

I. *The Life and Times of Hosea*

07-Dec-03

Hosea 1:1; 2 Ki. 14:23-20:21

Bentley Chapter 1

Theme: The book of Hosea calls us to live as Christians in a “post-Christian” world.

Key Verses: 2 Ki. 17:20, 22-23 – ²⁰And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. ... ²²For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, ²³until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.

Introduction

Last year, I taught a Sunday school class on the books Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. I really enjoyed studying a part of God’s word that was less well known than many other portions. In fact, it really fanned my interest in the message of all of the so-called “Minor Prophets.” They are “minor” because of the relative lengths of their books compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, not because of the lesser importance of their messages. In fact, I believe the message of the minor prophets is highly relevant to the Church today. And so, I have decided to teach another one of the minor prophets this Sunday school quarter. Lord willing, I plan to teach through additional parts of The Twelve in future quarters. But for this quarter, our focus will be on Hosea.

Let’s start with a short discussion. **Tell me what you know about the book of Hosea.** [Write class answers on the board or flip chart]. Hosea is probably the second best known of the minor prophets, after Jonah. And yet, he is not all that well known.

As we begin our study, I would like to give you an introduction to the life and times of Hosea, so we can properly place the book in its historical context. But even beyond that, I want you to be thinking how the historical context of Hosea’s day is connected with our modern situation. It is true that we will talk about ancient history today, but **the Scripture is only real and powerful if it has application in the 21st century and beyond.** My goal for this class is to apply the book of Hosea to our culture and our church today.

Exposition

A. The Life of Hosea (1:1)

The prophet Hosea lived during the 8th century BC in the northern kingdom of Israel, often also called Samaria after its capital city, or Ephraim after its leading tribe. Like most of the other minor prophets, we know relatively little about Hosea. His name—like the name of Israel’s last king Hoshea—means “salvation.” It is another form of the name “Joshua” or “Jesus.” We are told that Hosea is the son of Beerī, but we don’t know his hometown. As the book opens, it is likely that Hosea has already heard and received the call to the prophetic ministry, since it is not recorded in the book. Hosea’s prophetic ministry overlapped with Jonah and Amos before him, and Isaiah and Micah after him.

Chapters 1 and 3 of the book of Hosea tell us a bit about Hosea’s marriage and children. In Hosea 1:2, God tells Hosea whom he is going to marry. But this is to be no ordinary marriage. For while Hosea is a prophet of the living God, his wife Gomer was a prostitute, a harlot, an adulterous and unfaithful woman. As Bentley says, “Hosea obeyed and married Gomer, the

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daughter of Diblaim, despite the anxiety, and maybe even the taunts, of his friends. Hosea did as God commanded him, and in so doing he opened up his life to many years of misery.”

Chapter 1 is biographical and records Hosea’s marriage to Gomer and three children born to Gomer, although not necessarily all to Hosea. Chapter 2 is a prophecy that builds on Gomer’s infidelities, but is really talking about God’s relationship with His people. Chapter 3 is autobiographical, and relates Hosea redeeming Gomer out of slavery.

Eaton & Bentley: The entire experience was obviously exceedingly painful but it was so closely analogous to the relationship between God and Israel that the events of Hosea’s life, though they actually happened, were virtually a parable of the spiritual relationship between God and his people. God chose a bride. She was impure from the very earliest days, but responded in faith and was in a good relationship to God for a generation or so. Instead of showing love, and persevering in commitment to their God who had done so much for them, they had turned their backs on the one true God and had prostituted themselves to other, false, gods. Thus the nation fell into sin, and subsequently into bondage. God let his people fall into serious calamities and distresses as Gomer had fallen into slavery. But the time will come when God will redeem his people and after disciplining them will resume a marriage relationship with them. The pain that the soft and tender-hearted Hosea had experienced expressed God’s love and desire for his people. ‘How can I give you up?’ was the cry of Hosea. ‘How can I give you up?’ was the cry of God.

