



THE 52 GREATEST
STORIES OF THE BIBLE

HOSEA

HOSEA: UNFAITHFUL

HOSEA 1:1-3:5

BOOK READING: CHAPTER 19 – MONDAY

MEMORY VERSE: HOSEA 2:23

In this first section, God instructs Hosea to marry Gomer, a woman who will prove to be unfaithful to him (Hos. 1:2). Hosea's marriage is meant to serve as a vivid illustration of the broken covenant between the Lord and Israel, as do the names of the three children Gomer bears (1:4, 6, 9), two of whom are not fathered by Hosea. The prophet then builds a legal case against his adulterous wife, which points to how God will deal with his adulterous people (2:1-23). God then instructs the prophet to go and reclaim his wife and bring her home (3:1-5), which foreshadows what God has planned for his people. Although Israel has forsaken the Lord, God will remain faithful to his covenant and restore his people to himself.

The Big Picture

Hosea 1:1-3:5 shows God's heart toward his people as that of a husband toward his beloved and likens Israel to an unfaithful spouse.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Hosea 1:1-3:5. Then review the questions below and write notes concerning this introductory section. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, pages 1623-1627; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Hosea's Wife and Children (1:1-8) God instructs Hosea to marry Gomer, who will prove to be an unfaithful wife (Hos. 1:2). Hosea's broken marriage will reflect Israel's unfaithfulness to God. What does God's instruction reveal about the nature of his covenant with Israel? (See also Ex. 6:6-8; Ezek. 16:8-14.)

“He went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son” (Hos. 1:3). Hosea was told by God to name his firstborn son “Jezreel” (v. 4), which points back to the wicked Israelite king Ahab, who murdered Naboth, a godly man from Jezreel (see 1 Kings 21). Ahab's primary evil was to promote worship of Baal as the national religion of Israel. How do the naming of Hosea's child and the story from 1 Kings 21 reveal the nature of Israel's current unfaithfulness?

“She conceived again and bore a daughter. . . . she conceived and bore a son” (Hos. 1:6, 8). The wording used to describe the birth of Gomer’s second and third children suggests that Hosea was not their father, which is reinforced by the names given to the children: “No Mercy” and “Not My People.” What do these names reveal about what Israel stands to lose because of her unfaithfulness to the Lord?

“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered” (Hos. 1:10). Hosea echoes the promise God made long ago to Abraham (Gen. 22:17; 32:12), a promise God would keep despite Israel’s ongoing disobedience. What do the things promised in Hosea 1:10–11 reveal about the nature of salvation?

HOSEA 1:1-3:5

BOOK READING: CHAPTER 19 – TUESDAY

MEMORY VERSE: HOSEA 2:23

Israel's Unfaithfulness Punished (2:1-13)

“Plead with your mother, plead . . . that she put away her whoring from her face” (Hos. 2:2). As if speaking to his illegitimate children, Hosea speaks God’s words to Israel, clarifying where their unfaithfulness is taking them and what will happen if they refuse to repent. Why is this worded as a plea?

The nature and results of idolatry are uncovered in this section, first in the words of Gomer/Israel (2:5) and then in God’s response (2:6-13). Based on this passage, how do idols deceive their worshipers, and how does God’s judgment increase in intensity when idolaters refuse to repent? Where do we see these patterns in our culture and our own lives?

“I will hedge up her way with thorns” (Hos. 2:6). Israel is determined to pursue her lovers (v. 5), but God will prevent her from succeeding. As a jealous husband who has been wronged by the infidelity of his people, he desires them to come to their senses and return to him. How are his actions here—hedging with thorns, building a wall, obscuring Israel’s idolatrous paths—actually merciful? What does this reveal about the nature of godly jealousy?

God will destroy the vines and fig trees, which Israel has attributed to Baal (Hos. 2:12). Unlike the salvation the Lord holds forth—an unearned gift of grace—idols always exact wages from their worshipers. In their unbridled pursuit of Baal, God's people have forgotten him (v. 13; see also Jer. 3:21; 18:15). Review the warnings Moses gave to Israel before they entered the Promised Land: Deuteronomy 5:15; 8:2–3, 18; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:18. Based on his warnings, what specifically have the people forgotten?

HOSEA 1:1-3:5

BOOK READING: CHAPTER 19 –WEDNESDAY

MEMORY VERSE: HOSEA 2:23

The Lord's Mercy on Israel (2:14–23)

Although God will punish Israel for covenant unfaithfulness, his intention is restorative, not destructive, which is made clear in 2:14–15. What characteristics of God's love are seen in this passage, and how is such a love conducive to repentance? (See also Rom. 2:4.)

“In that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband’” (Hos. 2:16). The remainder of Hosea 2 presents a description of what life will be like when the marriage between God and his people is restored. Through a series of “I will” statements, God paints an enticing picture to woo Israel. How is the nature of true repentance, meaning “to turn around,” reflected in the promises God makes in these statements?

Hosea Redeems His Wife (3:1-5)

God commands Hosea to redeem his wife and bring her home. The fact that Hosea has to purchase Gomer shows the desperate situation into which her adultery has brought her. In like manner, God will redeem his unfaithful people, after which they will undergo a forced separation from all that has fueled their idol worship. What effect will this forced separation have upon God's people, and what outcome does he intend?

