

*Hosea and Gomer: Hosea 1*  
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We're going to begin, this morning, a short study through the Old Testament book of Hosea. It's fascinating to consider the different kinds of literature contained in the Bible. And God has various lessons to teach us in a wide variety of ways. There are historical narratives, telling of God's great acts. There are poetic and wisdom books, including the Psalms, which help us to express our thoughts and prayers to God. There are the Old Testament prophetic books. God sent His prophets to denounce sin and also to point forward to the coming Messiah. Then we turn to the New Testament and we find the fulfillment to all that the Old Testament revealed in shadows. In the Gospels we read of the life and teaching and miracles and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then we have the historical account in the book of Acts, telling of the events that happened after Jesus ascended to heaven. And then there are the letters, written by Paul and others, which teach us the theological and practical significance of what Jesus accomplished. Finally, there's the apocalyptic literature of Revelation—yet another literary genre.

In all of these different kinds of literature, in 66 books, written in 3 different languages by a diversity of human authors, over the course of 1,500 years, God has revealed Himself to us in this Book. An amazing thing about this, and something that should bolster our confidence in God's Word, is that out of these diverse literary forms, there is a unified message. If you think of the human authors of the Bible as a choir, when they sing together there is not dissonance, but harmony. They are not all singing exactly the same notes. They have different emphases, different parts to sing. And when you hear them as a whole, there is a profound harmony that is an amazing thing to experience.

I remember in college going to hear a performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. I wasn't typically that interested in things like that, but a lot of people were talking about it. The music majors seemed especially excited about it. So I decided to go. It was in the chapel there on the campus of Wheaton College. The place was packed—about 2,500 people or so. And there was a choir about 300 strong on the stage, made up of a few different choirs in the area. They had recruited professional singers for the lead parts, and then there was this massive choir backing them up. And I'll never forget when all those voices rang out together, it was like a powerful wind. I was way up in the balcony, but it was as though I was being pushed back in my seat and my hair was being blown back. That's what it felt like. To hear any one of

those individuals sing a solo would have been impressive. But to hear them all join their voices together in such a powerful and unified song, was unforgettable.

That's the way the Bible is. And that's why it's important for us to move around from the New Testament to the Old Testament, and to move through historical books and wisdom books and prophets and Gospels and letters. We need to be amazed at the diversity and unity of the Bible. We need to see the Gospel message shining through in all these different stories, in all these different forms of literature in which God has chosen to reveal Himself.

So for the next few weeks we're going to look at this particular prophet whose message and life are a powerful display of Gospel truth. Hosea is known as one of the Minor Prophets. It is the first of the 12 so-called Minor Prophets. These 12 prophets (the last 12 books of the Old Testament) were apparently grouped together very early on. Josephus makes a reference to this grouping. And Augustine referred to them as the Minor Prophets, not meaning that they are minor in significance or importance, but simply that they are shorter in length. It is one of those unfortunate terms that has been passed down to us. We may think that we're wasting our time studying one of the *minor* prophets, when we could be studying rather a *major* prophet. After all, why would anyone go and watch a minor league baseball team, if they had the opportunity to watch a major league game? Well, that's not how we should think about this at all. Maybe we should just refer to Hosea through Malachi as the shorter prophets, or the more concise prophets. They're just not nearly as long as Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel. But that doesn't mean they're less important.

As we look at the first chapter of Hosea this morning, we'll first learn about Hosea and Gomer in verses 1-3. Then we'll learn about the three children (Jezreel, Lo-ruhama, and Lo-ammi, in verses 4-9). And then, finally, we'll see the great reversal in verses 10-11.

### **Hosea and Gomer (verses 1-3)**

The first line of verse 1 identifies Hosea as a prophet and identifies this book as prophecy. This book contains the word of the Lord that came to Hosea. Hosea's name means "salvation." It's derived from the same verb from which we get the names Joshua and Jesus. And Hosea's life is certainly a foreshadowing of the deliverance, the salvation, the redemption, that comes to us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The rest of verse 1 gives us the historical context of Hosea's life. He was living and ministering during the time of these kings. Four different kings from Judah are listed, and then

one king from Israel. You remember that after Saul, David, and Solomon, the kingdom divided into these two kingdoms, Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

Hosea's message was directed primarily to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and these are during the years leading up to the fall of Israel in 722 B.C. These were tumultuous years. They were years when the moral landscape was spiraling downward and God was about to unleash His punishment on His people by allowing the Assyrians to come in and conquer them and lead them away into exile (2 Kings 17:6ff).

