

# ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

August 21, 2022 | A Metaphor for a Message [Hosea]

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Do you find it easier to be devoted to God during times of prosperity or times of need?

Read Hosea.

Pray this lesson in Hosea will open your eyes to any unfaithfulness to God in your life..

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Israel had committed spiritual adultery by neglecting its covenant commitment to God.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our commitment to God must be able to endure times of prosperity.

### MEDITATE

*“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’” (Hosea 1:10).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces Hosea’s ministry context and connects it to our own.

**Q:** *In what ways are you tempted during times of plenty that you are not during*

*times of need?*

**Q:** *Why is prosperity often more dangerous for your faith than need?*

Hosea was a prophet to the nation of Israel during the eighth century B.C. He ministered during a time of political and economic prosperity in the nation of Israel, at least during the early years of his ministry. The major superpowers of the ancient Near East, such as Assyria and Egypt, were experiencing declines because of internal strife, which opened an opportunity for Israel to recover much of the territory they had previously lost and offered the stability needed for the nation to thrive for several decades. Israel was experiencing a sort of golden age.

Israel's political and economic resurgence was not, however, accompanied by a resurgence in the people's loyalty to Yahweh. Instead, in their prosperity, they neglected their relationship with Him. They found security in their wealth rather than in the faithfulness of God. They wanted to secure their influence among the other nations, and this meant leaving their covenant with Yahweh behind. This is the context into which Hosea spoke. The prophet warned the people that their time of prosperity would be short-lived because God's judgment was on the horizon.

**Q:** *How has your faith been challenged during times of need in the past? How has your faith struggled during times of prosperity?*

**Q:** *What spiritual habits do you maintain to help grow your faith?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Often, what we want the most is what we need the least. No one wants to face challenges or times of need. We all want to prosper financially and emotionally. Like the ancient Israelites, however, times of financial and emotional prosperity often coincide with a decline in faith. We lose focus on our need for God during such times. We gain confidence in our ability to hold things together and fail to recognize our need for God's sustaining grace in every part of our lives. As we will see in Hosea, times of plenty can be the most spiritually dangerous times of our lives.

We cannot always control our circumstances, and it would be silly not to seek personal prosperity. The solution to this problem is not forgoing prosperity but ensuring that our faith is strong enough to endure the times when our need for God is not as apparent. Spiritual disciplines keep us from indulging the lie that we can get by

without Him. Like an athlete who is always ready to compete, spiritual disciplines keep us ready to face times of prosperity and times of need.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Hosea 1–3 sets up a metaphor that compares Hosea and his wife to God and His people. After this metaphor is established, the remainder of the book is a collection of accusations, judgments, and oracles of hope.

1. A METAPHOR FOR A MESSAGE
2. ACCUSATIONS
3. CALLS FOR REPENTANCE

## GOING DEEPER

*+This lesson will begin by explaining the metaphor created in Hosea 1–3. It will then look at three primary accusations Hosea made against Israel and conclude by considering his call for repentance and hope.*

## 1. A METAPHOR FOR A MESSAGE

### ■ HOSEA 1–3

🔍: *Why did God tell Hosea to marry a woman who would become unfaithful to him?*

🔍: *Why did Hosea give his children such strange names?*

Hosea's life characterized the heart-breaking message he had to proclaim to the people of Israel. The book begins in a typical fashion. The word of the Lord came to Hosea. What follows is anything but typical. God did not give Hosea a message to proclaim but a metaphor to live. Hosea must marry a "wife of whoredom." It is unclear whether Gomer, Hosea's wife, was a harlot before she married him or would become unfaithful afterward. Whatever the case, she ultimately proved to be unfaithful to him. The wording of Hosea 1:6 and 8 suggests the second two children she bore were not Hosea's.

God's purpose in calling Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife was to create a metaphor. Hosea's marriage to Gomer symbolized the relationship between God and Israel. By entering into a covenant relationship, God had "married" Israel. It is evident throughout the book of Hosea that Israel failed to keep the covenant it had committed to enter with God, and that unfaithfulness is symbolized by Gomer's unfaithfulness to her husband.

