



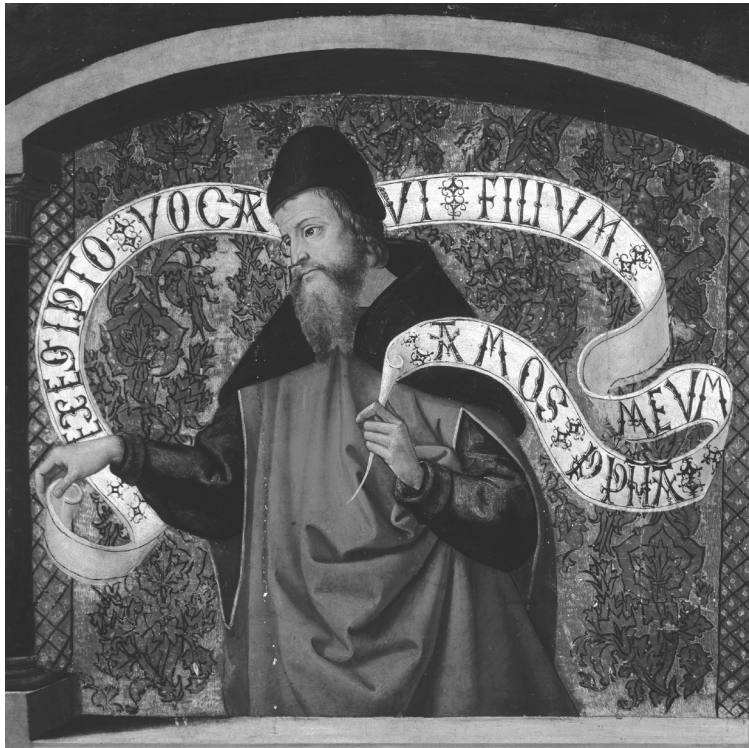
# LifeLight

*"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4*

## **Hosea/Joel/Amos**

### **LEADERS GUIDE**

The prophets Hosea, Joel, and Amos address the profound spiritual problems of Israel and Judah, calling the people to repentance while also announcing that God promised grace in the coming Savior. Oddly, in Juan de Borgoña's High Renaissance painting of Amos, he mistakenly includes a quote from Hosea: "Out of Egypt I called My son" (11:1).



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## Introduction

### Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

### LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

*In-depth* means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

### LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

### LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

#### The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

#### The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

#### The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

### The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

### The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 57.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 57**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small groups;
- encourage and assist the discussion groups in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion groups;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

### Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

### The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

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## Recommended Study Resources and Worship

*The Lutheran Study Bible*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxx-cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

*The Concordia Organist* is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.



# Getting into the Book of the Twelve

## A Survey of the Minor Prophets

### Preparing for the Session

#### Central Focus

The “Minor Prophets” have nothing minor to deliver. What you get in this Book of the Twelve is Christ and Him crucified for Israel, for Judah, and *for you!*

#### Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word, will

1. understand the unique way in which God’s Word unfolds by reading the Minor Prophets as one Book of the Twelve;
2. compare the underlying theme of this Book of the Twelve with the theme of Scripture as a whole, as seen on the cross of Christ;
3. find comfort in the sweet Gospel proclamation of the twelve prophets, receiving a new and confident hope in Christ; and
4. apply the Scripture to their own lives, growing in service to the Lord.

**Note for the small-group leaders:** Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

#### For the Lecture Leader

##### Session Plan

#### Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It’s especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

#### Prayer

O God of the prophets, as You spoke to Your people of old by the mouths of the prophets, speak again through their books and open our ears to hear. May the messages of the twelve Minor Prophets revive, for they comforted the people of Jacob and delivered them with confident hope. Give to us such a hope in Your Son, Jesus, who is the fulfillment of their words and the substance of which they preached. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

#### Lecture Presentation

### 1 Introduction: One Book or Twelve?

Twelve books: each has a different name at the top of the page; each rests within a unique context; each has its own date, time, setting, and place. Twelve books—so what do we mean by “the Book of the Twelve”? Is it one, or are there twelve? And does it really matter?

