

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

The Prophecies of Hosea

Readings: *Hosea 10:1-14:9; 2 Kings 14:17-22, 15:1-4; 2 Chronicles 25:26; 26:1-14*

Reflections:

- Hosea uses a number of fascinating images to describe Israel: a prostitute previously and now a heifer and a child. This suggests that these may be a collection of independently given prophecies that all relate to the same issue rather than one continuous prophecy.
- God's anger against their unfaithfulness and heart of compassion to restore them remains consistent throughout this section. We see themes from the story of God and Israel repeated:
 - Sowing and reaping - "Sow for yourselves righteousness and reap the fruit of unfailing love."
 - Father/child love relationship - "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."
 - God's doesn't care about religious ritual but humility, love and justice - "But you must return to your God; maintain love (or mercy) and justice, and wait (practical outworking of humble dependence) for your God always."
 - Problem of pride in the human heart - "When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud."
 - Power of God to resurrect from the dead - "I will ransom them from the power of the grave (Sheol); I will redeem them from death."
 - God's heart for the marginalized and vulnerable - "For in you the fatherless find compassion."
 - God's heart of love for redemption - "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely."
- We also find an interesting insight about how God speaks through prophets. "I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them." This insight

helps us to see that God's way of communicating is through engaging our imaginations. God uses symbols, signs, stories and parables that help us grasp his insights and truth. As Joel indicated, God's desire is to speak to all people through dreams (asleep) and visions (awake). This can make our more rational, logical side uncomfortable but this is the way God speaks through his Spirit.

- Hosea's conclusion is important for us to pause and reflect on: "Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them." Again we see that the heart is the deciding factor. God's ways are the best but those who live in independent pride (rebellion) simply can't walk in God's ways. They stumble because God's ways require love. Love requires consistent other-centeredness. Other-centeredness requires humility. People who are proud and independent simply can't live this way and so they stumble.
- As we return to the story line of Israel we see all the issues that the prophets are addressing continue. Amaziah is assassinated and another teenage king, Uzziah takes the throne. Here is the key statement about Uzziah, "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his father Amaziah did. He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of the God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success." "The high places however were not removed and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there."
- For all of Uzziah's accomplishments, his building projects and strong army, the mix of idolatry and worship of God continues. Again, we are confronted with the inability to truly serve God wholeheartedly. Again, we see the need of a true king, a true savior, one who will come as a child but will grow to maturity to lead people into the kingdom of God and release the power of the Spirit to change people from the inside out.