



## FOCUS VERSES

### Hosea 6:1-2

Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

## LESSON TEXT

### Hosea 1:2-11

2 The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.

3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.

4 And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.

5 And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

6 And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away.

7 But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

8 Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son.

9 Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

11 Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

### Hosea 3:1-5

1 Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

2 So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley:

3 And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.

4 For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim:

5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

God's eternal  
love for us and  
His willingness to  
forgive and restore  
us overcome the  
power of evil.



## CULTURE CONNECTION

### Forgiveness in an Unforgiving World

Previous generations faced a harsh, unforgiving world as they attempted to build shelter and find food in the roughest environments. This generation faces the unforgiving virtual landscape of the World Wide Web. One wrong post, flippant comment, or ill-advised statement can lead to a torrent of negative responses driven by anger and judgment.

Reputations decay incredibly fast. Many feel compelled to offer their opinions and ignite wildfires that rage throughout Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites.

Some become ensnared in their own tangled webs of lies or poorly chosen words. Others feel blindsided, accidentally wandering into unforeseen traps. When the critics

continue to pile on their attacks, many fight back, becoming more and more vicious.

If only someone would reach out with a lifeline of forgiveness, then perhaps they could be saved. Mercy, however, often proves elusive in online environments. While previous generations would have stopped to help a fellow pioneer facing danger, some not only abandon the idea of forgiveness, but they feel entitled to pour out judgment.

Today God calls us to offer forgiveness to the unforgiven. The Word of God encourages us to show mercy even when wrath rages within us. The Spirit of God challenges us to resist knee-jerk reactions and to get on our knees and pray for the humility needed to show love in spite of our feelings.

#### OUTLINE

##### I. HOSEA'S MARRIAGE

- A. A Chosen Bride
- B. An Unfaithful Spouse
- C. A Redeemed Wife

##### II. KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

- A. A Chosen Nation
- B. An Unfaithful People
- C. A Redeemed People

##### III. DESPAIR AND HOPE

- A. Prophecies Unheeded
- B. Hope Promised

#### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century along with Amos and Jonah. These prophets had a much more difficult job than Isaiah and Micah, their counterparts to the south. Isaiah served as a court prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah, advising kings. Micah ministered to people who were more willing to hear the words of the one true God than the Baal worshippers in the northern kingdom.

Yet God wanted to save His people no matter where they lived. Both the names "Hosea" and "Isaiah" come from the Hebrew root for salvation. God was willing to go to extreme measures to reach His people.

Because of the idolatry of the northern kingdom of Israel, God commanded Hosea to do something drastic and dramatic. We think of the prophets as preachers of righteousness who predicted the future, warning of the ills that would befall those who disobeyed the Lord. We sometimes neglect to consider they were also actors, dramatizing situations in an attempt to catch the attention of a wayward audience with little time for God.

The Lord commanded Isaiah to walk around naked and barefoot as a sign against Egypt and Cush (Isaiah 20:3). Ezekiel built a clay model of the city of Jerusalem and depicted the enemy laying siege to the city. God even required him to lie on his side 390 days for Israel and 40 days for Judah while eating meager portions of food to symbolize the difficulties of life under siege and in exile (Ezekiel 4). In Jeremiah 28, the true prophet

Jeremiah and the false prophet Hananiah had a dramatic contest where Jeremiah wore a yoke to symbolize the coming bondage of the people. Hananiah symbolically broke the yoke, but Jeremiah's prophecy ultimately came true when the people were conquered by the Babylonians.

While these dramatized prophecies required a great deal of commitment, perhaps Hosea's assignment required the most. He not only acted out his prophecy but lived it. The Lord commanded Hosea to marry the prostitute Gomer in order to illustrate God's love for His rebellious people. Like the people of Israel and Judah, Gomer left her husband to pursue other lovers. In an act of redemption that symbolized God's eternal devotion to His people, the prophet Hosea bought Gomer from the auction block.

