

Route 66

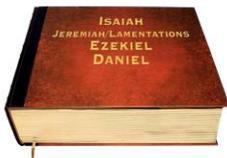
Hosea: Relentless Love

Part 28 – January 31, 2010

The O.T. prophetic books are divided into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. We just finished with the majors: Isaiah, Jeremiah/Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.



The Minor Prophets comprise the last 12 books of the O.T., and begin with *Hosea*. The distinction between the Majors and the Minors isn't like the difference between the Seattle Mariners and the Everett AquaSox.



These 12 men aren't God's *Minor League* prophets; it's just a way of separating the thick books from the thin books. The Minor Prophets play a major role in proclaiming God's Word!



And the story of Hosea is unlike any other in the Bible. It's definitely an R-rated story, but we'll do our best to keep it PG-13! If you're not familiar with it, the premise can come as quite a surprise: God tells prophet to marry prostitute! To be fair, we're not positive that Gomer was a professional prostitute. We just know that she was a ... *certain kind* of woman.

The NIV translates her as "an adulterous wife"; the NAS translates her as "a wife of harlotry"; and the NRS translates her as "a wife of whoredom". But, whether or not Gomer was a paid professional or just had a propensity for promiscuity, the point of the story is the same. And no translation does better service to the startling impact of God's living analogy through Hosea than *The Message*:

The first time God spoke to Hosea he said: "Find a whore and marry her. Make this whore the mother of your children. And here's why: This whole country has become a whorehouse, unfaithful to me, God." – *Hosea 1:2 TMOT*

Let's set this in its historical context:



After King Solomon died, the Jewish nation split into Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south). These are the 19 kings of Judah and their years of reigning. The blue kings "did right in the eyes of the Lord". The grey dots are Isaiah's ministry; the yellow dots are Jeremiah's, Ezekiel's, and Daniel's.

Hosea lived in the northern kingdom of Israel, but verse one tells us who was on the throne in Judah during his ministry:

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea ... during the reigns of Uzziah [a.k.a. Azariah], Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah ... - *Hosea 1:1a NIV*

Jeroboam 22	Jehoahaz 17
Nadab 2	Jehoshaphat 16
Baasha 24	Jeroboam II 41
Elah 2	Zechariah 6 (months)
Zimri 7 (days)	Shallum 1 (month)
Omri 12	Menahem 10
Ahab 22	Pekahiah 2
Ahaziah 2	Pekah 20
Joram 12	Hoshea 9
Jehu 28	

Hosea and Isaiah were contemporaries. While Isaiah warned the people of Judah (*in the south*), Hosea confronted the people of Israel (*in the north*). Here are the 19 kings of the northern nation of Israel. Again the blue kings “did right in the eyes of the Lord” ... and there’s *none!*

Hosea’s ministry begins during the reign of Jeroboam II (a time of prosperity) and lasts about 38 years until the destruction of his homeland and scattering of his people by the Assyrians. He lives through the assassination of Zechariah [ZEK-uh-RIGH-uh], the slaying of Shallum [SHAL-uhm], the murderous reign of Menahem [MEN-uh-hem], the execution of Pekahiah [PEK-uh-HIGH-uh], the killing of Pekah [PEE-kuh], and finally the capture of Hoshea [hoh-SHEE-uh].

Israel was a hostile working environment for a prophet! God had sent Elijah and Elisha, and now Hosea will be their last chance.

Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac. The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim¹ [EE-fra-ihm], yet snares await him on all his paths, and hostility in the house of his God. - *Hosea 9:7b-8 NIV*

But in spite of the dangers, Hosea records his many warnings.

They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction. Throw out your calf-idol, O Samaria! - *Hosea 8:4-5a NIV*

He even foretells what will happen to the poor little calf-idol:

... fear for the calf-idol of Beth Aven. Its people will mourn over it, and so will its idolatrous priests, those who had rejoiced over its splendor, because it is taken from them into exile. It will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king. - *Hosea 10:5b-6a NIV*

And Hosea will live to see the fulfillment of this prophecy. Hosea is not only being sarcastic when he says to “fear for the calf-idol”, he’s ridiculing the temple by calling it “Beth Aven”. Its real name is *Bethel* which means “house of God”. *Beth Aven* means “house of wickedness”.