Interestingly, the twelve Minor Prophets, as they’ve come to be known, have long been considered twelve books within one book. Just about two centuries after the writing of Malachi (the last of the Twelve), the Jewish teacher Jesus son of Sirach wrote:

May the bones of the twelve prophets revive from where they lie,  
for they comforted the people of Jacob and delivered them with confident hope.  
(Ecclesiasticus 49:10).

This summary follows upon a summary of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. It’s as if the author is walking his students through the Old Testament Scriptures one by one. These Twelve Prophets are summarized by their words of “comfort” and “confident hope.”

This evidence from the Apocrypha shows that early in the history of Israel, these twelve were read together as *one*. They had one message, one witness, but many voices. If we compare this Book of the Twelve with other Major Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—we find that these twelve books together are roughly the same size as one of the other larger prophets.

In the decades following the destruction of the temple in AD 70, two more pieces of evidence emerge that these twelve were read together: 2 Esdras 14:45 (another apocrypha text) and the first-century writer Josephus (*Against Apion* 1:38–42). In counting the Old Testament books, both assume that the twelve count as one. This listing of books was used among the early Christians, as well as by the rabbis. The first-century Bishop Melito of Sardis says it plainly: “The twelve in one book” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, iv.26.14). In fact, the New Testament also gives a hint of this in the Book of Acts. Luke presents a quote from Amos, saying, “As it is written in *the book of the prophets*” (Acts 7:42, emphasis added). One book, multiple prophets, and a quote from Amos: here’s New Testament evidence that these twelve were read together as one. All of this goes to show the long history and tradition within both the synagogues and the churches of reading and studying these twelve prophets as one book of sacred Scripture—the Book of the Twelve.

## 2 Does It Matter?

So, what’s the point? Does this change our reading or affect our understanding? Well, yes, and this is the point: by reading the twelve prophets as the Book of the Twelve, we will come across themes and clues, questions and answers that might not be readily available in one particular prophet but that appear in the next. Sometimes there are cliff-hangers. Sometimes the text raises a question for which we won’t find a good answer until we get to the next prophet. Hosea, for instance, exhorts, (14:1) “Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God.” Here is a call to repent, to come back, and the book ends with an admonition to the wise: (14:9)

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;  
 whoever is discerning, let him know them;  
 for the ways of the LORD are right,  
 and the upright walk in them,  
 but transgressors stumble in them.

So does Israel return and walk in the Lord’s ways—understanding and discerning what is right? Hosea doesn’t tell us! He just ends his book. But, as soon as you flip the page and pick up Joel, you find not only the continued theme of returning but also that the answer is “No!” And so Joel again issues the call: (2:12) “Return to Me with all your heart.”

Or take Jonah: when he finally gets to Nineveh, proclaims the Lord’s call to repentance (returning), and then sits back waiting for the city to be destroyed, he realizes that our Lord has had mercy on Nineveh. The

Lord heard their cry, saw their repentance, and saved them (Jonah 3:10). But just two books later, in Nahum, we see that this mighty Nineveh has again turned from the Lord. You see, within these twelve books of prophecy we have many connections, many ties from one to the next, from first to last, and all sorts in between. Reading the Twelve as one book allows us to ask questions not only of what Hosea meant in a certain isolated context but also of what Hosea has to say in light of Malachi and the rest of the Twelve. This sort of reading invites a look to the beginning and the end. It invites us to see various themes, rhythms, and cycles, and to cling to certain words intentionally repeated and emphasized.

## 3 The Day of the Lord

So what are some of these themes? For starters, a major unifying theme throughout the Book of the Twelve is “the day of the LORD.” This *day* is a day of both judgment and restoration. It is a day of great pain and recompense, but also a day of salvation and new life. Hosea introduces this day, saying, (1:11) “great shall be the day of Jezreel.” For Hosea, that day is a day of great reversal: judgment turns to blessing, mercy comes where there is “No Mercy,” and, (Hosea 2:16, 18, 20) “In that day, declares the LORD, you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call Me ‘My Baal.’ . . . And I will make for them a covenant on that day. . . . And you shall know the LORD.” Joel shows this day to be a day of great destruction: (1:15) “Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes”; (2:1–2) “The day of the LORD is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!” Amos recognizes some misunderstanding about whether the day is a good thing or bad: (5:18) “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light.” Obadiah, who preaches a strong message of repentance to the Gentiles, also warns: (v. 15) “For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations.”

