

Kings and Prophets 15-01-30a

This is Friday, the 30th of January, 2015. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets. We have come in the Northern Kingdom to the reign of Jeroboam II.

He's the second-to-the-last king in the line of Jehu. Jehu was his great-granddaddy, and he's about to finish his reign, come to a bad end. His son will have a very brief appearance and exit stage left, and the line of Jehu will be over.

In this connection, we have seen that the writing prophets have begun their ministries. We've already looked at Yonah the dove, and last week we began looking at the prophet Hosea. Jonah, Hosea, and Amos are the major prophets of this period.

All of them are contemporaries. They're alive at the same time. They may have known each other.

They may have gotten together and swapped stories, had fellowship of one kind or another. We'll be resuming our overview of the book of Hosea. If you haven't already turned there, you can be navigating in that direction.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea. As is our custom, we'll take a moment as we begin to pause and give each of us a chance to go before the Lord in prayer and ensure that our time will be well spent, that God the Holy Spirit can do his ministry of teaching, and that it will be effective and meaningful for us all. Shall we pray? Father, it is a privilege week by week to see all of the ways that you express your grace and your faithfulness toward us.

We're so privileged. We are so blessed. We are constantly in awe of your mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for him. We thank you for the wonderful privileges that we enjoy because we belong to you through him. And we pray tonight as we look for nourishment for our souls, we look for strength, we look for understanding, for comfort and encouragement through your Holy Spirit, and a deeper and better faith grounded in the truth of your word.

We pray that as we look at this portion tonight from so many centuries ago that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate it on our behalf, that we can see not only its purpose in its historical context, but the reason that you have preserved it down through the ages and brought it to us to be reviewed and to be reflected upon as we do tonight. We pray that each one will be encouraged and find fresh food for thought and strength in this portion of your word. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Hosea, the first thing you think of if you remember anything about Hosea's life and ministry as a prophet is that like Ezekiel, like Isaiah, like Jeremiah, God sets him a symbolic task. You remember Ezekiel had to lay around for 390 odd days on his side playing with a piece of tile

and chopping up hairs with a sword and burning things, and Jeremiah has to bury his girdle in the middle of the river, and Isaiah does various things.

We've had prophets, and these are such unusual, cartoonish actions on the part of the prophet that they attract tremendous notice and interest in the kingdom where the prophet is functioning. Almost in every case, this is the northern kingdom. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, will be down in the south because there is no northern kingdom left for a prophet to prophesy in.

But here we find Hosea, the contemporary, as I said, of Amos and of Jonah. This is a rather lengthy book, and we do not have the time to go through all 14 chapters in the course of this study, so what I'd like to do is just try to summarize it. What's the big idea in the book of Hosea? If God grants the time and the longevity, maybe we can do it verse by verse someday.

It is a fascinating, fascinating book, but we're looking at it in its context of the history of the kings, particularly of the northern kingdom. So what we want to do is just get a summary idea of what the book is about. Well, there's lots of different ways to do this.

Some of you have Wilmington's Guide to the Bible, a book which I highly recommend, and part of Wilmington's coverage of the book of Hosea I think is very helpful. It's just a portion, but it's what we're going to use as a rough outline because he summarizes nine of what I would consider to be ten really important metaphorical representations of Israel, of Ephraim, of the northern kingdom, prophetically speaking. Remember that this is the time of Jeroboam II.

They have had a resurgence of prosperity for no apparent reason. They haven't returned to the Lord. They've not gotten rid of the Baal worship.

Jeroboam II is following after the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. We've seen this in the notices in Kings and Chronicles. Corruption is rife in the country.

Spiritual decay is getting worse. Yet the country suddenly is blessed, and God sees their affliction and oppression. It is a result of their malaise and their disobedience and their outright rebellious attitude, and they have been disciplined for generation after generation.

We've seen that through the previous reigns. You think of Ahab, and you think of some of these other awful kings, and the bloodshed and the assassinations and the degeneracy that is characterized. It is as though God said, let me try a different approach.

I will stop the discipline, and I will remind you that I am a God of grace and a God of mercy. Grace is undeserved, it's unmerited. Let me try a positive approach, because the negative is clearly not working.

You're just getting worse and worse. And somebody might argue, well, you know, Lord, if you had only offered a little bit of mercy, why the people would have turned? So God says, fine, let's do the mercy approach. So he grants Jeroboam II these military victories, and he expands the

kingdom out almost to its original borders.

He fortifies, he builds up, there's a great sort of bubble of prosperity, and it is a bubble of prosperity. God could have easily made it substantial and made it last, but there is this season of peace and of growth and of respite from divine judgment. This is in the days, this is circa 750, 745, will be around the time of the end of Jeroboam II's reign.

