

Adult Teaching Resources

July 24, 2016



Getting On in Galatia: Paul's Angriest Letter (May 29-July 3)

Living Like You Mean It — Galatians 6:1-16

Nothing 'Minor' About These Prophets (July 10-31)

The Leaning Tower of Israel — Amos 7:7-17

Full Pockets and Empty Hearts — Amos 8:1-12

A Seriously Broken Home — Hosea 1:1-10

A Love That Won't Let Go — Hosea 11:1-11

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A Seriously Broken Home

Hosea 1:1-2:1

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

If you have children, how much influence did others have in the naming of your children?

How did you come by your name? (named after a relative, a friend, etc.)

Information

In today's story we have several unusual things happening. Hosea, the prophet, is commanded to take a wife – but it is an unusual wife. They have children. Hosea gives them unusual names. There is a lot in this story that we would not expect of a man – or of a God.

First, let's get the setting. The people of God are divided into two kingdoms. There is Israel, which is also called the Northern Kingdom, and there is Judah, which is also called the Southern Kingdom. Hosea lives and preaches in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but his message is for all Jews.

[Have a class member read Hosea 1:1.]

What do you notice about the number of kings who are named? (Judah has 4; Israel has 1.)

Being king was a lifetime role, so what does this tell you about these kingdoms? (Judah had a rapid succession of kings, so there was much turbulence and uncertainty in that part of the world. Israel had one king during this time, so there was a long time of peace and prosperity for this part of the world.)

If you pit one part of a people against another part of a people, competition can grow to the point of Civil War. The people of Israel and Judah were not at that point, but there was a growing sense of clannism and of one-upmanship. Judah, which had Jerusalem and the temple, felt superior to the Northern Kingdom. Israel, which had a great king and a long period of peace and prosperity, felt that they were the “blessed child”. But, like we heard in last week's message from Amos, religious heritage and rituals do not necessarily make a faithful and ethical people.

[Have a class member read Hosea 4:1-3.]

Information *continued*

Evil that was planted and nourished has produced bad fruit, to use Amos' image (Amos 8). Hosea's image is a not agricultural, but relational.

[Have a class member read Hosea 1:2-3.]

Many scholarly debates are held over several issues in these verses. First, is the story true, or is this allegorical fiction? Then, if it is a true story, did it really happen this way? That is, was Gomer a prostitute when Hosea met her and married her? Or, did that happen later, after their marriage? And does this mean a street prostitute, or does it mean a temple prostitute, or does it mean adulteress (not a job or a role)?

We will not be able to solve those issues today. The important point for today is, we have a story as we have it that has been handed down for generations since eight hundred years before the birth of Christ. Our question is, what did it mean for the people who first heard this story and what could it mean for us?

Let's begin with this question: How is a marriage like God's relationship with us? [Jot these characteristics on the board. Some answers may include mutual love, a growing trust, lifetime commitment, partnership, shared plans for the future, vulnerability, etc.]

What Hosea tells us a few chapters later is that the people of God had been unfaithful to God.

[Have a class member read Hosea 4:12-14.]

God is upset at this infidelity. God has power and God has options. What are God's options? (reject his people; destroy his people; warn them of potential rejection/destruction; ignore their infidelity, etc.)

God has power and God has options. God chooses to call on Hosea to marry Gomer. Then, they have children. Homer is a husband. He is also a father.

[Have a class member read Hosea 1:3-5.]

From our printed lesson: "Jezreel's significance for Hosea was two-fold. First, the city was the site of a bloody slaughter during the northern king Jehu's revolution and rise to power, according to 2 Kings 9-10. Secondly, the name 'Jezreel' means 'God sows.' Originally a reference to the region's fertility, in Hosea's prophecy it became a prediction that God would sow judgment. Hosea's prophecy predicted the end of Jehu's dynasty."

