

Sermon Series: *Hosea: A Divine Love Story*



## A Holy Love for a Whoring Land

### **Hosea 1:2-11** (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

<sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

<sup>6</sup> 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." <sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup> When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

<sup>10</sup> Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.” <sup>11</sup> And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

## Introduction

Among my fondest childhood memories are going for long walks through the woods behind my house with my dad when he would come home from work. We would walk back a long path through the woods to an old abandoned bridge. We’d cross the abandoned bridge and go over to an old abandoned farm. We took this walk dozens upon dozens of times. I never tired of it.

The path was always the same, the broken bridge was always the same, the decrepit farm buildings were always the same. What was never the same and what always kept me yearning for another walk, was the conversation with my dad. He always had something new to say to me. A new joke, or some new project at work to tell me about, or some story about his childhood. Going for long walks down old paths led to new and deeper ways of getting to know my old dad and drawing closer to him.

I believe this sermon series in the book of Hosea will be similar to this. Walking down this old path, called Hosea, will lead to new and deeper ways of getting to know our old God and drawing closer to him...

...but only for those who expect and yearn for it to be so.

If our time in this book is to be sweet, then you and I must eagerly yearn for the Lord to come and meet us and you must begin to actively pray for that to happen. When I was little I could not wait for my dad to come home from work so we could go for a walk. It must be this way for us with our God. We must have this kind of expectant faith. We must. If we do not, then there will be no pleasantness in the journey.

### Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

I believe that our time in book of Hosea will be rewarding. You must as well, or it will not be. We—all of us—must pray with thirsty, panting hearts that God will open the eyes of our hearts and allow us to really know him; to know him truly and more deeply. And we must believe that this will be wonderfully rewarding.

## Review

That was the point of last week's message. It was to whet your appetite to know God more deeply and walk with him more sweetly through the book of Hosea. Hosea is not an old dead book. It is the living word of God and Hosea still speaks to us today. He is saying,

*"Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord;  
His going out is as sure as the dawn;  
he will come to us, as the showers,  
as the spring rains that water the earth."*

Hosea 6:3 (ESV)

He will keep his word. He will come to us. He will come to the souls of those who seek him and he will rain down them like spring showers which bring life and beauty.

And if you need some help in believing how our time in Hosea will be good and sweet, then go read or listen to [last week's sermon](#). In it, I offered 11 reasons why I believe that walking down this old spiritual path will be worth your time.

## The Calling of Hosea & the Sin of Israel (v.2-3)

In say this is old path because the first verse helps us understand that the events of this book unfold between 753 - 687 B.C. We don't know much about Hosea except what we find in these few verses.

Hosea's ministry is primarily aimed at Israel, in the north. The prophet Isaiah was a contemporary of Hosea, and his ministry was focused in Judah to the south.

As I noted last week, we must remember that the nation (12 tribes) of Israel at this time was divided. The 10 tribes in the north were referred to as the house of Israel while the two tribes to the south were referred to as the house of Judah.



Throughout the book, the nation of Israel (the northern tribes) will sometimes be referred to as Ephraim or the Ephraimites. Ephraim was one of the two sons of Joseph and is used synonymously with Israel.

The kings of Israel abandoned God as soon as the division of the kingdom took place and almost all the kings of Israel were godless and wicked. The southern kingdom, the house of Judah, remained faithful to God much, much longer than Israel, but eventually they too embraced worshipping idols and turned away from God and forsook him.

## God's View of Idolatry

God views the worshipping of any one or any thing other than himself as spiritual adultery. Idolatry is spiritual treachery. It is evil and personally offensive to God. It is an insult against his holy character. Furthermore, it is a violation of the first commandment. *"You shall have no other gods before me."*

The giving of the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai was the wedding ceremony between God and Israel. The first promise they made was that they would worship no one else. It was now 700 years after they exchanged vows and Israel's idolatry was so spiritually abhorrent that God was no longer willing to tolerate it.

Verse two explains the situation.

Hosea 1:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> ...for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.

The people of Israel had forsaken God and gone after other gods. God says this is **great whoredom**. God uses strong language to convey the depth of the offense. They had grown so cold toward God that they were not even aware of how far they had gone. The worship of idols was everywhere, *"on every high hill and under every green tree."*<sup>1</sup> The primary object of their worship was Baal.

