

THE PREACHER & THE PROSTITUTE  
THE BOOK OF HOSEA





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THE BOOK OF HOSEA

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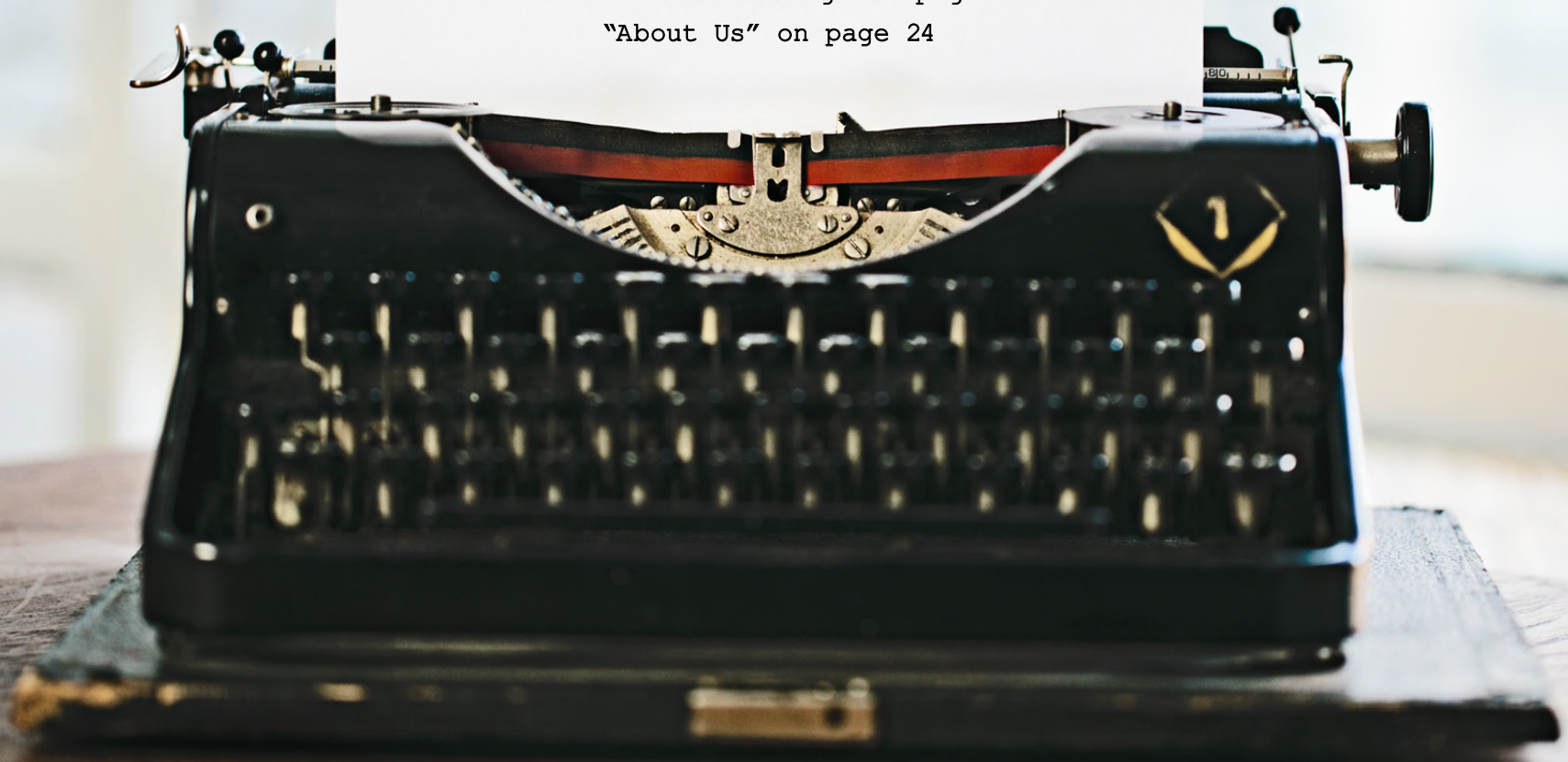
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# INTRODUCTION

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# INTRODUCTION

**“BEHOLD, I WILL ALLURE HER, AND BRING HER INTO THE WILDERNESS,  
AND SPEAK TENDERLY TO HER.” — HOSEA 2V14**

The book of Hosea tells the breathtaking love story of a preacher and a prostitute.

The scene takes place during the final decades of the 8th century B.C.. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is enjoying a season of prosperity in the midst of political turmoil and unrest. Here, we are introduced to a prophet who is attentive to the Lord's every command. His name is Hosea, which means 'Salvation'.

His life takes an unexpected turn when he is called by the Lord to marry a woman. Not just any woman but literally 'a wife of whoredom' (1:2). Hosea meets Gomer and before the Lord declares a commitment to love and cherish her until death. Theirs is a marriage made in heaven.

It is a beautiful picture: a precious bride standing by the side of her proud bridegroom. In many ways, it is a story that perhaps could have ended at the altar with the couple's first kiss and the rolling credits 'they lived happily ever after'. This however is no euphoric romance novel or Hollywood picture; it is a tale of true love— it is real and raw. It is an emotive and multifaceted journey through the height of soul-satisfying splendour and the depth of heart-crushing betrayal.

Their union serves as a symbol of the Lord's covenantal relationship with Israel. Hosea represents the faithfulness of the Lord who pursues a bride of iniquity. Israel is Gomer, the rebellious and unfaithful bride who is unrelenting in her deceit.

# INTRODUCTION

Instead of enjoying the love of the Lord she seeks love in the house of another. Israel's infatuation with lies, idolatry and covenantal transgression not only brings about her ruin but also deals a heavy blow to the heart of an all-loving God.

The image and poetry throughout this book paint a very confronting picture of human rebellion. Rejection of God, in its many and varied forms, is not trivial but a personal and cosmic tragedy. And whilst the story of Hosea emphasises the severity of all human sin, its spotlight is specifically on the disaster of covenantal unfaithfulness. Gomer is not merely an acquaintance or even a friend of Hosea—she is his chosen bride. Likewise, Israel holds a special and unique privilege with the Lord yet chooses to treat her vow and promise with contempt.

Like the people of God before us, the bride of Christ today is prone to wander and wound the heart of our Lord. Whilst wearing the ring of God's covenantal blessing, we find ourselves in bed with another.

This book pulls back the covers of our idolatry to reveal with searing accuracy our nakedness and rebellion. We are Gomer. Yet it is in the darkness of our sin that we see the brightness of God's redeeming love.

As Hosea remained faithful to his unfaithful bride so the Lord remains faithful to His people. He is committed to rebels and in His promise, He revealed a great plan of rescue and restoration. His pursuing love came at a great cost to Himself as He seeks to not only call us home, but capture our hearts. We, along with all people, are to see His love, hear His plea and receive with joy-filled delight the hand of our redeemer.

# THE SETTING

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# THE SETTING

The first verse of this book sets the scene: the word of the Lord comes to the prophet Hosea in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam the king of Israel. This is a period spanning 753 BC to 687 BC, a tumultuous and pivotal moment in the history of God's people.

By this stage God's people were divided into two nations: Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Israel –sometimes referred to as 'Ephraim' by Hosea–was in the midst of a period of unprecedented prosperity but their wealth masked sins that were destroying them from the inside. Though they enjoyed great security and comfort, they have forgotten their God (13:6), and their greed for wealth prompted widespread corruption and oppression of the poor.

Worse still, by mixing with the people of the lands around them, Israel had fallen under the

spell of Baal , a pagan god credited with rain, fertility and agriculture. Where the God of Israel had given His people commandments that honoured life and protected order, Baal worship was selfish and base, with child sacrifices and sexual perversions. One depraved ceremony called for Baal worshippers to perform sexual acts with prostitutes at the pagan temples in an effort to prompt the pagan deities to do likewise and thus 'fertilise' the earth. In following after such false gods, Israel was 'playing the whore' (4:12) both literally and figuratively. God's special people had joined themselves to false gods, like an adulteress cheating on her loving husband.

Complicit in this were the nation's leaders, who were supposed to provide an example of faithfulness to God's commands—both priests and kings alike instead drew the people away to idol worship.

# THE SETTING

Power-hungry and treacherous, Israel saw five kings rise and fall in the period of just 30 years, several usurping power by staging coups and assassinating their predecessors. Without godly leadership, the people strayed further and further. Hosea reports that there was 'no knowledge of God in the land' (4:1), and declares that the people were 'incapable of innocence' (8:5).

It is into this culture of complacent defiance that Hosea speaks, bringing a message of judgment for Israel— God's people will be 'crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth' (5:11). Their acts of wickedness will see them driven from His presence (9:15), and cast out of the Promised Land.

The instrument for God's judgment would be the mighty Assyrian empire. As infighting sapped the strength of Israel, the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser launched a period of conquest that

would see them expand their reach until their territories spanned almost the entire region— from Egypt in the south to the current-day Georgia in the north, Arabia in the east, and the island of Cyprus to the west. They would dominate the Near East for a hundred years, becoming one of the greatest empires of all time.

As the shadow of the marauding Assyrians spread across the ancient world, Israel watched with growing fear. However, instead of crying out to the God who had offered to shield them, they sought human alliances which brought disastrous consequences. Towards the end of Hosea's ministry, Hoshea pursues an alliance with the Egyptians with the aim of overthrowing the Assyrians, but when the Assyrian king catches wind of this, he invades the Israelites, besieging the capital Samaria for three years. God's people are carried off into exile, cut off from God's presence with their heritage and identity destroyed, exactly the way as Hosea had predicted.



# KEY CHARACTERS

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# KEY CHARACTERS

## HOSEA

In our clean, ordered world of 'professional standards', Hosea would most likely not have got past the interview stage at most churches. He marries a woman of bad reputation, and appears unable to manage his house. But humble Hosea acts in obedience to God's command, for God has a didactic purpose; He wants His prophet to feel something of the hurt and betrayal of a faithless people. Israel had 'forgotten their God', committing spiritual adultery by pursuing pagan idols. Like a wife breaking the bonds of her marriage covenant, God's people have rejected God, breaking His heart.

Hosea's own experiences with his faithless wife 'strengthened the conviction of his preaching, for he knew firsthand what he was talking about' (Smith). Having been instructed to marry Gomer, three children are born: Jezreel, and the ominously named 'No Mercy' and 'Not My People'. It would appear that Hosea is father only to the first; with the implication that those who follow

are born out of wedlock, the fruit of Gomer's adultery. As Smith summarises, Hosea 'knew how God hurt when he was rejected, and from his own experience he knew how deeply God loved his people'.

These experiences probably explain Hosea's firebrand preaching style. Addressing a complacent people who are blind to their sin, the prophet uses lurid, almost coarse language. As the commentator Smith suggests, 'it almost seems as if he relishes the idea of shocking his audience into thinking outside the box of their normal theology. He wants to jar them loose from their careless way of thinking about themselves and God'.

Despite the treachery of his wife, Hosea remains patient, and even buys her back from the slave traders (chapter 3). In so doing, he mirrors a picture of God's love for His people; in their treachery God remains loving; in their faithlessness He remains faithful.

# KEY CHARACTERS

## GOMER

It is startling that God would command a righteous man like Hosea to marry a prostitute. Doesn't God say we should not be 'yoked with unbelievers'? This has prompted many commentators to search for another explanation. Some suggest that the story is a vision, revealed to the prophet as he begins his ministry, or that he writes purely figuratively, making Gomer an imaginary character, functioning as a metaphor within a parable. Even those who concede Gomer was a real person attempt to squirm free of the scandal, suggesting her 'whoredom' was spiritual rather than physical, the shocking language of prostitution used to describe the severity of her sin, or that she became a harlot only after their marriage.

However, all of these efforts appear little more than an attempt to 'tame' the Bible, and rob this story of its savage power. The most plausible explanation for the description of this broken marriage is also the most obvious: Gomer was a real person, a woman who married the prophet Hosea and was unfaithful to him, before and after their wedding.

We, like Hosea, are supposed to feel the betrayal in her actions because they point to God's own experience— His people had betrayed Him by following after other gods, and He wants His chosen messenger Hosea to feel the sharpness of their betrayal.

# KEY THEMES

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# KEY THEMES

## OUR REBELLION

*"There is no faithfulness or steadfast love and no knowledge of God in the land" - Hosea 4v1*

The book of Hosea uncovers the naked truth about God's bride, Israel.

She is an exquisite beauty who is His precious jewel and desired love. And yet there is a soft sound that is growing ever louder; a secret that allures by day and moves her by night, calling her name. It is the voice that speaks so close and yet draws her so far. Intoxicated by her desire, the bride decides to go. She professes a love for her husband, but will not hold his hand tonight. She kisses his forehead and then crosses the threshold. Venturing out, she searches and finds the arms of another.

He is the other. The other man. The other lover. The one in whom she is both lost and found. With him it is always and never the last night. She is a complex meshing of beauty and betrayal.

Like an unfaithful bride, the story of Hosea reveals Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness. We will see the severity of her shame.

This is not merely a look at the general sin of humanity, but a raw and honest look at the rebellion of the bride. In this we see that sin is more than a breaking of rules but a personal and cosmic deceit and disloyalty of the highest order. It is a fracturing of the most precious relationship filled with bitter regret and misplaced love.



# KEY THEMES

Central to Israel's betrayal is idolatry. She fails to love the Lord wholeheartedly because she gives herself to other gods. These false gods cannot satisfy her the way the Lord can, and yet she repeatedly worships at their feet. The most prominent idol in the days of Hosea was the cult of Baal. This idol was born out of Canaanite culture and received Israel's honour as the one who could grant fertility to their crops and animals. In worship, they hosted festivals and participated in prostitution and sacrifice at pagan temples. The worship of the Lord became so syncretised with Baalism that people thought Yahweh and Baal were just two different names for one divine being.

