

The Book of Hosea

Introduction

The book of Hosea shares many similarities to the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. Hosea preceded Jeremiah by about 135 years. Hosea was sent primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel, when Jeroboam II reigned as king. During that era, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. In the 700s B.C., the southern kingdom of Judah was still relatively pure in its doctrine and worship, at least in comparison to the northern kingdom of Israel. However, by Jeremiah's day, 135 years later, the southern kingdom of Judah had likewise degenerated into the lowest depths of religious hypocrisy and false religion.

Hosea was preaching to Israel, warning of its impending destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were the great conquering empire of that time, and they destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722-721 B.C. History records that in 722 B.C., Samaria, the capital of Israel since 879 B.C., fell to Assyrian forces after a 3-year siege. Assyria's Shalmaneser V died and was succeeded by his son Sargon II. In 721 B.C., the kingdom of Israel, founded in 933 B.C., fell to Sargon II, who deported 27,290 people of Israel's 10 northern tribes to central Asia. In this diaspora, the Israelites essentially disappeared from history and became known as the "lost tribes of Israel." These events were the culmination of the judgments that Hosea prophesied would soon occur.

Similarly, in Jeremiah's day, in 587 B.C., Jerusalem fell to Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar II, after a 16-month siege. Nebuchadnezzar carried the Jews off to exile in three successive deportations in a "Babylonian captivity" that would continue until 538 B.C. In 586 B.C., Jerusalem's great temple was destroyed by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar II. The prophet Jeremiah warned in advance of these judgments that were coming, and he himself lived through them.

Israel in the 700s B.C. and Judah in the 500s B.C. shared several similar characteristics: religious hypocrisy, false worship, and false religion were rampant. The people rejected the one true God and His law, instead choosing to follow their own inventions, their own superstitions, and their own "good intentions." The people were idolaters and were guilty of spiritual adultery, of which the book of Hosea gives us a vivid picture through the story of the prophet Hosea himself, whom God commanded to marry a prostitute, a harlot named Gomer.

John Calvin's Introduction to the Book of Hosea¹

I have undertaken to expound The Twelve Minor Prophets. They have been long ago joined together, and their writings have been reduced to one volume; and for this reason, lest by being extant singly in our hands, they should, as it often happens, disappear in course of time on account of their brevity.

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 35-36.

So the Twelve Minor Prophets form but one volume. The first of them is HOSEA, who was specifically destined for the kingdom of Israel. MICAH and ISAIAH prophesied at the same time among the Jews.

But it ought to be noticed, that this Prophet was a teacher in the kingdom of Israel, as Isaiah and Micah were in the kingdom of Judah. The Lord doubtless intended to employ him in that part; for had he prophesied among the Jews, he would not have complimented them; since the state of things was then very corrupt, not only in Judea, but also at Jerusalem, though the palace and sanctuary of God were there. We see how sharply and severely Isaiah and Micah reprov'd the people; and the style of our Prophet would have been the same had the Lord employed his service among the Jews. But he followed his own call. He knew what the Lord had intrusted to him; he faithfully discharged his own office.

The same was the case with the Prophet Amos. For the Prophet Amos sharply inveighs against the Israelites, and seems to spare the Jews; and he taught at the same time with Hosea.

We see, then, in what respect these four differ: ISAIAH and MICAH address their reproofs to the kingdom of Judah; and HOSEA and AMOS only assail the kingdom of Israel, and seem to spare the Jews. Each of them undertook what God had committed to his charge; and so each confined himself within the limits of his own call and office.

For if we, who are called to instruct the Church, close our eyes to the sins which prevail in it, and neglect those whom the Lord has appointed to be taught by us, we confound all order; since they who are appointed to other places must attend to those to whom they have been sent by the Lord's call.

We now, then, see to whom this whole book of Hosea belongs—that is, to the kingdom of Israel.

But with regard to the Prophets, this is true of them all, as we have sometimes said, that they are interpreters of the law. And this is the sum of the law, that God designs to rule by His own authority the people whom He has adopted. But the law has two parts—a promise of salvation and eternal life, and a rule for a godly and holy living. To these is added a third part—that men, not responding to their call, are to be restored to the fear of God by threatening and reproofs.

