeasurable blessings on his people when Christ returns in glory.

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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

LESSON
ONE

An Introduction to Hosea
Faculty Forum



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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

Lesson One: An Introduction to Hosea

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Frank Barker

Dr. Todd Borger

Dr. David Correa

Dr. Brandon D. Crowe

Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim

Dr. Russell T. Fuller

Rev. Sherif Gendy

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

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Dr. Mike Ross

Dr. Seth Tarrer

Dr. Larry Trotter

Dr. Miles Van Pelt

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace

Question 1:

How did the Holy Spirit inspire biblical writers like Hosea to write down what he wanted them to say?

Dr. Brandon D. Crowe

How should we understand inspiration and the way it works? In other words, how does the leading of the Holy Spirit and the possible contribution of the actual author, how do those things relate, and *do* they relate? Well, I think the best answer to that is a term that has been called “organic inspiration.” This means that the Holy Spirit most certainly led the biblical authors to write what they wrote and superintended all that they did write, ensuring that it is the very truth of God. But at the same time, as he did this, he did not bypass the individuals who were writing. Therefore, what we find is the education, the personalities, the language of choice, and the situations to which the authors are writing, all of these things come through in our biblical text. So for example, Ezekiel the prophet inspired by God, and Hosea the prophet inspired by God, they sound a little bit different... The role of the Holy Spirit and the role of the human author, they are not in tension with one another but they coalesce organically, as the term goes, to create what we call “organic inspiration.”

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace

One of the things that we wrestle with when we think about the Holy Spirit inspiring Scripture is, well, how exactly did he do this? Really, in many respects, it's a mystery, but there are some things we can say he didn't do. One of the things we know he didn't do is he did not dictate the words to these authors. The Holy Spirit was not looking for good stenographers, but holy men to write Scripture. How do we know that? Well, you can compare the Hebrew, say for example, of Isaiah and Hosea. Isaiah is kind of like the Shakespeare of the Old Testament. Some have estimated that he had a vocabulary of something approaching thirty thousand words. That's just unbelievable. Hosea, vocabulary of maybe five hundred words. I mean, these are wide differences in the variety of how they wrote... These authors used their own

personalities fully in the writing of Scripture. They used their own skills in writing... The author is involved in the learning that God has taken him through for years, and you don't have these authors writing down what God is dictating, except of very few occasions like when Moses wrote down the Ten Commandments. But they're using their personalities, their gifts, their talents, their backgrounds, their language skills, their research skills. When they write the gospels they're not sitting down in a room saying, "Okay, Spirit of God, tell me what Jesus did, and I'll just copy down what you tell me." That's not at all what happened.

Question 2:

Why does the Old Testament refer to Israel and Judah as two different kingdoms or nations of God's people?

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

Judah and Israel are referred to as two kingdoms because of, really, a travesty that happened within the history of Israel. You had the initial king, that was King Saul, and which got dramatic in its own way, and following King Saul then you had King David. And then after King David, there came King Solomon, and that was really at the height of Israel's monarchic tradition within their history. I mean, the Solomonic era was the golden age. And after the Solomonic era, there was a split between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom was referred to as Israel, and they had their own central place of worship as well, and then the southern kingdom was referred to as Judah. And after the split of the kingdoms you'll often see prophets who go to different places. Like they'll be, Hosea was a prophet to Israel, and you'll have Isaiah who's a prophet to Judah, and so there's respective realms of ministry that are related to these split kingdoms of the north and the south.

Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

The nation of Israel divided into two nations: the northern kingdom, called Israel, and the southern kingdom, called Judah. This division took place because of two historical events. The main reason was because of Solomon. Solomon had gone astray from worshiping the living God. He married many foreign women who worshiped other gods, and they turned Solomon's heart away. God told him, "I will divide your kingdom for turning away from me. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son."

The second clear reason the division took place was in the days of Rehoboam, historically in the days of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Rehoboam was a young king when he succeeded his father. Solomon had wearied the people with taxes, so the people complained to Rehoboam. They said, "Your father wearied us with taxes. Make them lighter." The elders of Israel said to Solomon, "They are right. You have to make the taxes lighter." Rehoboam did not, however, listen to the elders' advice, and he went with the advice of his friends, the young men he'd grown up with. They advised him, "You have to show them that you are tougher than your father." And

this was exactly Rehoboam's response. He said to the people, "I am stronger than my father, and I will weary you more than my father did." As a result, the people rebelled against him, and the kingdom was divided into the northern kingdom, which included the ten tribes that left Rehoboam to be governed by Jeroboam, and the southern kingdom, which included two tribes — the tribes of Judah and Benjamin — governed by Rehoboam.

Question 3:

What was the prophet Hosea's message to the northern kingdom of Israel?

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

While the book of Hosea has a significant portion of its message directed toward the southern kingdom of Judah, it's also directed substantially to the northern kingdom of Israel, or we might say Ephraim. And the message is, "You have been unfaithful to the covenant." And there are a series of vivid metaphors where we can see this — an unfaithful wife, an illegitimate child, an uncaring mother — there are all these vivid metaphors, and the charges are particularly piled up there in chapter 4. And in spite of their disobedience, God was still going to pursue them, such as Hosea did through his object lesson of marrying Gomer, the prostitute, or the unfaithful wife. But exile was going to happen. That was an inevitability... They had leaned upon a relationship with Syria ... to help protect themselves against the empire of Assyria, and when they did that, they had depended upon human strength rather than on God as their king and defender. And as a cruel irony, the curses of the covenant would lead them into exile in Assyria. So, that exile was inevitable because their covenant-breaking was gross, and it was deep, and it was prolonged, but there is still this message of hope because Hosea says that God says that "I will take you into the wilderness, and there I will speak kindly to you." That is, even in bringing his people, bringing about the circumstances of exile, seeing them off into the Assyrian captivity, even still, God had purposes for them, that it was going to be in captivity where they would become receptive to hearing of God's faithfulness, to turning back to him, and to praying for his salvation and mercy. And so, this is why the book ends so prominently on a note of hope, offering the opportunity for restoration in spite of all that they had done to break God's covenant.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The message of the prophet Hosea to the northern kingdom of Israel was a message declaring God's lawsuit against Israel. It proclaimed God's judgment and punishment against Israel because of their sin, because they did not repent, and because they rejected the Lord by worshiping foreign gods. Also, part of this message was exhorting the people to return to the Lord, affirming God's love towards his people, as in chapter 11, and encouraging them to repent and return to the Lord, as we can see in chapter 14.

Dr. David Correa, translation

The prophet Hosea's message to the northern kingdom of Israel, was that all these calamities — the suffering they were experiencing from the Assyrian invasion — were well deserved because of their disobedience, their unfaithfulness, and their idolatry, just as it's described in his book.

Dr. Larry Trotter

Hosea's message to the northern kingdom of Israel was very simple: "I love you, but you've been disobedient, and so I want to bring you back, and I need to discipline you to bring you back to myself." That was the basic message, but the message was, throughout the book, the struggle within God, presenting God as having the passions of a betrayed lover who can't give his beloved up but needs to do something to get his beloved's attention and bring his beloved back to him.

Question 4:

How do we know that Hosea and other Old Testament prophets were under the authority of Moses' covenant when they delivered their prophecies?

Dr. Carol Kaminski

When we look at the message of the Prophets, we don't want to think of a prophet as bringing out a lot of new ideas, right? They're not creative. They're going back to the Mosaic covenant, and they're going back to the terms of the covenant. And so, what's very interesting is when you look at certain prophets you will find certain terms only appear in an Old Testament book and then in the prophet. For example, in the prophet Ezekiel, he will use language from Leviticus 26 to describe the coming judgment. And some terms are only in Leviticus 26 and in Ezekiel, and it's showing that clear connection between the two, and really saying, for Ezekiel, Leviticus in particular was the grid — of course, Ezekiel is a priest — so it's the grid through which he's describing both the judgment and the hope of restoration. You could look at Jeremiah. Jeremiah's going back to Deuteronomy often, and he's appealing, I mean, he quotes Deuteronomy 27 in one of his classic passages, in Jeremiah 11. He quotes it directly, and he says, you know, "The law says cursed is anyone who does not keep all the things written in the law," and he is reading this and says, "Remember what Moses had commanded you." And so, their vocabulary is coming from the Mosaic covenant, their categories about how they're describing it.

And in order understand the role of the prophet, we need to remember, again, they're under the Mosaic covenant: "If you obey me and keep my commandments then there's going to be blessing, but if you disobey my commandment then judgment is coming." And the role of the prophets really is a sign of God's grace and his mercy to his people because he uses the prophets to warn them of the judgment that's coming, and he's using the prophets to call them back to the Mosaic covenant and saying, "Look, go out there and tell my people that judgment is coming if you don't keep the

commandments.” And so, you have prophets like Jeremiah who has to go out into the public place. You have prophets like Ezekiel that’s meant to turn over, and there’s a visual aspect. Why? Because they’re trying to call God’s people back to the covenant, and thereby they’re wanting to prevent the judgment that’s coming.

Dr. Todd Berger

The Old Testament prophets had a good view of time so that they were able to look to the past, they were able to live in the present, and then look ahead to the future. The prophets depended on God’s covenant, in particular I’ll say the Mosaic covenant... So, if we’re talking about God’s law that he gave at Sinai, for instance ... that law that he gave provided the basis, the foundation for everything that the prophets were teaching the people. One of the problems that we see in the Prophets — and this has been a problem with critical scholars for, you know, well over a hundred years — is the fact that many of the prophets don’t refer specifically to specific laws. We get some of that in Jeremiah where he seems to list off some of the Ten Commandments at times. But we don’t get them just having these explicit discussions about the law at Sinai. And so, for many liberal scholars ... that has created problems. But if we look at it instead that they have the law at Sinai, that they assumed that all of their readers, all of their listeners, knew that, then we can look at this in a bit of a different light because now we have the prophets speaking to the people. They’ve got God’s covenant. It’s assumed that this was their basis for life. This was their basis for understanding the relationship with God, for instance. They can then preach to the people about the present situation, having that foundation in the past. This past, present and future terminology, I think, is helpful also with the prophets because what we’re seeing is that the prophets were not just future fortunetellers. They didn’t just tell things that happened in the future, but instead they were looking to the past. They saw God’s acts — the things that he did on behalf of Israel in the past — they had that as a foundation for what they then preached to the people about their present situation. But then also, they were always looking ahead to the future to what God was going to do in the future, perhaps through judgment, more often through restoration, through salvation of his people... This view of the prophets as having a past perspective to the covenants, a present perspective on where they preach to the people to that age, and then a future view to what God was going to do in the future is very important to understanding the prophets.

Dr. Douglas Gropp

Probably the most important passage for understanding the role of the prophets in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 18:15-18, where Moses, reminiscing with the Israelites on the making of the first covenant at Mount Sinai, which he mediated, says that the Lord will raise up a prophet “like me” — like “me,” Moses — who will proclaim my words.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see

this great fire anymore, or we will die.” The Lord said to me: “What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:15-18, NIV).

And he’s saying that future prophets are going to be in this same mediatorial role in relationship to this covenant that was made at Horeb, or as it says in the book of Exodus, the covenant made at Mount Sinai. The shape of the prophetic speeches, particularly the judgment speeches, which have often been called ... “covenant lawsuits,” are bringing to bear on Israel the actual terms of the covenant that the Lord made with Israel at Mount Sinai and renewed after Israel broke the covenant immediately with the sin of the golden calf.

Question 5:

How was Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria, connected to events described in the book of Hosea?

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

Tiglath-Pileser III is one of the kings of the Assyrian empire. He ruled between 745 and 727 B.C. We can read about him in 2 Kings 15:29. In the superscription of the book of Hosea 1:1, we read, “The word of the Lord that came to Hosea ... in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash,” or Jeroboam II, king of Israel, who reigned between approximately 786 and 746 B.C. Towards the end of Jeroboam’s days, the kingdom was declining on the religious, social, and political level. After the death of Jeroboam, six kings succeeded the throne in the span of 30 years. Three of them reigned for two years or less, and four of them were assassinated. During the reign of the second to the last king, whose name was Pekah the son of Remaliah, King Tiglath-Pileser came from Assyria and launched the first attack against Israel. After that, another king came to power named Shalmaneser who came during the reign of King Hoshea the son of Elah, who was the last king of Israel. Shalmaneser removed Hoshea from power and carried out the Assyrian exile. We can read about this in the book of 2 Kings 17:4, 5. The succession of these kings and events is echoed in the book of Hosea. For example, in Hosea 7:7, we read,

All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me (Hosea 7:7).

We read also in 8:4,

They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not (Hosea 8:4).

Also, in 10:3, we read,

For now they will say: “We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord; and a king — what could he do for us?” (Hosea 10:3).

All these indications in the book of Hosea show us how the kingdom after King Jeroboam was corrupted, declining, and was moving away from the Lord. Tiglath-Pileser is the king who launched the first attack against Israel.

Dr. Larry Trotter

After the days of Hosea, the four powers, the four kingdoms that are in view are Assyria, with Tiglath-Pileser III being the king, and then next to Assyria was Syria; Rezin was the king. And then next to Syria was Israel; Pekah was the king. And then south of Israel was Judah, and Ahaz was the king. Now, Assyria was by far the strongest, and so the weaker powers wanted to align themselves with each other to form an alliance to protect themselves against the aggressions of Assyria. And so Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel formed an alliance, and they wanted Judah to join that alliance. Judah didn't join the alliance, and so what they did is they attacked Judah somewhere around 735 B.C. And what they did was force Judah into the arms of Tiglath-Pileser III. Judah appealed to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria for help. Tiglath-Pileser came to the aid of Judah and took Damascus and killed Rezin, king of Syria. And then Ahaz became a vassal, became subjugated to Assyria, and so the intent of the alliance was to protect the zone from Tiglath-Pileser III and Assyria, but the effect of it was to bring him into their area and to bring further domination by the Assyrians.

Question 6:

What was the Syrian-Israelite coalition, and why was it formed?

Dr. Chip McDaniel

The Syrian-Israelite coalition was an agreement between Syria and Israel, the northern kingdom, to try to fend off the Assyrian Empire that was encroaching on its territory. Sometimes because Israel is also known as Ephraim, you'll see it in the literature as the Syro-Ephraimic alliance. To get a handle on this, we really need to look at the geography of the Holy Land. The Holy Land is called “the land in between,” and it's between three continents. You have Asia. And then the Fertile Crescent goes up and goes into Egypt. But then you also have Europe. And so, it served as a major trade route, and all of the big dogs in the neighborhood wanted to control those trade routes because they would generate wealth from that. Earlier on in Israel's history the “big guns” were the Hittites to the northwest and the Egyptians to the southeast. But by the time we get to Jonah, for example, the major player is Assyria. The Syro-Ephraimic alliance or the Israelite-Syrian alliance was from 735 to 722 B.C. We know these because of the chronological markers that are in the text; we can date these very precisely. So it lasted about 13 years... And the Syrian-Israelite

alliance was an attempt to join forces to keep Assyria from gaining hegemony over that region. The way that played out is seen to for us in Isaiah 7–8 where the king of Judah is concerned because the king of Israel and the king of Syria have allied themselves together against Assyria, and they want Judah to join them. And Isaiah would come to Ahaz and say, “Don’t worry about these kings or these kingdoms; God’s going to take care of it.” The way that played out chronologically is in 735 Isaiah says to King Ahaz, the king of the south, “Don’t worry about these kingdoms because a child is going to be born, and before that child can, with discernment, say ‘my father and my mother’ the tribute is going to have to be taken from ... Syria and Israel and is going to go to Assyria.” And so, it’s a way of saying they’re going to be humbled. They’re going to be — the two kingdoms that are in agreement here — they’re going to be humbled, they’re going to be impoverished by the king of Assyria. He also says in chapter 7 that before a child is born and reaches the ability to make moral categories, moral decisions on his own, the kings are going to be gone, they’re going to be out of there, meaning that there’s no more kingdoms to worry about. So, the message to Ahaz that Isaiah gives is, “You trust God. Don’t worry about these kingdoms. Don’t join them against Assyria. Don’t worry about them because God’s going to take care of them.” And how that played out historically is that in 735 the alliance was made between Israel and Syria. In 732 Assyria came in and took Syria into captivity and received tribute from Israel. And 10 years later, about 13 years after the time of the agreement, the king of Assyria comes in and takes the northern kingdom. And so, it only lasted from 735 to 722... It had a major role in helping us to understand Isaiah 7–8 where Isaiah is dealing with King Ahaz and saying, “Don’t worry about this alliance, God’s going to take care of it.”

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The Syrian-Israelite coalition was formed between King Pekah, the son of Remaliah, and Rezin, the king of Syria. The purpose of this coalition was to stop the Assyrian march led by Tiglath-Pileser in the eighth century B.C. So, King Pekah, king of Israel, formed this coalition or partnership, with King Rezin, king of Syria, to prevent the Assyrian advance. King Pekah asked Judah to join and help in this coalition during the reign of King Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah. However, King Jotham refused to join the coalition, and as a result of King Jotham’s rejection, Rezin and Pekah marched to Jerusalem to fight Jerusalem. This was during the reign of King Ahaz, the son of Jotham, in 735 B.C. This war is called the Syro-Ephraimite war, because it was the alliance of Syria and Ephraim, or Israel, against Jerusalem, or against the kingdom of Judah. Although God sent a message of assurance to King Ahaz and asked him to trust the Lord and not be afraid of that war and that coalition, King Ahaz, however, doubted and did not trust the Lord. So, he made an alliance with Tiglath-Pileser to resist this war from the coalition of Syria and Israel.

Question 7:**How did prophets like Hosea function as God's emissaries or ambassadors?****Dr. David Correa, translation**

Similar to what happened in the ancient near East, where great kings sent their emissaries to their vassal nations to warn their subjects about the consequences of their disloyalty, or to speak some word of blessing in the name of the king, we find that the prophets of the Bible, the prophets of the people of Israel, served the same function. A clear example of this is when Isaiah had his vision of the throne of God, and the Lord said, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?" And Isaiah said, "Here I am! Send me." To differ with the popular interpretation of this text as a text that speaks of evangelism, Isaiah, in reality, responded to the call of the Lord to be his emissary, to be his mouthpiece, to speak on his behalf to his vassals, to the people of Israel, and, in that case, to let the people know that they had been unfaithful to the covenant, that they were violating the covenant terms, and that they would suffer the consequences of that disobedience and disloyalty.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The prophetic office in the Old Testament was directly related to the covenant God established with his people... This is because the prophets were the emissaries of the covenant. In other words, they were guardians. They guarded the people's commitment to the covenant. God sent the prophets to remind his people of the covenant he had made with them, to warn them of the danger of disobedience and the coming punishment, and to affirm for the people the promises of blessings for obedience. Their role was that they were sent from God as emissaries to make sure that the people were keeping the covenant and living a faithful and loyal life to God within the covenant.

Question 8:**How was the prophetic office related to God's covenant with Israel?****Dr. Seth Tarrer**

Thinking about the Prophets, the prophetic literature, in relation to the covenant, it needs to be said, off the bat, the word "covenant" appears very rarely in the prophetic corpus. The primary place in which we see the motif of covenant, however, is in the book of Hosea in which God calls upon the prophet to enter into a covenantal relationship with a woman of questionable character. And we see modeled perhaps most clearly and dramatically later in Hosea ... in Hosea 11, we see God at pains to preserve this covenant relationship he has instituted with his people Israel. So when we think about the prophets in relation to covenant, we need to understand them in their function, their office, and that is, they were called by God to be keepers, watchers, ones who are continually calling the king, calling the priests, calling the general public at large to remember the covenant of their forefathers...

There's another component of covenant when we think about and read the Prophets, and that is, in Jeremiah and Ezekiel there's this forward thrust, that the covenant sort of becomes the mechanism by which Jeremiah talks about the way in which God is going to not only continue and perpetuate his relationship with his chosen people, but in some sense, it's going to take on a new and dramatic shape or form, as we see inaugurated by Christ in the New Testament... Jeremiah has told us early on in the book that the sin of Judah and Israel is engraved on their heart. Yet, when we come to chapter 31 — Jeremiah's famous passage regarding the new covenant that he's going to bring about with his people — the law replaces the sin that's been engraved on our heart. And so, in this way, covenant not only is the thing to which the prophets are calling for fidelity among the Israelites, covenant is also the thing that's thrusting Israel forward into their further-realized relationship with God.