We get the sense at the end of Obadiah that there is no hope for the Gentiles, for those nations outside of Israel. But then comes Jonah, giving a resounding “YES!” to the nations—even Nineveh! For Jonah, the Day of the Lord is not mentioned because, for Nineveh (at least for now), the Day of the Lord has not come.

Micah speaks of the healing and miracles that will come: (4:6–7) “In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I

will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation." Nahum sees "the chariots come with flashing metal on the day He [the Lord] musters them" (2:3); Habakkuk "will quietly wait for the day of trouble" (3:16); and Zephaniah calls all to "be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the LORD is near" (1:7). Then Zephaniah launches into a litany of what that day will be like: (vv. 14–16, 18)

The great day of the LORD is near,  
near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter;  
the mighty man cries aloud there.  
A day of wrath is that day,  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities  
and against the lofty battlements.  
Neither their silver nor their gold  
shall be able to deliver them  
on the day of the wrath of the LORD.

In fact, this text of Zephaniah inspired the thirteenth-century Latin hymn *Dies Irae*, which we sing today as the hymn "Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning" (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 607). This hymn (all nineteen stanzas!) rightly locates this Day of the Lord as ultimately fulfilled on the cross: (stanza 19)

To the rest Thou didst prepare me  
On Thy cross; O Christ, upbear me!  
Spare, O God, in mercy spare me!

The last portion of the Book of the Twelve again sees this day as a day of promise for Israel. Haggai proclaims: (2:23) "On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts." Zechariah likewise heralds great promises of joy for Israel: (9:16) "On that day the LORD their God will save them, as the flock of His people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on His land." Like Zephaniah, Zechariah also provides a litany of events for that day, all confessing the salvation of the people. For example, in Zechariah 12–14, nearly every other verse begins with the words "On that day." In fact, the very last words of Zechariah are "on that day" (14:21).

Finally, near the end of the Book of the Twelve, Malachi asks, (3:2) "But who can endure the day of His coming,

and who can stand when He appears?" So there's no confusion, he answers it for us: (4:1–3)

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

Before that day comes, Malachi also promises, will be the coming of Elijah (Malachi 4:5). He will turn us through repentance and stretch out his bony finger, proclaiming: (John 1:29) "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus says of John the Baptizer, (Matthew 11:14) "he is Elijah who is to come."

As we see, this the Day of the Lord runs consistently throughout the twelve Minor Prophets. This theme helps us to understand the purpose of the Twelve. It guides our reading, tunes our ears to what our Lord wants to say to us, and ultimately thrusts us forward into the New Testament, where we see the Day of the Lord finally fulfilled: on the cross of Christ. Understanding this fulfillment is the key to our reading not only of this Book of the Twelve but also, in fact, the entire Old Testament.

## 4 On the Timeline

But don't these twelve prophets cover many years and multiple locations? Yes, they do! That appears to be roughly how they are organized. Half of these prophetic books tell us exactly when the prophet preached; the other half don't—at least, not explicitly. The Books of Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah all begin with something like: "The word of the LORD that came to X, the son of X, in the days of X."

This is called a superscription. This sort of thing appears in each of the Major Prophets as well. Superscriptions tell us when the prophet received the Word of the Lord; and it's normally marked by which king is ruling at the time. So Hosea and Amos are contemporaries, because the kings who reigned in their days were roughly the same. Amos 1:1 lists only Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel, but Hosea 1:1 gives the fuller length of his preaching: "Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah,

kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." Whether Amos's ministry was shorter than Hosea's, we don't know. What we do know is that they are the earliest of the Twelve that we can date, and Micah isn't far behind (he begins in the days of Jotham, just missing Uzziah; see Micah 1:1). This sets at least Hosea and Amos in the middle of the eighth century BC, covering roughly from 753 to 715 BC. Isaiah and Micah aren't far behind.

Zephaniah receives the word of the Lord (1:1) "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah." King Josiah began his reign in 640 BC in Jerusalem as a young eight-year-old boy, and served until his untimely death at the battle of Megiddo in 609 BC (2 Kings 22:1; 23:29). Sometime during this reign, Zephaniah served Israel as prophet, placing him just before Jeremiah, whose prophecy begins roughly at the end of Josiah's reign.