So God is taking a different approach. He's demonstrating that it doesn't matter what he does, these people are not going to turn, basically. That's what's happening during this period.

And what's going to happen over the next few decades, down to 721, is as follows. You remember we talked about the rise of Assyria. Assyria right now has some internal problems that they're trying to iron out, and they're not really in an expansionist mode just yet.

There's internal jockeying for power, and it hasn't really stabilized to the point that it can begin to expand outward. But what they have done is clobber Syria for the moment. So Syria is not a threat to northern Israel.

Assyria is busy with its own affairs, and so Israel can expand. And so it's just temporary. But the two northern foes, Syria and Assyria, are sort of temporarily embarrassed with their own problems, and this provides the respite.

Well, at the close of Jeroboam II's reign, his son is going to come to the throne. And his son Zechariah is going to be murdered after only six months. And Zechariah is the great-great-grandson of Jehu, and as we saw last time, Hosea predicts the destruction of the house of Jehu right at the beginning of the book.

Verse 4 of chapter 1, Call his name Jezreel. For a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu. And you get the idea that perhaps Hosea opens near the close of Jeroboam II's reign.

And this could have been just within a year or two, just that little while, and you see Zechariah. Zechariah is going to be assassinated by a guy named Shalom. S-H-A-L-L-U-M.

And we get all this out of 2 Kings chapter 15. But I don't want to turn there just yet because I want to focus on Hosea. But just to set it in its context, Shalom murders the heir to the throne, so to speak, Zechariah, but in virtually minutes, historically, Shalom's only there a month, and he is in turn assassinated.

Apparently he didn't really win the hearts and minds of the people, and so after one month, he is in turn assassinated by a guy named Manachem, like Manachem Begin. Manachem. Manachem.

This is still in 2 Kings 15. And at this point, Assyria begins to start to look outward. This is around 745, and Tiglath-Pileser III comes to the throne in Assyria in 745.

Well, he is a strong, sharp, brilliant military commander, and very soon Assyria is going to sweep the field. And he wants to expand his Assyrian empire, particularly toward the west and the south. So this is going to spell bad news for both Syria and northern Israel.

So Manachem has to pay him tribute to stall. All this is is a delay. They empty the coffers trying to buy off Tiglath-Pileser.

There's no buying this guy off. He just says, well, you'll save me the trouble of hauling it back if you send it first. Then the army isn't going to have to haul the spoils back.

Send it all to me, then I'll conquer you. But Manachem empties the treasury. He's paying Tiglath-Pileser.

And then he dies and is succeeded, Manachem does, by his son, Pekahiah. And he doesn't last long. He is then slain by his right-hand man, Pekah.

And let me tell you something. If you're a seminary student, and they're testing you over the kings of northern Israel, and you're trying to remember them, and remember them in order, and how long they reigned, it's just a nightmare. It was for me.

I loaded it up just long enough to pass the test, and then I forgot it. Because Pekah, and Pekahiah, and Rezin, and Shalem, and Manachem, and Zechariah, there's going to be a king named Hosea. He's not the prophet Hosea.

He's a completely different Hosea. It's very confusing. But anyway, Pekahiah, who is, this is a two-person dynasty here.

Manachem, his son, Pekahiah, is murdered by Pekah, who's just a military officer. And you can see the thing is just fragmenting and falling apart in the north. It's whoever wants to kill you and take the throne can have it for a little while, but not for long.

And you remember Pekah, when we did the book of Isaiah, and we got to chapter 7 through 9, and a smoking flax and a bent reed he will not break before this alliance in the north dissolves. And that was Pekah, King Pekah in the northern kingdom, and Rezin, who is one of the last kings of Syria. And Pekah and Rezin form an alliance, and they think, well, together we can stave off the Assyrians to the north, and we can attack northern Israel to the south.

And so they make this unholy alliance, but God tells Israel through Isaiah, this is just a piece of smoking flax. This is going to all dissolve before the sign child, the son that is born to the young woman, before he is old enough to eat his curds and whey and know his right hand from his left and so on. In a very few years, what everybody fears, what everybody is looking at with dread, will disappear, and God tells them ahead of time.

Well, this is that Pekah. Now remember, all of this is taking place between 750 and 721. This 30-year period is just a very anarchic and rapid-fire time.

Lots of change, lots of instability. Well, eventually, the alliance will fall apart between Pekah and Rezin, and all of this, by the way, is still in 2 Kings 15 and also Isaiah 7. Ahaz, down south, is going to appeal to Tiglath Pileser. He says, well, if Pekah and Rezin are going to get together, northern Israel and Syria, well, I'm going to go to Assyria.

