

Our Unfaithfulness & God's Faithfulness

The RedLight District - Hosea 1

INTRO

Review

As most of you know we've just begun a sermon series named "The Redlight District," on the Old Testament book of Hosea. Chris spent a lot of time last week helping us to understand how Hosea fits within the larger story of the Old Testament. I would love to talk some more about the history of the Old Testament, but we really don't have time; however, I do want to talk for a second about the different types of books within the Old Testament. One of the things that we want to accomplish during this series is to help the people of 24church better understand the Bible and specifically the Old Testament.

OT History Review (from last week)

- Creation
- Fall
- Flood
- Babel (the origin of different languages)
- Abraham
- Isaac (not Ishmael)
- Jacob (not Esau)
- 12 sons of Jacob (from whom descend the 12 tribes of Israel)
- Joseph (one of the brothers) is sold into slavery in Egypt, but God is secretly using this situation to prepare provision for his people when a famine comes upon the land
- Israel is free in Egypt, but later becomes enslaved in Egypt when Joseph dies and the Pharaoh who knew Joseph dies
- Israel is led out of Egypt by Moses
- God gives Moses the OT Law on Mt. Sinai
- Israel wanders for 40 years in the wilderness because of their lack of faith
- The conquest of the Promised Land
- Time of the Judges
- First 3 kings: Saul, David, Solomon
- Divided Kingdom: Judah in the South, Israel in the North
- Israel is defeated by Assyria in 722 B.C. and carried in captivity
- **Hosea ministers near the end of Israel's kingdom until their exile to Assyria**
- Judah is defeated by Babylon in 586 B.C. and carried in captivity
- Cyrus defeats Nebuchadnezzar in 539, & allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem & rebuild the temple
- 536 B.C. - the temple begins to be rebuilt in Jerusalem (Zerubbabel's temple)
- 516 B.C. - the temple is completed
- Ezra leads more people out of exile, calls for them to renew their covenant to God
- Nehemiah leads more people out of exile and rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem

- Malachi encourages the people to be faithful to the Covenant and tells of the coming of Elijah (John the Baptist)
- John the Baptist shows up in Israel

4 main types of books in the OT

- **Law (a.k.a. Torah, Pentateuch, 5 Books of Moses)**

- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- “Although the Pentateuch contains many laws, it is essentially narrative with episodes of law-giving, but in the broader sense of torah all the Pentateuch can be seen as instruction, for it teaches as much through the history it records as by the law it gives.”¹

- **History**

- Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
- These tell the story of...
 1. Israel’s entry into the Promised Land of Canaan under Joshua
 2. Israel’s life in the land under the judges and the transition to kingship
 3. the division of the nation into two rival kingdoms (Israel and Judah) and life in both
 4. the downfall and exile of each Kingdom
 5. life in the exile
 6. Judah’s return from exile
- These books span close to 1000yrs of history.²

- **Poetry & Wisdom Literature**

- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
- “Poetry is pervasive in the Hebrew Bible-the only books in the OT without any poetry are Leviticus, Ruth, Esther, Haggai, and Malachi.”³
- “Biblical wisdom...might be defined as skill in the art of godly living.”⁴

¹ *ESV Study Bible*, page 35.

² *ESV Study Bible*, page 385.

³ *ESV Study Bible*, page 865.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, page 866.

- Although there is poetry and wisdom throughout the Bible it is not the dominant genre, as it is in these books.

- **Prophets**

- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Sometimes the prophetic books are organized into the subcategories: Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. This distinction of major or minor has more to do with the length of the book than its importance.
- Prophets announced the words of God to the people. They preached both future events and the meaning and application of the Law.
- Prophets existed throughout most of Israel's history, but these books are the "written prophets."
- This is the genre that Hosea fits within.

Reading

Hosea 1

¹The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. ²When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD." ³So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵"On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." ⁶Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them. ⁷"But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the LORD their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen." ⁸When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. ⁹And the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God."

