

Lo-Ammi

Hosea 1:1-9

This afternoon we are going back in time about 750 years before Christ. As a result of the rivalry between Solomon's sons, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the unified nation of Israel had been divided in two. Those two kingdoms had fought almost constantly since they split apart in 1075 BC. Foreign enemies were often invading and harassing them both. But finally, over 300 years later, there was a time of peace and prosperity for both Israel and Judah. Jeroboam II reigned over the northern ten tribes of Israel. Uzziah reigned over the southern 2 tribes of Judah. Quite amazingly, they lived at peace with their neighbors and with each other. They enjoyed great prosperity, in an almost unprecedented era. Wealth was abundant. Agriculture flourished. Commerce and business expanded. Building trades thrived. There was a demand for luxury. Houses became palaces. They were built out of ivory. Summer homes were built for splendor and convenience.

And the prophet Hosea was God's spokesman to the northern kingdom of Israel. In 750 BC, it was just a few years before the conquest of Israel at the hands of the Assyrian army.

But there was a flip side to all of outward happiness. Prosperity brought pride and arrogance.

Isa. 9:9 "All the people will know-- Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria-- Who say in pride and arrogance of heart: 10 "The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with hewn stones; The sycamores are cut down, But we will replace them with cedars."

Alongside of those living in luxurious splendor, there were those living in abject poverty. Often, those who were penniless

were sold into slavery. In business, there was much deceit and oppression. The rich swallowed up the poor and took advantage of their poverty. And there was no law and justice. It was better to suffer in silence than look for justice, better to stay out of courts than lose the last of your possessions and be condemned as a criminal.

And what about the religious conditions?

Well, beginning with Jeroboam, idolatry was the official worship of the northern kingdom. High places and altars were built at places not commanded by God. And at those high places, worship was offered to images, idols and visual representations of God. And the worship of Baal was connected with the horrible form of immorality of "sacred prostitution." Prostitution even became a part of worship. Immorality and idolatry flourished. There was no truth nor mercy nor knowledge of God, but swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery. Consider the words of,

Hosea 4:1 "Hear the word of the LORD, You children of Israel, For the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy Or knowledge of God in the land. 2 By swearing and lying, Killing and stealing and committing adultery, They break all restraint, With bloodshed upon bloodshed."

It is worth noting how that description parallels our own country, for the situation in Israel in Hosea's day is a lot like our own country in our own day, isn't it? The context is different, for Israel as a nation was the nation of God, but sin doesn't really change. The sin is the same, as it has always been since the fall of Adam and Eve.

But for Israel, the end was about to come. As soon as

Jeroboam II's strong hands no longer held the reins, a period of political unrest, rebellion, and anarchy followed. The nation would be overrun, laid to siege, destroyed, and sent into exile. That happened in 722 BC.

During this time of unrest and confusion, while the nation without realizing it, was rushing headlong into ruin, Hosea preached and prophesied to his people, whom he loved so fervently. I want you to recognize how deeply he loved them. Thus, you can understand his grief and agony. He was sent to preach to a nation doomed to be cast out forever, his country, a people whom he loved!

But Hosea wouldn't be an ordinary prophet who would speak for God using only words. Instead, his whole life would be a message from God to the people. In a way unlike any other prophet. With Hosea,

I. GOD SPEAKS TO HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF THE PROPHET.

Look at what God tells Hosea to do.

v.1-2a

God says to the prophet, "Get married. "Take yourself a wife of harlotry." Marry an adulterous woman, one actively engaged in gross immorality, one actively involved in a lifestyle of adultery and fornication. The word may actually even refer to a professional prostitute. Take a wife of whoredoms, a wife of fornication. I can't say it any clearer and still speak in good taste.

Now this has really caused some people lots of problems. "Why would God do that?" Or even, in a rejection of these words as the word of God, some would say, "God wouldn't do that."

Some commentators, some very respected and conservative commentators, even go so far as to say that this is figurative, that it wasn't a literal marriage, just a parable or an allegory. Others say that the reference to an adulterous wife is simply a woman with that propensity to sexual sin but who was actually pure when Hosea married her.

But that's not what it says. It says, in plain English, or I should say, plain Hebrew, the Bible says that God commanded the prophet to marry a grossly immoral woman. And there is a plain and obvious reason for that command. As God would speak to his people through the life experiences of the prophet,

A. The sins of the people are represented by a harlot.

God is saying to his people Israel, "Hosea's wife represents you." Her name was Gomer.

Imagine having that message today. Imagine God saying to the visible church in our own country, "Your life is accurately represented by a harlot."

I believe he could say that today. It would be an accurate description. Our land is no different from the land of Israel in 750 BC. And in too many places, neither is the church!

"[Our] land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD." We have lost the sense of horror at sexual sin. The prevalence of pornography has made sexual impurity common place in the mind and heart of men. Most men, the majority of men, perhaps. We have lost a sense of sexual purity, in marriage. And before marriage. Our young people, teenagers, young adults in their 20s, have lost the sense of the beauty and the glory of sexual purity. We are so inundated with images and examples of sexual immorality and impurity, we have come to

think it is normal. Even within the church!

