

Preface To The Prophet Hosea (1532)

Hosea lived and preached, as he himself indicates in the title, at the time of Jeroboam, the second and last king of Israel, at which time Isaiah also lived in Judah, also Amos and Micah; but Hosea was the oldest of them.

Jeroboam, too, was a fine and fortunate king and did much for the kingdom of Israel, as 2 Kings testifies in chapter 2 Kings 14:23; nevertheless, he continued in the old idolatry of his ancestors, the kings of Israel, so that, although there were many fine men in the nation, they could not make the people righteous. For the devil had inflicted this misery on the people, that they always killed the prophets and sacrificed their children to the idols, and so filled the land with the guilt of blood, because of which he here threatens Jezreel, in Hosea 1:3.

It appears, however, as though this prophecy of Hosea was not fully and entirely written, but that pieces and sayings out of his preaching were arranged and brought together into a book; but we can trace and discover in it this much, at least, — he performed two duties, fully and boldly. The first was that, in his time, he preached hard against idolatry and bravely rebuked the people, together with his princes and priests, because of which he certainly tasted of death, like the others, and had to die as a heretic against the priests and a rebel against the king; for that is a prophetic and apostolic death, and so Christ Himself had to die. The second was that he also prophesied powerfully and very encouragingly about Christ and His kingdom, as is shown especially by chapters 2, 8 and 14.

But no one should think, because he uses the words “harlot” and “harlotry” many times and took a harlot-wife (chapter 1) that he was unchaste in words and works; for he speaks in a spiritual sense, and the “harlot-wife” was his real, honest wife, and with her he begot legitimate children; but the wife and children had to bear those shameful names as a sign and rebuke to the idolatrous nation, which was full of spiritual harlotry, that is, idolatry, as he himself says in the text, “The land runneth from the Lord after whoredom.” In the same way Jeremiah wore the wooden yoke and carried the cup, and all the prophets usually did some strange thing as a sign to the people. So here, Hosea’s wife and children had to have harlots’ names as a sign against the whoring, idolatrous nation. For it is not to be believed that God would bid a prophet practice harlotry, though some have thus interpreted this passage in Hosea.