
Unfaithful People and God's Grace

SCOTT HOEZEE

Many of the biblical prophets of the Old Testament were asked to do some strange things by God. Micah walked around naked and howled like a jackal. Jeremiah was once asked to take a pair of his underwear and bury it in the ground. Ezekiel did all manner of odd things, including giving himself a public haircut, as well as lying down for a prolonged period of time next to a model of the city of Jerusalem; and the prophet Hosea needed to use marriage and a broken marriage as a symbol of all that was wrong with Israel in their relationship with God. Today on *Groundwork*, we will begin a short series on the biblical book of Hosea. Stay tuned.

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And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is the first now of a fairly short three-part series on the prophet Hosea, one of the minor prophets. So, in this first program, we are going to do a brief overview of who Hosea was, when he prophesied; and then we are going to look at Hosea Chapters 1-3. The second program is going to focus on, really, the lion's share of Hosea's fourteen chapters, and that is passage and passage of judgment. Then in the third and final program, we will look at some of the hope with which this otherwise very grim book concludes.

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Yes; so, we are in the minor prophet section, and it is minor only because of the size of the book and not because of the prioritizing of the prophets. But we see that this is after the fall of the kingdoms. So, David and Solomon were the end of the united kingdom of the north and south. After that, we see them breaking; and then in the Bible, we start seeing the explanations of what happens under either a good king or evil king, whether the northern or southern kingdoms. So, Hosea is one of the prophets who is called at this time to remind the people how much they have strayed from God's laws, and that there is judgment coming.

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So, after Solomon's kids...two of his sons...they both wanted to be king, so they ended up fracturing. Ten of the original twelve tribes ended up being in the northern kingdom, which was usually called Israel, and that is where Hosea works, though in the course of Hosea, Israel...the northern kingdom...is sometimes called Ephraim or Jacob as well; and then, of course, there was the southern kingdom, known as Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had its capital city in Samaria, and Judah retained the capital city of Jerusalem. As near as we can tell, Hosea's prophetic ministry spanned about twenty-five years, and most of it occurred during the reign of one of Israel's most evil kings, Jeroboam II.

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So, we know from history that the northern kingdom falls in 722 BC by the Assyrians and the southern kingdom falls in 586 BC by the Babylonians. So, this part of Hosea and most of his ministry is warning against this impending destruction that they have earned for themselves. If we just rewind all the way back to Deuteronomy, God tells Moses: If you obey me, you will be blessed; if you disobey me, you will be cursed and brought into foreign lands and foreign kings will come in and they will destroy you. They say: Yes, we can do it; but then they broke the covenant, and this...Hosea is primarily telling them that this judgment is coming.

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Right; so, Hosea, in other words, is before 722 BC when the Assyrians wipe out the northern kingdom, and we will see already in this episode, but also at the end, that Hosea does contain lots of promises of restoration. God will restore Israel. Historically, though, Darrell, we know that that is really...I mean, really, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel after the Assyrians wipe them out...we basically never hear from them again. They don't...I mean, mainly they were scattered in the diaspora. So, when we think about the restoration of Israel, it is really through the southern kingdom of Judah after the Babylonian exile, when the people come back.

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Starting in verse 2, it says: 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." ³So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

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Now, this is quite the prophetic calling, Darrell. Hosea has to find a woman known to be sexually loose and marry her. I don't know how he did it. I mean, it is not the kind of thing you would put a want ad out on, I guess; but anyway, God says go find somebody who is known to be promiscuous and marry her; and so, he does. He finds a woman who has, to our ears, rather the odd sounding name of Gomer; and we are told right from the start that the marriage was going to symbolize the way God regarded his own people. It is like God had ended up marrying a promiscuous woman, Israel. So, that is a rather startling beginning for this prophetic book in the Bible; but then it gets a little bit stranger. We are going to continue in Hosea 1 in verse 3.

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So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴Then the Lord said to Hosea, “Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵In that day I will break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel.” ⁶Gomer 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. ⁷Yet 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.” ⁸After she (Gomer) 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.