Dr. Mike Ross

The prophets and their prophetic office is directly connected to the covenant of grace that God made with his people, with Israel. One scholar calls them, "God's covenant prosecutors." They are like lawyers, attorneys whom God contracts with to represent his covenantal interest with his people, Israel. So, they are prosecuting attorneys. That's why they're so polemical and sometimes even accusatory. They are bringing a case against Israel. Some of them will even use that language — God has an argument, or a case, against Israel. They will assemble, in their imagery, the people before some divine court where a judge is listening to what they say and the people's defense to make a rendering of innocent or guilty. And this has been a history of them throughout the Old Testament. If you talk about Moses, he was the first great prophet. One scholar calls him the "pool" or the source out of which all the other prophets flow. Samuel would be the rapids of that stream, and all of the preaching prophets like Nathan and Gad who came out of that. And then there's this great school of writing or classical prophets with Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and Daniel, and finally, culminating in this last great prophet who was the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist. They are all covenant prosecutors. They are bringing repeatedly before Israel their covenant-breaking. The book they refer to the most in their prophecies is the book of Deuteronomy. That's their covenant treatise, that covenant agreement, that's the thing they keep pointing back to and calling Israel and the New Testament church to be faithful to. So they, perhaps more than maybe any other writers or speakers in the Bible, really understand not just what the covenant is but how it relates to God's church, God's people, and how we live as the people of the covenant of grace.

Question 9:

How do all biblical covenants display God's benevolence?

Dr. David Correa, translation

All biblical covenants display God's benevolence in several ways. One simple way we can see this is that God, without having any obligation, decides to enter into a relationship with his people. So then, God, out of his own grace, out of his own

mercy, chooses for himself a people without having to do so. Also, divine benevolence is displayed in how God gives many blessings for his people to enjoy. In the case of Adam and Eve, in the first covenant, divine benevolence was shown in how the Lord put at their disposal all that he had created. The Lord gave them permission to eat freely of all the trees except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Also, when he made restitution in the covenant with Noah, God once more displayed his benevolence by not only preserving the human race, but also guaranteeing them a stable world so that human beings would have the opportunity to be faithful to the Lord. And so, by the way, we can see this throughout the whole Bible... God shows his benevolence in many ways, arriving, of course, at the new covenant when the Lord, by grace, grants that the Lord Jesus Christ will carry, on himself, the punishment that belongs to his people. And, in turn, the Lord, by grace, grants his people forgiveness of sins and bestows on them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Gregory R. Perry

God speaks in a language that his people can understand, and in the ancient Near East one of the languages was the international language of diplomacy, of how kings would make covenants with one another. And so we see references to land grant treaties like in Genesis 12 and 15 and this emphasis on how God will give a land to his people, to Abraham's family. And so, the land grant treaty is there. But we also see references, especially in the Mosaic covenant, to the form of what's called a suzerain-vassal treaty. Suzerain is just a big word that means a "great king," and a vassal would be a "smaller king," a "lesser king," who is in relationship with this great king. Every one of the covenants of Scripture begins with God's gracious initiative, that a great king is giving protection, giving land, giving benefits to a less powerful partner and is establishing this relationship — not the junior partner but the great partner — the great king, God, is establishing this relationship, first with creation, then we see it with Noah and the renewal of that. We see it also with Abraham. And so, God is the beginning, the one who initiates this relationship, and he gives gifts and benefits in that covenant relationship to carry out what he wants his reign to do, his business in the world. So, it's really interesting because the land really corresponds to the initial commission to Adam to subdue the garden, to subdue the earth. The promise of children in the covenants refer back to "multiply and subdue the earth." And so, the covenants restore the original pattern of how man should show forth God's reign in the world and bear God's image.

Question 10:

What evidence do we have that Hosea intended his book to be read in the southern kingdom of Judah?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

It's certainly true that most of what Hosea said throughout his entirely ministry, and most of what is written down in the book of Hosea, has to do with the northern kingdom of Israel. There can be no doubt that's the case. If you look and see just how many times he mentions the northern kingdom, you can tell that that's true. But the

fact is, is that the book of Hosea itself, which was written after the time that Hosea completed what he had written down in his book — in other words, it's after the main body of his prophetic ministry — that book that he wrote has a definite focus on the kingdom of Judah... Now, the reason for this is fairly obvious. When this book was put together and the title was put at the front of this book, there was a focus on the line of David, the kings of Judah, the king in Jerusalem. And that gives us an orientation then toward the entire book, that it was written under the authority of the house of David, or the kingdom of Judah. And so, it's very interesting, when you take that orientation from the very first verse of the book, to notice where Hosea does actually mention Judah, and the progress of thought as he talks about what was going on in Judah during various periods of his ministry. I mean, in 4:15, he says Ephraim, or Israel, is guilty, but don't let Judah become guilty. But by the time you come to 5:5, he says Israel, or Ephraim, has stumbled into sin, and Judah has also stumbled into sin. Then in the rest of chapter 5 and 6 he actually equates the sins of Israel and the sins of Judah together. So, all through the various chapters, as we read through the book of Hosea, we discover that he actually does bring up Judah, sometimes just a small little note, but then sometimes, especially as Judah declines into further and further sin, more and more focus on Judah... And the reason for all of this is rather easy to understand. Hosea came from the north. He ministered there in the beginning, but when he came down to Judah, his heart was still with the northerners. He was concerned with what was going on in the north, but he wanted those around him in Judah, especially in the days of Hezekiah, to learn lessons from what was going on in the northern kingdom. He wanted them to gain wisdom — 14:9 — he wanted them to gain wisdom from the history of the northern kingdom so that they could avoid the same fate that the kingdom of Israel had endured... Hosea was concerned that Judah continue in the ways of God and avoid the judgment of God.

Dr. Larry Trotter

Hosea primarily directed his prophecy to the northern kingdom of Israel. However, you'll see at the very beginning of it, where he mentions the time period in which he was prophesying, he mentions Judean kings as well as the Israelite king. Also you find seventeen references, direct references, to Judah throughout the book. So, the preponderance of references are to the northern kingdom, but the southern kingdom is compared to the northern kingdom because the southern kingdom was going the way of the northern king in its unfaithfulness. So, more directly to the northern kingdom, but the southern kingdom was following in the northern kingdom's path, and so the same message was being extended to it.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

Although Hosea's message was primarily and largely directed to the northern kingdom of Israel, we see many times in the book that the prophet talks about Judah and refers to the people of the southern kingdom. For example, in 2:1, Hosea says that Israel and Judah are brothers. In 1:11, he talks about unity and the gathering of Israel and Judah under one royal head. In 4:15, the prophet says that though Israel played the whore by worshiping other gods, yet Judah should not commit sins like those of Israel.

It's clear that Judah didn't listen. We see in chapter 5 that Judah didn't learn from the warnings that Hosea gave to Israel. The conflict between the Lord and Judah reaches its peak in chapter 6 where there's a direct confrontation between the Lord and the people of Judah. In 11:12, he says,

And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One (Hosea 11:12, NIV).

And in 12:2,

The Lord has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds (Hosea 12:2).

We see a progression in the way God addresses Judah. He first starts with warning them not to follow the sins of Israel. When Judah does not obey, the Lord confronts them and affirms that Judah's sin has become very grievous and that the Lord has an indictment against Judah, as we can see in chapter 12. All of these references indicate that the message of the book was directed to the people of Judah, just as it was directed to the people of Israel. Judah should have listened to the warnings the prophet Hosea directed to Israel and his warning of the coming exile. They should have learned the lesson and returned to the Lord and repented. But clearly, Judah did not listen and persisted in their sin, and the Babylonian exile of Judah was the consequence of that.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

There is evidence in the book of Hosea that it's partly directed toward the southern kingdom of Judah, and this is particularly mentioned in chapter 6. Judah is named in very first verse or two there, and then later on down about verse 11, Judah is addressed directly. And the principal reason for this is that, even though the exile of the northern kingdom, Ephraim, is a *fait accompli*, that is, a fact that is sure to happen, Judah can learn from that example. Judah should look at what's happened to Ephraim and themselves purge their sanctuary of false worship, restore justice and generosity in the midst of Judah so that what happened to Ephraim doesn't also happen to them.

Question 11:

What is the overall purpose for the book of Hosea?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Any time you deal with a book that is as complex as the book of Hosea, you have to start off by simply admitting that there are far too many purposes or intentions or goals that that book was written to have than we could possibly list. I mean, they can

be very minor things like informing people of things that had happened in the past. Or they can be things like praising God for the good things that he has done, and even in the case of Hosea, for many of his judgments in the past. They can be theological lessons that certain people in the audience need to have, certain corrections of their theological views. It can also be moral considerations, things that are directing people to live in certain ways. Particular verses or even phrases can do that for people. You also have in a prophetic book like Hosea the purpose of showing how prophecies are fulfilled. That's another thing that goes on in the book of Hosea... But while there are many ways in which you can summarize all these details of the book of Hosea, the reality is, is that what we need to do to have an orientation toward the book as a whole is to come up with a way of summarizing it in a package. And I suppose that if you were to take all those various details, in addition to many others because they go on and on and on, I suppose you could put it this way: the book of Hosea was written to give wisdom — 14:9 says that, to lead people to wisdom — to learn lessons of wisdom, as it were, from the history of Hosea's ministry... Hosea had given prophecies to the northern kingdom and had given details of what was going to happen to the northern kingdom, and he also had threatened Judah with great judgments to come, and what he wanted his audience to take away on the whole was the lesson of those historical prophecies. And the reality is, is that what he wanted his Judahite readers to get from his book was that they must do all they can do under the law of God to avoid the judgment coming on them as it had come on the northern kingdom, because when this book was written in Judah, great threats had come against the people of God in Judah. Sennacherib was invading the land. Sennacherib and the Assyrians, and then even after the Assyrians, the Babylonians were threatening the Judahites, that the kind of judgment that the northern kingdom had experienced was now being threatened to the kingdom of Judah. And Hosea was writing this book to teach the people of Judah how to avoid those judgments and how to receive the blessings of God instead.

Dr. David Correa, translation

The overall purpose of the book of Hosea was to encourage the people despite the fact that he tells them the exile was well deserved because of their disobedience and unfaithfulness. He shows them that God remains faithful despite their having been spiritually adulterous. God remains faithful to his covenant, and so he encourages them, telling them that after this great suffering would come a great restoration for the people of God.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The overall purpose for the book of Hosea is to explain the relationship between God and his people, Israel, within the framework of the covenant God made with them. God entered into a covenant relationship with the people through which he showed them his benevolence, mercy, and blessing. However, the people left the Lord and broke his commands and laws, which the Lord required the people to keep in the context of the covenant. It's expected within the covenant that just as there is divine benevolence, there should be a human loyalty, such loyalty is shown through full obedience, submission, and love to the Lord. What we see in the book of Hosea is

that the people left the Lord and worshiped other gods and rebelled against the commands and the laws of the Lord. So, the overall message of God that he sent to his people was that there would be a punishment or a judgment because of the people's disobedience. This will take place through the coming exile against the people. The exile was a divine instrument to punish the people so that they might return once again to the Lord in full repentance and submission to the Lord within the context of the covenant.

Question 12:

What is the role of a covenant lawsuit in biblical prophecy?

Dr. Michael J. Glodo

The idea of covenant lawsuit actually exists outside of the Bible in the political treaties of the day. The suzerain king, when he hears the vassal king is not obeying, he sends an emissary, he sends an embassy to deliver the bad news that, "If you don't change your ways, the curses of the covenant are going to become operative." ... And it begins by the calling of divine witnesses. This is part of the covenant lawsuit, the calling of heaven and earth to witness as the jury, if you will, and the prophet brings the charges. And so, the charges will list the sins of God's people, and that will usually be accompanied by reminders of God's faithfulness. So, you have the sins of God's people as the evidence for the prosecution, the faithfulness of God for evidence for the prosecution. In the end, the people of God are called, normally, to turn back and repair their ways and repent and return to God.

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Whenever we deal with prophetic lawsuit in the book of Hosea, we have to remember that what form critics say about this genre of prophetic speech is somewhat artificial. Form criticism was created and was developed at a time when the thought was that you could identify specific characteristics or ideal characteristics for this kind of speech or that kind of speech. And when form critics talked about a "*rib*," or a lawsuit, they had in mind these kinds of elements: a summons to court; they had accusations against the defendants that were in the court given by God; sentencing that was given; sometimes interaction or complaints. At other times they would also add things like witnesses that stood against the defendants, all sorts of things like that. There were a variety of things that were put into these lawsuits, these ideal lawsuit genres. But the reality is, is that when Old Testament prophets spoke, they did not speak with these kinds of genre in mind. They are not specific or detailed ideal types of literature that prophets were imitating in their books. And that becomes very clear in the book of Hosea, because what he does throughout his book is he breaks every rule that form criticism ever brought up about prophecy, and he mixes this type of speech with that type of speech, or this element with that element. He leaves out this element, puts in this element, and so on and so forth. So, when we speak of a lawsuit, or a heavenly lawsuit, in the book of Hosea, or for that matter any other prophetic book, basically this is what we have in mind: that prophets often spoke in terms of

visions or insights they had into the court of heaven and the proceedings that took place there. And they would often involve elements that form critics identified with prophetic lawsuit, but they would also, at times, only pick certain of those elements, or use different sorts of elements and insert them in and modify it this way and that way...

What we have to keep in mind as evangelicals is this: prophets were not making up what they prophesied, and when they received visions or auditions of heaven, when they were involved with insights into what was going on in the heavenly court, as in a prophetic lawsuit, they were actually reporting what had taken place in heaven, and God himself in the heavenly court did not follow the strict rules of the forms of prophetic speech. And so, oddly enough, when the true prophets of God reveal what God actually said and did in the heavenly court, their speeches don't follow these idealized forms either... As you deal with the book of Hosea, and you notice all these different sorts of speeches that form critics have identified, and you see that they're mixed together, remember that Hosea is revealing what actually took place in the heavenly court, and as God spoke, Hosea reported.

Dr. Miles Van Pelt

Oftentimes in our modern world, when we think about prophecy or biblical prophecy, we are mostly thinking about talking about the future, and what the future holds, and how history will unfold in the future. Now, there is some of that in biblical prophecy, but it's actually one of the smaller portions of what's contained in our Old Testament prophetic books, let's say. So, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve Minor Prophets, these prophets are fundamentally covenant lawyers. Their job is to execute Yahweh's lawsuit against his people... The prophets announced that the people of God have disobeyed and, therefore, curses are coming. But after the curses, there's always this notion of hope where the lawsuit is broken, and the Lord through his prophet offers the possibility of renewal, a new covenant, or a new temple, or the remnant returning, or things like this. And so, they do more than talk about the future, although that's a part of it. Their main point, however, is to show the people how, over the last several hundred years, they have fallen away from Yahweh, how they have broken his law, and how they have not loved him with all their hearts and souls and minds.

Question 13:

How did the personal faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the kings of Israel and Judah affect the nations under their rule?

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

The kings of Israel and the kings of Judah were the representative of the people to God, so that in many ways they had a sacramental presence there, both as the representative of God on earth and the representative of the people to God. So, that particular swing status that they had was significant in how God responded to both

the king and then ultimately how that fell out onto the nation as a whole. And you had this whole history, I think, within Israel and Judah. There are no good kings in Israel. They were all bad. And then, they fell first in 722 B.C. But then within Judah, you had this sort of back and forth, where you'd have a good king, he did right in the eyes of the Lord, and then a bad king who did evil in the sight of the Lord. But when the bad kings did evil in the sight of the Lord, there were major repercussions that came from that. This was where the divine "No" of God's judgment would be heralded against both the king and then also the people as well. And it seems to be that there was a, there's an organic relationship between the status of the king and the way in which the people followed in that. If the king was setting up high places and worshiping foreign gods, the people were as well. And then vice versa; when there were reforms, like we had with King Josiah, that had huge national repercussions for the way in which the people responded to God and his Law. So, the king had a major role in representing both the people and God to the people.

Dr. Frank Barker

The personal faithfulness of kings of Judah or Israel made a tremendous difference to the entire nation. They would influence the nation. The kings of Israel, of course, continued to get into worshipping false gods like Baal, and you had Ahaz and Jezebel and the worship of Baal under them, and of course Elijah confronted them and the prophets of Baal there. But then the good kings, you think of a king like Josiah. Well, when he became king, the Bible had been lost, the Old Testament, for a number of years, and it was rediscovered, and they brought it to him, and then he wanted them to make sure this was the Word of God, and they checked with the prophetess and said it is, and so he said, "Wow, we've got to implement all of these things." And he began to try to do it, and it influenced the whole nation. Now, the problem was that it didn't reach the grassroots, but he did everything he could. It made a huge difference who was king.

Question 14:

Why did God allow his people Israel to fall to the pagan Assyrians?

Dr. Carol Kaminski

Yeah, it's very troubling when you think about what happens to this northern kingdom because in 722 the Assyrians come against the north. And of course, the Assyrians are one of Israel's enemies. You see this in the book of Jonah, in the eighth-century prophet. In Jonah, the last thing he wants to do is go to Nineveh, which is the major Assyrian city. We also know from the Assyrians. There are some incredible wall reliefs. One good example is the Lachish reliefs, and they depict the Assyrians as, they were taking, they're conquering people. They skin people alive. In the city of Lachish, they beheaded people and had their heads hanging around. They're beheading people, some of them cut off hands, impaling people. So, a hideous kind of situation, and it raises the question, why on earth does God use the Assyrians to bring judgment against his own people? Again, if you look at the history

of it with the northern kingdom, they'd been worshiping idols for 200 years. This is contrary to the Ten Commandments, it's contrary to the Mosaic covenant, and one of the things God had promised in Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27, 28 — these blessings and curses — one of the curses is “You're going to go into exile, and you're going to be defeated by your enemies.” And so, this really is in fulfillment of those promises and the curses of the covenant because of their disobedience. And what it really does is it underscores the human problem and the problem of sin, and Israel's inability to really keep God's commandments. So, God raises up the Assyrians. They come in; 2 Kings 17 describes this and gives a long, long list of why God brought the Assyrians, and it's not a pretty picture. So, clearly placing it on their own actions for several hundred years.

Dr. Russell T. Fuller

Israel fell — and we're talking about the northern half of Israel — fell to Assyria in the year 722, and the reason why they fell was because of their sin. If you look at 2 Kings 17, it goes right into detail, at the end of the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel, it goes into great detail of why God took them into exile. And again, it starts out right off that they forsook the Lord, they went into idolatry, and they wanted to go in the custom of the nations. They wanted to live just like all the other nations lived. And so, they went off into sin. They went off into idolatry. And then, the special sins that are mentioned are, again, this notion of like, again, an ancient abortion practice where they caused their children to pass through the fire. And this was especially something that God was very displeased with and something that God brought his wrath and judgment upon the northern tribes for this. But yet, the Lord at times, for the northern tribes, offered them very much grace and mercy if they would turn to him. Even at the beginning of their dynasty under Jeroboam I, God said, “If you'll obey me, I will establish you a house much like I did David” — again, not eternal and so forth, but God was offering them a great reward there. He made the same offer to Jehu, but again, both of them rejected God's offer of mercy, of grace, and so did all of the kings of the north, and so it was their apostasy, it was their sin that ultimately led to their destruction in the year 722.

Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

God allowed the people of Israel to fall into the hands of the pagan Assyrians. By “Israel” here we mean the northern kingdom, the ten tribes of Israel who were exiled by the Assyrians. Indeed, this was a very difficult matter because the wars launched by the Assyrians were extremely harsh and aggressive. They cruelly destroyed the northern kingdom and the ten tribes. The reason for this, in one word, was sin, all sorts of sin. The people of Israel in the northern kingdom lived in sin from the division of the united kingdom until the exile. There was no time when the people had a good king. All the kings of the northern kingdom were evil, even though God had sent them prophets like Hosea and Amos, and there were prophets who ministered among them like Elijah. Elijah tried to call them to reunite with the southern kingdom and return to Davidic rule. They refused and lived in sin and worshiped foreign gods. As a result, their judgment came sooner than the southern kingdom, and they were exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Question 15:

What does Hosea mean when he says “out of Egypt I called my son” in Hosea 11:1?

