

# Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.  
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.  
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

## **He Has Torn But He Will Heal Us**

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**Hosea**

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### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles this morning to the Book of Hosea. Hosea is the first of the Minor Prophets, which does not mean that he is under the age of 18 and it does not mean that his message is not important, it means that he is the first of the 12 shorter prophets after the major or long prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Hosea is writing in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in the time of the Divided Kingdom. You will recall that after the death of Solomon the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, the north called Israel, Ephraim or Samaria and the south generally called Judah. Hosea is preaching in the north just a few years before the horrific invasion and slaughter by the Assyrians. Israel is in a time of chaos. They go through 6 kings in 25 years, most of whom are assassinated by those who succeed them. The religious life of the northern kingdom has become disgustingly syncretistic. They still worship Yahweh but they have incorporated elements from Canaanite religions – particularly the fertility cults with ritualized prostitution. Syncretism is when you think that you can worship God while still living like a pagan. Syncretism is when you think you can be the bride of Christ while still having intercourse with the gods of the world. So in Hosea's day you have people going to church and worshipping Yahweh but then also participating in drunken orgies and pagan religious rituals. They have become a mixed people,

spiritually speaking. They have also become politically pragmatic and they think that by skilfully managing alliances with one superpower against another they can assure themselves of safety. Hosea and his contemporary Amos prophesy wrath and ruin and they are not well received.

The book of Hosea is structured around a dramatic prophetic sign. God often had the prophets act out in bizarre ways in order to supplement the content of their oracles. He had Isaiah walk around naked to symbolize barrenness and exposure, he had Ezekiel chop up his hair with a sword and cook his food over animal dung to symbolize warfare and famine and here he has Hosea to marry a prostitute to symbolize spiritual adultery and syncretism. God tells Hosea to go and marry a known whore; a woman named Gomer and to have children with her. He names the first child Jezreel, which means “the Lord will scatter” and if you’ve been tracking our readings in 2 Kings then you know it was also meant to summon up memories of how the wrath of God upon Israel was executed by a monster named Jehu. Do you remember Ahab and Jezebel? Ahab and Jezebel took religious syncretism to a whole new level – Jezebel brought in the prophets of Baal and the fertility cults and God used a hard, sinful, brutal man named Jehu to punish the whole house of Ahab. Jehu kills everybody. He goes way beyond his instructions from God and not only does he kill Ahab and Jezebel and Ahab’s 70 sons, he kills everyone loyal to Ahab and he even kills Ahaziah the King of Judah and 42 of his brothers. Jehu was not a man who cared a great deal about collateral damage and he filled the valley of Jezreel with blood and carnage and horror throughout his reign. Now here is the scariest thing about Jehu, the Bible says that what he did was decreed by Almighty God. Look quickly in your Bibles at 2 Kings 10:30:

<sup>30</sup>And the LORD said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in doing *what is* right in My sight, *and* have done to the house of Ahab all that *was* in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth *generation*.” (2 Kings 10:30. NKJV)

When you name your kid Jezreel you are reminding people that when the wrath of God breaks forth it is terrible, it is horrifying and there is collateral damage. God spans with a wide hand.

God tells Hosea to name his second child Lo- Ruhamah which means “no mercy”. That’s in Hosea 1:6. God is going to discipline us and he is not going to hold back.

Hosea has a third child with Gomer and he names him Lo-Ammi which means “not my people”. God will treat his people as though they are not his people. He will withhold from them all covenant blessings and he will leave them defenceless before all their enemies.

The rest of the book reinforces this message with more detailed oracles. The words give sense to the signs. At one point Gomer leaves Hosea and goes back to her pimp and God sends the humiliated Hosea to the pimp who is whoring out his wife to buy her back again. This sign is the sign of promise; even though God’s people have played the whore, even though they failed to respond to his warnings and his chastisements and even though it looked like the marriage was over forever, in the end God will not abandon his bride. He will buy her back at great cost and with great humiliation and he will woo her and win her love. The book ends with the prophet telling the people how to respond in that day, whenever it should come.

The Book of Hosea is a beautiful book, it’s a frightening book and it is a Gospel book. There are a ton of verses and chapters and symbols that we could analyse in depth this morning to great profit but the purpose of this WTTB journey is to give you the big picture and so that’s what I want to do this morning; I want to show from this book what God wants, how God works and how we need to respond to him in the day that he should visit us.

