

Lesson 7

Last week we met Hosea's first child, Jezreel, and when we ended we were looking at the phrase "the blood of Jezreel" in verse 4. Let's reread verses 4 and 5.

Hosea 1:4-5 – And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

What is the blood of Jezreel? As we saw last week, we have a lot to choose from!

- Jehu shot King Joram with an arrow, and Joram's body was thrown out on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth.
- King Ahaziah of Judah saw what happened to King Joram and started to flee, but Jehu also shot and killed him.
- Jehu commanded that Jezebel be thrown down and killed to fulfill the prophecy of Elisha that the dogs shall eat her flesh.
- Jehu then received the heads of the 70 sons of King Ahab in baskets, and Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab.
- Finally, Jehu tricked and killed all the priests of Baal and demolished the house of Baal, making it a latrine to this day.

And our question at the end of class was this:
Was God upset by all of that bloodshed?

The answer to that question is easy. No, God was not upset by all of that bloodshed.

First, as we remember from 2 Kings 9:7, God had commanded Jehu to strike down the house of Ahab. And, second, immediately after all the bloody events we just listed, here is what God said to King Jehu.

2 Kings 10:30 – And the LORD said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”

But perhaps that was not the question we should have asked – was God upset by all of that bloodshed? Perhaps we should have instead asked this question – was God upset by any of that bloodshed? Was God pleased with everything that Jehu had done, or just be some of the things that Jehu had done?

And perhaps that question has a different answer. Why? Because Jehu had been commanded to wipe out the house of King Ahab of Israel, but Jehu did more than that – Jehu also killed King Ahaziah of Judah (along with some of his relatives), and Jehu seemingly did so only as an afterthought.

2 Kings 9:27 – When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued him and said, “**Shoot him also.**” And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo and died there.

And Jehu did not stop there.

2 Kings 10:13-14 – Jehu met the relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah, and he said, “Who are you?” And they answered, “We are the relatives of Ahaziah, and we came down to visit the royal princes and the sons of the queen mother.” He said, “Take them alive.” And they took them alive and slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two persons, and he spared none of them.

And the death of King Ahaziah almost led to the destruction of King David’s royal line at the hands of Ahaziah’s mother.

2 Kings 11:1-3 – Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family. But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being put to death, and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus they hid him from Athaliah, so that he was not put to death. And he remained with her six years, hidden in the house of the LORD, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

So, yes, Jehu’s actions at Jezreel almost led to the complete destruction of the line of King David, but, of course, we know that God could not have allowed that to happen, and it did not happen.

And although God had commanded Jehu to strike down the house of Ahab, there is no record that God ever commanded Jehu to do the same to the house of Ahaziah. And, as for Jehu himself, he turned out to be just as bad of a king as the other northern kings.

2 Kings 10:31 – But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with

all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin.

So, with all of that background in mind, let's go back to our questions: To what event does "the blood of Jezreel" in verse 4 refer, and why and how is the house of Jehu going to be punished for that event 80 years after the fact?

Let's start with the easiest question first – how is the house of Jehu to be punished? We have already seen the answer to that question.

Yes, four generations of Jehu's family followed him to the throne as had been promised by God in 2 Kings 10:30, but that fourth descendant, Zechariah, reigned only six months before he was killed by Shallum. That event was yet future when the prophecy of Hosea 1:4 was given, and that prophecy against the house of Jehu was fulfilled when the dynasty of Jehu came to an end with the death of Zechariah.

But **why** did that happen? Why was the house of Jehu **seemingly** being punished for something God had **commanded** Jehu to do and then had **commended** Jehu for having done?

I used the word "seemingly" because, although it may look on the surface that God is now punishing Jehu for doing something he was commanded to do, I think we can immediately rule that out. It would not make any sense for God to punish Jehu for something that God had both commanded Jehu to do and had commended, and in fact had rewarded, Jehu for having done.

We should pause here to note that some commentaries disagree with that conclusion. They say that Jehu was in fact now being punished for something that had earlier been rewarded. Why? Because, they say:

“Hosea's pronouncement represents a major step forward in the evolution of Israel's understanding of God: the religious pogrom once commended by the prophets now stands condemned.”

But, of course, that doesn't make any sense at all. First, whether or not the people were evolving in their understanding, we know that God was not evolving. If God approved of some event that occurred in the days of Jehu, then we know that God still approved of that event in the days of Hosea.

And, we should note, Hosea himself is not shy at all when it comes to bloodshed:

Hosea 13:8 – I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs; I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.

