



To the hard of hearing you shout,
and for the almost-blind you
draw huge and startling figures.

—Flannery O'Connor

JUDGMENT, SALVATION, AND HOPE

The Message of the Minor Prophets

Hosea: *“I Will Love Them Freely”*

Hosea 1:1-3

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: 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 daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

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Outline

1. Idolatry: The Sin of Spiritual Adultery
2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal
3. Grace: The God of Steadfast Love

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1. Idolatry: The Sin of Spiritual Adultery

Hosea 1:1-3; 2:2-5, 13; 13:1-2

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1. Idolatry: The Sin of Spiritual Adultery

a. Gomer and Israel: Two Unfaithful Wives (1:1-3; 2:2-5, 13)

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Hosea 2:2-4

“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. ³ Otherwise 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. ⁴ I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery.

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Hosea 2:5,13

⁵ Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace . . .

¹³ I 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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1. Idolatry: The Sin of Spiritual Adultery

- a. Gomer and Israel: Two Unfaithful Wives (1:1-3; 2:2-5, 13)
- b. Idolatry and Judgment: The “problem” of God’s wrath (13:1-2; 8:2-5)

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Hosea 13:1-2

When Ephraim spoke, people trembled; he was exalted in Israel. But he became guilty of Baal worship and died. ² Now they sin more and more; they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of these people, “They offer human sacrifices! They kiss calf-idols!”

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Hosea 8:2-5

Israel cries out to me, 'Our God, we acknowledge you!' ³ But Israel has rejected what is good; an enemy will pursue him. ⁴ They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction. ⁵ Samaria, throw out your calf-idol! My anger burns against them.

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Deuteronomy 4:23-24

Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. ²⁴ For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

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Anger—no peevish fit of temper, but just, generous, scalding indignation-passes (not necessarily at once) into embracing, exultant, re-welcoming love. That is how friends and lovers are truly reconciled. Hot wrath, hot love. Such anger is the fluid that love bleeds when you cut it . . .

Wrath and pardon are both, as applied to God, analogies; but they belong together to the same circle of analogy—the circle of life, and love, and deeply personal relationships.



All the liberalizing and "civilizing" analogies only lead us astray. Turn God's wrath into mere enlightened disapproval, and you also turn His love into mere humanitarianism. The "consuming fire" and the "perfect beauty" both vanish.

—C. S. Lewis

1. Idolatry: The Sin of Spiritual Adultery

- a. Gomer and Israel: Two Unfaithful Wives (1:1-3; 2:2-5, 13)
- b. Idolatry and Judgment: The “problem” of God’s wrath (13:1-2; 8:2-5)
- c. Spiritual Adultery: The idols of our hearts (2 Cor. 11:1-2; James 4:3-4)

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2 Corinthians 11:1-2

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

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James 4:3-4

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

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2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal

Hosea 6:1-2, 4-6; 8:2-4, 11-14; 10:12; 14:1-3

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Hosea 6:1-2

“Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.

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2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal

a. The meaning of repentance: returning & righteousness vs. ritual & religion (6:4-6; 8:2-4, 12-14; 10:12)

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Hosea 6:4-6

“What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. ⁵ Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth— then my judgments go forth like the sun. ⁶ For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

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Hosea 8:2-4

Israel cries out to me, 'Our God, we acknowledge you!' ³ But Israel has rejected what is good; an enemy will pursue him. ⁴ They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.

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Hosea 8:11-14

¹¹“Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning. ¹² I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something foreign. ¹³ Though they offer sacrifices as gifts to me, and though they eat the meat, the Lord is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: They will return to Egypt.

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Hosea 10:12

Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

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2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal

- a. The meaning of repentance: returning & righteousness vs. ritual & religion (6:4-6; 8:2-4, 12-14; 10:12)
- b. The way of repentance (14:1-3)

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Hosea 14:1-3

Return, Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! ² Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. ³ Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount warhorses. We will never again say ‘Our gods’ to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion.”

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2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal

b. The way of repentance (14:1-3)

- Confess your sins: *“Take words with you and return to the Lord”*

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2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal

b. The way of repentance (14:1-3)

- Confess your sins: *“Take words with you and return to the Lord”*
- Seek forgiveness: *“Say to him: “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously...”*

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2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal

b. The way of repentance (14:1-3)

- Confess your sins: *“Take words with you and return to the Lord”*
- Seek forgiveness: *“Say to him: “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously...”*
- Turn from idols: *“We will never again say ‘Our gods’ to what our own hands have made”*

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2. Repentance: The Call to Covenant Renewal

b. The way of repentance (14:1-3)

- Confess your sins: *“Take words with you and return to the Lord”*
- Seek forgiveness: *“Say to him: “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously...”*
- Turn from idols: *“We will never again say ‘Our gods’ to what our own hands have made”*
- Trust God’s grace: *“in you the fatherless find compassion”*

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3. Grace: The God of Steadfast Love

Hosea 3:1-5; 2:14-20; 11:8-9; 13:14; 14:4

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3. Grace: The God of Steadfast Love

a. Redemption and reconciliation: Hosea and Gomer reprise (3:1-5)

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Hosea 3:1-5

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 [five bushels] 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

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Hosea 3:1-5

toward you.”⁴ For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods.

⁵ Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days.

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3. Grace: The God of Steadfast Love

- a. Redemption and reconciliation: Hosea and Gomer reprise (3:1-5)
- b. Covenant and compassion: The “I Wills” of Yahweh (2:14-20; 11:8-9; 13:14; 14:4)

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Hosea 2:14-16

“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.’”

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Hosea 2:17, 19-20

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

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Hosea 11:8-9

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. ⁹ I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you.

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Hosea 13:14; 14:4

13:14 I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?

14:4 I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.

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- b. Covenant and compassion: The “I Wills” of Yahweh (2:14-20; 11:8-9; 13:14; 14:4)
- c. Salvation through judgment: The Bridegroom’s sacrifice for his wayward bride (Eph. 5:25)

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Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

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God's Unfaithful Wife

A biblical theology of
spiritual adultery



The biblical story lifts up before us a vision of God as our lover. The gospel is not an imperialistic human philosophy making overrated universal claims, the gospel sounds the voice of our husband, who has proven his love for us and who calls for our undivided love in return. The gospel reveals that as we look out into the universe, ultimately reality is not cold, dark, blank space; ultimate reality is romance.

Raymond C. Ortlund Jr

Series Editor: D. A. Carson

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There is a God above with love in his eyes for us and infinite joy to offer us, and he has set himself upon winning our hearts for himself alone. The gospel tells the story of God's pursuing, faithful, wounded, angry, overruling, transforming, triumphant love, and it calls us to answer him with... love.

—Ray Ortlund

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The Message of the Minor Prophets

Hosea: *“I Will Love Them Freely”*