

Lesson 41

Hosea 12:10

10 I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables.

In just a few verses, Hosea has moved from Jacob to Egypt and now to the prophets. And again, we see that our first task in understanding Hosea is just to keep up with Hosea. Many verses in Hosea would be entire chapters in other books.

The message from God in verse 10 to the people is that they had been warned.

God says that he spoke to the prophets and multiplied visions. I think what that tells us is that, although the “prophets” in verse 10 certainly include the northern prophets we know about in the Bible such as Hosea and Amos, they also include many other prophets from God who did not leave us any written record.

Why so many? Because God was trying to get the people’s attention, and so God was sending them prophets and multiple visions to teach them and to warn them.

But why did God speak to them in parables or, as some translations say, in riddles? Why not tell them **plainly** what they need to do?

If you look at the Handout for Lesson 41, you can see that the parables in the Bible are not

confined to just the New Testament. In fact, there are quite a few “parables” in the Old Testament.

But why do I put quotation marks around “parables”? Because many of the parables listed on the Handout are quite different from what we usually think of as a parable based on our experience in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, a parable is a story that teaches a lesson – but that story is something that could have really happened. New Testament parables are not fables – we do not see talking animals or talking trees, for example.

And in the Old Testament, some parables are like that – but not all parables are like that. For example, we see some parables that might better be called fables, such as the trees choosing a king in Judges 9 and the thistle talking to the cedar in 2 Kings 14.

And other parables in the Old Testament are not spoken, but rather are acted out, such as the woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14 and the lost prisoner in 1 Kings 20.

In fact, we might need a better word than “parable” to describe what we find in the Old Testament, and perhaps that better word is “similitude.”

That is the word used in the KJV for verse 10, as shown at the bottom of the handout. And that word “similitude” seems a better fit for the Hebrew

word “dama,” which just means to compare or liken something.

So what then is verse 10 telling us? It is telling us that the prophets often proclaimed God’s word by giving comparisons – this is similar to that. And, in fact, we have already seen Hosea himself do that many times in this book.

But why? Why did the prophets use similitudes? Why not instead use exactitudes? Why all the metaphors? Why all the riddles? Why all the parables?

Well, we might ask Jesus that same question. And, in fact, we already have the answer to that question.

Matthew 13:11-17 – And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Just as the people had refused to heed Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9-10, so the people were refusing to heed Jesus in Matthew 13. In fact, Matthew 13 tells us that the prophecy in Isaiah 6 was also fulfilled by the people who rejected Jesus's message. And that reaction from the people, Jesus says, is why he speaks in parables.

But why not just speak clearly? I think we just read the answer to that question: "For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed."

We can speak clearly all day long, but if we are speaking to people who are blind and deaf, then our clear speech will not do them any good.

Yes, there is big problem described in Matthew 13, but that big problem is not a lack of clarity. The big problem described in Matthew 13 is that it is very difficult to teach (or even reach) people who close their eyes and cover their ears.

And so what is the solution? Well, one solution is to speak to them in parables.

But how is that a solution? It's a solution because the people who cover their ears to avoid hearing a clear message will often listen to a parable - and in doing so, they might end up accidentally learning something! They uncover their ears just long enough listen to an interesting story, and they end up hearing the

lesson they did not want to hear. It is like giving an educational toy to a child.

I think we see that with the New Testament parables.

Matthew 21:45 – When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

And we see the same thing in the Old Testament. Perhaps the best example is the story of the little ewe lamb that the prophet Nathan told King David in 2 Samuel 12. After that story, Nathan declared, “Thou art the man!” And when David heard that statement, he saw that story in a completely different light – and he learned something. But how would that event have transpired had Nathan spoken plainly right from the start?

Yes, Jesus could have told us with **only** very plain language that God loves us, that God wants us to repent, and that God does not want us to look down on those who sinned but later returned. But would anyone have preferred that over the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son?

Yes, Jesus sometimes told us those facts very plainly, but Jesus also told us those facts with parables that even two thousand years later are still touching the hearts and opening the ears of those who refuse to see and hear the gospel.

God always knows the perfect way to deliver his perfect message. God knows what we need to hear, and God how we need to hear it.

So, yes, the prophets often spoke very plainly.

Habakkuk 2:2 – And the LORD answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.”

But sometime the prophets instead spoke using parables and riddles and strange metaphors, as we are told here in verse 10 and as we have seen in our study of Hosea.

Hosea’s style is very different from Isaiah’s style. But both books are the inspired word of God, and both books show us the perfect word of God delivered in the perfect way.