## What God Wants

First of all, in terms of what God wants, take a look at Hosea 2:16:

<sup>16</sup> “And it shall be, in that day,”  
Says the LORD,  
“*That* you will call Me ‘My Husband,’  
And no longer call Me ‘My Master,’ (Hosea 2:16. NKJV)

Isn’t that beautiful? What God wants from his people, first and foremost is:

### 1. Loving obedience

The prophet looks with the eyes of divine inspiration into the future when God gets what he wants and he sees a time of loving submission, of intimate obedience when God’s people know

him, trust him and obey him because they love him. This is what God wants! This is what he's always wanted. This is why God gave Adam and Eve free will, this is why there was a tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden and this is why there was no electrified fence around that tree – because God wants us to CHOOSE to obey him. God wants us to respond to his goodness and his kindness and his perfection with willing submission. If God wanted slaves he would not have made us in his image. He would not have made us morally responsible – he would not speak to us, if mere obedience was all he wanted – he would shackle us. But mere obedience is not what he wants, he wants loving obedience. That is why Jesus says:

<sup>15</sup>“If you love Me, keep My commandments. (John 14:15. NKJV)

Oh church, this is why the modern day cheap grace thing is such an abomination! The modern day decisionism which says that if you ever pray a little pray in your tiny little heart that you can go on sinning and go on fornicating with the gods of the world and know in your tiny little heart that when you die you will go to be with Jesus. That is blasphemy! That is a heresy as old as the Serpent who speaks it. The church has been fighting this heresy for as long as she has drawn breath. We used to call it anti-nomianism; now we call it Evangelicalism. Anti-nomianism means literally “against law-ism”. Now we all agree that keeping the law of God doesn't save us, that would be legalism, but anti-nomianism says that keeping the law has nothing to do with salvation, either as a cause OR as an effect. But that is a heresy. Ephesians 1:4 says:

<sup>4</sup>just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world **to be holy** and blameless before him in love. (Ephesians 1:4. NRSV)

Keeping the commandments of God and living holy lives doesn't earn salvation, it responds to salvation. It is not a cause of salvation but it is a necessary EFFECT of salvation and it is the only appropriate RESPONSE to salvation because if you love the God who saved you then you will want to give that God what he wants from you and what he wants is loving obedience. That's why he created you and that's why he redeemed you. The second thing he wants is found in Hosea 2:17:

<sup>17</sup> For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals,  
And they shall be remembered by their name no more. (Hosea 2:17. NKJV)

What God wants from you is:

## 2. Absolute devotion

What is the first thing God says to the people that he saves?

“I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before Me. (Exodus 20:2-3. NKJV)

That is the preamble and the first commandment. The first thing God says to the people that he has saved is: “I will not share the God-space in your life with anyone or anything else!” We sometimes read that as if God is saying that he wants to be number 1 and he doesn’t mind if you have other gods as long as they are number 2. It sort of sounds like that in English because “before” can mean “ahead in priority” but the 10 Commandments weren’t given in English they were given in Hebrew and so the Jewish Bible translates it as “besides me”. God is saying that there is a God-space in every human heart and it was designed for one occupant: GOD. He will not share that space with anyone or anything else. If you put your wife in there, he will leave. If you put your job in there, he will leave. If you put money in there, he will leave. If you go to drugs or sex or alcohol for things you should go to God for – HE WILL LEAVE. God is not in to open marriages. He is faithful and he demands faithfulness from his people.

That’s what God wants. We could close right there and that would be an important message because there is nothing more important than for the people of God to know what God wants. If you love God truly you will want to note those things very carefully and you will want to spend the rest of your life giving God those things. We could stop there but we have 20 minutes at least left for this message and I’ve just come back from India where sermons are at least 1 hour long so I say we keep reading. This book also tells us how God works. The Bible doesn’t end with the sin of Adam. It doesn’t say that the sinfulness of humankind robbed God of what he wanted. The sin of man is not stronger than the Sovereign Will of God. No in fact, the sin of man ultimately SERVES the Sovereign Will of God. God always gets what he wants. God Wins, every time. He does not leave us in our sin, he is not content with our rebellion and our adultery and our lawlessness and so he begins to work and praise God that it is so.

God works first and primarily:

### 1. God works through his word preached

Seeing the rebellion and accommodation of his people he says in Hosea 6:5

<sup>5</sup> Therefore I have hewn *them* by the prophets,  
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;  
And the judgments on you *are like* light *that* goes forth. (Hosea 6:4-5. NKJV with margin reading)

God meets rebellion and apostasy with preaching and rebuke! The more flagrant the sin and the nearer the judgment that goes forth, the more brutal the prophet that God sends. When sin is in full flower and the day of wrath draws near God does not send a poet or a therapist – he sends a prophet with an axe. John the Baptist was such a one, Elijah was such a one, Amos was such a one and Hosea was such a one. These men did not pull any punches – they told the truth, they spoke the whole counsel of God as did the Apostle Paul. When Paul foresaw rebellion and apostasy coming in the church he told the gathered elders from Ephesus that ‘I have not held anything back, I preached the whole truth and nothing but the truth’:

