

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Lesson 03, Chapter 1 Continued

We'll review last week's lesson a little more extensively than I'll typically do throughout our study of Hosea. This is because I introduced you to some Hebraic concepts that are crucial for a proper and revealing understanding of the Prophet's words. And, appropriately, the review I most want to concentrate on is the word "Word". We'll also not read chapter 1 again, but instead will take it one verse at a time.

We spent much time with trying resurrect what the biblical Hebrew sense of the word "Word" meant because it represents a complex concept, and is not so easy for those who have been raised-up in the Church (or even in the Synagogue), or even as Bible students including Bible College students, to grasp. Is it because it is too hard to understand? No; it is because we have been taught to think about it so differently from what it actually meant that we must overcome what is lodged with superglue into our brains.

I want to first give credit where credit is due. Much of what I'm going to explain to you comes primarily from the superior research by Karen Armstrong and Steven Service, and a few other scholars, who also contributed to bringing this matter to our attention. The concept we're going to review concerns the Hebrew word *Dabar*, which is usually translated as "The Word", or at other times when used in conjunction with the phrase "The Word of God", is meant as a proper noun. That is, it is the name or the title of something. The biblical term "The Word" describes an event or action of God that also presents itself as being caused by a living manifestation of God. Don't overthink this; the same can be said of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also a living but invisible, mostly intangible, manifestation of God that often precipitates events or actions or thoughts within us.

The challenge for us to understand this concept of The Word is mainly because of the standard, everyday use of the English terms "words" and "writings". We see the term writings as consisting of a series of words to form sentences, paragraphs, and even chapters of text (which is, of course, true). However, biblically, this is not how it works. Words and writings are not essentially the

same things in the Bible. Let's try to make temporary Hebrew scholars of you. When the biblical Hebrew speaks of writing and texts there are few different Hebrew words used. Some of them include *kathab*, *miktah*, and *cepher*. We should probably throw *megillah* in there as well as among the more common words used. In the New Testament, the Greek words used for writings and texts are *grapho*, *gramma*, and *biblos*. However, in Hebrew the term used the vast majority of the time for "The Word" is *dabar*. So, the term *dabar* is quite set apart from the typical words for texts and writings. In fact, the term *dabar* occurs more than 2400 times in the Old Testament. Interestingly, the excellent King James Bible translators used more than 100 English terms to translate the various forms of *dabar* so the highly complex and spiritual nature of the word *dabar* became nearly opaque to the Bible's readers. I have little doubt that there was no intent to obscure, but rather it was out of not understanding Hebrew, Hebrew literature, and Hebrew culture sufficiently that it happened.

In Hebrew biblical writing the key to understanding what I'm trying to explain is that in our gentile English-speaking minds, words are thought of as written symbols formed from an alphabet. But in both Hebrew and Greek, the term "words" are only rarely references to texts and writings. In fact, in the Bible "words" from God were not about speech that was to be written down as texts, but rather they mostly described actions or events brought about by God. And the living manifestation of these actions...what Christianity might call a person of God... is the mysterious "The Word".

I have spoken especially in my extensive study of the Book of Matthew about how the term wisdom is used and meant biblically, because in modern Western terms wisdom merely means to have the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment. But among the Hebrews (and in the Bible), Wisdom was referring to a living entity. Wisdom was seen as divine, and as an actual manifestation (a person) of God. The concept of The Word operated similarly. This is why I caution severely on the adopting of the Trinity Doctrine as it is commonly understood within most branches of Christianity. That is, God as a strict tri-unity. The doctrine is that He is one, but at the same time He consists of three: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the various Trinity Doctrines adopted by various denominations, generally the idea is that whatever manifestation of God we may read about in the Bible, or that may exist, the sum

total that is possible of those manifestations are three and only three. Thus, when we read of an action or event that is connected with God, we are to ask ourselves which of those three caused that action to occur: was it the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Therefore, for instance, when we read of the divine Fire-Cloud that led Israel through the wilderness, we must accept that it was actually one of those three. When we read of the Angel of the Lord, it could only have been one of those three. But that is an arbitrary, artificial, and narrow sighted view that simply doesn't represent the biblical texts or ancient Hebrew thought or meaning. It's a Church tradition and not a biblical fact.