Just as Isaiah faced the humiliation of walking around naked, and Ezekiel felt the pain of lying on his side while nearly starving, Hosea felt the sting of infidelity and heartbreak. Sadly, God had to go to these great lengths to show Israel and Judah how He truly felt. Their rebellion against Him, flirtation and adulterous actions with other gods, and trust in foreign nations rather than in the Lord's might caused God to feel the hopelessness and dejection of a rejected spouse. Hosea shared God's feelings of love and betrayal as he took part in yet another of the Lord's continued attempts to win back the affection of His rebellious bride.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. HOSEA'S MARRIAGE

#### A. A Chosen Bride

Hosea lived during a time when the people had separated themselves from God. The people of the northern kingdom of Israel had divorced themselves from God by worshiping Baal. They had also broken most ties with their brethren in Judah. Attempting to avoid any hope of reconciliation with the southern kingdom and the one true God, the northern kings of Israel had set up shrines in Dan and Bethel to prevent their constituents from traveling to Jerusalem to worship. These shrines had golden calves similar to the one Aaron made

for the Israelites after the Exodus. The northern kings sacrificed true worship on the altars of idolatry in order to preserve their political power. The Israelites chose the convenience of these shrines rather than journeying to Jerusalem as true worshippers of God.

Hosea's life became a living symbol of the separation between God and His people. God asked Hosea to do something unusual to serve a purpose (Hosea 1:2). The Lord commanded Hosea to take the prostitute Gomer as his wife. God's words must have both surprised Hosea and made him cringe as the Lord spoke of taking a "wife of prostitution" and having "children of prostitution." Hosea would be forced to make a seemingly foolish choice in one of the greatest decisions of his life in order to show that God's people had committed the worst type of prostitution imaginable by turning away from the Lord and pursuing relationships with other gods and other nations.

In the Bible, the prophets often connected idolatry and adultery. They compared unfaithfulness to God with marital infidelity in order to illustrate the egregious sins of God's people. Isaiah lamented the fact that the faithful city of Jerusalem had transformed into a harlot (Isaiah 1:21). Jeremiah described the people of the Lord as a devoted bride in her youth (Jeremiah 2:2) who grew up to play the harlot on "every high hill and under every green tree" (Jeremiah 2:20). These places suggest both rendezvous points for illicit trysts between lovers as well as the locations of idolatrous shrines. In caustic language, Ezekiel railed on God's people for playing the harlot and accepting any potential lover who happened to pass by and take notice (Ezekiel 16:15-41).

Hosea and Gomer's marriage became a living metaphor of God's relationship with His people. Even the joy of children brought some measure of sadness as God commanded Hosea to give his offspring prophetic names. His firstborn, Jezreel, signified the end of the northern kingdom of Israel, which would fall to the Assyrians in 722 BC (Hosea 1:4-5). The prophet named his daughter Lo-ruhamah, which can mean "no love" or "no mercy" (Hosea 1:6-7). The name comes from the Hebrew word for *womb*, showing that the love

and care a mother provides for her unborn child would no longer be given to Israel.

God commanded Hosea to name his third child Lo-ammi, which means “not my people” (Hosea 1:9). The prophecy associated with this horrible name, however, offered some measure of hope because the Lord said, “and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God” (Hosea 1:10).

## B. An Unfaithful Spouse

Hosea’s personal life revealed that changing the ways of Israel and Judah would not be easy. After receiving the blessing of children, Gomer became blatantly unfaithful (Hosea 1–2). Hosea may have suspected cheating before Gomer went off to play the harlot. In Hosea 1:3, Hosea took Gomer and she conceived Jezreel. In speaking of the children Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, the Bible only recorded that Gomer conceived, perhaps casting doubt on the identity of their father. Since the names of the children respectively meant “no love/mercy” and “not my people,” the children may have symbolized not only God’s relationship with His people but also the waning love between Gomer and Hosea as well as Hosea’s denial of Lo-ammi as his son.

Hosea did not appear to blame the children. The prophet spoke of the greatness of the day of Jezreel instead of judgment. The name of Lo-ruhamah (“no love/mercy”) was changed to “Ruhamah” (“having obtained mercy” or “being lovingly accepted”). Lo-ammi’s (“not my people”) name was transformed into “Ammi” (“my people”).

The children were called to plead with their harlot mother. In spite of his acceptance of the children, Hosea no longer claimed to be in a covenant of marriage with Gomer just as God no longer claimed to be the husband of His people. Both Gomer and God’s people were required to put away prostitution and adultery, or they would return to their original state. Just as in the Exodus, God’s people would once again be lost in the wilderness and living in desolation. Their unquenchable lust would be replaced by an intense thirst.