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So, these three names of these kids: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi. Oh, man; that is the... Those names are like an indictment. So, when those kids are walking around and they are calling their names, they are actually... They are hearing the judgment of God in those names. It is really, really powerful.

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The singer Johnny Cash once wrote a humorous song called *A Boy Named Sue*. It centered on the consequences of a father who decided to name his son with a girl’s name of Sue. It is kind of a funny song, but compared to the names of these kids, you know, the boy named Sue probably got off easy. Little baby Jezreel got named after a valley where some great sin had taken place, but it is also going to be the future location of a great loss for Israel. They have a little girl. Hosea and Gomer have a girl named No Love, that is a symbol that God is not going to show any love for the people; and then a third child is born called No People as a symbol that they would not be the people of God anymore.

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That last one is really particularly painful, I think, in the eyes of the people, because God always said: I will be your God and you will be my people. I will be your God and you will be my people. And even in the book of Revelation, he restores that when he says he will be dwelling with us in the new heaven and new earth. He says: I will be their God and they will be my people. So, for him to renounce them here because of their unfaithfulness could be exceedingly painful for God, and the situation is really messed up.

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Exactly; and yet, here is a curious thing, Darrell. For all the grimness that we just looked at here in Hosea 1, the chapter ends on kind of a high note. Here is Hosea 1:10: “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 and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.”

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Exactly; and yet, here is a curious thing, Darrell. For all the grimness that we just looked at here in Hosea 1, the chapter ends on kind of a high note. Here is Hosea 1:10: “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 and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.”

So, didn’t really expect this though, *the sand on the seashore* brings you right back to Genesis 12. God’s original promise to Abram: You will have descendants like the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore. So, who would have thought that this really grim chapter would end up on this note, harking back to the covenant; and that God is going to find a way somehow to keep that.

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We are going to loop back to that at the end of this program; but in just a moment, we will look at a couple of things that we learn in Hosea 2. So, stay tuned.

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Segment 2

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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. ³Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. ⁴I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. ⁵Their 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.' ⁶Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. ^{7a}She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them... ⁸She 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.

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Yes; so, right here we have some really strong language of a husband, who is God, who is being cheated on by his wife, Israel; and he is upset; and so, this is a metaphor that God uses of marriage, and he is saying: You have been unfaithful, Israel, and you actually don't realize that you are breaking the covenant that we made together; and that is an issue for God, and he is showing it with a very graphic image.

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So, it is the metaphor of marriage. Before Hosea is finished...and we will see this in the third program of this series...in the Old Testament, sometimes the relationship of God and Israel is husband and wife, and we get that here with Hosea and Gomer, right? He marries an unfaithful woman; and sometimes God is a father and Israel is his child. So, I mean, it toggles back and forth. When we get to Hosea Chapter 11, a very famous chapter, there the imagery will shift. God will be a father and Judah and Israel will be like a child; but the primary image here in Hosea, and particularly because of the relationship of Hosea and Gomer, is of marriage, and it is not real explicit in Hosea 2, but we really seem to be getting some language here, Darrell, that reminds us of the fact that God had finally settled his people into the Promised Land; and all along it was a land flowing with milk and honey. We read that over and over in the Old Testament. So, here we are seeing

references to food and drink, to fine linen and wool, to olive oil and wine; and it was God who gave Israel all these things.

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Yes; and in Deuteronomy...we keep going back to this...God says: Hey remember; when you get in the land and you eat to your fill and you have all the things you need...and you know, their enemies are gone...don't forget me. Because you will begin to deceive yourselves, thinking: Oh, we did all this ourselves. We got ourselves out...we delivered ourselves from Egypt; we earned this. So, God reminded them way back then, but they obviously lost that point. So, it is important to know that they went astray and their pride and their arrogance of following other gods has gotten them into all this trouble.