Haggai and Zechariah are the last two who tell us when their prophecy occurred—indeed, they're also the most exact! Haggai says, (1:1) "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel." This locates us somewhere between August and September of 520 BC. Martin Luther rightly shows that "Haggai is the first prophet given to the people after the Babylonian captivity" (AE 35:329). With Haggai is Zechariah; the two overlap quite a bit. Zechariah begins: (1:1) "In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo." This puts Zechariah's first prophecy about two months after Haggai's. The two are one prophetic voice that accompanies the rededication of the temple as built under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

So, from the six superscriptions, we understand this Book of the Twelve spans from roughly 753 to 515 BC—and this doesn't even address the other six books that do not provide dates for their writing. Joel's prophecy suggests it might be located somewhere in the ninth century BC (e.g., Joel 3:2 mentions Jehoshaphat, who reigned 873–848 BC), which would make his prophecy the earliest written work, but this is questionable (see Joel 3:6, which mentions the Greeks). On the other hand, Malachi likely dates somewhere around the middle of the fifth century BC, making his the last of the written prophecies. With multiple centuries, with some prophets addressing Israel in the north and others addressing Judah in the south—what unity can there be?

## 5 The Ultimate Point

This brings us to the higher purpose of the Twelve: to proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). He is the purpose of *all* the prophets. He is their vision. He is their revelation. He is the Word that came to them. All prophecy is finally a forth-telling of Christ. It's the proclamation of God's will for man, and this Bible study will show how this is so. And what is God's will? (Luke 24:46–47) "That the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations." The apostles witnessed these very events. The prophets foretold them. They saw and heard of them as the Word of the Lord came to them; but they saw as through a veil—the full meaning was hidden from them for a time. And so they proclaimed this Christ through poetry, through parable, and through visions of destruction but also of promise. The ultimate purpose of these twelve holy prophets is to call sinners to repentance and to hold before their eyes the salvation that God Himself would deliver. They proclaim the Day of the Lord. They proclaim His righteous judgment and His merciful redemption. They proclaim the Lord's killing and His making alive. For these twelve, it's always Christ, God Himself, who is coming for us and for our salvation.

It is in Christ that God will "restore the fortunes of My people Israel" (Amos 9:14). It's in Christ that "the exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land . . . and the kingdom shall be the LORD's" (Obadiah 20–21). It's in Christ that the Gentiles will be saved (think Nineveh!) and that from Bethlehem, "too little to be among the clans of Judah, . . . shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:2). And it is in Christ that the daughter of Zion will sing and shout aloud and Israel will rejoice (Zephaniah 3:14; Zechariah 9:9). For Jesus Christ alone will suffer the rejection and death that all prophets point toward: (Zechariah 12:10) "When they look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced"; (Zechariah 13:7) "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." "But," Malachi 4:2 reminds us, "for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall."

That is the point of the Twelve: Jesus Christ is the One who suffers, dies, and rises *for you!* Repent and be glad! Shout aloud and sing for joy! For you a Savior has gone up Mount Zion, and the kingdom is the Lord's!

## Conclusion: Getting It Law/Gospel Right!

Now, this Christ that each of the twelve prophets saw under the revelation of visions certainly comes to us in two ways. That's how all of Scripture comes: by way of Law and Gospel, judgment and forgiveness, cursing and blessing. Looking again at one of the foundational themes of this Book of the Twelve, Dr. Reed Lessing gets it right:

When “the Day of [the Lord]” texts from the Twelve are placed together, the two themes of Law and Gospel emerge: it will be a day of destruction for the ungodly but also a day of salvation for the righteous. Usually it is described as a day of judgment, but it can also be the decisive time of grace. (*Amos* [St. Louis: CPH, 2009], 14–15)

This is true, not only for this day, but also for this Christ they proclaim. The cross itself is both joy and sadness, life and death, judgment and blessing. For those who reject Christ, the cross is simply another foolish act, along with healing the sick, exorcising the demons, and raising the dead. But for those of us who confess our sins, who admit to our own guilt and shame, who see ourselves in the shoes of Gomer or Nineveh, that cross is a life-giving tree.