HOSEA 1:1-3:5

BOOK READING: CHAPTER 19 – THURSDAY

MEMORY VERSE: HOSEA 2:23

Read through the following three sections on Gospel Glimpses and Whole-Bible Connections. Then take time to consider the Personal Implications these sections may have for you.

GOSPEL GLIMPSES

DIVINE HEDGE.

By erecting barriers along the path of sin, God frustrates the efforts of Israel to run from him. In mercy God will not give his people up to their sinful desires (Rom. 1:18–25) but will intervene to keep them from destruction. Divine hedges are specific and personal, as the psalmist notes in wonder: “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me” (Ps. 139:5–6).

TENDERNESS.

Adulterous Israel deserves to be cut off in anger from God’s love; they have broken the heart of their divine husband. Yet far from the typical response of a wronged husband, God woos his people with terms of endearment. This tenderness is reflected in Jesus, who spoke with compassion to guilty sinners and gently wooed them to embrace life in him.

BETROTH.

The old covenant God established with his people was designed to reflect the love, fidelity, and exclusivity of marriage. This finds its fulfillment in the new covenant in Christ, the husband of his bride, the church. He “loved the church and gave himself up for her” and “nourishes and cherishes” his bride (Eph. 5:25–28).

WHOLE-BIBLE CONNECTIONS

NAMING.

As instructed by the Lord, Hosea gives Gomer’s children prophetic names (Hos. 1:4, 6, 8). The names are meant to serve as symbols of covenant breaking and coming judgment. Isaiah also used naming prophetically (Isa. 7:3; 8:1–3, 18). In the Old Testament, naming was authoritative. At creation God instructed Adam to name the animals, signifying man’s dominion over all creatures as God’s vice-regent (Gen. 1:26; 2:19–20). Additionally, the name given to a child, or the renaming of an adult, often pointed to some distinguishing characteristic or epoch in the life of the one being named (see, e.g., Gen. 17:4–5; 32:28). Names were also signs, most especially in Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah: “The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14), the significance of which is made clear at the birth of the Messiah (Matt. 1:20–23).

WHOREDOM.

“Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD” (Hos. 1:2). Whoredom in the Old Testament is typically linked to

idolatry, a common temptation that took hold after God's people entered the Promised Land; the people did not obey God's instructions to destroy the idols and idol worshipers who dwelt there (see Ps. 106:34–39). Idol worship frequently involved illicit sexual practices, and participating in such practices, involving both heart and body, constituted unfaithfulness to the Lord and covenant breaking. The whoredom of idolatry is described in the prophets with much pathos and often with graphic sexual imagery (see Jer. 2:20–24; 3:1–2; Ezekiel 16; 23).

KING DAVID.

“Afterward 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” (Hos. 3:5). Hosea's prophecy of future restoration to the Davidic kingship signifies that God's people—both Judah and the northern kingdom—will one day be reunited under one headship, which at the time of Hosea's prophecy had not been the case for two centuries. Hosea's words find ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah, who will come from the royal line of David and will bring all things together under his divine kingship.

PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

Take time to reflect on the implications of Hosea 1:1–3:5 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might point to idols in your life and the need to return to your divine husband. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the Gospel Glimpses and Whole-Bible Connections.

Theological Soundings

Hosea 1:1-3:5

As You Finish This Section . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Hosea. Look back through this unit of study and reflect on some key things the Lord may be teaching you.

HOSEA 1:1-3:5

BOOK READING: CHAPTER 19 –FRIDAY

MEMORY VERSE: HOSEA 2:23

Read through the following section on Theological Soundings. Then take time to consider the Personal Implications these sections may have for you.

THEOLOGICAL SOUNDINGS

SIN AS IDOLATRY.

Hosea's primary message is a call away from idolatry, specifically the worship of Baal. Israel's history is a cycle of failing to trust the Lord and of turning instead to idols to meet their needs. Idolatry is foolish and destructive because there is only one God; trusting in anything besides him robs him of the devotion and glory he alone deserves. Idols in the Old Testament consisted primarily of the nature and fertility deities worshiped by surrounding nations. However, anything that displaces trust in and allegiance to God becomes an idol. According to Jesus, money can become an idol (Matt. 6:24). As is made so clear in the Old Testament prophets, lust and impurity often accompany idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), as do demons² (1 Cor. 10:19–20).

PURIFICATION.

When Hosea retrieves Gomer and brings her home, he segregates her from all that had drawn her away (Hos. 3:3). The separation will result in a restoration of marital purity. The greater application of Hosea's command to Gomer is the purification of God's people, which will occur when they are separated through exile from everything that has fueled their spiritual adultery: "The children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods" (v. 4). But God's purification process, while painful, is designed to be restorative and will result ultimately in blessing for his people in every era.

PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

Take time to reflect on the implications of Hosea 1:1–3:5 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might point to idols in your life and the need to return to your divine husband. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the Theological Soundings, and this passage as a whole.

Theological Soundings

Hosea 1:1-3:5

As You Finish This Section . . .

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