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August 3rd: Hosea 1 & John 7:1-24

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Hosea takes a wife of whoredom. Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.

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Transcript

Hosea chapter 1. The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Berai, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel. When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take to yourself a wife of Hordom, and have children of Hordom, for the land commits great hordom by forsaking the Lord. So he went and took Gomer, the son of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

And the Lord said to him, Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel, and on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. She conceived again and bore a daughter, and the Lord said to him, Call her name No-mercy,

for I will have no more mercy on the house of Israel to forgive them at all, but I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.

When she had weaned No-mercy, she conceived and bore a son, and the Lord said, Call his name Not-my-people, for you are not my people, and I am not your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, You are not my people, it shall be said to them, Children of the living God.

And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head, and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Hosea is the first of the twelve minor prophets, which, running from Hosea to Malachi, conclude the Old Testament canon. Isaiah, Jeremiah with Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel are typically classed as the major prophets, while Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi are referred to as the minor prophets, chiefly on account of their shorter length.

While there are twelve books of the minor prophets, since before the time of Christ they were treated as a single book, the book of the twelve. The books within the book were divided from each other, but they belonged to a greater single book, and were volumes within it. In the writings of Ben Sirah in the 2nd century BC, for instance, the twelve minor prophets are referred to in a manner that suggests that they were classed as a single text.

In Acts 7, verse 42, Stephen refers to the book, singular, of the prophets, when citing Amos. Melito of Sardis in the 2nd century AD also refers to the twelve in one book. The ordering of the twelve volumes of the book of the twelve varies in different textual traditions.

Christian orderings of the twelve follow the order of the Masoretic text. The prophecies contained in the book of the twelve cover a period of Israel's history from the first half of the 8th century BC to around the middle of the 5th century BC, addressing situations before and after the exile, moving from an emphasis on judgment to one of restoration. The book of the twelve is held together by themes such as that of the Day of the Lord.

Some scholars have also seen connections between the books and their current ordering, observing catchphrases that connect the beginning of books to the end of those that preceded them, although some of the volumes seem to have a more stable place within the larger book. For instance, Hosea chapter 14, verse 7, mentions the flourishing of the grain and the wine, but then Joel chapter 1 refers to the laying waste of the grain and the wine by the locust invasion. In Joel chapter 3, verse 16, we read, the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem.

The exact same words are taken up in Amos chapter 1, verse 2. Hosea is one of the longest of the twelve minor prophets, with only Zechariah being longer than it. It is the first of the volumes of the book of the twelve in both the Septuagint and in the Masoretic text. Not all of the books of the minor prophets can clearly be dated, but Hosea begins by giving us the period of Hosea's prophetic ministry.

Hosea was a close contemporary of Isaiah, prophesying during the reigns of the same kings. Amos also prophesied during the reign of Uzziah, which suggests that Hosea might not have been the earliest of the minor prophets. Hosea lived during an exceedingly eventful period in the history of Israel and Judah.

The power of Assyria rose rapidly under Tigilath-Pileser III to become the dominant force in the region. It would later overthrow the northern kingdom and it almost overcame the southern kingdom of Judah too. As Assyrian power rose, the kingdom of Israel flourished for a time under Jeroboam II as the Arameans were weakened and no longer troubled it.

Israel's foreign policy was a fraught issue during this period as it had to determine whether to throw in its lot with the Assyrians or Arameans or whether it had to do so with the Assyrians. Differences on this question seem to have contributed to the extreme political instability of Israel after the death of Jeroboam II. After his death there were a number of kings in short succession.

Around 738 BC, Pekah the king of Israel formed an alliance with Rezan the Syrian, a former enemy, and they attacked Judah and Jerusalem in the Syro-Ephraimite war around 733 BC. Ahaz of Judah appealed to Assyria for aid and Tigilath-Pileser III defeated the northern kingdom and set up Hosea as an Assyrian vassal. However, after Tigilath-Pileser's death, Hoshea rebelled and sought to align Israel with Egypt instead.

The Assyrians came up against Samaria and the northern kingdom fell around 722 BC. Hosea's ministry spanned this period of immense upheaval. Hosea speaks to both the northern and the southern kingdoms, both Israel and Judah, within his prophecy, although his focus is more upon the north.

Although the kingdoms were separate, the people were a single, albeit divided, family, and even though they were at war with each other for some periods of Hosea's ministry, we should expect some sense of their kinship would always have been present. Although Hosea seems to have been a prophet operating chiefly in the north, it is the names of the kings of Judah that head the list of the kings during whose reigns Hosea ministered. Furthermore, Jeroboam II's reign ended around 746 BC and Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah all reigned during the period after that time in Judah, Hezekiah coming to the throne around 715 BC.

