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T. W. Crafer  
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## INTRODUCTION

### § 1. THE HISTORY OF THE PERIOD.

It was once the custom to study the prophetic in the light of the historical books of the Old Testament. The difficult utterances of the former were read in conformity with the simple narratives of the latter. We have now come to realise that the prophets represent living voices of contemporary comment on the period in which they lived; whereas the historical books were compiled centuries later in their present form. The latter do indeed incorporate narratives which date back earlier than the prophets, but these are embedded in a record which looks back to a distant past. This has given a new value to the study of the prophets, as revealing the inner life of their nation from the 8th century B.C. onwards.

But it is necessary to begin with an outline of the history in one's mind, which may be obtained not only from books of the Bible, but also from the records of the great nations by which the chosen people were surrounded, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. The giving of approximate dates is meant only as a guide to the sequence of events. The separation of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had taken place about 940 B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah had remained true to Rehoboam and his descendants, so they had still a prince of the house of David in Uzziah (called in Kings Azariah), who came to the throne about 783 B.C. With the temple at Jerusalem as the centre of their worship, and but little connexion with other nations owing to their isolated position among the hills, away from the caravan route which was a highway of the nations, they had kept themselves comparatively free from the influence

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of the baser religions and grosser morals of the heathen world around them. But it was otherwise with the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel, who held the more spacious and fertile territory which was traversed by the caravan route which skirted the coast-line from Egypt, and then crossed the plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon, which has been the battleground of the nations as well as their highway.

Not only did they suffer severely from the inroads of their northern neighbour Syria, but they were continually menaced by the two great empires, Egypt in the south-west, and Assyria in the north-east. Moreover they were influenced greatly both in religion and morals by the nations with whom they came in contact, and at one period, during the dynasty of Ahab, various forms of the worship of Baal almost ousted that of Jehovah. But no one dynasty continued in power for long, and successful revolutions were frequent in their history. One of the most important was in about 840 B.C. when Jehu ended the dynasty which had popularised Baal, and destroyed his cult at the same time. In the period that followed, the nation was nominally true to Jehovah as their local God, but the cult of the Golden Calves, which Jeroboam had set up, inclined them to idolatry. Moreover their religion was largely modelled on the grossly immoral cult of Baal and other foreign deities. This meant that there were actually sanctuaries in Israel where, in the name of what they pictured as the creative and productive power of nature, women offered themselves as prostitutes, and men gratified their sinful lusts and called it a religious rite. Such degrading immoralities must be mentioned in order that Hosea's words may be understood, and they help to explain how the century that followed was one of national decay. Yet there soon came a period of great outward prosperity, which really only made things worse. About the same time that Uzziah became king in

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Judah, c. 783, there arose the most powerful and successful of all Israel's kings in the person of Jeroboam II. A brief summary of his forty years' reign is found in 2 Kings xiv. 23–29. He extended his borders, ended the continual menace from Syria, and created such a period of commercial prosperity that Amos describes his nobles as lying on beds of ivory and drinking wine in bowls. But the new commercial spirit only brutalised them, and they sought to add to their wealth by dishonesty, injustice and oppression of the poor (Amos vi. 4–6 and viii. 4–6). After the king's death, c. 743, decay led to speedy collapse. His son Zechariah was deposed after a few months by Shallum, but the usurper was at once assassinated by his rival Menahem, who succeeded in remaining on the throne till c. 737, and bequeathing it to his son Pekahiah. But the great king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser ('Pul' of 2 Kings xv. 19) was pressing out the life of the nations which resisted his advance, and Menahem only bought a temporary respite from this new menace by paying a heavy tribute. Pekahiah only remained two years on his precarious throne. For he was assassinated in his palace at Samaria by Pekah, one of his captains, who reigned until he was himself assassinated by Hoshea c. 730. But Pekah's policy was worse than Menahem's. He made alliance with Rezin of Syria against the mighty foe advancing to destroy them both, and they both declared war on Judah when that country refused to join the hopeless confederacy. In 734 the blow fell; the Assyrians took Damascus and destroyed Syria, and, after an attack on the northern parts of Israel, deported many of their inhabitants. It was therefore a sorry kingdom which Hoshea seized, and his only hope of safety was to become the vassal of Assyria. But there was still a remote chance that Egypt could be persuaded to come out and fight the rival empire which was drawing so near to her own borders. This would mean that Hoshea was freed

