

## Hosea—The Living Illustration

Hosea was a prophet that God raised up to minister to Israel from about 755 BC until about 710 BC. It had been about 200 years since the kingdom of David and Solomon had been divided. The northern kingdom of Israel was subjected to the threat of Assyria, but revolted, and was defeated in 722. Morally, Israel was at its lowest point during Hosea's time. Their idolatry involved even child sacrifice and religious prostitution. Pagan idolatry had taken over Israel. Hosea brought a word of warning and a prediction that Assyria would destroy Israel, and take the people into exile.

The totally unique and amazing story of Hosea in the first three chapters served as a "living illustration" of Israel's unfaithfulness, and God's unconditional love. Hosea wrote from his own sad marriage experience. Hosea married a woman named Gomer whom he loved in spite of her unfaithfulness. His heart break over Gomer's unfaithfulness became the basis of, or the personal experience of understanding God's response to Israel. What would it feel like to have the woman you love run off and commit adultery with multiple lovers? How hard would it be to continue to love her, forgive her, and do whatever it would take to restore her? Hosea found out the hard way. In doing so, he also became a living illustration of the love of God in spite of the unfaithfulness of Israel and the human race. The story of Hosea and Gomer also serves as an illustration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As the New Testament says, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God", so we have all been unfaithful. Yet God has continued to love us in spite of our failures, so much so that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." In a different way, we have all sinned like Gomer, but God has still loved us, and did what was necessary to restore the relationship.

### Hosea Chapter 1-3

The structure of The Book of Hosea can be broken down into two parts. Chapters 1-3 are Hosea's personal experience with his wife and children, and the second part of the book is chapter 4-14 which is a message to Israel of imminent judgment, but eventual restoration.

Hosea's experience in chapter 1-3 is a picture of God's dealings with Israel. Gomer's three children are named to symbolize God's reaction to Israel's idolatry. Gomer's adultery and prostitution are used to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Gomer is punished, but restored because of Hosea's love for her. In Hosea 3:1-5, he is told by God to go and renew his love and restore her, in the same way God will eventually restore Israel. You will notice also that Hosea had to pay a price for her in Hosea 3:2, just as Jesus paid the price for us. In studying Hosea, you must come away marveling at how awesome the nature of God's love is. You can't miss the terrible harm that human sinfulness causes, and that a price must be paid to atone for it.

## Hosea Chapter 1

When you read the first two verses of chapter one you will be amazed at God's command to Hosea. God told him to marry "a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry". Theologians struggle to figure out if this meant that he could anticipate that Gomer would be a harlot, or that she already was a harlot. Either way, Hosea knew going into the marriage that she was or would be a harlot. Amazingly, God was commanding Hosea to do this so that he would become a living illustration of the unfaithfulness of Israel and the love of God. Many interpreters can't handle this, and refuse to believe God would order it, much less condone it. I asked myself if God had ever asked any other prophets to become living illustrations, and in my search discovered that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all did this. In Isaiah 20, God commanded Isaiah to go naked and barefoot for 3 years as a sign against Egypt. This would reveal that God would judge Egypt, and the Egyptians would be led away as prisoners naked and barefoot by the Assyrians. I have been trying to figure out, if given a choice, if I would choose Hosea's command over Isaiah's---both would overwhelm me. Jeremiah had to wear an oxen yoke around his neck as a sign that they would be enslaved to Babylon, and Ezekiel had to act out the coming siege of Jerusalem by lying on his side while he prophesied, then eating only 8 ounces of bread a day baked over human excrement. Then Ezekiel had to shave his head, and take the hair around the city burning it and striking it with a sword to illustrate the fate of the people in Jerusalem. All of these living illustrations were shocking and must have served to get the attention of very complacent people. Now we know why the line to become a prophet was very short, I mean who wants to sign up for that kind of duty? Nevertheless, when Isaiah and Ezekiel were privileged to see a glimpse of heaven, they both said, "Here I am Lord, send me."

After their marriage, Hosea and Gomer had a son God tells them to name Jezreel, referring to the valley in Israel where the sons of Ahab were murdered by King Jehu. This symbolized that God was going to end the dynasty of Jehu. Then Gomer conceived again and had a daughter God named Lo-ruhamah, which means "no mercy", for God would no longer have mercy on sinful Israel. Then she conceived again and gave birth to a son named by God, Lo-ammi, which means "not my people" which symbolized that God was going to reject Israel. They had covenanted at Mt. Sinai to be God's people, but now would be cut off for an undisclosed time. We are not told if the second and third children are from Hosea or products of her harlotry. Then in a pivot in verses 10-11, the people who had just been told they would get no more mercy, are given hope that in the distant future, they will be restored, and return to being "the sons of the living God".

## Hosea Chapter 2

In chapter 2, the Lord instructs the children to rebuke their mother. Gomer was not behaving like a faithful wife, so Hosea cannot experientially be her husband. When Hosea says "she is not my wife, and I am not her husband", he means by practice. There is also a double meaning here with the mother being Israel, and the children are the individuals of Israel that should rebuke her. When he says in verse 4 that they are

“children of harlotry”, I believe he is inferring that the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> children were not conceived by Hosea. Thus God is comparing them to the children of Israel who were conceived as pagan idol worshippers. In verses 6 through 15 we read of three “Therefore”s from God detailing what He is going to do both to Gomer and to the nation of Israel. They will experience such severe circumstances that they will eventually desire to return to their original betrothed husband. God will block their path, frustrate them, and discipline them. God will deprive them of the very fertility that the idols they worship promise them. Finally in verse 14, “I will allure her...and speak kindly to her”, and God will restore them to the land and give them peace. This restoration is revealed in verses 16-23 through three “in that day” promises. First there will be no more idols and they will have a husband and wife relationship again. Secondly, He will reestablish a new covenant relationship. Thirdly, the effects of the new relationship will be restoration to the land along with a bountiful produce. The bottom line is that in spite of the painful discipline, there is hope for Israel, and they are still in His plans.

### Hosea 3:1-5

In chapter three, Hosea is called by God to reestablish his marriage to Gomer. Hosea’s love will be undeserved and incomprehensible because of her enormous sin. This act of unmerited love is connected to God’s love for Israel, as verse one says “even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods.” Apparently Gomer was working as a cult prostitute in a pagan temple, because Hosea had to buy her back for a price equal to about 30 shekels which was the typical price paid to free an indentured slave. We can’t miss the analogy that Christ had to pay a price to buy us out of the slavery of sin, but as Peter wrote “you were not redeemed with...silver or gold from your futile way of life...but with precious blood...the blood of Christ.” We see the steps of restoration in Hosea 3:1-2: 1.redemption with a price paid, 2.the conditions of a new relationship (repentance), and 3.experiencing the relationship.

Hosea’s instructions to Gomer in verses 3-5 also symbolize Israel’s time in forced captivity/exile that the nation would have to endure. She was placed in forced seclusion for “many days”, and this is explained in v.4-5, “Just as Israel will remain for many days without king, without religious sacrifices, and without idols. Afterward Israel will return and seek the Lord...”

### The Method to the Madness

As wild as it seems to us that God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute, it served an important purpose. Hosea marrying a terrible sinner, and then through love saving her and reforming her, is identical to God choosing us, and redeeming us through His love. For Hosea, he had read and studied how God felt about sin, and how God loved him anyway, but now he experienced both firsthand which made him a better prophet, and no doubt helped him get the attention of his audience.

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