



hosea

GUARDING SPIRITUAL AFFECTIONS AND EXPERIENCING REDEEMING LOVE

Through the book of Hosea—amid the severity of what was happening in a family and the tragedy of what was happening in a nation—we see how God moved, worked and appealed to people not only in the Old Testament, but how, I believe, God is also appealing through His church to people today. This book provides an amazing picture of God's abundant love for unworthy people to have an abundant life.

Read Hosea 1-14.

Contrast & Contradiction

What a wonderful, fulfilling experience it is when love is received and reciprocated, and what a hurtful, painful thing it is when love is rejected and spurned!

Hosea is the first of the twelve minor prophets. In this book we are given a first impression, a big footprint of an issue occurring in Israel at the time. This issue is also prevalent in the lives of many people today. The book provides a contrast and contradiction between loyal/sacrificial love and marital unfaithfulness/spiritual waywardness.

The entire story of Hosea is actually concentrated in one verse:

"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'" (Hosea 1:2 ESV).

This is a huge statement and yet, one that plays out in the book. God's man, Hosea, answered the call to do something that seemed so absolutely outlandish, it is difficult to believe we read it in Scripture.

Hosea married a woman by the name of Gomer, a woman who, in fact, lived the life of a prostitute. God used the marriage crisis in the life of Hosea and Gomer to visually dramatize the resistance, rebellion and heart of Israel, and to help us examine our own hearts today.

There are three layers in this story I want us to peel back and explore today.

1. Historically

The entire book is set within the framework of Israel's history in a real place and real time continuum.

“The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beer, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel” (Hosea 1:1 ESV).

The Bible provides the time frame in which Hosea lived. It was during the reign of four kings in Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel), and the Bible gives us their names. The Bible goes on to say, “...and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Josash, king of Israel” (Hosea 1:1b KJV).

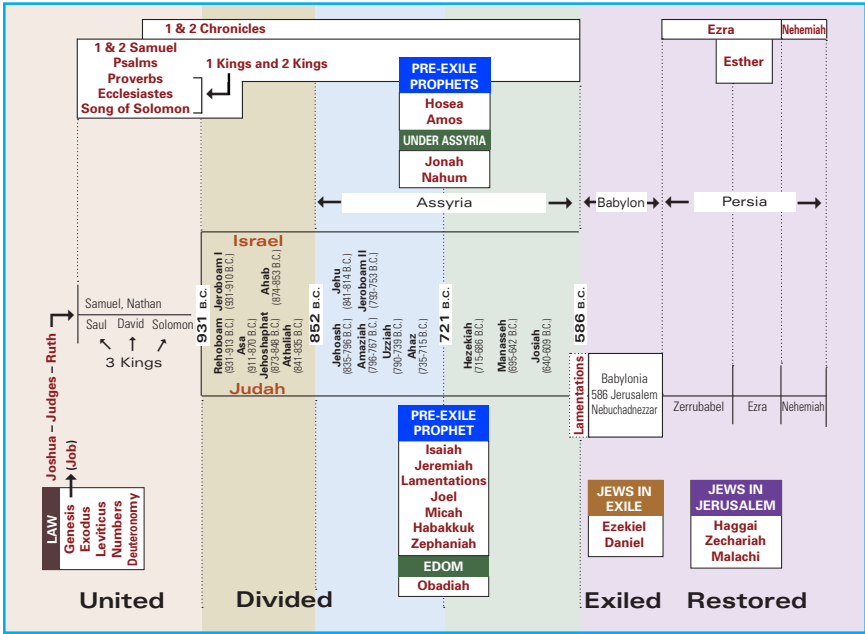
The wonderful story of Israel is that God called the people to Himself and brought them into a place called the *Promise Land*.

Israel was united during three kings: Saul, David and Solomon. These were great days of blessing

and prosperity, but the people of Israel divided in 931 B.C. after the death of Solomon.

