

Remember, Repent, and Return

DARRELL DELANEY

Have you ever watched someone you love drift further and further away, chasing things that cannot love them back? It is heartbreaking; and that is exactly how God feels in the book of Hosea. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will walk through some of the most emotionally charged chapters in Hosea, as God confronts Israel's spiritual betrayal. We will see how idolatry, injustice, and misplaced trust tore their relationship apart, and why God still pleads for their return. What can we learn from their story about our own hearts today? That is what we will explore next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in the second part of our three-part series...a short series...on the book of Hosea; and in the last episode, we just explored the heartbreaking metaphor of Hosea's marriage as a picture of God's covenant love and Israel's betrayal; and in this episode, we are going to zoom in the prophetic lens and God stops speaking in metaphors and deals deeply with the actual actions of what Israel has done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; a lot of symbolism that we saw in the first episode in this series, including the fact that Hosea was asked to marry a woman known to be promiscuous; and she does betray him. They have children together, and each child is given a very symbolic name, like: they are not my people; and so forth. As you said, a lot of symbolism going on there. Like many of the prophets, Hosea acted out his message in quite literal ways. It was not just preaching a sermon. He actually did get married and had children and all the stuff we read about in the first couple of chapters; but now, we have to get down to sort of brass tacks here, and God has to sober the people up. He has to get their attention, and that is going to require some very strong language, and in this particular episode, Darrell, we are going to have a lot of strong language from God...it is heavy.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is true...that is true; and so, God has been shifting. He started out in kind of like this courtroom language. I mean, this is actually where he will do it even more in this section, in this episode. It won't be like a love letter; it will be more like a courtroom, where God is bringing the charges against his people, and he begins that here in Chapter 4. It says:

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. ²There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. ³Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away. ⁴But let no one bring a charge, let no one accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. ⁵You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother— ⁶my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again, very direct here; a courtroom. There are multiple types of prophetic speech across all the prophets in the Old Testament; and one of them involves bringing...the Hebrew word is a *reeve*...a reeve is like a court case; it is a charge; it is an indictment against the people; and that is the language we have here, that I have a *charge* to bring against you.

So, we also see here, Darrell, this is not just about individual sin, it is about systemic sin—it is systemwide; it is baked in to the whole society. One thing I think is interesting, and you see this in Amos and some of the other prophets, too: Their sin is so bad that it actually affects the land; it affects the animals and the birds and the fish. There is this tight connection, between God as creator and God as redeemer, and the covenant God. So, when the people are faithless, even the land suffers.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, there is a systemic ripple effect that you are mentioning there. It kind of reminds you of the creation story because God starts creating the birds of the air, the fish in the sea, things like that; and now we see that because of their disobedience and rebellion, that is collateral damage that is being affected. The verse that really sticks out to me, Scott, is the one that says: My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. We know that that is not academic knowledge, that is not intellectual assent. The word for that in Hebrew is *yadah* and that means intimate personal connection—a relationship. They are not just forgetting about God, they are forgetting God himself, and they are breaking the connection with him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that *yadah* word; I mean, it is the same word used in Genesis: Adam knew Eve and she conceived, right? So, that referred to their sexual relationship, and it is that kind of deep, intimate, personal knowing that Israel did not have; and when we stop knowing God, we stop reflecting God's values; and let that go long enough, and you get moral collapse, which is clearly what is going on in Israel; and maybe I think sometimes we see that kind of moral collapse even yet today in societies around the world. We can be technologically advanced, seemingly spiritual; some people claim to be religious, but if there is no real knowledge—deep, intimate knowledge—a relational knowledge with God, then things are just going to unravel.

It affects even, of course...their hypocrisy seeps into their worship, and God addresses that through Hosea, in Chapter 8, starting at verse 11:

“Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning. ¹²I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something foreign. ¹³Though they offered sacrifices as gifts to me, and though they eat the meat, the Lord is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: They will return to Egypt. ¹⁴Israel has forgotten their Maker and built palaces; Judah has fortified many towns. But I will send fire on their cities that will consume their fortresses.”

