

Just consider this as a scenario, **Mark**, a church elder, a God fearing and God seeking young man, comes up to you and said 'God has told me to go out and marry a prostitute' not someone who has been, but someone who is right now living the life of a prostitute... how many of you would try your best to give him good counsel and talk him out of it?... Well that's where the book of Hosea begins - It's a crazy kind of story that is just too farfetched to imagine happening. Well that is until you watch the stories unfold on the sofa of Jeremy Kyle – not that anyone here would know the programme of course..... But seriously here are some actual Jeremy Kyle show titles – (Slide)



**Jeremy Kyle Show
Titles:**
My Mother Let Me Be a Teenage Prostitute.
Admit You're a Prostitute Then Prove My Boyfriend's the Dad.
My Ex Was A Prostitute Why Should I Believe Her Baby's Mine?
I Proved You're A Prostitute, Now Prove Your Child Is Mine.
Is My Wife A Secret Prostitute?

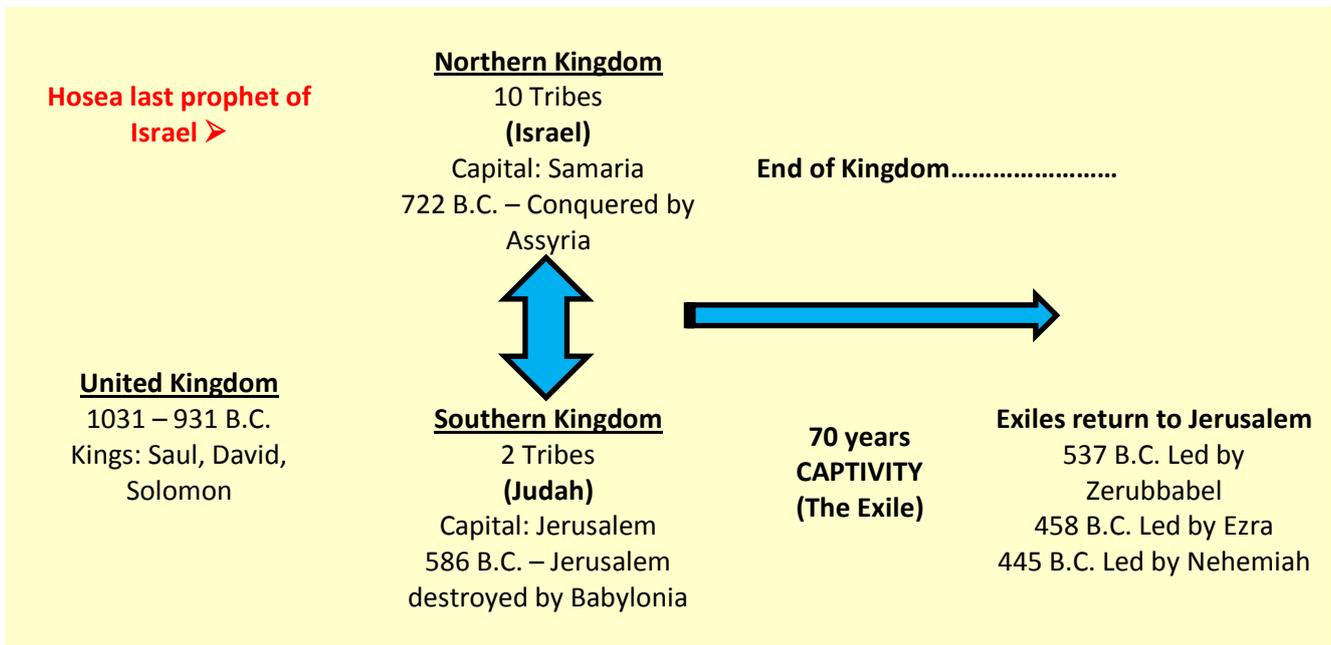
The sad part is that none of these stories are likely to end in the reconciliation we will learn about this evening – in fact from what I can gather all of the shows usually start with an ultimatum of sorts where people want their suspicions proven right or wrong through the use of lie detector or DNA tests and then if they are proven right they walk away from their relationships for good. Actually this programme is really sad, because people literally wash their dirtiest laundry on national television and often leave alone and broken hearted. Sometimes there's reconciliation and help – but often the programme just feed of the hate and shame of the people seeking their 15 minutes of fame.

But that's enough of that we need to focus on God's word and the truth that sets us free – although I think the message from Hosea is about as challenging as it gets – but it is quite simply the Gospel lived out – for all to see.

