

GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS WAYWARD PEOPLE

Hosea 1:1–3:5

Key Verse: 3:1

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 and love the sacred raisin cakes.”

The book of Hosea is a love story. It teaches us the nature of God's unfailing love toward sinners like us. Ever since God made a covenant with Abraham, he had been faithful to his people. But his people became adulterous and unfaithful. Like a wayward woman who goes after a lover, they spurned God's love and worshiped worthless idols. But God's love did not grow cold. He did not break his covenant promise. Instead, he did everything to help his people to come to their senses and return to him. I pray that God may help us to know deeply the nature of his love as we study this book. May God help us repent our spiritual idolatry and return to God!

I. “GO, TAKE AN ADULTEROUS WIFE” (1:1–2:1)

Look at verse 1. *The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel.* Hosea began his ministry during the end of the prosperous but morally corrupt reign of Jeroboam II of Israel. It was the twilight years of the northern kingdom of Israel, a time of rapid moral decline. Let me briefly summarize the history of how the chosen people of God came to this state. God blessed his servant David, “a man after God's own heart,” to establish a united kingdom of Israel. Solomon, son of David, was a wise king and built a beautiful temple of God in Jerusalem. But at the time of great success, Solomon took many foreign women who brought with them worship of false gods. This seed of sin began to bear evil fruit during the time of King Rehoboam, son of Solomon. Ten tribes of Israel broke away from Jerusalem and established a separate nation, with Samaria as its capital. Jeroboam became king and ruled the northern part of the nation. In order to consolidate his own power and close the door to potential reunion, Jeroboam I invented a state religion. He told his people that they didn't have to travel to Jerusalem to worship God. He set up two golden calves--one in Bethel and the other in Dan--for the people to worship. The kings and people of Northern Israel persisted in this idolatry until the final demise of the nation at the hands of the Assyrian Empire.

Hosea received the word of God and began to prophesy around 753 B.C., some 177 years after the division of the kingdom (930 B.C.). He came after Prophets Elijah, Elisha, and Jonah and was probably a contemporary of Isaiah. During Hosea's time, worship of false gods was mixed with worship of the one true God. Ritualism rather than righteousness was the order of the day as even the priests lost sight of the real meaning of worship. Although King Jeroboam II was the instigator of many of these policies, at least his 40-year reign (793 - 753 B.C.) brought a measure of political stability to the nation. This stability came to an end when he died. In rapid succession, six different

kings ruled Israel during the next 25 years; four were assassinated. Weakened by internal strife, the northern kingdom of Israel collapsed in 722 B.C. when Assyria destroyed Samaria. Hosea was probably an eyewitness to many of these events as his prophecy about God's judgment on Israel was fulfilled.

Look at verse 1 again. It says that the word of God came to Hosea. What does this mean? Hosea must have lived a life of faith in the midst of corrupt people. The word of God came to him. He studied the word of God. He prayed. He had a personal relationship with God. Most of all, he was an obedient servant, as we will learn.

Look at verse 2. *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."* Wow. God told Hosea, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness." Many young people would say, "I can give up many things for God, but not my marriage." Every young man dreams of marrying a pure and beautiful woman. No man would want to marry a woman who would sleep around with many other men. But Hosea was different. He obeyed God's word. He married Gomer. We can imagine how difficult this must've been. Hosea had to tell his mother about his upcoming marriage. "Mom, I am marrying this girl named Gomer. By the way, she is a hooker." How could Hosea do this? First of all, he was a man of obedient faith. He would do anything God told him to do. He believed that marriage was for the glory of God. Most of all, he understood how much God loved his people. He knew how God's heart ached because of their idolatry. So Hosea was willing to preach the word of God through his own marriage. He was willing to show God's concern and love for his people through his personal life. So he married a wayward woman. He lived his own message. His message was not an empty word. He probably said, "I know first hand how much it hurts to see my wife sleeping around with other men. And we are doing exactly that to our God when we worship these idols." His message was powerful.

But that was not all. What did the Lord tell him to do next? When Gomer had a son and God told Hosea: *"Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel"* (4-5). God told Hosea to name his first son Jezreel which means "God scatters or sows." The name was from the valley where Jehu had massacred all family members of the evil king Ahab (2Ki 9-10). No parent would want to give his son a terrible name like a valley of massacre. Missionary Pauline is thinking about naming her third child "Danielle" because she was deeply moved by the faith of Daniel from the message at our Spring Bible Conference. Even bad parents want to give their children good names. They don't want their children teased by other kids in school. But Hosea had to name his son after a valley of massacre. His son was to become like a billboard with God's message of judgment.

There was still more he had to do. Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. The passage does not make it clear that Hosea was her biological father. It sounds as though the father was unknown. With no DNA test available, only Gomer had an idea about who the father was. Still the Lord said to Hosea, *"Call her Lo-Ruhamah,*

for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them--not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God” (6-7). Gomer had a second son and the Lord said to Hosea: “Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God” (9). Hosea had to name the daughter Lo-Ruhamah, meaning “Not-Loved” and the second son “Lo-Ammi” (Not My People). He said of Israel, “You are not my people and I am not your God.” God warned of his impending judgment on Israel. He would break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel (5); he would withhold his hand of protection from their enemies. He would scatter the unfaithful people. It was a very serious warning to the people who committed a very serious sin.