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see here in this passage, Scott, that the people are morally off track. They are not just doing that, though, they are misusing worship now. So, they are going through all the motions, but their hearts are far from God. So, the altars that were meant for repentance are now becoming places of rebellion; and that is kind of a sobering thing for us, too, because, I mean, we could sing the songs at church, we could go to attend every week, but if our hearts are not in it...and even though we have the outward signs of faith, we can still be disconnected; and that is pretty sobering.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff, has written for many, many years that worship of God cannot happen in a genuine way in an unjust situation. If there is no justice; if people are not pursuing God's justice, then worship is hollow—it is false; and biblically we know that kind of worship nauseates God, right? God makes that very clear; and so, right; the people think that if they just go through the motions, God won't notice that there is nothing in their hearts.

There is a similar situation in Jeremiah, where Jeremiah upbraids the people who come to the temple and say: This is the temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord; you know, we are safe here. It is like a safehouse, but Jeremiah says: No, you have made it like a den of robbers. Jesus will quote that later. You are turning this into the place where you hide out after you rob the bank. This doesn't work. God sees through that falseness.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, we see that in Isaiah; you know, we see it in Joel, where: Rend your hearts and not your garments. He is saying: Don't perform; don't put on a show; I need your surrendered hearts. Hosea is trying to make sure that they understand that God is personally appealing to this, and it is a powerful image that God wants them to till the soil of their hearts in this situation, and not just go through the motions.

So, we covered two things mainly in this first segment, Scott. The first thing is that spiritual unfaithfulness begins when we forget who God is and what he has done. The second is that God wants more than our religion; he wants a renewal. But coming up in our next segment, we want to continue unpacking the book of Hosea. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott; and we have been talking about how things have been falling apart for Israel, and Hosea is calling to account and showing how idolatry, pride, and injustice are pulling the people of God away from God; and God has a broken heart about this, and he is continuing to call them back; but Hosea is actually also showing that the spiritual roots of the nation are in jeopardy here. In Chapter 5-7, God is going to continue laying out his charges, but there is particular emphasis on leadership failure, stubborn pride, and counterfeit repentance.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is from Hosea 5, starting in the first verse. God says, through Hosea: Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, royal house! This judgment is against you: You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. ²The rebels are knee-deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them. ³I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt. ⁴Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord. ⁵Israel's arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them. ⁶When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them. ⁷They are unfaithful to the Lord; they give birth to illegitimate children. When they celebrate their new moon feasts, he will devour their fields.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott; so, it is interesting. I don't want people to get caught up in this word *prostitution*, to relegate it only to sexual acts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think God is expanding the metaphor, because when you offer the gifts that God has given you to foreign gods, that is a form of spiritual prostitution; and God is wanting them to bring sacrifices and worship to him. They are doing that in the motions, but it is really just surface level, because their hearts and their pride are blocking that being pleasing to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in this passage we just read, we get Israel primarily, where Hosea primarily prophesied; but Judah—the southern kingdom of Judah—gets mentioned here, too; and of course, Judah is also in trouble, and they get condemned in other parts of the prophets. But again, they are thinking they can still go out and meet God on their own terms, and God says: Go ahead; look for me; you won't find me; uh uh; nope. I am pulling back; you are not going to find me. Don't even try.

We just talked in the previous segment about how worship in the absence of justice is nauseating to God...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is what we are seeing here: Don't even try it; don't even try it; because it is only going to make things worse for you at this point.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the issue that God is having with the people is that they want God *and*...they want God and the idol; they want God and the false worship; they want God and these things of the world; and God does not mix with any of those. He wants an exclusive relationship, where he is the source of their life, health and strength; the only true and living God. The problem is that not only the people are doing this, but the leaders...the priests, the royal houses are actually responsible. They are misleading the people, and that is a problem as well. So, he brings that up in Chapter 6, where it starts like repentance and sounds hopeful when he says: "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. ²After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.

Now, that sounds really hopeful, doesn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But then, in verse 4, it turns again, where it says:

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.