Getting Law and Gospel straight will do wonders at making sense of this Book of the Twelve. We must not shy away from its strict words of judgment, understanding that all judgment is ultimately poured out upon Christ on the cross. Nor can we minimize the great and expansive words of redemption, for those are ours in Christ!

In each unique context, the twelve Minor Prophets consistently preach Christ. Whether it's the false worship Amos addresses at Bethel and Gilgal in the eighth century BC or the rise of Babylonian power with Zephaniah in the seventh century BC or the return to Jerusalem in the Persian period of the late sixth century BC—in all contexts and all times and all places, the coming of Christ is proclaimed as a word of comfort to distressed and guilty consciences, as well as a word of rebuke and admonition to those comfortable in their sin. In all twelve, salvation and redemption is always God's work done in the promised Christ. Punishment and destruction are always on account of man's disobedience and willful, unrepentant sin.

While many might read this Book of the Twelve and think it rather Law-heavy, consider again the summary from Jesus son of Sirach:

May the bones of the twelve prophets revive  
from where they lie,  
for they comforted the people of Jacob and  
delivered them with confident hope.  
(Ecclesiasticus 49:10).

May the meditation on God's Word from these first three books of the twelve Minor Prophets—Hosea, Joel, and Amos—revive and comfort you through their proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.

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## Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 2.

# A Mysterious Love Story

## Hosea 1–3

### *Preparing for the Session*

#### Central Focus

Hosea sets the stage for the Book of the Twelve to be a story of repentance and great reversals, where God ultimately wins us back with His unquenchable and gracious love for us.

#### Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. recognize that the relationship between Hosea and Gomer is a depiction of God's love for us;
2. interpret the great reversals of Hosea in light of the great reversal that Christ enacts on the cross for us; and
3. come to critique their own lives in terms of repentance and absolution, recognizing the depths to which God descends for them in Christ.

**Note for the small-group leaders:** Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 58.

#### For the Lecture Leader

##### *Session Plan*

#### Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

#### Prayer

O Blessed Christ, You give what is Yours and take what is ours. You bless us with this happy exchange. As You have united Yourself to us in the wedding feast of Your

Sacrament, create within us thankful hearts to recognize that You have given us everything by Your grace alone. For You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in blessed communion, now and forever. Amen.

#### Lecture Presentation

### 1 Gomer: An Unlikely Wife

Our reason rebels against the very notion! God wouldn't do that—would He? A harlot? A prostitute? A “wife of whoredom” (Hosea 1:2)? No, not our Lord; not His prophet.

And yet, the plain sense of the book tells us God really did set up His prophet with such a woman. Not only was she unclean when Hosea took her, but everyone knew she had a propensity to return to that uncleanness!

Gomer, “daughter of Diblaim” (1:3), was probably not yet a prostitute when Hosea was first took her as his wife. She was probably a young girl who had not remained chaste. Though not so shocking in today's culture, it was a horrible offense in ancient Israel. She lost her virginity before marriage. And while such a discovery might legally have resulted in her stoning (as required in Deuteronomy 22:20–21), this is the first grace given to Gomer—she lives! God commands His prophet to take an unchaste woman for his wife, and it is with her he is to have children and establish a family. It seems surprising of our Lord, who commands chastity in the Sixth Commandment and also repeatedly commands stoning for those who break it (Leviticus 20:10; John 8:5).

So Hosea takes this unworthy Gomer as his wife. In chapter 1, we see that Gomer bears Hosea three children: two sons and a daughter. Assuming a normal course of pregnancy and standard weaning (by age 2 or 3), it seems that Gomer and Hosea were together for at least six or seven years.

And then something happens. Chapter 2 shifts our focus: first, because the chapter is largely poetry, not the prose we saw in chapter 1; and second, because this chapter wavers back and forth between describing typical prophecy and the marriage of Hosea and Gomer. This ambiguity between the themes is intentional. After

reading chapter 2, we wonder, “Was that about Hosea and Gomer, or God and His people?”—which is the prophet’s goal.

Here, Hosea addresses his children and begs of them, (2:2) “Plead with your mother, plead.” He then speaks of the reality of their divorce because of her unfaithfulness. Hosea pleads with his children to call their mother to account, to stop her adultery. Verse 3 is one of those ambiguous passages: is this the Lord speaking, or Hosea, or both?