I'll make friends with Tiglath. We've been sending him money anyway, and so we'll have him in a sandwich. And so Ahaz, down in Judah, this is going to be Jotham's successor down there, they go to Tiglath Pileser, and it just gets really messy.

But here's the big idea. The prosperity that God granted, the time of peace, the respite, the chance to fall back and regroup is completely wasted. It isn't taken advantage of.

It's ignored. And because of that, all of these warning signs, you know how they will have small earthquakes before the big one, they'll preview, there's rumblings, you can hear the thunder before the big storm breaks. Well, all of this is warning music for the northern kingdom.

This is the time when Hosea is prophesying. He prophesies from the end of Jeroboam II's reign all the way down to just before the northern kingdom dissolves. There's nothing in Hosea talking about the attack of the Assyrians and the carrying away.

So he's in this 30-year window. That's what Hosea is about. Now, there's a lot you could say about the book, but what I want to do is just focus on the descriptions that God gives, the warnings that God gives to the northern kingdom through Hosea.

And there's going to be 10 of these. The first one we've already seen, it's a very graphic depiction, and this is Gomer. Gomer represents Israel.

Hosea represents the Lord God. And her unfaithfulness, her unfruitfulness, her deceptive and disloyal nature is reflected in this very strange marriage that God commands Hosea to contract. And the names of the children, Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi.

And you remember Jezreel means to be scattered, and that valley of Jezreel is historically significant for that. This reflects not only the scattering of the house of Jehu, but the scattering of northern Israel. And what God does to the house of Jehu He's going to do to the whole northern kingdom.

Lo-Ruhamah, no mercy, no more grace is coming. What you've just seen, this last period of prosperity, that's it. If you don't respond, judgment will return, and judgment will be consummated and finished.

And then Lo-Ammi, when that judgment is finished, you're not my people. Now, Israel is God's people, but functionally speaking, they're not. We see a parallel in the New Testament when Paul talks to legalistic Christians in Galatians, and he says, if you, as a Christian, go back and try to obey the law of Moses for your righteousness, you have fallen from grace, and you are cut off from Christ.

You're not cut off in the sense of losing your salvation, but you're cut off in terms of having any functional benefits of being a believer. You're just like the field that has the rain come on it many times, and all it brings up is thorns and briars, and it is fit for burning, and near to a curse. You're like the people that Peter and Jude talk about, who are spots on your love feasts, and clouds without rain, who deny the Lord that bought them, and for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness in the future time, when it ought to be a reward and blessing and citizenship in the New Jerusalem, they're going to be in the darkness which is outside.

They're saved, but it's the basic package of salvation. It's not the deluxe package. It's not the premium.

It's saved yet so as by fire. So, Gomer is the first one, and we reviewed that. That's the first three chapters, and it's a sad tale of infidelity, and most of all, lack of appreciation.

There have been fictionalized stories in the entertainment books and movies of women who had a very difficult past, some cloud, maybe their father bankrupted the family, you know, these costume dramas set in England where the daughter's father drinks away the family fortune, and they can't get a good husband, and they're sort of betwixt and between. They're ladies, but they can't really function in their society, and then some generous Hugh Grant guy will come and marry them and legitimize them, and they're back in the good graces. And somebody like Emma Thompson who Hugh Grant comes and rescues, if you know the story I'm talking about.

What's the name of that? Sense and Sensibility. That's a classic case. You know, the gals are on the outs, and they're shut off from everything, but then the guy recognizes her qualities and marries her, and she becomes a true recognized lady again.

Well, in a nutshell, Hosea is told to go to this woman, fallen woman, she's associated with prostitution, and he's a prophet in Israel. By marrying her, she's Mrs. Hosea. That wipes the slate clean.

She has a fresh start. What an opportunity. But you see what happens.

By chapter 3, she threw that away, went back to her old ways, and now not only has she gone back to prostitution, but she's enslaved. And Hosea buys her out again with the barley and the shekels. And this is God picturing his grace specifically to Ephraim, to the northern kingdom.

But does she appreciate it? Does she respond? Does she say, you know, all I really needed was a good man, and I'd be set. Israel, all I really needed was God to be gracious to me, and I would repent and obey and reflect his glory. No.

So that's the first picture. There are nine more great pictures that God uses in Hosea, and we're going to cover them tonight. Let's begin in verse 16 of chapter 4. First three chapters is the Hosea-Gomer picture.