So, I think we can conclude that God is not punishing the house of Jehu for what Jehu had done to the house of Ahab. What is left? We have two options.

First, God may have been punishing the house of Jehu for what Jehu did, not to the house of Ahab, but to the house of Ahaziah. Perhaps Jehu went too far when he assassinated Ahaziah and 42 members of his family, so that the “blood of Jezreel” refers to the blood of Ahaziah.

But if God had a problem with the death of Ahaziah and the relatives of Ahaziah, then we might wonder why nothing was said about that issue when God in 2 Kings 10:30 commended Jehu for having “done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes.”

And we should note that Ahaziah, like Joram, was also an evil king.

2 Chronicles 22:2-4 – Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done. For after the death of his father they were his counselors, to his undoing.

And so we could certainly see how Jehu could have been commended by God after having killed **both** Joram and Ahaziah, which is seemingly exactly what happened.

A second option is that God may have been punishing the house of Jehu for not learning the lesson that God had been teaching with the bloody events that occurred in Jezreel during the days of Jehu. And this view seems very likely to me. Why?

Because the commendation in 2 Kings 10:30 came at the **beginning** of the house of Jehu, while the punishment here in verse 4 was now coming near the **end** of the house of Jehu. So perhaps that timing tells us that the punishment had more to do with what the house of Jehu had done **after** the

events at Jezreel rather than what Jehu had done at Jezreel.

And another reason I like this view is that it makes sense with the context. Hosea's message is not addressed to Jehu, who had died 50 years earlier. Hosea's message is addressed to the people who had been ruled by the dynasty of Jehu for 80 years.

Here is the key question: how were the people under Zechariah and the house of Jehu any different from the people under Joram and the house of Ahab (from the dynasty of Omri, Ahab's father)? The answer is not much!

Hosea's listeners, like their ancestors, had forsaken God for Baal. They had learned nothing from the blood of Jezreel, and so God would bring the house of Jehu to an end with that promised fourth generation.

But what does verse 5 mean?

"And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

Most likely the reference to breaking to bow of Israel refers to a military defeat of Israel. But which defeat?

It may refer to the defeat of Israel by Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser III in response to Judah's cries for help under King Ahaz. We talked about that defeat earlier when we looked at 2 Kings 16:7 and Isaiah 7. But that happened **after** the

end of Jehu's dynasty, which might be stretching the phrase "on that day" a bit too far.

A better answer may be that the defeat in verse 5 refers to death of Zechariah.

2 Kings 15:10 – Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and struck him down at Ibleam and put him to death and reigned in his place.

Notice that Shallum killed Zechariah at Ibleam. Where is Ibleam located? We have already seen an answer to that question! Let's read again the verse that we looked at earlier about the death of King Ahaziah of Judah at the hands of Jehu.

2 King 9:27 – When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued him and said, "Shoot him also." And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo and died there.

Ibleam was located in the valley of Jezreel, and Zechariah, the fourth generation of Jehu, died in the same valley where Jehu had killed Ahaziah, the king of Judah. (You can see Ibleam on the map shown on the handout for Lesson 6.)

This fact might provide some support for the view that the blood of Jezreel refers to the murder of Ahaziah. But wherever we land on that question, I think we would all agree that Zechariah's death at Ibleam falls under the category of poetic justice! Jehu's dynasty came to a bloody end in the same area where it had its bloody beginning!

Let's look at two more things about the name "Jezreel" before we move on to look at the next child.

First, the Hebrew word "Jezreel" (in addition to being a place name) can mean "God will scatter" as one might scatter seed. That secondary meaning is, of course, very relevant to Israel, which would soon be scattered by Assyria.

Second, in Hebrew (as in English) the name "Jezreel" sounds very similar to the name "Israel." That wordplay drives home the point that the child (Jezreel) is a sign for the nation (Israel). They are similar even to the point of their names sounding alike.

And if we are wondering whether this triple meaning was intentional, let's hold off on that question for a while. Why? Because we may see some **quadruple** meanings before this book is over! Also, we may get see some evidence later in the book confirming that these additional meanings were, in fact, intentional. For now, let's just keep the possibility in mind.

Hosea 1:6

6 She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.

In verse 6, we are introduced to Hosea and Gomer's second child, a daughter.

And immediately we have a question. In verse 3, we read, “she conceived and bore him a son.” Here in verse 6, we read, “she conceived again and bore a daughter.” The key word “**him**” is missing in verse 6!

Can we conclude that this daughter was **not** Hosea’s daughter?

One commentary says not necessarily. It suggests that Hosea may have just omitted the obvious with the description of his second child. (And, looking ahead, we see that same omission in verse 8 with Gomer’s third child.)