And, at the end of Israel’s history, when the people had only a brief remaining window in which to repent, and when their eyes and their ears were closed to the word of God and to the prophets of God – at that time, God knew that the perfect way to deliver his word was through prophets using strange parables and vivid metaphors that would first grab the listeners’ attention, wake them up, and then perhaps end up teaching them something they otherwise would never have learned.

That was how Jesus was able to teach the Pharisees after they had closed their eyes and covered their ears – and that is how God was able to teach the people of Hosea’s day after they had

closed their eyes and covered their ears. And likewise with the other prophets:

Jeremiah 5:21 – Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not.

Ezekiel 12:2 – Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.

We might now ask ourselves this same question. How can we today get through to people who have eyes, but do not see, and who have ears, but do not hear?

We know what they need to learn – God’s word. And we know that God’s word is living and active and powerful and endlessly fascinating. But how do we convey that word? How do we get people to listen to it?

I’m sure there are many good answers to that question, but one thing is certain – **we will never wake anyone up by being dull!** The very last thing a sleeping person needs is a sleeping pill.

If we aren’t excited by God’s word, then how will we ever get others to listen to God’s word?

Yes, Jesus was completely without sin. But do you know what else Jesus was completely without? Dullness!

Jesus was never dull! And we shouldn’t be either! I doubt that anyone ever dozed off while Jesus was talking to them! Yes, they may have covered

their ears and gnashed their teeth, but their attention did not drift away.

I think there is a lesson there for anyone who purports to teach God's word. If we are excited about God's word, but we can't convey that excitement to others – then that is a problem. But if we are **not** excited about God's word – then that is a bigger problem!

In my experience, my favorite teachers were the ones who had a genuine delight in their subject – be it tax law or vector calculus!

Hosea 12:11

11 If there is iniquity in Gilead, they shall surely come to nothing: in Gilgal they sacrifice bulls; their altars also are like stone heaps on the furrows of the field.

Verse 10 told us that the prophets spoke in similitudes, so, to really drive home that point, verse 11 gives us a strange prophetic comparison. What does it mean?

Let's start by quickly reviewing what we know about the two locations in verse 11: Gilead and Gilgal. We have previously seen each of them in Hosea.

We saw Gilead in Hosea 6:8. Gilead was not a city, but was instead a region that included cities. But those cities in Gilead often used the name Gilead, such as with Jabesh-Gilead and Ramoth-Gilead, and so Gilead may have sometimes

been used as a shorthand for a city, as it seems to have been back in Hosea 6:8.

And what happened in the region of Gilead? One thing that happened there is that King Pekah, the head of the anti-Assyrian faction in the civil war, based his operations in Gilead. After Pekah killed Pekahiah (the head of the pro-Assyrian faction), the civil war ended and Pekah moved his operations to Samaria in Ephraim. Most of Gilead was then soon taken over by Assyria.

So, with that short review, why is Gilead mentioned here?

We may see a clue back in Hosea 6:8.

Hosea 6:8 – Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood.

There are, in fact, two clues in that verse, but those clues are very hard to see in English.

First, the Hebrew word translated “evildoers” in Hosea 6:8 is “aven” – the same word that Hosea has been using to describe Bethel (the house of God) as Beth-aven (the house of wickedness).

And, second, the Hebrew word translated “tracked” or “footprints” in Hosea 6:8 is “aqob,” which is the root word of the name “Jacob” (“ya-aqob”). And elsewhere that same Hebrew word is translated “deceitful.”

Jeremiah 17:9 – The heart is **deceitful** above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

And so, with those two clues, what can we say about Hosea 6:8? “Gilead is a city of **evildoers**, **tracked** with blood.”

What we can say is that anyone hearing Hosea say that would be thinking of at least three things – they would be thinking of Hosea’s use of the name **Beth-aven**, they would be thinking of **Jacob**, and they would be thinking of what happened to Jacob at **Bethel**.

Let’s now go back to Hosea 12:11 and ask our question again: why are Gilead and Gilgal mentioned here?

I think we can now answer that question when it comes to Gilead. Why? Because the Hebrew word translated “iniquity” in Hosea 12:11 is the same Hebrew word that was translated “evildoers” in Hosea 6:8 and is the same Hebrew word that Hosea has been using as a nickname for Bethel.

I think verse 11 mentions Gilead to bring our minds back to Jacob and back to Bethel.

And, of course, Gilead brings our minds back to Jacob for another reason – that is where Laban caught up with Jacob after he tricked him and fled.

Genesis 31:25-27 – And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of **Gilead**. And Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done, that you have **tricked** me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and **trick** me, and did not tell me, so that I might have

sent you away with mirth and songs, with
tambourine and lyre?

