
Day 168 - June 17

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

The Prophecies of Hosea

Readings: *Hosea 1:1-3:5*

Reflections:

- By this point in the story it is quite easy to see why God would want to use a very dramatic and shocking image to challenge his people. The pattern of unfaithfulness to him has been so consistent and blatant that the image of an adulterous wife is a perfect fit. What is fascinating about God's decision to call Hosea to marry Gomer is that God and Hosea are knowingly setting up a situation where God's own law will be broken over and over again. In a sense, God is breaking his own Law to make a point. In fact, God will command Hosea to do the exact opposite of what the Law calls for. The Law called for adulterers to be put to death so that the land would be rid of sin and the community would be warned not to commit such sins. God actually calls his main leader and spokes person to do the opposite. He calls him to knowingly take an adulterous wife and to love her and keep receiving her back over and over. Hosea could have honestly said, "God, won't people get the wrong idea? Shouldn't a leader be the perfect model of the Law? Won't people all begin to think this is ok if I give them this kind of example?" God's mercy in Hosea actually contradicts the intent of the Law and like other prophecies of the time (e.g. Joel) God is beginning to set the stage for the coming of the Messiah and his triumph of over the Law through grace.
- Hosea's children are symbolically named. No doubt some could see this as cruel on God's behalf to label children with such a role. Yet God wants the image to be clear and lasting and so he instructs that the children that were born in adultery may play a part in this unfolding dramatic image.
- The message of God through Hosea, his wife and his children is multi-layered. In one sense God is giving the message that Israel is being cut off from him and is no longer his covenant partner. Yet at the same time he is indicating that he will continue to love her and bring her back to himself. God clearly takes responsibility to save Israel but at the same time declares clearly that he will hold her responsible for her sin.
- Key verses: "Therefore I am going to allure her, I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of

Achor (literally trouble) a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”

- God’s approach to Israel is to lead her into a place where she is stripped down and has nothing. In the desert she will be humbled and in her humility her heart will be opened to receive again God’s grace and love. In this way the valley of trouble becomes a door of hope. This insight into God approach helps us to see why the approach of Jesus to spiritual transformation begins with the exact same demands. Christ-followers are commanded to take up their cross and die. They are called to embrace a life of suffering and death so that as they lose their lives, they experience God’s salvation.
- The human heart in the garden of Eden chose to be its own master and its own savior. To undo that self-centered bent, the path to repentance begins in humility and humility is found in embracing your cross, or in the image of Hosea, accepting life in the desert. It is here in the place of barrenness, death, loss and emptiness that we hear God call us “His loved one” and claim us as “His people.” Through this purging process God removes the gods we worship from our hearts and lips.
- One of the transformations God wants to fulfill in his people is to change their concept of who he really is. “In that day”, declares the Lord, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master’ (literally my Baal).” Israel was viewing God as a slave master and a harsh, demanding ruler. This was leading them to look to other masters who offered them pleasure and gratification. God wanted to reveal himself for who he really is: a loving husband who was there to protect, love, care and nurture. Who we think God is will shape how we respond to him. If we think of him as an angry master, then we will live in fear and look other places to get our needs met. If we see him as our provider and protector who loves us deeply, then whenever we have a need we will run to him to receive what he has for us.
- At the beginning of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, God clearly indicates that a new day is coming when he will appoint a new leader who will bring salvation to them and will restore them and that prior to his appearing, that God would strip Israel of their king (king or prince) and their religion (sacrifice, altar, ephod or idol). Once Israel has both their religion and their human leaders removed, God says they will come trembling back to him. Again we see how God is clearly identifying the fact that after “the story of what doesn’t work” is complete and is exposed as a complete flop, God will begin the process of showing them “the truth of what does work.” Like Joel, God through Hosea is pointing us towards Jesus!