Let me be clear so there is no misunderstanding. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all actual, biblically defined manifestations, or attributes, or persons that together form the substance of God. I'm saying that the Bible describes even more manifestation, or attributes, or persons of God than only those three. The Word, *Dabar*, is another one. Mysterious? It passes any argument of reason or science? Yes. But the nature of God cannot be weighed or measured.

I could probably speak entirely on this subject for a couple of full lessons but I'll have mercy. The point is that we need to understand the actual nature of the term *Dabar*, The Word, as it pertains to the opening words of the Book of Hosea, and not what has been traditionally understood. To remind you the opening words are:

^{CJB} Hosea 1:1 *This is the word (dabar) of ADONAI that came to Hoshea the son of Be'eri...*

So, we're being told that a divine entity named The Word of Adonai (actually it is The Word of Yehoveh) sprang into action and made His presence known to Hosea. The Word was the divine vehicle God used to send His message to Hosea, just as The Word was the vehicle God used through Jesus to bring the message of the Kingdom and of salvation from sins first to Israel and then to the world.

The next thing we learned was that some unnamed scribe assisted Hosea in writing this message down and recording it for posterity. Employing a scribe (a professional writer) would have been a usual and customary way of handling

such a literary endeavor in Hosea's era. The proof that a scribe played a key role in this book is because of chapters 1 and 2 speak about Hosea in the 3rd person (he) and not in the 1st person (I).

We also discussed another important Hebrew term that dominates the early parts of Hosea: *zonah*. *Zonah* is properly translated to English as prostitute, harlot, or whore. However, the vast majority of times in the Old Testament that the term *zonah* is used, it is not meant literally but rather metaphorically as an illustration. That is, it is a strong term meant to startle and also to describe (usually) God's view that some individual, or His people as a nation, was behaving as an unfaithful wife behaves. This fact ties in with the concepts of covenant and marriage in the Bible.

We read of a few covenants in the Bible that involve God. The first that includes the Hebrews is the Covenant between God and Abraham that of itself led to the creation of the Hebrew ethnic group, and then later to Jacob (Abraham's grandson) who fathered the 12 tribes of Israel. Another and later covenant, The Covenant of Moses, was made specifically with those 12 tribes. In order to help Israel understand the relationship formed between them and God at Mt. Sinai, the covenant transaction was likened to a marriage. It was NOT a marriage; it is only that the institution of marriage that all societies embarked upon, and the concept of it being inherently understood by everyone in one form or another, was used as an easy illustration of sorts. Why? Because a marriage involves vows of faithfulness and fidelity, and usually of exclusivity between husband to wife, male to female, which are accepted in their particular culture. So, as an aid for Israel to have a good and memorable mental picture of their relationship with God, we find Him being portrayed as a husband with Israel as His wife. Since a prostitute is the opposite of a faithful marriage partner, then Israel not being obedient and faithful to Yehoveh is likened to prostitution and therefore Israel as a whore.

Moving to verse 2 of Hosea chapter 1, God commands that a drama of sorts be carried out by Hosea to create a visual and tangible illustration of what Hosea's prophecy is all about.

^{CJB} Hosea 1:2 *"Go, marry a whore, and have children with this whore; for the land is engaged in flagrant whoring, whoring away from ADONAI."*

The CJB translation is a poor one and there are others that are more literal and more correct. The KJV is a good representative of the more literal.

^{KJV} Hosea 1:2 *The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.*

It is ironic that even though there are significant differences between the CJB and the KJV, it is quite typical to interpret this verse as meaning exactly what the CJB says. And what the CJB says is that this wife Hosea is to find and marry is a prostitute. Thus, we get so many sermons and commentaries that speak of the great love affair of Hosea and this prostitute wife, and in mercy Hosea essentially overlooked this prostitute's profession and married her and loved her despite it all. And, they are wrong.

This marriage's single purpose is to educate Hosea to understand God's will in a most graphic way. She is NOT a whore; rather she is a wife of whoredoms. This is Hebrew idiom for the purpose of illustration (as I explained it is in nearly every case of prostitution in the Old Testament). We must transport ourselves into the 8th century B.C. and see things through Hosea's eyes. It is impossible that Yehoveh, God of Israel, would so deeply denounce prostitution in the Law of Moses and then turn around tell Hosea to marry a whore. Had Hosea felt he heard such a thing, he would have instantly known that this was not The Word of God speaking to him, but rather some wicked spirit.