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Exactly; and you know, Darrell, that is really good that you just referenced Deuteronomy, because, indeed, God warns them, because they had spent forty years in the wilderness where if they had something to eat, it was manna or quail falling out of the sky. Obvious gift of God. They didn't have water; Moses hit a rock—water out of a rock—obviously from God; but when you get your own garden and vegetable garden, you have your own well and you draw your own water, you kind of forget that that is just as much the gift of God as anything. So, don't give yourself credit, Moses says over and over. Remember and do not forget, right? The great refrain of Deuteronomy.

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Now, when you give credit to someone other than the God who did all these things, that is the ultimate insult to God. If you take credit away from the God who provided you everything and you give it to not even the real God...you give it to the false god...that is the spiritual adultery that God is talking about with this metaphor of marriage. That is the ultimate breaking of your faithfulness to God. When your allegiance and your faithfulness and your thanks goes to a foreign god that is not even real.

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Yes; sometimes we talk about God as though God doesn't have any feelings; and you know, can God have hurt feelings? Well, the Bible, in the Old Testament in particular, says: Yes, he can. God has feelings, and they can be hurt; and this hurts; this stinks. We have had it in our life. You know, if you do something super nice for somebody, Darrell...if you do something really nice to me, but I never say thank you to you, and then later you hear me saying that I am actually giving credit to somebody else who wasn't you; well, that really...and it hurts even to God; and so, it is going to keep going here in Hosea 2, and let's hear what happens next, starting in verse 9.

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It says: "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. ¹⁰So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. ¹¹I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals. ¹²I 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. ¹³I 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.

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I think it is really interesting that when people sacrificed to Baal and Ashera, they would sacrifice for these very things; for the fertility, for the crops, for all these things. They were offering sacrifices to these foreign gods in an effort to get them to send crops and health and growth; and God is saying: I am in control of that and I am going to take it away because you are not acknowledging me.

I think it is really interesting that when people sacrificed to Baal and Ashera, they would sacrifice for these very things; for the fertility, for the crops, for all these things. They were offering sacrifices to these foreign gods in an effort to get them to send crops and health and growth; and God is saying: I am in control of that and I am going to take it away because you are not acknowledging me.

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And God worried about this all along, Darrell; and that is why also in books like Leviticus and Numbers, as the people are getting ready to go into the Promised Land, which happens finally in the book of Joshua, God again and again says remove the high places. What were the high places? Because the altars to Baal and Ashera, the two main false gods of the Canaanites, tended to be up on mountains...up on hills; and God said get rid of those things; dismantle every altar, every high-place temple; get rid of them, get rid of them, get rid of them; and the people said yes, yes, yes; we will, we will; and then they didn't. And so, some of those places were left intact, and they were left in place; and the next thing you know, the people are going there and giving credit to these false gods for the good things that God had done.

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So, all in all, what we get here...so, we just saw a few minutes ago that there is this kind of surprising end to Hosea Chapter 1 with some hope, but then in Chapter 2 now, through 13 verses here, we have had nothing but doom and gloom that God has taken such a dim view of them that he is going to take away everything they've got. However, as it turns out, Darrell, we are not going to get out of Hosea 2 without giving some hope, too; and we are going to look at that in just a moment, so stay tuned.

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Segment 3

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DARRELL DELANEY

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SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, as we just said, we just saw through thirteen whole verses in Hosea Chapter 2 that God paints a damning portrait of Israel's horrible sins and idolatry. The people of Israel took what Yahweh, the true God of Israel...they took what God had given them, and they gave credit for these gifts to the false Canaanite god of Baal; and as we just noted, for God, that stings really bad, even for God. But that is why, Darrell, that what comes next in Hosea 2 and then extends into Hosea 3, which we will also get to, is a little bit shocking.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; picking up in verse 14, it says: "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond 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.'" ¹⁷I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. ¹⁸In 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 long the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. ¹⁹I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. ²⁰I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. ^{23b}I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Darrell, I think the biggest surprise in these verses from Hosea 2 is the first word you read in verse 14: therefore. I mean, think of it this way: If years ago when my kids were little...when they were young; if they had really misbehaved I could imagine myself saying something to them like: Now then, you broke our household rules; you messed with some of the appliances in the kitchen; you broke the blender; you smashed one of Mommy's favorite pieces of china that she got from her grandmother. So, I am here to tell you that you are both in a lot of trouble. Therefore, we are taking you to Dairy Queen tonight so you can get your favorite flavors of ice cream. No, no, no! After a long streak of indictments and promised punishments, if a

therefore comes, it should be followed by *therefore*, you are both grounded for a week and *no* ice cream for the whole week! That is what you expect.