Baal was the weather-god worshiped in Syria-Palestine, who [was believed to have] had control over agriculture and fertility, rainfall and productivity. Since ancient Israel was always an agricultural society, Baal worship was of unrivaled importance.<sup>2</sup>

Since Baal was understood to be the god of agriculture and fertility, the Israelites combined those two aspects of worship, so that when worshippers came to the shrines to offer sacrifices, they were also provided with prostitutes.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kg 14:23; 2 Kg 16:4; 17:10; 2 Chr 28:4; Is 57:5; Jer 2:20; 3:6, 13; Ez 6:13.

<sup>2</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, Introduction to Hosea (Crossway, 2001), 1619.

**Hosea 4:12-14 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> My people inquire of a piece of wood,  
and their walking staff gives them oracles.  
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,  
and they have left their God to play the whore.*

*<sup>13</sup> They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains  
and burn offerings on the hills,  
under oak, poplar, and terebinth,  
because their shade is good.*

*Therefore your daughters play the whore,  
and your brides commit adultery.*

*<sup>14</sup> I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore,  
nor your brides when they commit adultery;  
for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes  
and sacrifice with cult prostitutes,  
and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.*

What happens to a society when it becomes so deceived that it believes that it is pleasing God by incorporating into its ceremonies of worship, the very things which God has said he hates and has strictly forbidden? The final word in verse 14 answers that question; that is a society that will come to ruin.

Imagine the utter moral revulsion a holy God must feel toward this kind of situation. Even the most godless atheist among us would be shocked to read that the local church in order to strive for cultural relevance and increase attendance is now making available prostitutes for all worship attenders. This is cultural condition of day.

What would awaken such people to the danger in which they live? What would cause them to see that the things they are celebrating are the very things that will cause God to bring down destruction upon their heads?

In order to awaken the people out of their sinful stupor, they needed to be shocked. They needed an illustration of the depths of their spiritual insanity. They needed a living example that would stun them out of their pathway to ruin.

And so God called Hosea.

**Hosea 1:2-3 (ESV)**

*<sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim...*

This is quite staggering. God directly speaks to Hosea and the first words he speaks, is a command to **marry a wife of whoredom**. The first time God speaks to Hosea, he hears the words, "Hosea, I want you to marry a promiscuous woman." This is shocking.

## God Often Commands Crazy During Crazy Times

Some theologians get all twisted in knots about this because they can't imagine God would command something this insane. Well he wouldn't have to if his people hadn't gone insane by worshipping Baal. God often commands radical things in the middle of radically sinful situations in order to radically call his people back to himself. He commanded Isaiah to walk naked and barefoot for three years to expose the sinfulness of Judah (Is 20:2-3). He also commanded Ezekiel to lay on his right side for a year because of the sins of the people (Ez 4:4-5). God radically loves his people and he will often command radical things of his prophets in order to shake his people out of their sinful coma.

Imagine Hosea's possible ponderings. We are not told what went through his mind, because this is primarily a book about God and not about Hosea, but nevertheless, we can imagine some of his thoughts. "God, are you sure you want me to marry a whore? Do you really want me to promise to be faithful to an unfaithful woman?" The answer comes back, "Yes. I want you to marry and commit yourself to a whore, because this land is committing great whoredom by forsaking me."

Would you marry someone you knew would be unfaithful to you?

Whatever his thoughts were, he obeyed. He pledged to be faithful to an unfaithful woman. He married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. No doubt Diblaim was happy that someone was willing to marry his promiscuous daughter and her illegitimate children. Yes. It appears that Gomer already had children born to her out of wedlock.

Verse two literally says, "*Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom.*" The ESV inserts the word 'have' between 'and' and 'children' but there is no word there in the Hebrew. Hosea was to take a whore as his wife and he was to take her children as his own. He was to marry a woman that no one in his right mind would marry and he was to adopt children who did not belong to him.

No doubt this made front page of the Jerusalem Globe.

## **"Local Prophet Marries Whore & Adopts Bastard Children"**

Everyone would have been curious about this story, everyone from the priests to the prostitutes would have picked this edition of the paper. All heads would have been turning. The priests would have been asking, "Does he know what he's doing?" People would have thought, "He's

crazy." And that's exactly what God wanted. He wanted this crazy story to catch everyone's attention. God wanted all eyes on Hosea.

And Hosea knew whom he represented. He was to represent God. He knew his life and marriage and his family was to symbolize God's relationship with his people. God equipped Hosea to endure this painful calling.

Imagine the interviews that took place on the street.

Crowd: "Hosea, you're crazy for marrying a prostitute. She'll forsake you."

