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CONSTRUCTIVE STUDIES IN THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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IX. THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF HOSEA

§ 115. **The Personal Life of Hosea.**—In the history of no prophet is there a closer connection between the message and the personal life than in the case of Hosea. And, since Hosea's work was performed among his own people rather than in another country (cf. Amos), it is especially instructive to consider—

1. His place of residence. In this connection one may pass over (*a*) the view that Hosea was of the tribe of Reuben (compare his father's name Beeri with the name Beerah), and (*b*) the view that Hosea, like Amos, went up from Judah to Israel—a view based upon the frequent reference to Judah in the book. But would these passages, even if all authentic, prove the place of the prophet's work? Is this view supported by anything which may be found in the superscription or by the prophet's apparent attitude of leniency toward Judah in contrast with Israel? Is there any evidence that the book was written out in Judah after Hosea had left Israel? (*c*) In favor of northern Israel as his home take up the following questions: Does the language of the book indicate anything? Is there any evidence to be found in such expressions as "the land," "our king," etc.? Does he show any special interest in northern Israel, its historical conditions and foreign interests, and its political parties? Are the places with which he shows familiarity in the north or in the south—for example, Mizpah, Tabor, Samaria, Gilead, Shechem, Gilgal, Bethel, Gibeah, Ramah? Does he speak from the point of view of a visitor or a resident? How important is this question of his citizenship in the Northern Kingdom?

2. The suggestions offered as to the meaning of the

word "Hosea." Is it an importation, a combined word made up of "Jehovah" and the root "to save" (cf. Joshua), or simply a word meaning "deliverance"? Is there anything significant in the name?

§ 116. **The Date and Circumstances of Hosea's Life and Work.**—Are these indicated in the superscription? 1:1.
Is this superscription from Hosea's hand or from a later date? In what respect may Hosea's life and work be compared with those of Jeremiah?

1. Consider now the data which determine the beginning of his work and its duration. What date is implied in view of the threat concerning Jezreel? Would his marriage and the birth of his oldest son have preceded? 1:4.
Is evidence to be found that he preached in the midst of the anarchy which followed the death of Jeroboam II? 7:7 (cf. 7:3 ff.; 8:4).
Does the book contain any allusion to the Syro-Ephraimitish war? If not, what indication does this give of date? Is Gilead in Hosea's times a part of northern Israel? But 5:1; 6:8; 12:11.
was not Gilead with Naphtali conquered by Assyria in 734 B. C.? What then are the dates within which he must have preached?

2. Consider the historical events of the period indicated above and their consistency with the times described by Hosea; for example, is there evidence in the early part of the book of prosperity and wealth? On the other hand, does the situation change later? Is lawlessness prevalent? 2 Kings, chap. 15.
Is the political situation one of peril? Are the leaders themselves guilty? Are revolution and anarchy prevalent? Hos. 2:5 f., 9 ff.
How does Hosea's description of the times differ from that of Amos? Which of the two saw more widely? Which more deeply? 4:2; 5:1; 7:1.
5:15; 7:11; 8:8;
12:1.
4:8; 5:1; 9:15.
5:13; 7:11; 10:6;
12:1.

3. Concerning Hosea's occupation and social standing, it may be asked whether he was one of the so-called prophets, or was he, like Amos, neither prophet nor the son of a prophet? May we infer from a familiarity which he shows with the evil practices of the priests that he himself was a priest? Is there anything opposing this view? Is there evidence of any kind to indicate whether he occupied a high social position or the opposite? 4:4, 6-9; 6:9.

§ 117. **Hosea's Call and Preparation.**—This subject is perhaps the most important of all that will present themselves in a study of the Book of Hosea. The difficulty and the delicacy of the subject are apparent, but a careful examination of the material, and the various views that have been presented concerning it, will give a clear insight into Hosea's character and the significance of his personal experience as determining the nature of his message.