There was one group in the north (Israel) and another group in the south (Judah). We can place and date the ministry of Hosea sometime between 755 B.C. and 710 B.C. based upon the kings of Israel and Judah. So during this time, God told Hosea to do something shocking, something we might read in a tabloid-type headline at the grocery store: Go Marry a Prostitute!

It is difficult to imagine. It seems so inconsistent, so scandalous. Yet, God used this man and the ugly tragedy of his family to declare and demonstrate the real issue in the heart of the nation.



I, for one, do not believe this story is allegorical. Some people teach that it didn't really happen; it was just made up. Others teach that Gomer and Hosea had a marriage, and Gomer became wayward later. However, the Bible doesn't indicate that. The Bible clearly says that God instructed Hosea to marry a woman of whoredom. Hosea married Gomer and the tragedy that unfolds in his marriage is the same tragedy unfolding in the heart and life of Israel.

God uses this testimony, this tragedy, to reveal historically and nationally what was wrong in the heart of His people, Israel, in that day. The Bible says,

"Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. [Simply, the inhabitants were in conflict with God. What was the conflict?] There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed" (Hosea 4:1-2 ESV).

"They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the Lord to cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding. 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" (Hosea 4:10-12 ESV).

Whoa! Those are strong words, and yet, what a reflection of the heart of a nation— a nation that had forgotten God and wandered away!

As we read the entire book of Hosea, we see a pattern forming with the people of Israel:

Willful ignorance	Hosea 4:6a
Proud defiance	Hosea 5:5
Ritualized religion	Hosea 6:6
Political corruption	Hosea 8:4, 7-10
Perpetual backsliding	Hosea 11:7

Willful ignorance: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to Me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6 ESV).

Proud defiance. "The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them" (Hosea 5:5 ESV).

They were defiant in their sense of who they were and how they presented themselves.

I heard someone say recently that pride is a God-repellent. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud" (James 4:6 ESV), and the pride of the nation had repelled God.

Ritualized religion. “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6 ESV).

Political corruption. “They made kings, but not through Me. They set up princes, but I knew it not. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction” (Hosea 8:4 ESV).

Perpetual backsliding. 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” (Hosea 11:7 ESV).

The nation of Israel was deeply divided. Anarchy replaced order and kingdom authority. Weak kings made continual, foolish alliances. The result? The people were facing the judgment of God.

Frankly, as I read about the condition of Israel in that day, it is not difficult to see the correlation with our nation today.

Although America is not a people of covenant as was Israel—God has no special pledges or promises to our land—we see a great schism between those things that can build and benefit our nation (faith, law, order, civility) and those that destroy it.

In the 1863 Thanksgiving proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln said,

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence

upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord... We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us...”

Those are amazing words. And yet, I come before you today, not as a president, but as a pastor to say, “This is the condition of our land. This is the crisis of our nation today.”

As we look at the history of Israel—their rebellion, waywardness, wrongful dependence upon idols made from their own hands, the imaginations of their own heart—we also face a land that is in full rebellion of God and facing doom apart from the intervention of God’s mercy and His grace.

After God identifies the waywardness of the nation in the book of Hosea, God speaks and appeals to them, and provides this beautiful illustration of His love:

“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” (Hosea 3:1-2 ESV).

This is one of the most beautiful things that happens in the book of Hosea. After God identifies the waywardness of the nation, God appeals to them.

The Bible says that after Gomer became Hosea’s wife, she bore him children. We don’t know, but some of the children could possibly have been from other relationships. Gomer, destitute and desperate, ended up in the slave market.

Yet, Hosea went after Gomer and brought her back in love. This is an amazing picture of the work of God on behalf of His people, Israel, and the promise of God never to break the ultimate covenant He has with them.

What is God’s word to us today? God continues to extend mercy even in the midst of the ugliness, tragedy and the rebellion we see today. Although our nation is shamed, divided, stained and scarred, there is never a day that

we cannot know the mercy of God nor appeal to the grace of God, turn to Him and call upon Him.

Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet whose ministry was one of a broken heart, said this:

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in Him’” (Lamentations 3:21-24 ESV).

Church of God, no doubt we are in the most desperate of days in the life and soul of our nation, but I believe God’s Word is clear and God’s invitation is persistent: while the wayward heart of man ultimately results in bondage, injury and struggle, the Bible declares God persists in His love to offer freedom, forgiveness and pardon. That has been God’s way with Israel historically, and we can also pray to that end today.

Although we are tragically shadowed as a nation, I hope you are praying for our nation. God can still work in the life and heart of people who have been wayward.

2. Culturally

The story of Hosea is one of rejected love, broken commitments and shattered relationships as it relates to marriage. And Hosea is ultimately an incredible picture of the inestimable value of marriage.

Clearly this is not a message on marriage, but you cannot escape the fact that everything that happens in this book flows out of God's work in a marriage and in a world deeply confused and conflicted.

Do you know that one of the teaching tools God uses and one of the most important displays God has provided in His Word is the sanctity, the purity and the supremacy of marriage within society and within our lives?

Tim Keller wrote in his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*:

"At the climax of the Genesis account of creation, we see God bringing woman and man together to unite them in marriage. The Bible begins with a wedding (Adam and Eve) and ends in the book of Revelation with a wedding (Christ and the church). Marriage is God's idea. It is certainly also a human institution, and it reflects the character of the particular human culture in which it is embedded. But the concept and roots of human marriage are in God's own action and therefore what the Bible says about God's design for marriage is crucial."

God shaped marriage. God made it. God divinely designed it, and He has a divine intent for marriage. Marriage is made in heaven! Somebody once said, "Yeah, and so is thunder and lightning." There is truth in that as well, right?

According to Scripture, marriage is a spiritual, emotional, physical and theological relationship. Marriage is spiritual in the sense that it has to do with the union of two people with God. It is theological because God uses marriage in His Word as a display of who He is and how He works.

As we approach the subject of marriage in the book of Hosea, I would like to speak to the cultural issues of marriage we are facing today. The cultural aspect of marriage is a part of the fraying fabric of our nation.

In Genesis, the Bible tells us several important things about marriage.

First, the Bible is very specific about God's hand in the design of gender.

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27 ESV).

Second, the Bible links gender to marriage:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:24-25 ESV).

Clearly the Bible is talking about the compatibility of the sexes that were given and entrusted as a part of God's design and plan.

Sex, from start to finish, is God's idea. The only thing that impacts, distorts and injures us in the realm of sexuality is when we set aside God and try to create our own connections and fulfillment.

Very clearly, the Bible tells us that God did not make us generic for later self-identification. Our maleness and femaleness constitute part of God's plan of creation. Though our postmodern world declares gender merely as a social construct and we choose our way, God says any alteration leads to deconstruction and abandonment of His providence and provision in life, marriage and family.

I found it interesting this past week to read an article in *The Washington Times* about the 143-page paper published in *The New Atlantis Journal*. This paper combs through hundreds of studies in search of a casual, biological explanation for sexual orientation and gender identity, but comes up empty. This is what was reported by Dr. Lawrence Mayer and Dr. Paul McHugh:

"'The belief that sexual orientation is an innate, biologically fixed human property—that people are *born that way*—is not supported by scientific evidence,' says the report, written by a psychiatrist and a biostatistician at Johns Hopkins University. Likewise, the belief that gender identity is an innate, fixed human property independent of biological sex—so that a person

might be a *man trapped in a woman's body* or a *woman trapped in a man's body*—is not supported by scientific evidence,' the report states."

If I could give you a list of the credentials and criteria of these two doctors, you would see these are men with amazing medical and research backgrounds.

Of course, as soon as this article was published, it was immediately attacked. Yet, I find it interesting when we say, "The Bible says," somebody counters by saying the Bible contradicts science. So science comes along and affirms what we read in the Bible and people say, "But you can't believe any of this. It's bias; it's skewed."