¹⁰Yet the number of the sons of Israel
 Will be like the sand of the sea,
 Which cannot be measured or numbered;
 And in the place
 Where it is said to them,
 "You are not My people,"

*It will be said to them,
"You are the sons of the living God."
11And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together,
And they will appoint for themselves one leader,
And they will go up from the land,
For great will be the day of Jezreel.*

Relevance

In His book named *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller explains how prevalent idolatry still is in America today.⁵ During the recent economic downturn, there were reports of several stock brokers committing suicide because in essence their “god,” in this case it was probably their job and success, failed. When we make idols out of money, success, sex, or another person, ultimately we are setting ourselves up for failure because those idols will ultimately fail us.

Idolatry and thus Whoredom is still alive today. It’s different and yet the same. Most Americans don’t bow down to idols of Baal, or participate in sacred sexual acts with temple prostitutes, and yet we’re still just as idolatrous as Israel ever was. We need to examine Israel’s idolatry so that we can better detect our own idolatry. And then once we’ve identified our own idolatry we need to put it to death and fall in love with Christ.

BODY

1. Factual / Historical Review of the Chapter

Gomer (Hosea 1:1-3)

- **The Shocking Nature of God’s command.** I’ll be honest, the more I study this book, the more I am shocked by God’s command to Hosea. I can’t imagine what it would be like if God commanded me to marry a harlot as part of my ministry. And yet Hosea says that this was what God commanded him to do when “the Lord first spoke through Hosea.” God tells Hosea to go and marry a woman whom he knows will cheat on him, and to have kids with her (some of whom may not even end up being his biological kids), as the basis for his ministry. I don’t think we understand how drastic a command this really was because the word “whore” in our modern day culture has lost some of the shocking pain that it used to have. But if you’ve been cheated on before, or if you really think about what it would feel like to be cheated on, then you begin to understand how shocking and how hard God’s command to Hosea was.
- **Who was Gomer?** Gomer was prone to sleeping around with multiple men, and even probably doing it for money. We don’t have any other information about the

⁵ See *Counterfeit Gods* by Tim Keller for a fuller explanation of this topic.

specifics of Gomer's sin, we just know that the word for "harlotry" here means "promiscuous woman." Garrett points out that an immoral woman in this time would not have been married, and would not be able to get a job to support herself, so she would have depended upon her lovers for gifts and money. Gomer was not just a loose woman, but a prostitute who depended upon her lovers to make a living.⁶

Jezreel (Hosea 1:3-5)

- **Hosea's first son.** God tells Hosea to name his first son Jezreel, which means "he sows." And in the NASB it says that God told Hosea to name his son Jezreel because, "for yet in a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel." Jezreel was a city in Israel where tons of bloodshed had taken place over the years. One commentator says that the name "Jezreel" would bring to mind the same connotations in a Jew's mind that the phrase, "Pearl Harbor," would bring to an American's mind.⁷
- **What's the story of Jehu?** If you look in 2 Kings 9-10, you can see the story of Jehu. God anointed Jehu to become the next king in Israel and to destroy the household of Ahab. It is said of Ahab that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him."⁸ At the time of Jehu, Ahab had already died and his grandson was the king (although Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was still alive.) At God's command, Jehu killed Jehoram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah by shooting them both with an arrow through the heart. This happened right outside of the city of Jezreel. When Jehu entered the city of Jezreel he saw Jezebel looking out the window of her house at him, and Jehu asked the servants who were around her, "Who is on my side?" Two or three of the servants looked down at him, and Jehu told them to throw Jezebel down. They did! Jehu then trampled her as she lay dead on the ground and went inside her house for a drink and bite to eat. After eating for a while, he commanded those around him to go and bury Jezebel, but when they went to get her body it had been completely devoured by dogs and nothing but a few bones were left (this happened according to God's prophecy).⁹
- Next Jehu contacted the men in charge of the 70 sons of Jehoram, who was now dead, and told them to select the most fit of the sons to be the next king, and to prepare to come against him to fight for control of the kingdom. But the men in charge of the 70 sons of Jehoram told Jehu that they were on his side. Accordingly, Jehu told them to send him the heads of the sons, and the 70 heads of the sons of Jehoram were piled up at the gate of the city of Samaria. Jehu also

⁶ Duane Garrett, *New American Commentary on Hosea and Joel*, page 51.