It is true that the way the phrase "wife or whoredoms" is written is very odd and ungainly in English, but the concept **is** difficult to explain outside of the Hebrew language and culture. And, like so much else in most literature of any kind, and especially of the Holy Scriptures, we mustn't ever take a single verse out of its context because immediately in verse 2 we get the basis for characterizing this wife Hosea is to take as a "wife of whoredoms". It is "for the Land is engaged in flagrant whoring, whoring away from Adonai (Yehoveh)". Thus, once

again *zonah*, prostitution, is used not literally (as meaning illicit sex) but rather metaphorically (as meaning an unfaithful covenant partner). I think, perhaps, the best way (although not a perfect way) for us to think of it is as meaning "having a spirit of prostitution". We must also understand that the term the Land (meaning the *inhabitants* of the Land, the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom) is, to God, being unfaithful to Him. Let me stress this: they are being unfaithful on what basis? In other words, unfaithfulness is a relative term. I can't be un-faithful unless there is first a well-established principle, or law, or definition of being faithful. Clearly as we move through Hosea we'll find that the principle by which God determines faithfulness and therefore also un-faithfulness is according to the covenant He made with Israel 5 centuries or so earlier: the Covenant of Moses.

As a result of this marriage, naturally there will be children and they are called "children of whoredom"; that is, the marital offspring having the spirit of prostitution. Shortly we'll find that The Word even gives names to these children as symbolic...representative... of Israel's condition before God. I'll remind you here that this is NOT talking about the 2 tribes of the Southern Kingdom called Judah; only the 10 tribes of the North. Thus, when we add in the children we realize that on another level what is being described using the term *zonah*, harlots... prostitutes... is not the personal activity or occupation of an individual but rather it is a category or class of a person. So, here's the major take-away: this woman Hosea is to marry is simply an ordinary, everyday female Israelite member of the Northern Kingdom; neither better nor worse than any other Israelite woman. And the children that will be produced will be ordinary children; the same as all the other children of the Northern Kingdom; and this is the point. Essentially the wife and children are just random selections out of group (Israel) that represents the entire group.

^{CJB} Hosea 1:3 *So he went and married Gomer the daughter of Divlayim, and she conceived and bore him a son.*

The obedient Hosea does what The Word instructed him to do. He found a woman and married her. There is no reason to believe that he searched for an especially bad or promiscuous woman because there was no need to. Pretty much any Israelite woman he sought after would have fallen into the same category or

class. Nor did this happen overnight or even in a rush, because that's simply not how Hebrew culture worked. There would have been a proper courtship, the woman's father would have to be involved in a betrothal agreement, likely a bride-price would have been paid, and then some type of brief ceremony held where the father transferred his legal authority over his daughter to her husband, Hosea. Recall that I told you previously that all this took place over about a 35-year period.

The woman Hosea married is called Gomer. There is nothing about her name that seems to have any symbolic meaning. About all we know about her background is that she was the daughter of a man named *Divlayim*... and we don't know anything about him either. Some, like Rashi, have tried to find a symbolic meaning in his name but that is very dubious. In English these folks say it could mean fig cake, with the thought that the symbolic price for Gomer's metaphorical service of prostitution was a fig cake. Honestly, this is a stretch that I cannot subscribe to because the opening chapters of Hosea are not a weak attempt at a biography, so no useful biographical information is presented. This hasn't stopped several commentators from trying to construct a biography out of sheer speculation, but I'm not going to waste your time with my own attempt to construct one that could be no better. The symbolic meaning we are to ascribe to this is that after marriage Gomer goes astray (that is, after a marriage covenant is established Gomer breaks it) and it is meant to be an illustration of Israel making a covenant with Yehoveh and later going astray after other gods.

The story moves rapidly. Gomer becomes pregnant and a son is born. So, this rather destroys the notion that Gomer already had these children before she married Hosea (as some have suggested). In other words, that her profession as a prostitute resulted in her getting pregnant and bearing children on 3 previous occasions.

