



Understanding Israel -

Hosea

by Tim Kelley

Understanding Israel is important if a person is going to have any chance of properly discerning end-time events. Many of us believe we are living in the end times. We see major developments taking place in regards to the rise and fall of nations, and of course, we see the struggle for survival of a small portion of the Jewish people who have made the courageous migration back to the Promised Land.

With the current state of affairs in our own country (USA) many in the Christian world are seeing a need to draw closer to Israel, sending money, food, and labor in order to help the Jewish people as they struggle to co-exist with Muslim people with whom they share that tiny speck of land. Unfortunately, many Jews in other parts of the world fully support politicians whose policies are "anti-Israel". What gives? Why is there a greater percentage of Christians in support of Israel than there are Jews?

The answer might be found in the book of Hosea, a prophecy for all Israel, but specifically for the northern tribes of Israel, the people that YHVH endearingly calls *Ephraim*.

The prophecy takes place over nearly 45 years and spans the reign of a number of kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah – all Jewish kings as well as the last seven kings of Israel, beginning with Jeroboam II.¹

The overall theme of Hosea is restoration and salvation, not condemnation. Hosea's (הוֹשֵׁעַ) name means *salvation* and it comes from the same root word from which we get the name Joshua and Yeshua. In addition, the final king of Israel was named Hoshea (the same Hebrew spelling as Hosea) and the last Jewish king during Hosea's prophecy was Hezekiah, a king who brought a restoration of the worship of YHVH to Judah.

The book of Hosea is a prophecy in which the prophet literally *lives out the prophecy*. Just as Ezekiel was told to lay on his side for a specific number of days, and Jeremiah was told to buy a piece of real estate in a land that was soon to be conquered, Hosea was told by YHVH to do something that would seem to make little sense at the time. He was told to marry a harlot.

NKJ Hosea 1:2-3 . . . "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD." ³ So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim . . .

Gomer is called a *harlot*, but that may not be the case, at least not in our understanding of the word *harlot*. The Hebrew word for *harlot* is *zanuwn* (זנון - 2183). It comes from the root word *zanah* (זנה - 2181) which is the same word used to describe Dinah after her relationship with Shechem (Gen. 34:1). We've studied this passage many times and have somewhat come to the conclusion that Dinah was not a harlot, nor was she a prostitute. Instead, Dinah and Shechem seem to have had a consensual relationship, though unmarried. This may very well describe the situation with Gomer. She was probably

¹ Though only Jeroboam II is mentioned, it's apparent that the other 6 kings are included since their reigns all ended before Hezekiah became king.

a woman who was morally weak and attracted to many "lovers". Since, in this prophecy, Gomer is Israel – specifically the northern tribes – it's important to see that Gomer has this weakness, but that Hosea, her husband, is willing to forgive her and take her back, even to the point of paying for her release so she can come back. More on that later.

In addition to her role, we can glean insight into the prophecy by understanding Gomer's name. *Gomer* means *complete* in the sense of bringing something to completion. A thorough study of this prophecy shows that Israel does eventually complete the purpose for which she was called out.

Gomer has a son and YHVH tells Hosea to name him *Jezreel*.

ESV Hosea 1:4-5 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. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

This passage is a double prophecy in itself. First, the word Jezreel means "God will sow". It's a combination of the Hebrew words *zera* (seed, sowing) and *el* (god). *Zera* actually means more than sow, it implies the entire growing process from seeding to harvesting. By naming Gomer's child Jezreel, YHVH was indicating that He had no intention of destroying the people of Israel, but that the kingdom of Israel would cease and the people would be scattered and sown, just as we discussed earlier in the Amos 9 passage.²

The second part of the prophecy is that YHVH will punish the house of Jehu. The story of Jehu is found in 1 Kings 9 & 10. Jeru was chosen by YHVH to be king over Israel during the reign of Joram, Ahab's son. Jeru was commissioned with the responsibility of destroying Ahab's family, thus cutting off a line of successors. You might think of him as the 'rod of God's wrath'³. He did the job very well, seeing to the death of Ahab's wife, Jezebel and Ahab's seventy sons. But Jehu went too far and killed all of Joram's officers and acquaintances in Jezreel. What's more, he killed the forty-two brothers of Ahaziah, the king of Judah. But because Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel (even though he worshipped other gods), YHVH promised that his sons would reign over the House of Israel for four generations. This prophecy begins in the reign of Jehoram II, the third king in this succession.

What does it mean "break the bow of Israel"? It is probably a reference to a prophecy made by Elisha during the reign of King Jehoash, grandson of Jeru (2 Kings 13:14). Elisha had Jehoash shoot an arrow out a window toward Syria. He then had Jehoash beat an arrow on the floor. The number of times Jehoash beat the arrow was the number of times the House of Israel would be able to beat back the Syrians. Unfortunately, Jehoash only beat the arrow twice. Thus, breaking the bow of Israel meant breaking the divine protection YHVH would give the House of Israel.