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from his vassalage. He therefore in c. 725 invited So (or Sabako) of Egypt to his aid, and threw off the Assyrian yoke. But So never came; instead of him, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser arrived before the walls of Samaria, and after a long and hopeless siege the city fell in 721. The population was then deported, and Israel was wiped off the map. The fall of the nation, and its inner causes, is forcibly described in 2 Kings xvii.

Meanwhile Judah likewise nearly fell before Assyria. Uzziah died shortly after his northern contemporary Jeroboam II, and stormy years followed for his successors Jotham and Ahaz. The latter came to the throne in c. 735, about the same time that Pekah seized the northern kingship, and was attacked by the latter because he refused to join him against Assyria. His own policy was to appeal to Tiglath-Pileser for help, in spite of the advice of Isaiah to remain quiet within his Judaeen fastnesses. The flood of invasion which swept away Israel in 721 failed to reach as far as Judah, where Hezekiah had succeeded his father Ahaz. It was 20 years later, in 701, that the crisis came for Judah, in the invasion of the Assyrians under Sennacherib, and the siege of Jerusalem. If the nation survived the crisis, and the holy city did not meet the same fate as Samaria, but enjoyed another century of freedom, the cause was in something more than the varying fortune of war, and depended also on the different moral and spiritual conditions of the two kingdoms. It is for this inner side of the history that we turn to the prophets for guidance.

#### § 2. THE WORK OF THE PROPHETS—AMOS AND HOSEA.

The work of the prophets in the 8th century B.C. was not a new thing. In the northern kingdom Elijah had witnessed for Jehovah against Baal, and withstood to his face the sinful Ahab. Elisha had had a happier task, and

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had saved the southern kingdom from a calamity in its war with Moab. But it was not till the time of Jeroboam II that a prophet arose whose words were written down and are still to be known and read. About the year 760 a man of Judah appeared in the northern kingdom, and uttered a series of denunciations against the hypocritical and profligate conditions which he saw there, with stern warnings that these things were drawing the nation inevitably to punishment and exile. They were outraging the justice of their righteous God, and were sealing their doom thereby. Although these warnings were repeated over a period of several years, their only effect (apart from the stirring of uneasy consciences that must have followed) seems to have been that Amos was warned off as an impudent intruder by the representatives of religion (Amos vii. 10). But he gave to the world a new realisation of a God who was not merely local or national, but was concerned with all the nations of the earth. This God was not simply the protector of His people; on the contrary, the higher their privilege, the greater their responsibility. To worship a God of righteousness was in itself a call to live righteously. Failing this, the day of the Lord, to which they complacently looked forward, would be darkness and not light (Amos v. 18). The stern moralist bore his witness and departed, and in his place arose Hosea, no visitor from the south, but a man of Israel, for whom the condition of his nation was still nearer to his heart. During the ten years beginning about 745 (only a few years after Amos had ceased to warn), Hosea uttered a series, not of mere warnings, but of tender appeals, based not on the righteousness of Jehovah, but on His love. The last chance given to the decadent nation lay in the appeal to them to return to the God whose love they had outraged, and give Him an answering love, which should extend also to their fellow-men. Nothing short of a national repentance would do,

