

INTRO. I read Hosea in my private devotions this week and I have been amazed at how relevant it was for our own day and times! It is about God having **married** Israel – and Israel being **extremely unfaithful** to Him and leaving Him. Its about God calling Hosea, a young man in his twenties, to **assure** Israel that they are **welcome** to return to God – God **will** have them back. Hosea must make Israel realise the greatness of her sin, and the greatness of God's love.

There are **two** things that stand out in this book. One is that **God really loves** Israel! The second thing is that God **really wants to demonstrate** His love to Israel and wants to **communicate** it in very clear terms. God is so concerned for Israel that He **makes sure** they get His message, and if they fail to respond to His offer of forgiveness, they will **never** be able to say 'I wasn't sure if you wanted me back or not!'

ONE-SIDED LOVE

Some Xns have a problem with this book. God telling Hosea to marry a **prostitute!** But that is because they are treating God as if He were a **machine** without 'feelings' and emotions! God **has** emotions! He is very **angry** with Israel. Anger is not necessarily sinful! **Temper** is.

Imagine a wife who knew her husband was being unfaithful at work, unfaithful at the club – and she **wasn't bothered!** By not showing anger, she might be even condoning his sin! Anger **may** be **because** of **love!** If there was no anger in that wife What did the marriage mean?

God's anger here is not over a domestic 'tiff' about whose turn it was to empty the dish-washer! Its over a **real/basic/fundamental/divorceable** issue! And Israel is **apathetic** about the 'agony **God** is going through' over Israel's unfaithful behaviour! God is in **pain** over what Israel has done, **adoring** false gods, spending **time** and **money** and **affections** on other gods! And Israel does not even notice God's pain at this! **APP**

So God decides to **shock** Israel! Nothing short of a **startling shock** will bring Israel to its senses. God **commands** Hosea to marry a *wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom!*[1:2,3] So

strange! God **does** ask His faithful servants to do **very strange** things! Isaiah naked/barefoot for 3 years (Isa 20:2,3) +Ezekiel 4!

Why Hosea to do this? To make a **picture, a visual aid**, of what **they** were doing to God! To **remind** Israel of **their** sin! Every time Hosea would walk down the street, they would be reminded of his **incongruous** marriage to Gomer! Gthey would see them they mutter/ gasp 'What's **he** doing marrying with that type of woman', Hosea would reply 'This is what **you** are doing to God, **you're unfaithful** to Him!'

In order for Hosea to be **genuine** in his appeals, he needs to **experience** what God Himself is experiencing – so God asks him to take a prostitute as a wife. Unless Hosea experiences God's pain, he will not be able to **express** the hurt and anger God is 'going through!'

APP God really wants **you** to know that He hurts when you ignore His pleas for your **faithful love!** Are **you** giving God the **time** His love demands? How **long** is your **daily** worship with Him? How **often** to **you commend** Him to others? Do **you deny** yourself **anything?**

GOMER'S UNFAITHFULNESS

Gomer was **unfaithful** to Hosea. The 1st child was Hosea's [1:3]. But the **other two** were **not**, they had **another father** – *they are children of whoredom. For their mother has played the whore* (2:4) She was unfaithful **before** her marriage to Hosea, and unfaithful **after!**

Yet, despite Gomer's unfaithfulness, Hosea does **not divorce** her! (God hates divorce!) But she **leaves** him, as she *pursues her lovers* (2:7a) But she is **not** successful! *“Then she shall say 'I will go and return to my first husband for it was better for me then than now* (2:7b) She realises that this jumping from bed to bed doesn't bring the needed security! She didn't realise the good fellow she had. As God says about Israel *she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil* (2:8) God gave Israel everything!

APP This is one of the great sins of our day – our nation does **not acknowledge** nor even **recognise** God's **goodness** and **patience** with it. God is lavishing on us blessings which we take for granted!

So God **withdraws** His help from backsliding Israel. And He waits! He **longs** to have them return to Him in **penitence**! God says *I will return again to my place, **until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek Me** (5:15)]! **APP** You who are 'away' from God need to realise that God is **waiting** for you, “waiting to be **gracious** to you” - but **you must repent!***

GOD'S AMAZING LOVE

God appeals again **Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God...Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to him **Take away all iniquity**** Then this: *I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely* (14:1,4)

Of course God wants a **genuine** repentance. There are so many insincere, **counterfeit** repentances! Even here Israel has an **outward** but not an inward repentance *Come, let us return to the Lord...that He may heal us...He will bind us up ...He will revive us* (6:1,3) It's **religion** - not **repentance!** It' **not genuine!** Because *your love is like the morning cloud like the dew that goes early away* (6:4b)

Many people think that if they go to church, that will give them favour with God. If they keep showing their faces at the services, everything will be all right! It makes **them** 'feel' better! But no! God wants their **heart!** Unless the sin that keeps you from **commitment** to Christ is **fully confessed** and **repented** of, your sin is still before God! Look: *“...they do **not consider** that I **remember** all their evil...yet he does **not return** to the **Lord** their God **nor seek Him** for all this* (7:2,9,10)

What was wrong with Israel was they were **still** going back and **seeking solace** and **comfort** from to their **uncircumcised friends** *calling to **Egypt...going Assyria!*** (11) They still had **improper relationships** – they were **trading** with those who did not know God! **APP** Who do **you** seek comfort from? Where do **you** go when you need help? Who do you spend most of your time with? Well, in the midst of Israel's backsliding listen to God pleading for Israel: *I would **redeem** them but they speak lies against Me. They do **not cry out to Me** from the **heart** (7:13c,) + the **more** they were called, the more they went away* (11:1,2]

APP Anyone here going further from the Lord? Anyone here not attending to their soul's salvation? Are you less **interested** in God than you used to be? Are you **praying less** than you used to do?

Well, God is in **agony** for Israel – and He is in agony for any of his covenanted people today - who are estranged from Him! He says about Israel *My people are **bent on turning away from Me** (11:7) “**How can I give you up...How can I hand you over O Israel?** (11:8)*

So God now **spells out** for Israel what they must do! *Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to Him '**Take away all iniquity!**... **Assyria cannot save us** (14:2,3)* The only right thing to do is to **admit** and **confess** our sin before God. Open/honest **confession** before God!

APP Your **friends at the pub** can't help you in this matter of returning to God. Its your friends in the church who can help!

There is an **amazing verse** in this Book which the NT quotes. It gives a great clue to who is the Greatest Bride! It points us to **Jesus Christ!** Matthew proves to his colleagues that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah by quoting (Hosea 11:1) ***Out of Egypt I called My Son !*** (Matthew 2:15) But what the Bible is doing is showing us in this Book of Hosea that Jesus Christ is the perfect and **most faithful Bride!**

How did you find this book? Did you find it helpful or did you find it **irrelevant** to you? Hosea himself gives us an **analysis** of the various types of people who read this book! There are those who **understand** and **agree** with what he is saying – and those who don't! For Hosea, the only truly wise people are those who identify with his writings! *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*** (14:9)

A tremendous **warning** - God **did divorce** Israel eventually! And He found another Bride – the Church! Israel is now 'finished' as the **custodians** of the 'Oracles of God' and the 'Covenant' – there is a new Covenant made with the **International Church of Jesus Christ!** Are you a member of that covenant.