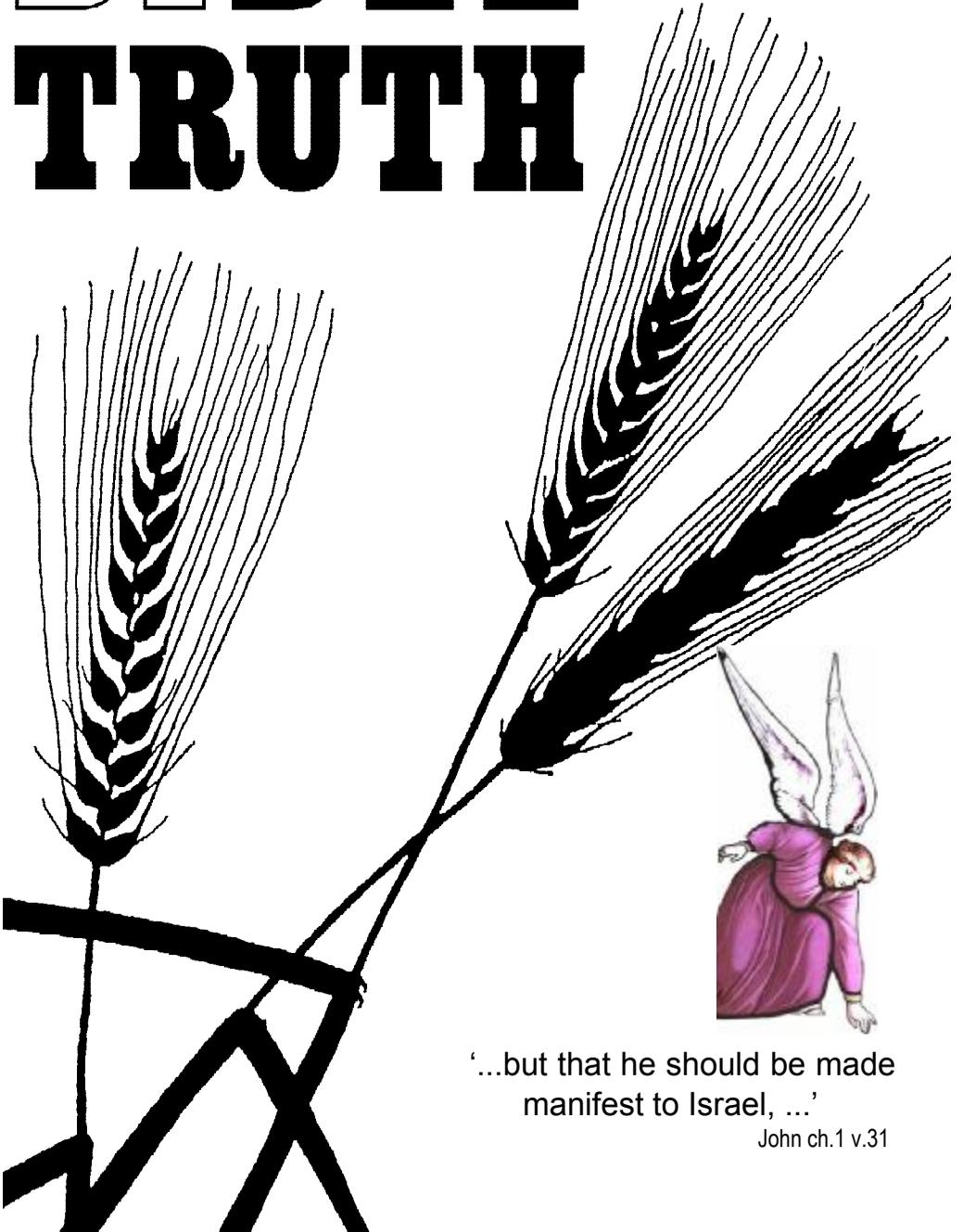


BIBLE TRUTH

No. 273
January/March 2014



'...but that he should be made
manifest to Israel, ...'