I testify to you this day that **I am innocent of the blood of all men.** <sup>27</sup>**For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.** (Acts 20:26-27. NKJV)

Paul didn’t pull any punches in his preaching but he knew that the church would be full of men who would. He knew that the devil would seek to rob God by sending man pleasers and ear ticklers to ruin God’s people and lure them into ruin. Paul knew that the only defence for this was solid, fearless preaching from the whole counsel of God and he urged the elders at Ephesus to see to it. It is preaching from God’s Word that awakens men and women to the goodness and the salvation of God; Paul said that in Romans 10:

<sup>17</sup>So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17. NKJV)

When the Word of God is preached the Holy Spirit calls. He opens our eyes to see our sin and he softens our heart so that we might believe and belong again to our heavenly Father. When Adam

and Eve sinned, God did not let them hide and he did not let them run away – HE CALLED TO THEM and he calls to us still. But the Puritans had a saying: “The same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay” meaning that the same word of God preached that softens the heart of some to repentance hardens the hearts of others into further and deeper rebellion. When that happens, God has step two. In the hard of heart, in the slow to repent:

## **2. God works through abandonment and absence**

Look at Hosea 9:17; knowing that the people would not respond to the preaching Hosea says:

<sup>17</sup> My God will cast them away,  
Because they did not obey Him;  
And they shall be wanderers among the nations. (Hosea 9:17. NKJV)

God will cast us adrift, the prophet warns. This is like the father who cannot get through to this 18 year old son and so he lets the son leave the home and face the world; he cuts up the credit card and cuts off the bank accounts and he says: “Ok big man, you want to be independent? You want to go your own way? Go for it. Go make your own way among the nations.” A lot of parents today would be wise to imitate the fatherhood of God. God does not subsidize sin and he does not support stupid. He will not be complicit. He is not an accomplice to idolatry. He withdraws his favour and his protection and he leaves Israel adrift among the nations. And the wolves, who hate everything that belongs to God, begin to circle and Israel who thought of herself as invincible and as special and as blessed discovers that absent from the grace of God she is nothing more than meat for the savages and grist for the mill. The Assyrians turn on Israel and they carve a path of HISTORIC carnage as they cut through Northern Israel like a hot knife through butter. Historians tell us that Assyria marshalled the largest land army in ancient history when they launched that attack. Israel had no chance. The Assyrians were trying to build a reputation in those days and trying to emerge as the sole superpower and they were not just trying to defeat Israel they were trying to send a message to all the surrounding countries and particularly to Egypt and so they did more than win – they slaughtered. Hosea saw it coming. Look at Hosea 13:15-16, speaking of Assyria, the superpower to the East he says:

An east wind shall come;  
The wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness.

Then his spring shall become dry,  
And his fountain shall be dried up.  
He shall plunder the treasury of every desirable prize.  
<sup>16</sup> Samaria <sup>f</sup>is held guilty,  
For she has rebelled against her God.  
They shall fall by the sword,  
Their infants shall be dashed in pieces,  
And their women with child ripped open. (Hosea 13:15-16. NKJV)

And that is exactly what happened. Assyria ravaged Israel with demonic fury and with each town that they defeated they murdered men, women and children and took the choicest people as slaves to be sold to the far reaches of their growing empire. It was genocide. It was a holocaust. And God sat it out on the sidelines, just like he said he would. He did not intervene to save. He let Israel come within inches of extinction and then he put an end to it at the gates of Jerusalem. He yanked Assyria's chain. The army of Assyria collapsed at Jerusalem in a sudden way that continues to baffle historians. The army imploded and the historians say that because this was the first truly massive land army in ancient history, it is likely that they had not figured out mass sanitation and a plague swept through the ranks. The Bible describes it differently, but whatever the means the army collapses and goes home. Israel lies ravaged, abandoned and ruined, just like God warned.

Now if this were the end of the story this would be a truly horrific and terrible story and in a sense it still is. In the immediate sense this is a story about the people of Israel – the Old Covenant people of God. Because they rejected God and loved the gods of the nations God withdrew from them and left them to wander without his protection among the nations having warned them that they would be ravaged by kingdoms larger and mightier than they. That is a pretty good summary of the last 2700 years of Jewish history. That still goes on. Like a bad record this story just keeps going around and around and around. How many times in her history has Israel been assaulted and mauled by some larger power and left bleeding and almost dead on the side of the road? The Assyrians did it, the Babylonians did it, the Romans did it and the Germans did it. Does it ever end? The prophet says it does. He says one day, God will buy us back at great cost and he will woo us and win us and we will love him as never we did.

### **3. In a time of God's choosing, God works to woo and win us to himself**

Look at 2:14-15:



<sup>14</sup> “Therefore, behold, I will allure her,  
Will bring her into the wilderness,  
And speak comfort to her.