Hosea says they have a national ‘pastime’ of arrogance, drunkenness, murder, deceit, thievery, and exploitation.

¹ Ephraim was the 2nd son of Joseph (*Genesis 48:5*). This was the tribe of Jeroboam (*1 Kings 11:26*), the man who split the nation (*1 Kings 12:20*) and set up calf-worship to keep Israel from going to Jerusalem to worship. (*1 Kings 12:28*)



Ancient Asherah statuettes

But, their worst sin is spiritual prostitution.

They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. – *Hosea 4:12 NIV*

They incorporated sex rituals into their idol worship, believing they could increase the fertility of fields, flocks, and family by encouraging the lust of the false gods who were watching. They're exchanging sexual favors for blessings! So, God says:

I will ruin her [Israel's] vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. – *Hosea 2:12 NIV*

Hosea's fellow Israelites have become so corrupt that they don't even see their actions as *sinful*. They still "believe" in God. They certainly worship the Lord as the God of War, for granting their ancestors victory over the Egyptians and the Canaanites. But, for abundant crops, herds, and children they turn to idols.

- They didn't abandon God, they just *supplemented* Him.

And God was as willing to share his "bride" with false gods, as a new husband would be willing to share his wife with unloving, lust-driven men who only want to use her to satisfy themselves. But how to get this message through to His people ... "Oh, Gomer!"

When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord." So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim [DIB-lay-im], and she conceived and bore him a son. – *Hosea 1:2-3 NIV*

Hosea's life becomes this incredible, living parable! Gomer is most likely overjoyed at being so honored above her station. Can you imagine the talk around town?! And God empowers Hosea to love and care for Gomer, no matter how she treats him. Notice it says she "bore him a son". When she has two more children, no mention is made of who the father is.



The valley of Jezreel

Hosea names his son Jezreel, after the site where God will allow Israel to be destroyed.

I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel." – *Hosea 1:4b-5 NIV*

The valley of Jezreel is also known as the valley of Armageddon.

Hosea names his daughter Lo-Ruhamah [LOH-roo-HA-muh], which means "not loved". And he names his youngest son Lo-Ammi [lo-AM-igh], which means "not my people".

Imagine introducing this family around town: “This is my wife, Gomer. Oh, you guys know her? These are the kids: Destruction, Unloved, and Not-Related ... they’re kind of named after *you*.



Gomer has her fill of domesticated life, abandons the family, and runs back to the moral cesspool Hosea had rescued her from.

The Lord said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods ...” - *Hosea 3:1a NIV*

Can you imagine pulling her out of some pimp’s filthy bed?! And Hosea has to *pay* the guy to redeem her! What a picture of Jesus: purchasing us from self-imposed slavery to sin, removing our guilt and shame, and restoring our intimacy with God. The name Hosea even comes from the *same* verb as Jesus, and it means “to save” or “deliver”.

Who or what does God have to share your devotion with? You can answer that by answering this: from where do you draw your deepest joy and greatest peace?

Even good and positive things like family, work, sports, and entertainment, can steal God’s rightful priority in our heart. All of life’s little joys will either be reflections that remind us of His glory, or distractions that tempt us from it. And *we’re* the ones who choose which they’ll be.

Gomer’s illegitimate children, her adulterous affairs, and even abandoning her loving husband and crawling back into misery don’t come as a shock – that’s what a prostitute might do. No, the real surprise is Hosea’s persistence, and likewise God’s reluctance to give up on Israel.

How can I give you up, Ephraim [EE-fra-ihm]? How can I hand you over, Israel?
... My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. - *Hosea 11:8 NIV*
condensed

This is one of the great “hidden” verses on the mercy, love, and compassion of God. Where sin abounded, His grace abounded even more vigorously to overcome the unworthiness of the recipients. And rather temporarily distracted or in all-out desertion; when we turn and come back to the one who truly loves us, He says:

I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. - *Hosea 14:4 NIV*

And if you’re saying to yourself, “I’ve strayed too far; there’s no way He could love me after the things I’ve done. *My* name should be Destruction, or Not-Loved, or Not-My-People.” The Lord would say to you what He said through Hosea:

I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ “You are my people”; and they will say, “You are my God.” - *Hosea 2:23b NIV*