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.

The imagery of this verse compares well with the picture of Judah’s unfaithfulness that Ezekiel presents:

(16:3–5) Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

Gomer is the image of sinful Israel: unclean from birth, adulterous, and full of unquenchable lust for other lovers. In fact, it is difficult to find much about Gomer that is not also and primarily about Israel, about us.

But notice that even when she is in the midst of her adultery—even caught in the act, much like the woman of John 8:1–11—our Lord comes in mercy: (Hosea 2:14, 16, 20)

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. . . . In that day, declares the LORD, you will call Me “My Husband.” . . . I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.

Gomer will be sought after, despite her sin. She will be pursued and chased and run after, just as in Jesus’ parable when the father runs to his prodigal son (Luke 15:20). The more we learn about Gomer, the more we learn of the depths of our Lord’s mercy for us and for all His people.

Chapter 3 draws us back into the story of Hosea. We return to prose, not poetry. Here we see the Lord com-

manding Hosea: (v. 1) “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress.” For the record, this isn’t another woman; it’s Gomer again. Hosea is to take her back, love her again. But there’s a twist. Not only has she been adulterous but it is also quite likely that her adultery has landed her in a prostitution ring. That’s what it means when Hosea says, (v. 3) “So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.” The price was comparable to buying a slave, freeing her from her bondage to life as a prostitute. Hosea, who had already married her, now buys his wife back—this is the second grace. He again vows his faithfulness and demands the same of her (v. 3). And that’s the last we hear of Gomer.

No one would consider Gomer a good spouse. She was undesirable, unchaste, prone to whoredom, caught in adultery, sold into prostitution, and almost worthless. Nothing good is spoken about her, not one thing to her credit. She has only Hosea’s love. And as we see this marriage and family unfolding before our eyes as an image of Christ and His Church, we rejoice in knowing that what goes for Gomer goes also for us. We also have nothing: (Romans 3:12) “all have turned aside; together [we] have become worthless.” All we have is Christ’s tireless love. That is the point of this book of prophecy: salvation is utterly up to God and depends solely on His love, His faithfulness toward us. He loves us, joins His life to ours, calls us His own, and brings us back again from our wandering ways. He buys us back, “not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death” (Small Catechism, Second Article). Like Gomer, we are the unworthy, unexpected spouse of God Himself in Christ.

## 2 The Children: Named for Reversal

As for the children, each is given a name you won’t find on any baby-name list: Jezreel (the location of a bloody coup), Lo-ruhama (meaning “No Mercy”), and Lo-ammi (meaning “Not My People”). Each is named in the way of judgment.

(1:4) Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel.

(1:6) Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.

(1:9) Call his name Not My People, for you are not My people, and I am not your God.

While the children are named for judgment, we are also told early on of their great reversal: (1:10–11)

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.” . . . And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Now, it is easy to understand the reversal of the second two children; Hosea says, (2:23) “And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are My people.’”

We know the Lord cannot go long without having mercy. That’s simply who He is. When Moses asked to see God’s glory, the Lord hid Moses in the cleft of a rock. Passing by, He revealed to Moses His name: (Exodus 34:6) “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” God’s self-confession repeats itself throughout the Book of the Twelve. If there’s something to know about the God of Israel, it is precisely this: He is the God of mercy.

The same goes for the youngest child, Not My People. To be the people of God is to be chosen and brought into a covenant with the Lord. Israel broke the covenant. They wanted a Lord other than this God of mercy. To have another Lord is then to be another people; so the judgment: “Not My People.” Yet the day of great reversal, the Day of the Lord, will again reinstate the covenant between the Lord and His people Israel. They again will be brought into His kingdom “and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (Small Catechism, Second Article).

We also see the fulfillment of the names of these last two children in the New Testament: (1 Peter 2:10) “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Here, Peter shows how we Gentiles are prefigured in the younger children of the prophet Hosea. But what about the eldest? What of Jezreel?