- 1:2-9. 1. Make a thorough study of the narrative which describes the harlotry of Hosea's wife, and in connection with this the narrative of the purchase of Gomer as a slave and her retention many days, and prepare a brief statement of the thought contained in these two passages, keeping in mind that, whatever view may be taken of the authenticity of the remaining verses of the first three chapters, these passages contain the actual narrative concerning Hosea and his wife.
- 3:1-4. 2. Consider whether this transaction is to be regarded as (*a*) a vision or trance, something that never actually happened in real life; or (*b*) as a parable or allegory. Could a prophet have done the thing here described? Is the woman of 3:1 the same as in chap. 1? And did Hosea have two marriages of the same kind? Did the prophets sometimes represent themselves as commanded to do strange things? Could Hosea psychologically have received such a command? Or (*c*) is the transaction to be understood literally? Does the prophet indicate in any way that it was a vision? Is the thing commanded less objectionable in a vision than in actual practice? Was it the custom of prophets to give symbolical names to real children? Is a real experience of this kind consistent with the message which Hosea preached? But (*d*), if it is taken literally, are we to understand that Gomer was a harlot when Hosea married her? Or is it possible (*e*) that spiritual fornication is meant, since Gomer was, like other Israelites, an idolator? Or may we understand (*f*) that the phrase "a wife of whoredom" may mean one who, although chaste at the time of marriage, had in her a tendency to impurity which manifested itself after marriage? Does this view cover the facts of the narrative? Does it remove the moral difficulties? Does it
- Ezek. 4:1-8, 9-17.
- Isa. 7:3; 8:1-4.
- Hcs. 1:2.

furnish a reasonable basis for Hosea's love for his wife? Will it furnish explanation of the mental process through which Hosea came to realize Jehovah's love for Israel?

3. Trace the connection between the symbolical names given to the children and the progress of the thought in Hosea's mind, and at the same time take up the close connection between 3:1-4 and 1:2-9. Is the old relationship of wife re-established in chap. 3? In what position is the wife placed at the close? Is the period of seclusion—namely, "many days"—a definite period?

4. Consider the following questions: If we restrict the narrative to 1:2-9 and 3:1-4, is the conclusion of the story furnished? Is there any inconsistency between the representation made of a love so strong that it leads the husband to do strange things, and the usual Israelitish custom in accordance with which the wife was the property of the husband? How long a period must these transactions have covered? What was Hosea's domestic situation during these years?

5. Consider these additional points: Might a call to prophecy come through a personal experience as well as in a vision? Was the chief teaching of these domestic experiences the announcement of Israel's destruction, or the announcement of Jehovah's love for Israel in spite of faithlessness? If Gomer was a harlot at the time of marriage, why was she called "wife of whoredom" rather than harlot? Is this command of Jehovah to marry such a woman to be compared with Scripture representations concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the command to Isaiah, and were these really commands? Could these experiences have been used in communicating to the people the thought which the experience itself brought to the prophet?

6. Is it to be understood that the prophet in writing out the story of his experiences at a later time introduced into the story much of his later history? Did Isaiah do this in the story of his call, and Jeremiah likewise? May we understand, then, that there first came the experience, after that the recognition of the truth which it suggested, and still later the writing out of the experience in the light of

this truth? Is there anything analogous to this in Amos?

7. To what extent did the old Semitic conception, that the national deity was the husband of the land, afford a basis for Hosea's interpretation of his experience? Supposing this to be the basis, what new thought does he introduce?

§ 118. **The Character of Hosea.**—Consider the facts and the material of the book, and picture to yourself the character of the author Hosea.

1. In what respects did Hosea's strength differ from that of Amos?

2. In what respects was his character complex as compared with the simplicity of the character of Amos?

3. Compare closely the character of Jeremiah with that of Hosea, and indicate the points of resemblance?

4. Does any other personality in Old Testament history exhibit so affectionate a character?

5. Was Hosea strongly ethical or rather strongly religious? Cf. Amos.

6. Was Hosea, because of his emotional character and the complexity of his temperament, illogical?

7. To what extent did Hosea represent the national type?

§ 119. **The Message of Hosea.**—Consider in general the importance of the message and the facts which contribute to it a special interest.

**Hos. 2:2 f., 5, 12 f.,
4:11-14.**

1. Is the message a strongly personal one, and is this personal element so pervasive as to give it a prominence over and above the political and religious factors?