⁷ Ray Ortlund Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, page 51.

⁸ 1 Kings 16:30

⁹ 2 Kings 9:36-37

had 42 of the relatives of the king of Judah killed. And finally he fooled most everyone in Judah by saying that he wanted to offer a huge sacrifice to Baal. When he got every Baal worshipper in Israel together into the temple, then his 80 guys stationed outside the temple came inside and killed everyone. They broke down the Baal statues, tore down the temple itself, and turned it into a latrine. With all this God was pleased, but at the end of Jehu's life, 2 Kings says:

- *2 Kings 10:28-31*

Thus Jehu eradicated Baal out of Israel. However, as for the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin, from these Jehu did not depart, even the golden calves that were at Bethel and that were at Dan. The Lord said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in executing what is right in My eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in My heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel sin.

- **What does Hosea's prophecy about Jezreel Mean?** I think verse four of Hosea is better translated, "visit the bloodshed of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu," than "punish the household of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel," as the NASB reads.¹⁰ Jezreel means "he sows," and God is saying that he will now sow the bloodshed of Jezreel upon the household of Jehu. God was not displeased with Jehu's killing of the house of Ahab, and his killing of the worshippers of Baal, God was displeased with Jehu's unwillingness to further eradicate idolatry from the land. Jehu loved the bloodshed more than he loved God. If he had really loved God with all his heart, then he would have removed the high places and the golden calves from Israel. But Jehu didn't love God with all his heart, and now four generations later, Israel didn't either. And that is why God is now going to visit the bloodshed of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and all of Israel for that matter. God is doing this as he promised, for he had said that he would allow the descendants of Jehu to sit on the throne for four generations, but only four generations, because Jehu was only partially obedient. In Hosea 1, God is telling Israel that he will punish them (the house of Jehu) and make an end of them because of the continued idolatry and spiritual harlotry.

Lo-Ruhamah (Hosea 1:6-7)

- **Hosea's Daughter.** The second child that Gomer bears is Lo-Ruhamah, which literally means "no mercy." Can you imagine naming your little girl "the girl who will not be shown mercy." You can just imagine how Hosea may have used this as a preaching opportunity. If he was walking around the mall with his family (ok malls didn't exist, so we'll say the market) and someone says, "Oh, what a cute little girl! What's her name?" And Hosea would have responded, "Lo-Ruhamah, for Israel will no longer receive mercy from God for her flagrant harlotry and idolatry!" He would have gotten strange looks, perhaps even disturbed looks, but his point would have

¹⁰ Duane Garrett, *New American Commentary on Hosea and Joel*, page 56-57.

gotten across. Some commentators speculate that Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi may not even have been Hosea's children, but may have been children born to Gomer from the men she was cheating on Hosea with.¹¹

Lo-Ammi (Hosea 1:8-9)

- **Hosea's Second Son.** The last son born to Gomer (and again, this may or may not have actually been Hosea's son by blood) was Lo-Ammi, whose name means "Not my people." And God says that Israel is no longer His people, and He is no longer their God. This is the equivalent of God saying, "I'm divorcing you!" You no longer even look like my people, all you look like is a worshipper of Baal. You have nothing in common with a child of God.