The Prophets do further teach what the law has commanded respecting the true and pure worship of God, respecting love; in short, they instruct the people in a holy and godly life, and then offer to them the favor of the Lord. And as there is no hope of reconciliation with God except through a Mediator, they ever set forth the Messiah, whom the Lord had long before promised.

As to the third part, which includes threats and reproofs, it was peculiar to the Prophets; for they point out times, and denounce this or that judgment of God: "The Lord will punish you in this way, and will punish you at such a time." The Prophets, then, do not simply call men to God's tribunal, but specify also certain kinds of punishment, and also in the same way they declare prophecies respecting the Lord's grace and His redemption. But on this I only briefly touch; for it will be better to notice each point as we proceed.

I now return to Hosea. I have said that his ministry belonged especially to THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL; for then the whole worship of God was there polluted, nor had corruption lately begun; but they were so obstinate in their superstitions, that there was no hope of repentance. We indeed know, that as soon as Jeroboam withdrew the ten tribes from their allegiance to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, fictitious worship was set up. And Jeroboam seemed to have wisely contrived that artifice, that the people might not return to the house of David [the southern kingdom of Judah]; but at the same time he brought on himself and the whole people the vengeance of God.

And those who came after him followed the same impiety. When such perverseness became intolerable, God resolved to put forth His power, and to give some signal proof of His displeasure, that the people might at length repent.

Hence Jehu was by God's command anointed King of Israel, that he might destroy all the posterity of Ahab, but he also soon relapsed into the same idolatry. He executed God's judgment, he pretended great zeal; but his hypocrisy soon came to light, for he embraced false and perverted worship; and his followers were nothing better even down to Jeroboam (II), under whom Hosea prophesied; but of this we shall speak in considering the inscription of the book.

Prayer—May the Lord grant, that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen.²

Chapter 1

1:1 “The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, 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's name probably means “He [God] has saved.” The prophecy of Hosea was written by divine authority; what he recorded was “the word of the covenant Lord.” God is the source of Hosea's prophecy; the prophet received his authority from God (cf. Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1; Amos 1:3; Obad. 1; Jon. 1:1; Hag. 1:2).

1:2 “*When* the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry *By departing* from the LORD.””

The relationship between Hosea and his wife Gomer parallels the relationship between God and His wife Israel, as we shall see throughout the book.

Were these children called *children of harlotry* because Gomer was formerly a harlot or because they were born through prostitution?

John Calvin comments³:

² This was the prayer which John Calvin was accustomed to use at the beginning of his lectures on the book of Hosea.

³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 43-44, emphasis added.

Here interpreters labor much, because it seems very strange that the Prophet should take a harlot for a wife. Some say that this was an extraordinary case.⁴ Certainly such a license could not have been borne in a teacher. We see what Paul requires in a bishop, and no doubt the same was required formerly in the Prophets, that their families should be chaste and free from every stain and reproach. It would have then exposed the Prophet to the scorn of all, if he had entered a brothel and taken to himself a harlot; for he speaks not here of an unchaste woman only, but of a woman of wantonness, which means a common harlot, for a woman of wantonness is she called, who has long habituated herself to wantonness, who has exposed herself to all, to gratify the wish of all, who has prostituted herself, not once nor twice, nor to few men, but to all. That this was done by the Prophet seems very improbable.

But some reply as I have said, that this ought not to be regarded as a common rule, for it was an extraordinary command of God. And yet it seems not consistent with reason, that the Lord should thus gratuitously render His Prophet contemptible; for how could he expect to be received on coming abroad before the public, after having brought on himself such a disgrace? If he had married a wife such as is here described, he ought to have concealed himself for life rather than to undertake the Prophetic office. Their opinion, therefore, is not probable, who think that the Prophet had taken such a wife as is here described.

Then another reason, utterly unresolvable, militates against them; for the Prophet is not only bidden to take a wife of wantonness, but also children of wantonness, begotten by whoredom. It is, therefore, the same as if he himself had committed whoredom. For if we say that he married a wife who had previously conducted herself with some indecency and lack of chastity (as Jerome at length argues in order to excuse the Prophet), the excuse is frivolous, for he speaks not only of the wife, but also of the children, inasmuch as God would have the whole offspring to be adulterous, and this could not be the case in a lawful marriage.

