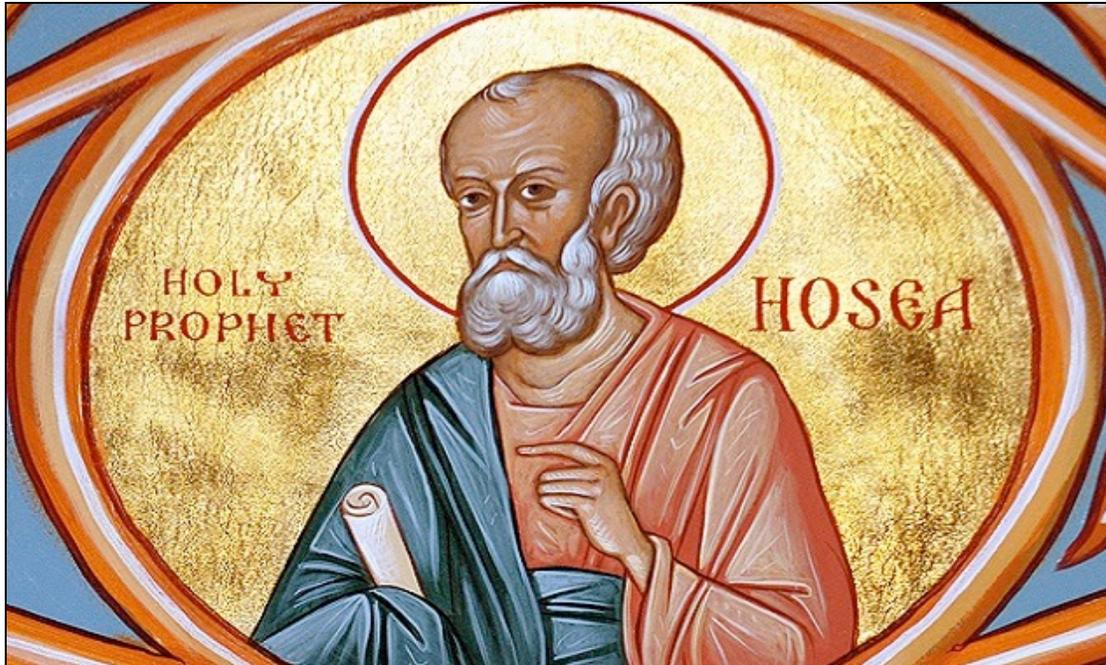


HOSEA 1: CALLING AND PREPARATION



T. M. MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Hosea 1: Calling and Preparation

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Hosea 1: Calling and Preparation

The book of Hosea begins unlike any that of any other prophet. Hosea shows us the lengths God went to prepare him for his calling, during which time He also begin to unfold an overview of the content of his preaching.

Hosea is called into service, then immediately instructed to begin a family. The wife he chose and the names of the children she bore are hugely significant for the prophet's ministry. They serve to remind people of God's faithfulness, to indict them of their rebellion, and to hold out the hope of a renewed relationship with God in the future.

Hosea's life embodied his mission. God is upset with His people, and not without good reason. He is coming to judge them, but because He is God and His Word cannot fail, His judgment will be replaced by restoration at some point.

Hosea thus brings a message of warning, judgment, and hope to a people who didn't much care about what he had to say.

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We hope you find this study of Hosea instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Troubled and Uncertain Times

Week 2, Monday: The historical setting

Hosea was not called to a cushy ministry of preaching and pastoral care. God sent him to a nation that was riding high at the time, but was clearly on its way to a calamitous collapse. Hosea indicates a good overall understanding of the times in which he was called to prophesy, and, as we shall see, he did not hold back in his ministry of the Word.

Let's take a closer look at the social, cultural, political, and spiritual climate into which God called and sent the prophet Hosea.

