

# God's Commitment to an Unfaithful Bride

Printed Text · Hosea 1:1-11

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: EXPLORE how God commanded Hosea to marry an unfaithful woman as a model for His love for Israel; REFLECT on God's desire for the restoration of broken relationships; and DEMONSTRATE faithfulness to God through a commitment to maintain faithful relationships with other people.

## In Focus

Cheryl pushed her cart through the produce section, trying to hurry. She had to be at Justin's soccer game in half an hour. Wheeling into the cereal aisle, Cheryl suddenly stopped and quickly turned around. "Darlique," she muttered. What was her sister doing in this part of town? Cheryl left her cart and darted to the restroom, determined not to be forced into a confrontation.

Later, at home, Cheryl thought about what had happened in the grocery store. "That was so silly," she said out loud. When had their little misunderstanding turned into this colossal issue? She had felt ridiculous hiding in the bathroom to avoid her sister. Cheryl thought about what she had read in her devotional that morning. It talked about being the first one to take a step toward reconciliation in a relationship, even if you felt you had been the one wronged.

"God, please help me to want to forgive Darlique," she prayed. "And please forgive me for not committing to humble myself enough to be the one to take the first step."

*God is a God of relationships. He is also a God of reconciliation. When you commit to restoring a broken relationship, what are some key factors you find helpful in fostering reconciliation?*

## Keep In Mind

"Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake" (Daniel 9:17, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

- A. **Whoredom** (Hosea 1:2) zanun (Heb.) – Adultery, fornication, prostitution
- B. **Have mercy** (vv. 6–7) rakham (Heb.) – To love deeply, have compassion

## Say It Correctly

**Beeri.** be-AY-ree

**Diblain.** Div-LIE-eem

**Jezreel.** JEZ-ree-el

## KJV

**Daniel 9:1** In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;  
2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

4 And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

7 O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

17 Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.

18 O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.

19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

## NLT

**Daniel 9:1** It was the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede, the son of Ahasuerus, who became king of the Babylonians.

2 During the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, learned from reading the word of the Lord, as revealed to Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years.

3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes.

4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands.

5 But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations.

6 We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land.

7 "Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame. This is true of all of us, including the people of Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel, scattered near and far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you.

17 "O our God, hear your servant's prayer! Listen as I plead. For your own sake, Lord, smile again on your desolate sanctuary.

18 "O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city—the city that bears your name—lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy.

19 "O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name."

## The People, Places, and Times

**Hosea.** Hosea, son of Beerī, was likely a native of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). He lived about the middle of the eighth century B.C., and his ministry appears to have begun around the same time as the prophet Amos. Hosea ministered for almost 40 years— prophesying throughout the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah and Jereboam II of Israel. Not much is known about

Hosea outside of what we learn about him in the book which bears his name.

**The Covenant.** In ancient times, “cutting” a covenant was essential to life. Parties would covenant together for many reasons: to protect their land or possessions, to show honor or earnestness in a business deal, to seal a marriage arrangement, and so forth. All people in biblical times understood how a covenant worked. It was more than just a contract; it was a pledge of loyalty and the giving of your entire life. God’s covenant with Israel, given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, was well-known to the people of Israel. It contained very specific blessings and curses, each tied to a specific point in the Law of Moses. If they disobeyed a specific law, God would curse them with a specific curse. If they obeyed a specific law, God would bless them in a specific way.

## Background

The valley of Jezreel was located in an area of central Israel that is today often called Megiddo. During the ministry of the prophet Elijah, Jezreel came to be a significant place. It was the place of Naboth’s vineyard, which was coveted by King Ahab (1 Kings 21). Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to Ahab, so Ahab’s queen Jezebel had Naboth murdered. The prophet Elijah reprimanded Ahab and Jezebel and foretold that their demise would take place on the very same land they had schemed to acquire.