The name Jezreel has both positive and negative connotations in itself, which is why, when the day of great reversals comes (Hosea 1:10–11; 2:22–23), his name doesn’t change like the others. The name Jezreel first appears in Joshua 15:56 as one of the cities listed in Judah’s inheritance of the land. Though many important political figures come from Jezreel, what gives meaning to its usage here is to the blood that was shed when

the prophet Elisha sent one of the “sons of the prophets” (see *TLSB*, p. 555) to anoint Jehu as king of Israel (2 Kings 9:1–13). Once Jehu is heralded as king of Israel, the massacre begins. Jehu’s revolution concludes: (10:11) “so Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men and his close friends and his priests, until he left him none remaining.”

All of this takes place in Jezreel. Blood, judgment—it all comes to mind with the birth and naming of Hosea’s first child. That’s his judgment—or better yet, Israel’s judgment lived out prophetically by Hosea’s eldest son.

But what about the reversal? How does this Valley of Judgment and Blood turn into a blessing, as the other children do? What does Hosea mean (1:11) “great shall be the day of Jezreel”? Or when he says, (2:21–23a) “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow her for Myself in the land”?

Notice the agricultural language: rain speaks to land, and land to grain, wine, and oil. These then answer Jezreel. Jezreel is Hebrew for “God sows.” The Valley of Jezreel was known for its fertility. The area is a fault basin, receiving an abundance of water. The day of great reversals brings for Jezreel a reinstatement of what his name intends for him to be: sown by God.

So each child—Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My People—is named for judgment and cursing. Then, on the day of great reversals, each is turned from judgment to mercy, curse to blessing, death to life. As it was for the children of Hosea, so also for the Israelites of old as they repented of their idolatry and clung again to their merciful God of the covenant. And as it was for the Israelites of old, so it is also for us! In Christ, all the judgments and all the curses find their end. The blood that was shed on Mount Calvary sunk much deeper and more profoundly into the land than the centuries of blood in the Valley of Jezreel. The fruit that sprang from the Valley of Jezreel was only a foretaste of the fruit that was to spring from Mount Zion—from the cross, we all receive the fruit of redemption: the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

### 3 Hosea: Living the Prophetic Word

So what about Hosea and his family? The first three chapters of Hosea are a classic example of what is called a “prophetic sign-act.” That is, while typical prophecy

pertains solely to the speaking of words, a sign-act requires also a *sign*, an event. It is a history-creating expression of the Divine Word that is tangible: visible, touchable, smellable and, if you like, even tasteable. So with Hosea, his wife, and his three children, we not only have preaching but we also have the sign of their lives and deeds as a living prophecy. Some have called these prophecies *word events*. Perhaps more liturgically, we would call them *sacramentals*, forerunners of what we find in the Sacraments (Word and element).

Such prophetic sign-acts are common in the Old Testament. For example, Ezekiel lay on his left side for 390 days, bearing the punishment of the house of Israel (Ezekiel 4:4–5). Jeremiah wore a heavy yoke around his neck as a warning for those who would not submit to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (Jeremiah 27:1–7). Isaiah strolled about naked and barefoot for three years as a sign against Egypt and Cush (Isaiah 20:1–4). These are just a few of the examples that pepper the Scriptures. But what does this tell us about Hosea? Or better yet, what does Hosea (and his family) tell us about our Lord?

Hosea's personal life and prophetic office were intertwined. He did not get to "clock out" when he went home. He was never off duty. That's the life of a prophet. So Hosea is a suffering prophet. While men of valor can surely endure great pains for the sake of others, whenever the family is brought into the suffering, everything changes. Hosea's family was not only open to the public eye but his wife and children were in fact part of the prophecy itself! Their lives were living testimonies of what our Lord would do with His people. This tells us much of the character of our Lord: He calls the whole person into service. Our Lord entrusted His prophet with the Word. This Word, which could be found only in the voice of the prophet, also attached itself to the person of the prophet (and here, even his family). All of this prepares us well to see in Christ the fulfillment of the prophets, where the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. It also helps to make sense of Hosea. The first three chapters are largely this prophetic sign-act. Chapters 4 through 14 will be the preaching that accompanies this strange marriage and family.