2. Is there a remarkable relationship between the message of Hosea and that of Amos, both being required to secure a complete conception?

3. Is there any significance in the fact that this message is given within a few years of the end of the northern kingdom?

**E. g., 1:7, 10-2:1;
2:4, 6 f., 14-16,
13-23; 3:5;
14:1-9.**

4. Is it true that nearly one-fourth of the verses contained in the Book of Hosea are to be regarded as insertions and additions from the point of view of later prophets, and will this affect somewhat the formulation of Hosea's message?

5. Consider whether the general thought of Hosea may

be connected with the following topics, and formulate a proposition presenting his thought concerning each of the subjects named: (a) Israel's character and condition; (b) Israel's future; (c) Yahweh's relation to Israel; (d) Israel's conception of Yahweh; (e) Israel's acts of repentance; (f) the outcome of Israel's present attitude toward Yahweh.

6. Consider what Amos had said that did not need to be said over again by Hosea, and also what Amos had not said which Hosea must now say. For example, did Amos present any plan for a restoration? Did Amos lay emphasis upon Jehovah's love, or upon universal law? If the latter, what was the next problem to be solved? Was it necessary for Hosea to promise redemption, or would it be sufficient if he would show that redemption was possible?¹ Had the popular feeling on fundamental questions changed, or was it practically the same as at the time of Amos's utterances?

§ 120. **The Convictions of Hosea.**—Recognizing the fact that Hosea, when compared with Amos, deals differently with the same questions, the one being deeper, while the other is broader; the one being strongly religious, the other strictly ethical; consider the more important points upon which expression is made:

1. The omnipotence of Jehovah. Is this idea as important in Hosea's scheme of thought as it was in that of Amos? How does Hosea represent Jehovah's power over nature, and in what way does he describe the power of Jehovah in history? Is he interested in Jehovah's work outside of Israel?

Hos. 2:8; 4:3; 9:
13:14.

11:1, 3, 4; 12:9, 10;
13:4, 5.

2. Was Hosea more truly monotheistic than Amos? Is Jehovah represented as a national God? Is Hosea's representation of Jehovah anthropomorphic? Is the manner of his representation of Jehovah influenced by his own poetic nature?

3:4; 9:3; 13:4.

6:5; 5:14; 13:7;
5:12.
5:10, 14 f.; 12:14;
13:7 f.

3. How are we to account for the fact that Hosea attacks the image-worship of the times, which was passed over in silence by Elijah, Elisha, and Amos? Why should Hosea have taken this position rather than Amos?

8:5, 6; 3:1; 13:2.

¹ Cf. George Adam Smith, *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Vol. I, p. 229.

- 6:7. 4. Prove that Hosea's fundamental idea of Yahweh is that of a God of love. What, in detail, is the significance of the word "love" used of Jehovah by Hosea? What is involved in the exercise of this feeling on the part of both Jehovah and Israel? What words or phrases may be used as synonyms to express the idea contained in the word translated "love"? What, according to the prophet, is the relationship of this feeling to religion itself?
- 2:8; 4:1-6; 5:4;
6:6; 8:2. 5. From a study of the passages cited formulate the substance of Hosea's most bitter complaint against Israel. Explain what is the full meaning of the word "know" as used in these passages. What knowledge of God is it that Hosea has here in mind? Something which the nation once possessed, but has lost, or is it something really new? Why is it that the people do not reach up to this new knowledge? And in what way is it possible for Israel to gain a true knowledge of Jehovah?
- 4:1 ff.; 6 ff.; 5:1 ff.
2:8; 4:6. 6. If Jehovah is the husband of Israel, or if he is the father of Israel, what relation does he sustain to outside nations? Is Hosea much concerned with the outside world? What evidence is there that Jehovah occupies a place of superiority in the outside world? Why was Hosea indifferent to the world at large?
- 2:2; 3:1.
11:1. 7. Formulate a statement representing Hosea's message on the cultus, and compare with this the thought of Amos. Why is the Canaanitish worship distasteful to Hosea? Why is he opposed to calf-worship? Does he give larger consideration to the cultus than does Amos?
- 4:13 f.; 6:6; 8:11-13; 13:11;
chap. 10, *passim*. 8. Prepare a statement expressing Hosea's conception of the immorality of Israel in those days. What is the occasion of this general immorality? Is it encouraged by the priests? Why? What methods does Hosea adopt to bring about a reform in this particular?
- 4:8; 5:1; 10:13;
6:4; 11:12. 9. Prepare a statement representing the political situation at home and abroad as represented by Hosea. In what respect has the home policy been wrong? Does he condemn the disruption of the kingdom which took place in the days of Rehoboam? What is his attitude toward the anarchy of his own time? What about the foreign policy? Exactly what was it, and what was its weakness?
- 8:4-6.
7:1-8; 8:4-13;
10:8 ff.