Later, King Jehu did indeed defeat Ahab at Jezreel and began to rid the land of the blatant idolatry brought to the nation by Jezebel. By the time of Hosea, the third generation of Jehu’s descendants, Jereboam II, was on the throne. At this time, Israel appeared to be prosperous, vigorous, and strong. They had won back much of the territory previously stolen by their enemies. The house of Jereboam II was in power during the first three chapters of the book of Hosea. After that, we see a sad, quick succession of six kings in 25 years.

God instructed Hosea to prophesy that the strength of the Northern Kingdom would again be defeated at Jezreel, this time by the brutal Assyrians, because of the Israelites’ continual desertion of God and turning to idolatry. They took their military victories for granted and worshiped the false gods of Baal, Ashtoreth, and Molech.

## At-A-Glance

1. The Prophet’s Challenge (Hosea 1:1–2)
2. The Prophet’s Children (vv. 3–9)
3. The Prophet’s Promise (vv. 10–11)

## In Depth

### 1. The Prophet’s Challenge (Hosea 1:1–2)

The prophets would often use demonstrative examples or imagery to convey a message to the people. In the book of Hosea, the life of the prophet himself serves as the example of God’s message to the people of Israel and Judah. When God speaks His Word through the prophet Hosea, He gives him a startling command: marry an adulterous woman. Hosea obeys and marries a woman named Gomer. There is some debate over whether Gomer had adulterous tendencies or if she actually practiced prostitution when Hosea married her, but regardless, she was known to be sexually unfaithful.

God asks Hosea to be a living example to vividly point out the unfaithfulness of His people. By their continued and blatant idolatry, God’s people had committed adultery, breaking the covenant

relationship they had with Him.

## **2. The Prophet's Children (vv. 3–9)**

Hosea obeys God and marries Gomer. Just as God had once made a binding covenant with the people of Israel, Hosea is now bound by a covenant to Gomer, and just as God loves His people, Hosea loves his wife. She soon bears a son, whom God instructs to be named Jezreel. As noted above, Jezreel was the name of a place of significance in Israel's history, and means "God scatters." By instructing Hosea to name his son this, God sends a clear message to the Israelites that judgment is coming.

Hosea continues to proclaim God's warning, but the Israelites pay no attention. Soon, Gomer bears a daughter. As instructed by God, Hosea names the little girl "Loruhamah," which means "not loved" or "not pitied." This is a stronger warning than the first, clearly conveying that if Israel continues in their idolatry, God will no longer love nor forgive them. Israel still refuses to listen. Their worship of other gods reveals a flagrant and wanton disregard for God's love, which ultimately leads to their alienation from Him.

After she weans Loruhamah, Gomer gives birth to another son. His God-given name is Loammi, which means "not my people." Sadly, this child's name sums up the break in the covenant relationship between God and His people that He had warned would come. God's heart still longs for His people, but they will not turn back to Him.

## **3. The Prophet's Promise (vv. 10–11)**

Though the Israelites persist in their wicked ways, God foresees a time when His people would repent and return to Him. In His great mercy and love, God reveals that their punishment would only be for a time. He has a plan for renewal and blessing. God, through Hosea, tells the people of Israel that one day they will be restored to God, and in the very place where He had said, "You are not my people," they would be called the "sons of God." This is in great contrast to verse 2, where the people of Israel are called "children of whoredoms."

God would not only restore His covenant with Israel, but He promises that Israel and Judah will someday be reunited into one nation. Though we are not told the eventual outcome of Hosea and Gomer's marriage, we can clearly see the promise of blessings and joy that result when reconciliation takes place between God and His chosen people.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Who was king of Israel when Hosea speaks to Israel (Hosea 1:1)?
2. What is the significance of the last mention of Jezreel in this passage (v. 11)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. God longs for us to be faithful in our relationship with Him and with others, but sometimes we are unfaithful. What does it mean to be unfaithful to God or to someone else? In what ways might a believer act unfaithfully toward God?