So, God sees through all the show. He sees through all the motions. He knows that this isn't just repentance, this is not repentance at all; this is more of a desperation move, because they are not looking for transformation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; they are kind of bargaining with God...plea bargaining with God here: If we do these things, you know, for a couple of days, it will be good. The third day, he will restore us totally; but, of course, although that looks like a spiritual response, it is hollow; it is hypocrisy; it is just saying the right words; even having the ability to quote scripture, which as we saw in the temptations in the wilderness with Jesus, even the devil can quote the Bible. Anybody can quote the Bible...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But unless it is in your heart...unless it is deep, deep, deep within you, then God compares it to the morning dew, you know, it is out there, then you look out a little later, and it is gone; it has all dried up. That is how that looks to God.

Then, if we move ahead a little bit, to Hosea Chapter 12, God is going to connect the current generation with a whole history of deceit. So, Hosea 12:2, again, that *reeve* language...that courtroom-like language: The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. ³In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. ⁴He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there— ⁵the Lord God Almighty; the Lord is his name! ⁶But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

So, there is that justice theme again. One of the things we know about the twelve minor prophets in particular, although you see it in the longer prophetic books like Isaiah and Jeremiah, but one of the refrains of the minor prophets...minor only in the sense that they are shorter books...is that Israel is not living up to God's call to justice. He laid it all out in Leviticus, you know, and Deuteronomy, where the law is. They were supposed to take extra-special care of widows and orphans and foreigners...aliens, immigrants in their midst; but they were abusing them instead. They were trampling on the poor. Amos famously uses that kind of language; and God just cannot take that. They cannot be God's people and live that way.

Darrell Delaney;

And God has been constantly pleading with them to return. If there is a refrain in the book of Hosea, it is: Return to me—return to me. He even uses it in this passage, where he reminds them of Jacob, who wrestled with God and was changed. The transformation is possible for them, but it starts with humility and not hiding behind their spiritual rituals; but the problem with Israel is that they don't understand that their sickness, spiritually speaking, is going deeper than they expected.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And God sees it. I mean, God sees right through it. They cannot deceive God. They are not going to fool God just because they, you know, sing the right songs and hold worship and sacrifice a bull or a lamb or something like that. God sees right through it and says, you know... It looks substantive, but as we just said, it is really like dew in the morning on the grass; it is there and then it is gone because it was never intended to last, really. Again, it is a sobering reminder for all of us today, too, that if we don't really know God... So, we said that earlier in the program, that deep, intimate *yadah* type knowledge, then even if we go to worship, we are just spinning our wheels. It is hollow, and God knows it. So, I think, Darrell, you know, it reminds us to examine our own response to conviction. Do we defend, distract or deflect when God calls us out, or do we genuinely repent? Do we think we can still secretly meet God on our own terms, or are we looking for a change deep, deep, deep, deep within our hearts?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, repentance has to come from a sincere heart in order to produce restoration, because God does not bless fake faith. I mean, we have to live and do it the way he calls us to do it, and do it in truth; and then he is ready to heal and open up his arms.

As we look at the rest of this episode, and how we close out the program, we want to talk about Hosea 9, 10, and 13, and talk about the consequences of rebellion; and we will see God's reflection of his heart. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are going to move into the latter part; Hosea has 14 chapters, and now we are going to go to 9 and 10. In a little while, I think we will look Chapter 13 a little bit, too; but the warnings are only going to get sharper. The grief in God's voice is just growing heavier. Israel, as we have seen, is reaping the consequences

of its long-term unfaithfulness. They have sown the wind and are reaping the whirlwind, because again, this is not just about a momentary lapse here and there, it is systemic—it is a systemic, spiritual decay; and God is still yearning for them. We can hear this from Hosea 9.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: Do not rejoice, Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor. ²Threshing floors and winepresses will not feed the people; the new wine will fail them. ³They will not remain in the Lord's land; Ephraim will return to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria.