^{CJB} Hosea 1:4 *ADONAI said to him, "Call him Yizre'el, because in only a short time I will punish the house of Yehu for having shed blood at Yizre'el; I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Isra'el.*

God, in the form of The Word, tells Hosea what he is to name this son. The name is actually part of the message that is being sent to the Northern Kingdom

through Hosea. It is symbolic but also it refers to something that actually occurred and would occur in a different way again. So, as yet another reminder from our previous lesson, symbolic doesn't mean something didn't also happen in actuality. Hosea actually married a woman named Gomer. Gomer actually had a son, and Hosea actually gave this special name to that son. The name in Hebrew is *Yizre'el*. It means *el* (God) sows. This name is an omen of fertility and blessing. However, as it is meant here, it is used to recall something terrible that happened in the historical past. *Yizre'el* (that in English we are more used to hearing as Jezreel) is more familiar to us as the name of a place called the Jezreel Valley in Israel. Indeed, it was a bread basket for Israel due to its flat, well-watered and fertile soil.

In its basic form, then, the name given to Hosea's son was a one of blessing. However, God used it to remember a place of murder. It goes back to the infamous son of King *Omri* whose name was *Achav*. King *Achav* married the equally infamous Jezebel. It was at the city of Jezreel that Jezebel arranged to murder a fellow named Naboth. The story can be found in 1Kings 21 and it is worth reading in order to explain why God had named Hosea's son as He did.

READ 1KINGS 21 all

King *Achav* and his Queen, Jezebel, connived to take a vineyard away from Naboth, simply because *Achav* wanted it. They acquired it by murdering poor Naboth. *Achav* seems to have repented of this to a degree and so God said that He would not punish *Achav* and his family line for this atrocity during *Achav's* lifetime; rather He would do it after *Achav* died and His son took over the throne. In 2Kings 9 and 10 we read about a man named Jehu who murdered *Achav's* son, and the entire royal family, thus ending the dynasty. Blood ran in the streets of Jezreel as many died. Next Jehu died and his son Jeroboam II took over. King Jeroboam was punished by Yehoveh for the murder and mayhem that had happened years earlier in Jezreel. So why name Hosea's son as symbolic for what had happened so long ago? It was because of what Israel's rulers had been doing in order to obtain the throne for themselves (by each murdering the sitting king) and keeping it by appeasing the peoples' want of worshipping other gods. God always blames the leadership of a group or a nation for what they do wrong, and blesses them for what the group or nation

does right. Nonetheless, the entire group or nation will usually suffer because of the leaders' bad choices.

As a brief aside: it was the Prophet *Elisha* that instigated Jehu's bloody overthrow of the dynasty of *Omri*. Jehu is sometimes depicted as a good reformer of a corrupt and evil line of Israelite kings; but it was a relative "good". God used Jehu to kill off *Omri's* dynasty in what was a sort of final-straw incident when *Achav* had Naboth killed. Later God killed off Jehu's dynasty after his son Jeroboam II died. What we see throughout the Bible is that God will use mankind's propensity for evil against even His own people in order to punish them. Supernatural punishments (like for Sodom and Gomorrah) were rare; instead, God used humans to bring about His discipline and as we look around us in this chaotic period of history in the 21st century we must assume that this is still happening today.

As I mentioned in the Introduction to Hosea, Hosea began to prophesy during the reign of King Jeroboam II. This is why we read in verse 4 that God WILL punish the house of Jehu (that is, Jehu's dynasty); so, it had not happened just yet. But that is not all. One dynasty after another, one king after another, was murdered by the next. What each didn't know in their lust for power was that soon this would end as God said it would in the last half of verse 4: "I will put an end to the kingdom of the House of Israel". Forget dynasties: Israel itself would soon no longer exist.

CJB Hosea 1:5 *When that day comes, I will break the bow of Isra'el in the Yizre'el Valley."*

To break the bow means to lose a battle militarily. So, in the same place that *Achav* had Naboth murdered; and where the horrific destruction of the Omri dynasty by Jehu occurred; at one of the most fruitful and blessed pieces of ground in the Northern Kingdom, Israel would fight a battle against a foreign invader... and lose. They would lose not only the battle but they would also lose their Land and even their right to live there. The Kingdom of Assyria would be that invading enemy and they would deport the conquered 10 tribes of Israel to far flung locations all over Asia and North Africa.