10. What was Hosea's interpretation of Israel's past history? What interpretation of this same history had been made before the days of Hosea, and what two great interpretations follow? Formulate in some detail Hosea's point of view and the great religious lesson which he based upon it.

1:4; 5:13; 7:3-7,
13 ff.; 9:14; 11:
1; 12:3, 9 f.

11. If 14:1-8 comes from a later hand, compare also other suspected passages with Hosea's representation concerning Israel's immediate future. Present in contrast his conception of the future on the supposition that these passages come from his pen. What considerations now may be urged in this connection against the authenticity of the passages cited? In any case, is not Hosea's conception of Yahweh one which furnishes a basis for a hopeful future? Did he teach the possibility of repentance? Did he expect Israel to repent?

1:10-2:1, 14-16
18-23; 3:5; 11:
10 f.

2:2; 5:4; 6:6; 10:
12.
13:14.

12. Consider two additional points in reference to Hosea's message. (a) To what extent did he make use of the nation's past history, and where did he get his material? Is it possible that he may have made use of oral tradition? Did he have information which no preceding document then in existence furnished? Did he exercise a judgment concerning the past, differing from that of those who preceded him? (b) In what sense now may the character of Hosea's message be said to be typically Israelitish? Was his message a true expression of the national spirit? In what respects may the message of Hosea be contrasted with that of Amos?

Cf. 8:12; 9:10-
12:3.
Cf. 8:13; 9:3, 10;
10:9; 11:1, 5;
13:4 f.
Cf. 11:8.
Cf. 1:4; 10:5.

§ 121. **The Ministry of Hosea.**—What is the external form of his work? What was its scope? In what did it consist? Remembering that the ministry of Hosea was that of a poet, not a philosopher; that of a man living almost entirely alone, not in association with rulers; that of a mystic, not a moralist—consider the following topics:

1. In the reception of his call to preach and the message which he was to preach, what method was definitely employed? Through how many years did this experience continue? What was the nature of the experience? How may we in a practical way explain the reception of the message by the prophet?

1:2-6, 8; 3:1-4,

2. In the presentation of his message to the people, what methods were employed? Was the use of symbolical names for children a good method? May we suppose that he made a public statement of the story of his discourse, and, if so, for what purpose?

2:2; 4:1; 5:1;
6:4; 9:1; 10:9.

3. Did he preach? What was the important purpose of his discourse? How many of these discourses have been preserved? What may be said as to the character of these discourses from the point of view of public delivery?

4. Did he follow the example of Amos in committing his addresses to writing?

5. How may we contrast the ministry of Hosea with that of Amos in its relation to political activity? Did Hosea occupy any public position? Did he come into contact, so far as we know, with the government? Was it, in other words, a private rather than a public ministry? Were the political conditions of his times peculiarly difficult? Was he more severe toward the prophetic policy of the past than toward that of his own times?

§ 122. Stages in the Ministry of Hosea.

