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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Hosea

by Matthew Henry

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET

HOSEA

I. We have now before us the twelve minor prophets, which some of the ancients, in reckoning up the books of the Old Testament, put all together, and reckon but as *one book*. They are called the minor prophets, not because their writings are of any less authority or usefulness than those of the greater prophets, or as if these prophets were less in God's account or might be so in ours than the other, but only because they are shorter, and less in bulk, than the other. We have reason to think that these prophets preached as much as the others, but that they did not write so much, nor is so much of their preaching kept upon record. Many excellent prophets wrote nothing, and others but little, who yet were very useful in their day. And so in the Christian church there have been many burning and shining lights, who are not known to posterity by their writings, and yet were no way inferior in gifts, and graces, and serviceableness to their own generation, than those who are; and some who have left but little behind them, and make no great figure among authors, were yet as valuable men as the more voluminous writers. These twelve small prophets, Josephus says, were put into one volume by the *men of the great synagogue* in Ezra's time, of which learned and pious body of men the last three of these twelve prophets are supposed to have been themselves members. These are what remained of the scattered pieces of inspired writing. Antiquaries value the *fragmenta veterum* — *the fragments of antiquity*; these are the fragments of prophecy, which are carefully gathered up by the divine Providence and the care of the church, that nothing might be lost, as St. Paul's short epistles after his long ones. The son of Sirach speaks of these twelve prophets with honour, as men that *strengthened Jacob*, Ecclus. 49:10. Nine of these prophets prophesied before the captivity, and the last three after the return of the Jews to their own land. Some difference there is in the order of these books. We place them as the ancient Hebrew did; and all agree to put Hosea first; but the ancient thing is not material. And,

if we covet to place them according to their seniority, as to some of them we shall find no certainty.

II. We have before us the prophecy of Hosea, who was the first of all the writing prophets, being raised up somewhat before the time of Isaiah. The ancients say, He was of Bethshemesh, and of the tribe of Issachar. He continued very long a prophet; the Jews reckoned that he prophesied nearly fourscore and ten years; so that, as Jerome observes, he prophesied of the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes when it was at a great distance, and lived himself to see and lament it, and to improve it when it was over, for warning to its sister kingdom. The scope of his prophecy is to discover sin, and to denounce the judgments of God against a people that would not be reformed. The style is very concise and sententious, above any of the prophets; and in some places it seems to be like the book of Proverbs, without connexion, and rather to be called Hosea's *sayings* than Hosea's *sermons*. And a weighty adage may sometimes do more service than a laboured discourse. Huetius observes that many passages in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel seem to refer to, and to be borrowed from, the prophet Hosea, who wrote a good while before them. As ²⁰⁷⁸Jeremiah 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; and ²⁰⁷³Ezekiel 26:13, speak the same with ²⁰⁷¹Hosea 2:11; so ²⁰⁶⁶Ezekiel 16:16, etc., is taken from ²⁰⁷⁸Hosea 2:8. And that promise of *servng the Lord their God, and David their king,* ²⁰⁷⁸Jeremiah 30:8, 9. ²⁰⁷²Ezekiel 34:23, *Hosea* had before, 3:5. And ²⁰⁷²Ezekiel 19:12 is taken from ²⁰⁷⁵Hosea 13:15. Thus one prophet confirms and corroborates another; and all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit.