

Introduction - The Relentless Love of God!

Hosea

Habakkuk 3:2 *O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.*¹

In around 760 BC, the Lord called the prophet Hosea to be his messenger to the nation of Israel. Hosea lived and prophesied in the northern kingdom during the years leading up to the Assyrian invasion of 722 BC, in which Israel was defeated and removed from the land. His ministry overlapped with prophets like Isaiah and Micah (who prophesied in the south) and Amos and Jonah (who prophesied mainly in rural areas of the north) and covered several decades.

Initially, it was a time of affluence and peace. The threat of the traditional dominant forces surrounding Israel was significantly weakened, with Assyria and Babylon distracted by internal disunity and other external pressures. During these years of stability, Israel could expand its smaller states, freely prosper through trade, enjoy extravagant material wealth, and engage in apparent religious devotion and activity.

However, the prophets of the time made clear that the people's hearts were far from God, their religion was shallow, and corruption was rife across the land. By mid-way through the eighth century, the nation began to collapse. Stability gave way to turbulence and prosperity to ruin.

The long reign of Jeroboam II, which spanned four decades, was nearing its end (2 Kings 14:23-29). His death would spark a series of six brief reigns in Israel across 25 shaky years. No less than four of those kings would be murdered by their successors (2 Kings 15:8 - 17:4).

Meanwhile, on the horizon, Assyria was gaining strength and amassing terrifying military might. The tremors from their marching army would soon be felt, and it would not be long before Israel was destroyed.

This was the climate in which Hosea was sent by God. His message resounds with love and wrath, mercy and judgment. The book begins with Hosea's marriage to a harlot named Gomer. This was no ordinary marriage. Initiated by God's word, Hosea's marriage and family provided a graphic and painful picture through which God's love for Israel would be displayed. Just as Israel forsook the Lord and committed spiritual adultery, so too Gomer would leave Hosea and pursue other men. With a wife who had gone astray just as Israel had done and children who depicted the doom that Israel deserved, Hosea's message was deeply personal and sharp in focus – concentrating primarily on Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord.

Despite his wife's bitter betrayal, Hosea is called by God to go and redeem Gomer, '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"' (Hosea 3: 1). What Hosea was painfully asked to do was a snapshot of what God had done in setting his love on Israel.

From the domestic drama of Hosea's home (chapters 1-3), the book then shifts to a series of prophecies full of tension, alternating between God's justice and mercy (chapters 4-14).

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Hab 3:2.

Throughout these chapters, the clouds of God's judgment and wrath - evoked by Israel's continued unfaithfulness - are broken by rays of mercy and hope that shine forth from God's unfailing love (e.g., Hosea 11:1-11; 14:1-9). In this way, Hosea's story and message point us to a time when God's love will triumph over the unfaithfulness of his people - a time when justice will be satisfied, anger turned away, repentance deep, and love exclusive. Then the relationship between God and his people - tragically unequal and bitter with betrayal like Hosea's marriage - will be made right. As one writer has observed, 'With unflinching obedience, Hosea drank a bitter cup. His home was his Gethsemane. In bending to a will not his own, he not only left a poignant illustration of divine love but prepared the way for One who perfectly embodied this love'.²

The book of Hosea casts our eyes forward to the cross of Jesus, where our relentless rebellion meets the relentless love of God expressed in the death of his Son. On that cross, Jesus gave himself to purchase a loveless bride, that he might make her lovely '...without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' (Ephesians 5:27).

Commentary by Russ:

The story of Hosea depicts mankind's rebellious journey from the time Adam and Eve rebelled against the love of God in the Garden of Eden to the present day. Just as God loved the world, He had a special love for His chosen people, the Jews. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 says, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

Sadly, just as the Israelites rejected God, so the world, from the fall of mankind until our present day, has continually rejected the love and mercy of God offered through the cross of Christ. Moreover, men and women throughout the ages have progressed along the downward spiral of sin as laid out in Romans 1:18-32. God loved Israel, but Israel rejected God and began to worship the false gods of the surrounding nations. In the book of Hosea, Gomer serves as a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness. Thus, due to Israel's moral decay and idolatry, God had no choice but to judge His beloved people.

Today, America is at a precipice due to its indifference towards God, its wanton moral decay, its blatant and widespread idolatry, and its obstinance to the light of the gospel. God's feelings towards America are revealed in Hosea's love for his adulterous wife, Gomer. Just as Hosea had a sensitive heart for Gomer, God has a sensitive heart for America. Just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44), God must surely be weeping over America.

So, is there any hope for America? Yes, most definitely! Just as God offered hope to Israel through the prophet, He offers hope to America. But that hope comes only by way of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God still loves America. However, just as a good, earthly father disciplines his wayward son (Hebrews 12:5-11), I believe God is disciplining America. Our only hope is repentance. As a nation, we must return to God and seek His forgiveness. Just as Jesus is the only hope for the world, He is our nation's only hope. God promised restoration to Israel even

² Lasor, W. S., Hubbard, D. A., Bush, F. W., *Old Testament Survey* {2nd Edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996}, p. 262.

after her blatant idolatry and wickedness (2 Kings 17:7-17). Does He promise the same for America? That is yet to be seen. We can only hope and pray that America has not reached the point northern Israel reached when God said, “No more!” and tore her away from the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 17). At that time, the Israelites were led as slaves to Assyria, never to be heard from again. May God have mercy on our country.

Hosea is not only a warning to America; this book is also a warning to us individually and personally. As we examine our lives by God’s Word, we will see that we all have idols we worship, such as money, success, popularity, sports, famous people, and even the health of our bodies over our spiritual health.

So, let this study provide an opportunity for you to examine yourself spiritually to determine first, “Do I have a personal relationship with God” (2 Corinthians 13:5); and if yes, “Are there some idols, some ‘lesser loves’ in my life, that I need to turn away from?” Hosea is a wonderful book that can propel us all into a more decisive hatred of sin and a more profound love for God. Enjoy your journey through “The word of the Lord that came to Hosea” (Hosea 1:1), an obedient and wise servant of the living God.