1. Criticise in detail the following hypothesis concerning the chronological order of the various stages in his ministry:²

a) At the time of his marriage (750 B. C. ?) he was presumably a young man, and, if his occupation was that of a priest, his mind had been dwelling on sacred things for many years. At first hand he gained his knowledge of the evil practices of his fellow-priests, and their close associates, the prophets.

b) Within two or three years (747 B. C.) he has satisfied himself as to the doom of Jehu's dynasty; this is announced in connection with the birth of his son (Jezreel). He, doubtless, expected Israel's collapse to be contemporaneous.

c) Within six or seven years the tragedy of his life has been enacted; the real call to preach has come; the great message has been received; Jeroboam has died, and anarchy has set in; important announcements concerning the future have been made (in the symbolic names given three children of his wife).

d) During the next six or seven years (742-735 B. C.), with his wife put away (for he cannot now live with her, however much he loves her), he preaches his impassioned sermons, breathing into them all the warmth and all the pain of an agonizing heart. These are the years of revolution and vacillation, of decay approaching close to death—years without any hope, yet with a faith in Yahweh that is strong and steadfast.

e) What next? We do not know. It is improbable that, like Amos, he left

² See my *Amos and Hosea* ("International Critical Commentary," 1905).

home and went to Judah, there to put his writings into form, and to include the Judaistic references which are in the present book. It is probable that he was spared the worst agony of all, that of seeing Samaria in ruins and Israel carried captive. We have nothing from his lips or pen later than 735 B. C.

2. Present considerations which may be offered to prove the efficiency of Hosea's ministry. What is its real success, notwithstanding the failure of the prophet to turn people from their sins and to save the nation from destruction?

§ 123. Literature on Hosea.

For presentations of the teachings of Hosea see: the introductions to the various Commentaries, especially those of Cheyne (*Cambridge Bible*), George Adam Smith (*Expositor's Bible*), Ewald, Wünsche, Valetton (*Amos und Hosea*), Nowack (*Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament*), Marti (*Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament*), and W. R. Harper ("International Critical Commentary," 1905).

Special discussions are: A. B. Davidson, "The Prophet Hosea," *Expositor*, 1st series, Vol. IX (1879), pp. 241-64; W. R. Smith, art "Hosea," *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1881); *idem*, *Prophets of Israel* (1882, 2d ed., 1895), pp. 144-90; Kirkpatrick, *Doctrine of the Prophets* (1892, 3d ed., 1901), pp. 109-42; *idem*, art. "Hosea," Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible* (2d ed., 1893); Cornill, *Prophets of Israel* (1894, English 1898), pp. 47-55; L. B. Paton, "Notes on Hosea's Marriage," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. XV (1896), pp. 9-18; A. B. Davidson, art. "Hosea," *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II (1899); Budde, *Religion of Israel to the Exile* (1899), pp. 45 ff.; W. R. Smith and Karl Marti, art. "Hosea," *Encyclopædia Biblica*, Vol. II (1901).

Duhm, *Die Theologie der Propheten* (1875), pp. 126-41; Lagrange, "La nouvelle histoire d'Israël et le prophète Osée," *Revue biblique*, Vol. I (1892), pp. 203-38; Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (1893, 2d ed., 1899), pp. 204-18; Oettli, "Der Kultus bei Amos und Hosea," *Greifswalder Studien* (1895), pp. 1-34; Volz, *Die vorexilische Jahweprophete und der Messias* (1897), pp. 24-40; Seesemann, *Israel und Juda bei Amos und Hosea, nebst einem Exkurs über Ho. 1-3* (1898); Volz, "Die Ehegeschichte Hosea's," *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 1898, pp. 321-35; Procksch, *Die Geschichtsbetrachtung bei Amos, Hosea und Jesaja* (1901); Oettli, *Amos und Hosea, zwei Zeugen gegen die Anwendung der Evolutionstheorie auf die Religion Israels* (1901); Nowack, "Die Zukunftshoffnungen Israels in der Assyrischen Zeit" in *Theologische Abhandlungen* (Festgabe für H. J. Holtzmann, 1902), pp. 33-59; Riedel, *Alttestamentliche Untersuchungen*, Heft I (1902) pp. 1-15; Boehmer, "Die Grundgedanken der Predigt Hosea's," *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, Vol. XLV (1902), pp. 1-24; Meinhold, *Studien zur israelitischen Religionsgeschichte*, I, *Der heilige Rest* (1903), pp. 64-88.