2. Implications and Application of Israel's Harlotry

- **God's Marriage with Israel.** Throughout the Bible God has always pictured his people, both Israel and later on the church, as His wife. We know from Genesis 2:23-25 that marriage in God's eyes has always been a serious ordeal. God created marriage to be a lifetime union with one other person of the opposite sex. And the union that forms between a man and a woman is a "one flesh" union. Early on throughout the torah, the Bible begins leaning towards the thought that Israel was God's wife, and that God was Israel's husband. They were forever to be bound to Him, and Him alone. We see this in passages such as:

- *Exodus 34:11-16*

Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim - for you shall not worship any other God - otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods.

- *Leviticus 17:7*

They shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations.

¹¹ see John Piper's sermon, "Call me Husband, Not Baal"

- These passages show that God is a jealous God (he fiercely desires the affections of His people), and that God perceives the involvement of His people in idol worship as “whoring after other gods.” This idea is further developed in the prophets and especially in the book of Hosea, and finally climaxes in the New Testament with verses such as:

- *Ephesians 5:28-32*

So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his own wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

- *2 Cor 11:2*

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.¹²

- **Baal Worship** God’s largest complaint with Israel throughout the OT was that they were constantly idolatrous and involved in the worship of other gods. Baal is the false god that is probably mentioned most in the OT, and Baal worship is a theme throughout the book of Hosea. Having sex was part of worshipping Baal. He was believed to be a god of agriculture, rainfall, productivity and fertility, and having sex with a temple prostitute was a way of mimicking human fertility and beseeching Baal to produce agricultural fertility.¹³ When Israel would turn to worshipping Baal, this is what they would be doing: having sex with a temple prostitute as a way of asking Baal to bless their crops and give them rainfall and fertility. It was a mystical, sexual, worship service and was demonic in nature.¹⁴ If you’ve read the Divinci Code or seen that movie, then you’ve seen this type of sexual worship eluded to within that story. Worshipping Baal meant not depending on God to bless the crops; it was cheating on God, Israel’s true husband.
- There are several ways that Israel fell into idolatry throughout the OT, but I want to highlight at least two ways that Israel was constantly idolatrous and therefore harlotrous:

1. trusting other gods (the gods of the culture around them) rather than the true God. - cultural gods such as Baal, Asherim, Molech, etc.
2. making God into something He is not. (i.e. - the golden calf)

¹² This overview of God’s marriage to His people is taken from Ray Ortlund, *Whoredom: God’s Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, chapters 1-3.

¹³ ESV Study Bible (Introduction to Hosea)

¹⁴ Lev 17:7

- this is what happened with the golden calf incident when Moses broke the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments in half. He came down off the mountain and the people had made a golden calf and were worshipping it, and basically saying not that it was another god, but that this calf was the God who brought them out of Egypt.¹⁵
- **Idolatry Today** We can still commit these two types of idolatry (or whoredom) today in our times. It might be very easy to dismiss this book as ancient history but not applicable to our lives, but that is simply not the case. We can commit this same type of spiritual harlotry today.
 1. **Trusting the gods of our culture.** Some of the gods of our culture are: hard work, political affiliation, proper schooling, the church we attend, the beliefs we have, the people we know, the neighborhood we live in, the alarm system we have installed, or even our particular brand of Christianity. We trust in these things to protect us and give us a good life. And when we trust ultimately in anything other than God to protect us, make us happy, or secure our place in heaven, then we are being just as idolatrous as Israel. It is no different than bowing down to a demonic idol. If you are trusting in your job alone as your means to security, then you are cheating on God. He alone is your security. He alone is your provider.
 2. **Making God into our own image.** It's very easy for us, perhaps unintentionally and even unknowingly, to make God into who we want Him to be, rather than investigating from the Bible who He really is. There is a belief that is especially alive today in the South-Eastern United States called moralistic-therapeutic-deism. This is a long name for something extremely simple, but extremely dangerous. It's a type of pseudo-Christianity that is considered with living a moral life, the felt needs of Americans, and a belief that God does exist. But in truth it denies the God of Scripture and fails to see the need for a personal relationship with God. God is not just around to give you your "best life now," and help you to have a few good morals. He is a jealous God, who desires your whole heart, and wants to mobilize you to fulfill the Great Commission.
 3. **Sin of Apathetic Devotion as Represented by Jezreel.** Jehu and his sons and household failed to love God with their whole heart. This is why they stopped short of completely removing idolatry from the land. You may love God well, but if anything: wife, husband, kids, football season, a new mac computer, your 401K starts to become more important to you than God, then you are beginning to fall into idolatry. God loved the zeal of Jehu in destroying the house of Ahab and worshippers of Baal, but He hated that Jehu stopped short of following God with his whole heart. Jehu should have gone ahead and removed the high places, not just the Baal worship from the land.