Verses 2-3, then, tell us of Hosea's unique calling and unique ministry. Hosea's prophetic ministry was unique in that he was called to live out a parable of God's faithful love toward His adulterous wife. You see, in the Bible idolatry and adultery are closely related. Idolatry, which is what the Israelites were doing (they were worshipping other gods), is spiritual adultery. God is married to His people. He has made a covenant with them. And when they turn away to worship other gods, they are committing adultery against their husband.

In this very unique calling on Hosea's life, God instructs Hosea to go and take a wife of whoredom. The Bible is shocking to us again and again. If this is the first time you've heard anything about Hosea, if this morning is the first time you've heard these verses read, you may have done a double-take as I read verse 2. Does the Bible actually mention whoredom 3 times in the same verse? Does this holy Book actually talk about whores, about prostitution? It feels almost wrong to say these words from the pulpit, but they're right there in the inspired Text. It's shocking, and it's meant to be. The whoredom of Hosea's wife is meant to be a picture of Israel's whoredom. Israel has played the whore by turning to other gods.

We read this at the dinner table last night. The kids naturally asked, "What's whoredom?" I told them it's when a person goes and sleeps with someone who is not their spouse in the intimate way that only a husband and wife should be together, and then they get paid for it. It's like a job. It's a horrible thing. The beautiful intimacy that is meant for marriage is taken and used as a way to make money. That's what Israel was doing spiritually. They were breaking covenant with their God and uniting themselves to idols, hoping for gain.

Here in chapter 1, God gives Hosea 4 commands. The first is here in verse 2. "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom." And then the command is followed by an explanation of how this is related to God's people. The next three commands have to do with the naming of the children, and each of those is followed with a similar explanation, as we'll see.

God's people, pictured as God's wife, have turned away from their loving and faithful husband to sell themselves to others. That's the imagery of their spiritual condition. They have violated that most intimate relationship with their husband to go and unite themselves in that intimate way with others, with the hope of gaining some profit from them.

In this unique book and this unique ministry, God called Hosea to live this out in his own marriage. He was commanded by God to marry a woman who would later commit adultery against him and abandon him in her pursuit of other lovers. In the wording of verse 2 we might assume that Gomer was already promiscuous, "a wife of whoredom." That could very well be the case. The text does not give us many details. On the other hand, it may be better to understand this as a description of what she would later become. At the beginning of the marriage, it seems that she was faithful to Hosea. We get an indication of this in the next verse where it says that "she conceived and bore *him* a son." In other words, the first child was the fruit of their union—Hosea and Gomer. The first child was fathered by Hosea, the true and faithful husband.

There are so many details we would love to know about this story that are not told to us. We don't know what Hosea's reaction was to God's command, other than that he obeyed, apparently without any questioning or complaining. When God spoke to Moses in Exodus 3-5, Moses had plenty of excuses for why he shouldn't be the one for this assignment. Here, we at least don't have any record of Hosea objecting to God's command. As difficult as this assignment is, he obeys.

God often calls individuals into difficult assignments, whether they realize it or not at the outset. God calls people into certain career paths, into specific ministries, to different places in the world. And oftentimes those are callings that bring much heartache and trial. Whatever roles God has called you to in your own life, you need to submit to that and pursue that to God's glory, even when it's excruciatingly difficult.

We should also be clear here that each person's calling is unique, and we shouldn't look to someone else's calling to make it our own. Even if we admire a person's life and spirituality, we shouldn't necessarily try to replicate their calling. Certainly in the case of Hosea, nobody should treat his specific calling as their own. Indeed, it seems almost unbelievable that God would instruct one of His children in this way. In fact, for this very reason, John Calvin took this to be an allegory rather than historical fact. I don't think we can read this as a mere allegory. It's told to us in a straightforward way, set in an historical context. Hosea is the son of Beerli. Gomer is the daughter of Diblaim. These are historical

figures who actually lived and married and experienced the things described in this book.

God's calling on Hosea's life, indeed, is shocking. And it is painful even to read about. We should understand this book as a vivid lesson of our own spiritual adultery and God's covenant faithfulness. We should NOT take this as an example to emulate, in terms of Hosea's calling. Nobody should take Hosea's calling as their own. No single person should try to seek out a promiscuous spouse. You should hope for and pray for and seek out someone to marry who will be faithful. If you are to marry someday, that is the type of person you should be on the lookout for—a godly, pure, mature, faithful individual. This point hopefully goes without saying, but I say it nonetheless. Don't emulate Hosea in the unique assignment God gave to him. Instead, look at what God is revealing to us about Himself in the life of Hosea.