Moving on with the prophecy of Hosea, Gomer had another child. This one was named Lo-Ruhamah.

NKJ Hosea 1:6 And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: "Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away."

² See Part 3 of this study

³ Isaiah 10:5

This passage is quite clear – YHWH was quite frustrated with the House of Israel and would no longer give her a reprieve. He was going to take Israel away. It would be as if they were swept away. As we know, this is precisely what did happen to Israel, they were completely removed from the land of Israel and taken beyond the Euphrates where they seemingly disappeared.

This passage goes on to say that Judah, on the other hand, would find mercy. This is important to see. Just prior to being taken captive by the Assyrians, Israel was paying tribute to Assyria to keep them from attacking her. At the same time, Ahaz, King of Judah was doing the same thing. When Israel's king Hoshea refused to continue making payments, Assyria came in and attacked. What's interesting is that King Ahaz and just introduced child sacrifice in Judah at the time of Assyria's attack. YHWH was certainly extending mercy to Judah.

The third and final child of Gomer was another son. This one was named Lo-Ammi.

NKJ Hosea 1:8-9 Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ Then God said: "Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I will not be your God . . ."

Here we have another clear prophecy. Once Israel is scattered throughout the nations, they would no longer be considered the People of YHWH. This doesn't mean they would no longer be Israelites; it's just that they would no longer be a contiguous people as was the House of Judah. This is clear to see as we continue with this passage.

NKJ Hosea 1:10-11 . . . Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.' ¹¹ Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!

YHWH will continue to increase the House of Israel. They will be as the sand of the sea, just as was prophesied by Jacob. They did not cease to be Israelites; they just ceased to be a kingdom. The prophecy goes on to show that in Samaria, the same place they received the "Lo-Ammi" prophecy, they would be called "the Sons of the Living God".

To complete the major portion of the prophecy, YHWH instructs Hosea to go find Gomer, his wife, who has apparently left him and gone to live with another man – clearly an adulterous situation.

ESV Hosea 3:1 And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods . . ."

So Hosea goes to the man with whom Gomer is living and literally buys her back, giving the man silver and grain in return for the release his wife. He then tells Gomer to stay with him, and that for many days he and her will not have intimate relations. YHWH likens this to Israel, after being bought back, to being without a king until they are gathered together in the latter days. Notice that instead of divorcing Gomer, or having Gomer stoned, God instructed Hosea to bring her back into his home and take care of her.

It's very clear – the woman - the House of Israel - who was walking contrary to YHWH would be scattered among the nations. While scattered, the woman's husband would seek her and buy her back - giving something valuable for her. For a period of time he would take care of her, but they would not have an intimate relationship, but eventually she would be drawn back to him.

The rest of this prophecy is mostly commentary on what we've discussed thus far and as such, helps us to better understand YHWH's relationship with Israel in this period of time between becoming "not My people" and the time she once again becomes the "people of the Living God". It's also becomes clear in the rest of these chapters that YHWH does not abandon the House of Israel during this time, but remains very involved in what she does. For instance we have this statement from YHWH –

NKJ Hosea 2:7-8 "She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me

than now.' ⁸ For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold -- which they prepared for Baal."

In her apostasy, Israel will seek people they can align with, but it will not work out. Eventually her wealth will begin to play out and she will desire to return to YHVH thinking that in doing so, she will begin to receive blessings. Unbeknownst to her is the fact that her wealth was a result of undeserved blessings from YHVH all along.

In chapter 4, YHVH begins to refer to the northern tribes as *Ephraim*. As was shown in the last study, Ephraim was one of the largest tribes in the northern kingdom, and was the tribe from which we got many of Israel's leaders. The following passage shows us some of the characteristics of Ephraim.

NKJ Hosea 4:17-19 "Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone. ¹⁸ Their drink is rebellion, they commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor. ¹⁹ The wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

Ephraim is a people who can be identified by her association with idols, or what we might call *paganism*. Technically, all religions that worship any other god than the God of Jacob is worshipping a pagan god, but most religions only worship their god. The Buddhists have Buddha, the Muslims have Allah, but the Christians worship a variety of Gods while proclaiming to worship the God of Israel. They do this by mixing their worship of God with the practices of other religions, mainly Mithraism. Thus, Ephraim might be identified with the traditional Christian religion.

Another characteristic of Ephraim is that they're religion is tossed around like wings in the wind. The Hebrew word for *wings* in this passage is *kanaph* which means *extremities* and normally refers to a garment that covers – a tallit or prayer shawl. I interpret this passage to indicate that Ephraim's worship changes quite often, a characteristic of Christianity and their myriads of denominations.

Another characteristic common to Ephraim and Christianity is alluded to by this passage –

NKJ Hosea 8:11-12 "Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin, they have become for him altars for sinning. ¹² I have written for him the great things of My law, but they were considered a strange thing.

