

Session 1: The Prophet Hosea

I. The Prophet's Words

Sandwiched between the story of Hosea's unhappy marriage in chapters 1 and 3 come the words which interpret that story.

Activity 1.5

Read again Hosea chapter 2 and make notes on the following questions:

- Who do you think is "I" throughout this chapter?
- Who or what do you think is the "mother" the prophet is talking about in verses 2 and 3?
- Who do you think are the children of verse 4?
- And who are the lovers of verses 5, 7 and 10?
- What can you gather from this chapter about what the people of Israel hoped for from their religious festivals?
- What change in their attitude does it appear that Yahweh was seeking?

1i. The Prophet as Messenger

Chapter 2 presents Hosea's message in words. This was an oral culture in which few people could read or write. So to send a message to someone, it was rarely possible to write it down and expect the recipient to read it at the other end. Instead, you sent a messenger. You told the messenger exactly what you wanted him to say. He would then go to the person to whom the message was addressed. He would first say, "Thus says so-and-so ..." and then speak in the first person, repeating word-for-word the message he had been given. Depending on the circumstances, you, as the message sender, might give the messenger permission to interpret and explain the message. Obviously this would depend on how much you trusted him to get it right.

You can see this taking place in ordinary situations in the cases of the brothers Jacob and Esau in Genesis and between King Balak and the sooth-sayer Balaam in the book of Numbers.

Genesis 32:3-6

Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, 'Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, "I have lived with Laban as an alien, and stayed until now; and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male and female slaves; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favour in your sight." ' The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, 'We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.'

Numbers 22:15-17

Once again Balak sent officials, more numerous and more distinguished than these. They came to Balaam and said to him, 'Thus says Balak son of Zippor: "Do not let anything hinder you from coming to me; for I will surely do you great honour, and whatever you say to me I will do; come, curse this people for me." '

This convention of speech is known as the MESSENGER FORMULA. As a prophet, Hosea is acting as a messenger for Yahweh, repeating words Yahweh gives him as a message for his people. Thus the "I" of chapter 2 is not Hosea but Yahweh.