

Seeing Jesus in Every Story

**“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;
and these are they which testify of Me.”**

John 5:39

Act 10

Hosea and Gomer: Redeeming Love

Hosea 1–3

Prologue

Right from the start, God told him it wouldn't be easy. Hosea, your marriage is going to be an object lesson for My people . . . a living parable. You will love her and she will disgrace you. You will give her a name and honor and she will hawk herself to the lowest bidder. Heartbreaking.

If Ruth and Boaz is the classic love story then Hosea's marriage to Gomer is the grocery-line tabloid. Different stories, different backgrounds . . . same reflection of God's unfailing purposes.

This will not be an easy read for us. The drama and tension is disturbing and the issues it stirs up can be—well, it's complicated. But this is God's unfolding drama of Redemption and His relentless love is written across every scene. Yes, life is complicated but God's grace is infinitely more complex. His promise of forgiveness and salvation always has the last word.

The back story . . .

Prophets didn't get to pick their assignments and this appears to be Hosea's first (1:2). Of all the difficult and downright peculiar things God had prophets do (and there were many) Hosea's life sermon was particularly raw and relevant. It mirrored the relationship Israel had with God which, during Hosea's lifetime, wasn't pretty.

After King Solomon's death, the nation divided. Two tribes followed Solomon's son (the house of Judah) and ten tribes split off to follow Jeroboam (the house of Israel). To consolidate his power over the northern kingdom, Jeroboam built a new worship center complete with golden calves to keep the people from going back to Jerusalem for worship. Before long, the worship practices outlined by God through Moses morphed into an evil blend of Jewish ritual and pagan idolatry. But the people didn't care because life was prosperous. The northern kingdom rapidly left the old ways behind and the southern kingdom went into a slow drift. So God sent them prophets.

We tend to think of prophecy as telling the future but that's only part of it. More often than not, a prophet's message focused on calling God's people to remember the Lord's words and works and call them back to repentance. Prophets often did this in dramatic, even disturbing ways. The people didn't like it much, and a prophet's job was never easy. (Maybe Israel had their own version of a popular song: “Mama don't let your babies grow up to be prophets.”)

For Hosea, the assignment was intensely painful, but urgent. He was the last prophet God sent to the house of Israel. Judgment was coming, but through Hosea the Lord declares His tender mercy and redeeming love.

Cast

Hosea, Gomer

Read Hosea 1:1–8 and Hosea 3:1–5. Briefly note what stands out to you at first reading. Be prepared to share one of your impressions with your discussion group.

1. How would Hosea's marriage serve as a living illustration of the Lord's relationship with the house of Israel?
2. What did Hosea's actions demonstrate about the extent of God's love for His people?

Scene 1: Hosea's Unfaithful Wife – Hosea 1

What will it take to get your attention? In this opening scene, the Lord gives Hosea a mission to deliver that message and illustrate it with his own life.

1. Hosea is instructed to marry a woman the Lord has said will be unfaithful to him. Why did the Lord give Hosea such a painful mission?
2. Three children are born and God has Hosea give each one a divinely chosen name. It was common for a child's name to reflect the parents' hope or describe some circumstance of their birth. But the name of a prophet's child was often symbolic of the prophet's message from God.

Give some thought to these names keeping in mind that God chose them. First and foremost, they reflect the broken relationship between the Lord and the house of Israel. And second, consider what the personal implication *might have been* for Hosea's own family, given the circumstances.

v. 4 – A son named **Jezreel** (“God will scatter” or “God will sow”)

- Warning to Israel: Jezreel spelled catastrophe to the people of Hosea's time. It was the historic sight of a bloody coup that brought down Israel's wicked king Ahab and his wife Jezebel who led the nation into idolatry. But the “house of Jehu” (v. 4) proved to be just as idolatrous. God's warning to Israel—echoed in Hosea's son Jezreel—was that their days were numbered. Their military power would be lost (“break the bow” v. 5) and the northern kingdom of Israel would be scattered.
- Personal for Hosea: Israel's devotion to God was insincere—they went through the motions but still lived as they pleased. How was this playing out in Hosea's home life?

v. 6 – A daughter named **Lo-Ruhamah** (“no mercy” or “not loved”)

- Warning to Israel: For many years leading up to this, Israel had ignored God's warning that He would remove protective mercy and bring the consequences of their sin on them. Hosea was the last in a long string of prophets that God sent (beginning with Elijah) to call the northern kingdom of Israel to repentance. Extreme sin called for severe measures and eventually Israel was exiled from their own land. The sordid details are recorded in 2 Kings 17:7–23.
- Personal for Hosea: This name indicates that Hosea may not have fathered this child. Did Hosea welcome this pregnancy? Was Gomer proving to be less than nurturing as a mother? These aren't questions we can answer from the text but they cause us to think. How does this family's heartache reflect the Lord's grief over Israel's habitual sin?