Hosea's marriage is not the only metaphor within Hosea 1–3. The children Gomer bore each were given a metaphorical name. The first child was named Jezreel (Hosea 1:4). The boy's name is a reference to Jehu's revolt against the Omride dynasty, which contained some of the most wicked figures in Israel's history, such as King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. To judge the Omride dynasty, God called Jehu, a commander in the army, to massacre every member of Ahab's family, including Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal, whom the family worshipped. Jehu then became king over Israel (2 Kings 9:1–10:28). He succeeded in putting to death all the members of the Omride dynasty in Jezreel, but he did not succeed in following God and instead led the nation further into idol worship. Thus, Jehu's house would be punished for the blood he spilt in Jezreel even though he did so under God's command (Hosea 1:4). His idolatry was no better than Ahab's Baalism, and God would soon bring an end to his dynasty just as he did Omri's. Jeroboam, the son of Israel's current king, (Hosea 1:1), would be the final member of Jehu's dynasty to reign.

The names of Gomer's other two children are much easier to understand but no less daunting for the people of Israel. Hosea called the second child, a daughter, No Mercy because God would have no mercy on Israel because of their sinfulness (Hosea 1:6). The name of the third child was Not My People (Hosea 1:9). This child's name was perhaps the most harrowing of all because it entailed a denial of the covenant relationship between Israel and God. God's covenantal commitment to the people and their commitment to Him was often summarized by the phrase, "I will be their God and they will be My people" (Exodus 6:7). Now, God was denying the very foundation of His commitment to the people.

**Q:** *Why is the comparison of Hosea's marriage to Israel's unfaithfulness so effective? How can you gain the attention of an affluent culture with the message of the gospel?*

**Q:** *The name of Hosea's first son references the massacre that took place in Jezreel. What did Hosea's condemnation of this event reveal about God's character?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Hosea was speaking to an affluent culture that had forgotten God, but he could not tell them that their affluence made them forget God. They would not have believed him. Instead, he used his own

life to illustrate the people's sin. Hosea's prophetic ministry was unique. God is not calling us to an unfaithful marriage. Nevertheless, we can learn from Hosea about confronting an affluent culture through our lives. A life of self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of the gospel will catch the eye of people who seemingly have everything. When they see you denying yourself the luxuries or pleasures they feel entitled to, they will want to know why you are different. That is your chance to tell them they are looking for joy in the wrong places. True joy cannot be found in anything money can buy but only in knowing Jesus Christ as Savior.

Q: *What verses reveal the hope Hosea had for Israel in Hosea 1-3?*

Q: *Who is the one head under whom the people would return [Hosea 1:11]? Since this is long after David's reign, who is "David their king" [Hosea 3:5]?*

Hosea's marriage and the names of his children painted a bleak picture for the future of Israel. They had been unfaithful to their covenant with God, and God had in turn rejected them. As bleak as the situation was, there was reason for hope throughout Hosea 1-3. Although God had rejected Israel for a time, there would come a time when God would again extend His grace to them. He would remember the covenants He formerly made with them by multiplying their number (Hosea 1:10; Genesis 15:5). The people God once rejected would once again be made His. No Mercy would receive God's mercy, and Not My People would be God's people again (Hosea 2:23).

Hosea's own life again becomes a metaphor for God's plan for His people (Hosea 3). We are not given the details, but Gomer, Hosea's unfaithful wife, had somehow become enslaved to her lovers. Hosea found her and bought back his own wife. She would now dwell with him faithfully for many days. Just as Gomer would return to Hosea and live in faithfulness, so Israel would return to live in faithfulness to God.

At two points, Hosea centered Israel's hope upon an individual. In Hosea 1:11, he spoke of "one head" the people would appoint as their leader. In Hosea 3:5, he spoke of the people returning from exile to seek "David their king." David had been dead for more than two hundred years at the time of Hosea's ministry, so the prophet was obviously not referring to the historical David. Instead, it is likely he envisioned Israel's throne returning to one of David's descendants.

Hosea's words created a profile or a pattern that was fulfilled by two individuals. God's rejection of the people of Israel ultimately led to their exile from the land and the dissolution of the nation. Years later, the people returned from exile under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of David (Matthew 1:12-13) and served as a governor among those who returned from exile and reconstructed the temple in Jerusalem. The other individual who fulfills the profile envisioned by Hosea is Jesus.

