

Sunday June 28, 2020
Lesson 4: Forever Love
Scripture: Hosea 1: 2-11

Context:

As we have studied, along with the kings of ancient Israel and Judah, there were also prophets. Prophets acted as the mouthpiece of God, calling accountability from the people as well as royal leaders. They were often portrayed as outspoken and intensely pious in their walk with God. Today's lesson focuses on the prophet Hosea.

Hosea's story comes from the book of Hosea, the longest of the twelve Minor Prophets. According to the book, the career of Hosea is dated to the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (788-747 BCE) and to the reigns of Judah from Uzziah to Hezekiah, spanning most of the eight century BCE.¹ However, the evidence points to an earlier period as the book has no details of the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians in 722.² There are not many details of Hosea's background. Due to the frequent references to places and events in the northern kingdom, the clues indicate Hosea was from the north.³ The main focus of Hosea is not his background, but on his present life and the marriage he finds himself in.

Often the portrait of Gomer, Hosea's wife, is of a prostitute used to make a point. Yet, the word in Hebrew does not translate to prostitute as much as it does "promiscuity."⁴ Thus, Gomer was someone with a tinged sexual reputation, probably not revealed as much until after the marriage as later chapters in the book indicate.

The marriage is a rocky one and is meant to be a metaphor to the relationship of Yahweh and Israel. The three children are given symbolic names of what has taken place to the people. Jezreel, usually an ordinary name, recalls Jehu's extermination of the dynasty of Omri at Jezreel (2 Kings 9-10).⁵ The other names, No Compassion (or No Love in some translations) and Not-my-people are more to the point about how the people have erred and the tension between God and the people of Israel.

¹ Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 320.

² Ibid., 320.

³ Ibid., 320.

⁴ Ibid., 320.

⁵ Ibid., 320.

The marriage metaphor is a powerful one as the main point is to portray God as the faithful one. Even though Israel has broken the covenant and worshipped other gods as well as making foreign national alliances, God is faithful to them. Even though most of Hosea's book contains prophecies of doom and judgment, there is still anticipation of a restored relationship between Yahweh and God.⁶ God will restore their relationship despite their attempts to sabotage it.

Application

Wouldn't you have wanted to be a fly on the wall for the pre-marital counseling sessions between Hosea and Gomer? The odds are there was a lot of deception and glossing over issues. The rocky relationship painted in chapters one through three of the book alludes to a troubled marriage with one party completely devoted and the other devoted in word only.

Yet the marriage metaphor gives great insight into how we come to know God. God has claimed humanity and desires to have a healthy relationship. Like a healthy marriage, God expects for there to be devotion and respect between both parties. There is an understanding of covenant, a promise made between parties agreeing on what it is important in the relationship and how respect and honor will be preserved.

The story of Gomer and Hosea portrays what happens though when the covenant is broken and one individual does not keep to their promises. God makes a covenant with humanity and time and time again, we fail on our end of the covenant. We look to other relationships and other gods to fuel our own passions or desires.

Fortunately, the story in Hosea reminds us of how God will be faithful even when we are not. Even though Gomer continues to be promiscuous and the children's names reveal the doom of what is to come, verse ten assures the readers of God keeping God's promises. God will reclaim the people of Israel and Judah and they will be fruitful. The place of Jezreel will be a place of celebration again.

The passage gives us both a jolt of accountability and hope. We are reminded that even though God is all-powerful and all loving, God also expects things out of us. Just as a couple is walked through their vows and the importance of covenant before getting married, God wants us to look at what is being asked of us. We are to have one God and to follow our Lord with our witness, our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service. When we fail to worship just God and neglect any of the ways to participate in God's church, we break our part of the covenant.

Fortunately for us, God does not abandon us as we abandon God. Usually though, we begin to see the negative side results after the fact and realize we have missed out on the life-giving power of our God. We have not loved God and have tried to put too many eggs in too many different baskets. The end result is us feeling disconnected from God and perhaps an unrest within our soul.

The rest of this passage reminds us of the hope we have in God who loves us unconditionally. Luckily for us God is always there and does not choose to abandon or

⁶ Ibid., 325.

forsake us. Instead of rightfully dismissing and abandoning us, God stands with open arms to welcome us back into the fold and embrace our wayward selves. The wonderful thing with God is God doesn't keep count like we do of when someone transgresses against us. God is always present and recognizes us as the children of the living God.

What does the word covenant mean to you? Why do you think the marriage between Gomer and Hosea is such a powerful metaphor for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel? What are the pros and cons of using metaphors to describe our relationship with God? What are the areas you think God might be calling you to grow? Why do you think God unconditionally loves us?

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