

CHAPTER 15, GOD'S MESSENGERS

TIMELESS TRUTH: GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS PEOPLE.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse, it does. Israel sank deeper and deeper into the cesspool of idolatry under the royal wickedness of Ahab and Jezebel. They led the people further into idolatry and disregarded the God who had made them a nation. The people of promise had broken their promises. But YHWH is a jealous God who would not sit idly on His heavenly throne and allow worthless non-gods and their followers to go unchecked. So He called prophets who would speak on His behalf and demonstrate that there is no God but Himself. Sounding the alarm, these prophets warned faithless Israel that her unbelief would march her right into captivity.

Elijah warned Ahab that Israel would experience a 3-year drought because of their worship of the pagan god, Baal. The shriveled up land seemed a fitting picture of Israel's desiccated hearts and shrunken worship. Ahab had gone so far as to build a temple for Baal in the capital city of Samaria. Then, atop Mount Carmel, the supposed sacred dwelling place of Baal, Elijah challenged the idolaters to the ultimate smackdown—YHWH vs. Baal. Baal failed to show up but the LORD made a dramatic statement when He consumed the water-logged sacrifice with fire. Elijah then put to death the 450 prophets of Baal. Ahab's wife Jezebel, the Queen of Mean, threatened to kill him so Elijah fled into the desert. Fatalistic, fearful and not without some Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Mount Horeb. God revealed Himself there to Elijah, much like He had done nearly 600 years earlier to Moses at Sinai. He told Elijah that he had kings and prophets to anoint – one of whom was his successor, Elisha. Once again, as with Moses and Joshua, God was passing the baton to the next generation of leaders who would speak for Him.

While the two prophets were traveling together, Elijah parted the Jordan by striking the water with his cloak – another throwback to Moses. As they continued on, a whirlwind took Elijah up to heaven in a chariot of fire. The cloak fell to Elisha whose authority was confirmed when he too divided the Jordan. Similar to Elijah before him, Elisha performed many miraculous feats for the benefit of the faithful remnant in Israel. He promised a barren Shunammite woman a son. When the boy suddenly died years later, Elisha brought him back to life. When the Aramean king sent his troops to capture the man of God, Elisha prayed. He asked God to open his servant's eyes so he could see the angels who were standing guard around them and to blind the Arameans. The prophet then led his captives to Samaria where he asked the king of Israel to prepare a feast of friendship in lieu of execution. This unconventional act of grace established peace between Israel and Aram.

Even with the powerful ministries of Elijah and Elisha, the deeply embedded idolaters remained powerful, numerous, and unrepentant in Israel. God sent Amos, a herdsman from the southern kingdom of Judah, to warn the northern kingdom of Israel that her prosperity, injustice, and sinful ways would soon be judged. He promised them that if Israel did not repent, they would be taken captive. God also sent Hosea to Israel as a living object lesson of His faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness. Israel refused to hear the pleas of God to return to Him.

God's holiness demands judgment against rebellious men, but His redemptive love always provides a way of escape. Whether it's a mountaintop showdown, a boy raised from the dead, a vision of guardian angels, or a prophet commanded to marry a woman who would become unfaithful, God is always telling His Upper Story of redemption and compassion through His messengers.

I. Hosea: The Minister

- A. The era of the prophets was a unique time in Biblical history. Although Israel had tended toward idolatry since the golden calf at Mount Sinai, the nation's unfaithfulness to the LORD and the spiritual corruption of the priests compelled God to call Israel back to Himself through these individuals or risk the tragic and severe consequences of judgment through captivity or death.
- B. **Hosea's Ministry:** Hosea began ministering during a period of great material prosperity and military success under the reign of King Jeroboam II in Israel and King Uzziah in Judah. King Jeroboam II had expanded the borders of Israel through military successes.
 1. Hosea did not date his prophecies, but from the names of the kings mentioned, we can be reasonably sure that his ministry spanned about fifty years, from about 760 to 710 BC. Although the exile of Israel to Assyria will come in Chapter 16 of *The Story*, Hosea's ministry began well before the Assyrian exile in 722 BC and went beyond it by several years. He was a contemporary of the prophets Amos, Isaiah, and Micah who describe similar conditions of prosperity, injustice, and apostasy in the Northern Kingdom.
 2. Unlike Amos, who was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Hosea was from the Northern Kingdom of Israel (7:5).
 3. Israel was marked by religious apostasy. They had been in and out of Baalism for centuries, but King Ahab and Jezebel had nationalized it. Baal was a Phoenician fertility god; his cult could be considered the most perverse form of religion around. Its worship promoted drunkenness, cultic prostitution, and even human sacrifice. When Hosea accused Israel of "playing the harlot," he meant it as more than a figure of speech.