Read Hosea 1

Meditate on Hosea 1.1

1. Read 2 Kings 14.23-29. Compare the spiritual health of Israel under Jeroboam with her political strength. Why, given what we see in verse 24, did God favor Israel with such might?
2. Quickly scan 2 Kings 15.1-31. How is it apparent that politics was the favored way of leading in Israel at this time? How would you describe the political life of Israel's leaders?
3. We remember that Hosea was prophesying throughout this period, all the way into the sixth year of King Hezekiah of Judah (Hos. 1.1; cf. 2 Kgs. 17.1, 18.1). Given what you saw in the introduction of Hosea last week, was this a risky business for this prophet? Why?
4. Hosea says "the word of the LORD" came to him during the reign of Jeroboam II. What does this mean? How does the Word of the Lord come to us today? Should we expect that Word to require of us anything like what it required of Hosea? Explain.
5. While Hosea's primary message is to the nation of Israel, he begins his "credentials" by mentioning the kings of Judah. Does this suggest anything about the scope of Hosea's message? Read 2 Kings 15.32-16.20. How would you describe conditions in Judah during Hosea's ministry? Is Hosea "telling it slant" or is he being crystal clear to the leaders of Judah? Explain.

Summary

How broad is the scope of God's Word? How relevant to times and cultures? That is, to how much of society and culture does the Word speak? And with what tone? What emphases? Is this the kind of preaching and teaching you receive in your church?

Closing Prayer

"Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him,
But their fate would endure forever.
He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat;
And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you."

Hosea 1: Calling and Preparation

Psalm 81.13-16

Observations, notes, questions:

2 Marrying into the Mess

Week 2, Tuesday: Preparation and promise

No other prophet had so strange a beginning to his call than Hosea. Before he can even get into the ministry of the Word, he is commanded to take a wife and start a family.

But not just any wife. And not just any family.

God is preparing Hosea for his ministry, and through Hosea, He is preparing the nation for the promise of His undying faithfulness.

Read Hosea 1

Meditate on Hosea 1.2

1. God instructs Hosea to marry. Before he can begin his ministry, he must be properly prepared. The phrase “of harlotry” probably means that Hosea was to choose a wife from among the people of Israel, rather than the people of Judah. It doesn’t necessarily mean that he was required to marry a prostitute. But what kind of statement would Hosea be making – and God through him – by taking this step?
2. Why start with a marriage? Why not just go into Israel, prophetic guns blazing, and give those adulterous people what for? What role does marriage play in the divine economy? Is there a message of hope for the future in Hosea’s action?
3. What reason does God give for this strange command? How does this help us in understanding why this marriage was good preparation for Hosea?
4. Already we can begin to see how Hosea – whose name derives from the Hebrew word for “salvation” – is a type of Christ. In Biblical studies, a “type” is someone or something which is real and significant for its time, but which points beyond itself to something greater and more significant. Meditate on Philippians 2.5-11. How can you see that Hosea is a type of Christ here?
5. The people of Hosea’s day would not necessarily have understood that his life and message were pointing to Christ. But Matthew understood (cf. Matt. 2.15), and so did Peter (cf. 1 Pet. 2.10), Paul (cf. Rom. 9.25, 26), and John (Rev. 6.16, cf. Hos. 10.8). What does this suggest about how we should read the Old Testament? What does Jesus teach us about this in John 5.39?

Summary

A prophetic book of judgment begins with an act of grace, which in and of itself points to the greater grace of God yet to come. No matter how bleak things get, or how far we may drift from obedience to the Lord, His grace is constant, His promise is unchanged, and He will always remain faithful to His Word and plan. How does Hosea’s marriage to this “wife of harlotry” encourage you in your walk with the Lord?

Closing Prayer

Blessed *is* that man who makes the LORD his trust,
And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.
Many, O LORD my God, *are* Your wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us

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Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak *of them*,
They are more than can be numbered.
Sacrifice and offering You did not desire;
My ears You have opened.
Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.
Then I said, "Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me.
I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law *is* within my heart."

Psalm 40.4-8

Observations, notes, questions:

3 Tokens of Covenant

Week 2, Wednesday: You and your children

Hosea takes his wife and they bring a child into the world. This is precisely in line with God's covenant plan for His people from the very beginning (cf. Gen. 1.26-28; Gen. 12.1-3). Here is yet another token of the continuing strength of God's eternal design. The children of Hosea will, by their very being in the world, remind rebellious Israel of the Lord's ongoing grace and faithfulness.

