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The Mission
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Hosea 1

So tonight we're going to begin with a new book in the Old Testament, or at least a new book to us. And we're going to look at the book of Hosea. And you might want to go ahead and try and find it. I promise you it's in there somewhere. It's right after the Book of Daniel which we studied not long ago.

And this is a book or a story about a prophet and a prostitute. And you might ask; why in the world would God include a story like this in the Bible?

Well, we're going to learn the answer to that question and more as we go forward, but before we do, let me give you a little background about the minor prophets in general as well as this book and its author.

Now, the minor prophets, of which there are twelve, is a collection of books in the Old Testament, which give us insight into, not only who God is, but also how God works in the lives of nations and people. They also contain much history about Israel and Judah. And though the text of a minor prophet, in most cases, is not as long as the text of a major prophet, that doesn't make them any less important.

And here's a list of the twelve in the order they appear in the Bible. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and the last one is Malachi.

Now, that's the order they appear in the Bible, but that's not the chronological order. And why God didn't arrange them in chronological order I don't know. Maybe I'll remember to ask God that question when I get to heaven, or maybe I won't, we'll see.

At any rate, from this point on, I had intended to teach them in chronological order, but I don't know what that is. And I don't think anybody else does either. And if you take the time to research that, you're going to find that they're are as many opinions and lists as Carter has little pills. And though I've spent hours trying to determine which list is correct, I'm no closer tonight than I was when I started several days ago.

And so we're just going to go with them from this point on in the order they appear in the Bible or the order in which God leads us to study them and we'll try our best along the way to determine where they fit chronologically.

Now, we've already studied Jonah and then we studied Nahum. And so we have ten more minor prophets to go. And eventually if I live long enough, and the Lord tarries long enough, we'll make our way through all of them.

And again, along the way, I'll give you the timeline best I can.

Now, we do know that Hosea prophesied from around 760 B.C. to around 710 B.C. and we know that because he tells us who the kings

are during the time of his prophecy. That's in verse 1. And from history we know when they reigned and so from that we know the general time period when Hosea prophesied.

And so he was after Jonah, and somewhere around the same time as Amos and Isaiah and Micah. And all of the prophets who I just mentioned would have prophesied sometime during the 8th century.

Now, keep in mind, this was after the division of Israel. After Solomon's reign, the kingdom, if you'll remember was divided. And Israel who would make up of the northern kingdom and Judah would be the southern kingdom.

The northern kingdom included 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel. The southern kingdom included only two. Those were the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and of course King David was from the tribe of Judah and so was Jesus.

Now, the northern kingdom of Israel, was also known as Ephraim, which was the largest tribe, but they were also sometimes called Samaria, and of course Shechem was the capital. And then the southern kingdom of Judah had Jerusalem as its capital.

Now, Hosea would have also been alive when Israel fell to the Assyrians which happened in 722 BC. But he would died prior the Babylonian exile of the southern kingdom which didn't occur until 587 B.C.

Now, Hosea, we believe was more than likely from the northern kingdom, and though he prophesied mostly with respect to the kingdom of Israel, he did prophesy to Judah as well.

Now, the setting in which he prophesied was this. Things were going pretty well for both the north and the south. They were experiencing a time of peace and prosperity, but along with it, there was a falling away from God.

There was moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy among the people. And isn't it strange that during the good times, people tend to get more distant from God and during the hard times or during times of persecution, people draw closer to God.

That seems to be our human nature, does it not?

Well, from history, we know the good times didn't last and after Jeroboam II's death in 753 B.C., things started to decline very rapidly in Israel. And they continued to decline until they were eventually overthrown by the Assyrians. And again that was around 722 B.C.

And so Hosea is prophesying during the days leading up to this fall of the northern kingdom.

But now, circumstances in the southern kingdom were no better. And though their judgement would be delayed, it would eventually come.

Now, a number of themes run throughout the book of Hosea. We're going to see how much God loves us, and how He's long-suffering and kind, and merciful and gracious and forgiving and not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and be saved. And so it's a book about restoration, and it's the gospel on steroids if you will.

But it's also a book about consequences and about judgment, because along with all those attributes that we love about God, come also these other attributes that we don't necessarily embrace.

And so we're going to see what the Israelites experienced, because of their choice to turn away from God, and to sin by turning to idols and to other gods. And how their choice to separate themselves personally from God affected their entire nation.

And we're going to see just how disastrous that decision was, but we're also going to see and learn about reconciliation and their restoration.

