

HOSEA AND THE HARLOT

Chapter 1:1 puts Hosea in its historical context. Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel from 760-710 BC. He served for 50 faithful years. Micah and Isaiah were Hosea's contemporaries, but they prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah. All three men had difficult ministries, but it's hard to imagine a tougher row to hoe than the call of Hosea.

Verse 2 tells us...

"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." So he went and took Gomer..."

God asks this noble, virtuous, godly young pastor to marry a hooker. Pastor Hosea is told to marry a madam - to take as his wife Gomer the go-go girl. What a shock to his sensibilities and morality. What would people think - a prophet and a prostitute? The Law of Moses required prostitutes to be stoned, not courted.

What was God's purpose? Hosea must've wondered if it was a trick...

I'm sure Hosea was concerned about his own ministry! *Lord, how will people respect me as a spiritual leader if they see me married to an immoral woman?*

But remember a prophet's job - he was God's spokesman. He was sent to the people to convey God's heart. And the plight that God assigns to Hosea, is the same situation God had endured for years in His relationship with Israel. God's wife, Israel, had committed spiritual adultery.

Rather than be faithful to Him, she had shared her bed, and given her heart, and wasted her affections on idols.

Hosea's home was to be a reflection of the *house of Israel*.

No doubt, it was tough to be married to a harlot. But what we would consider a burden, was actually a privilege. In Philippians 3:10 Paul explained the goal of his life, "that I may know (Christ), and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..." We all certainly want to experience the life-giving power of the risen Christ. We like that idea - supernatural strength!

Yes, *Lord, I want my ministry to embody your miracle-working power*. But Paul also wanted to know the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings. If you truly love someone you'll want to experience their pain as well as their pleasure. It's an honor to be allowed to share a hurt. On the other hand, if my wife or kids keep a disappointment to themselves, and hold in a hurt - I feel unwanted, and left out.

Paul loved His Lord so much He wanted not only to reveal His power, but feel His pain. And this was the privilege God gave Hosea. Before the prophet went out to reveal God's word, he first got to feel God's wound.

The deepest intimacy we can have with the Savior is to share in His sufferings. Work a miracle, and you draw close to His muscle. Feel His hurt, and you draw close to His heart.

WHAT A DAD

God says in 11:3-4, *"I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them."*

I'm sure you've seen the type - the dad who's obsessed with his child's every move. His first step, first tooth, first bicycle, first goal scored. Here's the man who can't go anywhere without a video camera. He spends his evenings mechanically manipulating his kid's legs supposedly teaching his infant how to walk.

God is a doting dad to me and you. He's preoccupied with His kids! God jumps for joy when one of His kids takes a step of obedience, or cuts a tooth on the truth. God's goal is to teach His kids how to walk - by faith - in the Spirit - in holiness.

Notice too, all that God is not. He's not pushy. He motivates us with love, not fear or hate. He doesn't expect more than we can deliver. He's gentle and patient. He removes, rather than creates burdens. He's willing to get down on our level to meet our needs.

What a dad!

Devotion Box - The Heart of God

Hosea 11:8 is to me the most stirring verse in the book. God knows Israel needs to be judged. Something has to be done, but the thought of the harm that will befall Israel breaks God's heart. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?... My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred." Philip Yancey writes of this verse, "In the very act of delivering a series of threats, God seems to break down, and a cry of love escapes..." Don't read the words of Hosea, then accuse God of being a cold, callous, vindictive judge. God comes closer to a heart-torn parent with an incorrigible kid. As last resort - out of deep desperation - He tries some tough love to rescue the rebel.

WHAT'S IN A NAME ?

Hosea takes Gomer to be his wife, and it doesn't take long for them to have a son. In 1:4 the Lord names the baby. He's called "Jezreel". Two more children follow. A girl named "Lo-Ruhamah", and another boy named "Lo-Ammi".

Recently, I had a friend who told me his doctor's last name was *Hurt*. Can you imagine, "*Doctor Hurt*"... I hope that's not a prophetic name. You'd think the good Doctor Hurt would either want to change his name, or find another line of work. Well, God did give to Hosea's three kids prophetic handles...

