Hosea - Commentaries by Henri L. Rossier

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This book constitutes part of the divinely inspired Scriptures among which it occupies a well-distinguished place. It presents to us, relative to Israel, the people of God, a remarkable display of the ways of God, of which the Bible in its perfect unity presents the whole. From this point of view, it is of great interest. There we find precious teaching and, as in all the books of the Old Testament, here we find shadows of that which answers to Christ and His earthly people in the future.

After the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4) had permitted the Jews, captives at Babylon, to re-enter their land and to rebuild the temple, we view them as being in two distinct positions.

A small number of them profited by the decree and returned to their land. There they are not formally recognized by God because “Lo Ammi” (not my people) had been pronounced upon them, and the time of lifting the sentence had not yet come (see Hos. 1:9-11). But working with faith and under the action of the Spirit of God (Ezra 1:5; Hag. 1:14), they carried themselves as faithful Jews in the land. We see them as keeping the ordinances of the law of Moses, raising their altar and offering sacrifices, reconstructing the temple and raising the walls of Jerusalem.

It is true, the glory of Jehovah did not come to the temple of these sons of the dispersion, as it had filled the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple of Solomon; no, the glory is departed (Ezra 11:22-25); the throne of Jehovah is no more at Jerusalem. No mention is made of the ark which also has never been in this new temple. “For,” said Jehovah by Haggai to the returned captives, “I am with you … according to the word that I covenanted … when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not” (Hag. 2:4-5). To faith God was there and that house was His temple. Consequently, the Jews keep themselves apart from the nations, read the Scriptures and hold to them, and follow the ways of the God of Israel, as far as the Gentile powers, under whose dominion they were, allowed them. Never since this time have they, as a nation, fallen again into idolatry. They call upon God, and God protects them in their dangers and sustains them in their difficulties. They have rulers, liberators and prophets.

This state of “the sons of the dispersion” is the subject of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and part of Zechariah. Malachi, the last of the prophets, witnesses to the ruin that this state, alas, would turn into at a later time. But marvelous grace, it was then that God’s faithful servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, came into this dark world!

This then is a new condition into which they are brought and put on trial. As we have said, the throne of God is no longer there, the glory of God is no longer is the temple, and there is no more “priest with Urim and Thummim” to render the oracles of God (Neh. 7:65; Num. 27:21), but we repeat, for faith this is always the house of God; as such the Lord Jesus recognized it (though it was another temple then). (Hag. 2:3, comp. John 2:16.)

The Jews which returned to their land are always bondslaves, dependent on the nations (Neh. 9:36-38). They have been gathered again in expectation of the Liberator, the Messiah (Hag. 2:7). This will be the last trial of man. Will they receive Him when He makes them hear His appeals of grace after urging them to repentance? We know the result by the gospel record and Malachi already shows the decline and the beginnings of the condition as found by Jesus when He came among them.

But a great many of the Jews — that is to say, of the Babylonian captivity — did not profit by the decree of Cyrus. They remained settled, not only at Babylon but dispersed throughout the provinces of the vast Persian empire (Esther 2:5-6; 3:6,8). One cannot but see in their conduct a lack of faith, of energy, of affection for the house of God. Nevertheless, they retain their customs which are different from those of the defiled nations. They stay separated even though in the midst of them. Here, of course, they have neither sacrifice, nor solemn feast days, nor the word of the Lord by means of prophets; nor can they keep the ordinances of the law of Moses in their entirety. They are, after a sort, in a position comparable to the Jews of our day; without king or prince, or sacrifice, or statutes, or ephod, or teraphim (Hos. 3:4). God does not recognize them, but whatever their state — and this is what puts into relief His goodness and faithfulness — His regard is for them; He acts in grace towards them; He protects and spares them, but His actions move in a hidden manner, and for this reason His name is never mentioned in this book.

It is this that we purpose tracing in this book, knowing the secret ways of the grace of God towards His people, dispersed throughout the nations till finally bringing them to the glory of the kingdom.

Let us examine some of the principal subjects which we find in this exceedingly interesting and instructive book.