John ch.1 v.31

Hosea, 'The Jeremiah Of Israel'

by Pastor Jory Steven Brooks

The Prophet Hosea's book is the first of what are known as the 'minor' or short prophets of the Old Testament, whose writings were shorter in length than the writings of the 'major' prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. Yet Hosea's prophecies were not only important, but of especial interest for us today in the lands of Western Christendom, for as the *Biblical Encyclopedia* (Gray and Adams) tells us,

'The prophecies of Hosea were addressed to the Ten Tribes'.

(iii:713)

Nevertheless, many commentaries seem to overlook the historic and prophetic importance of the division of Israel into two nations, which Hosea labels 'Ephraim' and 'Judah'. The nation of Ephraim (who descended from Joseph) constituted the northern ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, receiving this name from their largest tribe and inheritor of the national birthright blessings (1 Chronicles ch.5 vv 1-2). Bible reference books often simply refer to them as 'Israel', or 'the House of Israel', in contrast to two-tribe Judah.

Yet some commentaries attempt to make Hosea's prophecies fit the return of the House of Judah to Canaan after the Babylonian captivity. This does such violence to the meaning of the prophecies that even well-known dispensationalist author, Arno C. Gabelein, rebuked such a view and declared,

'His [Hosea's] prophecy is directed almost exclusively to the house of Israel'.

The book of the prophet Hosea could in fact be described as the redemptive history of the ten-tribe House of Israel. Here the prophet presents an account of her sin, punishment and restoration, beginning his first chapter with a concise synopsis using prophetic and symbolic language. He has little good to say of Israel's then current moral condition in the opening verses of this first chapter; his terse, harsh, sad words remind one of his later Judean counterpart, the Prophet Jeremiah. In fact, the *Biblical Encyclopedia* says,

'... he was the Jeremiah of Israel'.

Although Hosea had a similar moral message to Jeremiah, calling for repentance from sin, yet the House of Israel's prophetic prospects were significantly different from those of Judah. The dissimilarity, however, is not clearly understood at all by modern expositors, who fail to give the nation of Ephraim-Israel any future in the plan of God. One strangely declares,

'The prophets of Judah could look forward to a restored people and a repaired polity. The ten tribes had no separate future. Their temporal punishment was irreversible'.

(ibid., p.712)

Or was it? A closer look at Hosea's prophecies sharply contradicts that claim. Despite Ephraim's sin, Hosea forecasts what can only be considered a magnificent future for the House of Israel. They were to rid themselves of their idols, become the Lord's bride, receive mercy, be saved by the Lord's might, and expand greatly in numbers as the sand on the seashore. To ignore all of this – and more – is to be blind indeed to Hosea's tremendous prophetic promises. Yet the expositors who recognize only the Jews as legitimate Israelites after the end of the Babylonian captivity have just such blind confusion. And their confusion can only increase as Hosea's prophesied blessings upon Ephraim-Israel increase.

There are other mysteries for the expositors. In the parallel passages Hosea ch.1 v.11 & Jeremiah ch.3 v.18, if Judah and Israel were taken into two different exiles by two different enemies (Babylon and Assyria), how is it that Judah shall walk with Israel? *The Keil-Delitzsch Old Testament Commentary* maintains that verse eleven,

'... presupposes that Judah will find itself in the same situation as Israel; that is to say, that it will also be rejected by the Lord'.

(x:47)

Yet this we know for a fact did not happen, for Hosea records,

'... I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God ...'.

Hosea ch.1 v.7

Instead, Scripture informs us that the Assyrians who conquered Israel also captured all of the 'fenced cities' of Judah in 701 BC (2 Kings ch.18 v.13), and so a main body of Judah went into Assyrian exile along with Israel. Thus, Judah walked with, or to, Israel in their exile.

Yet this was not yet the prophesied final reunion of Israel and Judah, for as Keil-Delitzsch states, ‘... the object of the union is to appoint themselves one head, and go up out of the land’ (x:47) according to Hosea ch.1 v.11. Where then did they together go? Some leading commentaries recognize that they did not return to old Canaan!

