

## Sermon for June 11, 2023 (Hosea)

### 1. The Background of Hosea:

As we look at the so-called “minor prophets” this summer, those were the books of the Bible that were so hard to memorize when we were kids. Today we look at Hosea. But before we get to him, we will look at a general overview of the Old Testament.

When Adam and Eve sinned, it was passed on to all people. We know that because people die. But God planned to save the world through a special people. He chose a man, Abraham, to begin those people. Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, God renamed “Israel,” so the people became known as the “Twelve Tribes of Israel” after Jacob’s 12 sons. They went to Egypt to escape a famine. They became slaves there. Under a man named Moses God freed them from that slavery and guided them toward the homeland God has promised to Abraham—modern day Israel. Under Joshua they conquered much of that land, but got caught up in the worship idols that the local people made during the time of the Judges. God gave the kings, the greatest of who was David. Yet after David’s son Solomon died, God allowed the kingdom to be split in two—Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

During the time from Moses to Solomon historians note a period of great confusion in that part of the world. The ancient great empires collapsed. There were no big powers to stand in the way of the people of Israel taking over their promised land and flourishing. But as we move into the later time of the Old Testament, great empires emerge like Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. These empires bring along the collapse of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It is as this begins that Hosea gives his prophecy.

#### **Hosea 1: 1-9**

*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:*

*When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.” So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.*

*Then the LORD said to 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.”*

*Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, “Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means “not loved”), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the LORD their God, will save them.”*

*After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the LORD said, “Call him Lo-Ammi (which means “not my people”), for you are not my people, and I am not your God.*

Hosea speaks at the same time as the prophet Amos to the same people. But while Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah, Hosea is from the north. While Amos focuses on the way the people in the north pervert justice and take advantage of the poor, Hosea talks more about their worship of idols.

We use object lessons for children's messages, but the Scriptures are there for all. Jesus' parables use examples from everyday life. But in the case of Hosea, God uses his life as an object lesson. God tells him to take a woman, Gomer, who will be unfaithful, to be his wife. Just as Gomer will be unfaithful to Hosea, the people of Israel are unfaithful to God. This is the main way God describes idolatry—it is adultery against God.

And if that is not enough, God tells him to name his first son "Jezreel" to remind people of how the present dynasty of Israel came to be through the massacre of the former one. Then his daughter is named "Not loved," and another son is named "Not My people."

**Hymn:**

## **2. The Problem:**

### **Hosea 2: 2-3**

*"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. Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst.*

### **Hosea 2: 11-13a**

*I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals. I will ruin her 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. I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals;*

### **Hosea 4:12-13**

*My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner's rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray: they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery.*

### **Hosea 11:1-2**

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.*

### **Hosea 12:7-8**

*The merchant uses dishonest scales and loves to defraud. Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin."*

### **Hosea 13:4-6**

*"But I have been the LORD your God ever since you came out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but Me, no Savior except Me. I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot Me.*

Gomer is the symbol of the northern Kingdom of Israel. As she exchanged Hosea for other men, the people had exchanged God for idols. How could they do that? When the people of Israel first entered the land under Joshua they were used to living for 40 years on the manna and quail God gave to them. Now they had to farm. Farming in the dry land of modern Israel depends on water. Today they get it from sophisticated irrigation, but then they depended on rain. Since they could not control the rain, the pagan people did all kinds of rituals to get the gods to do it. A familiar god was Baal, the god of the sky. Pagans focused their religion on getting Baal to give them rain.

The Israelites learned farming from the pagans, so they adapted many of their religious practices. What made it tempting was that with God, you have to trust that He will provide by His grace. You can't manipulate Him to do it. But with the pagan gods, you believed you could. The people didn't completely ignore God. They continued their outward rituals. The idea was that gods were like investments—the more you have the better. But God is jealous—He wants His people to Himself. Why? because like a faithful husband, He is what is best for His people.

Like Amos Hosea warns about their cheating and dishonest business deals. That was not a problem with pagan gods who only gave you things if you gave to them—who didn't care about what is good and right. But when we break a relationship with God, we screw up the people in our lives.

All this happened to the people that God had rescued from slavery in Egypt, the people God guided to the promised land, the people God loved like a faithful husband.

Maybe people don't build idols out of wood and stone, but we can see the idolatry today. Why else would there be a controversy over what is a man and a woman? Why would we base judgments on what we receive from extreme groups over the internet? Why else would the country seem farther and farther removed from the basic values of what is right and wrong?

To add to that the northern Kingdom of Israel looked good to many people because of its power and prosperity. Their king, Jereboam 2 was powerful and built a beautiful capital in Samaria. As we heard earlier, this was right before the empires would rise and devastate the land. So, like our country, there is much wealth and comfort. But will that last?