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

In Hosea 11:1, we read these words:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1).

There's no doubt that the incident in the prophet's mind here is the exodus from the land of Egypt. At the time of the exodus, God called Israel his son in Exodus 4:22. This is not the first time Hosea mentions the exodus event in the book of Hosea. He refers to the exodus in 2:15, where he says that Israel's return from the exile, her restoration and repentance to the Lord, would be like a new exodus, similar to the exodus from the land of Egypt. So, the theme of exodus from the land of Egypt becomes a type of God's redemptive works in the people's history. The prophet portrays the return from the exile as a new exodus, and thus sin and abandoning the Lord is portrayed by the prophet as going back to the land of Egypt. In Hosea 7:11, for example, this theme is asserted when he says that the people are turning to the land of Egypt, and in 7:16, that they will be mocked and derided in the land of Egypt. Also in 8:13, he affirms that the people of Israel will return back to the land of Egypt, and in 9:3, 6, we see the same idea.

Therefore, in 11:1, the event in Hosea's mind is the exodus from Egypt, but he uses it as a type and picture for an event that will take place again, because the people will “return to the land of Egypt,” indicating that they have left the Lord and rebelled against his kingship, because they asked for protection from Egypt. In 11:5, the prophet clearly says that they will go back to Egypt. This verse is translated in some versions in a negative form: “They shall not return to the land of Egypt.” However, the precise translation is in the affirmative, that they *will* return to the land of Egypt. We know this because in the same chapter, in 11:11, the prophet says of the people that, “They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt.” In order for them to come trembling from Egypt — to exodus *from* Egypt — they had to first return *back* to Egypt. Thus, the theme of exodus and the return to Egypt, and returning from Egypt, indicates leaving the Lord, but also indicates the redemptive work of God, that he will restore once again and deliver once again his people from the land of Egypt. This is what the prophet meant in Hosea 11:1 when God said, “out of Egypt I called my son.” He was referring to the exodus in Moses's days, but he also was expecting a new exodus that would take place in the midst of the people, when they would return to the Lord from the exile.

Dr. David Correa, translation

When in 11:1 of the book of Hosea he says, “out of Egypt I called my son,” in the first instance, this is referring to the people of Israel, to the people that God redeemed from the slavery of Egypt and whom he adopted as his children at the foot of Mount

Sinai. Well, this same declaration ultimately found its completion in Christ, who is the true Son, who is the true Israel. This is what Matthew says when he speaks of the return of Jesus with his parents after having fled to Egypt because of the threat from Herod. He clearly says that this happened to confirm what the prophet said, “out of Egypt I called my son.” Well, Hosea in the first instance was referring to the people of Israel, but Matthew shows us that the true Son is none other than Jesus Christ.

Dr. Charles L. Quarles

Hosea 11:1 says,

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1).

A number of different interpretations of that text; some have suggested that the son is a clear and direct reference to the Messiah himself. But I’m convinced that in context this is actually a reference to the historic exodus. Even in the law of Moses, God had warned that if his people broke covenant with him that they would return to Egypt — a reference to exile — and they would ultimately be restored from that exile, which was portrayed as a new exodus. We see that in the Pentateuch in texts like, “I will take them in ships back to Egypt,” “They’ll be covered with the boils of Egypt,” and so forth. And Hosea picks up on this theme to describe the Assyrian exile that God’s people suffered because of their sin. Examples of this go all through Hosea. In Hosea 2 we read,

I am going to persuade [Israel by leading] her [in]to the wilderness ...

This return to the wilderness theme is a reference to a repeated exodus with wilderness wanderings.

she will respond as she did in the days of her youth ... in the day she came out of the land of Egypt (Hosea 2:14-15 (CSB)).

So, there’s a return to the wilderness and there is a new exodus that’s coming on the back of this new Egyptian captivity, which is really a reference to the Assyrian exile. And once Hosea introduces that, he reiterates it again and again. An example would be in 7:16:

They will be ridiculed ... in the land of Egypt (Hosea 7:16, CSB).

And 8:13:

He will remember their guilt and punish their sins; they will return to Egypt (Hosea 8:13, CSB).

When we get to chapter 9, though, Hosea makes it very clear that this return to the Egyptian captivity is a symbolic reference to the Assyrian exile, for he says,

They will not stay in the land of the Lord... Ephraim will return to Egypt ... they will eat unclean food in Assyria (Hosea 9:3, CSB).

Notice how Egypt parallels Assyria. So, Egypt is functioning like a code word for Assyria and the exile there. Similarly, in 11, we read:

Israel will ... return to the land of Egypt and Assyria will be his king, because [he] refused to repent (Hosea 11:5, CSB).

So, there'll be a return to Egypt because of Israel's sin. This reference to the historic exodus in 11:1 is using the historic exodus to picture an eschatological exodus. God goes on to say that he will return his people to the Land of Promise, and he'll do so in much the same way that he delivered them from the Egyptian captivity in the first place. And this is where it gets really interesting. He says,

I will make you live in tents again (Hosea 12:9, CSB).

Like the tabernacles they lived in in the wilderness wanderings, and then adds,

The Lord brought Israel from Egypt by a prophet, and Israel was tended by a prophet (Hosea 12:13, CSB).

The prophet with the historic exodus is Moses, but the prophet that will lead the eschatological exodus is the prophet like Moses, or the new Moses, the Messiah. So, I would argue that Hosea 11:1 is messianic, even though the "son" is not to be baldly equated with the Messiah. This is a description of the historic exodus that is being used to portray the eschatological exodus that will be led by Jesus, the new Moses, the prophet like Moses himself.

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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

LESSON
TWO

REVELATIONS FOR THE
WISE



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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

Lesson Two

Revelations for the Wise

INTRODUCTION

Difficult experiences in life often teach us a lot of wisdom. And the insights we learn about God, ourselves and the world can be priceless to those around us as they face their own trials. This was certainly true for the prophet Hosea. He received revelations from God in challenging circumstances over many decades. And in his later years, the Holy Spirit inspired him to compile these revelations to offer wisdom to ancient Israel and Judah as they faced some serious trials.

This is the second lesson in our series on *The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea*, and we've entitled it "Revelations for the Wise." In this lesson, we'll see how Hosea designed his book, from beginning to end, to impart wisdom to God's ancient people.

In our previous lesson, we learned that the book of Hosea begins with a title in 1:1 that introduces the full timeline of Hosea's ministry. And it ends with a closure in 14:9 that calls Hosea's readers to gain wisdom from his prophecies. Between these verses, the body of Hosea consists of three main divisions. The first division, in 1:2–3:5, focuses on both judgment and hope from God. The second division, in 4:1–9:9, looks more closely at God's unfolding judgment against his people. And the third division, in 9:10–14:8, returns to the unfolding hope God revealed through Hosea's prophecies. We also summarized the overarching purpose of Hosea's book in this way:

The book of Hosea called the leaders of Judah to gain wisdom from what God had revealed throughout Hosea's ministry as they faced the challenges of Sennacherib's invasion.

As this summary points out, the leaders of Judah desperately needed wisdom. God threatened devastating judgment against Judah during, or possibly just after, Sennacherib's invasion in the days of King Hezekiah. And Hosea's book called Judah's leaders to gain discernment from what God had revealed throughout Hosea's ministry so they could guide God's people in these trying times.

To explore how Hosea fulfilled this purpose, we'll point to the revelations for the wise that Hosea included in each major division of his book. We'll start with his prophecies of judgment and hope in the first division. Then, we'll consider his announcements of unfolding judgment in the second division. And finally, we'll explore his revelations of unfolding hope in the third division. Let's look first at insights disclosed in Hosea's prophecies of judgment and hope.

JUDGMENT AND HOPE

You'll recall that the first division of Hosea, in 1:2–3:5, consists of prophecies Hosea received in northern Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. As we learned in our previous lesson, these were prophecies about Assyria's rise to prominence in 744 B.C. In this lesson, we'll see that Hosea's presentation of these early revelations carefully balanced every threat of God's judgment with hopeful reassurances that God would still bless his people in the future.

By the time Hosea wrote his book, the kingdom of Israel had fallen under God's severe judgment, and the threat of judgment had come against Judah as well. These harsh realities were disappointing and confusing to the leaders of Judah. What was God doing? What should they believe about the future? In the first three chapters of his book, Hosea began to provide the leaders of Judah with wisdom as they dealt with these kinds of questions.

As we look at Hosea's chapters on judgment and hope from God, we'll begin with their original meaning — their significance for those who first received his book. Then, we'll explore the modern application of these chapters. Let's start with Hosea's original meaning for our book's first audience.

ORIGINAL MEANING

If Hosea had summarized the revelations he offered in the first division of his book, he might have said something like this:

After a period of judgment, Israel will receive God's blessings in the latter days through reunification with Judah and submission to David's house.

On the one hand, Hosea's prophecies taught that God's blessings would come to the northern tribes of Israel after they'd endured a period of judgment. But on the other hand, they also taught that God would pour out these blessings in the latter days through Israel's reunification with Judah and their submission to David's house.

We'll look at the original meaning of this division in two steps. First, Hosea disclosed God's plan that Israel would receive God's blessings after a period of judgment. Second, Hosea clarified that those blessings would come *through* Judah. Let's explore both of these steps, beginning with Hosea's teaching that God's blessings would come to Israel after a time of judgment.

Blessings After Judgment

Hosea began this division with a personal account of his earlier family experiences in 1:2–2:1.

Earlier Family Experiences. This section starts with a family narrative in 1:2-9. In verses 2, 3, God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer, “a wife” — or woman — “of whoredom.” This description indicates that Gomer was one of the many prostitutes who served in Israel’s fertility worship centers. Her way of life cast a dark shadow over Hosea’s marriage. But more than this, their marriage symbolized that God had joined himself, through covenant, with an unfaithful people — the people of Israel.

Then, in verses 4-9, God commanded Hosea to give his children specific names that revealed Israel’s condition before God. Hosea’s first son was named Jezreel; 2 Kings 10 explains that Jeroboam II’s ancestor, King Jehu, had established his dynasty with horrific violence at Jezreel. Naming Hosea’s first son Jezreel revealed that violent judgment was soon to come to Israel. Hosea’s second child, a daughter, was named Lo-Ruhamah, which may be translated “not loved,” or “no mercy.” This name indicated that God was going to stop showing love and mercy to the kingdom of Israel. Finally, God commanded Hosea to name his third child Lo-Ammi, which means “not my people.” This son’s name revealed that, for a period of time, God would treat Israel as if it were a Gentile nation under his wrath.

Hosea’s earlier family experiences revealed the terrible judgment that was coming to Israel. But, Hosea immediately balanced these words of judgment with some divinely-inspired hopeful prophetic reflections in 1:10–2:1. Here, he declared that, despite the devastation that was coming against Israel, God would still fulfill the promises he’d made to Abraham in Genesis 13, 22. Listen to Hosea 1:10 where Hosea announced:

The children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God” (Hosea 1:10).

We find in the prophetic books that sometimes the Lord — in order to emphasize his determination to fulfill his promises — used symbols. He made use of symbolic actions. So, when he asked Hosea to marry a prostitute, what God wanted was to illustrate vividly the infidelity of his people, how his people had acted like an adulterous woman — even more, like a prostitute — going after other gods, the gods of other nations. But by means of the prophet Hosea, he showed that, in spite of the prostitutions of his people, the infidelity of his people, he remained faithful to his covenant.

— Dr. David Correa, translation

Following this balanced account of his earlier family experiences, Hosea turned to God’s first lawsuit in his book, in 2:2-23.

God’s Lawsuit. As we usually expect with prophetic lawsuits, in 2:2-13, God declared in the court of heaven that northern Israel was going to suffer his curses. Like

Gomer and her worship prostitution, the Israelites had been unfaithful to God, and God was going to curse them through the rise of the Assyrian Empire. But unlike most divine lawsuits, this lawsuit didn't end with curses from God. On the contrary, in verses 14-23 God also spoke of blessings that would come after Israel's judgment. Listen to God's hopeful words in 2:18:

I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety (Hosea 2:18).

Here we see that God expressed the certainty of a grand future after judgment by promising to make a covenant with Israel — a covenant that later prophets also predicted. Jeremiah 31:31 speaks of this covenant as a “new covenant.” And Isaiah 54:10, and Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26 all refer to it as a “covenant of peace.”

Here, Hosea's prophecy focused on how God's blessings would restore nature — “the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.” And God also promised the cessation of violence from Assyria. He would “abolish the bow, the sword and war” and Israel would “lie down in safety.”

After recording how judgment and hope were revealed in his earlier family experiences and in God's first lawsuit, Hosea turned to an account of his later family experiences in 3:1-5.

Later Family Experiences. Hosea 3 begins with an autobiographical family narrative in verses 1-3. Gomer, we learn, had returned to worship prostitution. But God commanded Hosea in verse 1 to “Go again [to Gomer], love a woman who is ... an adulteress.” Hosea obeyed, but in verse 3, he told Gomer that she was to be without a man “for many days.” Still, Hosea was careful to balance these words of judgment with a second set of divinely inspired hopeful prophetic reflections. In 3:4-5, we read this:

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel ... shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness (Hosea 3:4-5).

As this passage indicates, Gomer's time without a man symbolized that Israel would have to endure a long period of devastation, “without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.” But once again, Hosea stressed the hopeful outlook that after this judgment ended, Israel would receive God's “goodness” or blessings.

Now that we've seen how the original meaning of the first division emphasized God's blessings after a period of judgment, let's explore the revelation that these future blessings would come through Judah.

Blessings Through Judah

You'll recall that during the first stage of Hosea's ministry, Uzziah the king of Judah was faithful to God. So, while God pronounced judgments on the northern kingdom of Israel at this time, he responded quite differently to the southern kingdom. In 1:7, he said, "I will have mercy on the house of Judah." But as we're about to see, Hosea's prophecies in this first division had much more than this to say about Judah. Listen to the second part of Hosea's revelations from the first division. Hosea taught Judah's leaders that:

... Israel will receive God's blessings in the latter days through reunification with Judah and submission to David's house.

To understand why Hosea focused his revelations on God's blessings coming through Judah, we need to review three Old Testament themes that shaped Hosea's prophecies. In the first place, from as early as the patriarchal period, the Old Testament stressed the importance of the unity of the 12 tribes of Israel. The book of Genesis indicates this ideal, particularly in the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers. And the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Samuel also promote the unity of all Israel. Of course, Hosea began his ministry when the tribes of Israel and Judah were divided and at odds with each other. But in line with these earlier biblical ideals, Hosea stressed that God's future blessings for Israel would require reunification of the 12 tribes.

In the second place, Hosea also drew from the Old Testament theme of submission to David's house. Several early biblical books, especially Judges, Samuel and Kings, as well as a number of early Psalms, confirm that David's house — the royal line of Judah — was to be the permanent dynasty over all of God's people. Like the first theme, this theme is rooted in the story of Joseph and his brothers. In Genesis 49:10, the patriarch Jacob prophesied over his sons and predicted that "the scepter" — a symbol of royal authority — "shall not depart from Judah." So, at a time when the northern tribes rejected the authority of David's throne, Hosea stressed that Israel's future blessings would require their renewed submission to the rule of David's house.

In the third place, to grasp Hosea's hopeful words about blessings through Judah, it's also important to keep in mind God's ultimate goal for all of history. As many Old Testament historical books and the Psalms indicate, the *reason* God's people were to be unified under David's house was, ultimately, to spread God's kingdom to the ends of the earth. As before, we can see this theme as early as the story of Joseph and his brothers. When Jacob prophesied over his son Judah in Genesis 49:10, he not only said, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah," he also said, "to him shall be the obedience of the peoples," or nations, as it may be translated.

In the end, the twelve tribes of Israel, united under the rule of Judah's king, will spread God's reign to the whole world. And Hosea's earliest prophecies about Judah promoted this glorious vision of a future. In light of this background, listen to Hosea 1:11 and the way Hosea touched on these themes:

The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel (Hosea 1:11).

Here Hosea predicted that “the day of Jezreel” — the violence Assyria was going to bring against northern Israel — would be “great.” But after this judgment from God, “The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together” into one reunified nation. And they will “appoint for themselves one head,” or king. And in 3:5, Hosea elaborated on these Old Testament outlooks in this way:

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:5).

As we see here, “Afterward” — after Israel’s time of judgment — “the children of Israel shall ... seek” not only “the Lord their God,” but also “David their king.” And notice that Hosea said these events would occur “in the latter days.” This phrase comes from the Hebrew expression *b’ahrit hayyamim* (בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים). In other passages, this and similar phrases are simply translated “in the future.” But here, it’s rightly translated “in the latter days” — a reference to the culmination of history, after the exile of God’s people, when God’s purposes will be fulfilled.

As we’ve noted in other series, a number of Old Testament prophets drew the expression “the latter days” from Deuteronomy 4:25-31. In these verses, Moses warned God’s people that if they flagrantly violated God’s covenant, then God would give them over to their enemies and exile them from the Promised Land. But in verse 30, Moses reassured God’s people that, “in the latter days,” they would repent, and their exile would be over. In accordance with Moses’ predictions, Hosea prophesied that northern Israel would suffer severely under God’s judgment. But, as we’ve just seen, he also reaffirmed that they would repent, reunite with Judah, and submit to David’s house. And all of this would bring about the blessings of the latter days, when history would reach its grand finale, and God’s kingdom would spread throughout the world.

There are times where you see the phrase “latter days” used, say, in the Pentateuch. One example is at the end of Deuteronomy 4... In that context, what Moses is warning Israel about, as they’re about to enter into the Promised Land, that when they get into the Promised Land, he says that if they disobey God and don’t follow what’s expected in the Sinai covenant, that ultimately they could get kicked out of the Promised Land and sent into exile. So, what Moses is warning or speaking about is once they’ve been kicked out of the land, are in exile due to disobedience, what he says though, is there’s still hope for those people who have been kicked out of the land, that in the “latter days” they can turn to God and call upon him and bring them back. And of course this is a wonderful glimpse of our God who is willing to not give up on his people, but bring them back and restore them, which

lays a great theological basis for who God is — a God who restores, a God who redeems even after sin. That provides a basis for understanding God’s later acts in the person of Jesus Christ and what he will do in the end ultimately.

— Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

Now, it’s easy to see why Hosea *first* delivered these early prophecies of judgment and hope in northern Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. God called him to warn Israel of the divine judgment that was coming and to urge them to seek God’s mercy. And even though northern Israel ignored Hosea’s prophecies and suffered God’s judgment, Hosea’s *purpose* for delivering these warnings was clear.

But why did Hosea include these balanced prophecies of judgment and hope decades later when he composed his book in *Judah*? What did he hope to accomplish? Well, for one, these early prophecies offered Judah’s leaders in Hezekiah’s day a solid foundation for understanding the wisdom of Hosea’s entire book. Just as Israel had, before them, Judah was now facing God’s judgment, and they needed the revelations found in Hosea’s book to guide them. But Hosea also wrote this first division of his book to remind Judah of God’s ultimate plan for his people. No matter what had happened, or was still to happen, there was only one way that God’s blessings in the latter days would unfold. One of David’s sons would reunite the nation and lead both Israel and Judah into God’s grand blessings.

We should note that according to 2 Chronicles 30, early in his reign, Hezekiah attempted to reunite Israel and Judah under his rule as a son of David. But later on, he turned away from God, and his attempt failed. Israel remained in disarray, and Judah fell under God’s judgment, still awaiting the blessings that were to come “in the latter days.”

Having considered the original meaning of Hosea’s opening, balanced presentation of judgment and hope, let’s turn to the modern application of this division of our book.

MODERN APPLICATION

Christians have applied the book of Hosea to their lives in a variety of ways. But sadly, many of us approach our applications rather haphazardly. We simply read along until we find some relatively minor theological or moral principle that easily fits with other things we believe as followers of Christ. Now, the Holy Spirit usually keeps us from missing the mark too badly as we focus on these bits and pieces. But we want to take a different approach by focusing on the main themes that appear in Hosea’s early prophecies of judgment and hope.