And there's just a lot there, but I can't do it in detail. But in chapter 4, Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel. The Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land.

There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. What's our common way of finding application of the Old Testament in our own lives? Here you sit. Here I sit.

We're all here. We are church-age believers. We are members of the body of Christ.

So what does the Old Testament have to do with us? How do we relate it? As goes the nation. As goes the land. In the Old Testament, that's me in the new.

So if God says, my charge against you is there is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land, what would I want to be watching for as a believer in the Lord Jesus right now? How is my truth level? How is my mercy level? And how am I doing with respect to the knowledge of God and myself? Because this is what brings the judgment of God upon His people. So it's pretty relevant. You remember in Ephesians the emphasis placed on put away deceit, speak truth to one another? By the way, just in case anybody brings special notebooks for different series, Sunday is going to be a special.

It relates to our Ephesians study, but it's not Ephesians. It's Acts chapter 5. We're going to do an Ananias and Sapphira special because it greatly illuminates and illustrates what Paul is saying in Ephesians chapter 5. And it has to do with truth versus deceit. I had no idea.

You can know a thing, but you don't really know it until you see it. And you say, wow, I've underappreciated this particular thing. The value that God places on truth and truthfulness, you can't believe it.

It's just stunning. Once you draw that out and start looking at it, we're going to see it on Sunday. But you can see it here.

I'm starting to see it everywhere. You know how it is. If you buy a car that's a certain model, then you drive down the road, all you see is that car.

Look, there's one, there's one, there's one. It doesn't happen if you drive a Volkswagen bus anymore. Everybody's taking them off the road.

They're trying to keep them in low mileage so they'll be worth more. But, you know, if you drive a Fiat, or if you drive a Ford F-150, or you drive a whatever it is you may drive, all of a sudden they become visible. They were there the whole time.

You just didn't see and appreciate that they were there. If you're like me, maybe, maybe you just don't care. But when I had that little Mazda buzz bomb Miata, every time I saw one, I thought, wow, there's another one, there's another one.

And you know what? I'm blind to them now. I go up and down the road, I don't even notice. I have no idea if I passed any or saw any today.

I used to note every single one. Well, truth, God's value on truth, you cannot overestimate it. You cannot fully appreciate how bent on truth God is.

He is hot on this topic. And you see it everywhere. Look at this.

What's the first thing He brings in the charge? What's the problem in the Northern Kingdom? No truth. Where's the truth? Look at the media today. Do you get accurate reporting? Does the government accurately reflect the state of our economy and the state of unemployment? No, they don't.

And if you research, you can find out that the employment figures have been vastly reduced from what they actually are. Well, we just cook the books. If a business ran their reports the way the government runs their statistics on the economy, they would be in jail, all of them.

I worked at a company, and I found out they were cooking their books, and I had to get out of there. The SEC was about to descend on them, but they could make it look any way they wanted by including this and dis-including that. Well, we'll categorize this as this kind of expense, and it doesn't have to be reported.

There's just way too much human corruption in it. There is no truth in the land. That is God's first and foremost indictment.

Now, think about you and me. We're about to go to the break. Some future time, somebody's only going to have time for the first session.

What's our conclusion here? There is no truth in the land? If we are going to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, how truthful am I? You think, well, I don't go around lying, and I'm not cheating on my taxes. I'm not embezzling from my employer. I'm not looking on somebody else's paper in school.

This is truth in the divine truth sense. It isn't, am I representing the facts accurately, so much as, is my life a reflection of divine truth? How is it that a woman can win her husband to the Lord Jesus Christ without saying a word? It is because her life is a reflection of truth, and the truth is communicated even without words. This is the truth that does not exist in the Northern Kingdom.

God's not charging them because they're falsifying records, per se. He's charging them because His truth, that was taught and valued and rehearsed and made the object of faith down in the Southern Kingdom for so long, has vanished. The worship of God doesn't take place up there.

And what little is done in His name is twisted and perverted and cut with bail worship. They call the golden calves El. Baal is the Lord in the Canaanite vocabulary.

And so when they talk about the Lord, Baal, they say, oh yes, this is the Lord of Israel. But it's bail. It's the Canaanite bail.

And they've taken a cardboard cutout of God and duct-taped it onto an idol of Baal or Ashtar or whoever else. And you see this happening today. Our lives, do our lives reflect the truth? Our practice, what we do, the way we treat other people, what we allow and don't allow in our periphery, what we are willing to be a part of and what we refuse to be a part of, do we reflect the truth? This isn't just telling the truth.

This is being true to God and to His Word and to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, where His body on this earth in the beginning was the Word. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and then He left. Now we are supposed to be the Word made flesh, the truth made flesh.