• *Matt 5:48*

¹⁵ Exodus 32:8

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

3. The Consequences of Israel's Sin

- There was a day when God said to Israel: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi! I will sow bloodsheed upon the land, I will no longer be merciful to you, and you are no longer my people! God's mercy is great, but it has a limit. At some point, and we're unaware of that point, God brings justice to unrepentant sinners. Hell is real. Jonathan Edwards, the great American theologian, is most well know for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In this famous sermon, Edwards pictures God holding sinners by a single thread over the pit of hell. When Edward's original hearers heard his descriptions of hell, the Holy Spirit so moved in the room that they screamed out in fear and agony. God could justly punish everyone who has ever lived for their sin, and yet he repeatedly withholds his wrath and allows us to repent and be forgiven. God can offer this mercy to guilty sinners because Jesus provided payment for our sin on the cross. But we must not presume upon God's mercy. Tomorrow may be too late to repent, and we all deserve hell. Israel's sin had a limit, and then God judged them. A similar fate awaits all those who reject the gospel of Jesus.

4. Is there Any Hope?

- **A fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham through Jesus.** In chapter one of Hosea God has essentially pronounced divorce upon His people. He has declared judgement upon them. They are no longer His people. And yet verses ten and eleven turn and offer hope. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God will remain faithful to His promises. God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore, and Israel's unfaithfulness at the time of Hosea will not prevent this promise from coming true. As God told the prophet Elijah that He had kept for Himself 7000 men who had not bowed the knee to Baal, so God is throughout all time preserving a bride for Himself. God's bride is unfaithful, but God will call out for Himself a bride, and purify her, and woo her to Himself. He will fulfill His promise through the sovereignty of His electing and predestinating power.
- Paul wrestles with this exact issue in Romans 9.¹⁶ He is looking around and hardly any of his Jewish countrymen are being saved. The gospel is spreading, but it is spreading primarily to Gentiles. And Paul wonders aloud, "God, have you forsaken Israel?" "Have you forgotten your promise to Abraham?" And he answers, "No! Not everyone who is born Jewish will be saved, but God will make sure that many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles will be saved despite their unfaithfulness." God will preserve for himself a portion of all humanity. He will predestine a group of people to

¹⁶ Rom 9:25-26

future perfection. They will one day be like His son. Despite their unfaithfulness, God will love them and provide a way of salvation.

- From our perspective, we have no idea if someone is elect or not. It doesn't matter from our perspective. We look at our own unfaithfulness, we look at the salvation provided on the cross, and we repent and take hold of Christ. Predestination is a word that freaks a lot of people out, and yet the Bible talks about it, so must believe it as truth. However, we also know that "Whoever will call upon the Lord will be saved,"¹⁷ and that "no one who believes in Him will be disappointed."¹⁸ So we take these twin truths, that don't entirely make sense in our minds, and we cling to Christ and His promise of salvation.

CONCLUSION

All of us are spiritual adulterers, but God has made an offer of salvation and forgiveness through His son. If anyone today would like to be forgiven of their sin, and be made part of bride of Christ, then you can know Christ today. Simply ask Him to come into your life and forgive you and become the Lord of your life.

¹⁷ Romans 10:13

¹⁸ Romans 10:11