Hence almost all the Hebrews agree in this opinion, that the Prophet did not actually marry a wife, but that he was bidden to do this in a vision. And we shall see in the third chapter (Hosea 3:1) almost the same thing described; and yet what is narrated there could not have been actually done, for the Prophet is bidden to marry a wife who had violated her conjugal fidelity, and after having bought her, to retain her at home for a time. This, we know, was not done. It then follows that this was a representation exhibited to the people. . . .

. . . it may be, and it is probable, that no vision was presented to the Prophet, but that God only ordered him to proclaim what had been given him in charge. When, therefore, the Prophet began to teach, he commenced somewhat in this way:

⁴ Editor John Owen comments: "Much difference has prevailed on this subject. That it was a *real* transaction, has been the opinion of not a few. *Poole* quotes *Basil*, *Augustine*, *Jerome*, and *Theodoret*, as entertaining this view. Bishop *Horsley* agrees with them; but he makes this wise remark, "This is in truth a question of little importance to the interpretation of the prophecy, for the act was equally emblematical, whether it was real or visionary only; and the significance of the emblem, whether the act were done in reality or in vision, will be the same." *Henry* seems to lean to the opinion that it was a parable; and *Scott*, that it was a real transaction. The notion of a parable is attended with the least difficulty, and corresponds with the mode of teaching often adopted both in the Old and New Testament."

“The Lord places me here as on a stage, to make known to you that I have married a wife, a wife habituated to adulteries and whoredoms, and that I have begotten children by her.” The whole people knew that he had done no such thing; but the Prophet spoke in this manner in order to set before their eyes a vivid representation. Such then, was the vision, a figurative exhibition, not that the Prophet knew this by a vision, but the Lord had bidden him to relate this parable, (so to speak) or this similitude, that the people might see, as in a living portrait, their own depravity and infidelity.

Indeed, the whole nation of Israel had departed from God, as in the days of Noah and as in the days of Sodom.

1:3-4 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. “Then the LORD said to him: “Call his name Jezreel, For in a little *while* I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.”

Jezreel means “God will scatter” (cf. Zech. 10:9); the name is a prediction of God’s judgment on Israel. God says that He will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel. It was at the city of Jezreel where Jehu slaughtered the house of Ahab (cf. 2 Kin. 9:7-10:28). The king of Israel, Jeroboam II, was from the house of Jehu, a dynasty established through the bloodbath at Jezreel.

God says that He will bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. This prophecy looks forward to the exile of Israel to Assyria in 722 B.C., from which she never returned.

John Calvin comments:

There is, as we see, much affinity between the names *Jezreel* and *Israel*. How honorable is the name, Israel, it is evident from its etymology; and we also know that it was given from above to the holy father Jacob. God, then, the bestower of this name, procured by His own authority, that those called Israelites should be superior to others. And then we must remember the reason why Jacob was called Israel; for he had a contest with God, and overcame in the struggle (Genesis 32:28). Hence the posterity [descendants] of Abraham gloried that they were Israelites. And the prophet Isaiah also glances at this arrogance, when he says, ‘Come you who are called by the name of Israel’ (Isaiah 48:1); as though he said, “You are Israelites, but only as to the title, for the reality exists not in you.”

Let us now return to our Hosea. *Call*, he says *his name Jezreel*; as though he said, “They call themselves Israelites; but I will show, by a little change in the word, that they are degenerate and spurious, for they are Jezreelites rather than Israelites.” And it appears that Jezreel was the metropolis of the kingdom in the time of Ahab, and where also that great slaughter was made by Jehu, which is related in the tenth chapter of 2 Kings. We now perceive the meaning of the Prophet to be, that the whole kingdom had degenerated from its first beginning, and could no longer be deemed as including the race of Abraham; for the people had, by their own perfidy [unfaithfulness], fallen from that honor, and lost their first name. God then, by way of contempt, calls them Jezreelites, and not Israelites. . . .