B. The Times of Hosea (2 Kings 14-20)

1. *Overview*

After the death of King Solomon in 931 BC, the kingdom of Israel split into two. Only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. The rebellious 10 northern tribes followed Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. Jeroboam established his capital at Samaria and idolatrous worship centers at Dan and Bethel, since the Temple in Jerusalem was in the hands of the kingdom of Judah.

While the southern kingdom of Judah maintained the Davidic line and had its share of godly kings, **every king over multiple dynasties in the northern kingdom of Israel was judged wicked.** As a consequence of their sin, the kingdom of Israel lasted just over 200 years, until the empire of Assyria destroyed Samaria in 722 BC and carted off the people into captivity. **The southern kingdom of Judah lasted another 135 years before being taken into captivity by Babylon in 586 BC.**

Hosea 1:1 gives us a list of five kings that help us understand when he prophesied. Hosea prophesied “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.” This list of kings, four from Judah and one from Israel, place Hosea in the middle of the 8th century BC, a generation before the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC. In fact, it is likely that Hosea continued to prophesy until shortly before that calamitous event.

Eaton: The 200-year history of Israel can be divided into four main sections.

1) First there were *the years under Jeroboam I and his successors.* The nation never recovered from the idolatrous worship that Jeroboam established. The book of kings repeats the refrain over and over again for each king: “he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.”

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2) A second phase in the story of northern Israel came with *the dynasty of Omri*. He introduced an even more serious paganism into Israel. His son Ahab made Baal-worship the state-religion of northern Israel.

3) A third phase in the story came with *Jehu*. He was commissioned by God to remove Ahab's regime from Israel. He did so with great cruelty and then sponsored his own form of idolatry. In the days of Jehu's great-grandson, Jeroboam II, Israel became prosperous. These were days of economic stability; the nation was affluent. Hosea's ministry began during the reign of Jeroboam II.

4) The fourth phase in the story is *the time when the country had six kings in thirty years*. This stage of Israel's history consisted of thirty years of political assassinations and intrigues of one kind or another. Hosea ministered throughout this fourth stage of Israel's history. Hosea bears witness to a very decadent society in the last half-century of the nation's existence. The underlying cause was corrupt religion.

In the handout, I've provided a number of reference materials, such as key dates, tables, and timelines to help orient you in the times of Hosea.

2. Kings of Judah (2 Kings 15:1-7;32-38;16:1-20; 18:1-20:21)

It's interesting that while Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel, he dates his ministry primarily by listing the southern kings of Judah. In fact, he only mentions one king of Israel, Jeroboam II. The last six kings of Israel are not mentioned at all by Hosea, although it is clear from his naming of the Judean kings that Hosea's ministry did in fact extend through all of these last, miserable kings of Israel. **Why does Hosea date his ministry primarily by the kings of Judah?** Perhaps it was easier to list their names than all of the puppet kings, pretenders, and assassinations that held the northern throne in rapid succession. In addition, it is likely that Hosea's prophecies continued to impact the kingdom of Judah long after Samaria was destroyed.

Well, who were these four kings of Judah, mentioned by Hosea?

1) First there was **Uzziah**, also known as Azariah (2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chr. 26:1-23; 790-739 BC) who reigned for 50 years. While **Uzziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord**, he did not completely eliminate idolatry in Judah. Furthermore, he presumed upon himself to take up the position of priest by burning incense on the altar of incense in the Temple. **For his pride, God struck Uzziah with leprosy** and he had to dwell apart from his people for the rest of his life. Remember that Isaiah has his grand vision in chapter 6 "in the year that King Uzziah died."

2) The next king mentioned is Uzziah's son, **Jotham** (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chr. 27:1-9; 750-731 BC). Jotham is regarded as a **good king**, doing "what was right in the eyes of the Lord." However, the people of his day still practiced idolatry.