While that explanation might make sense with a normal, happily married couple (where it would be readily assumed that all of their children were born in wedlock), that is hardly the situation here! Gomer was selected specifically because she was immoral, which immediately raises the question of paternity for each of her children. With the first child, we are told that Hosea is the father. With the second and third children, we are not told that Hosea is the father.

Was Hosea the father of his final two children? We don’t know for sure, but we have seen and will see some reasons to think that they were not.

But, again, that is not the question we should be asking – whether we think the children are legitimate. The real question is this: did **Hosea** think the children were legitimate? And I suspect the answer for him is the same as the answer for us – he didn’t know for sure, and there were some reasons for him to think that they were not. And

what about the children? Did they wonder who their father was?

The text is ambiguous as to the paternity of those final two children, and I think that ambiguity is deliberate. God, of course, knew the answer to that question, but God did not want us to know. I think God wanted both us and Hosea to wonder about the answer to that question – at least at this point in the text. Maybe we will see some conclusive evidence on this question as we progress through the book.

And maybe we don't have to wait very long for that evidence. What do we read next? "And the LORD said to him, 'Call her name No Mercy.'"

What does that name mean? The translation I just read was from the ESV. If we turn to the KJV or the ASV, we find the name Lo-Ruhamah, which is just a transliteration of the Hebrew words translated "no mercy" in the ESV. Other translations have "No Pity" or "No Compassion" as her name.

None of those translations seems to capture the meaning that I think we are intended to see here with this name. Why? Because we are not talking about a lack of mercy or pity or compassion that someone might have for an acquaintance or even for a stranger. This lack of mercy or compassion or pity is describing the feeling of a father to his daughter!

As one commentary describes it: her name "communicates rejection by her father and says

that he has abandoned her to all the troubles of the world.”

And how do we think that little girl would have seen her own name? I think she would have seen her name the same way that we are intended to see it: Not **Loved**.

And that interpretation of “not loved” does not violate the definition of the underlying Hebrew word. Here is how the underlying Hebrew word is defined in one lexicon:

“to fondle; by implication, to love, especially to have compassion on or upon, to love, to find, have, obtain, or show mercy on or upon, to have pity.”

Why then do all of those translations either opt for no translation at all or translate the name as “no mercy”? Perhaps because they are trying to soften the blow! Perhaps because it is unthinkable that someone would name his daughter “not loved”! But isn’t that the point? Wasn’t her name intended to be shocking? Intended to be unthinkable?

And as tempted as we might be today to soften the blow, do we think this little girl softened the blow when she thought about her own name? Do we think the other children in the village softened the blow? I think we should see her name as harshly as we can because I think that is what was intended, and I think that is how she and everyone else likely viewed her strange name.

One more reason I think we are on the right track with the translation “not loved” is because of how we see the same word used in the Psalms.

Psalm 103:13 – As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

That word translated “compassion” in Psalm 103:13 is the same word we find here in Hosea 1:6 – and it the same thing that Hosea was announcing to the world that he did not have for his daughter!

Psalm 103:13 assumes that all fathers have this feeling for all of their children, but not Hosea, at least according to Hosea 1:6.

So did God not love his people? Is that the message we are intended to understand with this name? Yes and no.

Of course, God loved these people in the sense of God loving all people – the sense of God loving the world in John 3:16. **But did God love these people as a father loves his children?** Look at Psalm 103:13 again.

Psalm 103:13 – As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

So the Lord shows compassion to everyone? No. So the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. This compassion is not something that God has for everyone.

And again, that is why I think “Not Loved” is a better translation for the name of this little

girl. Why? Because it is suggesting a break in that special paternal bond that a parent has for a child.

Now, earlier I said that Hosea did not have this love for his daughter, **at least according to Hosea 1:6**. Why did I emphasize that last phrase?

Because we should not assume that the name Hosea was commanded to give his daughter was ever an indication of how Hosea felt about his daughter.

The name "Not Loved" was intended to shock the people and to teach the people a lesson about their own relationship with God. It was not given as a sign for Hosea's daughter.

I do not see any evidence here that this strange name was ever intended to color Hosea's own feelings about his own daughter. And perhaps Hosea went out of his way to show his love for his daughter – both as a lesson about the restoration that God was planning for his own people and perhaps as a way to make up somewhat for the dreadful name that he had given her!

