

## Introduction To Hosea

Hosea 1:1-2

This Week's Prayer  
Requests:

**Memory Verse:** "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness," Psalm 17:15.

**Text:** Hosea 1:1-2, "The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, 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. <sup>2</sup> When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD.'"

### Lesson

We begin today with a study that I hope will be a great blessing to you through the book of Hosea. I've entitled it God's Loyal and Unending Love, because I hope that we will come to see that God is Love in a way that is completely different than men, and in a way that is some wonderfully compelling, that it should captivate all of hearts forever.

### Historical Background:

When did Hosea minister?

Now today, I want to begin with a broad overview of and introduction to the book. According to verse 1, Hosea ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom (786-746) and during the reigns of Uzziah (783-742), Jotham (750-735), Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715-687) of the southern kingdom. Thus the approximate date of his ministry was 750-715 B.C. The prophet ministered to the northern kingdom during a time of political stability, peace and economic prosperity. The society, however, was rife with moral corruption. The book makes clear that there was great exploitation of the poor, sexual licentiousness, drunken revelry, corruption in business, slothfulness, idolatry, rebellion against the covenant with Yahweh and corruption in the religion of Israel. The priests were not even teaching the law, and their worship was so mixed with Baalism that the names of Baal and Yahweh were actually used interchangeably by many people (2:16).

To which nation was he sent as a prophet?

What were the days

Regarding his life and ministry, Hosea was called by God during this time to confront the moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy of Israel, in particular their faithlessness to Yahweh and spiritual adultery, which is pictured in the prophet's own marriage. What little is known about

like in which Hosea ministered?

the prophet personally centers on his domestic life. He was commanded to marry “a wife of harlotry” (1:2), and her subsequent unfaithfulness served as an illustration of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Also, the names of his three children served as symbols of Israel’s spiritual condition, Jezreel, being a historical symbol (1:4), Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi being terminological (1:6,9). The restoration of the prophet’s marriage and the change of his children’s names likewise symbolize the redemption of Israel and restoration of the covenant people.

What was the primary thrust of Hosea’s message to the nation and how is this pictured in his marriage.

**Contents:**

Chapter one details the marriage of Hosea and Gomer as a picture of Yahweh and Israel, the birth of the three children, and the promise of restoration in a future age (1:10-2:1).

Chapter two constitutes a “riv,” in which Israel’s guilt is proven three times, judgment is declared twice, and then the third time God gives a wholly unexpected declaration not of judgment, but of His intent to restore and bless the nation (2:14-23).

Chapter three is the heart of the book picturing the restoration of Hosea and Gomer’s marriage, which is again a picture of God’s future restoration of Israel and a revelation of His glorious love for a wicked and sinful people.

Chapters four through fourteen are a series of prophetic oracles which repeat numerous times in different ways the primary themes of the book. The main themes that emerge from the book are as follows:

1. The sin of Israel, which is syncretism - a kind of spiritual adultery (3:1);
2. The people’s sin was the result of their heart condition (4:12, 5:4, 7:14);
3. Sin hinders fellowship with God (3:3);
4. Sin is a transgression of God’s law (8:1);
5. Sin results in God’s judgment (8:13);
6. The importance of the knowledge of God (4:6);

Looking over the major themes that we will be studying through this book, which do you think

will be the most important for you personally? Why?

7. What constitutes true worship (6:6);
8. The passion, nostalgia or longing of God's own heart (9:10, 11:8-9);
9. The mercy of God (2:14,15);
10. The incomparability of God (13:4);
11. The futility of false worship (13:1);
12. The nature of true repentance (5:15, 14:2) versus false repentance (6:1-3); and
13. The hope of a future restoration (14:5-8).

### **Contemporary Application:**

It is obvious from the above themes that there are numerous areas of potential application to our lives. Perhaps the best way to view the book's applicability, though, is by considering how it addresses some of the most fundamental questions of life.

These might include such questions as, "Why is sin so bad?" The answers from Hosea are that it creates a barrier between man and God, it is spiritual adultery, and it hinders one's ability to understand God's truth (8:12). Another question might be, "What does God want from us?" The answer is a love relationship, that results in personal righteousness (3:3). A third question might be, "When life falls apart, what do I do?" One sees the answer in Hosea's reaction of looking to God, listening to God and obeying God (3:1). A final question might be, "Can religion ever substitute for my failure to know and love God as I should?" (8:11). And the answer the prophet gives us is a very firm, "No, this is no substitute to a true relationship with God."

Considering our overview of the book today, what are your hopes and prayers with regard to this study?

Now as we begin looking at Hosea chapter one this week we have before us the story of Hosea and Gomer's marriage. God uses their marriage as a symbol of His own relationship to Israel, and He presents for us in this marriage first the utter desolation of spiritual unfaithfulness, but then He shows us the joy that His redemption can bring.

What is the marriage of Hosea and Gomer symbolic of?

The critical truth of this message for us personally is that we should reject unfaithfulness to God, return to Him and embrace His redemption, which is the salvation that He has provided through the Lord Jesus Christ to buy us back from sin and all of its consequences. Why should we be faithful to God and embrace the wonderful provision He provides for our redemption. The text gives us several reasons for doing so, which we will consider next week as we look at 1:3-2:1.

What does this marriage mean for us personally?

Now that we've already discussed verse one above, I also want to address the issue of God commanding Hosea in verse 2 to "take yourself a wife of harlotry" in this introduction.