Q: *How is the restoration Hosea envisioned ultimately fulfilled in Jesus?*

Q: *How does Romans 9:24–29 relate Hosea’s vision of Israel’s restoration to the work of Jesus?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Paul saw the connection between Israel’s experience in the Old Testament and the story of all humanity. Just as Israel sinned and failed to keep the covenant, everyone has rebelled against God and failed to live in righteousness. Thus, humanity lives with consequences of its sin just as Israel lived with the consequences of rejecting God. But God has the last word for the people of Israel in Hosea and for humanity.

Paul used Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 in Romans 9:25–26 to describe the inclusion of the Gentiles into Israel’s story. Just as God once called Israel “not my people” but later committed Himself to them by calling them “my people,” He also calls the Gentiles “my people” even though they were not originally part of His covenant people. He went on in Romans 9:27 to allude to a prophecy of Isaiah stating that Israel would be “as the sand of the sea,” which is nearly identical to what Hosea said in 1:10. When you read Israel’s story in Hosea, understand that Israel’s story is our story as well. We have broken the covenant and deserve God’s wrath, but God has made His grace available to us in Jesus Christ.

## 2. ACCUSATIONS

### HOSEA 4–10, 12–13

Q: *How is the theme of spiritual adultery continued throughout the rest of Hosea?*

Q: *What is the connection between idolatry and spiritual adultery?*

Hosea and Gomer’s story has been popularized in the last several years and is likely the aspect of the book you are most familiar with, but it makes up only a small portion of the book. Hosea is like Job in that respect. After the saga between Hosea and Gomer concludes in Hosea 3, the remainder of the book focuses upon Hosea’s prophetic indictment of Israel. His personal life is not mentioned again.

Although the metaphor comparing Hosea and Gomer to God and Israel is absent from the rest of the book, the main idea illustrated by that metaphor continues to pervade the book. Israel had committed spiritual adultery. Their covenant with God demanded allegiance to Him, but their affluence led them to compromise their commitment. Hosea's accusations of spiritual adultery focus upon three primary elements: idolatry, forgetting God, and pandering to the nations.

Israel's spiritual adultery is perhaps most clearly seen in their practice of idol worship. The tragedy of idol worship is how utterly foolish it is. The people worshipped wooden idols. Hosea sarcastically suggested they should ask their walking sticks for a word from God. They were the same substance (Hosea 4:12). In the same verse, Hosea identified idolatry as spiritual adultery. For the northern kingdom of Israel, idolatry was part of its worship since its split with the southern kingdom of Judah. King Jeroboam was concerned that although the people were politically divided from the southern kingdom, they were still under the southern kingdom's influence because the temple was located in Jerusalem. In an effort to entrench their independence from the southern kingdom, Jeroboam inaugurated the idolatrous worship of foreign calves (1 Kings 12:25–33). In Hosea's time, the people had continued to worship the calves Jeroboam set up (Hosea 10:5). But this idol would eventually be carried off to Assyria as a trophy of their victory over Israel (Hosea 10:6). This is the sad reality of idol worship. The people worshipped what would eventually become a trophy of a foreign king's victory over them. There would never have been any chance of this if the people had remained faithful to Yahweh.

Israel found idolatry attractive partly because they sought to appeal to other nations. Since the surrounding nations were experiencing a period of declining influence, Israel saw this as a time to form alliances and gain leverage among them. But how could they do this while refusing the common religious practices of their day? In seeking to appeal to foreign nations, Israel compromised its most fundamental beliefs. And so, these "strange" nations were draining Israel of its unique relationship to God (Hosea 7:9). Hosea patronized Israel's flirtation with the nations by referring to her as a dove. "Ephraim [Israel] is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria" (Hosea 7:11). Although he belittled Israel, their obsession with foreign nations was no laughing matter. The little dove would eventually be caught in a net spread out and brought down by God (Hosea 7:12).

Israel's unfaithfulness to God can be traced to the loss of knowledge of Him. Without knowing God, the people had little chance of remaining faithful to Him. Hosea emphasized the failure of Israel's leaders, especially the Levites, to preserve the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:4). Their failure to preserve the knowledge of God placed the people in danger of His judgment (Hosea 4:6).