The name "Jezreel" was the place where Jehu slaughtered the descendants of the wicked King Ahab. Jehu was God's instrument of judgment, but apparently, he went too far. The slaughter set the tone for a bloodthirsty reign, and God promises to judge the house of Jehu - which included the king at the time, Jeroboam II.

The word "Jezreel" means "*scattered*", and that's what God did to Israel. In 722 BC they were conquered by the Assyrians and scattered among the nations. Even today twice as many Jews live *outside Israel*, as *inside Israel*.

Hosea and Gomer's next child was a girl named "Lo-Ruhamah" which means "*no pity*". This is what happened to the wayward, hard-hearted Israel. Guys, there comes a time when God withdraws his mercies and pity. Before the flood of Noah God said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." God's patience has limits.

This explains the devastating plight of the Hebrews over the centuries. From the Crusades to the Inquisitions to the Holocaust the Jews have been an unpitied people. Names like Auschwitz and Dachau send chills down our spines.

The minister and madam have one more child, "Lo-Ammi", which means "*not my people*". What a strong rebuke

for Israel. They claimed to be God's children. But God denies them. They're illegitimate. They have his name, but not his nature.

It reminds me of the newspaper ad, "Lost Dog - Walks on three legs, is missing an eye, has a gnarled left ear, a broken tail, several scars... Goes by the name, "*Lucky*". Some names don't exactly fit the bearer's nature and life experiences. So it was with Israel, *the children of God*, would become "*not my people*".

Donald Barnhouse writes, "Never has so much been said in so few words." The names given to Hosea's three children will illustrate their future for two millenniums.

But here's the question. If Israel has been renamed "Lo-Ammi" or "*not my people*" does that mean God has abandoned the Jewish people forever?
And the answer, *No way Hose(a)!*

Chapter 2:23 provides a wonderful demonstration of God's faithfulness to Israel. The prophetic implications of the names God gave to Hosea's kids would not be permanent. Remember the name of his firstborn? "*Jezreel*" or "*scattered*". God scattered His people, Israel, yet in the end times God will sow or replant Jezreel. God says, "Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy;..."

Remember, Hosea's daughter's name? "*Lo-Ruhamah*" means "*no pity*" or "*no mercy*". Yet in the last days God will again show pity and have mercy on Israel.

He continues, "then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!' " In the Hebrew it implies that God will change their name from "*Lo-Ammi*" to simple "*Ammi*" - He'll drop the negative. In the end Israel will go from being "*not My people*" to "*My people*".

Devotion Box - Loving and Showing Love

Hosea 9 is a chapter of severe judgments. Israel has thumbed its nose in God's face for the last time. She will be utterly destroyed. God makes a heavy statement in verse 15. He says of Israel, "I will love them no more." Wait, Jeremiah 31:3 says God loved Israel with an everlasting love. But notice the difference in the words... In Jeremiah 31:3 "*love*" is used as a noun. Whereas here in Hosea 9:15 it's a verb, or action word.

Yes, God's love is everlasting. In a sense, God will always love you. Hey, God still loves everyone in hell. But God does not extend that love any longer to those who've permanently rejected Him. God will love Israel forever and ever, but there'll come a time when the people's sin and stubbornness will keep God from showing them His love.

Devotion Box - Don't Be Bull-headed

Israel set up idols in Dan and Bethel. They worshipped Jeroboam's golden calves. No wonder they became so *bull-headed*. Hosea 4:16 tells us, "For Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf..." After years of trying to break through Israel's hard-heartedness, God concludes in verse 17 - one of the saddest verses in the Bible - "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." God is not giving up on Israel, rather He's giving her over to what she's persistently pursued. God wants to protect you and deliver you, but if you persist in sin He will eventually turn you over the consequences of your choices.

Devotion Box - How Much Does God Love You ?

Hosea 3:1 says, "Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." What an amazing picture of God's love. You can stop serving God - stop loving God - stop worshipping God - *but you can never stop God from loving you*. His love cannot be extinguished. It's an undying love. *It endures all things*.

Four year old Ashton, loves the Toy Story movies, and his favorite character is space ranger Buzz Lightyear. In Sunday School the kids were learning that God's love has no limits. After the lesson the teacher quizzed the class, "Okay boys and girls, so how much does God love us?" That's when Ashton quoted Buzz Lightyear... "To infinity and beyond!" That is how much God loves us!