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and so Hosea the Israelite addresses, not the men and women of Israel, as the prophet from Judah had done, but the nation itself, which he personifies throughout, sometimes calling it by the name of Ephraim, its central and dominant tribe. The two prophets form a complete contrast, and their relation is well worth study<sup>1</sup>. But though the form of their appeal was different, the message itself was the same. 'The religious world has always been divided into men who look at the questions of faith from the standpoint of universal ethics, and men by whom moral truths are habitually approached from a personal sense of the grace of God....But Yahveh chose his prophets from men of both types, and preached the same lesson to Israel through both<sup>2</sup>.' But the nation gave heed to neither, and headed straight for moral and religious bankruptcy. A nation that has not lost its soul cannot be wiped off the map by a conquering enemy (Belgium is a modern illustration of this truth). But that is exactly what had happened to Israel, and so, about a dozen years after Hosea's patriotic efforts seem to have ended, it collapsed irrevocably. It was more than the ill-fortune of war; for it had sinned against light, against the Holy Spirit 'Who spake by the prophets.'

### § 3. HOSEA AND HIS MESSAGE.

Although we know nothing about Hosea except from his own words, he appears before us as so attractive, and indeed so pathetic, a personality, that to read the book without learning to know its author is to lose half its interest and meaning. In no other book of the Bible, except the Psalms and perhaps some of S. Paul's Epistles, does the author open to the world in all simplicity his own

<sup>1</sup> See Harper, *I.C.C.* pp. cxlv-clv. G. A. Smith, *Expositor's Bible*, pp. 227-231.

<sup>2</sup> W. Robertson Smith, *Prophets of Israel*, p. 163.

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throbbing and bleeding heart. The psychologist may like to study and dissect it, but there is something so movingly human in Hosea that all the world may feel their kinship with him, provided that they move on high enough planes of religious emotion. And throughout he is intensely and sometimes painfully practical. Never was a man less separable from his message. First he lived it, and then he spoke it. And so we must consider both him and it in one section, passing in review (a) His personal life, (b) The message which it suggested, (c) His message as a whole.

(a) *His personal life.* In the first three chapters he tells the sad story of his life, and the grievous thing which wrecked his home. He had married a wife named Gomer, and his exquisite description of Jehovah teaching his son Israel to walk, in the infancy of the nation, and holding him by the arms (xi. 3) reveals him as a man in whose life domestic love came first, and we can imagine him with his own little son Jezreel. But the immorality of his day, often indulged in, as we have seen, in the name of religion, was having its inevitable effect on the nation, and causing women as well as men to regard lightly the marriage bond, and seek other lovers. Hosea's own wife proved thus unfaithful, and when a second child was born, he knew that he was not its father, and so he called the fatherless little daughter Lo-ruhamah, 'unpitied,' or 'unloved.' In time another son was born to his 'wife of whoredoms,' whom he called Lo-ammi, 'not my people,' or 'not my kin.' And all the while he refused to divorce or expel his wife. For his tender love for her never ceased, in spite of all the pain, and he hoped she would see at length the error of her ways, and respond to the unflinching appeal of his love. Instead of this, she deserted him for some other man, and followed the inevitable drift of such a life until she was in the position of a slave-concubine. Here was the opportunity for her husband's undying love. He bought her back to him for half the price of a slave,

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and kept her for a while in his home, not in her former honoured position as the wife of his bosom, but apart, under a gentle restraint, until such time as she realised her sin. It may be that this tragedy of home had no happy ending. Or the husband's unending hope may at length have had its reward, and, accepting the two last children as his own, he took the prefix from their names, and called them Ruhamah, 'pitied', and Ammi, 'my people'. And yet, had this been the case, he would surely have tried to forget the sorrows of the past, and keep them locked in his own breast. But as he utters his message, we find him still in bitter anguish of soul, transferring the private tragedy of his own relation with his unfaithful wife, in order to illustrate by it the public tragedy of his nation, the unfaithful spouse of faithful Jehovah, who would fain draw her back to Himself in love, and be the Father of all her children.