3) The third king is Jotham's son **Ahaz, an out-and-out wicked man** (2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chr. 28:1-27; 743-715 BC). He "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel," not in the ways of his father David. In fact, he even practiced child sacrifice. During his reign, Judah was attacked by Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus. So Ahaz sent raided the Temple treasury to pay for help from Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria. The Assyrian king defeated Rezin. When Ahaz went up to Damascus at the end of the war, he imported the worship of the Damascus gods back into the Temple at Jerusalem.

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4) The fourth king listed is **Hezekiah, the best of the bunch** (2 Kings 18:1-20:21; 2 Chr. 29:1-32:33; 728-696 BC). Hezekiah truly loved the Lord, hated idols. **“He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.”**

3. Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kings 14:23-29)

Bentley: The fifth king mentioned in Hosea 1:1 reigned in the northern kingdom of Israel. He was **Jeroboam II**, the son of Joash (2 Kings 14:23-29; 793-752 BC). **Jeroboam was famous for a long, prosperous reign badly used.** The land prospered during his reign but, sadly, **he continued in the evil footsteps of the first Jeroboam** (2 Kings 14:24). Heathen idol-worship was rife in Israel. The land was filled with shrines to the fertility gods, or Baals, and asherahs, dedicated to female deities, were found in many places.

Boice: **It was an age of luxurious materialism, apparent religious devotion and activity, freedom, and even an apparent national security** in which politics, law, and religion all seemed to play into the favored people’s hands. Yet, it was the worst of times, because **the hearts of the people were empty, religion was shallow, and corruption was rampant on every hand. God had blessed His people; prospered them both materially and spiritually. But they had begun to live for pleasure. They had abandoned hard work, morality, and integrity in order to live for themselves. Can such things be said of our age, at the start of the twenty-first century?**

Kidner & Eaton: With Israel’s wealth had come increasing decadence; and then, halfway through the century, their world began to crumble. At home, the two strong kings, Jeroboam II of Israel and his contemporary, Uzziah of Judah, were at or near the end of their long reigns. In the distance Assyria had roused itself to a new pitch of terrifying strength and militancy. It was soon to march on Palestine. Decades of stability (790s to 750s) would be followed by decades of instability (750s to 720s) and the end of the nation. At the death of Jeroboam II (753 BC), the nation had only thirty years to survive. **God gave them another generation to consider their ways. It was to this generation that Hosea was sent to preach repentance.**

4. Jeroboam’s Successors (2 Kings 15:8-31; 17:1-41)

The last 30 years of the kingdom’s existence was a period of political upheaval. Assyria was becoming more and more powerful in their westward expansion. **Israel had six kings. Four of the six kings were assassinated and replaced by their assassins.** Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned only six months before he was killed by Shallum, fulfilling the prophecy made against the line of Jehu (2 Kings 15:8-12). Shallum reigned a “full month” before he was assassinated by Menahem (2 Kings 15:13-16). Menahem reigned for 10 years, and it was during his reign that Israel began paying tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (2 Kings 15:17-22). Menahem’s son Pekahiah reigned for 2 years before he was killed by Pekah (2 Kings 15:23-26).

Pekah reigned for a total of 20 years, likely 12 years in Gilead across the Jordan and then a further 8 years in Samaria. During his reign, he conspired against Assyria with Rezin of Damascus. Pekah and Rezin felt that they needed the help of Ahaz of Judah in their anti-Assyrian conspiracy. Ahaz refused and sent money to Assyria for help. Pekah and Rezin attacked Ahaz of Judah in the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war of 734-733 BC. Tiglath-Pileser came to Judah’s rescue, subduing most of Israel, including Gilead, Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali. The cream of the citizenry was taken captive to Assyria. Then Tiglath-Pileser ravaged

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Damascus in 732 BC and killed the king Rezin. All of this, apparently, was in response to Ahaz's desperate overture.