Hebrew children were usually weaned by the age of three. Years of infidelity have taken a toll on Hosea. With yet another illegitimate child on the way, Hosea's marriage to Gomer now represents a dramatic breaking point in the relationship between God and His people.

v. 9 – Another son named **Lo-Ammi** (“not My people”)

- Warning to Israel: With the birth of this third child, God's message to Israel was terse. The last phrase in v. 9 (“and I will not be your God”) literally reads “. . . and I am not I AM to you.” Let's be clear. God is saying, “I'm not your God anymore.” Is He is quitting them? With this name God is telling it like it is: *Israel . . . you quit Me a long time ago.*
- Personal for Hosea: The anguish of living with lies and broken promises was crushing Hosea's heart. Try as he might, his love was never enough. Gomer knew he was true to her but she didn't care. He must have pleaded with her—we can't go on this way. For her part, Gomer was done trying to live a double life. So she left her husband. Thinking of this broken family can bring us to tears . . . and a glimpse of God's heart.

Read the following verses and consider how it grieves God when His people reject Him and choose to live in open shame.

Isaiah 59:1–2

Isaiah 65:1–2

Additional thoughts and observations

- What similarities do you see between Hosea's wayward wife, Israel's persistent idolatry, and our natural tendency to wander?
- Read 1 John 2:15–17 and give this some thought. What are some warning signs that we may be having an affair with the world?
- List a few practical and specific ways to avoid these enticements.

Through Hosea, the Lord declared that His covenant with the adulterous people of Israel was broken. Just like the complainers who refused to enter the Promised Land and died in the wilderness, the house of Israel would be punished. But their broken vows would not undo God's faithfulness to future generations.

In 1:10–11 and 2:1, Hosea looks ahead to the day when God promises that Israel and Judah will reunite and be restored to a faithful relationship with Him. But it wouldn't happen in Hosea's lifetime. This part of the prophecy will not be completely fulfilled until the Lord's return, when Israel will recognize their Messiah is the one they pierced (Zechariah 12:10, 13:1) and those who trust in Him will be saved. But part of this prophecy has been fulfilled with the first coming of Jesus. We'll look at that later on in the epilogue.

Scene 2: Yahweh's Unfaithful Wife – Hosea 2

Hosea's personal story has set the stage to portray God's own people as an unfaithful wife. The houselights dim for scene two but Hosea doesn't appear on stage. Instead, God speaks directly to Israel and the language of this scene is poetic and painfully graphic. His own people have shamelessly abandoned Him. Like a betrayed husband who is justified in bringing legal proceedings against his promiscuous wife, Yahweh declares that Israel has given Him grounds for divorce.

1. The Lord charges Israel with unfaithfulness on three counts:

vv. 2–5 – **Idolatry**. Israel, as a wife and mother, is formally charged with spiritual adultery. She built altars to Baal and offered herself, body and soul, to a false god in hopes of getting good crops, abundance and many children. But the Lord said they would come up empty (Hosea 4:10).

‣ When God brought Israel into the Promised Land, He warned her not to get cozy or comfortable with idolatry because she belonged to Him and He would take care of her (Deuteronomy 7:1–8). According to Deuteronomy 7:12–14, what did Yahweh promise to do for Israel, His chosen wife? Just make a short, simple list.

‣ What is idolatry? Webster's Dictionary gives a simple definition: *excessive devotion to some person, pursuit or thing*. Even good things can become an idol when we seek more fulfillment or happiness from them than they were created to give. What are some examples that come to mind?

vv. 6–9 – **Ingratitude**. Israel took Yahweh's goodness for granted and scorned Him to His face. "She gave all My gifts to Baal" (2:8).

‣ In her desire for more, what had Israel forgotten? What did she need to remember? Read Deuteronomy 8:17–19 and 11:11–17.

vv. 10–13 – **Hypocrisy**. Every aspect of worship, once so meaningful to Israel was now just a series of self-serving rituals. God was on her lips but Baal was in her heart.

‣ In graphic terms, Yahweh describes Israel's empty worship as lewd behavior. She wore her religion like fine clothes but it would all be stripped away and nothing would hide her disgrace. Consider what a true heart of worship looks like to the Lord. Read Psalm 50:23 and Psalm 51:6–12 & 17 to help get you thinking.

