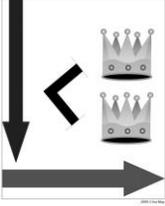


Week Twenty-six: Kingdom Infidelity - Hosea 4:1-5:7; 14



Overview

God evaluates His creation before the fall and finds all of creation “good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25, 31). He evaluates His creation before the flood as well, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man as great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). He sees Israel’s every thought and act of rebellion during their wilderness journey. He sees their spiritual decline throughout the Judges Era. Throughout Israel’s history God sees her spiritual state and responds accordingly.

As Jesus sits on a hill overlooking Jerusalem, He weeps and describes Israel’s hardness of heart and role of the prophets among them, “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes; some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, so of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar” (Matt. 23:34-35). Prophets play a significant role throughout Israel’s history. They are sent by God as His agents or spokesmen to urge His people to return to God. Jesus links Israel’s rejection of the prophets with the rejection of God Himself, “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37).

Sixty years into Israel’s 209 years of existence as a nation, Elijah bursts on the scene during the reign of King Omri and prophesies for nearly forty years during the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram. Elijah humiliates the prophets of Baal before all of Israel, yet Israel persists in her idol worship. Elisha takes Elijah’s mantle and prophesies for nearly sixty years during the reigns of Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash, and a portion of Jeroboam’s reign. His miracles benefit widows and others outside of the covenant and rebuke Israel for their trust in and worship of idols. Yet Israel does not listen.

Jonah and Amos serve alongside Hosea for a brief time and prophesy during Jeroboam II’s forty-one year reign. Hosea prophesies for approximately seventy years, beginning with Jeroboam II and the succession of kings that follow Jeroboam, until Israel is finally taken captive by the Assyrians. Israel refuses to heed the voice of God’s prophets and pays dearly.

Today’s lesson concentrates on Israel’s last prophet and God’s final visual that depicts the heart of Israel’s sin before they are taken captive by the Assyrians.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will understand the seriousness of Israel’s sin and their hardness of heart toward the prophets He sends to warn them. Students

will understand that God is better to Israel than they deserve and that His people (and all humanity) are worse off than they think.

Key Truths

God sees, evaluates, and judges the sin committed by His people.

God raises up those who speak prophetically to turn the hearts of His people back to Him.

Visuals portray spiritual reality effectively and are useful in communicating God's truth to His people.

God pursues a relationship with His sinful people to a point, in hopes that they will turn to Him.

God grieves over the sin committed by his people in the same way a husband grieves over the sin of an adulterous wife.

Lesson Outline

1. The charge of adultery - Hosea 3:1; 4:1a

To give Israel a clear picture of their relationship with Him, God commands Hosea to marry a woman who then commits adultery. Imagine the humiliation and shame Hosea experiences as his wife openly pursues one lover after another. Any other man would divorce her. Not Hosea. God tells him, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of pagans" (Hosea 3:1). Not only does Hosea take her back, but he pays for her return.

God uses the visual imagery of the adultery of Hosea's wife to illustrate Israel's spiritual adultery with God and God's faithfulness to His erring people. Just as Gomer is declared guilty of unfaithfulness in the court of marriage, so God's people are found guilty in God's court of law, "For the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land" (4:1). Hosea's marriage to an adulterous woman testifies to God's assessment of Israel's sin against Him.

2. The cause of adultery - Hosea 4:1b,5-6, 11-13

That God is interested in Bible literacy is evident from Israel's early days, when Moses compiles the history of mankind and God's instructions to His people, commanding Israel to read the Book of the Law aloud as a community every seven years (Deut. 31:9-13). He further declares that, "It is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess" (Deut. 32:47). Nearly 700 years have passed (Hosea prophesied from 793-722 BC), and Israel finds herself tried and found guilty of the spiritual adultery as a result of the lack of Bible literacy, "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land" (Hos. 4:1).

The law of God is forgotten. The priests and the people have become Biblically illiterate.

The lack of Bible literacy and the fear of God leads to Israel's implosion as a community. They are "destroyed for lack of knowledge" (4:6). Like Gomer's seeking after lovers, Israel openly seeks counsel from and worships idols (4:11-13).

3. The consequences of adultery - Hosea 4:3, 7, 9-10, 16

Just as Gomer brings forth a child by Hosea and then children from her lovers, so Israel will bear the fruit of her adultery:

- The land of Israel and even the animals in their land will waste away
- Israel's glory will turn to shame
- God will punish Israel for their evil
- Israel will suffer food shortage
- Israel will be vulnerable, as a lamb in an open field
- God will say of Israel, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone" (4:17).

Adultery negatively affects every life it touches. In the same way, Israel's spiritual adultery affects everyone involved; even more, it causes the land to suffer.

4. The cure for adultery - Hosea 14

Just as Hosea receives his wife after her open adultery, so the LORD offers to receive Israel back to Himself:

A. He pled with Israel (14:1-3):

- To confess their sin, "Say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity.'"
- To repent of trusting in Assyria for salvation, ("Assyria shall not save us"), and for worshipping idols, "Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods'" (3).
- To turn to God and declare, "For in You the fatherless finds mercy"(3). B.

He promises to those who return (14:4-7):

- Healing (4)
- Love (4)
- Turning away of anger (4)
- Growth, beauty, and reviving (5-7)
- Influence (8)

Hosea finishes his message with a word of warning, "Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them" (9).

Sadly, unlike Gomer, Israel rejects the LORD's overtures, and the Assyrians carry them into captivity in 722 BC.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

- The lack of Bible literacy among God's people accelerates their spiritual decline.
- God goes to great lengths to capture the gravity of Israel's sin by using Hosea and Gomer's marriage and her adultery, demonstrating again that the LORD "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
- Any generation can go astray. Just as the LORD says of Ephraim, "Let him alone," so the Lord Jesus says of the Pharisees, "Let them alone" (Mt. 15:14).
- God will not allow His people to continue in their adulterous ways without acting.

Summary

God speaks by warning about the consequences of sin in advance and by raising up a prophetic voice to turn His people back to Himself.

God acts by sending a prophetic visual to mirror Israel's sin, by allowing His people who refuse His overtures to wallow in their sin, and eventually by sending His people into captivity.

God reveals His heart for His people by using the adulterous wife of a prophet to illustrate Israel's blatant adultery and to get their attention.

Discussion Questions

Who has God raised up in our day to speak prophetically to His people, and what is the emphasis of his message?

List some ways Christians commit spiritual adultery today.

Should God use a visual to capture the state of the church today, what visual would He use?