First some background: As this is the first of the series on Minor Prophets I think it would be useful to explain the terms Major and Minor Prophets, which are simply a way to divide the Old Testament prophetic books. The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Minor Prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The Minor Prophets are also sometimes called The Twelve.

The Major Prophets are described as "major" because their books are longer and the content has broad, even global implications. Whereas the Minor Prophets are described as "minor" because their books are shorter and the content is more narrowly focused (although Hosea and Zechariah are almost as long as Daniel). But Minor does not mean these books we are going to work our way through are any less inspired than the Major Prophets. It is simply a matter of God choosing to reveal more to the Major Prophets than He did to the Minor Prophets.

Just to put Hosea into perspective we can look at the next slide which shows that Hosea was a prophet to Israel which was also known as the Northern Kingdom following the split where Judah or the Southern Kingdom. While Judah is referred to a number of times in this book, the prophecy of Hosea was intended primarily for the Kingdom of Israel. It was important that Hosea should concentrate his attention upon the people of Israel in particular, because this division of God's chosen nation was rapidly approaching the culmination of its time of grace, while Judah was first carried away into the Babylonian captivity a hundred and thirty-five years later, in the year 587 B. C.



Can we have the last slide please?

The Book of Hosea			
Chapters 1-3 HOSEA'S MARRIAGE <i>Hosea's Love for an Adulterous Wife</i> (PERSONAL)		Chapters 4-14 HOSEA'S MESSAGE <i>God's Love for an Adulterous People</i> (NATIONAL)	
- Marriage - Children - Unfaithfulness - Separation - Reconciliation		(CH 4-6) Israel's Unfaithfulness	(CH 6-10) Israel's Consequences
Adulterous Wife – Faithful Husband		Adulterous Nation – Faithful God	
Theme verse Hosea 1:2 (NIV)	When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: <i>“Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her,</i> (PERSONAL – HOSEA'S MARRIAGE) <i>For like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.”</i> (NATIONAL – HOSEA'S MESSAGE)		
Theme	God's Faithful Love Towards His Unfaithful People		

In the book of Hosea the first 3 chapters cover Hosea's personal journey through marriage; addressing Hosea's love for his adulterous wife. It covers his marriage, the birth of children, unfaithfulness of the wife, separation and reconciliation. In other versions it reads

Hosea 1:2 (NKJV)

2 When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea:
 “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry,
 For the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.”

Hosea 1:2 The Message (MSG)

2 The first time God spoke to Hosea he said:

“Find a whore and marry her. Make this whore the mother of your children.

And here’s why: This whole country has become a whorehouse, unfaithful to me, God.”

Hosea 1:2 Living Bible (TLB)

2 Here is the first message:

The Lord said to Hosea, “Go and marry a girl who is a prostitute, so that some of her children will be born to you from other men. This will illustrate the way my people have been untrue to me, committing open adultery against me by worshiping other gods.”

In chapters 4 – 14 this covers Hosea’s message to God’s people of Israel. This is a message of God’s love for his adulterous people. With Chapters 4-6 speaking on Israel’s unfaithfulness, chapters 6-10 covering the consequences of Israel’s sin and finally chapters 11 – 14 covering the faithfulness of God in pursuing and taking back his people as his own.

We are going to focus on the chapter 1 and 3 mainly, looking at the personal journey taken by Hosea because in reality God was using Hosea not just as his messenger but he used his life to live out the prophecy spoken over Israel – so please open your Bibles as the words won’t be appearing on the screen.

Hosea 1 (NIV)

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:

Hosea’s Wife and Children

² 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.” ³ So he married Gomer [which means “completion,” that is, the filling up of the measure of idolatry, or ripeness of consummate wickedness.] daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. So the Bible identifies this first born child as Hosea’s child.

⁴ Then the LORD said to Hosea, “Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵ In that day I will break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel.”

The word Jezreel means “God scatters.” This name is probably indicative of the fact that God was going to punish and scatter the nation for its sinfulness. But has a double meaning since God says He is going to punish the house of Jehu for what he did at the valley of Jezreel. What was so bad about what Jehu did at Jezreel? If you read the story about Jehu in 1 and 2 Kings, you see that God told Jehu to destroy Ahab’s family. (Ahab was husband of the well-known Jezebel and they promoted Baal worship in Israel. If you’ll remember, Elijah was the prophet that prophesied to them.) Though the execution of Baal’s servants was certainly in accord with the Lord’s will (cf. 1 Kings 18:40), Jehu’s attack on the house of David went too far. Jehu went beyond the call of duty. Not only did he kill the sons of Ahab, he killed all possible competition to the throne and claimed God’s sanction for doing it. And Jehu kept the golden calf worship. Why? Probably for the same reason as Jeroboam who was King at the time of Hosea. The problem with both Jeroboam and Jehu, was that they were pursuing their own agendas or goals and they changed their concept of God in the process worshiping idols and living outside the law.