So, it is really interesting how Israel has enjoyed the abundance and blessing the whole time, but instead of giving glory to God about it, they turn to these idols, and they celebrate, just like pagans, and they attribute their success to the false gods, just like the pagans; and that is a problem because God is the one who has done all this; and because of that, as a consequence, he is going to strip away all the blessings and the exile is going to happen physically. It reminds us of what happened in Deuteronomy 28, where God warned them. He said: If you obey me, you will be blessed in the land. If you disobey me, you will be cursed in the land and you will be moved and foreign people will come and take you away; and that is what is going to happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; God often uses the metaphor of returning the people to Egypt. They never actually did go back to Egypt, but that is symbolic: You are going to go back to a time of being under the thumb of somebody else; and for the northern kingdom of Israel, it will be Assyria. The Assyrians will wipe out Israel; and that northern kingdom never really fully comes back together. Judah will be wiped out by Babylon, but they will come back eventually, after about seventy years of exile. The northern kingdom just kind of gets spread all over the world and never really comes back together; and it is because of their divided hearts.

Now we will go into Hosea Chapter 10:

²Their heart is deceitful, (God says), and now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones... ¹³You have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors... You are doomed, basically, right?

So, God is using an agricultural metaphor here of planting and reaping and eating bad fruit: You are going to reap what you have sown.

But God does call them, Darrell, to something better. Here is Hosea 10:12:

Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, even now God is saying to them to break up this hard ground. King James says: Break up the fallow ground. He is saying you can start over, and you return to me, and I will pour out my righteousness on you. It is not just a doom message; it is not just a warning; but it is a warning motivated by love, because God still seeks restoration. He also does that, picking up in Chapter 13, he says in verse 6:

When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.

So, God is trying to show them that: You have already experienced my mercy; you have already experienced my love. You took that and you turned the wrong direction with it. Sometimes that happens with us, even today. Sometimes we forget that God has been good; that he has been providing. He has given us this roof over our heads, clothes on our backs, jobs that we carry, family members; but then we become self-reliant and independent and we think that we are okay, and our hearts kind of drift; and God is trying to remind us: Hey, don't forget where you get that stuff from. I am blessing you; I am helping you. So, he is trying to remind us of that as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You mentioned Deuteronomy earlier in the program. That was the great call of Moses in that long sermon that is the book of Deuteronomy: Remember and don't forget. You have been in the wilderness for all these years; you knew the manna was a gift of God; you knew water from a rock wasn't not a natural...these were

from God; but once you get to a new land, where you grow your own crops and you have your own well, it is easy to say: I am my family's provider; I have given myself these things, instead of giving credit to God. Well, as we wrap up the episode, maybe a couple of key takeaways, Darrell, that we have seen in some of these latter chapters in Hosea: First, God does hold us accountable, but he does it because he loves us. He confronts idolatry, injustice, pride. Not just to shame us; it is to bring us back. His discipline is a form of mercy; an invitation to change before it is too late; and indeed, you know, sometimes I say to students in my preaching classes that we think about God's grace as always just a happy thing and a saving thing; but sometimes God's grace comes to us as a rebuke. It is like the letter to the Galatians, where Paul just *yells* at the Galatians for having embraced the false gospel that they helped save themselves. So, he rebukes them; but it is a gracious thing, because Paul loved the Galatians; and God is holding the people of Israel accountable because he loves them and he wants them to come back.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, a lot of people are always doing a false dichotomy between law and grace. We are not under the law, we are under grace; but, I mean, if you understand the Reformed tradition, you understand the law *is* grace, because if God did not love us, he would not give us the standards by which to please him by the way we live; and we do that, not because we earn our righteousness, but because we are grateful for what he has done.

The second thing we think about as well is that only sincere repentance leads to restoration. The three Rs that God is interested in in the book of Hosea are: Remember, repent, and return...remember, repent, and return. We cannot just go through the motions and fool God, because that does not move him. You said it earlier: It nauseates him when we play church; when we put the face on, we sing the songs, and your hearts are not... He wants our whole self; he wants us broken and surrendered. When we do that, he can restore us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the challenge for all of us today. It is easy to look back on Israel and say how bad they were: Oh, oh, oh! But what about us? What about our own hearts? Are they like hard ground sometimes, too, that God's Word just does not penetrate? Do we go through the motions? God wants us to know what is wrong so that he can turn us to what is right, and that is what God wants to do for Israel despite how bad the situation is. Let's return to the one who never stops pursuing us, where God's grace is always there, thanks be to God. Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we conclude our study of Hosea.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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