And so to tell this story, God is going to use Hosea's own life as a symbol or metaphor if you will for this relationship. And He's going to use the prophet Hosea's marriage to a woman named Gomer, who would ultimately be unfaithful to her husband to show us how the nation Israel had related to God during this time period.

Now, two things right off will probably seem rather strange to you and maybe even disturbing to you. First, that God would want Hosea to marry a woman who He knew would become a prostitute. And second, that He would want Hosea to marry a woman named Gomer. I mean can you imagine?

Hi, my name's Grady and this is my wife Gomer, and oh by the way, she's a prostitute!

Now, why would God do that?

Well, the answer and we're going to see the answer as we go through this book; is because God had a greater purpose and plan for this marriage!

Just like God's silence for those four hundred years between the Old and New Testament, may have seemed very disturbing to folks, God had a plan. And God always has a plan, even when we can't see it, or understand it.

And so as we're going to see, Hosea's life and ministry serve not only as prophecy for Israel at that time, but also as a reminder to us, about the consequences of choice, and the power of forgiveness, and also the importance of virtue and commitment.

And so let's look verse by verse at what happens in this story.

And if you haven't already, go ahead and turn to chapter one and to verse one.

Now, something to keep in mind as we go forward. The Book of Hosea can be broken up into two sections; each with its own theme. First, there's the story of Hosea and Gomer and their children. And then secondly, there's the story of God and Israel. And both are stories are about broken covenants. Both include relationships which get violated, but then later get restored.

As we know about the covenant that God made with Israel through Abraham. That's the Abrahamic Covenant and we find that record in.

Genesis 12:1-3 and I'll read it for you. It says, Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From

your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.

2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So this the covenant that God made with Abraham, but what kind of covenant was this?

Was it conditional or unconditional?

Well, for the most part it was unconditional?

This covenant was made by God to Abraham and His promise to make Abraham a great nation was all on Him. It was all on God to make that come to pass.

But now there were certain blessings attached to that covenant that required obedience. And so those blessings were conditional. They hinged on the obedience of the people.

Now, how do we know that God will fulfill that promise?

Because that's one of His attributes. God is faithful and God is trustworthy and when God says He will do something, He will always do it no matter what.

And so Abraham and his family couldn't do anything to make God change His mind. He made a promise to make them into a great nation and He would fulfill that promise. And He has fulfilled that promise to a certain degree.

They did possess the land of Canaan as God promised them in the Old Testament and they did become a physical nation in 1948 and of course Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment as far as blessing the nations, but the full and final fulfillment won't come about until Jesus returns.

Now, to describe God's relationship to the nation of Israel, He's going to use the institution of marriage.

Now, the institution of marriage in God's eyes is a lifelong promise between a man and a woman. And when a man and woman are married, God's intends for that man and woman to be faithful to each other, and to help one another, and to serve one another, and to love one another, and to even be willing to die for one another.

And when the Lord told Hosea to marry Gomer, God knew beforehand that she would become unfaithful, and that she would commit adultery. But He had Hosea marry her anyway, because God wanted to give to the Jewish people a real life example of how their relationship with Him was going. In other words, He wanted to show them how they were being unfaithful to Him, and how they too, were guilty of adultery.

And so this marriage that God initiated was to serve as a symbol for the relationship between God and His chosen people; the people of Israel.

And so look at verse 1.

Hosea 1:1, The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and

Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

And so we're told that the word of the LORD had come to Hosea; a word that he was to speak forth to the people. And that, phrase, the word of the Lord came, is used to introduce many other prophetic books of the Bible. And by the way, this is also a definition of the term prophet. A prophet of God is one who speaks forth the word of God to the people.

And then we're told that Hosea was the son of Beeri. That was his father, and we don't know anything about him. And really we don't know much more about Hosea.

And we know his name means "salvation." It comes from the same Hebrew root word (hoshea) as the names Joshua and Jesus. And throughout this book, Hosea will show us that salvation is found only in the Lord and only through turning from our sin and turning to the LORD.

And then like I told you before, we know the timeframe in which Hosea ministered, by this list of kings that he gives us. In the last part of verse one, he mentions the names of four kings in Judah and one king in Israel.

And so what does that tell us?

And so we know he ministered during the time in which the kingdom of Israel was divided, with Israel to the North and Judah to the south. And we know that Hosea's ministry was during the reign of these particular kings, which meant that it would spanned the years

between 760 B.C. and 710 B.C. , which was some 250 years after the time of King David, and some 650 years since Israel had come into the Promised Land.

