

Hosea: Saved by Faithful Love

*Various bible passages from Hosea, from the series, "Ancient Messengers Modern Message"
Message from the Master Broadcast June 10, 2007 by Pastor Daron Lindemann*

Like the hot headliner on the evening news, we begin this new series with a steamy scandal. The wife of one of God's holy prophets has committed adultery! "Prophet Married to Prostitute." If anyone is looking for a soap opera story line this affair sets the stage perfectly. Surprisingly, it comes straight out of the Bible. And not only does it happen right under God's nose but he produces and directs the scandal into a media blitz! He is intent on tuning the people of Israel in for a message they cannot miss.

This is just one of the many surprises that Bible-believing Christians will find in the section of God's Word we call "the minor prophets." These twelve men of God – the number twelve paralleling the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples – collectively wrote 67 chapters in the Bible, about as many as Isaiah wrote in his book alone. Late in the 4th century somebody designated them as the minor prophets and the title stuck. But the only thing lacking in these books of the Bible is length, and what these little gems lack in volume they make up for in concise, dramatic, eloquent, and poignantly Messianic messages. How about a little tour of this section of the Bible to set the stage for his exciting new series? Here's more ...

- The minor prophets include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- We're not sure why they appear in this specific sequence in the Bible, because it's not exactly chronological.
- The writings cover a 400 year span of history with God's people in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah interacting with the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires – some of the most eventful times for God's plan of salvation in the Old Testament.
- Some of the prophets appeared on the scene before God's Old Testament people were exiled, some during the exile itself, and some after the exile when the remnant returned.
- Before the time of Christ Jewish scribes wrote the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel each on its own scroll. However, these twelve prophets were all included on a single scroll, and were known collectively as "the twelve."
- The message of the minor prophets is old, but not obsolete. They lived during national unrest and church crisis, they challenged the lapsing morals of their neighbors and friends, they risked personal peril to pull people away from the appeal of false religions that satisfy carnal appetites alone, and they expanded the vision of God's kingdom with mission efforts to the Gentiles. The promise, guidance, and straight talk from these ancient messengers of God bring a modern message for the world outside your window and inside your heart.
- The prophets wrote in both prose and poetry. The distinguishing characteristic of Hebrew poetry is not rhyme or rhythm but parallelism. That is, comparing, contrasting, or repeating thoughts and ideas. One line of Hebrew poetry may be restated in the next line, just by contrasting it with its opposite, for example.
- As much as the structure and themes of the minor prophets repeat themselves: warning of judgment, description of sin, description of coming judgment, call for repentance, promise of future deliverance – the style of each prophet speaks in a unique way. Therefore, our goal is for each sermon to deliver a message for today's people that speaks in the tones of that particular prophet. We will focus on the unique characteristics of each prophet's persona and style, connect his words to their fulfillment (especially Messianic promises), and bring words of promise, guidance, and straight talk to our listeners. There is perhaps no better landscape in the Scriptures to see and hear clearer messages of law and gospel from God than the minor prophets.

God uses his prophet, Hosea, to set that tone. "*The word of the Lord ... came to Hosea*" (1:1), the book of the Bible that bears his name begins, reminding us that this is not some fictitious tale of a fanciful story teller but the word of the Lord, whose words do not – can not – ever drop to the ground unfulfilled and empty. And the words with which the Lord begins are not pleasant. Especially for Hosea, to whom the Lord gave these instructions: "*Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the*

land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord” (1:2). Thus begins Hosea’s first day on the job as prophet to Israel, finding a wife who would, according to the Lord’s own decree, cheat on him, have an affair with another man or men, and even bear children apparently as the result of this adultery! Talk about taking your job personally!

When Hosea’s unfaithful wife had a son, the Lord said, *“Call him Jezreel ... because I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel” (1:4).* Wicked King Ahab had murdered innocent Naboth at a place called Jezreel, simply because Ahab’s pride and greed convinced him he had to have Naboth’s prosperous vineyard operation. This atrocity symbolized the corruption among the leaders appointed by God who should have shown the way with lives of piety and faith but instead considered their own pleasure more important than the people whom they served. This son of Hosea’s promiscuous wife now reminded Israel of her injustice and pride. When Hosea’s unfaithful wife had a daughter, the Lord said, *“Call her [not loved], for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel” (1:7),* because of Israel’s unfaithfulness and adultery with heathen idol worship, the Lord could not engage in a loving relationship with them. Again, Hosea’s unfaithful wife had another son, and the Lord said, *“Call him [not my people], for you are not my people and I am not your God” (1:8).* The unfaithful Israelites had broken the bond of a covenant relationship God had extended to them in his promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in his faithful deliverances from Egypt and other enemies. And they had chosen to become a different people worshipping different kinds of false gods. The grief that the Lord felt, and the heart broken jealousy of the pagan idol who had become Israel’s lovers, would now bleed in Hosea’s broken heart. Both Hosea and the Lord found themselves to be the victims of a promiscuous wife looking for pleasure in the beds of other lovers.

