

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
January 17, 2016

Lesson Text: Hosea 1:1-11
Lesson Title: An Unfaithful Bride

Introduction

The prophet Hosea began his ministry to Israel shortly after the time of Amos and continued until Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians. He was most likely a native of Northern Israel, which partially explains his frequent references to Lebanon, Tabor, Samaria, Bethel, Jezreel and Ramah. Hosea's ministry was prominent during the final days of Jeroboam II, under whose guidance Israel was enjoying both political peace and material prosperity (755-725 B.C.). In spite of the material prosperity, moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy was conquering God's people. The people were characterized by stubbornness and rebellion (Hosea 4:1-5). Instead of heeding the words of the prophet when her sin was exposed, Israel turned to Assyria for help (Hosea 5:14). Turning to Assyria would provide no help since the Lord was using Assyria to punish Israel for her disobedience and sin.

Hosea is best known as the prophet of love who lived what the nation of Israel was experiencing. In the first three chapters of Hosea, the prophet was called to marry "*a wife of whoredoms*" (Hosea 1:2) to illustrate God's covenant with idolatrous Israel. Likewise, he was called upon to love and purchase his adulterous wife from the auction block. His humble actions demonstrated God's love for Israel. Hosea's love for his unfaithful bride paralleled God's love for Israel.

The Historical Situation (Hosea 1:1-2a)

Verse 1

"The word of the LORD that came unto 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. The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea..."

Hosea begins his prophecy with the words "The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea...The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea...And the LORD said to Hosea." These three phrases declare this entire prophecy has been received by divine revelation. Hosea does not claim it as the creation of his own mind. This is significant because the prophecy deals so much with his personal life. The claim to divine revelation is also important because whatever the spiritual and social conditions may have been at the time of the writing, the

ultimate source of Hosea's prophecy was God. Hosea claims divine inspiration for his message.

Hosea names four kings of Judah, "Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah." These were the kings in the south at this particular time. These four kings of Judah are mentioned in Isaiah 1:1, showing Hosea and Isaiah were contemporaries. Hosea names one king of Israel, "Jeroboam the son of Joash." "The kings of Judah, of course, belonged to David's dynasty, the only dynasty the Lord accepted (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4). The kings of Israel were a wicked lot who followed the sins of Israel's first king, Jeroboam I, and refused to repent and turn to God (2 Kings 13:6)" *Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Amazed (Hosea, Joel)*.

The Personal Illustration (Hosea 1:2-9)

Verse 2b

"...Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD."

God spoke to Hosea and commanded him, "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms..." The word "Go" means God was commanding Hosea to marry. Is God commanding Hosea to search out a prostitute and marry her? No. The word "whoredom" is a broad term used throughout the book of Hosea for various types of sexual immorality. God did not command Hosea to take an immoral wife but permitted him to carry out his desire to marry Gomer, warning him that she would be unfaithful, and using the prophet's sad experience as a basis for the presentation of lessons about God's relation to Israel.

Because the Book of Hosea does not provide information concerning the premarital sexual status of Hosea's bride, and because of the wide spread immorality of God's people at this time, it is impossible to definitively know if Hosea's wife was sexually pure before marriage. The text seems to indicate she was pure at the time of marriage and later entered into a life of immorality, possibly after the birth of their first child. Like Israel, Hosea's bride was first pure and then wandered away from God (Hosea 9:10).

Hosea's marriage to "a wife" who entered a lifestyle of "whoredoms" was a real event with symbolic implications. His marriage was a personal illustration of Jehovah's unfaithful wife, Israel. Sometimes God required His prophets to live in difficult circumstances to convey His message (Isaiah 20:1-4; Ezekiel 4:1-5:4). Hosea's unhappy marriage was to symbolize the breakdown of proper relations between the Lord and the nation betrothed to Him at Mount Sinai.

The offspring resulting from Hosea's marriage will be "children of whoredoms." This statement points to the fact Hosea knew at some point his bride would be an unfaithful mother and the children she would bare would be fathered by other men. Hosea's marriage and his children was to depict God's marriage to Israel.

"For the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD" explains why Hosea has been commanded to marry and will watch his wife go away from him to the world. God's relation to His people was as a marriage covenant; while unfaithfulness on her part is spiritual adultery. Hosea would live this reality.

Verse 3

"So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son."

Hosea married a woman named "Gomer." It is possible the name "Gomer" means "completion," as if God is completely revealing the picture of Israel's departure from him through "Gomer's" marriage and adultery. She was the daughter of "Diblaim" which could be the literal name of her father, or of her father's hometown. The name "Diblaim" means "to press together in a round mass." It most likely refers to the pressing together of two cakes such as dried figs pressed together for eating. The thought here is Hosea, whose name means "salvation," has married a woman who is the "daughter" of "sweet pleasure."

After her marriage to Hosea, Gomer "conceived, and bare him a son." The language in verse three does not prove the first conceived child was the prophet's own son, though it might seem to favor it.

Verse 4

"And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel."

The names of Hosea's children signified certain truths to Israel. The "LORD said, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." The name "Jezreel" means "God sows." Hosea's first son was a prophetic symbol, reminding the people that the Lord would avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.

