

HOSEA—THE PROPHET WHO PROVED THAT GOD IS LOVE

Presented by

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The Bible contains numerous fascinating accounts of how, in the past, God used some rather unusual methods to teach people important spiritual lessons that they desperately needed to learn. On one occasion, for example, God sent fire from heaven to light an altar that the prophet Elijah had constructed on the top of Mount Carmel during a challenge with the pagan prophets of Baal. This daring demonstration of God's power was intended to show that, as 2 Chronicles 6:14 says, "There is no God in heaven or on earth like Jehovah." On another occasion, God commanded the Israelites to walk around the walls of the city of Jericho on seven consecutive days and then blow on their trumpets, after which the city's walls came tumbling down—without the Israelites ever having laid a finger on them. This destructive demonstration of God's power was intended to prove that, as Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 32:17, "There is nothing too hard for the Lord." On yet another occasion, God even allowed wicked, sinful men to kill His own Son—Whom He then raised from the dead three days later. This deliberate demonstration of God's power was intended to show, among other things, that "with God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

But surely one of the strangest set of circumstances in the entire Bible is found in the Old Testament book of Hosea, which is composed of only fourteen brief chapters. Hosea was a prophet of God who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel during the chaotic period when Israel and her kings insolently ignored God's commands and defiantly disobeyed Him. God sent prophet after prophet to the Israelites to try to convince them to turn from their wicked ways and to return to their covenant relationship with Him. But, as Nehemiah recorded in Nehemiah 9:26, the Israelites were "disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs, and killed Your prophets who testified against them to turn them back to You." God had shown that He was more than willing to extend both mercy and grace to the people of Israel. But they summarily rejected His generous offer with an unparalleled hardness of heart. Eventually, God's patience grew thin, and then evaporated completely, thereby paving the way for the powerful Assyrian nation to invade and conquer the apostate kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., at which time **27,000** Israelites were shipped off to various Assyrian territories—a horrific event that marked the final, permanent destruction of the kingdom of Israel. Most of the deported Israelites never saw their beloved homeland again.

It was within the context of the Israelites' rebellion to God—but before their fall into the hands of the Assyrians—that Hosea appeared. The tone and content of the book indicate that Hosea was a man of deep compassion, fierce loyalty, and keen awareness of the sad events taking place around him. As one of the Lord's faithful prophets, Hosea was genuinely committed to doing God's will. But little could he have known that one day his commitment to God would be tested—almost to the breaking point.

For many years the people of Israel had been worshiping false gods, and as a result had fallen into the practice of idolatry. As far back as Mount Sinai, when God had given Moses the Ten Commandments, He had made it crystal clear to His people that idolatry was completely unacceptable. In fact, the very first of the Ten Commandments was this:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Exodus 20:2-5).

Yet in spite of what God had commanded them, the people of Israel abandoned God in favor of a multiplicity of pagan gods in the form of various wood, stone, brass, or gold images. God therefore devised an exceedingly graphic plan that was intended to help Hosea show the people of Israel the drastic departure from God’s Word that had resulted from their headlong plunge into idol worship.

In what can only be called a startling turn of events, God commanded Hosea to go find a wife to marry. But Hosea was not allowed to choose just **any** wife. Rather, God told him to marry...**a prostitute!** Using powerful imagery borrowed from the sanctity of the marriage relationship, God said to Hosea, “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord” (Hosea 1:2). By giving Hosea this unusual command, God made it clear that He intended to put a painful, public face on the sin of idolatry that was being committed by the Israelites. Just as a harlot polluted the sacredness of marriage, so the people of Israel had polluted the sacredness of proper worship of God.

Hosea did as God commanded him, and married a prostitute by the name of Gomer. Eventually, Gomer gave birth to a son, whom God instructed Hosea to name Jezreel, which referred to the seed of Israel that God eventually would scatter abroad. Next, Gomer gave birth to a daughter, whom God told Hosea to name Lo-Ruhamah, meaning, “I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but will utterly take them away.” Lastly, Gomer gave birth to another son, whom God commanded Hosea to name Lo-Ammi, which means, “You are not My people, and I will not be your God.” Thus, through the humiliating marriage of the prophet Hosea to a prostitute, as well as through the names that God assigned to the children of Hosea and Gomer, God made it clear that a terrible fate awaited the people of Israel if they did not repent.

When the Israelites gave the glory and honor to pagan gods or idols that should have been reserved for God alone, it was as if a wife had given to a stranger the glory and honor that should have been reserved only for her husband. And it was not just one or two people who had committed such atrocities against God. Rather, **the entire nation had abandoned Him and turned to idols.** It was God’s hope that when the Israelites saw a holy man like the prophet Hosea marry a prostitute—and even have children by her!—that such actions would be repulsive to them, and would help them understand that **their actions were just as repulsive to God!**

But God's object lesson for the Israelites was not yet complete. Eventually, Gomer abandoned Hosea and returned to her sinful life as a prostitute. When that happened, God commanded Hosea, "Go again, and love the woman who is loved by a lover and who is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods" (Hosea 3:1). Once again, Hosea did as he was told. He went to the slave market, bought Gomer back, and restored her to her rightful place as his wife. This action on Hosea's part was symbolic of what God had told Hosea when He compared Hosea's acts as being "just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel." Hosea's unhappy family experience was an object lesson of the sinfulness (or "harlotry") of the nation of Israel in rejecting the one true God and turning to serve false, pagan gods. Although the people of Israel deserved to be rejected because they had turned their backs on God, Hosea's life story emphasized in a very real and personal way that God would continue to love them and use them as His special people—**if they would repent!**

Through Hosea's unquestioning obedience of God, he demonstrated that he was a prophet who was willing to follow the Lord's will—**no matter what the cost**. Hosea was an obedient, compassionate, dedicated spokesman for righteousness, as well as a man whose own life echoed daily the important message that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Over and over again God repeatedly reminded the people of Israel, "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves, pray, seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

That was Hosea's message to the people of Israel. And it is the same message God sends to us today as well. The people of Hosea's day refused to listen. I cannot help but ask: **Are we making the same mistake?**