. . . God, when He wished Jehu with His drawn sword to destroy the whole house of Ahab, had this end as his object—that Jehu should restore pure worship, and cleanse the land from all defilements. Jehu then was stirred up by the Spirit of God, that he might re-establish God's pure worship. When a defender of religion, how did he act? He became contented with his prey. After having seized on the kingdom for himself, he confirmed idolatry and every abomination. He did not then spend his labor for God. Hence that slaughter with regard to Jehu was robbery; with regard to God it was a just revenge. This view ought to satisfy us as to the explanation of this passage; and I bring nothing but what the Holy Scripture contains.

For after Jehu seemed to burn with zeal for God, he soon proved that there was nothing sincere in his heart; for he embraced all the superstitions which previously prevailed in the kingdom of Israel. In short, the reformation under Jehu was like that under **Henry King of England**; who, when he saw that he could not otherwise shake off the yoke of the Roman Antichrist than by some disguise, pretended great zeal for a time. He afterwards raged cruelly against all the godly, and doubled the tyranny of the Roman Pontiff: and such was Jehu.

When we properly consider what was done by Henry, it was indeed an heroic valor to deliver his kingdom from the hardest of tyrannies. But yet, with regard to him, he was certainly worse than all the other vassals of the Roman Antichrist; for they who continue under that bondage, retain at least some kind of religion; but he was restrained by no shame from men, and proved himself completely void of every fear towards God. He was a monster (*homo belluinus*—a beastly man) and such was Jehu.

Now, when the Prophet says, *I will avenge the slaughters of Jezreel* upon the house of Jehu, it is no matter of wonder. How so? For it was the highest honor to him, that God anointed him king, that he, who was of a low family, was chosen a king by the Lord. He ought then to have stretched every nerve to restore God's pure worship, and to destroy all superstitions. This he did not; on the contrary, he confirmed them. He was then a robber, and as to himself, no minister of God.

The meaning of the whole then is this: "You are not Israelites (there is here only an ambiguity as to the pronounciation of one letter), but Jezreelites"; which means, "You are not the descendants of Jacob, but Jezreelites;" that is, "You are a degenerate people, and differ nothing from king Ahab. He was accursed, and under him the kingdom became accursed. Are you changed? Is there any reformation? Since then you are obstinate in your wickedness, though you proudly claim the name of Jacob, you are yet unworthy of such an honor. I therefore call you Jezreelites."

And the reason is added, *For yet a little while, and I will visit the slaughters upon the house of Jehu*. . . . God declares essentially, "Since, then, Jehu did not change the condition of the country, and you have ever been obstinate in your wickedness, I will avenge these slaughters."

This is a remarkable passage; for it shows that it is not enough, no, that it is of no importance, that a man should conduct himself honorably before men, except he

possesses also an upright and sincere heart. He then who punishes evil deeds in others, ought himself to abstain from them, and to measure the same justice to himself as he does to others; for he who takes to himself a liberty to sin, and yet punishes others, provokes against himself the wrath of God.

We now then perceive the true sense of this sentence, *I will avenge the slaughters of Jezreel*, to be this, that He would avenge the slaughters made in the valley of Jezreel on the house of Jehu. It is added *and I will abolish the kingdom of the house of Israel*. The house of Israel He calls that which had separated from the family of David, as though he said, "This is a separated house." God had indeed joined the whole people together, and they became one body. It was torn asunder under Jeroboam [I]. This was God's dreadful judgment; for it was the same as if the people, like a torn body, had been cut into two parts. But God, however, had up until now preserved these two parts, as though they were but one body, and would have become the Redeemer of both people, had not a base defection followed. And the Israelites having become, as it were, putrefied, so as now to be no part of His chosen people, our Prophet, by way of contempt and reproach, rightly calls them the house of Israel.⁵ It now follows —

1:5 "It shall come to pass in that day That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

The Valley of Jezreel extends ten miles in width from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, near Carmel. The bow was a symbol of Israel's military strength. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Assyrian Empire, under the leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III, conquered Israel in 722 B.C.