We should be clear, however, that sign-acts are not mere allegories or symbols. Real life bears a real message. Hosea really married Gomer. They really had children. Those children really had those awful names of judgment. But what does it all mean? Well, that's what the book unfolds for us along the way. But right up front,

we know that this is all a prophecy of God's relation to His people Israel. Hosea is an image of God (most clearly, God in Christ). Gomer represents sinful Israel. She was filthy when Hosea found her, just as Israel was wallowing in her own sinfulness. The children all represent the people of Israel, the sons and daughters of Israel. Adultery is the consistent image of Israel's idolatry. The initial marriage represents the initial covenant; the remarriage is the reestablished covenant—the new covenant that Christ tells us is in His blood (Luke 22:20).

The parallels go on and on, and that is where the theology is richest! Chapter 2 shows the fine line between the prophecy and the sign-act. When Hosea says, (v. 14) "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her," is this his wooing of Gomer, or the Lord's wooing of us in Christ? Perhaps it would be best to say both!

## 4 Happy Exchange

The historical context of Hosea's marriage is difficult to pinpoint. We know Hosea carried out his prophetic ministry roughly sometime between 753 and 735 BC. His message is addressed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, though Judah in the south listens in along the way. Beyond that general background, we can't get much closer. Hosea is tantalizingly obscure when it comes to political figures. Though frustrating for the historian, this permits and encourages the hearer of every time and place to hear this Word of prophecy as a Word that extends beyond eighth-century Israel. Each of us is intended to perceive in Hosea's marriage a divine message of mercy and great reversals that is also for us!

These great reversals—or as Luther famously called them, "happy exchanges"—come with a clear call to repentance. As we know, repentance has two parts: confessing our sins and then receiving forgiveness. The confession of sins comes about only after an awareness of sin: the preaching of the Law. The sin Israel is abundantly guilty of is idolatry. Within the marriage metaphor, that's what all this talk of adultery is about: (Hosea 2:5b) "For she said, 'I will go after my lovers.'" The manifestation of her adultery is idolatry, the false worship of false gods—most notably, Baal: (2:13) "And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals . . . her lovers." This is the Law Hosea presents before the people of Israel: the god(s) you worship are not the one, true God. Israel's worship and prayers have faltered from the fear, love, and trust in the Lord, the God of Israel. As we enter the main body of Hosea's prophecy, we'll find

many more details of this false worship. For now, it's enough to know that both Israel's doctrine of God and Israel's worship have together gone far astray—so much so that God must act. He acts first in the preaching (and living) of this word of judgment against Israel—hence the names Not My People and No Mercy. This is the first part of repentance: recognizing and admitting guilt. The second part is to receive absolution, forgiveness. And this comes also from the Lord: (2:14) "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her." This is the gentle word of sins forgiven. That's our Lord's wooing of Israel, of us. Notably, it all takes place in that day.

We've already discussed at length the importance of the Day of the Lord for the Book of the Twelve. For Hosea, it is the day when Israel is forgiven, loved again by the Lord. This is prophesied in Hosea's own life, as he, in chapter 3, buys Gomer back and restores her to his household. This Day of the Lord is the day of great reversals, of happy exchanges—the day when the broken covenant is restored and (3:5) "the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to His goodness in the latter days."

### **Conclusion: The Mystery of Christ and His Church**

Hosea's family carries his prophetic message in tangible ways. They live his prophecy. So, when Hosea pleads to Gomer to repent, to turn from her ways (Hosea 2:2), our Lord pleads with His people Israel to repent; and along with them, with us as well. This marriage is a mystery. While we may glean some dos and don'ts for marriage counseling, that is not the intention. The purpose of all marriage sign-acts, metaphors, and imagery throughout the Scriptures is to proclaim Jesus Christ. He is the faithful groom who saw Israel wallowing in her blood (Ezekiel 16). He is the faithful groom that bought Gomer back from prostitution. Paul says, (Ephesians 5:32) "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." The mystery of marriage is that it presents before us an image of Christ's love toward us, His Church.

What makes this mystery so glorious is the happy exchange: we get the Lord, and He gets us. Gomer receives the honor of Hosea, while Hosea takes on the adultery of Gomer. Her iniquity becomes his; his righteousness hers. That's Jesus for you. He gets into the filthy baptismal waters; whatever flowed off you gathers right onto

Him. It's a mystery; it's the Gospel; it's the message of Hosea 1–3.

### **Concluding Activities**

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 3.