

## ***Hosea 1/3: Hosea 1:1-9, 3:1-5***

### ***Remember?***

So we're back in our walk through the Minor Prophets. And it's been just long enough that we should review where we're at, I think.

Two Kingdoms, North is called Israel, the south, Judah. Nearly all our Minor Prophets prophesy to the Southern Kingdom, which will go on to inherit all the promises God made to Abraham, be the remnant and bearers of God's process of redeeming humanity. Judah inherits all this because in 722 BC, Assyria overwhelms Israel and destroys it, sending their people into exile, and the tribes that make up Israel, which is most of them, eventually all disappear to history.

The last prophet to Israel before its exile is Hosea, and Hosea is...well, Hosea's book is insight into the weird life a prophet can have, and Hosea's message, calling, and life is one that has haunted God's people. It's fascinating--compelling--and...strange, man. Today we'll talk about it broadly, connect that to personal calling, if we can, and following God. Over the next couple of weeks we'll talk about particular passages of Hosea, and I think a few weeks will do justice to this

last, great prophet of Israel.

Let's pray, and get into it.

### ***Prayer:***

### ***Location:***

Before we get into the really weird life of Hosea, whose life was like, tabloid-ready, you know? Made for Instagram and vlogging; it's a life that should make all of us feel like the drama we're dealing with just isn't that bad. But: Before we get into it, let's locate Hosea; in history, in time, in his world.

Little is known about his background. His dad's name is "Beeri," which doesn't tell us anything. He's a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel from the Northern Kingdom of Israel, not counting Jonah this makes him the only one. And he knows Israel; he has a lot of local knowledge. We see him using the Northern Kingdom names we've already talked about, especially Ephraim, the largest tribal territory that makes up the Kingdom.

And Israel is a mess. It's just a mess. We know from Amos that there are huge, ongoing social inequalities.

Israel is paying tribute to Assyria just to exist, they're at constant war with Judah. There's a political mess in play; they've had six kings, and five have been murdered, and there's all the idolatry and false-god worship that we saw in Amos.

Hosea's basic prophecy is that Israel's doomed. It's doomed. Hosea prophesies during the very last years of Jeroboam II's reign, and just a few years before Israel's fall to Assyria in 721. We remember, if I jog our memories, that Jeroboam II was a terrible king, named after the first Israelite king, Jeroboam, who splintered the kingdom into two and set up and staffed idol worship chapels all over the place, along with other wicked stuff. Jeroboam II took after his namesake.

But Hosea never describes Samaria's fall, which implies he died before it happened. The Book tells us Hosea worked during the reigns of many of those kings who were murdered, and in the passage that was read today, Hosea preaches against the Jehu dynasty, whose last heir was King Zechariah. King Zechariah was assassinated in 752, so we have a good sense of when Hosea started preaching, which was before that, or else why share that judgment is coming his way.

He prophesied from around 750, a little before Zachariah's assassination, to just before 721, maybe, say, 723 or 724. Whatever you've been doing for the past 25 years, Hosea was doing this: condemning king after king after king, watching them murdered one after the other, trying, vainly to get Israel to notice that their way of life had abandoned God, and yet: God still loved them, and still wanted them to return to Him.

And he was also, during this time, married. It's hard to say how happy Beerli might have been about this. It's hard to say how happy Hosea himself was. Here's the passage that was read to us today:

### ***Married, With Children:***

***...When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord." 3 So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.***

Let's stop there; we'll pick it back up, I promise. But

this is Hosea's first call. This is God's start to Hosea's ministry. "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her..." Look, we talk about calling a lot in the Church, usually to talk about that thing that makes us come alive, where our gifts and the world's needs connect. We talk about the Spirit giving us gifts to bless the church. We talk about following Jesus, and trying to live for the Lord, and trying to do what God seems to be asking us, uniquely and personally, to do.

But none of us imagine anything like this, right? And we agonize about what it is God might be trying to make clear in our lives, but this was clear to Hosea: Marry a promiscuous woman, and have children with her.

### ***Married, With Children: Speech-Act***

He marries Gomer, Diblaim's daughter. And this marriage is not just a marriage, it's a speech-act. Remember, when we talked about the prophets, we talked about the crazy things they do sometimes, really public things that you can't look away from, and these things act out some truth that God is trying to make clear. These actions speak; they become metaphors for what God is trying to communicate to His People. These are sprinkled throughout the Minor

and Major Prophets, but none of them are as crazy as Hosea's.

Because here's what he's told to name his first son:

***4 Then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. 5 In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel."***

First child, a son, is named after the place where Israel massacred Judah, and the place where Israel will eventually be massacred in turn. That's what he gets to walk around with. And Hosea is his father, and his mother slept around before they were married.

***6 Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means "not loved"), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them. 7 Yet I will show love to Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the Lord their God, will save them."***

Second kid, a girl. Named “not loved,” whose life is a reminder that Israel, for all that they think they are in the right and holy, so much better than Judah, are wrong. Judah will receive God’s love and salvation, because they trust in God, not their arms, as Israel does. That’s what she gets to walk around with. And Hosea is her dad, and her mother slept around before they were married.

***8 After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. 9 Then the Lord said, “Call him Lo-Ammi (which means “not my people”), for you are not my people, and I am not your God. [b]***

One more son is born; the youngest, called “Not My People.” He’s a reminder that God, who had created Israel, was no longer going to claim them. That’s what he gets to walk around with, and remind everyone about when they call his name. And Hosea is his dad, and her mother slept around before they were married, and his older sister is named “Not Loved,” and his older brother is named “Jezreel,” that old national shame.

***Married, With Children: Hosea’s Calling***

This is Hosea's calling. Out of the gate. Marry a prostitute, as Gomer seems to be called in Chapter 3--there's some jumping around in time between Chapters 1, 2, and 3--Marry a prostitute, raise children with her, and name them names that shame Israel.

Now, look: Hosea was written to a different people at a different time. We'd talk about the way most women in prostitution are, essentially, enslaved and often children. We don't care that Hosea both shamed himself and honored Gomer in marrying her. We've had a Child Dedication, literally, for God's sake. Hosea has, too, but not in any way we'd recognize as nurturing. How we treasure children, and our expectations around everything from how certain we are that our children will survive childhood, to how valued they are apart from their economic capacity are wildly different. That huge difference is part of what makes Hosea's life so shocking. His entire life becomes a speech-act, a metaphor, meant to communicate...what? That God hates Israel?

### ***Metaphors: An Opposite Meaning***

No. Because here's how things continue in Hosea.

We ended with Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not My People arriving into a world where their lives were meant as reminders to Israel “that you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

Yet, Hosea continues,

***10 “Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘children of the living God.’ 11 The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.[c]***

So Hosea declares, just after naming his children, this promises that they will be gathered together with Judah, who they have broken with, and will be loved and will be God’s People again. The kids are metaphors for Israel. They’ve been named what Israel is, but their names are going to be wonderful reminders, someday, of what Israel was, because someday, whoever is faithful in Israel can be, if they want, will be gathered back to Judah.

And Hosea goes on to talk about Gomer, his adulterous wife, except...not really. We realize, really quickly, that what Hosea is saying isn't about Gomer at all, but that Gomer has become, like her children, a metaphor. And she's a metaphor for all the ways Israel has abandoned God, rejected God, been unfaithful to God, but how God just can't get over them. God loves them, even though they sleep around, over and over again.

I won't read it all, but Hosea says things like this. He starts as if he's talking to Gomer about their relationship, talking to his children:

***“Rebuke your mother, rebuke her,  
for she is not my wife,  
and I am not her husband.  
Let her remove the adulterous look from her  
face  
and the unfaithfulness from between her  
breasts.***

He threatens to divorce her, and leave her without any resources in the world. We discover that Hosea's children weren't fathered by him.

**5 Their mother has been unfaithful  
and has conceived them in disgrace.**

**She said, 'I will go after my lovers,  
who give me my food and my water,  
my wool and my linen, my olive oil and my  
drink.'**

**6 Therefore I will block her path with  
thornbushes;**

**I will wall her in so that she cannot find her  
way.**

**7 She will chase after her lovers but not catch  
them;**

**she will look for them but not find them.**

**Then she will say,**

**'I will go back to my husband as at first,  
for then I was better off than now.'**

**8 She has not acknowledged that I was the one  
who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil,  
who lavished on her the silver and gold—  
which they used for Baal.**

**Metaphors: Hosea & Gomer's Relationship As  
Metaphor for God and Israel's:**

And things start to morph from Hosea talking about his wife, to God talking about Israel. When you hear “her,” hear “Israel,” when you hear “lovers,” think of the pagan gods that Israel’s been worshipping so freely:

**9 “Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens,**

**and my new wine when it is ready.**

**I will take back my wool and my linen,**

**intended to cover her naked body.**

**10 So now I will expose her lewdness**

**before the eyes of her lovers;**

**no one will take her out of my hands.**

**11 I will stop all her celebrations:**

**her yearly festivals, her New Moons,**

**her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals.**

**12 I will ruin her vines and her fig trees,**

**which she said were her pay from her lovers;**

**I will make them a thicket,**

**and wild animals will devour them.**

**13 I will punish her for the days**

**she burned incense to the Baals;**

**she decked herself with rings and jewelry,**

**and went after her lovers,**

**but me she forgot,”**

**declares the Lord.**

## ***Metaphors: God Recommits Instead of Abandoning***

And we'd expect God to completely abandon Israel. He's well within his rights to do something like divorce Israel--they broke their covenant obligations, marriage-like commitments--to Him. It's what we'd expect. But instead, we hear this:

***14 “Therefore I am now going to allure her;  
I will lead her into the wilderness  
and speak tenderly to her.***

***15 There I will give her back her vineyards,  
and will make the Valley of Achor[b] a door of  
hope.***

***There she will respond[c] as in the days of her  
youth,***

***as in the day she came up out of Egypt.***

***16 “In that day,” declares the Lord,***

***“you will call me ‘my husband’;***

***you will no longer call me ‘my master.[d]’***

***17 I will remove the names of the Baals from her  
lips;***

***no longer will their names be invoked.***

***18 In that day I will make a covenant for them***

***with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky***

***and the creatures that move along the ground.***

***Bow and sword and battle***

***I will abolish from the land,  
so that all may lie down in safety.***

***19 I will betroth you to me forever;***

***I will betroth you in[e] righteousness and justice,***

***in[f] love and compassion.***

***20 I will betroth you in[g] faithfulness,  
and you will acknowledge the Lord.***

(That was part of Carolyn & my wedding vows!)

***21 “In that day I will respond,”***

***declares the Lord—***

***“I will respond to the skies,***

***and they will respond to the earth;***

***22 and the earth will respond to the grain,  
the new wine and the olive oil,  
and they will respond to Jezreel.[h]***

***23 I will plant her for myself in the land;***

***I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my***

***loved one.[i]'***

***I will say to those called 'Not my people,[j]' 'You are my people';***

***and they will say, 'You are my God.'"***

God doesn't want to divorce Israel, God doesn't want to abandon his people, not show them love, leave Jezreel their place of shame instead of their place of reunification with Judah. God wants Israel, and longs to renew his wedding vows, his covenant relationship, with her.

And Hosea's relationship with Gomer? The real relationship he's had with her? She's gone. But he's going to go get her, because God wants him to, and it seems like more than a guess that he loves, her, too. We read in chapter 3:

***3 The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."***

***2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels[a] of silver and about a homer and a lethek[b] of barley. 3***

***Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”***

Hosea, in recommitting himself to a wife who’s abandoned him, is acting out God’s love for Israel. God intends to redeem Israel, restore them.