The name "Jezreel" was well known by the Israelites and was associated with blood shed. When Jehu was ascended to the throne of Israel, King Joram, the reigning king at that time had gone to Jezreel to be healed of battle wounds

received while fighting against the Syrians (2 Kings 8:28-29). As soon as Jehu was proclaimed king, he furiously drove his chariot to Jezreel, and there assassinated Joram, as well as the queen mother, Jezebel (2 Kings 9). Jehu also had the seventy sons of Ahab killed and all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel (2 Kings 9:14-10:11). It was a bloody mess!

It would appear that Jehu had exceeded his instructions for the destruction of Ahab's family acting purely for selfish reasons. So now God declares the blood shed in "Jezreel" will be avenged on the house of "Jehu" by bringing his dynasty to an end.

Combining the story of "Jehu" with the meaning of Jezreel, "God sows," the message is clear. God will sow destruction and put an end to "Jehu's" dynasty in Israel. This was fulfilled in 752 B.C. when Zechariah, the great-great-grandson of Jehu was assassinated.

Verse 5

"And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."

The "bow of Israel" means the power of the nation. The power "of Israel" will be broken "in the valley of Jezreel." God is promising the destruction of Israel's military power. The "valley of Jezreel" extended southeastward from north of Mount Carmel to the Jordan River. Most likely this is the location where the Assyrian army met and defeated the army of Israel.

Verse 6

"And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away."

The second child born in Hosea and Gomer's home was "a daughter." God instructed Hosea to name her "Loruhamah." The name means "she is not pitied, or loved." It is hard to imagine how this name affected Hosea and how the people reacted when they heard what he had named his daughter. God had loved His people and pitied them on many occasions. Because Israel had sinned so grievously and rejected God's pleas to repent and return to Him, He would now withdraw that love and no longer show them mercy. God promises to "utterly take them away."

This prophecy was fulfilled when the Assyrian army captured the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. The best of the people were taken to captivity and the poorer people were left to till the land. Whereas a partial return of the people of Judah in 586 B.C., that of the northern kingdom was final. Never did

the people of Samaria return to their own land. Thus they were “utterly taken away.”

Verse 7

“But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.”

Contrary to the fatal condition of idolatrous Israel, upon whom God will have “no pity” (Lo-ruhamah), “the house of Judah” is promised “mercy.” She will be spared and return home from captivity. Her coming home will not be by her own military power. She will be saved “by the LORD her God.” Her military might, “bow...sword...battle...horses and horsemen” will not save her. All of these items symbolized military might. But only “the LORD her God” would secure her return home.

Verse 8

“Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son.”

Children were usually “weaned” (finished breast-feeding) between the ages of two or three years. After Gomer had “weaned Loruhamah,” she “conceived” again and “bare a son.” The inclusion of this period of “weaning” could possibly imply the uninterrupted succession of the birth of these “children of whoredoms.” As soon as Gomer was finished nursing her daughter, she became pregnant with her third child, a son.

Verse 9

“Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.”

“Lo” means “not” and “ammi” means “my people.” Taken together, the name “Loammi” means “not my people.” This was the most striking and fearful name of all the children. Literally God is saying, “I am no longer ‘I Am’ to you.” This suggests the complete separation of Israel from God because of the willful disobedience of the people. That strikes at the very foundation of the nation of Israel being God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2). God would leave them to their own fate. It is the final note of judgment.

The Remarkable Explanation (Hosea 1:10-11)

Verse 10-11

“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.”

“Yet” means despite the assured fate of destruction and judgment, Hosea insisted Israel will be preserved. There is no contradiction here. Israel will be punished by God’s hand, banished from the land, and held in captivity; but she will not be annihilated! Instead, the LORD will preserve Israel although she has been an unfaithful wife.

In the coming days when the captivity is over “the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea.” Their population is going to explode past counting, like sand on the beach “which cannot be measured nor numbered.” In the “places” where it was said, “Ye are not my people,” or “Israel is nothing,” people will cry out again, “Ye are the sons of the living God.” The promises are in keeping with the Abrahamic Covenant. Not even an unfaithful wife can void God’s covenant!

This is nothing less than the amazing grace of God. God will one day in the future change Israel’s name from “not my people” to “Ye are the sons of the living God!” Judah and Israel will reunite as one nation and the Lord will rule them without division and sin. The splintered, divided kingdom will be healed from years of separation and dispersion. Only a loving Savior could cause that to happen.

Conclusion

Our lesson has taken us from a sad picture of judgment to a glorious promise of hope. Hosea married a wife who eventually engaged in immorality and was unfaithful. His marriage was symbolic of how God’s people, once faithful to Him, committed spiritual adultery and brought shame upon Him. The names of Hosea and Gomer’s children reflected the spiritual condition of the nation as God’s judgment moved from stage to stage and then final separation from His love.

The important feature of our lesson though, is not the symbolism in Hosea’s marriage to Gomer or the names of his children; rather, the importance is God promised preservation and restoration of His people. No less than the Israel of Hosea’s day, we as born again believers have sinned and failed the Lord in many ways. When we do, we always pay a price physically and spiritually. Like Israel of Hosea’s day, we look forward with great hope and anticipation of that future time when David’s heir, Jesus Christ, will reign in the midst of a regenerated and purified people composed of all tongues, tribes, and nations

living on a refreshed, God-enriched, and blessed earth (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15; 21-22).

Amen.