It is possible that Hosea moved to the southern kingdom of Judah as things heated up for him in the north as his message went contrary to the nation's foreign policy. Verse 2

introduces the first of the words delivered by the Lord through Hosea, likely around 750 BC, as it deals with the House of Jehu, which ended less than a year after the death of Jeroboam II. The opening three chapters of the Book of Hosea contain elements of narrative and present the hero of the Book of the Twelve with an arresting metaphor for the Lord's relationship with his people at its very opening.

While several biblical prophets were instructed to perform various prophetic sign acts, perhaps none is so shocking as the one that Hosea was given here, taking a wife of Hordam. In this chapter, Hosea is commanded to perform actions by the Lord on four successive occasions. The first occasion, given in verse 2, outlines the Lord's commission to Hosea more generally.

He must take a wife of Hordam and have children of Hordam. The wife of Hordam was a woman of sexual ill repute, whether on account of prostitution or something else. To marry such a woman would be shameful, and that shame would also affect the way that the children of the union would be regarded.

It seems most likely that the children that were born were Hosea's own children, but they would have carried the deep stigma of being children of a whore. The power of the prophetic sign is seen in the relationship between this disgraced woman and the land, presumably thereby referring to the unfaithful Israelites. Throughout scripture, adultery and idolatry are repeatedly related.

The Lord entered into a covenant with Israel at Sinai, taking her as his bride, yet she had proven unfaithful to him. Such a metaphor for the Lord's relationship with Israel is developed at length in Ezekiel chapter 16, although no other prophet was given a commission so remarkable as that of Hosea here in order to illustrate it. Hosea obeys the Lord's commission by taking a woman called Goma, the daughter of Diblehim, as his wife.

When she conceived and bore a son, Hosea was instructed to name him Jezreel. Such naming of children as prophetic signs is also seen in Isaiah chapter 8 verses 3 to 4. And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, Call his name Meher-shal-al-hashbaz, for before the boy knows how to cry, my father or my mother, the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Syria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.

The name Jezreel probably relates to scattering. The valley of Jezreel was a strategic geographic location in the land of Israel in the north, giving access to its territory. Jezreel was also the site of Jehu's defeat of the Amrites, the house of Ahab.

However, the blood of Jezreel would soon come back on the head of the house of Jehu, which would be cut off shortly afterwards. Having named one son after scattering, and in allusion to the bloody dawn of the house of Jehu, that would soon be matched with its

bloody sunset, Hosea has a second child by Goma, this time a daughter. This child has a more troubling name, No-mercy.

Israel relied upon the covenant mercy and goodness of God for its continued existence. For the Lord to cease to extend such mercy to her was a serious matter indeed. The Lord would not, however, spare Israel, which would fall to the Assyrians.

Nevertheless, he declares that he would have mercy on the house of Judah. Judah was miraculously delivered from the Assyrians by the angel of the Lord, just when it seemed as though Jerusalem was doomed. The third and final child born to Goma was a son, to be called Not-my-people, the most threatening name of all.

The familiar covenant formula was that God would be the people's God, and that they would be his people. However, this child is named after the inverse or negation of that. You are not my people, and I am not your God.

The covenant bond is broken. The chapter ends on the most surprising note, however. It moves from a devastating statement of judgment to one of restoration so quickly that the hero might get whiplash.

The final two verses reverse the previous judgments. The children of Israel would be multiplied as the sand of the sea in fulfillment of the promises first given to Abraham. The people who had been scattered would now be gathered.

Jezreel, which was the place of the fall of the dynasty and the influx of the adversaries into the land, would become the place where a united people would venture forth against their enemies as a mighty power under one presumably Davidic king. A question to consider. Can you think of other occasions in the prophetic literature where Israel is compared to an unfaithful wife? John chapter 7, verses 1 to 24.

After this, Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of booths was at hand.

So his brothers said to him, Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.

For not even his brothers believed in him. Jesus said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.

You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come. After saying this he remained in Galilee.

But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly, but in

private. The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, Where is he? And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, He is a good man, others said, No, he is leading the people astray.

Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him. About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, How is it that this man has learning when he has never studied? So Jesus answered them, My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.

If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law.

Why do you seek to kill me? The crowd answered, You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill you? Jesus answered them, I did one work, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision, not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers, and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.

If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. The context of the events of John chapter 7 is provided by the feast of tabernacles or booths. We'll see later on in some of the events and some of Jesus' statements that this background is important for understanding what he's doing.