Even in this state, God’s people would be just like Gomer, looking for other lovers

to satisfy their needs rather than returning to their one true husband. To prevent any further dalliances with the enemy, God would put a hedge of thorns around His shameless bride in order to thwart her attempts to find old flames and rekindle romances with them.

The Lord would go so far as to make His bride undesirable to any of her former lovers. None of them would be able to deliver her—even if they still wanted her. All joy would cease because God would take away feast days and Sabbaths (Hosea 2:11). Her happiness and fruitfulness would be gone because God would take away her vines and her figs. She would be forgotten just as she had forgotten the Lord.

## C. A Redeemed Wife

God’s decree seemed final in Hosea 2:11, but then a radical change occurred. The Lord spoke of alluring His bride by returning her to their honeymoon days in the wilderness. God would give her vineyards and hope. God would forget her past lovers. The Lord would forever be betrothed to His bride in righteousness, judgment (justice), loving-kindness, mercies, and faithfulness.

This change of heart seemed miraculous. Hosea 2 began from the perspective of a jilted lover too angry and hurt to feel anything except wrath and hatred. But somewhere in the middle, the overwhelming, undeniable love eradicated the hate. Hope sprang from this love, bringing memories of the good times and the promise of a future together.

Hosea must have battled these same emotions in his heart. On one hand, he felt the wound of Gomer’s betrayal threatening to destroy any affection he might have felt for her. On the other hand, he recognized he still loved his bride in spite of her infidelity. He could choose to allow her unfaithfulness to completely destroy the marriage, or he could demonstrate his love and faithfulness to her. His faithfulness might be enough to redeem their relationship.

Gomer found herself in an awful place with little hope of redemption. A slave to her desires, she would be sold as a slave to quench the lusts of her master. Awaiting a detestable fate on the auction block, she had no expectation of salvation. But then

her husband Hosea appeared. Hosea paid a large sum to buy Gomer back to be with him forever (Hosea 3:2).

Hosea and Gomer's love story is not as exciting as the romance of Boaz and Ruth. Yet both Ruth and Gomer found themselves in need of redemption. Ruth was the outsider because of her nationality. Gomer's mistakes had placed her outside the loving care of her husband. The various reasons we may be in need of redemption do not matter to God, because God has come to save us all.

## II. KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

### A. A Chosen Nation

God had such great hopes for His people. He had chosen and appointed them as a kingdom of priests to the world (Exodus 19:6). They were to be a holy nation, a shining example of the love of God in the midst of a decaying world full of unrighteousness. God truly had a plan to make His people exceptional.

The Lord acted as a selective groom, looking for a bride who would be His "treasured possession among all peoples" (Exodus 19:5, ESV). Although the whole earth belonged to the Lord, God was searching for a people He could truly call His own. If they had only obeyed Him in their marriage covenant, they would have had peace and prosperity.

### B. An Unfaithful People

Unfortunately, the people of Israel and Judah proved to be unfaithful to God. They went after the ways of the world (Hosea 4:6–11, 15–19), and they were destroyed for their lack of knowledge. They had forgotten the most basic truth: God loved them and wanted to provide the best for them; He only asked obedience in return for His favor. As a result of their disobedience, God rejected their calling as a priestly nation. God would forget both them and their children. They would not find satisfaction because they had chosen to be unfaithful to the Lord.

While Judah often considered herself more faithful than Israel, God warned Judah against acting like her treacherous sister. The Lord criticized Israel for her backsliding, idolatry, and continued lewdness. Israel was left

in shame like Gomer. Judah needed to heed the words of the Lord in order to avoid the same fate.

### C. A Redeemed People

In spite of Israel's backslidden condition, the Lord did not give up on her. God promised to revive the people in His sight after two days (Hosea 3:5; 6:1–2). They would seek the one true God again. They would remember that God chose the kings of the Davidic line.

Hosea called the people to return to their first love. The Lord had torn them, but now He would heal them. The Lord had smitten them, but now He would bind them up. The Lord would revive them and raise them up. God's people, once so close to death, would live again!