That's what Hosea is communicating to the northern kingdom. At the end of this period of prosperity, God says, look, it's time to put up or shut up. You either turn, you either recognize the problem and fix it or you're going out.

Well, they don't fix it and they do go out. The same is true for us. God is not casual.

God isn't laissez-faire. God, if you can use the term like they use it today, God is passionate about truth. He cares about it and He expects it in us.

And if we have the opportunity to live the truth and do not, God is paying attention and He will act. That's the message that begins here in chapter 4 when we look at the similes. There are going to be nine similes after Hosea and Gomer.

And the first one is here in chapter 4. We'll look at it just as we close here in verse 16. And notice that the preceding section 11 through 14, Harlotry, wine and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from their wooden idols and their staff informs them.

They've got a wooden stick and they say, Well, stick, which way should I go? How dumb can you be? The spirit of harlotry has caused them to go astray. You see the tie back to chapter 1 through 3. The spirit of harlotry, spirit of infidelity. They have played the harlot against their God.

They offer sacrifices on mountaintops and burn incense on the hills, oaks, poplars and terebinths because their shade is good. I'm comfortable up here. Who wants to make a long, sweaty trip down to Jerusalem when I can go up here to this shady grove that's real nearby? I've got an air-conditioned sanctuary.

I've got a wonderful multimedia system with big screens. Not to disparage, but it's comfort. It's comfort.

Comfort is a primary concern. I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry nor your brides when they commit adultery for the men themselves go apart with harlots and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. The point here is why should the women be punished because of an injustice they have done to the men when the men are just as bad? There's no point in punishing half the population.

The point of punishing harlotry and adultery for wives was you've done an injustice to the man. Well, the man is just as unjust. So God says I can't punish one and not the other.

Therefore, people who do not understand will be trampled. Everybody's going to go out. That's the end of verse 14.

Though you, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend. Learn the lesson of observation. And that's a message for us.

Learn the lesson of observation. We want to be Judah and we want to learn and not repeat the mistakes of others. Do not come up to Gilgal nor go up to Beth-Avon.

More about that right after the break. But just circle that, Beth-Avon. That's a very important substitution.

Nor swear an oath. For Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf. This is number one.

This is the first like simile. A stubborn calf. I think the old King James said a backsliding heifer.

But it's a stubborn calf. The Lord will let them forage like a lamb in open country. What happens to a lamb in open country? Watched any National Geographic specials lately? You don't want to be a lamb in open country or a baby penguin or anything else away from the group.

But this is what's going to happen. God will no longer hem them in. God will no longer use the stick to beat them back to where they need to be.

He'll say, okay, fine. You want to be the lamb going out in the open field? Go. You want to be a stubborn calf and you're not going to stay with the herd? Go.

And your fate is in your own hands. You will realize the consequences when it is too late. Well, it is written for our instruction.

And keep in mind, these people are not walking around saying, well, I woke up this morning and I just really felt disobedient. I think I'll disobey the Lord. I think I'll just go become an idolater.

These people are content. They are self-justifying. They think they're fine.

It all makes sense to them. Their neighbors think the same way. It's a community and a culture where everybody, you know, I'm okay, you're okay.

We're all okay. We're all doing well. This all makes sense.

They don't have a sense of guilt. And when the Word of God comes to them, they do not allow it to penetrate. They just deflect it.

That's for someone else. That doesn't apply. That doesn't pertain.

And there is a danger. We are made out of the very same flesh as these people. And we can be just as confident in the wrong things.

We can be just as assured of our own righteousness when it is not justified. And we have to take a hard look. We have to ask and seek and knock.

We have to ask God to show us our secret faults. Remember David in Psalm 51? Show me my secret faults. Show me my hidden problems.

That desire will be honored by God with illumination. But if we're not seeking and we're not looking, we will have a false confidence and this is the result. So, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see each of these similes illuminates a different facet, a different aspect. And by looking at these, it will help us to recognize when it is starting to spring up in us. We'll say, well, it's an identifying feature.

When I was in the military and they would say, well, here's what a Russian tank looks like. It's one thing when they just show you a black silhouette and you think, I'm supposed to do it from the silhouette. But if you get a bunch of pictures, well, what if I'm in an airplane? What does it look like from the top? What if I'm up close? What do the tracks and the armaments and the weapons look like? The more you know about it, the more angles you have on it, the easier it is to identify.

God gives us 10 different ways to identify this terminal situation in Israel. And by looking at the symptoms, we will be alert and aware and be able to avoid this situation ourselves. Let's pause here and take a break.