Because of their many idols, Israel had to have a number of altars on which they offered sacrifice. In contrast to the God of Israel who wanted sacrifice so the people would draw near to Him, in practically all pagan religions, sacrifice was for the purpose of appeasing the Gods. Thus sacrifice in the pagan world became a chore, not a joy. Thus when those who worship pagan gods are "set free", they tend to look at sacrifice as sin, being a form of self justification. The same could be said of the Torah which Ephraim considered a burden – a strange thing.

YHVH makes it clear that Ephraim, though cast off, continues to exist –

NKJ Hosea 8:8-9 Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the Gentiles Like a vessel in which is no pleasure. ⁹ For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey alone by itself . . .

According to this passage, Ephraim has not become Gentiles, but because they are *among the Gentiles* they may be considered by some, and by themselves, to be gentiles. This is an important to understanding the Acts 15 conference where this same phraseology is used.⁴

There are many other passages we could cover, but we want to shift our attention to some of the prophecies for Judah. Though Ephraim, the House of Israel, was about to be removed from the land in accordance with the prophecies of Moses in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Judah would remain for two hundred more years. You would think that Judah would learn from what happened to Ephraim, but such was not the case. Judah continued to walk contrary to YHVH except for brief periods

⁴ Acts 15:19

of restoration such as what took place in the time of Hezekiah. While predicting the coming judgment on Israel and Judah, Hosea says –

NKJ Hosea 5:5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also stumbles with them.

Because of lawlessness, both Israel and Judah fail to understand YHVH and thus stumble in understanding. This is reiterated in the Isaiah 8:14 passage which speaks of both houses stumbling over Messiah – Judah does not see Him, and Ephraim believes He did away with Torah. Another passage speaks of both Ephraim's and Judah's shallow faith. God compares their faith to the morning clouds and the dew –

NKJ Hosea 6:4 " O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away.

We can understand this here in East Texas. On a typical spring, summer, or fall morning we have clouds that form just after sunrise then melt away by about 10:00 PM. Meteorologists call this a *southerly flow* – moisture off the Gulf of Mexico is carried in by the south winds and form low clouds as it encounter the cooler air inland, but as the sun begins to warm the earth, the clouds fade away. I first noticed this when I was flying and wanting to make morning trips. There was usually a short window of time each morning where you could fly without incurring overcast skies. This southerly flow was quite predictable, just as Ephraim and Judah's predictable repentance when things got bad, and their returning to iniquity when things got better.

One characteristic of Judah that is not shared with Ephraim can be found in chapter 5 -

NKJ Hosea 5:10-12 "The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark; I will pour out my wrath on them like water. ¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked by human precept. ¹² Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, And to the house of Judah like rottenness.

Moving or removing a landmark is a sin against your neighbor. When you do so, you enhance your possessions while taking from your brother. This is an aggrieved sin and is listed as the third curse uttered from Mount Ebal in Deuteronomy 27. What landmark has Judah moved? I submit that it is the landmark of Torah. How? By adding their own law and pushing it onto Ephraim. YHVH gave one law to both Israel and Judah, but Judah expanded the law to where it became an oppressive set of rules and regulations that has achieved the opposite of its intention. Because Judah claims ownership of Torah, he expects Israel to follow his new-expanded version of torah in order to be a part of God's people. As a result, Ephraim, and many from Judah, gave up Torah altogether. Because of this, God is as a moth eaten garment to Ephraim, something he can wear, but his understanding has holes all through it. On the other hand, Judah is wearing a rotten garment, one that will need to be completely restored.

To finish up our study, we want to discuss some of the passages dealing with restoration. As I said at the beginning, Hosea is a book about salvation. In fact, we see a type of resurrection in the name of Hosea's first son, Jezreel.

God speaks in chapter two of drawing the House of Israel back to Him at the end of days –

NKJ Hosea 2:14-15 " Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. ¹⁵ I will give her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.

As YHVH drew Israel out of Egypt, He will draw the House of Israel out of the nations from which he scattered them and bring them to the wilderness. From there He will again teach them His ways. Then look at what it says a few verses down –

NKJ Hosea 2:21-23 " It shall come to pass in that day that I will answer," says the LORD; "I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. ²² The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer Jezreel. ²³ Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not my people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!' "

"They shall answer Jezreel" – "God has sown". Heaven and earth will testify that what God had sown has indeed produced fruit. Remember, the word *Jezreel* is a combination of word, *zera* and *el*. *Zera* – to sow – actually means to sow with the intent of harvesting. So in effect, Heaven and earth are saying "God has harvested". Because Israel has indeed produced fruit, God will give them mercy and once again claim them as His people.

This book ends by saying –

NKJ Hosea 14:9 Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them.

The words of this prophecy were written to a people who were headed into captivity, but were recorded for those of us who are coming out of captivity. By combining what we see here with the myriads of other prophecies concerning Israel, we'll be able to understand the *Mystery of the Gospel*.

Shalom Aleichem