Hosea: "You're crazy for worshipping Baal. Why have you forsaken the LORD?"

Crowd: "Hosea, why did you marry her, you'll never be happy with her.

Hosea: Why have you forsaken the LORD? Baal is incapable of making you happy?

Crowd: Hosea, why did you marry a prostitute?

Hosea: Because God told me to marry her.

Crowd: And why would he tell you to do something unlawful like that?

Hosea: Because you have broken God's law and have prostituted yourselves by worshipping Baal.

Perhaps there were some who thought to themselves. "This is very curious. I'm going to watch this guy for a while."

Indeed life with Gomer became something to take note of and their marriage became increasingly symbolic.

## The Birth of the First Child, A Son: Jezreel

Hosea 1:3-5 (ESV)

3 ... and she conceived and bore him a son.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

Apparently after the wedding there was some semblance of normalcy in their life and marriage. Gomer gets pregnant and has a baby boy. God tells Hosea to name him Jezreel. The name was a reminder that God does not overlook the shedding of innocent blood. Jezreel was the place of many battles and was the place where Jezebel had plotted the death of Naboth so that her husband, king Ahab, could have his vineyard for himself. This name of this little boy is a constant reminder that the LORD does not forget the sins of the kingdom and neither does he leave any sin unpunished.

The fact that God will "**break the bow of Israel**" points to the fact one of the idols of Israel was their strength. The bow was single most valuable weapon in warfare and a symbol of the soldier's strength and might. They trusted in the bow, their power and military might. They were not trusting in God, but they were trusting in their own strength. They mistakenly thought they were self-sufficient. But they were not and so God would remove the thing in which they trusted, he would break their bow.

## The Birth of the Second Child, A Girl: No Mercy

Hosea 1:6-7 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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."

The second child is not said to be born "to him" i.e. Hosea, as the first child was said to be "born to him" (see v.3). It is possible that this is not Hosea's child. Nevertheless, God chooses a name for this little girl and her name is *lo-Ruhamah*, which means "no mercy," or "not loved."<sup>3</sup>



There is a limit on God's mercy. The house of Israel pushed and pushed until they found that limit. Israel was conquered and destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C. The house of Israel was overthrown, Samaria was destroyed, and the people of Israel were exiled out of the land that the LORD had given them. God had patiently endured the idolatry of Israel for several hundred years, but his patience and his mercy finally came to end. There were still mercy to be had for the house of Judah, but Israel's idolatry and spiritual treachery had reached its limit. This baby girl's name, No Mercy, was a continual reminder that mercy for Israel had run out.

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<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 19.

## The Birth of the Third Child, A Son: Not My People

Hosea 1:8-9 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> *When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."*

The name of the third child, a son, was *lo-Ammi*, which means, "not my people." This is a reversal of the covenant language of God's promised love, "*You shall be my people and I will be you God.*"<sup>4</sup> This is the language of divorce. It signifies that there is no longer a true relationship between God and Israel.

**HELLO**  
my name is

*Not My People*

It may be that about right now you're thinking, "Wait a minute. I thought you said Hosea was a divine love story. Yet here we are with God talking divorce?" This is a divine love story and yes, God words are the language of divorce. But this is why we always keep reading. God's about to point to a time when he will renew his vows.

## The Promise of Covenant Renewal (v.10-11)

Hosea 1:10-11 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> *Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."* <sup>11</sup> *And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.*

These are the sweetest words in this chapter. God is reminding Israel of his promise to Abraham. He's remembering back to his original covenant with them as a people.

**Genesis 13:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> *I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.*

Even though God is about to bring judgment upon them as a nation, that judgment will have a purifying effect so that eventually Israel will turn away from their idols and whole-heartedly return to God as their Father and they will be "children of the living God."

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<sup>4</sup> Ex 6:7; Lev 26:11-12.

Furthermore, God promises to erase the division that stood between Israel and Judah. He promised to so work among them that they would together, appoint for themselves one king and not two. God was saying that one day they would be united into one kingdom.

## Application

### 1. Beware of idolatry

God takes idolatry incredibly seriously. What is an idol? An idol is anything that stands in the place in which God alone has the right to stand. God commands what we worship him and him alone. To worship something means ascribe to it the highest value or to treasure it above all things. To worship something is make that thing or that person the highest priority in your life. You worship most highly that thing around which you structure and organize your life. We worship most highly that thing or person from whom we receive the greatest joy and satisfaction. We worship most highly that thing or person whom we love most deeply. God commands that he be loved most deeply in our hearts and so your idol is anything that you love more deeply than you love God.