As we approach the modern application of Hosea’s first division, we’ll examine two crucial connections between this part of the book and the New Testament. First, what does the New Testament teach about the church as the bride of Christ? And second, what does it teach about the latter days in Christ? Consider first how the New Testament outlook on the bride of Christ connects our lives with Hosea’s day.

Bride of Christ

In Hosea's first three chapters, the story of Hosea's marriage to Gomer symbolizes God's relationship with his Old Testament people, Israel and Judah. Hosea and Gomer were bound together by their marital covenant; God and his people were bound together by God's covenant. Gomer broke her covenant with Hosea; Israel and Judah broke their covenant with God. Hosea renewed his love and marital covenant with Gomer; God promised to renew his love and covenant with his people in the latter days. These parallels intentionally compared God's relationship with Israel and Judah to human marriage.

Other prophets also referred to God's relationship with Israel and Judah as a marriage along similar, although less personal, lines. We see this in passages like Isaiah 62:5 and Jeremiah 2:2, 32; 31:32.

The New Testament builds on this Old Testament theme by speaking of the church as the bride of Christ, much like Hosea presented God as the husband of Israel and Judah. This metaphor appears in passages like 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-33, Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9.

This New Testament perspective reflects the fact that the Christian church grew out of the people of God in the Old Testament. Throughout biblical history God has had only one bride. So Christ's relationship with the Christian church isn't completely new. Rather, it's an extension of God's relationship with his people in the Old Testament. Of course, there are many more Gentiles in the New Testament church. But New Testament authors made it clear that, even in the Old Testament, Gentiles could become part of the people of God by being adopted or grafted into the family of Abraham. For this reason, Hosea's revelations for God's Old Testament bride, Israel and Judah, apply to us as the bride of Christ, no matter what our natural ethnicity may be.

When we speak of the church in the New Testament, it's important to realize that it's not totally brand new; it's rooted back in terms of God's redemptive purposes with Israel of old. God has one people, one plan, that from all eternity he has had, and then he has worked it out in redemptive history and unfolded it before us... The Old Testament believer believed in God's promises, covenantal promises that looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. The church now, in light of his coming, believes in him with greater understanding and greater clarity, but the same promise, the same Redeemer; we are all one in that. We are as one people of God throughout the ages. Yet, obviously in the New Testament there are some differences. There's the fulfillment that has taken place. There's the greater understanding. There is the whole community that are comprised of those who are regenerate and those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must not minimize the continuity, the sameness of the people of God of Old, of the church in the New. We must not so separate Israel and the true people of God in terms of believers in the Old from the church. And remembering that there is one people, one

plan, and that is still being worked out. And in the new heaven, new earth, when Christ comes again and consummates all things, both Jew and Gentile, those who are faith believers in the Old Testament, the true church comprised of Jew, Gentile, and all the nations, are those that will bow before the knee of the Lord Jesus Christ and give him praises for all eternity.

— Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

In our modern application of Hosea's first division, we've seen the connection between Hosea and ourselves as the bride of Christ. Now, let's consider how Hosea's hopes for the future of God's bride are fulfilled in the latter days in Christ.

Latter Days in Christ

In the first division of his book, Hosea affirmed the hope that after a period of judgment God would pour out great blessings on Israel and Judah. And he made it clear that this would occur "in the latter days." But because God's people continued to rebel, God's judgment remained on them for more than 700 years. Still, despite God's prolonged discipline, Jesus and his first century apostles and prophets never gave up on Hosea's hopeful prophecies about the latter days. Rather, time and again, New Testament authors identified the entire New Testament age — the age of the Christian church — as "the latter days," using the Greek term *eschatos* (ἔσχατος). This is the term from which we get our theological expression "eschatology." Put simply, New Testament authors taught that Jesus is the great son of David who fulfills Hosea's prophecies about the eschatological or "latter" days.

But, as we've seen in other series, the New Testament also teaches that God's latter day blessings for his bride are unfolding in three stages. The first stage was the inauguration of Christ's kingdom when Jesus established the foundation of the church in his first advent and in the ministries of his apostles and prophets. The second stage is the continuation of Christ's kingdom throughout church history. And the third stage will be the final consummation of the kingdom when Christ returns in glory and makes all things new.

As followers of Christ, we must apply Hosea's early prophecies of judgment and hope in the light of all three of these stages of Christ's kingdom. First, the inauguration of the latter days, in Christ's first advent, sets the stage for the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecies. Through faith in Christ — his death, resurrection and ascension — men, women and children become part of the church. In this way, they are betrothed, or securely promised, to Christ. As the apostle Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." So, in the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, the hope Hosea presented to God's bride for the latter days began to be fulfilled in the church, the bride of Christ.

The New Testament gospels emphasize that Jesus himself began to fulfill Hosea's latter day hopes for God's bride during his earthly ministry. Jesus called a remnant of

followers for God's kingdom out of Judah, but he *also* gathered followers from northern Israel, especially from around the Sea of Galilee. By creating his church out of faithful followers from both regions, Jesus began reunifying Israel and Judah under his rule as David's son.

And more than this, the mission Jesus established for his apostles and prophets in Acts 1:8 also corresponds with Hosea's latter day expectations. Christ's reunification of Israel and Judah under the house of David was only part of God's plan. To fulfill God's grand goal for the latter days, Jesus' apostles were to be his witnesses, not only in the territories of Israel and Judah, but also "to the end of the earth." This is why, in 1 Peter 2:10, the apostle Peter alluded to the first two chapters of Hosea when he described the early church — a church consisting of Judahites, northern Israelites and Gentiles. Peter wrote:

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:10).

The apostle Paul did much the same in Romans 9:25, 26 when he referred to the first two chapters of Hosea to explain how God incorporated both Jews and Gentiles in the Christian church. These passages demonstrate that the betrothal of the church to Christ throughout the world is the beginning of the fulfillment of Hosea's hopes for the latter days.

Second, Hosea's revelations are being fulfilled for the bride of Christ during the continuation of the latter days throughout church history. As Christ rules from heaven, he also continues to sanctify his bride on earth. This is why Paul instructed husbands to be like Christ, sacrificing themselves for their wives. As he put it in Ephesians 5:26, 27, Christ died for his bride "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself ... holy and without blemish."

Throughout church history, God has continued to form his bride as one people from Judah and Israel and to unite them with Gentiles from all over the world. And he has given us the gift of his Holy Spirit as a down payment guaranteeing the wondrous blessings we will receive at the fulfillment of the latter days. In union with the Holy Spirit, we've been given the grand privilege of spreading God's kingdom by proclaiming the gospel, or good news, that the latter days have come in Christ. And as we do this, we get to see firsthand how Hosea's prophecies are being fulfilled. Jews and Gentiles throughout the world enter the blessings of the latter days by seeking the Lord, uniting with God's people, submitting to David's great son, Jesus, and spreading God's kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Third, the revelations in Hosea's first division also call us to live today in the light of our ultimate hope for the consummation of Christ's kingdom. When Christ returns, he'll bring everlasting judgment on all who don't believe in him. But the New Testament gives us a compelling and glorious vision of what it will be like for Christ's bride when Hosea's hope for the future is completely fulfilled.

There is creation, there was a fall, there is redemption in Christ, and there will be consummation. History is coming to a close. God is going to wrap things up. All things that are wrong will be set right. And Christ has promised that he would return. He says in John 14 that he goes to prepare a place for us, and that if he goes and prepares a place for us, he'll return and receive us unto himself. Christ is also going to return to judge the living and the dead... There are a number of reasons that the return of Christ is important, not the least of which is that the return of Christ is sort of the consummation of the resurrection of Christ. He is risen; he is risen indeed. But he is risen that he might come again. And this is what we say in the Lord's Supper, right? "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

— Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.

In Revelation 19:7, 8, the apostle John described the consummation at Christ's return as a great wedding feast. Listen to John's words:

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure (Revelation 19:7, 8).

Hosea's hope for blessings after judgment in the latter days will be completely fulfilled when God's bride enters into the new creation. And believers from Judah, from the northern tribes of Israel, and from every nation on earth will fill the new creation. So, Hosea's earliest prophecies of judgment and hope should compel us to maintain our hope for our glorious future as the bride of Christ. And we should devote ourselves gladly to spreading God's great latter day blessings throughout the world until Jesus returns in glory.

One of the ways to think about the time that Christians find ourselves now living in, that is to say, the interval of unknown length between the first coming of Christ and his second coming, is to refer to that as — the entire period — as the "last days"... To us it seems strange. Why didn't God just accomplish salvation all at once, completely renew the earth in every way at Christ's first coming? The answer is, we don't know; we're not God. He gets to decide. But as we wait for Christ's return in glory and power, new things have started. The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all Christians in a newer and more powerful way. God is doing new things in Jesus, sending the mission of his good news more energetically to all the nations than ever he had before. So again, God is doing new things. So, even though we await the fullness of what God will do in Jesus for his whole world and for the human race and for all who trust in him, even now, there's the

**paradox of: the end has begun, but it hasn't yet fully been completed.
And that understanding is foundational to a lot of what we do as
Christians.**

— Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

Now that we've examined Hosea's revelations for the wise concerning judgment and hope from God, we should look at the second division of our book and Hosea's focus on God's unfolding judgment.

UNFOLDING JUDGMENT

In the second division of his book, Hosea collected revelations of God's judgment against Israel and Judah that he had received from God over the decades of his ministry. He drew attention to these revelations to give those who first received his book in Judah another set of insights they needed to be wise in their circumstances. God had already poured out severe judgments on northern Israel time and again, and he was threatening to do the same to Judah. So, what wisdom were the leaders of Judah to gain from these revelations? How were they to lead God's people in the light of what Hosea prophesied? And what wisdom do the revelations of the second division of his book reveal to us today?

As we discussed in our previous lesson, Hosea's chapters on unfolding judgment broadly divide into two sections. First, this division begins with two more of God's lawsuits in 4:1–5:7. Second, Hosea highlighted prophecies that revealed two of God's calls for alarm in 5:8–9:9.

You'll also recall that Hosea received his prophecies about God's unfolding judgment as God poured out his curses through two major Assyrian invasions. Hosea's prophecies focusing on God's lawsuits originated when he received revelations about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. And his prophecies of God's calls for alarm stemmed from revelations he initially received about Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C.

As we did earlier, we'll explore Hosea's emphasis on God's unfolding judgment by considering the original meaning of these chapters. Then we'll turn to the modern application of this division. Let's begin with Hosea's original meaning for the second division of his book.

ORIGINAL MEANING

As always, there are many ways to summarize what Hosea hoped his revelations would teach his original audience in these chapters. But for our purposes we'll put it this way:

Israel suffered God's increasing judgments because of their persistent rebellion, and now Judah faces similar judgments because they also have rebelled.

By the time the book of Hosea was composed, the Assyrians had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and threatened the destruction of Judah as well. To explain why this was so, Hosea took his original audience through prophecies from different stages of his ministry to convince them of two perspectives. First, Israel rightly suffered God's increasing judgments because of their persistent rebellion. And second, Judah now faced similar judgments from God because they also had rebelled against him.

To consider this division's original meaning, we'll look first at Israel's rebellion before God. And then we'll touch on Judah's rebellion before God. Let's start with Hosea's revelations regarding Israel's rebellion.

Israel's Rebellion

Throughout these chapters, Hosea's prophecies emphasized Israel's rebellion so much and in so many different ways that it can seem overwhelming. So, it helps if we think in terms of two issues: God's accusations and his judgments.

Accusations. On the one side, Hosea's revelations drew attention to four types of accusations against Israel. First, he pointed out that Israel had violated the fundamental requirements of God's covenant and law. In the section dealing with God's lawsuits, God's earlier lawsuit begins with categorical condemnations. In 4:1, Hosea said that Israel had "no faithfulness or steadfast love" and "no knowledge of God." In verse 2, Hosea alluded to the Ten Commandments when he said that Israel was full of "swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery." And in this same verse, God stressed the particularly heinous sins of violence in Israel, saying, "bloodshed follows bloodshed." Hosea 4:6 sums up widespread conditions in Israel by explaining that the Israelites had "forgotten the law of . . . God." In God's later lawsuit, Hosea spoke again of widespread violence. In 5:2, he declared, "the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter."

Then, in Hosea's prophecies highlighting God's calls for alarm, God's first call for alarm repeats this focus on God's covenant and law. In 6:7, God said that "like Adam they transgressed the covenant." Verses 8 and 9 mention violence again, saying that "Gilead is . . . tracked with blood. . . robbers lie in wait . . . and even the priests . . . murder." Hosea 7:1 raises another accusation of widespread violence when it says, "the thief breaks in and the bandits raid outside." God's second call for alarm records God's accusation in 8:1, saying, "[Israel] transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law." And in verse 12, God sarcastically concluded that Israel would ignore him, even if he wrote "laws by the ten thousands." In fact, 9:7 tells us that Israel viewed God's covenant messengers, the prophets, with contempt, saying, "The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit" — the Holy Spirit — "is mad." Hosea left no room for doubt. Israel had flagrantly violated God's covenant and his law.

A second accusation emphasized in these chapters is against widespread idolatry in Israel. Idolatry was a fundamental violation of the loyalty God required of his people because it represented Israel's treasonous submission to the false gods of other nations. According to 1 Kings 12:28, Jeroboam I established the worship of a golden calf when he founded the kingdom of Israel. And Hosea knew that this rebellion against God had only increased as the Israelites continued to mix their own worship with the idolatry of Canaanite religions. Idolatry also increased every time Israel made an alliance with another nation because international alliances in the ancient world required acknowledging the gods of other nations.

When modern readers notice in the book of Hosea that he condemns the alliances that Israel made with other nations, we sort of scratch our head and wonder what is going on there, because when we think of forming international alliances, we think that's a good thing. I mean, that's what one country does with another in order to establish peace and safety and power and all those kinds of things. So, we think of it as something good. But you have to understand that in the days of the Old Testament that when one nation formed an alliance with another nation, that also involved forming associations of their gods, so that one nation would accept gods from the other and the other nation would accept gods from the one. And so, when Israel — or Judah for that matter — made alliances with foreign kingdoms, then they were *de facto* accepting the gods of those kingdoms. And this was a great rebellion against the God of Israel, because God demanded loyalty only to himself from his people, and he required them to depend on him only. But as soon as they made alliances with other kingdoms, that meant that they had to at least give nominal acknowledgement to the other kingdom's gods. And in addition to that, they actually began to depend on those gods and to pray to those gods.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

We see God's accusations of widespread idolatry in Hosea's prophecies focused on God's lawsuits. In God's earlier lawsuit, in 4:13, God accused the Israelites of practicing idolatry on "mountains, hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth." And in verse 17, it says that "Ephraim" — or northern Israel — "is joined to idols." We also find this accusation in God's later lawsuit, in 5:1, where God accused the "priests" and other leaders in Israel saying, "you have been a snare at Mizpah." A number of interpreters have noted archeological findings from Hosea's day of Canaanite idols in Mizpah.

We find similar accusations of idolatry in God's first call for alarm. In 5:13, we learn that the Israelites "went to Assyria" to make an alliance with the Assyrians and their gods. Hosea 7:11 states that Israel sought foreign gods by "calling to Egypt, [and] going to Assyria." In God's second call for alarm, 8:4 tells us that "with their silver and gold they made idols." In verses 5, 6, God alluded to the golden calf Jeroboam I had erected in Dan, when he spoke of "your calf, O Samaria... the calf of Samaria." In verse 9, God

said again that Israel had “gone up to Assyria.” And verse 11 conveys that Israel had “multiplied [idolatrous] altars for sinning.” Throughout these chapters, Hosea repeatedly pointed to Israel’s fundamental infidelity. They had flagrantly broken the first and second of the Ten Commandments — commandments against following the idolatrous practices of other nations.

A third accusation that appears repeatedly in these chapters is against Israel’s whoredom and adultery. The pain Hosea felt from his own wife’s worship prostitution must have made these accusations especially poignant for him personally. But these chapters focus on *God’s* offense at the Israelites’ involvement in the debauchery of fertility rituals.

God’s earlier lawsuit opens in 4:2 with the accusation that Israel was “committing adultery.” This accusation referred to the physical sexual acts that occurred in fertility religion. According to verses 10, 11, God said that the Israelites “cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine.” They were so deeply involved in these practices that, in verses 12, 13, Hosea said that “a spirit” — or demon — “of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore... daughters play the whore ... brides commit adultery.” In verse 15, God said, “you play the whore, O Israel.” And we read in verse 18 that “they give themselves to whoring.” Then, in God’s later lawsuit, in 5:3, God said again, “you have played the whore.” And in verse 4, we learn that “the spirit of whoredom is within them.”

References to Israel’s debauchery also appear in God’s first call for alarm. Hosea 6:10 speaks of “Ephraim’s whoredom.” Fertility religion was so widespread that God said, in 7:4, “They are all adulterers.” In God’s second call for alarm, Hosea so generalized this accusation that, in 8:9, he described Israel’s foreign mercenaries as “hired lovers.” In 9:1, God said, “you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute’s wages on all threshing floors.” God was deeply offended, and even repulsed, by the vile practice of fertility religion in Israel.

Hosea also highlighted a fourth accusation in these chapters: Israel’s hypocritical worship of the Lord. As was common in the ancient world, the leaders of Israel didn’t utterly reject their national religious traditions. They called on the name Yahweh in worship and claimed to humble themselves before him. But they did so only outwardly and not from the heart.

This is why God’s earlier lawsuit directly addressed Israel’s worship leaders in 4:4, saying, “With you is my contention, O priest.” This is also why God insisted in 4:15 that Israel should “Swear not, ‘As the Lord lives.’” Along these lines, God’s later lawsuit expanded his accusations of hypocrisy in 5:1 to include all of Israel’s leaders saying, “O priests ... O house of Israel” — probably a reference to the nobility in general — and “O house of the king” — most likely a reference to the royal family. He admitted in 5:6 that “They shall go to seek the Lord,” with flocks and herds for sacrifice. But he insisted that they will not find God because “He has withdrawn from them.”

In God’s first call for alarm, Hosea urged Israel to repent with sincere worship in 6:1 saying, “Come, let us return to the Lord.” But in verse 4, God revealed that their “love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.” And in verse 6 God insisted, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:9 addresses the hypocrisies of “the priests.” And, according to 7:7, as Israel’s kings fell one after another, God said, “None of them calls upon me.” In verse 14,

God declared, “They do not cry to me from the heart.” According to verse 16, “They return,” — or repent — “but not upward” toward God.

And we find similar accusations in God’s second call for alarm. In 8:2, God said, “To me they cry, ‘My God, we — Israel — know you.’” But in reality, as verse 3 tells us, “Israel has spurned the good.” And according to verse 13, “They sacrifice meat and eat it, but the Lord does not accept them.” Although we may be confident that some in Israel were true believers like Hosea, on the whole, Hosea’s prophecies revealed that the piety of most in Israel, especially their leaders, was nothing more than false piety.

As we can see from this overview of God’s accusations, Hosea stressed that Israel’s sins were far from trivial. Rather, the northern kingdom had fallen into flagrant rebellion against God. They’d rejected God’s covenant and law, engaged in widespread idolatry, given themselves to the whoredom and adultery of fertility religion, and practiced hypocritical worship. Hosea’s prophecies made it clear that Israel’s sins were worthy of God’s severe judgment. So, while these accusations *demonstrated* Israel’s rebellion before God, we must also recognize that judgments were coming from God *in response to* this rebellion.

Judgments. Now, before we look at the judgments associated with Israel’s rebellion, it’s important to keep two things in mind. First, like other Old Testament prophets, Hosea focused on what we may call “temporary judgments.” Judgments such as economic hardship, famine, death, exile, and the like, in association with Assyria’s invasions of the northern kingdom. He did not refer to God’s everlasting judgments — the judgments that will come when history reaches its fulfillment in the latter days.

Second, as both the Old and New Testaments teach, when God pours out his temporary judgments, he has very different purposes in mind for unbelievers and true believers. For unbelievers who never repent and never exercise saving faith, God’s temporary judgments lead to everlasting judgments in the fullness of the latter days. But for true believers, God’s temporary judgments are his loving discipline, designed to ensure everlasting blessings in the fullness of the latter days.