For both kingdoms of the coalition, the results were disastrous: the bulk of Israel was divided into Assyrian provinces and locked into the third stage of vassalage, totally under Assyrian dominance, with the elite members of society removed and an Assyrian governor and bureaucracy put in their place.

Ephraim only, the hill country around Samaria, retained for a brief moment the semi-independence of first-stage vassalage and then they were clapped into the second stage, with Pekah's demise by assassination and Hoshea's appointment to the throne as lackey of the Assyrians (2 Ki. 15:30; 17:1-4). But even that would not last very long, for Hoshea also rebelled against his Assyrian overlord, plotting with Egypt, and so Shalmaneser V of Assyria marched into Samaria and destroyed it in 722 BC, thus ending the northern kingdom of Israel forever.

C. The Book of Hosea

With that historical background in mind, let's briefly look at Hosea's book.

1. Date

Given the names of the kings mentioned in Hosea 1:1, the shortest span of time for Hosea's ministry is the 25 year period from 753 (Jeroboam II's last year) to 728 (Hezekiah's first year as co-regent). However, it is likely that his ministry extended a bit in both directions, say from **755 to 723 BC**. Thus, Hosea's ministry covers the last years of the "golden age" of King Jeroboam II and extends through the final 30 tumultuous years of the history of the northern kingdom.

2. Organization

Bentley: The book of Hosea divides into three parts — chapters 1-3, 4-11, and 12-14. In the first of these divisions Hosea briefly describes his marriage to an adulterous woman and makes the connection with Israel's unfaithfulness to God. From chapter 4 onwards this dramatic, personal beginning is not mentioned again. However, it broods over the rest of the prophecy as Hosea paints a picture of God's deep love, his disappointment and anger, and his determination to persevere with his 'unfaithful wife' — the people of Israel. The Lord called Hosea to warn the people of God's impending judgment upon them because of their immorality.

Hubbard: The oracles in chapters 4-14 are arranged both thematically and also chronologically. Hosea 4:1-5:7 seems to be set in the last days of Jeroboam II and emphasizes harlotry, both physical and spiritual. The Syro-Ephraimite struggle during the days of Pekah and Ahaz seems to be the historical background of 5:8-7:16, with its emphasis on political upheaval. The tumultuous years of Assyrian vassalage as the time neared for Samaria's destruction describes chapters 8-13.

Hubbard: **The book of Hosea is about judgment and hope. Each of the three major sections of the book begins with the threat of divine judgment on Israel and ends with the promise of divine restoration:** 1) the story of Hosea's marriage illustrates the sins of Israel and the consequent judgment, 1:2-2:13, while the account of the reconciliation of Hosea and his wife in response to Yahweh's promise to restore Israel, His own bride, exemplifies the hope that Yahweh, as loving husband, offers beyond the judgment, 2:14-3:5; 2) the oracles of judgment - sparked by corrupt worship, savage politics, and foolish foreign alliances - spell Israel's doom, 4:1-10:15, while the divine complaint raised by Yahweh, as the offended parent of a delinquent

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child, culminates in an offer of forgiveness and a call to return, 11:1-11; 3) the closing speeches of judgment continue to sound the alarm for Israel's fate, as they depict God's wrath in virtually unparalleled terms of ferocity, 12:1-13:16, while the prophecy reaches its climax in a love-song in which God's husbandly love triumphs over all of Israel's unfaithfulness, 14:1-9.

3. Major Themes

Hubbard: We are not left to guess about the person of God in Hosea. Yahweh introduces Himself in words that feature his uniqueness and sovereignty (12:9; 13:4). Yahweh's unique sovereignty meant that all of life was within his control, whether history, nature, domestic politics, international affairs, or religious life.