At this point Jesus is generally operating in the context of Galilee, where he is facing opposition and rejection as we see in this and the previous chapter, but in Judea the Jews are trying to kill him. Again, it's worth remembering that the Jews are the Judeans and the Judean leaders in particular, and so the contrast between the Galileans and the Judeans plays out in this chapter and elsewhere. He's facing challenge within his own family as well.

Jesus' mission is surrounded by family and relatives, his mother, characters like James and John who seem to be his cousins. As we compare some of the details between the Gospels this would seem to be the case. James the son of Alphaeus is quite likely Jesus' cousin.

John the Baptist is a relative. The brothers of Jesus also become important in the early church. So this was a mission where he's surrounded by family members and opposition from family members and disbelief by family members.

And this provides part of the precipitating events for this chapter. They're not necessarily

directly opposed to him, but they don't believe in him or understand the nature of his mission or the father's timing. The attempt to make him a king in the previous chapter is a typical failure to perceive the true nature of Jesus' calling.

John's Gospel has a number of episodes that present the greater themes of Christ's ministry in embryo. And this is one of them. There's a surface message, a story of Jesus going down to the feast and speaking at the feast.

But then there's a deeper significance. There's broader themes of openness and secrecy playing in this chapter, knowledge and lack of knowledge, origins and failure to perceive origins. Notice how many of Jesus' statements in the Gospel, and particularly perhaps in this chapter, are cryptic, requiring later revelation or events for their understanding.

In the Gospel of John, as in the other Gospels, there is a theme of a messianic secret. Jesus hides his identity and reveals it only cryptically. The true character of his calling and his kingship will be revealed in time, but it will occur through the cross and the resurrection.

And prior to those points, Jesus avoids a false revelation, which would suggest that he is just associated with mere human earthly power. There are parallels, perhaps, to be observed with John chapter 2. Family members requesting signs, Jesus saying that his hour hasn't yet come, Jesus going on to perform the requested things secretly, rather than more openly, as was originally requested. There are, of course, contrasts.

Jesus' mother is never described as failing to believe in him, as his brothers are at this point. The fact that Jesus says that he is not going up to the feast, or not yet going up to the feast, in verse 8, according to some translations, has provoked a number of questions. This seems to be, if not an explicit lie, an attempt to mislead.

Jesus invites misconstrual of his meaning and purpose throughout the Gospel. And perhaps it's worth thinking about the way that the messianic secret works in terms of themes of deception. Jesus does not give his full identity out.

Earlier on in the Gospel, in chapter 2, Jesus does not fully commit himself to people, because he knows what's in man. And at this sort of point, Jesus is engaged in a veiling of his identity, a veiling of his intentions, a veiling of his destination. Why does Jesus do this? How can we justify these actions? Well, in part, I think it is worth recognising that there are people trying to control Jesus' mission, trying to control his vocation.

People who are trying to make him king by force, for instance. And his brothers have their own purpose and intention. They wish for Jesus to reveal himself openly and seek a particular type of power.

And his commitment to his father's mission involves a refusal to commit himself to them, a refusal to give himself into their hands and to their purposes. And so Jesus' deception

or misleading at this point is legitimate. It's an attempt to prevent people from taking charge of his vocation, from stealing his vocation from the father.

He owes his father his loyalty, not his human brothers. Jesus' identity at this point is clearly a matter of significant debate among the people and among the Jewish leaders. We can see all these divisions arising among the Jews on account of Jesus' identity.

His teaching stands out and as he speaks to the people it's clear that he has not learnt this from a human teacher. He claims he has learnt it from his father, the father, not from other teachers or from any earthly father such as Joseph. He ends by referring to the healing of the man on the Sabbath in chapter 5. This is the work that they really seem to be opposing him for the last time he was in Jerusalem.

And he talks about the way in which a small part of the body can be removed in circumcision. And that can take precedence over the refusal to work on the Sabbath. And yet he heals a man's whole body and yet they oppose him for it.

When Christ talks about the Sabbath here and in the other Gospels, Christ challenges the teaching of the Jews. And often it's presented as if Jesus is identifying exceptions to the rule of the Sabbath. But Jesus seems to be going further than that.

Jesus is presenting the true intent of the Sabbath. That the Sabbath is made for man and to make a man whole on the Sabbath is not merely a valid or legitimate exception to the law of the Sabbath. It's a fulfilment of it.

This is the intent that God had that man would be restored and made whole by the Sabbath. And so healing on the Sabbath is not just a valid exception but a true fulfilment of what God's Sabbath means. What God's coming kingdom means.

The restoration of humanity. The establishment of humanity in God's grace. One question.

Where do you see John's greater themes of legal witness and authority surfacing in this passage?