But what happened to Jacob? Did he come to
nothing? Absolutely not.

Jacob was reconciled with Laban, Jacob was
reconciled with Esau, and Jacob was reconciled
with God – wrestling with an angel at Penuel and
meeting God again at Bethel.

Yes, Jacob struggled, but Jacob prevailed! Yes,
Jacob struggled, but Jacob received grace! Yes,
Jacob struggled, but Jacob was blessed by God and
once again received the promises of God at
Bethel.

But what about the people who were listening to
Hosea? They, like Jacob were struggling. Would
they, like Jacob, prevail? Would they, like
Jacob, receive grace? Would they, like Jacob,
receive the promises? No. They would not.

And why not? Because they did not know God.
Because they had all of Jacob's bad qualities,
but they had none of Jacob's good qualities.

The first half of the prophetic riddle in verse
11 is a very short restatement of what we have
already seen in this chapter – if the people
wanted to enjoy the promises given to Jacob, then
the people needed to seek God and know God like
their father Jacob.

So what then about the second half of verse 11?
“In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls; their altars
also are like stone heaps on the furrows of the
field.”

Why is Gilgal mentioned here?

We saw Gilgal in Hosea 4:15 and Hosea 9:15. Gilgal was where King Saul disobeyed God by failing to destroy all of the Amalekites, and so in Hosea 9:15, God said, "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them." And back in Hosea 4:15, we saw how Gilgal had gone from being a shrine for pilgrims to instead being a center of apostasy.

So what then is verse 11 telling us about Gilgal? It is telling us that the people were still sacrificing bulls there, but those sacrifices were meaningless because the city and the altars in Gilgal were all defiled.

Rather than allowing the people to get closer to God, their altars had instead become "like stone heaps on the furrows of the field."

That is, those altars were doing the opposite of what they had been intended to do – they were keeping the people away from God. They had become just stumbling blocks in a field. They were preventing the people from plowing and harvesting. Their altars had become obstacles for the people rather than blessings for the people as God had intended.

We saw this same thing earlier in Hosea 8.

Hosea 8:11 – Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they have become to him altars for sinning.

As we discussed back in Lesson 30, those altars **for sinning** (that is, altars to deal with sin)

had instead become altars for sinning (that is, altars providing an excuse to sin more and more)! Rather than dealing with their sin, the altars for their false gods had instead become the locations for their immoral worship of their false fertility gods.

I think we see the same message here in verse 11. The altars of stone had become only piles of stone, and those stones prevented the people from plowing and reaping as they should.

And so what can we say about verse 11? We can say that it is an excellent example of what we said about verse 10 – that God sometimes uses parables or riddles or vivid metaphors to reach people who might otherwise be unreachable. I think that is what the text of Hosea is doing right here in verse 11.

Hosea 12:12

12 Jacob fled to the land of Aram; there Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he guarded sheep.

The first thing we can say about verse 12 is that it confirms what we said about verse 11 – that verse was intended to remind us of Jacob.

And so now here in the next verse we have more than just a reminder of Jacob – we have an explicit mention of Jacob. The context about Jacob that started in verse 2 is continuing here in verse 12.

Back in verses 3–4 we saw an abbreviated account of some of the events in Jacob’s life. Here in verse 12 see another event from Jacob’s life.

First, we read: “Jacob fled to the land of Aram.”

This event is described in Genesis 27:41–28:5.

Esau threatens to kill Jacob, and Rebekah, his mother, hears about the plot. And so Rebekah gets Isaac to send Jacob to her brother Laban in Paddan–aram to keep Jacob from marrying a Canaanite woman. And it is on that journey to the land of Aram that Jacob has his first meeting with God at Bethel in Genesis 28:10–22.

Notice that Genesis 27:43 tells us that Laban was in Haran, but Genesis 28:2 tells us that Jacob went to Paddan–aram (from which we get “the land of Aram” here in verse 12).

Paddan–aram is either the area around Haran, or is possibly an Aramaic rendering of the city name Haran. This connection with Aram is why Jacob is called “a wandering Aramean” in Deuteronomy 26:5.

Second, we read: “There Israel served for a wife.”

This event is described in Genesis 29:1–30.

Jacob serves seven years for Rachel, the younger sister of Leah, but Laban tricks him and gives him Leah instead. And so Jacob agrees to serve another seven years for Rachel.

Third, we read: “And for a wife he guarded sheep.”

This event is described in Genesis 30:25–43, and also earlier in Genesis 29:9 where we are told that Rachel was a shepherdess.

And so verse 12 is a brief but straightforward account of Jacob's journey to live with Laban, of Jacob's marriage to Rachel and Leah, and of Jacob's service to Laban by guarding his sheep.