Hubbard: Hosea portrays **God's lordship of history** throughout his book. The Exodus is seen as a time when Israel defected from her relationship with God. Her present sin is understood to have its beginnings in that time, and is linked to the future in the descriptions of judgment which, in part at least, reverse the course of history: judgment is a 'return to Egypt' (9:3, 6; 11:11) or a reversion to the wilderness (2:5; 12:9). [In addition to the Exodus, Hosea makes frequent reference to events in national Israel's past at Gilgal, Bethel, Gibeah, and events in the lives of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob.]

Hubbard: The picture of **God's lordship of nature** contributes to the book's unity. Hosea reminds Israel that Yahweh, not Baal, is the source of all that sustains their lives: He is the One who gives them crops and wealth (2:8), who initiates 'a cosmic covenant' to set at peace the animal kingdom (2:18), who provides their pasture (4:16), who brings the rain (6:3), who will restore their fruitfulness (*cf.* 10:1) in the end (14:4-7), and who, in the meanwhile, names their true source of righteousness and steadfast love (10:12). Who is responsible for fertility and therefore should receive the worship and gratitude of the people? Yahweh, of course.

Hubbard: Hosea's depiction of **God's lordship of domestic politics** is as clear and specific as his dealing with the other expressions of sovereignty. Most of what Hosea says about the monarchy is leveled at priests who have conspired against the monarchy (6:7-7:7) or at the people in general, who have changed kings as though they were changing clothes (8:4, 10; 10:3; 13:10-11). Where the kings themselves were culpable in their domestic leadership, two major wrongs seem to be in view. First, as sponsors of the shrines they were guilty of complicity in adulterous religious activities (5:1-7). Second, the kings were held accountable for lack of justice and covenant compassion in the land (10:4). They should have set the example for sowing righteousness.

Hubbard: Hosea's way of dealing with **God's lordship of international affairs** is to show the nations as either instruments of *judgment* by invasion (1:5; 7:16; 8:14; 10:8-10, 14-15; 11:6-7; 13:15-16) and exile (2:6-7; 3:4; 8:13; 9:3, 6, 15, 17; 10:6; 11:5, 10-11) or of *temptation* by enticing Israel to foolish treaties (5:13; 7:11; 8:9; 12:1) and wicked military build-ups (8:14; 10:13-14). Yahweh does not hesitate to use the foreign powers for his purposes.

Hubbard: These relationships can be summarized as **God's lordship over Israel's religious life**. God's lordship is described in personal terms: Yahweh is husband and parent to the people; they are wayward spouse and stubborn child to him. It is a lordship built on a relationship described as: **covenant love** (2:19; 4:1; 6:4, 6; 10:12; 12:6); **faithfulness** (2:20; 4:1); **mercy** (1:6-7; 2:1, 4, 19, 23; 14:3); **knowledge of God** (4:1-6; 6:6; 2:8, 20; 5:4; 6:3; 8:2; 11:3; 13:4). **Righteousness** and **justice** are his ways of summarizing the covenant response (2:19; 10:4, 12; 12:6).

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Obviously, one of the major themes in the book of Hosea is that of the **husband-wife relationship** between God and his people, as portrayed in the marriage of Hosea to Gomer. The marital infidelity of Gomer is an extended metaphor throughout the book of the spiritual adultery of Israel toward God. In addition to a husband, **God is portrayed as a Father**, one of the few places in the Old Testament where this image of God is used. Israel is the prodigal son, and God the Father mourns over wayward Israel and calls for His people to return to Him. In fact, **the concept of “return” or “turn” is also prevalent in the book.** This is a book that calls the people of God to forsake their idolatry, apostasy, and spiritual adultery and return to the Lord God. **The overall theme of the book can be describe in this way: “Return to your loving Husband.”**

4. Use in the New Testament

Hubbard: The direct quotations of Hosea in the New Testament are listed here: the changing of the children’s names from negative (1:6,9) to positive (1:11-2:1; 2:23) becomes a prophecy of the inclusion of Gentiles into the church (Rom. 9:25-26; 1 Pe. 2:10); Christ quotes Hosea 6:6 twice in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7 indicating that obedience without love is not true religion; Hosea 10:8 is referred to in both Luke 23:30 and in Revelation 6:16 where the cry of calling mountains to fall down on the sinners is a picture of the final wrath of God at the Second Coming of Christ; God’s account of His care for Israel in the Exodus (11:1) is said to be fulfilled in Christ’s descent into Egypt (Mt. 2:15); God’s ironic summons to Sheol and death to work their judgment (13:14) becomes for Paul a cry of resurrection victory (1 Cor. 15:55).