We have our own cultural idols today.

Wealth



Independence



Personal autonomy



Fame



Military supremacy



Education



An idol could be your own self, it could be status, or a hobby, or sexual stimulation, or praise of men, or a car, or the computer, or some sport, or another person, or your kids. It could be anything that you love more than God. Hosea demonstrates to us that God is deeply and truly concerned about what you cherish most in your heart. If there are any idols in the temple of your heart, then ask God to reveal them to you. Then pray that God would give you the spiritual insight to see them for what they are and the ability to see God for truly who he is. If you are able to see God truly and treasure him rightly, then you will be able to turn away from every idol in your life.

## **2. Beware of Self-sufficiency**

The Israelites frequently vacillated between trusting in their own military might and trusting in the might of the nations that surrounded them. Sometimes they trusted in Egypt, sometimes Syria, sometimes they trusted in themselves. Each time they did was disastrous. However, when they trusted in God, things went incredibly well.

Don't trust in your own strength, or wisdom, or ability. *"Do not lean upon your own understanding, but in all of your ways acknowledge God and he will direct your paths."*<sup>5</sup> Don't make decisions solely based upon a list of pros and cons. Pray about everything. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes 4:7). Talk to God about everything. Ask his advice daily. Don't trust in yourself. Trust in God.

## **3. Beware of Presuming Upon God's Grace**

This chapter does teach us that God's mercy has its limits. If a person continues to refuse to worship God, even though he or she hears God's repeated calls to repentance, then there will come a day when that mercy and grace are no longer available.

Romans 2:4 (ESV)

*<sup>4</sup> Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

We dare not mistake God's patience in waiting for our repentance as indifference to our continued idolatry. This does not mean that a true believer in Jesus can lose his salvation. This means that unbelievers who persistently ignore the call of God to turn away from their sins and turn to Jesus for salvation, will one day run out of time to do so.

If you are here today and you keep refusing to repent even though you know you should, then you should beware. One day you will reach the limit of God's mercy and grace and

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<sup>5</sup> Prov 3:5-6.

that is one day you do not want to come today. *“Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your heart.”*

Those of you who are already God’s children. Don’t tell your unbelieving friends and family that they have plenty of time. Tell them not to presume upon the grace of God and to repent today.

#### **4. Be Glad that God Keeps His Promises**

The first nine verses of this chapter are incredibly sad. Yet the last two overcome all the sadness of the previous nine. Verse 10-11 remind us that God remembers all his promises—even the ones he made thousands of years ago—and he will keep them all. The good news that in Jesus he already has fulfilled them all.

2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.*

The perfect, sinless obedience of Jesus throughout his life, has forever secured all the promises of God to those who put their faith in him. The promise that the descendants of Abraham would be as numerous as the sands of the sea will come true because in everyone who puts their faith in Jesus becomes a descendant of Abraham through faith.

Those who are called “not my people” are us Gentiles and yet through faith in Jesus we are called “his people” (Rom 9:24-25), even “children of the living God.” This is what Jesus does for all who will trust in him.

#### **5. Be Willing to Let Your Life Be an Example**

Hosea surrendered whatever may have been his will for his life to God’s will for his life. God needed someone to be a living example of unfailing love and devotion to God. Hosea is that example for us. Are you willing to be that radically obedient? If you desire to be mightily used by God to bring him great glory, then obedience starts with what you know. I know Hosea was habitually obedient to God. God doesn’t walk up to someone sitting on the fence in his relationship with God and call him to do something like he did Hosea. Only the people who have been faithful in the small things will be given greater responsibilities. Hosea was obedient to God before God ever spoke a word to him. And so when he did speak and commanded what he did, Hosea said, “Yes, Lord. Not my will but yours be done.” Can you say that?

## Conclusion

This is the way in which we have been loved. This is the holy love of God and he will not allow us to comfortably love an idol, which can do us no good but in fact can only do us harm.

God called Hosea to be a living demonstration of his holy love towards a whoring land. This love is shocking and is intended to cause us to think deeply about the nature of his love. He will not tolerate rival lovers. This is not because he is insecure, but because he knows that no other lover can satisfy our souls. It will be immensely frustrating to keep looking to receive from lifeless idols what only God can give us. He is worthy of all of your love because in no other thing or person can you find such a love that he declares he will give.

Are you willing to now demonstrate this love to the world? Will you be a living illustration of God's holy love to our whoring land?