

**LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text**  
**Part thirteen - Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
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**HOSEA - LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND THE HEART OF GOD**

- 1) **Some background information** - The story takes place in the city of ***Samaria***, the capital city of the ***Northern Kingdom of Israel***. The events took place around ***750 - 720 B.C.*** The book of Hosea is the only Scriptural writing we have from the Northern Kingdom of ***Israel*** (opposed to the Southern Kingdom of ***Judah***). Hosea was a contemporary of both ***Amos*** and ***Jonah***, and prophesied to Israel at the same time ***Isaiah*** was prophesying to Judah. ***Hosea warned of the judgment of God coming with the Assyrians.*** Assyria took Israel about ***20 years after*** Hosea's message ended.
  
- 2) **The story of the book of Hosea** - Hosea had the most difficult task of all. He was called upon to urge the people to repentance during a time of ***great moral and spiritual collapse***, while, at the same time, enjoying great ***material ease and prosperity***. This is always God's more challenging task - to make people ***see*** their need long before they actually ***feel*** it.

The basic sin of the people was their ***indifference to God***. They kept all of the outward observances of their religion but ***it had all become so lifeless and unrelated to the rest of their lives***. The central theme of Hosea's plea is that God is after the people's ***hearts*** more than their ***offerings*** and ***sacrifices***:

**Hosea 4:1&6 - “Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land....4:6....“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”**See also the strong words in **Hosea 6:6 - “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”**

In order to convey God's heart effectively to the rest of the people, God gives Hosea a vivid, unforgettable lesson on the passion of His commitment and feelings toward Israel.

In a nutshell, God tells Hosea to ***marry an ungodly woman from among the people*** (1:2). Hosea obeys and has children with her (2:3-9). ***Gomer*** was a harlot when Hosea married her and she ***continued unchanged in her impure ways even after her marriage to Hosea***. On this point we are meant to see the likeness made between ***Gomer*** and ***Israel*** in **2:1-5** - “Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.” [2] “Plead with your mother, plead— for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband— that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; [3] lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst. [4] Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom. [5] For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’”

Finally, **God tells Hosea to go and buy Gomer back out of her slavery - 3:1-4** - “And the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.” [2] So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. [3] And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.” [4] For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.”

This serves as a living illustration of God's endless love and heartache over His people, Israel.

### 3) What was God trying to teach Hosea and us in this strange book?

- a) **First, Hosea learned the true nature of Israel's sin.** He came to see that what was fundamentally wrong with **Gomer** was what was wrong with Israel. We always see our own sin more keenly when we see it in someone else. Probably none of us sees his or her indifference to God with the same pain as we would view the unfaithfulness of our own spouse to us.

But there's something even deeper revealed here. **Why** did Gomer leave Hosea? It was not just because she was sexually immoral. Rather, it was because **she had failed or ceased to love him as she should**. A wife doesn't love her husband as she should unless she loves him **exclusively**. This is why our love for God is almost always compared with marital faithfulness in the Scriptures. And lack of love isn't just indifference. It's adulterous. Love isn't genuine unless it is **exclusive**.

Jesus continues the same pattern in the New Testament. He talks about love for God in terms of what **else** we love. See **Matthew 6:24** - **“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”** Jesus isn't worried so much that we **deny** our love for God as He is that we **divide** it.

Also, back to Gomer, she didn't believe Hosea could provide her greatest measure of blessing and happiness. This lesson too is played out over and over in the Scriptures in a variety of pictures. ***Why did the prodigal squander his inheritance?*** Was he merely wasteful? That's not quite it. Rather, he ceased to believe his greatest blessing came from his relationship with his father. This is what led to all his other sins.

- b) ***Second, Hosea learned what it was God desired of Israel.*** What did Hosea desire of Gomer? He wanted more than someone who would **do things** for him. What Hosea wanted more than anything else was Gomer's **love and faithfulness**. He wanted her heart and devotion. Everything else was empty without this.

God relates this to his people so clearly in **Hosea 6:6** - **“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”** The knowledge of God isn't just the knowledge that He is Trinity, or the ability to list His attributes. It's knowing what His heart desires. And here's the point. Everyone resents a **relationship** being turned into a **routine**. Love can't be manipulated in a **job**.

So it is with God's relationship with us. How could He ever be content with the offering of sacrifices and ceremonies **when the people's hearts were no longer in love with Him?** What a searching book this is! How important for each of us to remember as the years roll by that God is not first of all after our **prayers** or our **offerings** or our **religious observances**. These observances only have value when they flow from a loving heart. God deeply desires our **fervent, ongoing love and devotion**. Everything else is empty and useless apart from this.

- c) **Third, Hosea learned God suffers when we sin.** How do you think you would feel if you found out that your spouse was unfaithful to you? God wants to teach, very descriptively, to Hosea and us, that **this is how He feels when His own people are lured away from their first love for Him.** It only feels painless from the viewpoint of the **deserter** - never the **deserted**.

This is one of the reasons God allows us to be sinned **against**. Perpetrators of sin don't immediately feel the pain of sin. Those sinned against hurt. The point here is God's laws aren't broken the way the laws of mathematics are broken. They are broken the way a child feels the pain of child-abuse. God hurts when we sin.

- d) **Finally, Hosea discovered the amazing mercy and love of God.** It is **God** who tells Hosea to go and buy Gomer back in spite of all her sin and waywardness. There is no **law** requiring Hosea to do so. **Justice** didn't demand such lavish mercy. Hosea, in his retrieval of Gomer **feels** some of the weight and measure of God's mercy.

**"How can I give you up, O Ephriam?"(Hosea 11:8).** This whole eleventh chapter tells of God's heart of outreach and compassion. It will not remove the coming divine judgment from Assyria, but it ***will last through it.*** So Hosea's actions demonstrate a love that goes totally beyond reason and explanation.