#### **Jezreel (verse 4-5)**

Hosea's calling was unique and heart wrenching. He entered into this marriage with Gomer, knowing that she would cheat on him. The first child was not a result of her whoredom, however. She conceived and bore *him* a son (verse 3). So the first child is fathered by Hosea. Then God instructs Hosea to name this first child Jezreel. This is God's second clear command to Hosea in chapter 1. The Lord tells him in verse 4, "Call his name Jezreel." In the Hebrew, this name looks almost identical to the name Israel. But this son will not be Israel, but Jezreel. Jezreel means "God sows," and it's a word of judgment. God is going to scatter His people. Jezreel is also the name of an infamous Valley where there had been much bloodshed. 1 Kings 21 tells of a man named Naboth, who had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab, who was the king of Israel at the time. Maybe you remember this story. King Ahab really wanted Naboth's vineyard, but Naboth wouldn't sell it to him. So Jezebel got involved—Ahab's wicked wife. She set things up so that Naboth would be falsely accused of cursing God and the king. Naboth was then stoned to death, and then Ahab took possession of the vineyard.

God declared judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel, and later Ahab's son, Joram, was killed by Jehu and thrown into Naboth's vineyard in Jezreel. Jehu killed many others there as well, including Jezebel and other descendants of Ahab (2 Kings 9). To mention the name Jezreel was to call these images to mind—images of killing and judgment and destruction.

The message of this son's name is that Israel will soon experience destruction. God spells this out in the explanation that follows in verses 4-5. Each of these relationships in Hosea's

family has significance for his prophetic ministry. Verses 4-5, “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.” God will break the bow of Israel. He will cripple them militarily, and they will be defeated.

That happened in 722 B. C. when the king of Assyria captured the northern kingdom of Israel. It’s very clear in 2 Kings 17 that the defeat was due to God’s anger over Israel’s sin. Listen to this indictment from 2 Kings 17:15-18, “They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do like them. And they abandoned all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.”

That’s the fulfillment of what God stated here in the naming of Hosea’s child—Jezreel.

### **Lo-ruhama (verses 6-7)**

The few details we have about these children come in rapid succession. The second child is a daughter. And if we read between the lines we can see that this child is a result of Gomer’s unfaithfulness. The pronoun referring to Hosea is absent. With the birth of Jezreel, it said, “she conceived and bore *him* a son.” But here in verse 6 it says, “she conceived again and bore a daughter.” We can only imagine the heartache that Hosea must have felt, the pain that was involved in being married to an unfaithful wife. He would have watched as her pregnancy progressed, all the while knowing that he was not the father of this baby.

The Lord gives Hosea another direct command concerning the name of this second child. It’s a shocking command—a dreadful command. Call her name Lo-ruhama, which means, No Mercy. What an awful name for a child. You may be able to think of many names that you would never want to give to one of your children. You may have met people before and wondered, “What were their parents thinking to give them a name like that?” But this name, along with the name of the next child, are about as bad

as it gets. Because with these names God is pronouncing judgment upon His people.

The command to name the child Lo-ruhama is followed by an explanation that reveals the symbolic meaning of the name. Just like with Jezreel earlier, the name is followed by the word “for.” “For I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.” That’s a harsh word, and a fearful word, coming from the Almighty God.

The Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner comments “that oracles like these are shouts of warning, not irrevocable sentences. The classic illustrations of this fact are found in Jonah and Jeremiah. Jonah’s oracle, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,’ was as doom laden as even he could wish; yet he knew that it was given to avert the very judgment it foretold.”<sup>1</sup>

God is merciful. He is loving and kind and patient. He is longsuffering. He is even merciful in His warnings, even in His pronouncements of judgment. He is seeking to instill in His people an appropriate fear of the Lord so they do not turn away from Him but instead run to Him.

Unfortunately, in the case of Israel, they would continue in their rebellion and then receive God’s punishment of being kicked out of the Promised Land. In 722 B. C. the Assyrians would invade and conquer them. Judah, on the other hand, would be delivered, as verse 7 points to. They would continue to exist as a nation, at least until 586 B. C. when they would fall to the Babylonians.