**Q:** *Why does affluence make spiritual adultery harder to recognize?*

**Q:** *In what ways do you see spiritual adultery at work within your church?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –The worst way for Christians to respond to Hosea’s message is to think it only applies to non-Christians. We may be tempted to think that by confessing Christ as Savior we could never be in danger of committing spiritual adultery, which is a dangerous mistake. Hosea’s accusations against Israel demand that we examine our own faithfulness to God. God said through Hosea, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). Hosea knew the people were doing all the “right things” and going through the motions but did not love God. This could be true of people in our churches as easily as it was true of the people Hosea addressed. There are no magic tests that can yield definitive results in this matter, but the important thing is that we consistently examine ourselves, identifying things in our lives that could easily become idolatrous loves. Israel “idolized” her position among the surrounding nations. Perhaps you need to be wary of how much you value the opinion of others over God’s opinion of you. Find people you can trust to help you examine yourself. Our idols have a way of blinding us to their existence, which makes spiritual idolatry difficult to recognize. But others can help us recognize our idols if we are willing to trust them.

### 3. CALLS FOR REPENTANCE

#### ■ HOSEA 11, 14

**Q:** *How does God’s roar in 11:10 differ from His roar in 5:14 and 13:7-8??*

**Q:** *Why did Hosea describe repentant Israel like a fruitful garden in 14:5-8?*

Most of Hosea dwells on God’s accusations against Israel and the judgment they face. There are moments, however, when the prophet called for Israel’s repentance and anticipated God’s forgiveness if they did. Hosea introduces a new metaphor in Hosea 11:1. For most of the book, Hosea portrays Israel as an unfaithful wife. In Hosea 11, however, Israel is portrayed as God’s beloved son. The shift in metaphor coincides with a shift in subject. Hosea does not speak of Israel’s spiritual adultery but of God’s devotion to His people. It depicts God as a lioness calling her cubs (Hosea 11:1). When He roars, his people return to Him with trembling. This roaring lion metaphor in Hosea 11 differs from how it is used elsewhere in Hosea. In Hosea 5:14 and 13:7–8, Hosea declared that God was roaring, but the roar was that of a predator about to destroy its prey. It symbolizes God’s judgment. This roaring lion metaphor in Hosea is remarkable for the way it showcases the difference the people’s



repentance would make. God did not want to punish Israel. His roar of judgment could just as easily become a roar of endearment if the people would only turn back to Him.

Hosea concludes with words of hope. If Israel would return to God (Hosea 14:1), He would gladly heal them (Hosea 14:4). He would make them like a well-watered garden (Hosea 14:5–8), symbolizing the fruitfulness of a life of faithfulness to Yahweh. Israel would no longer be a dry and barren wasteland (Hosea 9:16).

🔗: *What does God's eagerness to forgive repentant sinners mean for you?*

🔗: *Why is it easier to trust ourselves rather than God when seeking personal prosperity?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In Hosea, Israel's forgiveness begins with God's yearning to forgive repentant sinners. There could be no better news for those who are willing to acknowledge and repent of their sins. We need never wonder whether God will forgive us if we return to Him in repentance. We need never fear that our sin is too great. We never have to earn His forgiveness. It is given freely to all those who confess Jesus Christ as Savior. God's yearning to forgive gives us the freedom to pursue Him out of love instead of fear. Hosea's vision of God's forgiveness rests at the foundation of the gospel.

## NEXT STEPS

The concluding verse in Hosea (14:9) seems like it was ripped from the book of Proverbs rather than being part of a prophetic oracle. The book ends with a wisdom saying. If anyone is wise, let him understand the things written within this prophecy. It takes wisdom to recognize the signs of spiritual adultery in your life and in the lives of others. Since Hosea concluded his book with an exhortation to be wise, it is appropriate for this lesson to conclude by encouraging you to seek wisdom. It takes great spiritual discernment to recognize the ways we are being unfaithful to God. Ask Him to give you the wisdom necessary to do so (James 1:5).

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, thank you for illustrating the truths found in your word. Help me to appreciate how the Bible communicates the message you have for the world.*

*-Lord, give me the wisdom I need to recognize when I am being unfaithful to you.*

*-Jesus, thank you for the forgiveness you secure for me. Help me to always trust in the sufficiency of your work on the cross.*

*-God, keep me from pandering for the approval of others. Help me to rest secure in my relationship with you.*