GO GET GOMER

What happens to Gomer out on the streets is not a pretty picture. She gets bought by a brothel. She becomes a slave to a pimp. Imagine how Hosea felt...

Put yourself in Hosea's shoes. How would you feel if your wife left your happy home - for a dark, dank, nasty hotel room, and a succession of loveless lovers?

At the beginning of chapter 3 Hosea is wondering what he should do...

Verse 1 says, "Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." What an amazing picture of God's love. You can stop serving God - stop loving God - stop worshipping God - *but you can never stop God from loving you.* His love cannot be extinguished. It's an undying love.

Apparently, Hosea found Gomer in the slave market on the auction block.

History tells us a little about the slave markets of the ancient world. The slaves were stripped naked and paraded before the buyers. Imagine, Hosea standing in the crowd watching his nude wife get inspected like a head of cattle. How humiliating for her and him. Hosea had to enter the bidding, and buy her back.

Notice in verse 2, Hosea bought *Gomer* for a *homer* - actually "fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley." According to Exodus 21:32 the standard price for a slave was 30 shekels. Apparently, sin had taken its toll on Gomer. She was bought for half of the amount of a normal slave.

What a moving scene- Hosea pays the price, and wraps his disgraced bride in his overcoat. He dries her tears, helps her to her feet, and escorts her home.

Isn't this what Jesus has done for us? We were once a slave to sin. But on the cross Jesus entered the bidding for our soul. He paid the price for our redemption. Now He's clothed us in His righteousness, dried our tears, and helped us home.

In fact, the Hebrew name "*Hosea*" means "*salvation*". And what a powerful picture the story of Hosea and Gomer provide us of the salvation that comes to us through Jesus. *He forgives our sin - covers our shame - and ends our slavery.*

But verse 3 continues the story. When Hosea got her home we're told, "And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man - so, too, will I be toward you." It's interesting, Hosea took Gomer back, but he didn't try to turn back the clock and ignore what she'd done.

Hosea took her home, but not to bed. He brought her under his protection and provided her his provision, but they continued to sleep in separate rooms. Hosea gave her time to learn repentance, and demonstrate her desire to be a wife.

For an unspecified period of time Gomer was without a man, Hosea included. To sum it up, Gomer was no longer a *harlot*, but neither was Hosea her husband.

And this is where the analogy shifts from the Church to Israel... Verses 4-5 describe Israel's status for the last 2000 years. She's no longer an idolatrous people - or a harlot - but neither is God her husband. She was cured of faith in false gods, but hasn't yet been convinced of faith in the Son of God.

God supports her and protects her, but they're sleeping in separate rooms. Israel lives in limbo - the people of God have yet to embrace their Messiah.

Devotion Box - The Knowledge of God

Hosea 6:6 is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 9, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." A person can *sing and serve and salute the Lord with his praise*, and in the end never really know Him. What matters to God is not ritual, but relationship.

Once a new preacher came to town, and visited the noted scholar, Thomas Carlyle. He wanted to know what his new parish needed most. Carlyle never hesitated, "What we need is a man who knows God other than by hearsay."

It was said of an old preacher, "He preaches as if Christ were at his elbow." This is what's needed today. Men who know more than rituals and rules and liturgies and formulas - rather men who know God personally and intimately.

Devotion Box - Holding On and Letting Go

It's interesting how both God and Hosea deal with a wayward wife. Rather than try to hold on, they let the girl go. They turn her loose to reap the consequences of her actions.

God says in Hosea 2:6 He'll, "hedge up (her) way with thorns, and wall her in..." In other words, her way will be hard, and thorny, and restrictive. Verses 7 reveals God's strategy, "She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.'"

Here's good advice for handling an adulterous spouse, or rebellious friend, or even an embittered church member. Don't try to hold on to them, just let 'em go. Guys, you reap what you sow. Try to stand in the person's way, and you'll keep God from getting their attention. You prohibit

them from reaping their ruin.

Verse 7 tells us the sooner we let 'em go the sooner we'll get 'em back. One day they'll wake up and realize how good they had it - "Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.'"

When I was 5 years old I got mad at my parents, and I decided to run away from home. I'll never forget what happened. Dad helped me pack. Mom made me one last peanut butter and jelly sandwich for the road. And I made it four doors down the street before I realized life at the Adams' house wasn't quite so bad.