The problem is not with the truth; the problem is with the heart. We somehow imagine we can find our way apart from the God who made us for Himself, but we cannot deny the rule of God in His plan and design in creation.

No matter what culture may adapt, no matter what kind of clothes someone may wear, when it gets down to the chromosomes, there is a XX and a XY, and our bodies will always tell the truth.

Please hear me, I am not saying there are not issues. We need to be very sensitive to the broken needs of lives and hearts, both to those who do have gender identity

issues and those who don't, but some are living immoral lives to try and somehow fill the vacancy that only God can fill.

Whether we look back to the Old Testament or look forward through the New Testament, God has used and designed marriage for His plans and purposes. God ultimately wants glory through the institution of marriage.

The book of Hosea pictures for us the waywardness, brokenness and injury that comes when God's design of marriage is set aside. Yet in the New Testament, we have an incredible picture of Christ and the church.

In Ephesians 5, there is an incredible, sacrificial, sanctifying love that is reflected both in human marriage and ultimately, in the picture of the divine love of God for us. This is why we are so desperate not to release God's design, but to recover and to restore God's design in our world.

As long as we make marriage—in every form of relationship—about our fulfillment, we will find ourselves empty. But when we give ourselves and commitment to the glory of God, we discover His grace, His power and His love.

The amazing story of Hosea is the story of one way—love. Hosea loved a woman who didn't love him, but he wasn't willing to give up. He loved her with the love that is like the love of God—

continued, persistent, continually seen and demonstrated—even to the degree that Hosea was willing to go and buy Gomer back out of a slave market.

God knows best when it comes to the plan and design of marriage. God has a right way and God extends to you His instruction in love. God wants you to know His love and truth.

"Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them" (Hosea 14:9 ESV).

The book of Hosea ends with this instruction: our God is ultimately a God who gives us what we need in order to know life and freedom. The Bible continually says the wayward heart traps, shames and destroys, but the persistent love of God pursues, releases and heals.

What is needed in every life and relationship is the knowledge of the way and the Word of God. The truth of God brings freedom and the lies of our world give bondage.

Our Lord Jesus Christ concludes *The Sermon on the Mount*—the greatest sermon of all time—with these words:

"Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain

fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall" (Matthew 7:24-27 ESV).

Jesus ended His sermon with an illustration of two kinds of foundations. Either you build your life on the foundation of the bedrock of God's truth, believe His word and prove His strength and security; or else you build your house on sand. Surely the latter foundation will fall.

How are you building your life?
How are you building your family?
How are you building your future?

Clearly our culture today has decided on sand. As a result, we see the destruction in life.

3. Personally

Personally, we need to hear the word of Hosea in the following ways:

A Call to Marital Fidelity

If you are married, the message found in Hosea is a call to secure your marriage through selfless and sacrificial love. If you're not married, then certainly the call is to affirm and embrace God's

plan, God's purpose and God's design for marriage. Marriage is first and foremost not about our fulfillment, but about God's glory. Therefore for all of us—single and married alike—there needs to be an understanding of why God has made much of marriage.

Saying *I do* in a marriage ceremony is one thing, but getting up every day and saying *I will today* is another thing. It is that persistent love that enables you to live out the spirit of sacrifice and service necessary in marriage—and not just your love, but the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The problem with marriage today is not the institution; the problem is with people who have chosen to make marriage about their fulfillment more than about God's plan, commitment, and ultimately, His service.

"We are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared to hope."

—Timothy Keller

The problem in our marriages today is the person in mirror, not someone or something else. If a change is needed, it has to begin in our hearts.

A Concern Regarding a "Motional" Faith

The concern is not *emotional* faith, but *motional* faith. Faith should not

be a ritual or a religion; it should penetrate the heart and transform life.

What is the crucial spiritual issue of this book? The wayward heart and withering affection of a wife for her husband—someone who keeps giving her heart away to someone other than her husband.

Likewise, spiritual affections can fade into empty religious actions. People can go through the motions when they get around others while they are unmotivated inwardly to love God and live for His glory. God doesn't want a dutiful people; He wants a devoted people. God doesn't want you to go through the motions of faith; God wants your heart.