But why are we told these things in verse 12? Verse 13 will answer that question.

But before we get to verse 13, let's ask one more question about verse 12: why do we see both the name Jacob and the name Israel in this one verse?

I think the answer is simple – the text wants us to remember that Jacob changed. Jacob had a meeting with God, and Jacob was transformed. Yes, Jacob had his faults, but Jacob also had many good points. Jacob did not stay Jacob forever – Jacob became Israel!

I think there is a very profound message in the occurrence of both the name Jacob and the name Israel in this one short verse. Jacob changed, and so could the people who were listening to Hosea. God through Hosea repeatedly reminds the people of that wonderful fact, and through Hosea God also reminds us today of that same wonderful fact! Jacob became Israel!

Hosea 12:13

13 By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded.

Our question about verse 12 was why the people were being reminded of those events from the life of Jacob. Verse 13 answers that question.

As we recall, we had the same question about verses 3–4. And the answer we found there was that God wanted the people to see how they had inherited Jacob's bad traits but had not inherited Jacob's good traits. That is why the great promises to Jacob and his offspring no longer applied to them even though they were Jacob's offspring.

As with verses 3–4, verse 12 is intended to teach the people a lesson from the life of Jacob – but the lesson in verse 12 is different from the lesson we saw earlier about verses 3–4.

So what is the lesson we are intended to see in verse 12? Verse 13 tells us we are intended to see something about the exodus and something about a prophet.

Now, for starters, those topics should not come as a surprise to us. Why not? Because we saw the exodus in verse 9, and we saw prophets in verse 10. Verses 12–13 are part of a context that already includes the exodus and prophets.

But what is the lesson here about those two topics? What do the events in verse 12 from Jacob's life teach us about the exodus? What do those events from Jacob's life teach us about a prophet?

As for the exodus, there are several similarities between what happened to Jacob in Haran and what happened to Jacob and his descendants in Egypt.

First, both Haran and Egypt are foreign lands that served as a place of refuge.

Jacob fled to Haran to keep Esau from finding him and killing him. And, later, Jacob and his family fled to Egypt to keep themselves from dying from a famine.

Second, both Haran and Egypt turned out to be more a place of servitude than a place of refuge.

Jacob sought refuge but ended up being tricked and having to serve Laban for 14 years to obtain Rachel's hand. Likewise, Jacob's descendants eventually met a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph and ended up being oppressed and enslaved by those to whom they had fled for safety.

Third, both Haran and Egypt tried to prevent those who sought refuge from becoming wealthy and then leaving with that wealth.

We see that in Exodus 30 when Laban tried to trick Jacob by hiding the speckled and spotted goats and the black sheep that he had agreed Jacob could have.

Likewise, the Egyptians oppressed the descendants of Jacob because they feared "the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us" (Exodus 1:9). "But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad" (Exodus 1:12). And so, Egypt "ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made

their lives bitter with hard service” (Exodus 1:13-14).

Fourth, with both Haran and Egypt, God delivered those who had fled there for refuge.

With Jacob, we see a miracle in Exodus 30 by which “the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted” sheep and goats. And Jacob eventually fled from Laban taking his wealth with him.

Likewise, God miraculously delivered the descendants of Jacob from Egyptian servitude, and they also fled with wealth.

Exodus 12:36 – And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Fifth, in both Haran and in Egypt, those living there were tended.

The Hebrew word translated “guarded” in verse 12 (“for a wife he guarded sheep”) is the same Hebrew word translated “guarded” in verse 13 (“and by a prophet he was guarded”).

With Haran, it was the sheep who were tended or guarded. With Egypt, it was Israel who was tended or guarded. But in each case someone was watching out for them and was keeping them safe.

But who is the prophet in verse 13?

“By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded.”

That prophet, of course, is Moses. And we know that Moses was a prophet.

Deuteronomy 18:18 – I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

That verse tells us two things. First, it tells us that Moses was a prophet. And second, it tells us that someday there would be another prophet who, like Moses, would proclaim God's word to the people.

And, of course, we know that promised prophet was Jesus (Acts 3:22), the Messiah who (like Moses) came to deliver people from bondage and death and lead them to a wonderful promised land filled with blessings from God.

I think that connection with the Messiah is one reason why Moses is called a prophet twice in this verse.

But I think a second reason Moses is called a prophet here is that the people were intended to see in that description of Moses a connection between the prophet Moses and the prophet Hosea. When the people rejected Hosea, they were also rejecting Moses. And, as they rejected Moses and rejected Hosea, we know that many of them would later reject Christ.