There are some names that have historical significance. Imagine a child named Appomattox. That was a good name, the name of an Indian tribe. But when Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, the name took on a new significance to persons in the Confederacy and in the Union. For the rest of his life, that child would bear that baggage.

God was sowing judgement. The seed was being sown, but it would not bear fruit for years. In the meantime, another child was born to Gomer and Hosea.

[Have a class member read Hosea 1:6-7.]

Information *continued*

Hosea and Gomer do not have a say in the naming of their children. God does the naming. In this case, the name begins with the Hebrew prefix, “lo”, which means “not”. Throughout the book of Hosea, this prefix is used. There is a rhythm of the threat of “not” and then a promise of the “not” neutralized.

What does your Bible give as the translation of this baby girl’s name?

“The term *ruhamah* (the root *raham*), is a significant theological term in Hebrew. It derives from the Hebrew term for “womb” (Heb: *rehem*) and so connotes affection and motherly love. It most often describes God’s grace toward his people with the emotive overtones of a parent lovingly caring for a child (e.g., Ps 103:13). It was a way to confess how the Israelites had experienced God, and so became a description of the nature and character of God. With this background to the concept, Hosea’s message here would be shocking. Even to raise the possibility that God would not be compassionate would negate what they understood about God. Hosea thus suggests that perhaps the people have presumed to define God in static, absolute ways without considering that they existed in dynamic *relationship* to God. . . . God had chosen to be compassionate for the sake of establishing and sustaining the relationship, and then expected reciprocation in that relationship. It seems that they had never considered the possibility that their actions in the worship of Ba’al might have disrupted that relationship to the point that they would no longer experience God as compassionate. Just as infidelity in a marriage puts the entire marriage at risk, so lack of faithful response to God had put the relationship between God and Israel at risk.” (<http://www.crivoice.org/lectionary/YearC/Cproper12ot.html>)

How do you react to this idea that God’s relationship with us is conditional?

Hosea is preaching that *our* behavior affects *God’s* behavior. Do you agree or disagree?

[Have a class member read Hosea 1:8-9.]

If the previous child’s name was shocking, this is even more scandalous.

“After Lo-Ruhammah was weaned – a reminder that these events would have taken place over some time in a land where children were typically breast-fed for two or three years – Gomer gave birth to a second son. Again claiming to follow God’s instruction, Hosea named the child ‘Lo-Ammi,’ a name that plainly raised a question about patrimony, as it means ‘not my people’ (vv. 8-9). The name not only suggested that Gomer had been unfaithful to Hosea, but symbolized Israel’s abandonment of God. This effectively reversed the covenant terminology by which God had consistently referred to Israel as ‘my people’ (Exod. 6:7, Jer. 7:23, Ezek. 36:28, and others). No more.” [from the printed lesson]

This relationship between Hosea and Gomer lasted long enough to bear three children. God did not initiate judgment immediately. There was time for children to be born and their names to be known in the community. What does this tell us about the character of God?

“It might appear here that God has rather arbitrarily decided that they should no longer be his people. But the impact of ‘Lo-Ammi’ goes a different direction. If the covenant formula really does describe a relationship with mutual responsibilities and commitments, it is clear

Information *continued*

that it is Israel not God who has failed in this relationship. It is not that God has decided they will no longer be his people, it is they who have decided he will no longer be their God! The consequences are obvious in the metaphor of the covenant. If they disavow God from being their god, then they have abrogated the covenant relationship just as surely as Gomer had violated the marriage covenant by her prostitution. They have removed themselves from being God's people. This is not a threat of future punishment; it is simply a statement of what is already a fact." (<http://www.crivoice.org/lectionary/YearC/Cproper12ot.html>)

Once I met a person in the community I had lived in for over three years. "Where do you go to church?" I asked, as we got to know one another. "Oh, I've gone to Antioch all my life. We have a new preacher there now." It got to be a bit awkward as I noted that I was the "new" pastor (of over three years). The person had never been removed from the church books, but had they, over time, basically removed themselves from church membership?