Conclusion

As we read about the judgment against Israel in the book of Hosea, I would like to remind us of **two Biblical principles of judgment: 1) God judges apostate nations; and 2) God judges apostate churches.** In Hosea’s day, the nation-state of Israel (Samaria, Ephraim) is both an apostate nation and an apostate church. And so they are judged. Within a few years after the close of Hosea’s book, the nation of Israel was no more – they were destroyed by Assyria and deported across the Near East. In their place, others were imported, and they mixed in their religious and social ideas with the remaining Jews and ended up with the syncretism of the Samaritans of Jesus’ day. Thus ended the nation.

But we should remember that **Samaria was also an apostate church.** When the northern kingdom split from the southern kingdom after Solomon’s death, the true worship of God remained with Judah at the Temple in Jerusalem. King Jeroboam I had a big problem: How could he maintain the political allegiance of his people if their religious allegiance were with the other kingdom? And so he established his own worship centers at Bethel and at Dan, complete with golden calves, representing the True God. And so, with the worship of God corrupted, thus began a 200-year slide into oblivion. The Bible is clear to record that Jeroboam’s successors followed in his sin: “he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (e.g., 2 Kings 15:18, 24). **The religion of Samaria was apostate – they had split from the true church, and their end was destruction.**

At the time of Hosea, the nation of Israel could in many ways be considered a “post-Christian” society. They had broken away from Judah more than 150 years before, and their religion, while somewhat loosely based on the “Bible”, bore little resemblance to true temple worship in Jerusalem. The time when God’s law was most prevalent was past (been there, done

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that), and there were many serious national sins. Worship had been corrupted, although some outward forms remained. Accommodation to outside cultures was rampant.

Economically, it was a golden age. After the political instabilities and wars of previous generations, Israel was basking in the long reign of Jeroboam II – a period of 50 years of peace and economic expansion. *There was a chicken in every pot, a camel in every garage, the Samaria stock exchange was up, and the chariots ran on time.* Times were good. People prospered. That nasty little business with Elijah and Ahab and Jezebel was in the past, almost forgotten, like that difficult massacre that Jehu, Jeroboam’s great-grandfather, had accomplished to secure the throne and the country. **Reliance on the God of the Bible was forgotten.**

Instead, there were exciting things to do. There were plenty of fertility shrines where a ritual prostitute could be found. If you were into the whole “Yahweh” thing, there were also plenty of those altars, and the priests there seemed to throw a mean party. Their attitude seemed to be – “the more you sin, the more sin sacrifice parties we can have!” (*cp.* Hos. 4:7-8). It was a self-indulgent era with sex appeal and fun times for all.

Sound familiar?

We live in a post-Christian society today. Our society was founded on Christian principles, but our country is so secularized today, that those Christian principles are being forced out, like the Ten Commandments in the Alabama State courthouse. Instead, an MTV-generation is fascinated by the sensual and self. Sex sells. Anything goes. Our culture is not far removed from that of 8th Century BC Israel.

As I write this, the American Episcopal church is undergoing seismic shocks precipitated by the installation of an openly gay bishop in New Hampshire. Conservative Episcopalians are threatening to split and seeking support from the worldwide Anglican community. Much of their support is coming from the Anglican church in Africa, which is dynamic and growing even as the Episcopal church in the US is stagnant and shrinking. Peter Akinola, the archbishop of Nigeria has written that “homosexuality is such a sin it would be worth splitting Anglicanism over it” (Houston Chronicle – October 11, 2003). **Such divisions of the church over matters of right doctrine and orthodoxy are commonplace in our age.** In 1973, our own PCA denomination split from the PCUSA church over matters of Biblical authority.