Consider the kinds of judgments related to the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C. that appear in God’s lawsuits. Because this was early in Hosea’s ministry, these prophecies threatened relatively limited judgments. For instance, in God’s earlier lawsuit, 4:3 predicts trouble in Israel’s economy and food supply with these words: “The land mourns ... [the people] languish ... beasts ... birds ... and even the fish ... are taken away.” In verses 4, 5, God focused primarily on Israel’s leadership, rather than on the whole nation, addressing, “priest ... prophet ... your mother” — this last term referring to the nobility in Samaria. God addressed priests again in verse 6 saying, “I reject you from being a priest to me.” In verse 7, he declared, “I will change their glory” — meaning Israel’s prosperity — “into shame.” And he threatened to punish the priests once more in verse 10 when he said, “They shall eat, but not be satisfied.” Also at this early stage, in verse 14, God limited his judgment in a remarkable way. He said, “I will not punish your daughters ... nor your brides” for their involvement in worship prostitution, because the fathers and husbands bore the primary responsibility for their misconduct. In verse 16, Hosea remarked that God would no longer feed Israel “like a lamb in a broad pasture.” Instead, according to verse 19, “They shall be ashamed.”

In much the same way, God’s later lawsuit addressed the leadership of Israel in 5:2 saying, “I will discipline all of them.” And verse 5 indicates that more difficulties were coming to the northern kingdom. Here we read that, “Israel ... shall stumble in his guilt.”

Now, as we’ve seen, God’s calls for alarm were revealed to Hosea later on as he predicted the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C. — the invasion that led to the fall of Samaria. So, as we should expect, God’s judgments against Israel’s sins were much more severe in these prophecies. In the first call for alarm, 5:9 declares that Israel “shall become a desolation.” In verse 11, Israel will be “oppressed, crushed in judgment.” According to verse 13, Israel’s alliance with Assyria “is not able to cure” their problems. And in verse 14, God warned of exile from the Promised Land, saying, “I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.” Now, even as God increased his threats of judgment against Israel, in 7:1 God admitted that, even now, he would heal Israel. But Israel continued to rebel against him. As verse 10 puts it, “They do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him, for all this.” So, in verse 13, God declared, “Woe to them ... Destruction to them.” In this same verse, God reaffirmed, “I would redeem them,” but they continued in their sinful ways. And as a result, verse 16 tells us that “Their princes shall fall by the sword.”

God’s second call for alarm — originally received even closer to the invasion of 722 B.C. — announces in 8:3 that “the enemy shall pursue” Israel. Verses 6 and 7 declare that “The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces... and [Israel] shall reap the whirlwind.” Then verse 8 says that “Israel is swallowed up” by Assyria. And verse 10 reveals that the leaders of Israel “shall soon writhe because of the tribute” owed to Assyria. And beyond this, Hosea referred to an upcoming Assyrian exile in verse 13 by saying that Israel “shall return to Egypt.” As God put it in 9:3, “They shall not remain in the land ... Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and ... eat unclean food in Assyria.” Israel’s defeat would be so severe that in verse 6 God said, “Egypt shall gather them ... [and] bury them.” And as Hosea prophesied in verse 7, very near the fall of Samaria, “The days of punishment ... and recompense have come.”

The Assyrian exile was a punishment from the Lord because of the sins of the people and because they had forsaken the Lord and the Lord’s laws. In the book of Hosea, we ... see the prophet giving more explanation concerning the Assyrian exile. In 9:7 the prophet says: “The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.” He asserts here that “the days of punishment” and “the days of recompense” had come, which refers to the Assyrian exile.

In the same chapter — 9:15 — we read these words: “Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels.” Because of rebellion, disobedience, and evil, the exile came, or would come, to the people of Israel.

Finally, in the same chapter — 9:17 — it says: “My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations.” The exile was preceded by several invitations from prophets — Hosea being one of them — who were sent by the Lord to the people to call them to return and repent. But the people did not obey, and as a result, the exile was a punishment from the Lord to the people, because they insisted on their willful rebellion against the Lord.

— Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

As we’ve seen so far, the original meaning of this division focused heavily on Israel’s rebellion before God. But in his second division, Hosea also revealed Judah’s rebellion.

Judah’s Rebellion

Listen again to the end of our summary of Hosea’s second-division revelations about God’s unfolding judgment:

... Judah faces similar judgments [to Israel] because they also have rebelled.

You’ll recall that in the first division, Hosea only said positive things about Judah. But in this division, Hosea indicated that, over the years, Judah had become like Israel. We know from what other prophets said, and from what Hosea himself said, that Judah, like Israel, had abandoned God’s covenant and law. Like Israel before them, they were practicing widespread idolatry, engaging in the whoredom and adultery of fertility religion, and performing hypocritical worship. And for these reasons, Judah was now facing divine judgment as well.

As we know, Hosea’s focus on God’s unfolding judgment, began with two of God’s lawsuits. God’s earlier lawsuit, concerning Assyria’s invasion in 732 B.C., took place when either Uzziah or Jotham ruled as righteous kings in Judah. So, in this opening section of the second division, we still find positive words about Judah. In fact, God revealed a striking contrast between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In 4:15, God said, “Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty.” In this earlier lawsuit, God simply warned Judah not to become like the northern kingdom.

But the same cannot be said of God’s later lawsuit that was revealed to Hosea as the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C. drew near. At this stage in Hosea’s ministry, Ahaz had begun to rule in Judah. Ahaz promoted idolatry and injustice and trusted in an alliance with Assyria and Assyria’s gods to gain protection from his enemies. So, in 5:5, God announced his judgment that “Israel ... shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.” And indeed, Judah suffered in many ways as the Syrian-Israelite coalition took place at this time.

Hosea's revelations concerning God's calls for alarm also addressed conditions in Judah. You'll recall that, in the first call for alarm, Hosea prophesied about Assyria's invasion of Israel in 722 B.C. In all likelihood, Ahaz was still king in Judah at this time. And in 5:10, we read, "The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark." Many interpreters believe this passage refers to Ahaz' attempt to annex territories in Benjamin in retaliation for Israel's attacks during the Syrian-Israelite coalition. If this interpretation is correct, rather than seeking the healing of God's people, Judah violated Israel's land-inheritance rights. And in response, in verses 10-14, God threatened Judah saying, "I will pour out my wrath like [flood]water... I am ... like dry rot to the house of Judah... like a young lion to the house of Judah. I ... will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue." With these words, Hosea predicted the horrors of Sennacherib's invasion that would come to Judah in 701 B.C. God also accused Judah of testing his patience at this stage by their hypocrisy when he asked Judah in 6:4, "What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away." And God threatened judgment against Judah in verse 11 when he said, "For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed." The "harvest" appointed for Judah was most likely Judah's upcoming troubles at the hands of the Assyrians.

Now, consider what God said about Judah in his second call for alarm as the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C. came even closer. This was probably while Ahaz and Hezekiah were co-regents in Judah. In 8:14, God noted that "Judah has multiplied fortified cities," a reference to Hezekiah's efforts to fortify Judah against Assyria. Of course, building fortifications was not sinful in itself. But Hezekiah's fortifications were a symbol of his rebellion against God because, in addition to his fortifications, he also sought protection from Assyria through an alliance with Egypt and Egypt's gods. As a result, God threatened judgment in verse 14 saying, "I will send a fire upon his cities." This threat was fulfilled when Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 B.C.

When Hosea first received his prophecies of unfolding judgment, he directly, and repeatedly, addressed the need for repentance, first in Israel and then later in Judah as well. His ministry extended for decades because God continued to show patience toward his people. But sadly, Israel's rebellion only grew. And, in 722 B.C., God finally executed the judgment he had threatened against them. The northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyria, and its people were sent into exile.

Later on, when Hosea composed his book in the days of Hezekiah, Judah was facing a similar threat of destruction and exile. In light of this reality, Hosea's prophecies of unfolding judgment offered Judah's leaders two crucial insights. On the one side, his prophecies demonstrated, beyond doubt, that God had been more than patient and just in his severe discipline of the northern kingdom. No one could rightly question God's final destruction of Samaria and the exile of the northern tribes. And on the other side, Hosea's prophecies also gave Judah's leaders a view into the condition of their own kingdom. God had protected Judah, as they remained faithful to him during the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham. But Ahaz and Hezekiah had departed from the path of righteousness, leaving the leaders of Judah in Hezekiah's day in great need of wisdom — difficult, sobering wisdom. Judah had become like Israel, and they were no longer safe from God's judgment.

Having looked at the original meaning of these chapters on God's unfolding judgment, let's consider the modern application of this division. How should these revelations impact our lives today?

MODERN APPLICATION

Unfortunately, many evangelicals have difficulty gaining any wisdom from the second division of Hosea because it focuses so much on God's accusations and judgments against his people. All too often we assume that these themes have nothing to do with us because Christ has delivered us from God's judgment through his death and resurrection. Now, we know that Christ's righteousness has been imputed to true believers in the court of heaven through faith alone. And this imputation has secured the deliverance of every true believer from God's everlasting judgment. These are essential facets of the Christian gospel. But to apply the wisdom revealed in the second division of Hosea to our lives today, we also have to keep in mind several other important facets of what the New Testament teaches.

It will help to approach the modern application of Hosea's second division as we approached his first division. We'll consider what the New Testament teaches about the bride of Christ. Then we'll look at the fulfillment of the latter days in Christ. Let's think first about the church as the bride of Christ.

Bride of Christ

As we saw earlier in this lesson, there's always been just one bride or people of God because the New Testament church grew out of God's people in the Old Testament. But to understand how Hosea's revelations of God's unfolding judgment apply to us today, we need to point out another connection. In both the Christian church, and in Israel and Judah, a distinction is often made between the visible people of God and the invisible people of God.

In Romans 2:28, 29, the apostle Paul made this distinction in reference to Old Testament Israel. He said, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly..." — or "visibly," as it may be translated — "But a Jew is one inwardly" — or "invisibly." And for this reason, Hosea's focus on unfolding judgment addressed both unbelievers and true believers in God's Old Testament bride, Israel and Judah.

In much the same way, Christian theologians have often made a distinction between the visible church and the invisible church. In the New Testament age, the visible church consists of everyone who professes faith in Christ, their children, and those who are otherwise closely associated with the Christian faith. The invisible church, however, is a special group of people within the visible church that consists of those who have come, or will come, to saving faith in Christ. So, much like Hosea addressed both unbelievers and true believers in ancient Israel and Judah, we must be ready to apply Hosea's revelations of God's unfolding judgment to the entire visible bride of Christ in our day as well.

We talk in both theology and in history about the visible church and about the invisible church. The visible church is generally referred to as the local expression of the body of Christ. That can be made up of real Christians and people who think they are Christians. The invisible church would be the people of God of all times, and all places, heaven and earth — so, all that have been the people of God forever — that’s the invisible church because there are many of those members, a great majority of them, we cannot see at the present time. They are in heaven with the Lord, or they are in other places of the world. The visible church is that which we typically think of as the local church, when Christians gather together, maybe many churches come together. But it’s important to remember that in the visible church there will always be “wheat and tares,” as Jesus said. You’ll have the true people of God; you’ll have those that appear to be, just like you had the disciples who were those faithful to Jesus, but you had Judas in there. Paul had his Demas among those that were his disciples, if you will.

— Dr. Donald S. Whitney

With the current imperfection of the bride of Christ in mind, let’s consider the modern application of Hosea’s prophecies of unfolding judgment to the church during the latter days in Christ.

Latter Days in Christ

As we’ve already mentioned, Christ brings the blessings of the latter days in three stages: the inauguration, continuation and consummation of his kingdom. The New Testament clearly teaches that at the *consummation* of the kingdom, the bride of Christ will be purified when Christ returns in glory. Christ will pour out everlasting judgments on unbelievers in the church who’ve never repented and have never exercised saving faith. And he’ll graciously pour out everlasting blessings on true believers in the church. At that time, the bride of Christ will no longer need to hear God’s accusations and judgments.

But during the inauguration and continuation of Christ’s kingdom, the situation is very different. Jesus didn’t perfect his bride in his first advent. And his bride will remain imperfect as his kingdom continues throughout church history. So, until Christ’s bride is perfected at his glorious return, God’s accusations and judgments continue to apply to the entire visible church.

Of course, we always have to remember that God has revealed more of himself in Christ. So, the wisdom of Hosea’s prophecies must always be applied in the light of New Testament revelation. Listen to the way Jesus himself did this in Luke 24:46-47 when he connected his resurrection with repentance. Jesus told his disciples:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name (Luke 24:46-47).

Here, Jesus applied Hosea 6:1, 2 to himself in the light of God's New Testament revelation. Hosea had announced that blessings for Israel would come quickly, or "on the third day," if Israel would sincerely repent and return to the Lord. And Jesus applied this to his own resurrection on the third day and to his call for repentance. As just one other example, listen to Matthew 9:13, and the way Jesus applied Hosea's prophetic wisdom to his first-century audience. Jesus said:

**Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."
For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Matthew 9:13).**

The expression "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" derives from Hosea 6:6, where Hosea accused Israel of hypocritical worship. And Jesus used Hosea's words to confront the hypocrisy of the Jews in his own day.

Given Jesus' example, it's clear that the second division of Hosea applies to everyone in the visible bride of Christ during the continuation of Christ's kingdom. And, as it was in Hosea's day, God continues to pour out both temporary blessings and temporary judgments on his bride. Both unbelievers and true believers in the visible church suffer temporary judgments in the form of hardships, natural disasters, sickness, war, oppression, physical death, and the like. And, as both the Old and New Testaments indicate, God sends these judgments for a variety of reasons. At times, he sends them in response to our own actions. At other times, they are God's response to the actions of others associated with us. And of course, until Christ returns in glory, the visible church experiences God's temporary judgments simply because creation still reels from the curse of Adam's sin.

For this reason, Hosea's accusations and warnings of judgment against Israel and Judah still offer us great wisdom. We may not be tempted to violate God's covenant and law precisely as God's people did in the days of Hosea. But we must be faithful to God's covenant and law as people living in the new covenant in Christ. We may not practice widespread idolatry as they did in Hosea's time, but we are to avoid idolatry in whatever forms it takes in our day. We may not involve ourselves in the whoredom and adultery of ancient Canaanite fertility worship, but we are to turn from every form of sexual immorality. And even though we don't fall into hypocritical worship exactly as Israel and Judah did, God still calls on us to approach him in sincere repentance and devotion.

When viewed in the light of New Testament revelation, every accusation and judgment that God brought against Israel and Judah gives us wisdom for how we should live today. So, even as we endure God's temporary judgments, we must humble ourselves, repent of our sins and renew our faith in Christ.

Now that we've looked at Hosea's revelations for the wise dealing with judgment and hope and unfolding judgment, we're ready to turn to the wisdom Hosea conveyed through prophecies about God's unfolding hope in the third division of our book.

UNFOLDING HOPE

In the first division of his book, Hosea explained that, after a period of judgment, Israel and Judah would be reunited under the rule of David's house in the latter days. But in the second division, Hosea presented prophecies from several decades of his ministry that explained why God had rightly devastated Israel, and was also bringing judgment against Judah. These harsh realities must have torn at the hearts of Judah's leaders who first received the book of Hosea. Was everything lost? Was there anything Israel and Judah could do to turn things around? The third division of our book answered these questions. Hosea presented yet another set of revelations he received throughout his ministry. And he did this for those who desired a path of wisdom towards God's blessings.

We'll explore Hosea's presentation of unfolding hope from God in the same way we've looked at the other divisions of his book. We'll consider its original meaning. And then, we'll turn to its modern application. So, what was the original meaning Hosea hoped to impart to the leaders of Judah who first received his book?

ORIGINAL MEANING

Hosea could have summarized the revelations in the last division of his book in this way:

Hope for God's blessings of the latter days is found in God's gracious responses to his people, but these blessings will come only as God's people respond properly to his judgments.

In these chapters, Hosea gathered prophecies from throughout his ministry to establish two perspectives. First, there was still hope for God's blessings of the latter days because of God's gracious responses to the sins of his people. But second, Hosea's prophecies also made it clear that the blessings of the latter days would come only as God's people responded properly to his judgments.

Let's look at both sides of Hosea's original meaning in his third division — first at God's responses to the sins of his people, and then at the people's responses to God. To begin with, what did Hosea want Judah's leaders to learn from God's responses to the sins of his people?

God's Responses

You'll recall that Hosea's chapters on unfolding hope divide into five main sections. The comparison of Israel with fruit, in 9:10-12, came to Hosea when he

received his initial prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. His comparison with a planted palm, in 9:13-17, and with a luxuriant vine, in 10:1-10, also derived from prophecies concerning Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. The comparison with a trained calf, in 10:11-15, and the final comparison with a beloved child or son, in 11:1-14:8, originated when Hosea received prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C.

We're about to see something quite remarkable in this division of our book. Hosea introduced each of these sections with God's reflections on his relationship with Israel in the past. And these reflections revealed how God had responded graciously toward Israel, even as he was threatening judgment against them. All too often, we may think that it's impossible for God to be both wrathful and merciful at the same time. But Hosea shaped this portion of his book to reveal that this wasn't true at all. As God revealed his judgments, he also revealed his favor toward Israel. And this fact offered those who first received Hosea's book irreplaceable wisdom for the challenges they faced in their day.

Fruit. Hosea introduced these perspectives using God's comparison of northern Israel with fruit in 9:10-12. These verses disclose how God's reflections on the past demonstrated his gracious response to Israel's sins. We see God's favor toward Israel in verse 10 where God recalled that Israel had been "like grapes in the wilderness" and "like the first fruit on the fig tree." Here, God reflected on how he cherished Israel in the days when Moses led them through the wilderness. And he indicated that this favorable disposition had not ended, even as he announced the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C.

These verses also reveal God's patience with Israel. In verse 10, God mentioned that Israel's idolatry and whoredom began long ago. As he put it, "Your fathers ... came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame." As we read in Numbers 25, in the days of Moses, Israelite men worshiped the idols of Moab and engaged in fertility rituals with Moabite women as they travelled toward the Promised Land. So, Israel's idolatry and whoredom were nothing new. And by recalling this event, God demonstrated that he had shown great patience toward the tribes of Israel for generations.

Planted Palm. The second comparison of northern Israel with a planted palm, in 9:13-17, also touches on God's gracious responses to Israel's sins. First, we see God's ongoing favor toward Israel in verse 13 where God declared that Israel "was like a young palm planted in a meadow." This comparison represents God's reflections on the past when he had "planted" the tribes of Israel in the Promised Land. Once again, even as God threatened severe judgments in the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C., he remembered how he felt toward Israel.

And more than this, God spoke of his patience toward Israel. In verse 15, we read, "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them." This verse refers to 1 Samuel 13:8-14, where King Saul offered sacrifices contrary to the Lord's command. Once again, it was only after God had graciously tolerated violations of worship for generations that he determined to bring Assyria against Israel.

Luxuriant Vine. God's gracious responses to Israel during Hosea's ministry appear in similar ways in his comparison of Israel with a luxuriant vine in 10:1-10. God showed his ongoing favor toward Israel in verse 1 when he said, "Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields

its fruit ... his fruit increased ... his country improved.” God reflected on how much he admired Israel’s growth and expansion, even as he determined that he would bring judgment through Assyria’s invasion of 722 B.C.

And once again, God’s reflections on the past revealed his patience toward Israel. In verse 9, God again referred to the days of Saul. He said, “From the days of Gibeah” — the capital of Saul’s kingdom — “you have sinned, O Israel.” God was about to judge Israel, but only after he had extended kindness to many generations of Israelites.

Trained Calf. After this, Hosea turned to God’s comparison of Israel with a trained calf in 10:11-15. God’s responses to Israel in these verses disclosed his continuing favor toward them. In the first half of verse 11, he said, “Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck.” God reflected favorably on how Israel had been like a lively, industrious calf, even as he condemned them to the trials of Assyrian aggression in 722 B.C.

God also revealed his patience toward Israel in verse 13 when he said that Israel had “plowed iniquity ... reaped injustice ... [and] eaten the fruit of lies” for generations. It was only after God had tolerated these sins for many years that he brought his judgment.

Beloved Child. Finally, Hosea highlighted God’s gracious responses to Israel’s sins as he reported God’s comparison of Israel with a beloved child or son in 11:1–14:8. Again, we see God’s favor toward Israel in his reflections on the past.