John Calvin remarks,

We are here warned ever to take heed, lest any thing should lead us to a torpid [apathetic] state when God threatens us. Though we may have strength, though fortune (so to speak) may smile on us, though, in a word, the whole world should combine to secure our safety, yet there is no reason why we should felicitate [congratulate] ourselves, when God declares Himself opposed to and angry with us. Why so? Because, as He can preserve us when unarmed whenever He pleases, so He can spoil us of all our arms, and reduce our power to nothing. Let this verse then come to our minds whenever God terrifies us by His threatening; and what it teaches us is, that He can take away all the defenses in which we vainly trust.

Now, as Jezreel was the metropolis of the kingdom, the Prophet distinctly mentions the place, *I will break in pieces the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel*; that is, the Lord sees what sort of fortress there is in Samaria, in Jezreel; but He will make an end of you there, in the very midst of the land. You think that you have there a place of safety and a firm position; but the Lord will bring you to nothing even in the valley of Jezreel.⁶ It follows —

⁵ Ibid., 49-52.

⁶ Ibid., 53-54.

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.”

The name *Lo-Ruhamah* means “No-Mercy” or “Not Pitied.” This daughter is named to symbolize God bringing judgment on Israel. God had shown Israel much compassion, despite her covenant unfaithfulness. Now He will no longer pity them or show His mercy to them.

John Calvin comments,

The Prophet shows in this verse that things had become worse and worse in the kingdom of Israel, that they sinned, keeping within no limits, that they rushed headlong into the extremes of impiety. He has already told us, by calling them Jezreelites, that they were from the beginning rejected and degenerate; as though he said, “Your origin has nothing commendable in it; you think yourselves to be very eminent, because you derive your descent from holy Jacob; but you are spurious [illegitimate] children, born of a harlot. A brothel is not the house of Abraham, nor is the house of Abraham a brothel. You are then the offspring of debauchery.”

But he now goes farther and says, that as time advanced, they had ever been falling into a worse state; for this word, Lo-Ruhamah, is a more disgraceful name than Jezreel. And the Lord also denounces here His vengeance more openly, when He says, *I will no more add to pursue with mercy the house of Israel.*

By calling the daughter, then, Lo-Ruhamah, God means that His favor was now taken away from the people. We know, indeed, that the people had been freely chosen; for if the cause of adoption be inquired for, it must be said to have been the mere mercy and goodness of God. Now then God, in repudiating the people, says, “You are like a daughter whom her father casts away and disowns, because he deems her unworthy of his favor.”

We now, then, comprehend the design of the Prophet; for, after having shown the Israelites to have been from the beginning spurious, and not the true children of Abraham, he now adds, that, in course of time, they had become so corrupt, that God would now utterly disown them, and would no longer deem them as His house. He, therefore, charges them with something more grievous than before, by saying, ‘Call this daughter Lo-Ruhamah;’ for she was born after Jezreel. Here he describes by degrees the state of the people, that it continually degenerated. Though they were at the beginning depraved; but they were now, after the lapse of some time, utterly unworthy of God’s favor.⁷

1:7 “Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, Will save them by the LORD their God, And will not save them by bow, Nor by sword or battle, By horses or horsemen.”

⁷ Ibid., 54-55.

God's mercy on the house of Judah was seen when He chose to intervene on behalf of Hezekiah when Jerusalem was besieged at the hands of the Assyrians in 701 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 19:32-37; Isa. 37:14, 33-38).

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

Throughout the Bible, we find the covenantal formula, sometimes referred to as the Emmanuel principle: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 26:16-19, Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:19-20; 37:23, 27; Zech. 8:7-8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10 Rev. 21:3).

The name *Lo-Ammi* means "Not My people." This name symbolizes God's rejection of Israel. It is the high point of God's judgment. God cancels the ancient covenantal formula. God says that not only are they not His people, but He also will not be their God. Literally, He is saying, "I will not be I AM to you." The breaking of the covenant, a kind of divorce formula, is placed in contrast to the covenant or marriage formula "I am that I am" in Exodus 3:14.

Contrary to popular belief, God's love is not unconditional. The Scriptures teach that there are blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Nevertheless, God is patient and longsuffering with sinners.