^{CJB} Hosea 1:6 *She conceived again and bore a daughter. ADONAI said to him, "Name her Lo-Ruchamah [unpitied], for I will no longer have pity on the house of Isra'el. By no means will I forgive them.*

The story continues to pick up speed as we're told that Gomer gave Hosea yet another child; this one a daughter. While the son was given a name that actually was quite nice, but for God's purpose it was to be used as a dark history lesson, this daughter's name is *Lo-Ruchamah* that means no pity or no mercy or not loved. That's probably not something any Hebrew normally would name their child! As a man with daughters and granddaughters I can tell you that love is so vitally important for them that to be called unloved is perhaps one of the worst curses they could ever suffer. Remember: in the Hebrew culture a name wasn't merely some form of ID. Rather names were carefully chosen and given to represent qualities and attributes of a person. I can't imagine what this child thought of her own name that says her quality was to be unloved; it would have been devastating. It is exactly this devastation of no longer being loved that God would curse the Northern Kingdom with. As He says to end this verse: "By no means will I forgive them". Translation: Israel is doomed. The time for repentance has passed. There is some line-in-the-sand that lay out there even for God's people that when crossed, God takes action. Where is that line? I don't know; but I do know it is there. No amount of pleading with Him or promises to change were going to forestall what would happen to Israel. Were there still good and faithful God worshippers among those 10 tribes that had NOT taken up with other gods? Of course. Hosea himself was one of those. What was going to happen was not individual by individual but rather corporately; so, all... righteous or wicked... who resided in the North would suffer.

Hosea is so much more than a history lesson. It is necessary that we, as God's Believers, understand how this same scenario may affect us or our immediate posterity. As evil keeps rising and begins to finally overrun this planet (as the Bible says it surely will), and wars and depravations on a scale we have yet to see happen break out, this is NOT God's direct wrath. It will be a global punishment, but not a global wrath; there is a difference. Israel was not going to suffer God's supernatural wrath; volcanoes wouldn't explode and meteors from the sky wouldn't rain down on them all at God's command. Rather God would simply step back, stop blessing Israel with protection and, like a matador side-stepping a

charging bull, allow Assyria to have their wicked way with Israel. When the Bible speaks of End Times tribulation it is speaking of essentially the same thing. It is not that God is sending His supernatural wrath; rather He will just step back and let the wickedness of the worldwide population suffer at the hands of the most evil men ever to live and rule. I'll say this plainly; the so-called Tribulation so often spoken about among Christians will not be an event of God's wrath; it will simply be a time of men's evil running rampant without the restraining power of The Lord.

Why, then, if there is not one thing Israel can do about holding off God from allowing Israel to be smashed, conquered, exiled, and in this way suffer punishment, is The Word telling Hosea about it? Is Yehoveh merely rubbing Israel's face in it, so to speak? No. It is meant to warn those who have the ears to hear, and for future generations to learn and understand what happened and why. What is the expectation of the warned? First to repent and second to prepare. Therefore, I call upon us all to take a long look not only at our own individual lives, but also the character of the national society in which we live, perhaps even our various social associations, and evaluate them. Do you or they reflect biblically defined Godliness? Or might you or they reflect a kind of Church-created manmade definition of Godliness that pleases people and follows social trends? Or might you or they reflect no kind of Godliness whatsoever? In all these cases confession and repentance while called for, will not stave off the inevitable. But... on an individual level during this soon-coming period of unprecedented tribulation, you can have eternal spiritual safety.