Their names, however, will carry other messages, and will prepare Hosea for the proclamations God has in store for him.

Read Hosea 1

Meditate on Hosea 1.2-5

1. Meditate on Genesis 1.26-28, 12.1-3, 15.1-6, 22.15-18, 26.1-5. God consistently bound up all the promises of His covenant with the gift of children. Why would it be important for Hosea's ministry to begin with bringing children into the world? What was God trying to say to Hosea, and through him, to Israel?
2. What happened at Jezreel? Read 1 Kings 21.1-24. How many ways did this act of treachery constitute a violation of God's Law? Can you see how Ahab's wickedness presents a template for Israel's entire history?
3. Jehu became king under the command of God (cf. 1 Kgs. 19.16, 17) with the mandate to bring judgment against the house of Ahab. This charge he fulfilled. However, it seems he should have taken this as a message from God to lead the nation of Israel back from its violent, Baal-worshipping ways, and from all its spiritual adultery. Instead, what actually happened (2 Kgs. 10.18-31)? In God's eyes, therefore, Jehu shed the blood of Ahab's descendants needlessly; he did not carry God's plan through to completion but used his violence to establish himself more firmly. Thus, God would have to pick up His own work of judgment from that point (cf. 2 Kgs. 10.32, 33).
4. OK, given what we've seen about children, Jezreel, and Jehu, what "message" is bound up in the name the Lord appointed for Hosea's first child? "Jezreel" would be for Hosea a symbol for a certain aspect of his message to the people of Israel (vv. 4, 5). Summarize that message:
5. The phrase "Valley of Jezreel" doesn't seem to refer to any particular place or event in Israel's history. Rather, it suggests the kind of judgment God intends to bring against His rebellious people. How do you suppose the prospect of such preaching would have affected Hosea?

Summary

God's "case" against Israel has deep historical roots. Israel has abused His grace, flouted His faithfulness, and spurned His covenant. Should God merely overlook such treachery? Ever?

Closing Prayer

Remember this, *that* the enemy has reproached, O LORD,
And *that* a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.
Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast!
Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.

Hosea 1: Calling and Preparation

Have respect to the covenant;
For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.
Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed!
Let the poor and needy praise Your name.
Arise, O God, plead Your own cause;
Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.
Do not forget the voice of Your enemies;
The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

Psalm 74.18-23

Observations, notes, questions:

4 No Mercy, Mercy

Week 2, Thursday: Respite from wrath

A second child is born to Hosea and Gomer, and God names her Lo-Ruhamah: “no mercy.” Not on Israel, anyway.

Again, the message at this point is primarily to Hosea. Having lived for some time with the “Jezreel” message tottering around the house, the prophet must have been prompted to plead with God for some stay of violence against His people. This second child was both an answer to Hosea’s prayers and a portent of his ministry, yet to come.

Read Hosea 1

Meditate on Hosea 1.6, 7

1. How do you suppose Hosea must have felt when God explained this daughter was to be named Lo-Ruhamah? How was this helping to prepare him for his ministry? How must Hosea have been feeling about this calling God had appointed for him?
2. God provides consolation for the prophet, and this takes the form of a more specific focus of the message, “No mercy.” What does God promise?
3. We note that, while God’s judgment against Israel comes in the form of sword and bow, God’s promised salvation to Judah will not be by that means. God says only that He intends to save His people “by the LORD their God.” Israel would be destroyed by political and military means. Judah would not be saved by these. What message for God’s people of all times is suggested here?
4. The word “will save” sounds, in the Hebrew language, almost like the name, Hosea. How would this contribute to Hosea’s preparation for his ministry? What might this have affected what Hosea may have been thinking about his calling and the message he would proclaim – its content, thrust, and focus?
5. Evidently, God’s mercy is not boundless. What provokes God finally to withdraw His mercy from someone? How can you see in the birth of Lo-Ruhamah that God is pointing His prophet’s mind toward a far horizon in the unfolding of His redemption?