John Calvin remarks,

The Prophet here, I have no doubt, sets forth the patience of God towards that people. The Lord then, before He had utterly cast away the Israelites, waited patiently for their repentance, if, indeed, there was any hope for it; but when He found them to be ever like themselves, He then at length proceeded to the last punishment. Hence Hosea says, that the daughter, who was the second child, was weaned; as though he said, that the people of Israel had not been suddenly cast away, for God had with long patience borne with them, and thus suspended heavier judgment, until, having found their wickedness to be unhealable, He at length commenced what follows, *Call* the third child Lo-ammi.

The reason is added *For you are not My people, and I will not hereafter be Yours*. This, as I have said, is the final disowning of them. They had been before called Jezreelites, and then by the name of the daughter God testified that He was alienated from them; but now the third name is still more grievous, *You are not My people*; for God here abolishes, in a manner, the covenant He made with the holy fathers, so that the people would cease to have any pre-eminence over other nations. So then the Israelites were reduced to a condition in which they differed nothing from the profane Gentiles; and thus God wholly disinherited them.

The Prophet, doubtless, was not well received, when he denied them to be God's people, who had yet descended from Abraham according to the flesh, who had ever been so accounted, and who continued proudly to boast of their election. But let us hence learn, that those awfully mistake who are blind to their own vices, because God spares and indulges them. For we must ever remember

what I have said before, that the kingdom of Israel was then opulent; and yet the Prophet denies them, who flourished in strength, and power, and riches, to be God's people. There is then no reason for hypocrites to felicitate themselves in prosperity; but they ought, on the contrary, to have regard to God's judgment. But though these, as we see to be the case, heedlessly despise God, yet this passage reminds us carefully to beware lest we abuse the present favors of God. It follows--

1:10 "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.'"

Chapter 1 closes on a positive and encouraging note, with a promise of the restoration of Israel. The promise that God will restore His people looks forward to Christ's Church. In the short term, God joined remnants of the north with the south during the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah (2 Chr. 30:11, 18) and after the Exile (1 Chr. 9:3; Ezra 8:35). However, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is the Church. The Church of Jesus Christ is now the true Israel of God, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16).

Paul looks back to Hosea to explain the doctrine of God's sovereign act of predestination (Rom. 9:6, 14-26).

The promise that the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea hearkens back to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 22:17; 32:12; cf. Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 26:24; 28:14).

John Calvin remarks:

I indeed admit that the Prophet here gave hope of salvation to the faithful; for it is certain that there were some remaining in the kingdom of Israel. Though the whole body had revolted, yet God, as it was said to Elijah, had preserved to Himself some seed. The Prophet then was unwilling to leave the faithful, who remained among that lost people, without hope of salvation; but, at the same time, He had regard to hypocrites, as we have already stated.

We now see the design of the Prophet, for he teaches that there would be such a vengeance as he had spoken of, though God would not yet be forgetful of His word; he teaches that there would be such a casting away of the people, though God's election would yet remain firm and unchangeable; in short, He teaches that the adoption by which God had chosen the offspring of Abraham as His people would not be void. This is the meaning of the whole. Then the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which is not to be measured nor numbered.

He afterwards adds, *And it shall be in the place where it had been said to them, . . . You are not My people; there it shall be said, You are the sons of the living God.* It has been asked, whether this prophecy belongs to the posterity [descendants] of those who had been dispersed. This, indeed, would be strange; for so long a time has passed away since their exile, and dejected and broken,

they dwell at this day in mountains and in other desert places; at least many of them are in the mountains of Armenia, some are in Media and Chaldea; in short, throughout the whole of the East. And since there has been no restoration of this people, it is certain that this prophecy ought not to be restricted to seed according to the flesh. For there was a prescribed time for the Jews, when the Lord purposed to restore them to their country; and, at the end of seventy years, a free return was granted them by Cyrus.

Then Hosea speaks not here of the kingdom of Israel, but of the Church, which was to be restored by a return, composed both of Jews and of Gentiles. So Paul, a fit interpreter of this passage, reminds us, 'Whom He has called, not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles; as He says by Hosea, I will call a people, who were not Mine, My people; and her beloved, who was not beloved: and it shall be, where it had been said to them, You are not My people; there shall they be called the sons of the living God' (Romans 9:24, etc.).