In 11:1, God recalled that, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Although God was about to destroy the northern kingdom through the Assyrians in 722 B.C., he still remembered his fatherly love for Israel. As he put it so tenderly in 11:8: “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.”

We also find that God disclosed his patience toward Israel in this section. In 11:2, God complained that through the centuries “The more [the Israelites] were called, the more they went away.” And he reflected on how long he had shown forbearance toward the northern kingdom.

The last division of the book of Hosea is arranged in a way that you can’t spot right at first unless you’re looking very carefully, but a number of interpreters have said that this is the best way to understand the arrangement; that they’re various snippets of prophecies that Hosea gave at different times in his ministry, but that they are arranged around these sort of controlling metaphors. And there are a number of those metaphors, but each one of them has this in common: they were things that were highly prized in the ancient world — finding figs out in the wilderness or finding a planted palm, or finding a vineyard that was spreading, those kinds of things, a trained heifer that could plow the fields, a son of a home. Those were highly prized items, and God compares the northern kingdom of Israel to those things... Especially that last one, the son, where he says, “It was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I lifted him up.” And as a

loving Father, God had endeared himself to Israel, and they were dear to him, yet they kept rebelling. The more he gave them, the more he did for them, the more they rebelled against him. But then he says, “But then, how can I give you up, O Israel? How can I give you up, Ephraim? I can’t do it because you’re that precious to me.” So we miss the point of those metaphors unless we understand that, in his wisdom, yes, God disciplines his people, his covenant people, as a matter of fact, his *precious* covenant people, but he never gives up on his covenant people; that one day, somehow they will come to repentance and they will receive his blessings.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

It isn’t difficult to understand the purpose of these prophecies about God’s gracious responses to Israel when Hosea first received them. During the different stages of his ministry, Hosea had watched how God displayed his favor and patience toward Israel to call them to repentance. But for the most part, they didn’t listen and continued to rebel against him. So, the northern kingdom fell further and further under God’s curses. But God still offered his grace to them every step along the way.

So, when Hosea wrote his book to give Judah’s leaders wisdom in Hezekiah’s day, he concentrated the third division on God’s gracious responses to Israel. He wanted to inspire Judah’s leaders to hope for the blessings of the latter days, even though God had sent the northern kingdom into exile. Despite Israel’s rebellion, God’s reflections on the past revealed his favor and patience toward them. And this offered Judah hope that one day the two kingdoms would be reunited under the rule of David’s house, and God would still pour out his latter day blessings on his people.

We’ve seen how Hosea’s original meaning in the third division of his book taught Judah’s leaders to have hope because of God’s gracious responses to his people. Now let’s consider how the hope of future blessings also lay in the people’s responses to God.

People’s Responses

As our summary of the third division’s revelations tells us:

Hope for God’s blessings of the latter days ... will come only as God’s people respond properly to his judgments.

God’s gracious attitude toward his people throughout Hosea’s ministry offered hope for God’s blessings in the future. But at the same time, Hosea didn’t diminish the significance of human responsibility. If Judah’s leaders wanted to see God withdraw his curses and begin to lead his people toward the blessings of the latter days, then the people of Israel and Judah needed to do something. They had to repent and live in service to God.

As we know, the five sections of this division of Hosea were first revealed to Hosea at different stages of his ministry. But because the northern kingdom turned away from God much earlier than the southern kingdom, the beginning of this division concentrates primarily on *Israel's* response to God. Of course, during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, Judah fell into rebellion against God as well. So later, Hosea also added calls for Judah to respond to God with humility and repentance.

In God's comparison of Israel with fruit in 9:10-12, Hosea called Israel to reckon with their long history of rebellion against God. As we saw earlier, verse 10 focuses on the fact that Israel's "fathers . . . came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame." God's reflections on the past disclosed his patience, but Hosea also emphasized something that Israel needed to learn about themselves. Their current rebellion against God was not an isolated event. On the contrary, Israel had to acknowledge that their ancestors had stored up the wrath of God against them by practicing idolatry and fertility worship for generations.

God's comparison of Israel with a planted palm, in 9:13-17, challenged Israel even further about acknowledging their past. In 9:15, God pointed out that he "began to hate them" in Gilgal during the reign of Saul. Clearly, the northern tribes had never sincerely turned from the sins of their ancestors. As Hosea said in 9:17, "They have not listened to him." Israel's repeated refusal to heed warnings from God made their sins great in his eyes.

In God's comparison of Israel with a luxuriant vine, in 10:1-10, we find a similar focus on repentance over the past. In 10:9, God declared that Israel's sins extended as far back as King Saul. As we read earlier, God told them, "From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel." But Hosea also pointed out, in verse 2, that despite their claims that they had humbled themselves before God, "their heart [was] false." And again in verse 4, God said that "They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants."

In his comparison of the northern kingdom with a trained calf in 10:11-15, God again confirmed Israel's need to acknowledge their sin. In verse 13, God accused Israel of a long history of rebellion and failure to repent by saying, "You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies. . . you have trusted in your own way and in the multitude of your warriors."

Now, as we've seen, this section most likely originated when Hosea prophesied about the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C. — after Ahaz had begun to reign in Judah. Unlike the kings before him, Ahaz led Judah in rebellion against God. So here, in addition to addressing *Israel's* response to God, Hosea also addressed *Judah's*. But unlike Israel, Judah didn't have a long history of rebellion in the past. So, Hosea focused on Judah's response in their current circumstances. In 10:11-12, we read these words:

Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow for himself. Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you (Hosea 10:11-12).

Rather than calling on Judah to repent of a long history of failure, Hosea urged Judah to pay attention to what was happening *right then*. They must turn from Ahaz'

sinful ways. They must sow righteousness and reap steadfast love. They must “break up [their] fallow” — or unused — “ground.” And why? As the threat of Assyria came against them too, it was the time for the people of Judah to seek the Lord. If they turned from their evil ways, then a new day would come to Judah. God would “come and rain righteousness upon [them].” With these words, Hosea alluded to the blessings of the latter days when Israel and Judah would reunite under the rule of David’s house. But the kingdom of Judah couldn’t begin to fulfill their role until they repented, and God’s righteousness was poured out on them.

Finally, God’s comparison of Israel with a beloved child or son in 11:1–14:8 offers the most extensive treatment of Israel’s need to acknowledge failures in the past. Once again, God confronted them with their long history of rebellion. He had treated them as his son from the time of Moses. But in 11:2, God reflected on the fact that, “The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.” Israel’s stubbornness through the centuries led God to conclude, in verse 7, “My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.” Israel had become so corrupt that God would not accept their hypocritical calls for mercy. As the exile of Israel continued, the northern tribes had to forsake the insincere, hypocritical piety of their ancestors. God called on them to offer earnest repentance over their sins. But God also reassured Israel that the blessings of the latter days would still come to them. As we read in verse 11, “They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the Lord.”

Judah’s response to God in their current circumstances is also mentioned in this last section. In 11:12, God announced that “Judah is unruly against God” (NIV). Unfortunately, the Hebrew of this passage is difficult to interpret. It’s been translated both as a word of God’s approval of Judah, in contrast with Israel, and as a word of judgment against Judah. But given the placement of this passage near the end of Hosea’s ministry, it’s most likely a word of judgment. As the destruction of Samaria grew near, Judah became increasingly more rebellious, just like Israel. Listen to 12:2-6, the last and longest prophecy about Judah in the third division of Hosea:

The Lord has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us — the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial name: “So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God” (Hosea 12:2-6).

In this passage, God called Judah to reflect on the story of Jacob’s life in Genesis 25–36. His prophecy noted how Jacob had sinned when he took his brother by the heel. But Jacob also strove with God and with the angel at Peniel. There Jacob wept and sought God’s favor, and he prevailed. By implication, Hosea called on Judah to weep over sin and seek God’s favor. And what was the result for Jacob? He met God at Bethel and learned anew that God is “the Lord, the God of hosts,” a divine title that referred to

God as the head of angelic armies. Hosea applied the story of Jacob to Judah. Judah also could have the favor of the Lord, the God of the heavenly armies, as they faced their enemies, whether Assyria or Babylon. If “by the help of ... God,” they would “return” — or repent — “hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for ... God,” then they would see the Lord intervene on their behalf with his angelic army.

It’s not difficult to see why Hosea included these words about Judah toward the end of his book. As you’ll recall, he either composed his book as Judah faced the threat of Assyria, just before Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 B.C. Or, he wrote it as Judah faced the threat of Babylon, just *after* Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 B.C. — as we know from Isaiah 39:6. In either case, Judah desperately needed God’s help. If they wanted to see God lead his angelic army against their enemies, they needed to respond with humility and repentance. They needed to acknowledge that they had been like Jacob in his early years, and that they must become like Jacob in his later years. Then, and only then, could Judah be the channel of God’s latter day blessings to the northern kingdom of Israel.

But, as much as Hosea pleaded for Judah’s repentance, he still knew that Judah’s leaders needed hope for the northern tribes in exile as well. Hosea had made it clear in the first division of his book that God’s blessings would come after Israel and Judah were reunited in submission to David’s house. So, Judah’s hope for latter day blessings could only come if Israel returned to the Lord. Because of this, Hosea closed this last section of his book with a lengthy call for Israel to repent in 14:1-8. Listen to 14:1-3:

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy” (Hosea 14:1-3).

In effect, Hosea called for northern Israelites, whether living with him in Judah or scattered in other regions, to “Return ... to the Lord your God.” And to insure that they knew how to do this, he provided them with a liturgy of repentance. They were to say to the Lord, “Take away all iniquity.” They were to ask God to “accept what is good ... the vows of our lips.” They were to reject any hope in Assyria and horses, or human military strength. They were to reject all idolatry, never saying, “Our God” to an idol. And what would be God’s response to their sincere repentance? In 14:7, God said:

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon (Hosea 14:7).

When northern Israelites humbled themselves in this way, God promised to pour out blessings.

The original meaning associated with Hosea’s prophecies of unfolding hope revealed many insights into God’s gracious responses and the responses required of Israel and Judah. Now, let’s consider the modern application of this division. How should Hosea’s revelations in this division impact us today?

MODERN APPLICATION

In the third division of his book, Hosea reassured Judah's leaders that God still loved his bride and would one day restore his beloved people. And in much the same way, as followers of Christ today, we can be assured that God continues to love the bride of Christ. But much like Hosea pointed toward the need for Israel and Judah to respond properly to God, if we hope to participate in the blessings of the latter days when Christ returns, we too must pay attention to how we respond to God's love.

To explore the modern application of this third division, we'll look once again at the New Testament themes of the bride of Christ and the latter days in Christ. Consider first how Hosea's final revelations apply to us as the bride of Christ.

Bride of Christ

In Hosea's day, the sins of God's Old Testament bride led to severe suffering under God's judgments. Northern Israel had been sent into exile through Assyrian aggression. And, as Judah began to rebel, they were threatened with destruction and exile as well. Yet, despite these disappointing, and even horrifying circumstances, Hosea called on every person in the visible and invisible church to seek forgiveness through repentance and faith. He looked forward to what other prophets called "a remnant," a faithful people who would turn to God for salvation and would receive his everlasting blessings.

In much the same way, until Christ returns in glory, the bride of Christ will remain far from perfect. And at different times and in different ways, God has brought judgment against his New Testament people. While the church is strong in some parts of the world, in other places, where the church was once strong, it barely exists because God has brought his judgment. But much like Hosea, we can be confident that no matter how hopeless the condition of the church may seem, God will not set his bride aside and find another people. God calls every man, woman and child in the visible and invisible church to seek forgiveness through repentance and faith. He calls *us* to be the "remnant" of faithful people who will receive full redemption and everlasting blessings when Christ returns.

With this basic orientation toward the condition of the bride of Christ, let's consider the modern application of Hosea's last division in terms of the latter days in Christ.

Latter Days in Christ

As we learned earlier, Christ's fulfillment of the latter days takes place throughout the New Testament age. It began in the inauguration of his kingdom. It reaches greater heights during the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history. And it will be

completed when Christ returns at the consummation of his kingdom. So, as we've done with Hosea's other divisions, we'll approach his prophecies about God's unfolding hope with all three of these stages in mind.

In the first place, the New Testament makes it clear that the hope Hosea offered to Israel and Judah began to be fulfilled during the inauguration of Christ's kingdom. Jesus' first advent demonstrated that God hadn't utterly abandoned his bride. Rather, in Christ, he showed favor and patience toward his people by beginning to fulfill Hosea's hopeful prophecies concerning the latter days. But during the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, God still required the human response of repentance and faith. So, just as in Hosea's book, Jesus' gospel combines God's mercy with human response. In Matthew 2:15, we can see this coupling of grace and repentance. Matthew wrote:

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matthew 2:15).

"This" refers to Joseph, Mary and Jesus' flight to Egypt and their safe return. Matthew quoted from Hosea 11:1 where God showed great mercy when he called the nation of Israel out of Egypt. And Matthew stated that this prophecy was fulfilled during the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, when Christ returned from Egypt after the death of Herod.

Now, we have to be careful here. Matthew knew that Hosea didn't refer directly to Jesus. Instead, Hosea referred to Israel's exodus from Egypt and how Israel rebelled against God, despite his great mercy toward them. Matthew pointed to the fact that God had shown great mercy to his bride by calling Jesus — his royal Son — out of Egypt. But many in Israel still rebelled against God. As Matthew demonstrated a number of times in his gospel, even in his mercy, God still requires the human response of repentance and faith. And in Jesus' day, many, like Herod, fell under God's everlasting judgment because they didn't respond appropriately to God's mercy in Christ.

In Hosea 11:1, God said, "Out of Egypt I have called my son," and that harkens back to God's call to Moses, because when God called Moses to liberate his people, he said to Moses, "Israel is my firstborn son." And then the instruction that he gave to Moses was to say to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son. Let my son go. Let my people go that they may worship me in the desert." So, that language goes back to the call of Moses and the exodus... But it also, in reminding us of the exodus and the Mosaic period, it reminds us of what God gave to Israel back in the desert. He gave to Israel his law, and in his law he promised blessings on obedience and cursings on disobedience. And so, in reminding Israel of from where Israel came, he was reminding Israel also of Israel's responsibilities to the law. And that was the call in Hosea. The people had been unfaithful. They had chosen disobedience and chosen cursing instead of obedience and blessing. If we take that up into the New Testament, it's fascinating that in the New Testament Matthew quotes that from Hosea, referring it to Jesus Christ because Joseph and Mary and Jesus had to flee into Egypt and then came up

out of Egypt. And Matthew, interestingly and surprisingly quotes this and said, “Out of Egypt I have called my son,” recognizing that Jesus is the new Israel, Jesus is the true Israel, Jesus is the obedient Israel, and Jesus is repeating the exodus and the coming up out of Egypt, but he’s doing it right. He’s doing it obediently this time. So Israel, the real Israel, has finally obeyed.

— Dr. Larry Trotter

In the second place, throughout the continuation of Christ’s kingdom, the church must apply Hosea’s third-division revelations to our present circumstances. As the church has spread further and further throughout the world, God’s grace in Christ has reached more and more people — both Jews and Gentiles. And despite our imperfections, God still mercifully cherishes his bride, the church. So, our hope for blessings must always be rooted in God’s gracious responses to our failures. Even so, Hosea insisted that the hope of latter day blessings also rested in proper human responses to God’s grace. And in the same way, God’s blessings in Christ come to those who turn from their sin and call out to God for salvation. This is why repentance is such a vital dimension of the daily lives of all who claim to follow Christ today.

In the third place, Hosea’s prophecies of God’s unfolding hope are ultimately fulfilled in the consummation of Christ’s kingdom. Hosea offered Israel and Judah the hope of blessings in the latter days to those who would repent. And the New Testament offers the bride of Christ today hope for the glories of the latter days. Because of God’s love for us, he will one day completely cleanse from sin all those who have saving faith. And he’ll deliver them from all judgment as he brings them into the blessings of the new creation. In 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, the apostle Paul referred to the consummation of the latter days in this way:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written ... “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

Here the apostle extolled the wonder of Christ’s return by referring to Hosea 13:14. There, God mocked the power of death despite the judgment of destruction and exile that had come upon Israel. Hope was not gone. The curse of death would cease to have any effect on Israel because, in the latter days, God would redeem them and reunify them with Judah in submission to the house of David.

As Christians, we know that this hope will one day be fulfilled in Christ, the great son of David. Despite the failures and hardships we still face in our day, we look forward with great expectation to the return of Christ. On that day, all who have put their hopes in the grace of God in Christ, and all who have repented of their sins, will receive the full blessings of the latter days. We will join Hosea in mocking the power of death and the grave, as the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead raises us up into everlasting life.

The apostle John expressed this same hope in his vision of the consummation of Christ’s kingdom in the book of Revelation. Drawing from a number of themes in the

book of Hosea, he described the new Jerusalem, the glorious city of David's son and the dwelling place of God's bride. As we read in Revelation 21:2-3:

I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Revelation 21:2-3).

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on Hosea's revelations for the wise, we've considered how Hosea revealed God's judgment and hope for the people of God and the blessings that will come in the latter days through Judah. We've examined how Hosea taught Judah's leaders in Hezekiah's day why God's unfolding judgment had come upon both Israel and Judah. And we've explored the unfolding hope of blessings that will come to God's people in the latter days by God's grace and by his people's response to that grace.

God's revelations to Hosea provided wisdom to the people of God hundreds of years before Christ. And they still offer wisdom to us today. As the bride of Christ, we face the challenges of living in a world that still suffers under God's judgments. But God has never given up on his church. He sent Christ to secure our salvation and begin the latter days. And Christ lives in us now through the Holy Spirit, to lead us into the blessings of the world to come. When we take to heart the wisdom that the book of Hosea offers, we will overcome this world and join with countless others in the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb. As Christ's beloved bride, we will receive the blessing of sharing with Christ in the immeasurable joys of everlasting glory.

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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

LESSON
TWO

Revelations for the Wise
Faculty Forum



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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

Lesson Two: Revelations for the Wise

Faculty Forum

With

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Dr. David W. Chapman

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Dr. Brandon D. Crowe

Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim

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Dr. Scott Redd

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

Dr. Daniel Treier

Dr. Larry Trotter

Dr. Eric J. Tully

Question 1:

Hosea designed his book to impart wisdom to God's people, so how should we understand the concept of wisdom?

Dr. Daniel Treier

Wisdom is the growing capacity to run with, rather than against, the grain of God's created order. Sometimes the vocabulary is used in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, for something that's merely a skill or perhaps for abstract philosophizing. But of course, that's only going to run so far in terms of going with, rather than against, the grain of God's creation. So, ultimately, wisdom begins where it ends, with the fear of the Lord. And it's a growing capacity to live in light of the fear of the Lord. So, wisdom is both a process and a product. We have two ways — toward life or toward death. We're to choose the way toward life and grow in our ability to walk in it in the right direction, rather than choosing to go in a wayward direction and pursue folly. So, wisdom is communicated through tradition. The wisdom literature in the Old Testament provides us with memorable, punchy sayings that enable us to capture the best of what the community wants to pass on regarding how to live well. But wisdom involves not only tradition; it also involves inquiry. It involves ongoing reflection about how that tradition relates to present-day circumstances and challenges. So, the traditional wisdom of Proverbs is balanced out by the more reflective and challenging wisdom of Job or Ecclesiastes.

In the New Testament, of course, wisdom has a new dimension. It becomes more fully personal as it is embodied in Jesus Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is further democratized or spread around through the capacity we have to gain the mind of Christ by the Holy Spirit. All of God's people can grow in wisdom rather than having wisdom be initially focused in a group of sages who are learning to teach others how to live well... The other emphasis in biblical wisdom comes in terms of virtue, and the way that moral and spiritual excellence is formed in community. Of course, ultimately our relationship to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit

is the center of how we gain wisdom, but Christ, by the Spirit, forms wisdom in his people as the people of God grow together in virtue over time.