In the 14 chapters of his dealings with the people of Israel, the prophet Hosea condemns the sins of the Israelites no less than 150 times, and over half of those target their adultery against the Lord. *“They have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution ... they consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God” (4:10-12).* The Lord God had married the Israelites and committed his faithful love to them, only to come home one evening and find them in bed with another god, a popular idol named Baal worshipped by their Canaanite neighbors. The Lord God had promised to provide for the Israelites and protect them in time of need but they sold themselves to the ravenous lust of nations like Assyria and Egypt, eager to make treaties with the Israelites for more than their national treasury – for the price of their souls. *“For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone,”* the Lord cries (8:9), comparing the people to a donkey in heat looking indiscriminately to satisfy her desires. And if you’re still not shocked at Israel’s promiscuity, then consider the fact that the pagan idol worship practices included fertility rites that engaged the services of temple prostitutes. In the end, both spiritually and physically, Israel cheated on God.

Quite naturally, as it always does, this cheating on God led to cheating people. And the sins piled higher. During a time when the Lord had protected Israel from foreign enemies, provided shrewd government leaders, and blessed the womb of the earth to produce with its fertile soil some of the most abundant harvests of the time, the Israelites walked out the door of justice, compassion, and general human decency. The building trades flourished, and instead of building homes for the poor the rich people built lake homes for themselves. The powerful became even more powerful so that those who couldn’t afford to bribe them found no resolution in the court system, and determined it was better to suffer in silence than be condemned as a criminal by a corrupt judge. Soothsayers and wizards were in high demand. And the murder rate launched to new levels, for example, four of the Israelite kings that ruled during the time of Hosea gained the throne by assassinating the previous king. The unmerciful treatment of other people and the pagan sacrifices offered to make believe idols prompted the Lord to say through Hosea, *“I desire mercy not sacrifice” (6:6),* a truth Jesus taught about in the New Testament. For now, this land of Canaan which the Lord had given to the Israelites as the promised land now festered with greater sins than it had ever known, even from its pagan inhabitants. So under God’s direction the land would soon spew the Israelites out just as it had done to the Canaanites.

Today God blesses America with its spacious skies, fields of grain, technology advancements, educational endeavors, ethnic diversity, and opportunity for gainful employment, not to mention the best economy in the world, the strongest military in the world, and freedoms like no other nation. Christians like us and

congregations like ours enjoy all of these blessings as much as anyone else. Sad to say, we conveniently abuse these blessings just as much, we comfortably ignore human need just as much, and we do little or nothing to plug the drain down which the morals of our land swirling with a sucking sound emanating from the open mouth of hell. We have a voice in our government but leave political activism to monster organizations or professional lobbyists whose interests don't even parallel ours – and the poor remain trampled and trapped while we enjoy freedom and employment. We have wealth like no other nation but adjust our level of contentment to reflect the materialistic mantra of consumerism, “I gotta have it now,” – and the budgets of our congregations and synod fall miserably short of doing the kind of mission and ministry work we'd like while we meet our investment goals and retirement planning. We have the joyful responsibility of witnessing Christian love to others, seasoning our conversations with Christ, and being prepared to give an answer to those curious about our faith but we defer to the religious professionals at church and prefer not to say too much about religion lest we embarrass ourselves or get in trouble – and the souls of those who don't know Christ or struggle in the faith find themselves trapped in the quicksand of the devil while we walk right by with a disinterested shrug. Like adultery, the lusts of our pleasures for self have lured us away from God's faithful love to the dangerous traps of sin, selfishness, and injustice. The gods of this age have beckoned us with their empty promises and we've joined the masses of people who answer all too willingly their empty call. We are cheating on God. We who have received his promised land and his protective care and his soothing comfort are walking out the door to sleep with other lovers. How dirty! How unfaithful!

There's a song I hear once in a while on the radio that talks about a woman whose lover cheated on her, and she doesn't take to it kindly. She finds his second favorite object of affection, his truck, and she takes matters into her own hand. She smashes in the headlines. She takes her car key and scratches long, thin, ugly lines in the paint. She knifes open the leather seats. All this she does, according to the song, so that the next woman in this guy's life will notice the damaged truck, put two and two together, and realize that this guy is a no good cheater. The Lord God responds in a similar way in Hosea, hoping to help people, but his motives have more to do with reconciliation than revenge. God will smash the economy of Israel, scratch the throne from Israel so that the nation will be occupied by foreign powers, and knife open the comfortable lifestyle of the people with painful troubles. “*They will say to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us!’*” (10:8), the Lord anticipates in words spoken by the Israelites facing the troubles the Lord will bring on them. Catastrophic disasters will be preferred to the heavy hand of God. And then ... and then the people will see! Then the people will repent and turn away from their other lovers! Then the Israelites, and we today, when pressured by situations we can't handle alone, will turn to our faithful husband, our Lord and Savior, for help, for forgiveness, for salvation, and he will be there.

Hosea puts it this way: “*Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your own downfall ... Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously ... Assyria cannot save us’*” (14:1-3). Then the Lord, the victimized but forgiving husband, the faithful companion determined to save, will reply, “*I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them ... Israel will blossom like a lily*” (14:4,5). Not only does the Lord who saves promise to restore wayward sinners, but he promises to flourish us, making us beautiful like a lily as we bloom with words and actions of faith. Beautiful like a bride dressed up for her groom on an eternal wedding day. Beautiful in his love. This is the message of the prophet Hosea, whose name, pronounced ho-shay-ah in the Hebrew, means “salvation.” Another expression of that name is Joshua, which when pronounced in the New Testament Greek is yeh-shu-ah, or ... Jesus. The love of God, our everlasting husband and Lord, comes faithfully because of our salvation, our Savior, our Hosea, Jesus. Amen.