Summary

God does not forgive everyone. He does not wink at sin. He brings the wages of sin against people precisely in line with what their works deserve. But does this mean His mercy is ever beyond reach? Why or why not? Can we proclaim the Good News of God’s saving mercy apart from the bad news of His wrath? Explain.

Closing Prayer

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,

And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

O LORD, open my lips,

And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;

You do not delight in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,

Hosea 1: Calling and Preparation

A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

Psalm 51.14-17

Observations, notes, questions:

5 Broken Covenant

Week 2, Friday: His people no longer

The essence of God's covenant relationship with His people can be summarized in the phrase, "I will be your God, and you will be My people." God had taken Israel to Himself by an act of sheer, unfathomable love, as we see in Deuteronomy 7.6-8. But the threat of divine displeasure was always present in God's covenant (Deut. 7.9-11), and now His patience with Israel had reached its limit.

Read Hosea 1

Meditate on Hosea 1.8, 9

1. A third child is born to Hosea and Gomer, and the name God appoints for him must surely have weighed on Hosea like a great weight. What does the name of this child suggest about God's covenant with the people of Israel?
2. God was renouncing Israel and denying that she had any claim whatsoever on His promises. Hosea's job was to make it plain why this was so. Israel should have *proved* her calling as God's covenant people. What did she do instead?
3. God's calling into His covenant is all of grace, as we've seen (cf. Eph. 2.8, 9). Israel was not expected to *earn* her good standing with the Lord. She was, however, expected to *prove* it. How did God expect her to do that (cf. Deut. 10.12-15)?
4. Israel had manifestly failed to prove her claim as God's people, and it would be Hosea's job to make it clear *where* she had fallen short, and *what* God was going to do as a result. Does God still expect His covenant people today to *prove* their calling and election (cf. Eph. 2.10; 2 Pet. 1.5-11)? How?
5. Can we ever fully prove ourselves to be the people of God? That is, at the end of the day, do we point to *our* works as *proof* of our having been adopted into God's covenant family? Does this mean that we don't need to "work out our salvation" (Phil. 2.13)? Explain.

Summary

Hosea's family situation was now complete, and it's clear God intended this as preparation for Hosea's work as a prophet. Does God still use the circumstances of our lives to prepare us for His service? Can you think of an example from your own life?

Closing Prayer

Praise the LORD!

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good!

For His mercy *endures* forever.

Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD?

Who can declare all His praise?

Blessed *are* those who keep justice,

And he who does righteousness at all times!

Remember me, O LORD, with the favor *You have toward* Your people.

Oh, visit me with Your salvation,

That I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones,

That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation,

That I may glory with Your inheritance.

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Psalm 106.1-5

Observations, notes, questions:

6 The Promise of Restoration

Week 2, Saturday: A coming day of restoration

Hosea's message to the people of Israel is bleak and terrifying, as we shall see. But what's coming upon them is no more than what they've chosen. Israel *chose* to come under divine wrath, rather than to live within the blessings of God. And God promised to honor their choice, with all the dire consequences that would entail.

But this did not by any means suggest that God's promises and covenant would fall to the ground.

Read Hosea 1

Meditate on Hosea 1.10

1. Note the language of the first part of this verse. We've seen it before (Gen. 22.17). What is God saying by reaching all the way back to Genesis and applying that language to "the children of Israel"?
2. A message is coming to the children of Israel, outlined here in verse 10. What is the substance of that message?
3. That message would be delivered by *speaking*, and it would be delivered in the same place – the same geographic location – in which God had pronounced judgment on His people. What are the implications of this for Hosea's calling? For some time in the future?
4. A day is coming when God will declare "the children of Israel" to be "sons of the living God." Is it necessary to understand by "the children of Israel" only those of Jewish descent (cf. Rom. 9.6-8)? According to John, who has the right to become a child of God (Jn. 1.12)?
5. Hosea could not have understood the full Gospel scope of this message. Nevertheless, it must have filled him with hope, and it must have shaped all the rest of his preaching and ministry. Yes, Israel was wicked, and judgment was coming. But God holds out hope for His people, and He sends faithful prophets to declare that hope to them. In what ways is our own calling as witnesses for Jesus Christ similar to Hosea's calling as a prophet?

