

With What Kind of God Are We in Relationship?

Small Group Follow-up Study for Hosea 11:1-12

RE-READ

[1] When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. [2] The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.

[3] Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. [4] I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

[5] They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. [6] The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels. [7] My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.

[8] How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. [9] I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

[10] They shall go after the LORD; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west; [11] they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD. [12] Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.

RECAP

Hosea 11's picture of how God relates to his wayward children is unfolded for us in three scenes. In verses 1 to 4, we get a look at Israel's past relationship with God, how God responded to her waywardness up to the time of Hosea's writing. In verses 5 to 7, we get a look at Israel's present relationship with God together with God's immediate plans for the nation. In verses 8 to 11, we're given a look into the future at God's future relationship with Israel. How does God deal with a people who, according to verse 12, have surrounded him with lies and deceit?

Scene 1 depicts our God as one who loves—genuinely loves—his rebellious children. Two pictures are used here to convey this truth: a father's love for his children and a farmer's love for his animals. Scene 2, on the other hand, depicts our God as a God of holiness who, eventually, does judge his people's sin. If verses 1 to 4, show us that the LORD is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," verses 5 to 7 show us that he "will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Scene 3 brings us back to the picture of God we began with, a picture of a God who genuinely loves his rebellious children.

How does God love a rebellious people when his holiness calls for judgment? The answer is that Jesus becomes the rebellious person's righteousness and substitute.

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise in your mind that you would like to discuss?
2. How do you view God? Do you view him as a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak or do you view him as merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love? How does your view of God inform how you approach him both in worship and when you have sinned?
3. In what ways should God's love and his holiness inform our day-to-day living?
4. Compare 11:1-4 with 11:8-11. What are the two different time references? How is the intervening paragraph (11:5-7) a contrasting one? What encouragement do you see here for Israel?
5. How is God both just and the justifier of the ungodly? Why is Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 so important to properly understand this chapter?
6. Given our conversation tonight, what should we be praying for ourselves and for our church?