So God uses an image for his people to see their own sin for what it is. The image of a grossly immoral harlot. And God frequently uses sexual immorality as a symbol of spiritual idolatry. And for good reason, because it is something we can all identify with and understand. Let me read parts of one particularly uncomfortable passage,

Ezek. 23:1 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying:
2 “Son of man, there were two women, The daughters of one mother. 3 They committed harlotry in Egypt, They committed harlotry in their youth; Their breasts were there embraced, Their virgin bosom was there pressed. 4 Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; They were Mine, And they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah. 5 “Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; And she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians, 6 Who were clothed in purple, Captains and rulers, All of them desirable young men, Horsemen riding on horses. 7 Thus she committed her harlotry with them, All of them choice men of Assyria; And with all for whom she lusted, With all their idols, she defiled herself. 8 She has never given up her harlotry brought from Egypt, For in her youth they had lain with her, Pressed her virgin bosom, And poured out their immorality upon her.”

v.11 “Now although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became more corrupt in her lust than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister’s harlotry. 12 “She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians, Captains and rulers, Clothed most gorgeously, Horsemen riding on horses, All of them desirable young men. 13 Then I saw that she was defiled; Both took the same way. 14 But she increased her harlotry; She looked at men portrayed on the wall, Images of Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 Girded with

belts around their waists, Flowing turbans on their heads, All of them looking like captains, In the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, The land of their nativity. 16 As soon as her eyes saw them, She lusted for them And sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17 “Then the Babylonians came to her, into the bed of love, And they defiled her with their immorality; So she was defiled by them, and alienated herself from them. 18 She revealed her harlotry and uncovered her nakedness. Then I alienated Myself from her, As I had alienated Myself from her sister.”

Why does God include such a passage in Scripture? It’s embarrassing to read. And that’s the point. Spiritual adultery should be just as embarrassing and physical adultery. We should see sin as disgusting. We should be embarrassed by it. We should be ashamed by it. And turn from it. The sins of the people are accurately represent by a harlot. And we should see our sins in that light.

But we should also see the faithfulness of God. Just look at Hosea.

B. The faithfulness of God is represented by the prophet.

Actually, the emphasis here in Hosea 1 is not upon the unfaithfulness of Gomer, but upon the faithfulness of Hosea. The emphasis is not the immorality of Gomer but the graciousness of Hosea. Hosea took this woman to be his wife. He was faithful to her, he was loving to her.

Hosea’s life experiences are to be a message of God, a revelation of God. Hosea himself is called to represent God. For God is described in Scripture as a husband, a bride groom. And God’s people are called his bride.

And make no mistake about it, God has married an adulterous bride. God didn't marry us because we were righteous or pure. He married us knowing exactly what we were like, just like Hosea married Gomer knowing exactly what she was like.

Let me put that in NT terms:

Rom. 5:8 "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Or, Titus 3:4 "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

And, Eph. 2:4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

When you look at the marriage between Hosea and Gomer, you see a representation of the marriage between God and his people. With that image, learn to see your own sins represented accurately by gross immorality. Realize that when you sin against God, you are acting like a prostitute. Realize how disgusting those sins are in God's sight, as disgusting as a wife who plays the harlot despite the faithfulness of her husband.

You and I are that wife. So great is our sin. God is that husband. So great is his love!

So God speaks to his people throughout the life experiences of the prophet. First, his marriage. Then, his children.

II. THE PROPHET'S CHILDREN REPRESENT THE JUDGMENT OF GOD UPON THE PEOPLE.

Talk about a tough home life!

When we name our children, we often give them names with great significance. Names like Nathaniel, given by God. Or Timothy, honoring to God. We give them names that were names of godly men and women in Scripture. Names like Isaiah. Or Luke. Or Joshua. Esther, or, in my case, Elizabeth. Or Ruth.

Sometimes we give them names from our own family, to honor our own relatives and ancestors. But I doubt any of you would consider naming your children to represent God's judgment.

That's what the Lord commanded Hosea. First, Jezreel.
v.4-5

The firstborn son is named Jezreel. The meaning of his name is that,

A. God will bring judgment to people who are swift to shed blood.

Jezreel was a fertile plain in Israel, a place marked by terrible bloodshed. The valley of Jezreel was desecrated by murder and massacre.

First, by the murder of Naboth. Let me read the description to you.

1 Kings 21:1 And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money." 3 But Naboth said to Ahab,

“The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!” 4 So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. 5 But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, “Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?” 6 He said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” 7 Then Jezebel his wife said to him, “You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

Jezebel had Naboth put to death. She wrote letters in Ahab’s name to the elders of the city, initiating this conspiracy,

1 Kings 21:9 She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; 10 and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, “You have blasphemed God and the king.” Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die.”

Her orders were obeyed. And God’s response? It came through the prophet Elijah.

1 Kings 21:17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. 19 “You shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Have you murdered and also taken possession?’” And you shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “In the place where dogs licked the blood

of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.’”...23 “And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’ 24 “The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field.”

That prophecy was fulfilled. Judgment came to Jezebel and to Ahab. That judgment was represented by Jezreel.