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DARRELL DELANEY

It is really crazy because the *therefore* turns us into a whole nuther direction; and I think this shows the heart of God, because God is upset and frustrated with the sins that Israel has done; and yet, he still loves them. He longs for a relationship with them; and so, he wants to restore them, but he cannot restore them without acknowledging this sin, because he is holy. So, we see both sides of God's heart in this book of Hosea. It is really, really interesting.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

The *therefore* of grace. God is saying: Like, I have kept my end of the covenant bargain with Israel; and somehow, some way, God is saying: I am going to help keep their end of the deal, too. God has been faithful. God has not messed up, but Israel seems repeatedly unable to keep their end of things, so God is going to figure that out, too.

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Oh, that is the echo. It reminds us of 1 Peter 2, when Peter talks about this...about God's people. He says in verse 9: But 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. ¹⁰Once you were not a people (there it is), but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; and that comes through there in Hosea 2; and Darrell, a lot of this hope carries over also into Hosea Chapter 3. Hosea 3 is a very short chapter. God returns now directly. So, the symbolism of marriage, which we saw in the first chapter with Hosea and the promiscuous woman, Gomer, whom he marries...that kind of...that specific reference kind of disappears in Hosea 2, but now here is Hosea 3. What I am going to read here...it is just five verses...the whole chapter.

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David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days.”
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So, he also... In the beginning of the book of Hosea, God is giving Hosea a visual reminder to the people of Israel when he marries an unfaithful wife, Gomer; and he is also, in this chapter, showing God’s heart again by God continuing to go back and restore Gomer and bring Gomer back into this marriage, which is what God needs to do with the people of Israel. He just wants to purify their hearts. He wants to bring them back because they are, after all, his people.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is a stunning reminder of the grace of God, and especially what we now, Darrell, know to be the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. As sinful human beings living in a fallen world, you know, we are pretty good at making all the wrong choices. Whether we are guilty of the kind of obvious idolatry Israel engaged in when worshipping Baal, I think, Darrell, most of us could likely admit that we too sometimes give less credit to God for the good things in our lives, and maybe a little too much credit to our own hard work. Again, as we have said before, even when assessing ourselves over against non-Christian neighbors or co-workers, you know, we don’t often see the free gift of grace given to us as the main difference between us and those people. Now we think: What is the difference between me and them; God’s grace? No; I am a better person. They sleep in Sunday mornings; I go to church. I make the right moral choices; they make the wrong moral choices. That is the difference between me and other people. No; the difference is this grace. We all need the therefore of grace that we see in Hosea Chapter 2.

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DARRELL DELANEY

And we need that grace, because the grace is the thing that restores us in a right relationship with Jesus; and we have to be honest about the fact that we are susceptible to be drawn away by all the things that tempt our

hearts; and so, we need the Holy Spirit to redirect us; we need the Holy Spirit to reorient us and realign us with the things of God; and even though Hosea's message tends to be a hard word and a difficult word for a lot of his book, there is a message of hope that let's us know that God's grace can simply restore us and bring us back.

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Yes, exactly; you know, and again, we have mentioned this in other programs before, but that very simple, little thing often called the Jesus prayer; you know, just to say that more than one time a day: Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner; and let's remember that that therefore of grace that we see in Hosea 2 is the grace for us as well; thanks be to God.

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Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we examine the many chapters of Hosea that describe Israel's sins and God's judgment, and discuss the lessons we can glean to inform our own faith with these difficult prophecies of Hosea.

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