

Our first love: Introduction to Hosea

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Introduction

God desires that when we think about sin (our sin) that we do not think about it as an objective theoretical act against some impersonal code of ethics, such as breaking a set of rules on a list in an ancient book, rather God wants us to consider our sins against Him as an act, or even multiple acts, of spiritual adultery against God the true lover of our soul.

Adultery is an image of the relational impact of our attitude and our actions toward our creator. But here is the good news the gospel message in the book of Hosea brings to us: although our actions deserve punishment, although our actions deserve a break in the relationship, although our actions are biblical grounds for divorce, God continues to pursue and love us. God chooses forgiveness and restoration. That is the gospel in Hosea. God's steadfast, enduring love for His people causes him to pursue reconciliation. Betrayal hurts, but God's love is greater still.

The main idea

God wants to be our first love. He is faithful even when we are unfaithful.

Author: Hosea (YHWH has saved). Hosea was a prophet whose life portrayed the Israelite's relationship to God. He was called to marry a woman who represented Israel's unfaithfulness to God, and the names of his children represented God's judgment on Israel. Hosea announced this coming judgment on Israel and Judah, but he also announced that God, by His grace, would be merciful to His people and turn their hearts toward Him under the Davidic king, Jesus Christ (see Hos. 3:5).

Theological Themes

- Sin as spiritual adultery
- God's just judgments against sin
- God's covenant faithfulness and steadfast love (Hebrew: "hesed")
- The need for redemption (that a ransom be paid).

Historical Background

As a prophet, Hosea is a covenant mediator representing God to the people much like a prosecutor in the judicial system.

The key to understanding all the prophets is found in Deuteronomy 4:25-31, where God makes his covenant blessings and curses explicit.

Hosea served most of his time in the Northern Kingdom alongside Amos, Jonah, Isaiah, and Micah but then migrated South after the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria in 722.

The period covered in Hosea 1:1 by those Kings mentioned means Hosea began ministering between 760-701 B.C. (shortly before Judah was invaded by Assyria).

Hosea's prophecies were most likely collected and put together after his death by his disciples as a warning to the rulers in Judah to learn from the mistakes made by Israel, the Northern kingdom.

Spiritual Adultery

"Because Scripture frequently refers to the people of God metaphorically as His wife, spiritual adultery occurs when they leave their husband by worshiping idols."

The Reformation Study Bible Student Edition

Main themes

In Hosea 4:1 *Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land."* we see the charges that Hosea brings against the people (notice how these charges are relationally oriented):

- No faithfulness or loyalty to God
- No enduring, covenant love for God
- No knowledge of God, but better translated "no one acknowledges" God.



These are the covenant charges. In Deut 4:25-31 we can see how God told Moses that if Israel breaks this covenant there will be curses.

In Hosea 14:9 *“Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.”* This postscript gives us the desired outcome of the book. Hosea brings these charges, so the wise, the faithful remnant can return to God and His ways by rejecting the idols, but at the same time the unrighteous will be offended and stumble.

Finding the Gospel: Hosea's Marriage as a Parable for Israel

Within this beautiful love story, we find the gospel message as the main theme of the book of Hosea. “A forceful illustration of the broken covenant relationship was the unhappy marriage relationship between Hosea and his wife, Gomer. Her unfaithfulness to Hosea pointed to and illustrated Israel's unfaithfulness to her husband, the Lord. Hosea's taking back his wife after her unfaithfulness paralleled God's restoring Israel after frequent and serious instances of covenant unfaithfulness.

Israel's unfaithfulness is overshadowed by God's faithfulness. The promised renewal of the covenant ultimately comes through the promised Redeemer. Christ is alluded to in Hosea 11:1: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” Where Israel failed to be faithful to God, Christ prevails as the true Son of God, the true Israel of God, through His perfect obedience to God's holy law. He has paid the penalty for our unfaithfulness and idolatry.” - *The Reformation Study Bible Student Edition*

Main Gospel Themes:

- Our Sin- Spiritual Adultery
- God's Just Judgements
- God's steadfast love restores and forgives our sins.

The main lesson of Hosea is the intensely personal nature of sin. Through the study of this book, we may be more aware of the relational effect our sin has on our relationship with God.

The application of the Gospel:

Our justification: Before Christ came to live in us, we were indeed rebellious, unfaithful people, we were Gomer. We were a spiritual whore but by God's grace and his justification He has made us His beautiful bride.

The Lord came and redeemed us, he paid the ransom to buy us back from a life of spiritual prostitution. He bought us, redeemed us, and cleaned us up, and remains faithful and loyal to us. In His steadfast, enduring, covenant love Jesus saved us.

Our sanctification: The assurance of our salvation in Christ, the security we have in Christ, provides the right environment for us to grow deeper in love with the Lord although we continue to sin. It is in this secure relationship, that our affectional love for Christ grows deeper and deeper on a daily basis as we continually learn more about God's love for us and, at the same time we continually learn more about our adulterous hearts. As we see the purity of his love in contrast to the impurity of our love and our faith we learn again and again how amazing his grace really is.

Questions for application:

- How does Hosea's love for Gomer represent our relationship with God?
- Do you tend to see your sins as a personal offense or betrayal against a loving God or do you see them more like breaking the rules of an impersonal code (moralism)? Why?
- List the things/people/activities (good and bad) that you love in this world. Which of these could become an idol (a first love)?
- Is the Lord your first love? What comes to mind when you ask yourself this question?
- How can you grow more in love with God this week?

Other resources

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/hosea/>



<https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB28/hosea>

<https://openthebible.org/article/confuse-hosea-heres-need-know/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/hosea/#teaching-preaching>



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