Paul applies this passage, and that rightly, to the whole body of the faithful, collected without any difference, from the Jews as well as from the Gentiles: for otherwise, as we have said, the correctness and truth of prophecy would not be evident: and this view also agrees best with the design of the Prophet which I have just explained. For, since hypocrites in a manner tie to themselves the power of God, the Prophet says, that God can, if He chooses, raise up in an instant a new Church, which would exceed in number the sand of the sea. How so? God will create a Church for Himself. From what? From stones, from nothing: for, as Paul says elsewhere, 'He calls those things which are not, as though they were' (Romans 4:17).

At the same time, God, as it has been said, by His goodness contended with the wickedness of that people; for though they rejected His favor, yes, and obstinately thrust it away from themselves, yet such perverseness did not hinder the Lord from preserving a remnant for Himself. . . .

Hosea says, That after the Israelites shall be reduced to a very small number, that nothing but waste and solitude will appear, then the Lord will restore the Church beyond all human thoughts and will prove that He had not in vain promised to Abraham that His seed would be as the sand of the sea. . . .

Thus then ought this passage, *The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea*, to be expounded: God will gather His Church from all quarters, from the Gentiles as well as from the Jews when the whole world will think it to be extinct. . . .

We ought not to apply this, as it is commonly done, exclusively to the Gentiles. For Hosea speaks not here only of the Church which God attained for Himself from the Gentiles, but of the whole Israel of God, a part of whom is the seed of Abraham. Let us then know that God here offers His grace generally, to the Israelites as well as to the Gentiles, and testifies, that after having justly cast away this people, He would make all to know that He had not been unmindful of His covenant, for He would attain to Himself a much larger Church — from whom? From the children of Abraham, as it has been said, as well as from strangers.

1:11 “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!*” **2:1** Say to your brethren, ‘My people,’ And to your sisters, ‘*Mercy is shown.*’

The “one head” is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. The hostile siblings, Judah and Israel, will be fully reconciled in the Church. God will establish a new covenant. God’s people, Jew and Gentile, are His people and “vessels of mercy,” which He has prepared beforehand for glory (cf. Romans 9:23, 26; 1 Pet. 2:10).

John Calvin comments:

But this passage clearly teaches, that the unity of men is of no account before God, except it originates from one head. Besides, it is well known that God set David over His ancient people until the coming of Christ. Now, then, the Church of the Lord is only rightly formed, when the true David rules over it; that is, when all with one consent obey Christ, and submit to His bidding. And how Christ designs to rule in His Church, we know; for the scepter of His kingdom is the gospel. Hence, when Christ is honored with the obedience of faith, all things are safe; and this is the happy state of the Church, of which the Prophet now speaks.

It seems, indeed, strange, that what is peculiar to God should be transferred to men that is, to appoint a king. But the Prophet has, by this expression, characterized the obedience of faith; for it is not enough that Christ should be given as a King, and set over men, unless they also embrace Him as their King, and with reverence receive Him. We now learn, that when we believe the gospel we choose Christ for our King, as it were, by a voluntary consent. . . .

This is the manner of the gathering; and it must be also added, that the Church then obeys God, when all, from the first to the last, consent to one Head: for it is not enough to be constrained, unless all willingly offer themselves to Christ; as it is said in Psalm 110, “There shall be a willing people in the day in which the King will call His own.’ Then the Prophet intended to express the obedience of faith, which the faithful will render to Christ, when the Lord shall restore them.

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, that as we have not only been redeemed from Babylonian exile, but have also emerged from hell itself; for when we were the children of wrath You did freely adopt us, and when we were aliens, You did in Your infinite goodness open to us the gate of Your kingdom, that we might be made Your heirs through the Son, O grant that we may walk circumspectly before You, and submit ourselves completely to You and to Your Christ, and not feign to be His members, but really prove ourselves to be His body, and to be so governed by His Spirit, that You may at last gather us together into Your celestial kingdom, to which You daily invite us by the same Christ our Lord. Amen.