## **Liberating Lesson**

Unfaithfulness in relationships leads to brokenness and alienation. The tragedy of divorce, the ugliness of a breach between lifelong friends, or the pain of separation between siblings or other family members are all too common. Yet God longs to bring reconciliation to those relationships. He also desires for believers to develop empathy and compassion for others who have been hurt in relationships. When we experience restoration and forgiveness in our relationship with God, we can learn to extend that same grace to others.

It can be hard to extend grace when we have unresolved issues in our own lives from past relationships. Many who are unaware of the significance of the hurt and pain they have incurred from these relationships have become toxic in their current interactions with others. This results in more unhappy marriages and families, and ultimately it affects society overall, as the foundation of society—the family— is in need of serious repair.

## **Application For Activation**

Knowing that God is a God of reconciliation means we can be optimistic and hopeful even during trying circumstances of a difficult or broken relationship. Ask God to show you your part in forgiving or asking for forgiveness. Make a commitment to God that you will do your best to maintain faithfulness in all relationships.

## **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## **More Light on the Text**

### **Hosea 1:1-11**

**1 The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beer, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.**

Hosea 1:1 begins with the formulaic “The word of the Lord” found in other prophetic books. It records to whom the Lord spoke—in this instance Hosea—and the time the messenger’s ministry took place. The introduction refers to the time of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. This would place Hosea’s ministry in the eighth century B.C.

**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.**

Hosea 1:2–9 is written as a third person, biographical account of Hosea’s marriage and children, which symbolize Israel’s fate. It is important for the modern reader to understand that the Old Testament prophets used socially and culturally relevant situations and examples to convey their messages. The marriage metaphor was a way of using a common social institution, such as marriage and the ancient Israelites’ views of the roles of husbands and wives, to describe the breach in the covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel. God prompted Hosea to use demonstrative signs to communicate what was viewed as an act of prostitution committed by Israel against the Lord.

In verses 2 and 3, Hosea recalls the Lord’s command for him to take a wife of “whoredoms” and children of whoredoms. The Hebrew noun *zenunim* (zeh-noo-NEEM), translated whoredoms in the KJV, is also translated “promiscuous woman” (NIV) and “harlotry” (NASB). Traditionally, commentators have interpreted this as a command for Hosea to marry a prostitute. However, a more accurate interpretation of *zenunim* would be to marry a woman who is sexually promiscuous or had sexual relations outside of marriage. In a culture that placed a high value on women being sexually pure at the time of their marriage, or being faithful in marriage, to the point of threat of death (Deuteronomy 22:20–21), all the Israelites would be shocked to be likened to a promiscuous woman.

Hosea shows that by entering into this marriage, he is performing a sign-act symbolizing the state of Israel’s relationship with the Lord. The people, represented as the wife of promiscuity, have betrayed the Lord, figured as her husband. Thus, the Lord accuses the nation of Israel of infidelity or apostasy, turning from worshiping the Lord alone to seeking other gods. Hosea does as the Lord commanded and takes a woman named Gomer as his wife.

**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.**

The Lord instructed Hosea a second time, telling him to call his firstborn son Jezreel, which is Hebrew for “God sows.” The naming of Hosea’s son was a continuation of the sign-act. The idiom “reap what you sow” is applicable in verse 4. The Lord will sow or bring upon the dynasty of Jehu what it sowed in spilling the blood of the house of Ahab in Jezreel. Jehu, the grandfather of King Jeroboam son of Joash (cf. v. 1), killed Joram, son of King Abab of Israel, along with his mother, Jezebel, and every family member and supporter of the Omride dynasty when he was an army commander, for their idolatry (see 2 Kings 9–10). Although the Lord had anointed Jehu king of Israel and commanded him to put an end to the house of Ahab, the Lord may have denounced the brutality with which Jehu carried out the assault. Moreover, Jehu himself was guilty of forming political alliances with other nations that were condemned by the Lord. Jehu’s dynasty came to an end just as predicted in 747 B.C. with the assassination of King Zechariah.