So, we should be wise and prepare for what the period of tremendous tribulations will inflict upon us all, without exception. Could it happen soon? Even tomorrow? Has not the Covid pandemic as well as near global level catastrophes of the past shown us how the seemingly improbable can arrive in an instant? I refer to preparing in practical ways, as opposed to digging underground bunkers. Common sense driven; not fear and panic driven. Securing food, savings, shelter, safety. An alternative energy source might be important in this day and age. There is so much we can all do to help and protect our families, our friends, and even ourselves to survive. Surviving not in the sense of giving in to our anxieties and constantly focusing on the what-ifs of life, but rather of reasonable preparedness that once done, we can move on. This preparedness should begin

by learning to live within our means and not on debt. We can acquire emergency items slowly, steadily but intentionally, over a period of time. We can create a plan for what to do if the worst happens, and be ready to carry it out. This sort of thinking does not reflect a lack of faith; it is a demonstration **of** faith because God has told us unprecedented bad times are coming and we're choosing to believe Him and take action. He has given us ample warning well in advance; maybe given us a taste of what it is going to look like... so that we can do the best we can, have the time to make rational and long-range plans, and not just blindly believe that our human governments or charities will care for us even if they wish they could. Or that God will single us out and somehow supernaturally protect us from physical harm or financial disaster; that's not how it works. Preparedness is a fundamental biblical principle; both earthly and spiritually. It is our God commanded duty and obligation to prepare. So, while we are preparing on a physical level we also must prepare on a spiritual level by seeking God and His truth...and living it out. Further we are to take this preparedness message to others and not hoard it. All of this is what Hosea is to relay and to demonstrate to the doomed people of the Northern Kingdom by means of his odd family dynamics.

^{CJB} **Hosea 1:7** *But I will pity the house of Y'hudah; I will save them not by bow, sword, battle, horses or cavalry, but by ADONAI their God."*

It is quite common among Bible scholars to say that some editor added this verse far later in time because the stream of thought of the narrative gets interrupted. I find that to be quite ingenuous and is merely part of an ongoing effort even within Christianity to discredit the accuracy and truth of the Bible. The style of the writing and what is being communicated fits nicely with verse 7. The issue is most important for an Israelite living in the North hear. It is that there is a back-door escape route if they will but take it when the time comes. They can flee to the South. But... it takes the faith to believe the warning and take action versus hoping upon hope that what God says is going to happen, won't; or deciding they'll just accept whatever fate befalls them with a fatalistic attitude. They know that if they do flee they will have to humble themselves and adapt to the government and religious system of Judah in order to be welcomed.

Further, in rather typical Hebrew literary style (that actually involves a bit of poetry), when The Word communicates to Hosea that God will have “pity” on the House of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) there is a play on words taking place. The previous verse said that God would have no pity (*lo racham*) on the House of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) but WILL have pity (*racham*) on the House of Judah. So, whatever the translation of the root word *racham* into English (mercy, love, pity), God will withhold it from Israel and act in the opposite way towards Judah. Further Judah will be saved not because God will stand behind their military and they will be victorious in battle against mighty Assyria (while Israel will be defeated). Rather it is that while God is pulling away His supernatural blessing of protection from Israel, He will continue to be a protective covering over Judah. In this case for political reasons Assyria decided not to invade Judah when they easily could have.

Yehoveh, God of Israel, all throughout Bible history has intervened in the politics and in the military as it concerns His people. It is no different today. The reborn nation of Israel... tiny as compared to almost all other nations and especially so to their surrounding neighbors... by any human standard stands no chance of survival. The day that the UN voted to recognize Israel as a sovereign nation of Jews, they were attacked by 6 armies of their neighbors. Israel had no air force and not much more than handheld weapons. No nation came to fight beside them. Somehow... impossibly... Israel won. It makes no sense. It is one of the most infuriating and shameful things that ever happened to Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia that had set aside their own considerable differences for a few days in order to bring their combined military might against a nation of around 500,000 at that time. This defeat has continued to echo at least among some of those nations ever since and only strengthened their resolve to regain their honor by pushing Israel into the Mediterranean.

How could such an improbable thing have happened? It was because just as God had protected (first) united Israel, and then the two Kingdoms of Israel and Judah for so long, defeat no matter how mighty the opposing force was impossible. That proposition had come to an end for the 10 tribes of the North. But around 130 years later, the same would happen for Judah, and the entire nation of Israel... all 12 tribes... would disappear from the world’s landscape for 2500 years.

So, Hosea with Gomer has now fathered a son and a daughter. Next another son will be born and God's living message to the Northern Kingdom will have been given according to the names of each of these children. That's what we'll open with next time.