

• LESSON 8 (February 19) •

The God Whose Heart is Grieved by Forsaken Covenants

The LORD God had made a covenant with and incredible promises to Abraham, the nation of Israel, and King David. But if you're familiar with the "big picture" of the Old Testament, you know that Abraham's descendants were far from faithful to their covenant with God.

How did their unfaithfulness make the LORD feel? While we could point to dozens of passages—especially from the Old Testament prophets—that provide an answer, we find profound responses to that question in Ezekiel and Hosea. Let's start with one chapter in Ezekiel's prophecy.

Again the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born. (Ezek 16:1-5)

- ❖ "Abominations" is a strong word. What does it mean?
- ❖ What or who does the LORD have in mind as he refers to "Jerusalem"?
- ❖ What is the LORD talking about as he describes the "origin" and "birth" of "Jerusalem"?

"And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.

"When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine. (Ezek 16:6-8)

- ❖ The LORD is clearly using powerfully vivid language in this section of Ezekiel's prophecy. What is he communicating? What was this covenant, and why describe it in this way?

"But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be... Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband!" (Ezek 16:15-16, 32)

- ❖ What did "Jerusalem" do against the LORD and why would the LORD describe her actions as "whoring" and "adultery"? What do these descriptions tell us about God?

And yet, even before the chapter has reached its conclusion, the LORD God says:

"For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in **breaking the covenant**, yet I will remember my **covenant** with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you **an everlasting covenant**. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the **covenant** with you. I will establish my **covenant** with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD." (Ezek 16:59-63)

The same message is conveyed, not just with words, but in the living example of the prophet Hosea.

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim... (Hos 1:2-3)

After children are borne through this union, Hosea 2 goes on to heartbreakingly describe a mother who "has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully" (2:5). And yet...

The LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hos 3:1-5)

- ❖ What was God teaching his people about covenants through Ezekiel and Hosea? Notice especially the insight provided in Hosea 6:4-7. What is the LORD God looking for from his people and how does he feel when covenants are forsaken?