For example, the *Keil-Delitzsch Old Testament Commentary* (x:49) says,

‘So far as the fulfilment of this prophecy is concerned, the fact that the patriarchal promise of the innumerable multiplication of Israel is to be realized through the pardon and restoration of Israel ... shows clearly enough that we are not to look for this in the return of the ten tribes from captivity to Palestine, their native land. ... the numbers of the ten tribes, who may have attached themselves to the Judaeans on their return, or who returned to Galilee afterwards as years rolled by, formed but a very small fraction of the number that had been carried away; the attachment of these few to Judah could not properly be called a union of the sons of Israel and of the sons of Judah, and still less was it a fulfilment of the words, “They appoint themselves one head” ... this fulfilment falls within the Messianic times, and hitherto has only been realized in very small beginnings, which furnish a pledge of their complete fulfilment in the last times ... (Romans ch.11 vv 25-26)’.

This eminent commentary contradicts much of the popular teaching today concerning Ephraim, the House of Israel. The ten tribes never returned to Palestine, other than a tiny remnant, and therefore logically must remain ‘lost tribes’ in our world today. Further, the joining of the two houses of Judah and Ephraim-Israel has not yet taken place, awaiting the dawn of the millennial age. Yet, Keil-Delitzsch's solution is that Ephraim-Israel must only be a spiritual people in our world today (x:49).

There is another mystery in ch.1 v.11 which concludes by saying, ‘... for great shall be the day of Jezreel’. These words cause untold consternation for the expositors.

‘The day of Jezreel causes no little difficulty’, admits Keil-Delitzsch (x:48). This is true, if the verse is made to refer to the city and valley in old Canaan where Assyria broke Israel's might (see 2 Kings ch.15 v.29). How could a place of tragedy for Israel be a symbol for anything good? But taking instead the Hebrew meaning of ‘scattering’ or ‘sowing’, it makes eminent sense. Israel was to be scattered and sown in the lands of her exile, so that Hosea could proclaim that she

would become 'as the sand of the sea' for multitude (ch.1 v.10). This cannot await a millennial fulfilment, since Israel will not be in exile then.

The word, 'Jezreel', has a double meaning of sowing or scattering, yet the latter meaning is often neglected by many commentaries, who thus fail to see that Ephraim-Israel did not return to Canaan, but travelled far afield in her exile down to the present day.

The New Testament treatment of Hosea's tremendous prophecy in ch.1 v.10 was given by the Apostle Paul in Romans ch.9 vv 25-26. Paul quoted this to show that during Israel's exile, her 'sowing in the earth' (See Hosea ch.2 v.23) still continued to that time, and that Israel's restoration still lay in the future. Some expositors try to spiritualize this, but since the spiritual fulfilment of prophecy parallels and augments the physical fulfilment, Israel's physical exile must have still continued to the time of Christ.

Has no one noticed the incongruity of giving Judah's prophecies a literal, physical fulfilment, while limiting Ephraim-Israel's prophecies to the spiritual realm? In actual fact, the physical and spiritual realms parallel one another as a necessary double witness (Deuteronomy ch.19 v.15, Matthew ch.18 v.16 & 2 Corinthians ch.13 v.1).

Furthermore, from other prophecies (for example Ezekiel 37) we know that Ephraim-Israel's spiritual restoration was to precede her physical reunion with Judah. This true spiritual restoration could only begin to take place with the coming of Christ, as Peter proclaimed in the New Testament, 'Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy' (1 Peter ch.2 v.10). Peter's language is lifted directly from Hosea ch.1 v.10 and ch.2 v.23, showing clearly that these Old Testament prophecies of Ephraim-Israel's physical and spiritual restoration had not previously been fulfilled.

Paul in Romans ch.9 v.26 also quoted Hosea ch.1 v.10, giving an emphatic reference to their physical 'place' of exile, and then in the next chapter declares that the Gospel must go to the ends of the earth (Romans ch.10 v.18). Clearly, Ephraim-Israel had not been physically regathered to old Canaan! Her scattering took her to new lands of promise, where her spiritual restoration is now well underway.

'Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime.'

2 Samuel ch.7 v.10