⁶ Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Note this time there is no reference to Hosea, and so we can assume that this child was born out of adultery. Then the LORD said to Hosea, “Call her Lo-Ru-ham-mah (which means “not loved”), for I will no longer show love to Israel that I should at all forgive them. ⁷ Yet 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.” Showing a distinction between the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Bible then says;

⁸ After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Again no reference to Hosea so another child from adultery 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. Although these are direct instructions to Hosea, to actually marry a prostitute and take on children that are not

his – the names of the children are as such to give a message to the people of Israel so the last verse, verse 10, this book flips back to speaking about God’s people Israel – and offers some hope -

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; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. **God is saying right from the start that there will be reconciliation not only between God and Israel but also that the two kingdoms will be reunited by a single leader again – and of course he means Jesus. So at the end of all this bad news there is a glimmer of hope.**

In chapter 2 Hosea starts to outline God’s word to Israel -

2 “Say of your brothers, ‘My people,’ and of your sisters, ‘My loved one.’

Israel Punished and Restored

² “Rebuke your mother, rebuke her,
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband.

In this chapter, Hosea is saying things in a special way. He says that God is like a judge. This judge is going to decide things about Israel. He will decide them in a ‘court’. First, he asks his children to argue with their mother. Which children are these? The ones that understand what God wants. Their mother, Israel, is the part of Israel that does not follow God. And so God is going to make a judgement against the children and the mother.

‘She is not my wife’ (verse 2) is perhaps a legal way of saying something. God says that he does not want to be Israel’s husband any more. Their marriage is now over. But God does not want to end the marriage. He wants his wife to return to him. He wants his wife to change the way she behaves. But God is a judge too and will make Israel pay for her *sins. This is because they have not been true to him. He has the legal power to do this.

When Israel was born, she needed God. But when she grew up, she worshipped false gods (verses 4-5). The men she loved were the Baals. This was as bad as a woman who is not true to her husband. God decides to punish her. He will make sure that she cannot go where she wants. Walls and other things will stop her. Then she will want to return to God.

⁷ She will chase after her lovers but not catch them;
she will look for them but not find them.

Then she will say,

‘I will go back to my husband as at first,
for then I was better off than now.’

Verse 7 She will repent and the marriage will not end. But this idea of repenting does not last for long. Hosea will quickly bring the people back to the idea of judgement. Israel forgot that God gave her everything. God gave her the grain, wine and oil. She thought that Baal gave her the silver and gold. But it was God who gave her real riches. So for the second time, God becomes like a judge. He will take away her riches. There will be no grain and no wine. Israel will have no clothes. This happened after 748 BC. There was war between Assyria and Israel and things became difficult.

¹¹ I will stop all her celebrations:
her yearly festivals, her New Moons,
her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals.

God was angry because Israel’s holidays became days of Baal (verse 11). God wanted people to rest on the Sabbath. But this, too, became a holiday for eating (see Amos 8:5). Hosea comes back to the idea of a prostitute. Hosea perhaps means that this is like the time in Exodus 32:2. This was when the people of Israel worshipped the young cow in the desert. Aaron made this young cow out of gold.

In verse 14 -16 Hosea says what the judge is going to do. But this time it is a message of love.

¹⁴ “Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the wilderness
and speak tenderly to her.

¹⁵ There 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.’”

The desert was the place where God and Israel ‘married’. This was where Israel needed God. God will use kind words. These are the words that a husband uses before he marries a wife. Perhaps Hosea is thinking of a time far in the future. It will be after the time that God has punished Israel. Trouble Valley (the Valley of Achor) was a place where Israel did not obey God (Joshua 7:24). It was a place where a man broke God’s covenant. It was a place of sin, it was a place where God’s people broke his heart – but every time God is willing to come into that place to return to the very thing that hurt him the most and offers hope – a door through which we can escape – and as we are told in Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.* God meets us and offers us a way out – IF we are willing to take it.

¹⁷ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips;
no longer will their names be invoked.