II. Hosea: The Man

- A. Probably no single book of the Bible paints a clearer picture of God's redemptive love than the book of Hosea. Through the life and message of Hosea, God shows us that He will never stop loving His prodigal people and graphically illustrates to us just how far He will go to bring us back to Himself and restore us to a right relationship, even in spite of our sin.
- B. **His Marriage:** The life of a prophet was never an easy one, but from the very beginning, God called Hosea to be a living object lesson to the faithless people of Israel. Hosea was not the only prophet called to do bizarre things that would shock the Israelites into hearing the Word of God. Isaiah went around naked and barefoot for three years (Isaiah 20:1-4), and Ezekiel had to lie on his side for over a year because of Judah's sin (Ezekiel 4:1-5:4). But no prophet was asked to sacrifice himself more personally and more painfully than Hosea. "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord" (Hosea 1:2 NIV). **The Message is even stronger, "Find a whore and marry her. Make this whore the mother of your children. Here's why: This whole country has become a whorehouse, unfaithful to me, God" (Hosea 1:2 Message). Yes, you heard right! God actually called Hosea to marry a woman who would become unfaithful to him after they got married and poor Hosea would know this beforehand.**
 1. Why would God do such a thing? The text tells us that Hosea's marriage was to be a living object lesson to the people of Israel because of the nation's "flagrant harlotry" toward God. The covenant between God and Israel was a marriage-like covenant. He expected Israel to love Him faithfully while Israel could depend upon the provision and protection of her Husband.

2. That Hosea immediately took Gomer as his wife is a remarkable testimony to the man's commitment to obey the will of God! There is nothing to indicate that Hosea even for a moment hesitated or questioned the Lord. He recognized that his Lower Story obedience would contribute to Israel's (and our) understanding of God' Upper Story of redemption.
 3. Just as Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful woman illustrated God's covenant faithfulness to an unfaithful Israel, so too did his redemption of his adulterous wife and her restoration picture the love of God for Israel. Humiliated, Hosea had to buy her back for the price of a slave—the quintessential picture of God's redemption in Christ. Because he loved her with a godly love, he informed Gomer that her adulterous lifestyle was over and shut her up for awhile. Hosea had to "save her from herself" so to speak, and cut off her temptations so that she would learn how to love her husband and only her husband.
- C. **His Children:** Even Hosea's children were to be a living message to Israel of God' love for His prodigal people.
1. His son was named Jezreel to commemorate the bloodshed in the city of Jezreel.
 2. His daughter's name was Lo-ruhamah, which means "she is not loved." The compassionate God is willing to forgive sin, but the time comes when He will no longer allow the guilty to continue to go unpunished.
 3. Gomer gave birth to another son and named him Lo-ammi, which means "not my people."

III. Hosea: The Message

- A. Hosea's main message to Israel, and to us, is that God's love is loyal toward those who are His own. Through the startling object lesson of Hosea and Gomer, God showed Israel that His faithfulness was sure even when they were unfaithful to Him time and time again. He is a covenant-keeping God and His character is marked by faithfulness.
- B. Hosea's message to Israel stressed her sin, God's judgment, God's salvation, and His loyal love for His prodigal people.
- C. Hosea used very strong—even shocking—words to describe the spiritual adultery of Israel.
- D. Israel's unfaithfulness to God also caused her to oppress the poor (12:7), participate in violent crimes (4:2, 6:9, 12:1), and live in selfish arrogance (13:6). Consequently, Hosea gave five passages of judgment, but with each one He provided the hope of salvation upon repentance.

<p>Gomer Wife of Hosea A prostitute Chased after other men</p>	<p>Israel Spiritual "wife" of God by covenant A spiritual harlot (idolatry) Chased after other gods</p>
<p>Hosea Suffered because of Gomer's adultery Continued to love Gomer with loyal love Did not divorce her Purchased/redeemed her Punished her Restored and forgave her</p>	<p>YHWH, God of Israel Suffered because of idolatry Continued to love prodigals with loyal love Has not forsaken His own Purchased and redeemed Punishes/disciplines His own Restores and forgives</p>

E. Gomer's life story parallels that of Israel's life story of sin, judgment and redemption.

IV. Hosea: The Message for Us (Applications and Implications)

A. The relationship between Israel and God is parallel to the relationship between Christ and the Church. The Church is the "bride of Christ" (Ephesians 5:22-33). The Church is the "bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Revelations 21:9, 22:17). (2 Corinthians 11:2). Therefore, we are to put away sin and live righteously and faithfully in Christ.

QUESTIONS

- 1. What is it about Ahab and Jezebel that provoked unprecedented anger from the LORD? How does this relate to the first two commandments?**
- 2. Look up Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Was Elijah correct or too brutal in slaughtering all the prophets of Baal? Why does God take idolatry so seriously?**
- 3. Baal worshipers believed their god made rain and storms, and during the dry season he needed to be brought back to life. Mount Carmel was his supposed sacred dwelling place. What was the point in God taking the battle to enemy territory?**
- 4. Despite a recent, dramatic victory, Elijah was scared and depressed when he ran from Jezebel. Why do the deepest doubts often come on the heels of great triumphs or strong spiritual advancement?**
- 5. Elijah ended up at Mount Horeb, the same mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God (p. 207). What other parallels do you discover between Elijah and Moses?**
- 6. Elisha's spiritual insight allowed him to know the plans of the king of Aram and to see God's angelic armies. Are there forces at work in our world today that we cannot see (p. 211-212)? What did this episode teach you about spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:12)?**
- 7. What is the role of the prophets in this chapter? Was their role predicting the future or calling the people to repentance? Does God still send prophets today?**

8. Do you see any similarities between the prophecies of Amos and Hosea and our world today? What do you think they would say to America? Our church?