What is our responsibility when it comes to our relationship with God and with God's people?

In spite of God's "Lo" ("not") statements and namings, God's love is longsuffering and patient.

[Have a class member read Hosea 1:10-11.]

Which message do you think today's Church needs to hear more: the warnings and threats or the promises of reconciliation?

The next chapter and verse begins with an incomplete sentence, but it gives us a more complete message.

[Have a class member read Hosea 2:1.]

What happened to the names? (the "not" was dropped)

"To people who are arrogantly self-sufficient, who have abrogated their responsibility as God's people, who have lost their sense of accountability in covenant relationship with God, they need to hear "Lo Ammi!" But to people who have already realized that they are, indeed Lo Ammi, they need to hear again the promise that they can still become Ammi, children of the living God." (<http://www.crivoice.org/lectionary/YearC/Cproper12ot.html>)

Transformational Exercise

We can only imagine how stormy Hosea's life must have been. Think of all the unsettling events: marrying a person who was/would be unfaithful; having three children you must give distasteful names to; preaching to a people who would reject your message over and over.

As Hosea was a husband and father, he represented God as husband and father. Here, God is pictured as longsuffering, yet insisting on mutual responsibility for the relationship.

William Stafford wrote a poem about his girl and he climbing sand dunes during a passing storm over the ocean.

Find the poem at <http://tinyurl.com/zuucu56>.

Transformational Exercise *continued*

[Read the poem aloud, or have a good reader from your class read it aloud.]

How do you think this poem relates to God and God's children? (Like the father, God will do whatever it takes to bring salvation; God is already active; God hears our questions; etc.)

[Close in a prayer something like this: *God, you are the perfect parent, the perfect spouse. We are not perfect children of yours. We are not perfect spouses of yours. Forgive us our sins. Renew us. Give us the grace to model that reconciliation for others who do not know you or have wandered from you. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text – The Revised Common Lectionary text for the day stops at 1:10, but the hopeful thought begun in v. 10 continues through v. 11 (2:2 in the Hebrew text), so we’ll include it in our study for the day.

Note how the chapter is structured: after the superscription in v. 1, the chapter contains four speeches from Yahweh (2b, 3-5, 6-7, 8-9). Each follows a similar pattern: Yahweh tells Hosea to do something; then explains the prophetic significance of the action.

The superscription – The prophecies that bear Hosea’s name must have been edited in Judah, for the superscription (1:1) dates his activity by the kings of Judah who ruled during Hosea’s ministry. Only one king of Israel is named, even though Hosea presumably lived in the northern kingdom, the only one of the classical prophets who did so. The book focuses on the sins of the northern kingdom, but the emphasis on kings of Judah in the superscription, along with other comments in the book, show that the editors wanted to ensure that the message was not lost on the southern kingdom.

When was Hosea active? – Hosea probably began to prophesy sometime during the final years of Jeroboam II’s rule (786-746 BCE), continuing through a tumultuous time that included a single year in which four different kings came to the throne, most dying by assassination (see 2 Kings 15) – even though they are not mentioned in the superscription to his book. Tiglath Pileser III (745-727) of Assyria began a western campaign in 743 BCE, forcing Israel to pay tribute. The northern kingdom continued to live under Assyria’s thumb until 722 BCE, when Shalmaneser V and his troops leveled Samaria, crushed Israel, and scattered its population. Hosea may have been active through much of this period.

Gomer – The name of Hosea’s wife, “Gomer the daughter of Diblaim,” occurs only once, in 1:3. The name Gomer appears as a son of Japheth in Gen. 10:2-3 (repeated in 1 Chr. 1:5-6) and as the name of a warring country in Ezek. 38:6. The name Diblaim does not occur anywhere else in the Bible.

Names and meaning – Hosea – whose name means “salvation” – married a woman whose name can mean “coming to an end,” and gave to his children names that signified an impending judgment. Does your name have any significance other than family connections or that your parents liked the sound of it? Imagine what it would be like to grow up with one of Hosea’s prophetic names. If you could give a name with spiritual symbolism to yourself or one of your children, what would it be?