The parallel pronouncement that the house of Israel would end was more than a prophecy about the end of a particular king’s rule—it also declared the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The Northern Kingdom was severely weakened following the downfall of Jehu’s dynasty, leaving Israel vulnerable to an invasion by Assyria. The idiom “break the bow” meant that the Lord would cause Israel to fall in a military defeat. Ironically, the destruction of Israel would lead to the scattering of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom, perhaps also symbolizing Hosea’s son’s name.

**6 And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah: 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.**

Gomer conceives once more and gives birth to a daughter, whom the Lord instructs Hosea to name Loruhamah (lo-roo-khaw-MAW), Hebrew for “without compassion,” “not pitied,” or “not loved.” She is to be called such because she is a sign of the Lord’s Word to Hosea that when Israel fell, the Lord would show no mercy on them. The meaning of the parallel phrase in Hebrew is difficult to interpret; two interpretations are “I will annihilate them completely” or “I will certainly not forgive them.”

Some scholars contend that verse 7 is a later addition due to the focus on Judah instead of Israel, and disagree whether it should be attributed to Hosea or a later editor. The message, in contrast to verse 6, is that the Lord would have compassion on Judah and spare it from Assyrian devastation. However, the Lord would deliver Judah from the Assyrians, but not by military might. Instead, the text shows that Judah managed to avoid being overtaken by the Assyrians by paying tribute to King Tiglathpileser III of Assyria in 732 B.C. (2 Kings 16:5–9; Isaiah 7:1–16; cf. 2 Chronicles 28:5–21), and later King Sennacherib of Assyria stopped short of destroying Judah in 701 B.C.

**8 Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. 9 Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.**

In the ancient world, as well as some places today, children were nursed until around the age of three. Therefore, verse 8 provides the reader with chronological information that is not provided elsewhere. The reader can infer that there were approximately three years between the birth of Loruhamah and her younger brother, whom the Lord told Hosea to name Loammi (lo-am-MEE): “not my people.” The marriage metaphor, from the accusation of adultery in verse 2 to the estrangement in verses 4–7, is taken to its final conclusion in verse 9, with the Lord announcing that the relationship between the Lord and Israel is ending in divorce. The declaration “You are not my people, and I am not your God” (NIV) is a reversal of the covenant the Lord made with Israel that they would be God’s people and He would be their God (Exodus 6:7). It is also thought to be the words written on the bill of divorce required by the Torah (Deuteronomy 24:1).

**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.**

Verses 10 and 11 conclude this chapter with a series of speeches by the Lord strikingly different from the message above. The Hebrew conjunction waw/vav can be translated as “yet, for, and, but.” The use of “yet” as a conjunction here conveys that the Lord’s disaffection toward Israel will not last forever. The people’s infidelity results in the destruction of the land and their removal from it, yet the Lord promises that the land of Israel will be repopulated with its people, and they will be too numerous to count. This is reminiscent of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the sand on the shore (Genesis 22:17). Those whom the Lord once declared were children of promiscuity and “not my people” will be called children of the living God.

The reversal of Israel’s fate will result in Israel and Judah being united under a single “head”, or leader, as in the days of David and Solomon before the kingdom split in two. Moreover, the unification implies the restoration of the covenant and the security and blessings that accompany it. Metaphorically, the people are again in the land of Egypt before the Lord entered into covenant with them; yet, the Lord would symbolically bring them up from Egypt to the wilderness where they once declared their loyalty to Him. Now Jezreel, which stood for judgment, destruction, and scattering (1:4–5), represents a place where redemption and restoration will occur.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Psalm 51:6-12

## **Tuesday**

Psalm 89:24-29

## **Wednesday**

Psalm 119:25-32

## **Thursday**

Galatians 4:16-25

## **Friday**

Hosea 4:1-6

## **Saturday**

Hosea 2:18-23

## **Sunday**

Hosea 1