Summary

Only God can restore people to His favor, and He does this by speaking a message to them, a message of forgiveness and hope. How should you expect to see this work of God coming to light in your own daily experience?

Closing Prayer

The LORD *is* my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD *is* the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
When the wicked came against me
To eat up my flesh,
My enemies and foes,
They stumbled and fell.
Though an army may encamp against me,

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My heart shall not fear;
Though war may rise against me,
In this I *will be* confident.
One *thing* I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple.

Psalm 27.1-4

Observations, notes, questions:

7 One People, One Head

Week 2, Sunday: Restoration through judgment

Undoubtedly, this was the hardest part of his message for Hosea to fathom. How could Israel and Judah ever be united into one people? And whom could they ever find to agree on as their head? And how would going through the judgment implied by the term “Jezreel” ever make this possible? What would be so glorious about that?

Read Hosea 1

Meditate on Hosea 1.11

1. A day of gathering together is foreseen as part of the restoration God is bringing to His people. How unlikely must this have seemed to Hosea and those to whom he prophesied? Why?
2. The two tribes, united into one new people, would appoint for themselves one head. This promise reaches back to that unfolding of His covenant which God made with David. Meditate on 2 Samuel 7.4-17. How can you see that God is connecting His future promise with this ancient covenant? What do we learn from this about God’s covenant and the promises it contains (cf. Heb. 13.20)?
3. What do you make of the promise, “they shall come up out of the land”? Does this suggest a larger “boundary” for God’s covenant people and promises in the days to come?
4. This uniting of Israel, recovering the Davidic King, and enlarging the boundaries of the covenant people will come about through a kind of day of “Jezreel.” Like the judgment that would fall on Israel, ending her covenant privileges, a coming judgment would graft her back in. Do you think Hosea understood this perfectly (cf. 1 Pet. 1.10-12)? To what was he pointing?
5. In a very real sense, the restoration of all things is coming, when all the people of God will be united under one head and the fullness of God’s covenant will be finally revealed. This, too, shall happen through a season of “Jezreel” all its own (cf. Rev. 19-21). Should this coming restoration be part of the message *we* proclaim, even though we cannot fully understand it?

Summary

Hosea 1 ends on a very positive note, and this must have come as a great sigh of relief and hope for Hosea. Summarize God’s preparation of Hosea for his ministry. *How* did He prepare him? For what kind of ministry was Hosea being prepared? And was his ministry to have merely immediate effects, or did it have a long-term dimension as well?

Closing Prayer

“I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
‘You *are* My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”
Now therefore, be wise, O kings;

Hosea 1: Calling and Preparation

Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish *in* the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

Psalm 2.7-12

Observations, notes, questions:

Hosea 1: Calling and Preparation

Questions for discussion

1. How would you summarize the calling God had appointed to Hosea? In what ways is our calling similar to his?
2. What is God's covenant, and why is understanding it so important to the message of the Bible?
3. The message of Hosea was of judgment and hope, and hope through judgment. How does the message of Hosea provide a kind of "type" or "shadow" of the Gospel that has been entrusted to us?
4. God used the public circumstances of Hosea's life to remind him and others of very important and eternal truths. Does God still do this? What might be some examples?
5. What's the most important idea or lesson you take away from Hosea 1?

Glory to Glory

Scripture is like a mirror that reflects two images. The first is our own image, as the Bible shows us who we are, what we're like, and what we need (Jms. 1.22-25). The second is the image of Jesus Christ, Who is the glory of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18). The Spirit works to use the glory of God to transform us, from the glory we see to the glory we live (1 Cor. 10.31), increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ.

What are you learning about yourself from our study of Hosea?

What are you learning about God and His glory?

What new directions or "next steps" is the Spirit leading you to take?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.