Judgment and hope – An overview of Hosea reveals that, while themes of judgment are predominant, indicating the seriousness of Israel’s sin and need for repentance, elements of hope are regularly interspersed. Each of the first three chapters, for instance, employ the metaphor of Hosea’s marriage to a prostitute to illustrate Israel’s spiritual adultery, but each

Digging Deeper *continued*

chapter ends with a word of hope. Then, while chapters 4-10 focus on judgment, chapter 11 offers a beautiful image of a hopeful father. Chapters 12-13 return to the theme of judgment, but chapter 14 closes the book with a call to repentance and the possibility of hope.

The names of Hosea's children all predict judgment, and yet all are also reversed. For Jezreel, the aspect of God sowing judgment appears to be reversed in both 1:10-11, which speaks of new growth and harvest, and in 2:22-23, where Yahweh says "I will sow him for myself in the land."

The "not pitied" aspect of Lo-Ruhammah's name is reversed in 2:1, where Lo-Ruhammah is called "Ruhammah" (pitied), and in 2:23, where Yahweh declared "I will have pity on Lo-Ruhammah" ("I will pity Not-Pitied").

The harsh name "Lo-Ammi" (not my people) is also reversed in 2:1 and 23, where God says "I will say to Lo-ammi, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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What's the deal with Jezreel?

The city of Jezreel, located beneath Mount Gilboa at the head of the Jezreel valley, was popular as a winter home for Ahab and possibly other kings. It was in Jezreel that Jezebel engineered the murder of Naboth in order to take his vineyard (1 Kings 21), and she later met an ugly fate in its streets (2 Kgs. 9:36). The prophet Elijah had once confronted her husband Ahab on his way to Jezreel, predicting a time of drought (18:45-46).

Hosea's reference to Jezreel grows mainly from its association with the brutal events leading to King Jehu's rise to power. God had told Elijah to anoint Jehu, Israel's military chief, as the future king, according to 1 Kgs. 19:16. Elijah passed the job on to Elisha, who sent an assistant to actually deliver the message and carry out the anointing. The young prophet did so, but knowing Jehu's violent reputation, quickly fled for his life (2 Kgs. 9:1-10). The prophets likely did not realize how bloody Jehu's rise would be.

Following his anointing, Jehu went to Jezreel, where King Joram, a son of Ahab, was recovering from wounds suffered in battle with the Arameans. Joram got into his chariot and fled, but Jehu chased him down and killed him with an arrow through the back. He then brazenly murdered King Ahaziah of Judah, who had been present on a state visit.

Jehu went on to write threatening letters to officials in Samaria, the capital city, ordering them to behead the 70 male descendants of Ahab who might be potential rivals. Jehu had them bring the bloody heads and piled them on either side of the gate of Jezreel as a macabre symbol of his power, where he made a speech declaring that his actions fulfilled "what the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the LORD has done what he said through his servant Elijah." To further establish his power, he "killed all who were left of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his leaders, close friends, and priests, until he left him no survivor." As if that were not enough, he slaughtered 42 visiting "royal princes and sons of the queen mother" from Judah. As a prophetic name, then, "Jezreel" was a reminder of how horrifying the coming judgment could be if Israel did not repent and return to God.

When Jeroboam II's son Zechariah was publicly assassinated by Shallum son of Jabesh just six months into his rule (in 746 BCE, 2 Kgs. 15:8-11), Jehu's dynasty came to an end. The reference in 1:5 that Yahweh would "break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel" signifies a coming military defeat. In 733 BCE, the Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser III swept through and routed Israel's army in the Valley of Jezreel, though the country was not utterly defeated and exiled until 722 BCE.

If you were looking for a prophetic image founded in a city with a brutal reputation, Jezreel was an ideal candidate.