There are several ways to interpret this command of God, namely:

A. It was a hypothetical marriage. This view sees the marriage as never happening historically but understands it as either a vision or an allegory symbolic of the relation of God to unfaithful Israel.

Why might God commanding Hosea to take a wife of harlotry pose an ethical dilemma?

Those who hold it say that God would not have commanded a prophet to marry an unchaste woman, especially since the priests had been expressly forbidden to do this (Lev 21:7, 14). They also point out that Hosea's ministry as a prophet would have been shattered had he married an unchaste woman.

Evidence against this view includes several points:

- i. Hosea's straightforward narrative style gives little indication of symbolism being intended.
- ii. Some things of central importance to the text (e.g., the name of Hosea's wife, Gomer) are not presented symbolically at all.
- iii. The text includes numerous details inconsistent with a mere symbol, such as Gomer is called the daughter of Diblaim; the third child, Lo-Ammi, is said to have been born only after the second

was weaned; the children are said specifically to have been two boys and one girl.

iv. In chapter 3 the exact amount of payment for Gomer is stated, both in money and barley. Such details belong to history, not allegory.

v. It is difficult to understand why an allegory should be spread over two chapters (1 and 3) separated by the longest narrative in the whole book. This is inconsistent with prophetic symbolism as it occurs throughout Scripture.

B. It was a literal marriage and Gomer was unchaste at the time it occurred. This view holds that the marriage did occur in reality and Gomer already unchaste, and very likely possibly a temple prostitute.

Arguments in favor of this view are that: this is the most natural meaning of God's command to Hosea; and that so far as the ethical impropriety of this command is concerned, it was only the priest that was forbidden by the law to marry an unchaste woman; Hosea was a prophet.

In respect to the first reason, however, it is questionable whether this view takes the command in its most "natural" meaning. One would hardly expect the descriptive term "an adulterous wife" (*eset zenunim*) on this basis but merely the word "harlot" (*zonah*). Also, in Hebrew one expects the terms "an adulterous wife" and "children of unfaithfulness" to carry parallel meanings; but if the first means a woman who already practiced prostitution, then the second should mean children who did the same - which is impossible, considering their age. A more likely parallel meaning is that "an adulterous wife" signifies a woman of an adulterous character (but not necessarily having practiced adultery yet) and the children being born to have similar characters, a view supported by 2:4 4:2; 5:4. Furthermore, the term "an adulterous wife" is exactly the type of designation one would expect for indicating the idea of a woman of this kind of character.

With respect to the other reason, while it is true that the prohibition against marrying an unchaste woman is given only to priests, it is still unthinkable that God therefore approved other religious leaders' marrying unchaste women at will. It should be realized that regulations for prophets - unlike those for priests - are not prescribed in the law. If they had been, it is only reasonable to assume that a similar prohibition would have been given; for prophets were as much religious leaders (i.e., in places of influence) as priests.

C. It was a literal marriage and Gomer was only spiritually unfaithful.

This is another view, held less widely, which claims that Gomer's infidelity was only spiritual, rather than physical. Gomer became unchaste because, like the Israelites of Hosea's day, she became a worshiper of false gods. Thus this view removes the ethical difficulty of marital unfaithfulness. Furthermore, Scripture often uses harlotry as a figure of spiritual unfaithfulness.

The problems here, however are this: One must ask whether the difficulty of God's ordering Hosea to marry an unchaste woman is any greater than his ordering Hosea to marry one who worshiped false gods. The answer must be, "No." Furthermore, this view does not account for the shift in the language between vv. 3, 6 and 8, and the name given to Gomer's third child, in particular (v. 9). Besides, the question arises how Hosea could have used this kind of infidelity by his wife as an illustration for people involved in the same type of sin.

What is the best view of Hosea and Gomer's marriage and why?

D. It was a literal marriage in which Gomer was chaste, but had a heart prone to adultery.

This view holds that the marriage did indeed occur, that Gomer was chaste at the time and only became adulterous later. This is the preferred interpretation, being consistent with the language of the text and resolving all possible ethical difficulties with regard to God's command to Hosea.

The words "an adulterous wife" are to be understood as a foreshadowing. Gomer was not a harlot at the time Hosea married her; and if she was not, then the objections raised to the second view are removed. Such a marriage would have been difficult for Hosea to contemplate and carry out, knowing his bride would surely prove to be unfaithful; but the ethical problem of his marrying an acknowledged harlot would simply not have existed.

Some have objected that this view would take many years out of Hosea's life to allow for his marriage, the birth of three children, his separation from Gomer, then their reunion, and that all this would have unduly shortened Hosea's prophetic ministry. Yet for these events six or seven years would have sufficed - which is by no means excessive in comparison with a normal life span. Another point in favor of this view is that, as the book shows, Hosea genuinely loved Gomer.

All of the objections to this view can be answered. If Gomer was chaste when they married, there is no reason for the marriage to have shattered Hosea's ministry. People would have sympathized with a husband whose wife had been proved scandalously unfaithful. He would not be personally disqualified as a prophet, as must have been the case had he married a woman who was already a temple prostitute. Indeed, many might well have listened more closely to his messages because of this heartache.

Perhaps the most convincing reason in favor of this view is that it implies a significant parallel between Hosea's marriage and God's own personal experience with Israel (cf. 1:2, 6-7, 9; 2:2-13). In the OT Israel is presented as having been chaste when espoused by God in the wilderness (Jer 2:2-3), though God, of course, knew that she would become unfaithful and had an adulterous heart.