Hosea says this from the Lord:

"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6 ESV).

What was it that Jesus said to the church in Ephesus?

"I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first" (Revelation 2:4 ESV).

Have you lost your first love?

Every time I speak, I am aware I need to be sure my heart is not only right with God through the confession of sin, but also that I am in love with God because I am loving the One who first loved me.

That is something every one of us needs to examine because there is a tendency in every one of us to have a cheating heart.

Gomer was a cheater. There are many Christians today who are cheating God. Grace makes me a debtor. When I see and understand the grace of God, it is amazing what grace does to my heart. The hymn writer said it so well:

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.*
—Robert Robinson

You have to preach the gospel to your heart every morning, every day, to remember your dependence upon God's grace and to provoke gratitude for the mercy and the love of God.

A Compassionate Action for Freedom and Forgiveness

I think the most amazing part of the book of Hosea is not the love and obedience that it took for Hosea to marry Gomer; it was the love and obedience that took Hosea to the slave market to buy Gomer back! It was not only that Hosea was willing to take her to begin with, but also that he was willing to bring her back again.

In this book, we not only read about what Hosea did, but we also hear the voice and heart of God toward the people of Israel:

"I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are My people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:23 ESV).

The Hebrew word used here is *chesed*—a love that won't quit, a love that is kind even in the face of evil, a love that extends to waywardness.

God demonstrated that kind of love when He sent Hosea to buy back Gomer. And of course, this is the picture of redeeming love. Hosea pursued a wayward wife. He purchased her out of slavery and then he adopted her children into his family.

That's exactly what God does for us in our Savior and His Son, Jesus Christ. God pursues us in our waywardness. He purchases us out of sin. And then, He adopts us into His family so that we become His and we live in the fullness of His grace and love.

This is the story of the gospel. It is what every one of us needs to hear and know to be saved. The wayward heart traps and shames and destroys, but the persistent love of God pursues and releases and heals. That's what we see in the beauty of Hosea.

The New Testament says it this way:

"God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8 ESV).

God loves us not because we deserve it, but because we don't deserve it. That's the amazing part of the love of God. We, like Gomer, are in chains and enslaved, but God came to demonstrate His love for us. The Bible says that Jesus purchased the price of my and your sin:

"For our sake He [God] made Him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV).

Hosea had no reason to buy Gomer back out of slavery. It almost made Hosea complicit and yet, he was willing to go and buy her out of slavery in order that she might know the freedom of his love. And in the exact same way, God sent Christ for this purpose—for you, for me, for all to know Him.

I don't know where you are as you consider this message today, but I know one thing: you need to know the marvelous love of God and the redeeming grace of God found in Christ.

Do you need to embrace the love of God today? There is nowhere you can go to where you are too far that God's love cannot reach you or God's grace cannot recover

you or God's forgiveness cannot give you new purpose and peace.

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 ESV).

The book of Hosea is an amazing picture of God's abundant love for unworthy people to have an abundant life.

It has nothing to do with our own ability, our own strength, or our own provision.



Father, help us to hear the testimony of this great love. Cause us today to know and understand the power of the message of Hosea in our hearts. How I pray You would help us to look and

examine our own selves—whether or not our affections are toward You or whether our lives are filled with distractions, associations and adulterous attitudes that move us away from You.

Father, I pray for marriages today that have known great injury and struggle. I pray the message of Hosea, his love for Gomer and the picture of Your love for us—though we don't deserve it—can be a part of helping people to recover and reclaim a first love for You and a renewed love in marriage.

Father, I pray for people today who need Jesus, who believe that they have messed up. I pray for those who are in bondage and cannot find freedom. I pray they would hear and know the power of the love of Christ in their lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This edited message from the series, *Prophets, Politics and Prayer*, was preached from the pulpit of Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia, on Sunday, September 4, 2016, by Dr. David H. McKinley.

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