<sup>15</sup> I will give her her vineyards from there,  
And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope;  
She shall sing there,  
As in the days of her youth,  
As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. (Hosea 2:14-15. NKJV)

God says that one day he will bring his covenant people into a wilderness – evoking the imagery of the wandering after the Exodus as a kind of honeymoon between God and his people – and he will win their hearts. He will speak into their hearts and she will sing to him. In a time of barrenness and danger God will win to himself a bride but that day for Israel is not yet, the prophet says. It will take a long time before Israel is ready to be won. Look at chapter 3:4:

<sup>4</sup>For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. <sup>5</sup>Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days. (Hosea 3:4-5. NKJV)

I told you several weeks ago that I do not think that Romans 11:26 means that all of ethnic national Israel will be saved. I said that I believe that there are passages in the Bible that speak of the future salvation of Israel but that Romans 11 did not seem to be making that point. This passage seems to be making that point and so does Zechariah 12:

<sup>10</sup>“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only *son*, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. <sup>11</sup>In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of <sup>4</sup>Megiddo. <sup>12</sup>And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; <sup>13</sup>the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; <sup>14</sup>all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves. (Zechariah 12:10-14. NKJV)

God will woo the hearts of Israel in a season of barrenness and danger and they will be won. They will look upon the one whom they have pierced and they will realize at what price God bought them back out of whoredom and they will mourn. They will repent. Not as a nation, but family by family, man by man, woman by woman. God will get what he wants. His elect will know him, they will love him, they will trust him and they will obey him.

I told you a moment ago that this story immediately refers to the nation of Israel – in the Old Testament election was NATIONAL – God elected to save Israel from among the nations and to reveal himself to her. This story then in its immediate sense refers to how Israel slid into idolatry and compromise and how God worked to restore the intimate, loving obedience that he desired. So why are we reading it? We’re not Jewish, at least most of us are not Jewish. We’re reading it because in the New Testament election is individual. The election of God is broadened to include people of every tribe, tongue, race and nation and the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 says that these stories in the Old Testament were written down for OUR INSTRUCTION. This is how God works with respect to his elect – Old Testament and New. How God works with Israel creates a pattern for how we can anticipate his working in us. He will preach to us – he will call us and if our hearts are softened under his call and we are awakened then we will embrace him in faith and be restored. But if we are not he will abandon us to the things we have put in our God spot. He will abandon us to our addictions, he will abandon us to our lesser gods of money or sex or relationships and the devil will work through the things we love to seek our death, ruin and destruction. This cycle can go on and on and on until we die or until we are blessed to hear God’s call again in the desert. And if you hear that call, if you find yourself in a barren place and God speaks comfort to your soul, here is how you should respond. The prophet closes, in chapter 14, by leaving the elect people of God with a word of counsel. He says when God comes to woo you in the desert:

<sup>2</sup> Take words with you,  
And return to the LORD.  
Say to Him,  
“Take away all iniquity;  
Receive *us* graciously,  
For we will offer the sacrifices<sup>f</sup> of our lips.

<sup>3</sup> Assyria shall not save us,  
We will not ride on horses,  
Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘*You are our gods.*’  
For in You the fatherless finds mercy.” (Hosea 14:2-3. NKJV)

“When God comes to you in the desert have your confession pre-prepared! Turn to God and confess your sins, beg for grace and offer praise! Tell him how much you hate the things you once trust in – tell him how Assyria – the allegiance you once believed would make you safe – tell him how you found the devil inside your former love! Tell him how much you hate your own whoredom and cast yourself upon his tender mercies.”

And you will find that God has an answer prepared for you. He has promised that he will answer his elect people by saying to them:

<sup>4</sup> “I will heal their backsliding,  
I will love them freely,  
For My anger has turned away from him.  
<sup>5</sup> I will be like the dew to Israel;  
He shall grow like the lily,  
And lengthen his roots like Lebanon....  
They shall be revived *like* grain,  
And grow like a vine.  
Their <sup>f</sup>scent *shall be* like the wine of Lebanon. (Hosea 14:4-5. NKJV)

These sound an awful lot like wedding vows don't they? They are meant to. The bride shall say at last:

‘What have I to do anymore with idols?’  
I have heard and observed him.  
I *am* like a green cypress tree;  
Your fruit is found in Me.”

God has new wedding vows already written. God has a chapel decorated in the desert of despair. Come. If you hear his voice today, come. All has been made ready. God has bought you out of whoredom at the price of his own humiliation and blood upon the cross of Jesus Christ. Why will you suffer any more? Why will you insist on abandonment and perpetual defeat at the hands of your idols? They cannot give you what they promise. They are hollow and made of lies. Come. Repent and say the words. Receive the Spirit of grace and supplication and obey the Lord in the splendour of holiness. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.