And so today, Christian churches are under siege. In many churches, Bibles aren’t necessary, because sermons are not based on the Bible. Social gospel (social justice) is emphasized more than Biblical gospel. The top issue in many churches today is embracing homosexuality as a valid alternate lifestyle (Episcopal bishop). Not wanting to offend, church services are watered down to be “palatable” to the world, to be “seeker friendly”, with empty pop music, entertaining bands, and fireside chats that make no mention of sin or judgment. “Let’s go to XYZ church because they have a great single’s group. They have a big Super Bowl party.” And so on. **The church’s influence on our culture shrinks as the culture’s influence on the church grows.**

To be careful, in the Bible, God’s people and political identity were the same. Today, no single political nation shares this same special relationship with God. Instead, God’s people are now in the Church, which includes people of every nation, tribe, and tongue. The Church is now a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Pe. 2:9). Today, the church is separate from the nation. The two are not the same. **The church lives within the nation, and across many nations.** And yet, the church’s culture is heavily impacted

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by the culture of the nation they are in. “Be in the world but not of the world” is often difficult for individuals and for churches. So, as we study God’s warnings to OT Israel, **we will need to look at both the application directly to the church and also to our larger society.**

For we need to remember that **God is sovereign over the nations as well.** God also speaks words of judgment against other nations in the OT – Moab, Ammon, Canaan, Nineveh, etc. So, “non-church” nations are not exempt from God’s judgment. The same is true today. God causes nations to rise and fall. The more leavening content they have of the Word of God, the better off they are. When they reject God’s Word as a nation, God casts them off in His providential timing. The United States may be the greatest nation on the earth today (and I believe it is), but that is no guarantee that the USA will last. Ask Assyria; ask Babylon; ask Greece; ask Rome; ask the Third Reich. So, **we need to be aware of the culture of our country, for it impacts the culture of our church, and it has consequences for the future of the society.**

As we study the book of Hosea, we will be looking at the warnings there from both a societal viewpoint as well as a church viewpoint. Today, in our post-Christian society, many churches have so blended in with our society that it is difficult to tell them apart. They seem more interested in politics than in prayer, in social activism rather than in personal piety, in gay clergy rather than in sanctity of life. Seeker-friendly services strive to entertain, not explain the Gospel. Fervent proclamation of the truth of God’s Word has been lost.

This era of compromise and rejection of God’s Word is similar to that of Hosea’s world. Our cultures are both materialistic, sex-crazed, and religiously hollow. Our cultures are both “post-Christian.” And so Hosea’s message is one our Church needs to hear, to stop chasing after our own image of what God wants, and to return to the God of the Scriptures. This is why I’ve subtitled our study in Hosea as “Christian Living in a Post-Christian World.” “Judgment begins in the house of God.” **Samaria did not escape from God’s judgment, and neither will the Church of our day, unless it collectively repents and returns to the God of the Bible. We need to return to our loving Husband.**

But, I want to end on a positive note, so I want to encourage you that the negatives of Hosea can be turned around to become positives. What Samaria didn’t do or did wrong are the things that we need to do or do right. **We need to have an emphasis on right living, right conduct, and right worship, as given to us in the Scriptures.** We need to re-orient our hearts and our lives towards the Word of God, and live as followers of Jesus Christ, regardless of our society’s culture around us. **Instead of the pagan culture of our society impacting the Church, the Church needs to impact positively the culture of our society. Like the prophet Hosea himself, we need to be examples of Christian living in a post-Christian world.**

Next week: Lesson 2 – The Gospel According to Hosea – Hosea 1:2-2:1; 3:1-5 – Bentley Chapters 2&5

Close in Prayer.