water was in abundance and fruits and forage were provided for man and beast. Now they must depend upon their own skill in planting, cultivating and harvesting—*and the uncontrollable factors of rainfall and soil fertility.*

Inasmuch as Moses had not taught them that other gods did not exist (only that they should have no other gods *before* Yahweh), it was easy to convince them that to worship the local gods of the soil was just good business. Therefore they built shrines for the *Baalim* alongside their altars to Yahweh. They were never far away from the temptation to mix paganism with Yahwehism.

108. How long did this condition last?

We find evidences of it all the way down through Hebrew history from the wilderness to the Exile (Judges 17:5; 18:14-20).

109. Did the Hebrews practice sacred prostitution?

Amos found it in vogue in Israel (Amos 2:7). It is impossible to know just to what extent it was practiced by the Hebrews, but that it went on inside the land is certain. The migrants from other lands brought it in with them and practiced it at the altars erected to their gods in various Hebrew cities. Hebrew women became enmeshed in the pagan systems in various ways, and it was impossible to tolerate it among the foreigners without its effects appearing among the Israelites themselves.

110. What part did Hosea play in this situation?

His earlier sermons seem to have been vigorous denunciations of the prevailing immoralities of the time. He was keenly sensitive to the sins of Israel and spoke out against them, sometimes with deep passion (Hosea, chapters 1-3). He condemned the political blunders of the government especially.

111. What were those political blunders?

As the Assyrian menace grew, the kingdom of Israel turned instinctively to Egypt for help. Egyptian diplomats, always at the courts of the small nations, made large promises in behalf of their home government in the hope that the little Palestinian states might serve as an effectual buffer holding the mighty Assyria at bay. Clearer than any other man in the kingdom Hosea saw the folly of such an alliance and denounced it with all his might (5:13; 7:11, 15; 8:9; 9:3; 12:1; 14:3). He seems to have recognized the duplicity of Egypt and the terrible might of the oncoming Assyrian, and he did all in his power to keep his king clear of entangling alliances with the nation which he so rightly judged to be a faithless ally. He could foresee that any such arrangement with Egypt would only anger the Assyrians and hasten the day when the land would be overrun.

112. Was Hosea a political preacher?

His first sermons were passionate pleas that the nation should keep clear of alliances. They dealt with political and international issues, but in every case Hosea announced what he believed to be the judgment of God. The turning point in his career, however, came in connection with a great domestic tragedy.

113. What was that domestic tragedy?

Hosea married a girl by the name of Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim (1:3). The mention of her father lends credence to the belief that she was the daughter of one of the small rural landed aristocrats. Sometime after her marriage to Hosea Gomer took up with the licentious rites practiced at the pagan shrines, and gave herself over as one of the sacred prostitutes. She was not sold into the life but entered of her own free will. It is quite possible that she did so for religious reasons, and perhaps the charge of viciousness should not be lodged against her. But the domestic tragedy was hardly lessened by any religious sanction it may have had in Gomer's mind. Nevertheless Hosea went on loving her, and when she was cast off by the shrine Hosea found her in a slave market and purchased her for the price of a slave, taking her into the country with the intention of wooing her back to virtue. The fact that he continued to love such a woman was something of a mystery to the prophet himself, but as he thought about the matter he came to the conclusion that if love such as his could exist for such a woman as Gomer, then surely the love of Jehovah must persist for such a nation as Israel. The tragedy of his own life caused him to see the sins of the nation in a new light. He came to understand that Jehovah loved Israel as he loved Gomer. With this new message he went out to preach to the nation again, this time of the love of Yahweh.

114. Why call it a new message?

His earlier sermons were full of bitterness and scathing indictments. He had seen the sins of the nation and poured out his wrath upon the people and their political leaders without mercy. But his own tragedy corrected his vision, and his later messages were models of tenderness and winsome love.

115. What are the facts of the marriage story?

1. The marriage to Gomer (1:2-3).
2. The birth of the first child, Jezreel (1:4-5).
3. The birth of the second child, Not pitied (1:6).
4. The birth of the third child, Not my people (1:9).
5. Gomer's search for other lovers (2:5).
6. The vain appeal of the children (2:2).
7. Gomer's self-confidence (5:15; 6:1-3).
8. Hosea finds her in the slave market (3:2).