Now, according to God’s command, this firstborn son of the prophet Hosea would bear the name Jezreel. He would represent judgment upon Israel, a total and complete destruction such as the judgment inflicted upon the house of Ahab, a judgment upon one who was swift to shed blood.

Illus. Again, there are appropriate parallels to our own life and existence as a country, as a culture, today. We are swift to shed blood, ever so quick to shed human blood. Most notoriously, for the blood of unborn children. And politicians and political activists call that shedding of blood “freedom.” We think little of it. But God does. Because of this bloodshed within the nation of Israel, God would put an end to her strength and exalted power. He would destroy their weapons, annihilate their army, and crush their nation. And all of that represented by this first child of the prophet Hosea, Jezreel.

v.5

How’s that for a name for your firstborn son? Jezreel. How’s that for a message from God? Pretty clear, isn’t it?

Well, the prophet had another child. A daughter.

v.6-7

Again, the meaning is pretty obvious.

B. God will remove his compassionate love from those who have rejected him.

“Lo-Ruhamah.” Hebrew for “she has not received mercy.”

There isn't one single word adequate to translate the Hebrew, though mercy is good. Compassion is good. Even compassionate love. And yet it's not that God's love somehow failed, but that his compassion drew to an end. His mercy was withdrawn.

And it is his mercy, or compassionate love, as I've translated it, it's his mercy that drives God to grant forgiveness. Mercy is compassion for someone in need. Help for someone who is helpless. That is God's motive.

But here God says in no uncertain terms, “I will withdraw my mercy. I will not forgive them.”

v.6

Those are strong words, words so strong that God sees fit to soften them a little with the following verse,

v.7

There will be a remnant. God's withdrawal of compassionate love and forgiving mercy is not absolute and universal. The southern two tribes of Judah will be shown mercy. The Lord their God will save them. He doesn't abandon the entire nation.

BUT, the judgment is severe. This daughter's name is deeply profound in its judgment. God withdraws his compassion from Israel, as a judgment for their sin.

The warning of this verse ought to be applied today, but very carefully. There ought to be a warning of judgment, a warning

that God's mercy is not infinite, in the sense that it can never be withdrawn. It is a warning that we need to declare and pronounce as a church, as God's people. And its a warning we ought to sound within the visible church.

Eph. 5:3 “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

That's plain, isn't it? Similarly,

1 Cor. 6:9 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Yet we need to be careful in giving that warning, as is Paul, noting that the promise of forgiveness in the gospel is very, very real. The very next verse in,

1 Cor. 6:11 “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

So the warning of Jezebel is not for those who struggle with sin with the painful awareness of their sin, who come to God in repentance, for we are promised not only to be forgiven but also to be cleansed.

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

So this warning is not intended to cause you to fear that you, too, perhaps will experience the removal of God’s mercy. I don’t want to create or evoke that fear in any of you. Unless you are sinning with the dreadful presumption of Israel. The severe warning is to those who care very little about their sin, who fail to fight it and who presume upon God’s love and goodness.

Such was the state of Israel in the day of Hosea. And the prophet’s daughter represented that great warning of judgment.

Then came the third child, a son. Now the judgment of God reaches its climax.

v.8-9

That statement is a direct and complete reversal of his covenant promise. You remember that promise, the most basic expression of God’s covenant with his people? “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

God claims ownership of his covenant people. He receives them into his family and adopts them as his children. But here, the awful, awful warning is that,

C. God will disown those who have rejected his covenant.

Lo-Ammi. Literally, “not my people.”

God will say to the nation of Israel, “I am not your God, you are not my people.” How absolutely and totally devastating! How thorough is his judgment. It couldn’t be stated in any more compelling way.

For Hosea and Gomer, I guess three kids was enough. Three children who represent the judgment of God upon the people of Israel.

In the Hebrew Bible, that is the end of chapter 1. And after verse 9, a chapter break is very appropriate, for the next verse introduces a whole new subject which puts everything I have just said into the right perspective. That will be our focus for next week, yet I don’t want you to go away tonight with a renewed terror of God and a fresh sense confusion about the unchangeableness of God’s love and the faithfulness of his covenant promise.

The warning is for the stubborn and the rebellious! The warning is for those hardened in their sin. And it is that warning of judgment and that threat of condemnation that makes the promise of the gospel all the more sweeter. Just look at the great contrast from all of that to the words we will look at more closely next week, and I leave you with these words to remind you of the great promises of God, the promise of the gospel.

v.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! 1 Say to your brethren, ‘My people,’ And to your sisters, ‘Mercy is shown.’”

So in the context of the threatening of his judgment, God is declaring the promise of the gospel. God does call us his people, in Christ. God does show us mercy, in Jesus.

Please hear the warning, loudly and clearly. Repent of your stubborn sinfulness, sin that is represented by a harlot. Put to death even the remnants of that sin that remain in your life as a Christian. And in your repentance, hear the words of the gospel,

Ps. 103:8 “The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

To you who trust in Jesus Christ, to you who proclaim the Lord’s death for your sins, to you who hear this warning of judgment and repent of your sins, this is the promise,

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”