### **Lo-ammi (verses 8-9)**

The third child is apparently a child of whoredom as was the second child. Verse 8 tells us that after Gomer weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. Again, any reference to Hosea as the father is noticeably absent. Here is another child born to Gomer, whose father is someone other than Hosea. The message attached to the second child was harsh. This message is harsher still. The Lord says in verse 9, Call his name Lo-ammi, meaning Not My People, and again the explanation and message follows the name, “for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

Hosea surely experienced that agony as he watched this child grow up. You are not my child. I am not your father. And that is the agony of God’s pronouncement to Israel. You are not my people. I am not your God. They had run from Him. They had turned their back on Him. They had gone to other lovers. They had broken the covenant. And now they will reap the consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> *Love to the Loveless: The Message of Hosea*, page 23.

### **The Great Reversal (verses 10-11)**

But then look at the remainder of the chapter. Look at this great reversal of the awful statements we just looked at. There is hope beyond the punishment. God will remain faithful to His bride, even when she is not faithful to Him.

Read verses 10-11

If you're familiar with the Old Testament, the language of verse 10 will be familiar to you because it's the language the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 22. This was right after Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, as God had instructed him to, but then the angel of the Lord stopped him. And the Lord provided a ram to be sacrificed instead. And then God said to Abraham, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:17)

The New Testament uses these verses from Hosea (here and at the end of chapter 2) to speak of the inclusion of Gentiles in the new people of God, the church. Paul quotes this in Romans 9:25-26, and Peter alludes to this in 1 Peter 2:9-10. "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." What an awesome reality this is! Even though God's people sin, and they don't deserve His mercy, He is still faithful to fulfill His promises. We'll look at this further next week in Hosea 2.

This morning we've had an introduction to the story of Hosea and the message of this book. I want to close by making it clear the primary way that this applies to each of us. This book of the Bible wouldn't have its intended effect on us if we didn't see ourselves ultimately in the place of Gomer. There are other points of application as well. We should give grace like God gives grace. We should be faithful like Hosea was faithful, even as he showed grace to an unfaithful spouse. But, first and foremost, we each need to recognize that we are Gomer. We have sinned against our God. We have run to other lovers. We have been idolaters, spiritual adulterers. Yet in spite of our rebellion, in spite of us heaping scorn and ridicule upon Him, He has pursued us and redeemed us. We'll continue to see this picture of our God vividly in Hosea 2-3. I hope that you will see what an awesome God we have. I hope that His redeeming love will bring you to your knees today in repentance and faith and thanksgiving. Let me read to you these powerful words from Donald Grey Barnhouse.

"The pursuing love of God is the greatest wonder of the spiritual universe. We leave God in the heat of our own self-desire and run from His will because we want so much to have our own



way. We get to a crossroads and look back in pride, thinking that we have outdistanced Him. ‘My child,’ He says in great tenderness, ‘I love you; and when I saw you running away from all that is good, I pursued you through a shortcut that love knows well, and awaited you here at the crossroads.’ We have torn ourselves free from His grasp and rushed off again, through deepest woods and farthest swamp, and as we look back again, we are sure, this time, that we have succeeded in escaping from Him. But, once more, the touch of love is on our other sleeve and when we turn quickly we find that He is there, pleading with the eyes of love, and showing Himself once more to be the tender and faithful One, loving to the end. He will always say, ‘My child, my name and nature are Love, and I must act according to that which I am. So it is that I have pursued you, to tell you that when you are tired of your running and your wandering, I will be there to draw you to myself once more.’

“When we see this love at work through the heart of Hosea we may wonder if God is really like that. But everything in the Word and in experience shows us that He is. He will give man the trees of the forest and the iron in the ground. Then He will give to man the brains to make an axe from the iron to cut down a tree and fashion it into a cross. He will give man the ability to make a hammer and nails, and when man has the cross and the hammer and the nails, the Lord will allow man to take hold of Him and bring Him to that cross; He will stretch out His hands upon it and allow man to nail Him to that cross, and in so doing will take the sins of man upon Himself and make it possible for those who have despised and rejected Him to come unto Him and know the joy of sins removed and forgiven, to know the assurance of pardon and eternal life, and to enter into the prospect of the hope of glory with Him forever. This is even our God, and there is none like unto Him.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, “Epistle to the Romans,” Part 38. Quoted in James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, page 23.