*God's commitment of love (Hosea 4:16, 11:1–4, 8–11).* In spite of all the negative feelings toward Israel, God would forgive the people of their backsliding and once again provide for them. God would remember Israel as a youth called out of Egypt. Throughout the years, God had continued to take care of His people—even when they did not realize it was the Lord who healed them. Even though God's anger was kindled against Israel, the Lord chose not to act on it. Although a man might feel justified in his actions and give in to his wrath, God showed restraint.

*God's commitment to forgive (Hosea 14).* Since the Lord had turned from His divine wrath and had forgiven Israel, He called Israel to turn aside from their wicked ways and serve Him. Hosea implored the people to ask God to take away their guilt. If they would promise not to look to the Assyrians or other gods for salvation, the Lord would answer their prayer by healing their disloyalty and causing them to prosper.

## III. DESPAIR AND HOPE

### A. Prophecies Unheeded

In spite of God's love for them, the people of Israel ignored the voice of the prophet Hosea and continued backsliding. Hosea must have felt like a failure both in his personal life and professional life. He witnessed Gomer's infidelity and had to deal with it. Even though

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

he pleaded with the Israelites to turn back to God, he saw their continued unfaithfulness to the Lord. He sought to win the affections of a woman and the attention of a people who would not accept the love that was offered to them.

By ignoring the prophecies of Hosea, the people of Israel set themselves up for the wrath of God. God used the Assyrians to administer the punishment of His people. The Assyrians gained control of Israel in 722 BC and deported the people. Like Gomer on the auction block, the people found themselves enslaved to wicked masters. Judah watched this take place, hoping to avoid the same fate. But Nebuchadnezzar overtook Jerusalem and exiled her people in 587 BC. Both the nations of Israel and Judah found themselves in need of redemption.

### B. Hope Promised

All hope was not lost. Hosea prophesied redemption for Judah and Israel (Hosea 6:1–2; 11:9–11; 14:1–9). God would heal and revive His people. Foreshadowing the redemption Jesus would ultimately provide by rising on the third day, Hosea wrote that “in the third day he will raise us up” (Hosea 6:2).

God provides the hope of resurrection for those who turn away from Him. They need only to return to God in repentance. Many talk about God’s power to heal sickness, blinded eyes, lame legs, and other infirmities. Perhaps they should remember God’s ability to heal a backsliding soul. Everyone else may have given up on a backslider, but God has not. Just as Hosea did not give up on Gomer and the Lord remembered Israel and Judah, even so God has a plan for those who have turned away from Him.

## REFLECTIONS

- What are some steps we can take to help us be more forgiving?
- God’s words in Hosea 2 began with the anger of a jilted lover and then turned to feelings of affection. How can we learn to deal with our anger while creating a space for love and forgiveness?
  - Discuss Hosea’s calling as a prophet. How do you think Hosea felt when God called him to do something so strange?
  - Discuss ways we can reach out to backsliders and let them know God wants to forgive them and raise them up again.

The story of Hosea’s love for Gomer and God’s continued pursuit of Israel in spite of her unfaithfulness shows us the power of love and forgiveness. One of the key points Hosea made appears in Hosea 11:9. Here God declared that He would put away His wrath and avoid punishing Israel. He could complete this act of forgiveness because He is God and not a mortal.

As humans, we often have trouble forgiving others. In many instances, we feel justified in our anger. We can think of many reasons why it is reasonable to hold to our wrath. Our rage-filled minds find few reasons to forgive. But if Hosea could forgive Gomer, and a loving God could forgive His people, perhaps we should not be so quick to let fury rule the day. We must forgive others because we have received the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Jesus had every right to feel justified in avoiding the cross. He had felt the sting of the whip, but the sting of rejection hurt Him even more. He had experienced the pain of the cross, but the pain of being forsaken by the world He came to save was even more intense. He chose to forgive in the face of intense physical and emotional suffering.

We should choose to be more like Jesus and show the love and forgiveness He demonstrated. This lesson shows not only the power of God’s love but also the power of one individual’s love for another. Hosea forgave Gomer in spite of feelings of shame for her infidelity. He chose to love her children—even though he could not be sure they were his. If Hosea could demonstrate the power of love and forgiveness in such trying circumstances, then perhaps we can too. ■