(b) *The message suggested by his personal life.* We do not know how soon Hosea became a prophet. It has been surmised, from his familiarity with the priests and their perverted aims, that he was himself a priest, lamenting the degeneracy of his fellows. But there is no indication that he was one who saw visions, and through them was impelled to give utterance to what he had seen of the mind of God. Nor was he a prophet whose first object was to foretell the horrors which were so speedily to befall his nation. Prophecy was with him more of the New Testament type, an inspired preaching which revealed God to men. So sure was he whence his message came, that he felt no need to preface the divine message, as the other prophets so often did, with 'Thus saith the Lord.' He was doubtless profoundly moved by the preaching of Amos, though to his emotional nature it must have seemed to leave out the highest thing of all, the love that conquers all. But the form of his own message was shaped by his personal experience. As he brooded in silent agony over



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the unfaithfulness of his wife, the thought came to him that the love for her which still burned in his own heart was like Jehovah's love for unfaithful Israel. When his first child was born he called him 'Jezreel,' 'God shall scatter,' in plain reference to the scattering that should befall his nation. This symbolic name is akin to those which Isaiah gave his sons (Is. vii. 3 and viii. 1), and indicates that he already felt himself to be a prophet. To the next children he gives names which may have only been suggested by their being born to his wife in sin. But Loruhamah, 'unpitied,' suited equally well the land that had forfeited the right to God's pity, and 'Lo-ammi' was just what the fatherly heart of God must feel about the people who had ceased to be His. And so, in the certainty of his own undying love as husband and father, there comes to him, perhaps not a vision, but an intuition of the love of God to Israel. And as he uses all means to win back his wife, and awaken her love once more, he feels that, by the pathetic recital of his own story, he can touch the heart of his nation, and draw it back to God. But as there must come a time of punishment and probation first, he realises that, just as he keeps his wife in solitude for a while, waiting patiently for the change to come in her which alone can make the restoration complete, so God must send Israel into exile, to await a full restoration which must depend upon herself. We have said that it is doubtful whether his wife had responded when he spoke his message. Did he expect a restoration of Israel after its fall? The answer to this is to be found in the final prophecy of his book (ch. xiv.) where Ephraim puts away idols and delights to be 'like a green fir tree,' and Jehovah assures his restored people 'from me is thy fruit found.' But some critics regard ch. xiv. as an addition to the book made by some later hand. This must be discussed later (*infra*, pp. 19, 20), but it is enough to say here that, even if that last prophecy

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be set aside, it is difficult to think that he can have placed his God below himself in the lastingness of his hopeful and expectant love.

This message, which occupies the first three chapters of his book, seems to have been uttered while Jeroboam was still on the throne, in the years preceding 743. An indication of this is found in his prediction that the blood of Jezreel (where Ahab was killed by Jehu) should be avenged 'upon the house of Jehu' (i. 4). For Jeroboam (whose dynasty ended with the murder of his son Zechariah after a reign of only a few months) was evidently still reigning. The prophet gives this as the reason why he called his own son 'Jezreel.' The rest of his book evidently dates from the period of anarchy and rapid decline which followed the first of a series of usurpations six months after Jeroboam's death. In these later prophecies he makes no further reference to his own domestic experience. But, though the message is no longer conveyed by such picturesque means, the tone and attitude are the same throughout.

(c) *The prophet's message as a whole.* Hosea judges his people's needs by the contrast which he saw between the character and demands of God, in his own mind, and in the thought and practice of the nation. Reference should therefore be made to the following paragraph (§ 4) on his theology and religious ideas. He felt that the only chance for this decadent Israel, which had lost the knowledge of God, was in a complete change of attitude and of life. Their ignorance of God's real character had led them into three things: (1) a corrupted worship of Jehovah, which copied the gross immoralities of Canaanitish heathenism; (2) a state of political anarchy, which made them turn to one usurping king after another; (3) a weak and hesitating foreign policy, which made them put their faith in some great alliance, without being able to agree whether it should be with Assyria or Egypt. The same sin was at