Dr. Eric J. Tully

In its most neutral, in its most basic sense, wisdom just simply means skill. It means doing something effectively... Whether that's being a skillful carpenter and cutting wood to the correct dimensions, or whether it's being an effective stone mason and being able to cut blocks for a building to the correct dimensions, wisdom means being skillful at something. And often, the ways that we think about wisdom are ways in which we think about living life skillfully, knowing not only what to do but when to do it, knowing the proper social situation for something, living life in an effective way so that you get ahead, so that you prosper, so that you live the life that you want to live... Wisdom has a very practical orientation in the Bible. It's dealing with the kinds of things we run across all the time, whether it's relationships, dealing with authority, thinking about our use of money, thinking about relationship to our parents, in thinking about our job, and even table manners — all kinds of really practical issues like that. And then, in a broader way, wisdom is concerned with order, being able to understand life and the world correctly so that we can live skillfully. We know the kinds of pitfalls to avoid. We know the ways to get ahead in life. And it's the Bible that begins to help us understand that if we really want to live life skillfully, we have to do that in terms of the fear of the Lord. So that's where we really begin to move from the most basic sense of wisdom as being something that you're good at, even if it's wrong or neutral, to being something that is related to our relationship with the Lord and recognizing that he is the Creator of the entire world, and that if we are properly related to him, then that is what will help us to live life skillfully.

Question 2:

What significance for Hosea's overall message do we gain from the closure of his book in 14:9?

Dr. Larry Trotter

Hosea 14:9 says:

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (Hosea 14:9).

And so, this is the prophet's parting shot, and in the prophet's parting shot we hear God's final plea to Israel saying, "The Lord's ways are right. Your ways are not right." The Lord's ways are right, and so you have two choices: you can either walk in them and stand, or you can rebel against them and walk in your own way and stumble.

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Usually, when evangelicals look at Old Testament prophetic books they're noticing how prophets predicted things, and then they're looking for the ways those predictions were fulfilled. That's just sort of the normal thing. And will even go further and say how they were fulfilled in the New Testament in Christ. But in the case of the book of Hosea, the very last verse of the book, 14:9, is sort of a key as to what the significance of this book was. It's where Hosea calls for his readers, the people who first received his book, to learn wisdom from the prophecies that he had given earlier in the book. Verse 9 of chapter 14 stands alone and is, as it were, a key for understanding what the purpose of everything he has said before actually was for the people that first got the book... Now, in reality, Hosea does make predictions, and those predictions are fulfilled, sometimes even before Hosea's life was over. But Hosea refers to those predictions, and even sometimes their fulfillments, in order to reach a goal, and the goal is that his recipients, the people reading his book, would learn wisdom and understanding from the prophecies that he had given... And as Christians, when we think about the book, there are many ways we can approach its various themes, it's predictions, it's fulfillments, all the sorts of things that are there because there's lots there, but one of the crucial things that we have to do is to take the clue of 14:9 and understand that this book was not just designed to give wisdom to the first people who received the book, but it's also given to us so that we may receive wisdom also.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

In Hosea 14:9, the last verse in the book of Hosea, we read these words:

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (Hosea 14:9).

This verse is, in fact, what we might call a "wisdom saying," because in it the prophet asks, "Whoever is wise ... let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right." The Lord's revelations that came to his people throughout this book came through metaphorical language, whether through Hosea's marriage to Gomer the adulteress, or through his three children whose names have specific indications and meanings. So, the reader needs wisdom to understand the meaning and the purpose of the book, and to understand God's thoughts and purposes. Also, the generations that would come afterwards and read this book would not live when Hosea married Gomer, nor would they see his children. They would need divine wisdom in order to understand the purpose of this book and the message God intended to send to his people in this book. That's why the ending of this book is very significant as it asks for wisdom to understand the message of the Lord to his people in the book of Hosea.

Question 3:

Given that Hosea's purpose was to challenge Judah to gain wisdom, how should we understand the purpose of biblical prophecy in general?

Dr. Gordon H. Johnston

So, when we study prophecy, one of the major questions we have to ask is, "What's the main purpose of prophecy?" In a lot of popular-level contemporary literature, it tends to focus on trying to tease out the mysterious details and get a timeline as far as this event versus that event following next, and prophecy then becomes a study more for intellectual exercise, cognitive information. But biblical prophecy itself, when Yahweh inspired the prophets, it was primarily to move the people to obedience. So it wasn't so much content and information oriented as much as functional. Yahweh's primarily calling the people to obedience, calling them to repentance. For those that are already obedient to persevere in faith and obedience; to those that are disobedient to repent of their sins. So, it's primarily to move the people. If you will, biblical prophecy, Yahweh would reveal to the people that judgment was coming, but for the purpose that this could be avoided if the people would repent. Or he would reveal to the people this is the blessing that's in the offing, but that was with the assumption that if they continued to persevere in faith and obedience. So it's almost if you could think of a highway with exit ramps where the prophet would tell the people that they're on a path of danger, and this is what's at the end of the road, but there's an off ramp. And so, it's not simply that this is set in stone, that there's a calendar that we have to fulfill in the future, but it's primarily giving the people a providential edge, if you will, that this is your fate, but this is fate that can be avoided if there's repentance.

Dr. Gregory R. Perry

A lot of times, I think, many readers of Scripture think that prophecy mainly was about prediction, that prophets made predictions, and then they came true, and that illustrates God's sovereignty. And, of course, it does. There is an element, a predictive element, in many prophecies that we see fulfilled in the New Testament. But the main purpose of biblical prophecy we see in a passage like Jeremiah 18, where the prophet goes down to the potter's house, and he talks about how the potter is working with the clay, and he says to the people of God that God has the right to reshape them. And so, the main thing that prophets did was call people back to covenant faithfulness, and so he says, "If I were to say that disaster will come upon you, and yet you turn from your wicked ways, and then I relent of my plans to bring disaster against you," that would be a fulfillment of the prophet's role. Or, if God says that he's going to bring good things, that he's going to plant and increase them, and yet they go and they are wicked, and they turn from the covenant, and God then relents of his plans... So, what we see is that instead of this prediction, that this is going to happen, what God does is he offers two ways. He says, "If you are faithful to the covenant on the one hand, I will bless you. If you're disobedient to the covenant on the other hand, the curses of the covenant will come against you." So, the

prophet's role is to represent the covenant and to call God's people back to covenant faithfulness.

Dr. Scott Redd

Many people believe that the purpose of biblical prophecy is to tell something about the future. Well, of course, that's incredibly significant and important to biblical prophecy. As a matter of fact, a false prophet is one who mistells the future. It's not the main purpose of biblical prophecy. Rather, biblical prophecy was a way for God to communicate to his covenant people in a way that would either encourage them to continue on the path on which they're on, or to dissuade them and to encourage them towards repentance that they might return to a path that they should be on... So biblical prophecy is not so much about prognostication of future events as it is about proclamation of God's words to his people, requiring them either to return to him from a path of disobedience, or to encourage them along their way in covenant faithfulness to continue seeking him and following him... We find a clear example of this in Jeremiah 18 where the prophet articulates that when God proclaims a blessing on a nation and that nation turns away from the Lord, then that blessing will turn to a curse. Likewise, if God declares a curse on a nation and that nation repents and turns back to him, that curse will turn to blessing. So you see, the purpose of prophecy is not so much to just tell something about the future, but it's really to change behavior, to call God's people to him, to call them to covenant faithfulness. We see this throughout the Old Testament. In the case of Jonah with the Ninevites, calling the Ninevites to repentance. Jonah is not a false prophet because his prophecy of destruction over Nineveh does not come true. Rather, he shows that he is a true prophet, because when the Ninevites repent and turn to the Lord in repentance, the destruction is mollified and put off... Likewise, in the story of David and his son with Bathsheba, David is told that his son will die as a result of his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah. However, David laments, and repents, and turns to the Lord saying, "Who knows? Maybe the Lord will take this judgment, this curse, away from me." David knew that true prophecy requires repentance, requires a response of faithfulness... This is also the case with the story between Isaiah and Hezekiah. When Hezekiah becomes ill, Isaiah tells him, "Put your house in order for the disease that you have is fatal." But Hezekiah repents and he turns to the Lord, and the Lord relents and extends Hezekiah's life. You see, Hezekiah knew that Isaiah was not a false prophet because his prophecy did not come true, but rather, his prophecy had the desired effect of calling about faithfulness in God's king, Hezekiah.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

The main purpose of biblical prophecy can be understood if we have a sense of the prophets as, say, ambassadors or secretaries of state. They came as representatives of God, and they came to call God's people back to faithfulness to God's covenant with them. At times, it was to call them to repent and to turn away from sin, and at other times it was to give them hope in difficult circumstances. When the prophets came to call the people to turn back to God, it was to turn away from sin, from individual sin, but particularly we see to call people from sinning against one another, from gaining an advantage against others, from being unjust, from not being merciful, and those

kinds of things; and also to call them to turn back from serving other gods that they had begun to worship, sometimes alongside the God of the Bible, and sometimes to the exclusion of him. And so often we speak of the prophets as those who brought a covenant lawsuit, like a lawyer would bring, to bring God's people back, to give them an opportunity to repent, and to turn to him and be faithful to the covenant that he had given them at Sinai, in the book of Exodus. Or we see the fuller version of that in the book of Deuteronomy... But there was not always this message of only woe. There was a message of hope often, or sometimes in alliteration we say, "woe and weal." You know, good news. What was their hope? What could they look to for God to deliver them from their circumstances, or how they could persevere in them? So, the prophets came to bring a message of warning at times and of hope at other times. But the important thing to remember is that he spoke to them in those circumstances initially, and how we read those prophecies today has to start with what they meant to those people then. And occasionally God would predict things in the future that would confirm or seal his authority, his credibility, his faithfulness. Unfortunately, we tend to think of the Old Testament prophets as *only* predicting things, which is actually probably a lesser percentage of what they did, than to speak words of warning and words of hope and blessing.

Question 4:

Why did God tell Hosea to marry a wife of whoredom?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Usually when someone makes an announcement of a marriage it's a joyous thing. It's a situation where a man knows a woman, and the woman is fantastic. She's just perfect. She's everything he ever wanted in a wife. But in the case of Hosea, when God commanded him to marry Gomer, he actually said, "She is a woman of adultery," or "She is a woman of whoredom" — any number of ways you can translate it. And what's behind that expression is this: it is that Gomer had been a prostitute in the worship centers, the fertility worship centers that were all over Israel. In those days, if you were not a wealthy person, one of the ways you actually supported your family, one of the ways that you made sure that your family had food to eat, was that your daughters would be given over to the worship centers in prostitution. And so, when God tells Hosea to marry Gomer, who is that kind of person — a woman who had gone through that — he's actually reminding Hosea that his marriage is not going to be this wonderful, joyous experience, but rather, it's going to be troubled. And in fact, it ends up being troubled because later on she returned to that practice. And the reality is, is that God did this for Hosea so that it would be impressed upon his heart, so that he would not be able to escape the pain of what was happening with the people of Israel and their relationship with God, because God had chosen Israel even though he knew that they had this propensity toward whoring, toward adultery, toward being unfaithful to him as their husband. And he also knew that Israel was going to continue to have that propensity to turn away from their covenant requirements, the loyalty that God had required of them.

But God had Hosea marry her despite that fact. He had him marry Gomer despite the fact that she was that kind of women with those kinds of propensities, because God had married himself to Israel. He had become her husband, and Hosea was to exemplify in his life, and even to learn in his own life, the pain that that caused God, to see his people turn away from him and why his judgment would come against them, because they had violated something sacred — their relationship with God.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

In the book of Hosea, God does come to the prophet, and he is going to embody the message that he is giving to Israel. And the message he's giving to Israel, the primary message, is to say that the Israelites have been forsaking God and worshiping other gods. And in the book of Hosea he's going to use this language of "playing the harlot" or "committing adultery" with other gods. And we see from the Prophets that in many cases they're going to embody the message, and in fact, God tells him to go and marry a woman of harlotry. And there is, I will mention, there is some debate about the language being used there because it's not the usual term for a woman who is either a prostitute or playing the harlot. It's a little bit of a different term, same verbal root being used. And so the question for some scholars is, does this mean that she's a woman of, kind of, not a literal prostitute, but is she a woman who, like every Israelite... Is it a spiritual kind of term? Is she a woman of spiritual harlotry? And so, in that sense she's like every Israelite. Or is she actually a prostitute? ... I think my own view is that I think we are right to say that it is a woman of harlotry, and it's not quite the same term being used. However, I think once you get to the next woman who's mentioned, a woman committing adultery, I think it's absolutely clear, and everyone agrees there, and I actually think that they're the same woman, not two separate wives. And I think that it's really a poignant message for Israel that here, Hosea, of course his language is very passionate when you look at the book; beautiful language about God's love for Israel. Why? Because I think he's also suffering in his relationship with his unfaithful wife. So, he's able to give that passionate message because of that. And I think she clearly is representing Israel's turning after other gods. So, I think that he's experiencing that with his own wife.

Question 5:

What did God intend to convey through Hosea's marriage and their children's names?

Dr. David Correa, translation

Through Hosea's marriage and the names he gave to his children, God wanted to illustrate his relationship with his people. God demonstrated that he was a faithful God, a loving God, a patient God. Nevertheless, we see that because of the constant disobedience and infidelity of his people, God came to the point of divorcing his people, to the point of saying, "You are no longer my people." ... This is shown by the name "Lo-Ammi," a name given to one of Hosea's children. We see something similar with the name "Lo-Ruhamah," meaning "no pity." So, the people came to be a

people who were no longer pitied, no longer loved by God — “Now you are no longer my people. I divorce myself from you.” And yet, God says, “How can this be? Therefore, take Lo-Ammi and Lo-Ruhamah and make them yours once again,” just as Hosea shows through his relationship with his unfaithful spouse whom, in spite of her infidelities, he took back.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

So, in the book of Hosea God is really trying to communicate his message to his people through Hosea’s marriage as well as the children’s names. And so, the marriage is representing this forsaking for other gods, as his wife is forsaking him and for the sake of other lovers — that’s kind of the imagery that’s being used. But you also have it with these children. I mean, you have the first son being born called “Jezreel.” Now, Jezreel, we might not know much about that name and think, you know, it’s just an ordinary name, but if you’re an Israelite, and you’re in the northern kingdom, this is a powerful term that’s being used because it recalls key events that have happened in the northern kingdom, especially with King Ahab and Jezebel. And it recalls this event where Ahab had wanted this man’s vineyard — Naboth — wanted his vineyard, and he wasn’t able to get the vineyard, and so his wife Jezebel organizes these two false witnesses and basically has the guy killed, and then Ahab takes the vineyard. And this is all taking place at Jezreel. And so, that happens there. There are several other events that happened at Jezreel, like terrible bloodshed that happens, including Jezebel getting killed, as well as Ahab’s seventy sons and their heads get cut off and sent to Jezreel. So, as soon as you hear the word “Jezreel,” it is bringing up these terrible events, and it is announcing God’s judgment for what took place at Jezreel. And then you have two other terms. . . You have the first one being Lo-Ruhamah is in Hebrew or “no compassion.” I mean, this is a *terrible* term when you think of it because God says he’s no longer going to have compassion on his people. This picking up that there’s going to be an exile coming. They’ve been worshiping idols since 930 B.C., so this means for almost 200 years they’ve been worshiping idols and God hasn’t destroyed them because of his compassion. So, when he says, you know, Lo-Ruhamah, he’s really pronouncing that judgment is coming and he’s withdrawing his compassion. And then the last term, the last name is Lo-Ammi, which means “not my people.” And then again, this is very significant at the heart of the covenant relationship God made with Abraham — Genesis 17: “I will be your God; you will be my people.” You think of it in the Mosaic covenant: “I will be your God, you will be my people.” Now he’s saying through this third child, Lo-Ammi, “You are no longer my people.” And in fact, he’s going to treat them like they are not his people. He’s going to treat them like the nations, and so judgment’s coming. I will mention that immediately after he says Lo-Ammi, not my people, there is going to be hope that at the place where it is said “not my people,” they will be called children of the living God — wonderful little nugget of hope in the midst of that, and Paul’s going to pick this up in Romans to say that this is the hope of the Gentiles coming in. So, you have judgment being pronounced but also this little window of hope of the future restoration.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The names of Hosea's children, in particular, demonstrated God's judgment against sin — the people's sin. Each time Gomer bore Hosea a boy or a girl, the severity of the judgment gradually increased. For instance, we read about the first son Gomer bore in Hosea 1:4, where it says,

And the Lord said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel” (Hosea 1:4).

Actually, there are at least two reasons behind choosing the name Jezreel. The first reason is that it sounds similar to Israel in pronunciation — yiz-RAH-eel and YIZ-rah-eel. The other reason is that there was a valley in Israel called the valley of Jezreel. This valley is associated with many bloody events. We read about it, for example, in Judges 6:33 and 1 Samuel 29:1. Also, the name Jezreel is related to the story of Ahab and Jezebel and the killing of Naboth. We can find this in 1 Kings 21. We also read about it in the killing of Ahab's family through Jehu the son of Jeshoshaphat in 2 Kings 10:11. Actually, there is a very important passage in 2 Kings 10:28-31 that, although Jehu son of Jeshoshaphat obeyed God's command and killed the family of Ahab, he did that for his own personal purposes and ambitions. That is why the Lord said in the book of Hosea: “I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel.” We read in 2 Kings 10, beginning with verse 28:

Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin — that is, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan. And the Lord said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.” But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin (2 Kings 10:28-31).

Although Jehu destroyed the altars of the Baals, he erected idols and walked in the sins of Jeroboam. That is why Hosea's first son stands for the judgment of God on the Israelites, for the bloody events that were related to Jezreel, especially against the house of Jehu, and for the corrupt religious and behavioral practices that were in the kingdom at that time. The second child, the daughter, whom Gomer bore to Hosea, was called “Lo-Ruhamah.” We read about her in Hosea 1:6:

She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, “Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all” (Hosea 1:6).

The name “Lo-Ruhamah” in Hebrew means “no mercy.” The Lord declared that he would remove his mercy from the people of Israel. Mercy here is related to the covenant faithfulness of the Lord. So, the Lord here says that he will remove his mercy from the midst of the people. We read about the last child that Gomer bore Hosea in verses 8 and 9:

When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hosea 1:8-9).

The Hebrew name “Lo-Ammi” means “not my people.” This was the highest level and the hardest of the Lord’s judgments.

Question 6:

What does Hosea’s family life teach us about a prophet’s role in representing God’s covenant with Israel?

Dr. Gregory R. Perry

The prophets represented God’s covenant to his people and to the king over his people, and oftentimes the way that the Lord would ask them to do that was by acting out a living parable. We can think of Jeremiah, and he’s building a siege ramp, and that is symbolizing what is about to happen against the city of Jerusalem. Well, in a similar way, because God’s people were going after other gods, Hosea was called to the difficult task, like Jeremiah was, of bearing witness against the covenant people. And we can think about the importance of covenant language. Kings in the ancient Near East, great kings who conquered other kingdoms, would use the language of love to call people to covenant loyalty to them: “I want you to love me.” That sense of a fatherly relationship or a husband-wife relationship symbolized the covenant loyalty that that king expected of those people. And so, in that context, when God is calling his people to covenant loyalty, he uses the imagery of adultery to powerfully illustrate the pain that God himself experiences in the breaking of this covenant as his people go after other gods instead of holding fast in covenant love to him. And so, it is a powerful illustration of Israel’s infidelity to the covenant that God calls Hosea to illustrate in this very painful way.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

God entered into a covenant relationship through which he took the initiative to show mercy and benevolence to his people. But, just as Hosea’s wife was unfaithful and an adulteress, the people were unfaithful in their relationship with God. They were worshiping other gods and committing various sins that kindled the Lord’s wrath... Within the covenant, God had entered into a relationship in which he adopted Israel as his people, and he was their God. Through this covenant, he declared his name to Moses saying, “*ehyeh asher ehyeh*” or “I am who I am.” So God, through Hosea’s last child, was saying to Israel, “You are not my people” — “Lo-Ammi.” Moreover, he said, “I am not your God.” In Hebrew, “I am not” is the reversal of his covenant

name that he declared to Moses. He was saying, “I am not,” or “not *ehyeh*” — “I will not be your covenant God.” Thus, Hosea’s marriage and children illustrate how God dealt with his covenant people. He declared his judgment over the people because of their sins and because they had acted contrary to the conditions of the covenant, conditions that required their loyalty in response to the covenant mercy and grace that God had initiated and shown them.