Her name was intended as a sign for Israel, and we can imagine how Hosea used her name in his preaching. Here is how one commentary describes it:

The little girl was the text of Hosea's sermons. The people heard that terrible name and no doubt whispered to one another, "Hosea's wife is unfaithful; he must doubt that this child is his. He has rejected the poor thing!" and Hosea could respond something like: "Do you trouble yourself over Lo-Ruhamah? I tell you, you are Lo-Ruhamah! God has turned his back on you!" He

would be like Nathan with David: "You are the man!"

And **why** was she given that dreadful name? The text answers that question: "for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel."

And I think that reason fits perfectly with what we just said. God is describing the break of a paternal bond. God would no longer have for Israel the compassion that a father shows to his children. God would no longer have the compassion that he shows to those who fear him. And whether we refer to that as "No Mercy" or "Not Loved," I think the conclusion is the same: that special paternal bond that a parent has for a child had been lost.

Before we leave verse 6, let's look at the much-debated phrase at the end of the verse: "to forgive them at all." What does that mean? Is the ESV translation correct ("for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all")?

Let's start with that last question first – is the ESV translation correct? And in answering that question, we will also be judging virtually every other translation of that verse. They almost all translate the verse to say either (1) that God would not have mercy on Israel **and** would not forgive Israel or (2) to say that God would not have mercy on Israel **by** forgiving Israel.

Is either of those translations the correct translation? Perhaps not.

One Hebrew scholar describes the first translation as a “very questionable, and one might even say impossible, translation of the Hebrew.” And as for the second translation, he says that “if the Hebrew here means this, it is unlike any other Hebrew in the Bible.” According to him, the most obvious understanding of the Hebrew is that it means the **opposite**: “But I will certainly forgive them.”

If the English translations are correct and this Hebrew scholar is wrong, then the meaning is clear. God’s patience had run out with regard to Israel. The door had really be closed, and there was no re-opening it.

But what if that Hebrew scholar is right? What if – once again – we consider the possibility that the text means exactly what it says! Where are we then? Can we explain how God could say to Israel, “I will no longer show mercy to the house of Israel, but I shall certainly forgive them”?

First, as to the translation question, in my opinion the English translations are wrong. I think the text is saying that God **will** forgive them rather than saying that God **will not** forgive them. Why?

Because this is hardly the only example in Hosea where we see such a thing! Just look a few verse later!

Hosea 1:9-10 – ...for you are not my people, and I am not your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea...

We are used to the Bible telling us that one thing is true in one sense, but that the opposite is true in another sense. For example, we understand what Jesus means in Mark 10:31 when he tells us that the first shall be last, and we understand what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 12:10 when he says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." But we usually have some context when that happens in the Bible. Hosea usually doesn't give us much context here.

Remember in our introduction we made the point that Hosea places great demands on his readers. Here in verse 6 I think we see an example of that. "I will no longer show mercy to the house of Israel, but I shall certainly forgive them."

What does that mean? Does verse 7 help? No. Verse 7 changes the subject! Then how are we to figure out how God could both have no mercy on someone while certainly forgiving them?

First, I think we may be seeing here what someone described as "the language of the vexation of a broken heart." And here that broken heart is God's heart. I think we will see that again near the end of the book.

Hosea 11:8 – 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.

But second, I think we are seeing here something that we will see again and again in this book –

immediate judgment and rejection, but with a **future** promise of blessing and restoration.

We must never forget that this book of Hosea, like every book in the Old Testament, is pointing us to Christ. I think that is what the end of verse 6 is doing – pointing to Christ and the kingdom of Christ. Yes, the judgment of Israel is coming, but so is the Messiah!

Hosea 1:7

7 But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

With verses 6 and 7, we see something that we will see again and again in this book – pessimism about Israel, but optimism about Judah. Verse 6 told us that Israel would have no mercy, but verse 7 tells us that Judah will have mercy.

Why the optimism? One reason may be that of the four southern kings we saw in verse 1, only one of them (Ahaz) was evil. The other three did what was right in the eyes of God.

But, if Hosea is from the north and is living and preaching in Israel, then why does Hosea have anything at all to say about Judah? Chapter 3 helps us answers that question.

Hosea 3:5 – 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.

The happy ending that God was planning for Israel (and everyone else) depended on King David, who was from the tribe of **Judah**. God could and did scatter Israel to the winds, but God could not do that to Judah. Why? Because God had made an unconditional promise to King David in Psalm 89 (and elsewhere) that one of David's descendants would reign forever from David's throne.

Psalm 89:34-36 – I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

That is why Hosea keeps talking about Judah in his message to Israel. It was because Israel's future blessings depended on Judah, as did the future blessings of the entire world.