God is saying the best opportunity for the rebel to reach the same conclusion is let him go. Once he's without, it'll finally dawn on him how much he really had!

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - April 22, 2001 Young At Heart, 50+ Fellowship, cookout Thursday, April 26 at Lenora Park— CC Christian School (Grades K5-5th) is registering students for the 2001-2002 school year. An open house will be held Sunday, April 29th at 3 PM — May 1st at 7 PM Mother / Daughter (First grade and up) Ladies Night Out — Ladies Payer Meeting & Brunch Thursday, May 3rd at 10:00 AM—All Guys Retreat (ages 8-80) May 27-28 at FFA Camp in Covington.

Next Bible Scan - April 29 - Joel and Amos

"Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD..." - Hosea 10:12

Memory Verse

PICTURES OF UNFAITHFULNESS

In chapter 7 Hosea uses four idioms to describe the spiritual unfaithfulness of Israel - *a heated oven* - *a cake unturned* - *a silly dove* - *a deceitful bow*.

Verses 4-7 compare Israel to a baker's oven. The baker stokes the fire, then cooks on top of the fireplace. After a day's work he lets the fire die out. But Israel is a fire that never cools. Her evil refuses to wane. She's full of unbridled lust.

The history of Judah consisted of periods of wickedness interspersed with periodic revivals, led by a few godly kings. But not so with the northern kingdom of Israel. All 19 kings were corrupt to the core, and pursued idols. In her 200 years her evil never dimmed or died out.

Verses 8-10 use a comparison of an unturned cake. Forget to turn pancakes over, and they'll burn to a crisp. Likewise, a proud Israel refused to change. They refused to acknowledge the error of their ways and return to God.

I like the maxim, "When you're through changing, you're through." That's true for us. The Christian life calls for constant change. If the goal is to be like Jesus you and I can never afford to become resistant to change.

Verses 11-15 compare Israel to a silly dove. An east-

ern proverb says, "There's nothing more simple than a dove." Doves are dumb. If they hear multiple voices they become confused and lose their way. They don't know who to trust. And this was Israel. She made alliances first with Egypt - then with Egypt's adversary Assyria - everybody - but the God who was able to deliver her. Rather than *faithful*, Israel was *fickle*! Are you like a silly dove?

In verse 16 Israel is compared to a warped bow.

When Zack was 11 years old he bought from a friend a BB gun that had a warped barrel. It cost him 15 bucks.

I hated to tell him but he'd been ripped off. When I made him look down the barrel, he could see it was as wavy as a piece of taffy. But I've got to hand it to him, at least he was smart enough to have negotiated a money-back guarantee.

Likewise, Israel's barrel was bent. Her bow was warped. She missed the target not because her aim was off, but because the bow itself was bent, and incapable of shooting straight. This is the problem with mankind in general.

Guys, our sin is not the result of an occasional slip, or bad aim - our very nature is warped. And you can't repair a warped bow. It has to be replaced. Which is what Jesus does for us. He cuts out the old nature, and plants in us a new nature - that loves God and loves others. This is what the Bible calls regeneration, or the new birth.

Devotion Box - Breaking Up Your Fallow Ground

Hosea 10:12 is a vital verse, "Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD..." Whenever you plant a garden you first have to prepare the soil. You take a hoe, or plough, or motorized tiller, and you turn up the ground and over and over until the dry and brittle earth becomes soft and fertile.

Once I borrowed my dad's tiller to turn up my backyard and plant some grass. Months later I could see where I'd tilled and where I hadn't. The strongest stands of grass were in the places where I'd worked and softened the soil.

Repentance does to our spirit what a tiller does to a garden.

To truly repent is to see my sin in all its ugliness - it's to see myself and my situation as God sees it - it's to evaluate the hurt

I've caused God and others - it's to turn over actions in my mind, and search out the root causes - it's to identify the character flaw - pinpoint the besetting sin - admit the area where I lack faith.

This type of repentance breaks up the fallow ground of a sinful heart. It allows God to sow the seed of His Word, and water it with His Spirit, and cause it to grow.

Hey, if you've done it, you know that tilling a garden is laborious, back-breaking, agonizing work - and so is real repentance. But the results are worth the effort. The strongest stands of spiritual fruit will grow where you've worked the ground.