Question 7:

Why do New Testament authors refer to the time from the first coming of Christ to his return as “the last days” or “latter days”?

Dr. Brandon D. Crowe

The Old Testament hope — and we should begin there — was that whenever God intervened to bring his kingdom in a permanent way, God’s king would be established, his kingdom would spread, the nations would come in, his enemies would be destroyed, and there would be a re-gathering of the people, the temple would be rebuilt, and there would be a great day of flourishing. And all of this was understood to happen at one time, and it was all going to happen. Trace back to Genesis and Numbers and Deuteronomy to what the prophets developed the phrase called “the last days,” or “the latter days.” But something surprising happens when we come to the New Testament. When Jesus comes, he comes as God’s king, and he comes bringing God’s kingdom in a very real way, and he brings the beginning of the messianic blessings, and he begins to re-gather the people, and he begins, in one sense, to bring in all the nations. But all of those hopes from the Old Testament don’t happen all at once. There’s a delay. This is where we get the phrase, “already, not yet.” *Already* the blessings of the messianic age are here but *not yet* in their fullness. All of these hopes from the Old Testament for the latter days, they have begun to be realized but not completely, not in their consummate form. And so we see this illustrated very well, for example, in Luke 4, when Jesus begins his ministry. Whenever he begins his ministry and he reads from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 61, he reads about the forgiveness of sins, the great news of jubilee, the redemption and the release of the captives, but he cuts his reading off from that text before mentioning the day of the vengeance of our God. And that seems to be intentional because Jesus brought in the beginning, the blessings, the hope, but not the end when all of the enemies would be defeated. And so all of these hopes that were anticipated in the Old Testament, they had begun to be realized in Jesus, the days of blessing and the fruitfulness. We see even like in the wedding at Cana in John 2, it’s a great day of, the water has turned into wine, and there is so much more wine than anybody could have ever imagined. And that is one of the hopes of the messianic age. These things have begun to be realized, but the complete gamut of what would happen whenever God definitively fixes all that is wrong with the world, all of that has not yet been consummately perfected, and that’s why we refer to this whole span of time from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ, as “the last days,” because it is this time frame in which all of the latter days hopes will be fulfilled, culminating with the second coming of Christ.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

Some theologians refer to the whole period from Christ's first coming to his return as "the last days" simply because that's exactly the way the New Testament refers to them. On the day of Pentecost, when Peter was preaching after the Holy Spirit had been poured out by the risen Lord Jesus, Peter quoted from the prophecy of Joel the second chapter, and Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit, tweaked just a little the wording of Joel. Joel had said, "It will come to pass after this; I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." Peter shows now in the light of the fulfillment, it's more specific than that. "It will come to pass in the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit." So the death and resurrection of Christ, his ascension, and now his celebration of his coronation, his enthronement at the Father's right hand by pouring out the Spirit, marks the beginning of the last days. The writer to the Hebrews picks up that same theme at the very beginning of that epistle. He says, "In times past God spoke to the fathers through the prophets ... but in these last days God has spoken to us in his Son." And so, from a biblical point of view, all that the prophets were looking forward to, begin to be fulfilled in a profound sense with the first coming of Jesus the Messiah, with his death and resurrection, his undergoing in a sense last judgment for his people, and his entering into the resurrection as the firstfruits of the resurrection, and that fact that he's now ruling and reigning at the Father's right hand and extending his power by the work of the Spirit among his church on earth. That marks this time as "the last days."

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

The real question is what are the last days in Scripture? Second Timothy 3:1 says,

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty (2 Timothy 3:1).

As you read through the rest of 2 Timothy, you find that Paul is addressing Timothy in the first century in terms of things that are happening then, so he's indicating the last days encompass Timothy's own time, and of course, we're still in them. In the Old Testament, there is the phrase "the latter days" or "the last days," looking forward to the great climactic salvation that God will bring in the future. Well, that climactic salvation has already happened in its first installment in the first coming of Christ and will be consummated in the second coming. So, the last days, from that standpoint, encompasses both ends from the first to the second coming of Christ.

Question 8:**Why does Hosea condemn foreign alliances in his book?****Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

The prophet Hosea, in his book, condemned the foreign alliances Israel had made. That's because these alliances indicated a declared rebellion against God who had entered into a covenant relationship with the people. Within the context of this

covenant, God was the real king over the people. These alliances took place because Israel was seeking military protection and supplies, and this meant that they put their trust in these foreign nations instead of trusting the Lord. It also showed that they rejected the covenant the Lord had made with them as they put their trust in foreign nations. These nations didn't just supply them with support and military resources, they also had a negative impact on them through imposing their laws and legislations, most of which were against the laws and the commands of the Lord. And also, there was the influence of their religions that affected Israel.

We see in Hosea 10:6 that Israel gave presents to the Assyrian king. And in 12:1 Israel did indeed make a covenant with Assyria. The prophet announced to the people that these alliances would not benefit Israel — not in any military, political, social, or spiritual level. The prophet highlighted this point in 8:7-10. So, the prophet Hosea condemned these alliances because of their political danger. And from the spiritual aspect, these alliances indicated the people's rebellion against the Lord within the context of the covenant that he had made with them. In that covenant, God told them that he is their king and that they must put their trust in him alone. *He* would be the source of their help during hard times.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

Hosea condemns the Syro-Ephramite coalition, that is, the alliance between Ephraim and Syria, for the same reason that the prophets frequently condemn such alliances. Isaiah warned Judah, "Don't lean on the sharp reed of Egypt because it will pierce your hand." That is, Judah was tempted to form alliances with Egypt because everybody is looking for a partner to protect themselves against the empires, first the great Assyrian Empire, but then the Babylonian Empire, which displaces Assyria. But this whole matter goes back to the very beginning of Israel being saved out of slavery in Egypt and the crossing the Red Sea, the song of Moses and Miriam: "[We] will sing to Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and ... rider he has thrown into the sea." And from then on, Israel is taught they must depend upon God as their king and not depend upon the strength of nations... This is the great sin of David when he took a census because God had not commanded that census. But David wanted to number his military strength, so he counted his horsemen, his chariots, his warriors, and so forth, and when he did that, it was a subtle indication that he was relying upon military strength rather than God to be the divine Warrior King who would defend his people. And it wasn't just because God was jealous. That's part of it. But beyond that, to be dependent upon other people is always a two-way deal, because as we see in the tragedy, the tragic turn that Solomon's life took — his alliances with the Queen of Sheba, with Hiram of Tyre — ends up eventually bringing the gods of those people into the sanctuary in Jerusalem. And so the intermarriage in the days of Nehemiah as well as the corruption of worship to the bringing in of false gods before the exile, all these things are along the same theme, which is, when you make a bargain with the nations, it cuts both ways, and it corrupts. You see it very simply in the life of Abraham who refused to pay tribute to the king of Sodom, but instead gave tribute to the King of Righteousness ... because to be beholden to the nations runs contrary to be loyal to God. And so, to depend

upon Syria, for Ephraim, or to depend upon Egypt later, for Judah, those things inherently corrupt true devotion to the Lord. And the lesson for us today is, when we make bargains with the world where we are enriched by the ways of the world and we become empowered by the ways of the world, the world inherently disempowers us and enslaves us. So it's a great lesson for us to continue to remember.

Dr. Larry Trotter

Hosea condemns foreign alliances really in keeping with the Deuteronomic code. If you go back to the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, foreign alliances are forbidden basically because they represent a lack of faith in God — depending on foreign alliances instead of depending on God for salvation. And there are other practical concerns as well. They don't work. Foreign alliances don't work. They entangle Israel and Judah in relationships in which the people of God always come out badly. They come with a high price tag, and that is subjugation to foreigners. Also, foreign alliances have a tendency to corrupt the faith of Israel and Judah. As they have to depend on the foreign alliances, their faith in God wanes, and in some cases they even fall into the idolatry of worshipping the gods of those powers to which they've become voluntarily subject.

Question 9:

Why does Hosea provide such harsh condemnations of idolatry?

Dr. Carol Kaminski

Well, really, in the book of Hosea the topic of idolatry is absolutely central. So, if you look at it, there's a couple of key pieces of background that's important. I think one is the Ten Commandments. The first commandment talks about you're only to worship the Lord God — the first two commandments — and then you're not to worship any idols, you're not to make them, but you're not bow down to idols, because this is an absolute breach of the covenant relationship with Yahweh. He requires loyalty, and he will accept no rival worship of any other gods. So, of course this is Israel's problem. The golden calf narrative right out, you know, they haven't even got into the land yet, and they're worshipping idols, and this becomes really a paradigm of God's people. And then Hosea is in the northern kingdom, and in the northern kingdom you have the first king, Jeroboam. He sets up two golden calves just like the one they made in Egypt — the first thing he does at Dan and Bethel — and he says, "Here are your gods, O Israel." So, you have from 930 B.C. to 722, for two hundred years, you have idols being worshiped in Dan and Bethel, and you have Baal worship during the time of Ahab. So, this is a central problem, and really as soon as those idols were worshiped, they should have been destroyed. But God is gracious and compassionate to them. And so, how does his grace manifest itself? One of the ways is by sending a prophet, and he sends Hosea to really condemn the issue of idolatry, and he's going to do it through visual, through his own marriage, and through this image of playing the harlot after God. So, it's really at the fundamental core of the relationship God has with his people.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

Israel, instead of showing loyalty and submission to the Lord and worshiping him alone and not other gods, they engaged in worshiping idols and entering into relationships with other nations, which had a negative impact on the people's loyalty to the Lord. That is why the Lord described the condition of the people as they went "whoring" away from him, because they were engaging with other gods — especially the gods of the Canaanites where adultery and sexual impurity were part of their rituals. So, when the Lord said of the people, or of the land, that it had committed great whoredom, such a phrase not only refers to the spiritual aspect of leaving the Lord and trespassing his covenant, but the literal aspect too, as at that time, the people were indeed worshiping foreign gods through relationships full of sexual practices and immorality.

Question 10:

What can we learn from the fact that Hosea wasn't the only prophet giving similar warnings to Israel and Judah prior to their exiles?

Dr. Donna Petter

Prophetic activity was really profound in ancient Israel before the exile. And evidence of that is that there were sixteen prophets that God raised up to speak a word to the nation. And this is because... Why sixteen prophets? Why not one? Why not five? But there are sixteen of them. And so, that is evidence that the story of the Bible is that God is relentlessly pursuing people for relationship. But in the Old Testament those sixteen prophets are really visual aids of God's grace that he is relentlessly pursuing Israel for a relationship and the hope that Israel will get back in relationship with God as she had stepped out time and time again. And so, in that regard, prophetic activity is profound, and sixteen visual aids of God's grace show up on the scene of redemptive history in the Old Testament and reveal that. But there's more that I would say as to why there was so much prophetic activity before the exile. There is a great verse in 2 Chronicles 36:15-16, and it tells us from the perspective of the Chronicler. So, this is a historical writer writing after the events of the southern kingdom and giving his perspective on ... why Jerusalem fell. And the perspective is, he highlights God's character in all of this. And so, 2 Chronicles 36 says this, that God "sent persistently to them by his messengers." And why did he do that? He sent them persistently with these messengers because, it says, "he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling." And so, the Chronicler is telling us that God's very character was such that he sent the prophets, that it was in his very nature to give them warnings and grace through these prophets. And I think it is really important for us to remember that because a lot of times we think of the prophets as breathing nothing but fire and brimstone down on their audience. But from the perspective of the historian, the Chronicler, these prophets were given by God out of his grace and out of his compassion. But the sad story is, although God persistently kept sending the prophets to his people, the nation rejected the prophets so much so that the wrath

of God had to be brought about in the fall of Jerusalem, and there was no remedy, as it were, for what needed to take place. So, the prophets then are, in many ways, the visual aids. The writing prophets are God's visual aid of his grace to a nation, but they also reveal his character and that he's not ready to just judge any would-be transgressor and shake his finger that them, but he is extending his character through bringing them on the scene.

Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

The role of the prophets was clearly to warn the people of their sins, to call them to repent, and to remind them of the covenant between God and the people of Israel through Moses, to remind them of the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. So, this is why there was so much activity. The people had gone far away from God, from the law, and were worshiping foreign gods. So, they were warned over and over that they had to return to the Lord. For example, in the northern kingdom, the kings were all evil, and the nation received many warnings, so their captivity occurred earlier. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken to the Assyrian exile sooner than the southern kingdom. The prophets also warned the southern kingdom. They not only warned them using the law, but they also warned them using what happened to the northern kingdom — “Be careful, this happened to the northern kingdom because they rebelled.”

Dr. Todd Berger

If you are reading in the Hebrew canon — with the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, in that order — the next book that you turn to after finishing the book of Kings, the next page that you turn is the book of Isaiah. And we come to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets. And the way that I view this is that what God has done is he's brought the people to the point of exile, and then if people were in exile, and hypothetically speaking let's say they said, “You know, if God had given us appropriate warning we wouldn't have done this. We wouldn't have been this kind of people if you'd only told us what to do.” Well, when we turn to the book of Isaiah, what we're getting then, in a sense, is we're getting all of the sermon tapes. This is the preaching that they heard in the years leading up to the exile, and so in these two centuries or so, you know, two hundred years or so leading up to the exile, they were hearing the preaching of Isaiah. They were hearing the preaching of Jeremiah. Ezekiel was coming out of the exile, but as you read through the Minor Prophets, you're hearing warning after warning after warning: “Don't do this! Don't be this kind of people!” And that's why the people ended in exile then, was because they had ignored all of the preaching of the prophets... So, as the people were hearing the preaching of the prophets, it left them with no excuse, that they had to end in exile because of their disobedience and the way that they followed other gods.

Question 11:**What can we learn from God's warnings of judgment throughout Scripture?****Dr. David W. Chapman**

So when we think of warnings of judgment, we also immediately start thinking of Old Testament prophecy and judgment against those who are opposing God and opposing his people. And so the warnings of judgment ... they provide assurance for God's people that God is still in control and that he is going to ultimately vindicate them and also judge those who have opposed the work of God and who have opposed his people and thus provide encouragement for God's people to persevere. They also, secondarily, provide a warning for those who might otherwise seek to harm God's people or yet not consider themselves to be part of God's people, haven't yet consented to the gospel; a warning of judgment that could fall even on us and thus encourage us to cling to Christ and to come to him. So, there's that twofold purpose of vindicating God's people, judging those who are not, and that works together to encourage people to flee to Christ, and those who already know Christ to persevere and cling to him.

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

This world is a stage on which a great spiritual battle is taking place, and our actions with regard to that battle are significant, and God has a purpose and plan in this world, and we are to live our lives in line with his purpose and plan. And so, those who oppose God's purposes will pay the price. They will face judgment from him. We as believers have a responsibility to be faithful. And so ... the message that occurs again and again is: hold fast, persevere, persevere to the end, because God is going to win, and God is the sovereign Lord, even though along the way it might seem like things are going in the other direction. And so, the fact that God is going to judge evil and reward good calls us to respond in faithfulness to his message, in faithfulness to his purpose and his plan.

Question 12:**Why does God demonstrate so much patience with Israel when he has promised to judge his people with covenant curses if they disobey?****Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

Leviticus 26 has a lot to teach us about the nature of divine judgment. You see that God anticipates potential future disobedience by Israel, and that ... he's going to call his people back to repentance so that they can avoid the curses of the covenant. But you see this almost like a cascade in Leviticus 26. The warnings are going to be repeated and they're going to be extended... And really, you see this reflected largely in the book of Deuteronomy where God rehearses Israel's stiff-necked rebellion over time and his patience with them. It's where we see God's faithfulness manifested in his longsuffering. And so, God is a patient God. He's not willing that any should

perish, the New Testament says, and it takes a lot to try God's patience. And even in a book like the book of Judges you see repeated cycles of rebellion, disobedience, covenant curses, and then God's people cry out to God. And in fact, there's a beautiful verse in the book of Hosea that I think captures all of this, when God says exile is inevitable for the northern kingdom, he also says, "I will take you into the wilderness and there I will speak kindly to you," so that even when his hand of chastening comes down, it's for the purpose of turning his people back to him. And so, we have to not only appreciate, but we have to see it fully in the Old Testament as well as the New, that God is longsuffering, and he proves himself not just in spite of, but even through the times of rebellion of his people.

Dr. Douglas Gropp

It's interesting to make a comparison of the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Curses in Deuteronomy 28 are fairly straightforward, but in Leviticus 26 they're staged, giving the opportunity at each stage for Israel to repent. The recitation of the curses are designed in Leviticus to provide an opportunity to repent, and at the end of those lists of curses, there's a section, I think it's verses 40-41, actually making provision for the Israelites to confess their sins with the hopes that the Lord will honor the covenant that he made with the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and bring about a restoration... In the prophets and their use of covenant curses in judgment, sometimes they proclaim those curses using a transition word in Hebrew that's translated "therefore" — *lahen* in Hebrew — where it's giving God's verdict on their sins and proclaiming the judgments that is to come. But sometimes the prophets use another term that's often also translated "therefore," but I think should be translated "that is why" — *alken* in Hebrew — and it's really giving an explanation for why the covenant curses are already beginning to be realized. And in that sense, we see in the Prophets the unfolding of the curses together with an implicit call for Israel to repent so as to bring an end to the full realization of the curses, mirroring the staging of the curses that we have in Leviticus 26.

Dr. David Correa, translation

Leviticus 26 teaches us in many ways about God's patience, the great patience of our Lord. However, we can mention one that is very interesting. This was when Moses revealed the judgments that would come for unfaithfulness to the covenant. Moses tells us that the Lord didn't bring complete and total destruction all at once. Rather, he tells us there in Leviticus 26 that if the people were unfaithful, if they were disobedient, God would bring certain calamity to them. And if there was no repentance, he would gradually strengthen the punishment, continuing in this way until they came to the greatest threat, and that was exile. So, we see that God was patient because he gradually intensified the punishment, the curses, that would come upon the disobedient. That teaches us truthfully, as the psalmist tells us, that our Lord is a God slow to anger and abounding with mercy.

Question 13:**What hope for Israel does Hosea provide in 14:1-8?****Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

After the prophet Hosea proclaimed the message of God's judgment over Israel for their sins — leaving the Lord and worshiping other gods — he presented a message of hope in the last chapter of the book, chapter 14. This chapter is divided into two parts. Verses 1-3 have a call to repent and return to the Lord. The prophet says,

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God (Hosea 14:1).

In the second part, verses 4-8, the prophet presents an assurance of the Lord's love and his will to heal his people from sin, from the disease of sin. The Lord says,

I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely (Hosea 14:4).

This is the message of hope that the prophet presents after proclaiming the judgment. There is always a chance to repent and return to the Lord. It is accompanied with God's hand that is extended with healing and love to restore the people and restore their relationship with the Lord once more.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

As tragic and as agonizing as the message of Hosea is, the last chapter, particularly the first eight verses, end on a note of hope. And it should remind us that God is longsuffering, and he shows lovingkindness to the thousandth generation of those who love him and keep his commands. It begins with the prophet calling God's people to call out to the Lord. It gives them a prayer to pray: "O Lord save us, remove our sin, restore us." It has a response from God, where God answers, "yes" and reminds them that he's always ready to receive his people back when they turn from the idols and turn from their sin and turn back to him. And it ends with a reminder — "Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?" Because, you see, idolatry is not just about bad worship. Idolatry is about turning away from life to death. Psalm 115 is a wonderful hymn about this that says that the gods of the nations, they have eyes but don't see, ears but don't hear; that the gods of the nations, they don't have any power because they're dead gods and the psalmist says those who worship them shall become like them. And Israel would experience what the prophet had said would come about. Israel would experience the death, the lifelessness, the powerlessness, the slavery of idolatry, because it would lead them into bondage in Assyria and lead them into exile. But, "What does God have to do with idols, O Ephraim? Turn to me and I will return to you." That's the basic message of the prophets, as Zechariah even begins his prophecies. And the very last words ... are the word to the wise — open your eyes, be wise, do the wise thing. Own the prayer. Own the prayer of repentance and calling upon God to return and save, and God would be faithful to heed that prayer. And that, you know, that is the key to all prayer, isn't it? If we ask of God what he has promised, we know his answer will always be "yes."

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