Now, does this mean the Lord had abandoned his chosen people? Let us read verses 10-11 and 2:1. *“Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. Say of your brothers, ‘My people,’ and of your sisters, ‘My loved one.’”* God still loved the adulterous people of Israel. His love is unchanging. God had a hope for his people that someday both the people of Judah and the people of Israel would be united and they would be called “sons of the living God.” The people of Judah and Samaria did not associate with one another. They were brothers but became enemies of each other. They were like Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda. How could they be reunited? It is possible only when people come to God in repentance. St. Paul quotes these verses to talk about how God would raise up a new Israel from the Gentile world (Ro 9:24-25). God envisioned the day when all people of God would be united under Christ.

II. “I WILL BETROTH YOU IN FAITHFULNESS” (2:2–3:5)

Look at verse 2. *“Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.* In this part, we learn the extent of Israel’s spiritual adultery that prompted God to issue a serious warning. The people of God were like a wayward wife to her husband God. They were unfaithful (2). They went after their lovers (Canaanite idols) in pursuit of material things, even though God lavished upon them his blessings including the land flowing with milk and honey (5,8). They worshiped the Canaanite gods. They burned incense to the Baals and forgot about God (13).

Why did the chosen people commit such adultery? Like the original sin committed in the Garden of Eden, their life of sin began with ingratitude (8). They took God’s blessings for granted. They did not praise God from their hearts. Another reason for their idolatry was that they set their hearts on material things (5). They sinned against God deliberately. This is a warning to all of us living in a very materialistic society.

How would God punish the people who deliberately sinned against him? What would be God's judgment on them? God would remove his blessings. He wanted to teach the ungrateful people that God is the source of all blessings (7b). He would make them like a parched desert (3). He would ruin Israel's vines and fig trees, which she said were given by Baal (12). He would take away the wool and linen which covered her nakedness (9). He would put a stop to her hypocritical worship services, and punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baal gods.

However, even as he issued a stern warning of judgment, God left open a window of salvation. In fact, the real purpose of his judgment was to awaken the adulterous people from their sins and to help them turn their hearts to the Lord. The hope of God toward his people is expressed in verse 7: *Then she will say, "I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now"* (7b).

What was God's promise for his people despite their sins? Look at verses 14-16. *Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'"* God is a God of hope. He promised to make the valley of trouble (Achor) a door of hope (15). There is a redemptive purpose in his punishment; he wants sinners to repent and return to him. He will restore repentant sinners and put a song in their hearts. God wants his people to love him. He does not want them to worship Baal. When they respond to his love and acknowledge that he is the Lord, a chain reaction of love will be put into action.

Look at verses 19-20. *"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD."* These verses teach us about God's desire to establish a new covenant relationship with his people. God wants to be the permanent husband for his bride—his church. In our sin and rebellion, we had become like wayward women. We prostituted ourselves to this world for material things. We did not thank God for his abundant blessings and chased after worthless things of this passing world. But God wants to have an intimate relationship with us. He wants us to begin a new relationship with him, based on his righteousness, justice, love and compassion. He wants us to acknowledge him as our loving God. The Creator will respond to the sky; the sky will respond to the earth; the earth will respond with fruitfulness (21-22). God wants us to be his holy nation people!

What did God ask Hosea to do to show his unfailing love for his people? Let us read 3:1. *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 and love the sacred raisin cakes."* God asked Hosea to do something that no man can do. His wife walked out on him and chased after other lovers. She was living in the roach-infested apartment along with other street hookers. She owed money to her pimp for the food and clothing she bought on credit. She couldn't leave the terrible place; she was a slave. She had to pay the debt with her body.

What a terrible thing she did to her husband! What a terrible situation she got into herself! Still, God told Hosea to buy her back, take her into his home, and love her again. Hosea obeyed the Lord again (2). He tracked down Gomer in the dangerous section of Samaria and paid off her debt. He bought her back with 6 ounces of silver and 10 bushels of barley. The money does not sound like a large sum, but that is beside the point. What husband would pay even a dime for his wife who runs away, abandoning him and the children, and sells her body on the street? But Hosea obeyed God's word. He knew God's broken heart toward his wayward people. He not only brought her back home but said an amazing thing to her. Look at verse 3. He said to her: "*You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you.*" Hosea's words remind us of what our Lord Jesus said to a woman who was caught in the act of adultery: "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (Jn 8:11).

Look at verses 4-5. *For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.* During Hosea's lifetime Israel had 7 kings. All of them were godless. So they had no real king and no God--and no peace. Their only hope was to return to God and accept his appointed king--a descendant of David. This prophecy looks forward to the coming of the Messiah, the true King, the promised descendant of David. When we accept Christ and acknowledge God's righteous rule in our lives, we have true peace.

In today's passage we learned about God's amazing love for his people, and his redemptive purpose in his punishment. We have no right to come to God, but God seeks us, his sinful, rebellious people, just as Hosea sought his wife and bought her back from slavery. May God help us to know this love of God personally and share the message of hope with many young people of our time!