But if that is the way we see it, then we are missing the message of Hosea. Hosea was written not to just any people, but the people of God, the nation of Israel. Those people were both a political entity and a religious group. But Christ Jesus came to change that. The “Israel” of Scriptures is no longer a political nation, but the people of the “True Israel,” Jesus Christ. “Israel” today is not the United States, but the Church.

We too have been made by God just as God called Abraham. We too have been called out of slavery like the children of Israel under Moses. We too have been put here by God to show Himself to the world. But do we fail by falling into idolatry like the Kingdom of Israel?

**Hymn:**

### **3. The Verdict**

Note that when Hosea speaks of “Ephraim” and “Samaria,” he is talking about the northern Kingdom of Israel.

#### **Hosea 5:9-10**

*Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain. Judah’s leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out My wrath on them like a flood of water.*

#### **Hosea 6:4-5**

*“What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore I cut you in pieces with My prophets, I killed you with the words of My mouth— then My judgments go forth like the sun. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*

#### **Hosea 7:7**

*All their kings fall, and none of them calls on Me.*

#### **Hosea 8:6**

*This calf—a metalworker has made it; it is not God. It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria.*

God’s clear promise through Hosea is that the northern Kingdom will be destroyed. We know this came true as in 722 BC the empire of Assyria obliterated the nation. This was God’s punishment for their idolatry. He also includes the southern Kingdom of Judah, speaking about leaders moving boundary stones. Moving those stones was a way of stealing land from others. Judah too would be punished later by the Babylonians.

Hosea speaks about the calf. We may associate that with the Golden Calf of the time of Moses at Mt. Sinai. This is something different. When Israel divided into the two kingdoms, the king in the north, Jereboam, had a problem. His people were still going to the southern kingdom to worship God at the temple in Jerusalem. So he set up two shrines, one in Bethel and one in Dan, both in his kingdom, to worship God. The “calves” at those shrines were not supposed to be gods, but to symbolize thrones for God. The invisible God was supposed to be

seated on the calves. But what lay under it was Jereboam's desire to use God for his own means, to try to control God. That is what really leads to idolatry, "adultery" against God.

No, we may not be caught up in all the evil going on in our society, but do we follow God because we love Him or to get what we can out of Him? Do we exist as the Church to be His people or to get what we can out of it?

**Confession:**

#### **4. The Restoration**

##### **Hosea 2:16**

*"In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call Me 'my husband'; you will no longer call Me 'my master'.*

##### **Hosea 3:1-5**

*The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."*

*So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you."*

*For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. 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.*

##### **Hosea 1: 10-11**

*"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 'children of the living God.' The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel."*

The story doesn't end with destruction. No, God tells Hosea to go back and buy back his wife Gomer. That may not seem so amazing to us with our ideas of romantic love. But in that world, if a woman committed adultery, she could be stoned. And as an adulterous, she was defiled. It is what led Joseph to be willing to let Mary end up with the man he thought had gotten her pregnant. Then she would not be defiled—that is until he learned she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

It would have been seen as a shameful thing for Hosea to take her back, even if he did not have to pay for it.

Just as Gomer shows our unfaithfulness, what God told Hosea to do shows us God's incredible love. Instead of letting us be destroyed as Gomer could have been stoned to death,

He takes us back. He did it both by paying the price of His only Son, Jesus, who died for us, and by taking us back even though we were unfaithful (what we call “reconciliation”).

The image of God as our husband contrasts the pagan image. “Baal,” the main pagan god, means “lord” or “husband,” but in the sense of an extreme male chauvinist. God promised Eve after the first sin that Adam would “ba-al” over her, seek to dominate and treat her as a slave. She, in return, would seek to manipulate him. What is missing in all of this is love. But God is to us a real husband, the one who as Paul said in Ephesians 5 is willing to give up his love for his wife. And in return we as His wife “submit” to Him in love. God has turned our “idolatry” and “adultery” into a loving marriage,

On the night before He died, Jesus told His disciples in John, “In My Father’s house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you.” In the old board game of Life the goal at the end is to retire in a mansion, not a poor house. We see the image that God has a mansion, a “dream house”, ready for each of us. That is not the image Jesus is trying to give. He is using the language a man would give to the girl he wanted to marry. People didn’t build separate homes. They added rooms on the existing houses so the extended family could be together. Before man got married, he built on to his father’s house to make a place for him and his wife. Promising this was like giving her the ring. Jesus has “proposed” to us, His Church. We wait, like a bride, for Him to come and take us to that room in heaven.