¹⁸ In 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 along the ground.

Bow and sword and battle
I will abolish from the land,
so that all may lie down in safety.

¹⁹ I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.

²⁰ I will betroth you in faithfulness,
and you will acknowledge the LORD.

But, in the future, Israel will not need Baal any more. Israel will not worship Baal because Israel will not know anything about him. Nobody will hear about Baal. Nobody will remember him (verse 17). People will only remember the name of God. In this future time, Israel will have two blessings:

- Animals will not be able to hurt the people of Israel.
- There will be no more war.

There will be a covenant between God and Israel. Animals will not eat crops. There will be no more exiles. God will make Israel a good place to live in again. This is not because God will change his mind. Nor will it be because Israel will deserve this. It is because God is being true to his covenant.

The word ‘love’ (verse 19) does not explain this idea completely. Hosea uses the special Hebrew word ‘hesed’. This word means being true to a covenant a ‘covenant of love’ Hosea is perhaps describing a time when Israel will be very different. Perhaps there will be many more people added into this new Israel. God will finish the old marriage but he will bring back a new marriage. The new marriage will be fair and true. God will have mercy on Israel. It will be for all time. In Israel, a man paid money to the father of his future wife. In the future, God himself will pay the money for his wife (Israel). He will be the husband and father. God himself will bring the rain. Baal will not bring it. The rain will give Israel everything that the people of Israel need.

²¹ “In that day I will respond,”
declares the LORD—
“I will respond to the skies,
and they will respond to the earth;
²² and the earth will respond to the grain,
the new wine and the olive oil,
and they will respond to Jezreel. ^[h]
²³ I will plant her for myself in the land;
I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ ^[i]
I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ^[j] ‘You are my people’;
and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”

God declares that he will bring about fruitfulness and The name Jezreel will from now on mean ‘God plants’ not scatters. And all of Hosea’s children will be part of this future. Despite In the past, not belonging to Hosea. In the future, they will belong to him.

And finally in chapter 3 we see how this prophecy is lived out in the life of Hosea. His wife has now abandoned him and their 3 children; and returned to the life of prostitution. She has subsequently been sold on into slavery – this would be the equivalent of someone today volunteering to be sex trafficked. Gomer was taken out of prostitution and loved and given all she needed by Hosea; a good man – but she chose sin. She chose to return to what was familiar even though it was unpleasant. So we see in chapter 3, Hosea pursues her on God’s say so yet again.

Hosea’s Reconciliation with His Wife

³ The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”

² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. ³ Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”

Homer the legal husband of Gomer went after her, he didn’t wait for Gomer to return as a prodigal wife – he pursued her – more than that he paid all he had to buy her back. Her sinfulness, her rebellion and her choice cost Hosea not Gomer. How scandalous is that. How many of us here could do that – honestly? Not just forgive enough to let them back in the marital home but pay for them to be there? – well the truth is – sin costs. It costs the people around you, pain usually – and usually the pain of your sin can be more acutely suffered by those around you than you yourself. Adultery is a sin that destroys relationships in this world, unforgiveable some may say – it’s often termed even by Christians as being something that can’t be forgotten or gotten past in a marriage. But look at the picture of marriage posed by God from the beginning. He loved Adam and Eve and gave them everything. They chose another, they chose themselves and satan over God – they chose to follow the father of lies over the Loving father their creator. God’s people from then on went through cycles of disobedience – until the final pay out was made – and that was by Jesus. You see. God hates sin, he remembers all our wickedness – we cannot treat our sin lightly – sin is so bad in our lives that the only way it can be covered over is by the sacrifice of God himself. Think on that for a minute – you sin, my sin – can only be put behind us and God so that we can stand before him and not die – because he died for us first. Now that’s scandalous Grace – not weak and woolly – Jesus loves you no matter what – but all powerful love – a love that cost him everything he had – his life.

Love travels a difficult road in a sinful world. Hosea has shown us just how sad and difficult a journey love can be. But this book also shows us how we can appreciate God’s love – and begin to comprehend the cost of our sinful lives to God. One thing I think we need to take into our lives today from this is the forgiveness of others in our lives – and that that forgiveness may hurt us, may cost us – but it is possible. If Hosea a mere man, an obedient man at that but just a human – if he can forgive his wife after all she has done – then we can forgive at least the same. We also need to check our life for other idols, for other loves that come higher than God – and take it to him – repent and turn and receive the blessings that living in grace will give you. **Let us pray.**