And, you know: It didn’t happen, right? Not the way, if you don’t read closely, Israel’s political and religious leaders might have thought, if they bothered to listen to Hosea at all...which they didn’t. Israel, as a Northern Kingdom, wasn’t re-established on earth. Those faithful Israelites who fled to Judah found themselves there, and we’re, this far from them, still waiting on the Day of the Lord imagery that Hosea leans into, when all God’s People throughout time will experience something like a renewal of vows with God, what Revelation calls the “wedding reception of the Lamb.”

### ***Hosea & the New Testament:***

I do think that the New Testament draws on this marriage metaphor that Hosea lifts up; it’s not absent in other places in the Old Testament, but nobody leans into it like Hosea does. That said, Hosea shows up

explicitly in the New Testament all over the place. It's incredibly, incredibly important for the early Church, is used as proof that Gentiles' getting saved, that the resurrection of the dead and the end of death isn't a new idea, but an ancient one.

Peter, writing to Christians tossed throughout Rome, tells them, quoting all sorts of passages, but lifting up Hosea as the kicker "...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Peter isn't the only one to see, in the Gentiles salvation, Hosea's promises realized in the Church. Paul quotes this same thing in Romans 9, and also lifts up another Hosea promise we've already heard, "In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'children of the living God.'" Paul does this in the middle of an incredibly complex argument he's making about how his "heart's desire and prayer to God [is that] the Israelites...may be saved. He's also writing about the way Gentiles have been brought into the People of God, when they weren't God's People. For

two different New Testament authors to lean into Hosea and see there the promise that we Gentiles would be brought into the family of God is a rare thing, and it speaks to the powerful way this passage was read. Elsewhere, Paul will crow out Hosea 13's line, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Something God says to Israel right after promising, "I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death." Hosea introduces the idea of resurrection really, really early among the prophets. And, you know, Jesus quotes Hosea a few times himself.

So maybe Hosea has stuck with the church not just because of the crazy life choices Hosea was called to make, but also because in some ways Hosea hinted at some of the most foundational promises of our faith: that all People can be God's People, that death will die, that knowing the Bible well matters.

### ***Conclusion:***

I'll give us more, oh, basics on Hosea next week--a couple of ways to outline the book, maybe some of the ways Amos and Hosea compare or contrast. And we'll talk about a particular passage we'll see. But today, as an Introduction message, I just want to share

something.

When I started learning about Jesus, I remember loving that quote from that famous Christian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

Yes! Hard Core for Jesus!

But you know what, I’ve maybe metaphorically died, maybe, in following Christ. Died to, say, some dreams. Ooo--“died to my flesh,” that’s biblical, right? But mostly following Christ has been filled with blessing, and I’m still, you know, really alive right now. And we could talk all day about the verse, mostly I’m using it to say this: I’d rather be called to die, than to have a 25 year long vocational ministry that starts with marrying a prostitute, raising children she had by other men, and then, after she leaves me, finding her again and recommitting my life to her. I’d rather not spend a couple decades being ignored by people. It’d be easier to just, you know, be martyred or something.

We talk about calling all the time, we use it to describe that thing we’re searching for, where our passions are activated, our talents are in play, the Church and the

Spirit confirm we're doing what we ought to do. But none of us want what Hosea had. None of us want that. We want all of God, you know: Give me more of Christ, a life full of impact...but none of us want for ourselves or the ones we love a life guided by God if what it means is what it meant for Hosea. And part of why Hosea so powerfully lingers is maybe because we recognize we simply wouldn't want to have to do what he did, or anything close to it.

God hasn't asked such drastic stuff of us. And yet, here's what we could think about:

***What has God asked of us, that is so much less than what God asked of Hosea, but we're still ignoring or avoiding Him on it?***

I had a whole slew of questions for us to reflect on, and then I thought, "Meh." This one's good enough. Hosea is a powerful book; Hosea spoke promises that only came true in Jesus. Hosea's life's work was launched in one of the most difficult asks that God could make, and yet, without him, the early Church might not have deeply realized just how welcome we Gentiles in the room were. So, again:

***What has God asked of us, that is so much less than what God asked of Hosea, but we're still ignoring or avoiding Him on it?***