Now, like I said, in the beginning of Hosea's ministry, things were going pretty good in the nation of Israel. The economy was good, there was peace in the land and people were prospering, but they were drifting farther and farther away from the Lord. And idolatry was prevalent and they were apathetic at best in their worship and they were sinking deeper and deeper into sin.

And so in verse 2, the Lord begins to speak to Hosea and he tells him to

2 “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the Lord.”

Now, some might question the moral implications of God's command for Hosea to marry a prostitute?

But that's assuming that she was a prostitute when he married her, which would be a problem. Because that would be against God's moral character and also against the nature of God.

And so she more than likely was not a prostitute when he married her, but rather became a prostitute at some later time.

In other words, when God says “go take yourself a wife of harlotry” He's looking into the future or at least her future. And He's seeing her as she will be, not as she is.

An already immoral woman could never serve as a picture of Israel coming out of Egypt, who then later wandered away from God.

Because when we get to chapter 3 it's going to describe how Hosea takes back his wife, who has been rejected because of adultery. If she had been a prostitute before he married her and he knew it, then he wouldn't have any reason to reject her after he married her for doing what he already knew she did.

In other words, it would be unjustifiable for Hosea to reject her after having married her knowing she was a prostitute and having full knowledge of her character beforehand.

So look at verse 3

3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

4 Then the Lord said to him: “Call his name Jezreel, For in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

5 It shall come to pass in that day

That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

So God's going to use not only this marriage between Hosea and Gomer, but He's also going to use these children to present a real life spiritual lesson for the nation Israel.

Jezreel is the name of the son; and it means “God will scatter.” And God says, “I will avenge the blood of Jezreel.”

Well, Jezreel is the name of a city, and it's also the name of a famous plain, the plain of Armageddon, or the Valley of Armageddon. And it not only has a long, bloody history and but it has a bloody future to come as well. Because it's going be here that the Battle of Armageddon during the last days will be fought.

And what God is saying here is that He is going to scatter the northern kingdom.

6 And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: “Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, But I will utterly take them away.

God named her Lo-ruhamah, which means "not loved" or "no mercy" or that she "never knew a father's pity." And it may have been implying that she was illegitimate and didn't know who her father was.

At any rate, Israel had crossed over that invisible line. God was saying through this circumstance to the people of Israel who had gone back into idolatry, "You'll no longer know My pity, because I'm not your Father." No more love! No more mercy!

And this wasn't the first time this had happened nor would it be the last. Others crossed over line as well. In

Genesis 6:3, And the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

This was before the flood. God through Noah was warning the people, but they wouldn't listen. And they too crossed over that line. They too rejected the call of God to be saved one too many times.

There is a point of no return in man's rejection of God. God's Spirit will not strive with man forever. And if for no other reason, this out to be reason enough for all of us to say, that today is the day of salvation and today is the day to respond in faith to Christ. Because we have no promise or guarantee that God will draw us some other day.

7 Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, Will save them by the Lord their God, And will not save them by bow, Nor by sword or battle, By horses or horsemen.”

In other words, Israel had crossed over the line, while Judah had more time. In fact, this was probably during the reign of one of Judah's good kings and so the Lord was pleased with them at the moment, but that wouldn't last, because they too would be judged in a few more years. And then verse 8 says,

8 Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son.

9 Then God said: “Call his name Lo-Ammi, For you are not My people, And I will not be your God.

What sad words, those must have been for the people in Israel. You're not My people and I'm not your Lord. Those are sad words.

This third child was named Lo-ammi, which means “not my people.” Or “not my child.” And if there was a question about whether

the second child was legitimate or illegitimate; there's no question whatsoever about this one.

God in no uncertain terms is telling the nation Israel, "You're not my people, and I will not be your God."

Now, if this were the only verse in the Bible, we'd have to conclude that God is through with the nation Israel. But of course it's not the only verse, and in fact the next few verses makes it clear that God is not through with Israel.

10 "Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them,

'You are not My people,' There it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.'

11 Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel Shall be gathered together, And appoint for themselves one head; And they shall come up out of the land, For great will be the day of Jezreel!

The truth is the Hebrew people have been decimated time and time again by persecution. I mean just think of what Hitler did! He killed over 6 million Jews, 2/3 of the Jewish population in Europe. And yet here God says, they're only going to increase in number.

And one day also they're going be united under one leader and that one leader will be Christ.

They don't have that today. In fact, they've never really had it, but one day they will.

So that finishes up chapter one. Next week we'll go to chapter 2.