- Living under vines and a fig tree (v. 12) would be similar to our saying “living the good life”. Yahweh chides Israel for chasing pleasure instead of Him. How can we guard against doing the same thing? Reading James 4:3–10 will help with your answer.

After charging Israel with infidelity, what would Yahweh say next? He has been cheated on, lied to, rejected and abandoned. Like Hosea’s wife, Israel went looking for love in all the wrong places. Adding insult to injury, she won’t even think of returning until she’s been used up and abandoned. Then she will say, “I might as well return to my husband, for I was better off with Him than I am now” (v.7).

Here’s where God’s amazing grace catches us by surprise. If Yahweh’s relationship with Israel was only a legal agreement, He could cite irreconcilable differences and dissolve the covenant with her. If all He wanted was a formal arrangement, He could take her back, stay angry and demand she make up for all the trouble she’s caused. But that isn’t what God had in mind for Israel—and it isn’t what He has in mind for us either.

2. What does the Lord say He will do? Give some thought to v. 14 and let God’s grace sink in.

- “I will allure her.” – Simply put, God says He will romance Israel back to Himself. Was she worthy of being courted? Are we? The Lord expressed the same intention through Jeremiah 31:3, *“I have loved you, My people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to Myself.”* What does this say to you about God’s grace and how He wants to treat us, even when we run from Him?

- “I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there.” – Certainly the desert held bittersweet memories for Israel. She could dwell on hardships, hurts and past failures. Or she could remember how God came to her rescue, how He was always with her, forgiving and never failing to provide for her. Grace changes our perspective.

How do we see those painful, but necessary trips into the desert when the Lord knows we need a tender reminder of His grace? Read Psalm 130:1–4 and Psalm 32:1–5 and share your thoughts.

This scene began with grounds for divorce as God expresses His grief and holy anger. But have you noticed that two words keep coming up? **“I will . . .”** With every promise that follows that phrase, judgment turns to hope. Yahweh does not intend to divorce His wife—He will love and restore her to faithfulness. Keep in mind that these “I will” promises point to Jesus who will completely fulfill each one.

Scene 3: “So I Bought Her” – Hosea 3

What would compel a husband to bring his wife who sleeps around back home? Hosea’s family and friends must have wondered. And what about Gomer? Was she surprised to see him? Relieved? Ashamed? We don’t know.

1. This time, what did God tell Hosea to do? In a thought or two, explain how this might have been even more difficult than the first time.

2. What makes the unlikely marriage of Hosea and Gomer such a compelling example of the way God loves us? Briefly share your insights from the following scriptures.
 - 2 Timothy 2:13

 - John 8:34–36

 - Romans 6:12–14

 - 1 Peter 1:18–19

 - 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

Intermission: Pause – Ponder – Pray

**Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience,
not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?**

Romans 2:4 (ESV)

As you memorize this passage, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea . . . satisfying as it is savored. So give yourself time to savor God's Word. Write the scripture in the space provided and meditate on what it says.

Ask the Lord to open your eyes and increase your understanding. Jot down what He points out to you; keep returning here and adding your thoughts throughout the week.

Ponder what this says about God. Consider His character, attributes, work, promises . . .

When you consider the kindness of God to melt wayward hearts and draw us back to Him, what comes to mind?

Write your response to Him in worship and praise . . .

Epilogue: Seeing Jesus in the Story

Search to See . . .

1. Through Hosea, God promised that the day would come when He would love those who are called “not loved” and to those called “not My people” He would say, “You are My people.” Briefly explain how this was fulfilled through Jesus.
 - Romans 9:24–26
 - Galatians 3:28–29
 - 1 Peter 2:9–10
2. Through Hosea, God promised “I will make you My wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you Mine, and you will finally know Me as the Lord” (Hosea 2:19–20 NLT). Briefly explain how Jesus has already begun—and will ultimately—fulfill this.
 - Ephesians 5:25–27
 - Revelation 21:3, 9

Consider the Big Picture . . .

How does the story of *Hosea and Gomer: Redeeming Love* play into the glorious telling of God’s grace? Ultimately it’s about redemption and our Redeemer! A few thoughts to consider:

- Hosea loved Gomer in spite of her sin; Jesus loved us in spite of our sin (Romans 5:8).
- Hosea pursued Gomer to save her; Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).
- Hosea bought Gomer to be his own; Jesus bought us to be His own (1 Corinthians 6:17–20).

Make it personal . . .

- For you personally, what is the most significant insight you’ve gained from the story of *Hosea and Gomer: Redeeming Love*? How will you apply this insight in your life?

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