The heart and mind drive the rebellion of Israel. Her heart wanders with desires for another god, fuelled by a false knowledge in the idols that surround her and a forgetfulness of the Lord. This has led to a life of deception and debauchery that is unfitting for the bride.

At the centre of this poetic revelation lies a raw and confronting message for the bride of Christ today. In a moment of honest reflection, we too see our own wandering. Our folly and failing is not the amount of our love, but the object of our love. Instead of running to the Lord, our heart is captured by another. To add insult to our insurrection is the revelation that the idols we pursue are nothing as compared to the glory and beauty of our Lord.

Throughout this series we will explore our idols, confront our rebellion, uncover our need for truth, and investigate the heart of our slavery. In the darkness of deceit, God's word will bring a light of truth. This is a bright light, a light that not only unveils our folly, but guides our path home.

# KEY THEMES

## HIS REDEMPTION

*"I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord."*  
– Hosea 2v19–20

In the book of Hosea we are brought face-to-face with the personal heartache experienced by the Lord in the face of our rebellion. Israel is the unfaithful bride who continues to give herself to other lovers. The Lord is the faithful husband who looks from the balcony of His home waiting for His bride to return. Yet, she never does.

The pain within a man's heart echoes the love he holds for his bride. The Lord's love is like no other. As we see in the poetry and proclamation of Hosea, the Lord is not only perfectly and infinitely loving, He has chosen to lavish that love in unceasing abundance upon His bride, Israel.

She is His elected one who carries His name, has His affection and is His desire. He is like the husband gripped by an unbounded passion, which drives His thoughts and captures His heart by day and by night. It is in the deep and everlasting adoration of a lover that betrayal holds the most severe sting.

The rebellion of Israel is therefore much more than a tearing of the legal covenant—it is a crushing of God's open heart. God is a wounded and restless lover, enveloped by the highs and lows of euphoric love, betrayal, regret and hope. These are the emotions of God, a personal battle on public display. Hosea is the bittersweet harmony of His divine love.

# KEY THEMES

The extent of God's love is demonstrated not only in the sadness our sin brings, but the commitment to redemption He holds.

It doesn't matter how rebellious or dishonouring the bride is for the Lord's love never gives up. It is an unceasing and perfect love that remains truly faithful at the depth of our unfaithfulness. No matter how far she runs, she cannot pass the bounds of His love.

This is evident in the pursuit of Hosea. He was called to not merely wait but to actively seek.

The Lord is in passionate pursuit to win His bride back. We are not a bride looking for His love, but an adulteress who must have our hearts won and our lives freed. We are enslaved to a false and empty love; we do not want to come home and cannot pay our way.

Central to His redeeming love is the heart. The Lord is not merely interested in the duty of His bride, but her delight. He longs to not just call her home, but capture her heart.

# KEY THEMES

## THE TRUE HOSEA

*"Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days" - Hosea 3:5*

Jesus believed and taught that the Old Testament Scriptures were not only the divinely inspired word of God (Matthew 15:6), but a revelation that testifies to and finds its fulfilment in Him (Matthew 5:17, Luke 24:25, 26). This is why He condemns the Pharisees who search the Scriptures and fail to see Him (John 5:19). Therefore, as we read the Scriptures and about prophets like Hosea, we must ask how these words foreshadow and find their answer in Him.

In marrying and relentlessly pursuing an unfaithful woman, Hosea's life serves as a living and gripping picture of God's immeasurable love for His chosen people. Yet even at this point in history, the love story that began before creation and was wounded in the Garden of Eden still has not reached its summit. There is more to come. In fact, the extravagant, persevering and sacrificial love displayed by the prophet Hosea is but a reflection of a greater love that would be shown to all of mankind through the God-man Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the better, the greater, the true Hosea.

# KEY THEMES

He demonstrates perfect love in pursuing us. Regardless of our depravity and rejection, Jesus comes after each one of us. His love is offered to all (John 3:16); it is unconditional (Romans 5:8), infinitely patient (2 Peter 3:9) and limitless (Ephesians 3:18–19). The desire that inspires His relentless battle over our hearts is ever present. He perseveres with each in the hope that we will one day embrace and enjoy Him forever.

To win us back to Himself, Jesus paid a heavy price. While Hosea claimed back his adulterous wife for a mere fifteen shekels of silver, a homer and a lethech of barley, Jesus went above and beyond by paying for us with His blood.

In His perfect love, He gave up His right to the kingship and the honours of heaven to live the life of an ordinary man with an extraordinary mission. He was born to die on a cross as a sinless sacrifice, thereby paying the perfect price to satisfy the wrath of God and His judgment against our rebellion.

In taking our sin upon Himself, He set us free from condemnation and provided the way for our reconciliation with God. When we accept His redeeming work for our personal lives, we enter into His perfect plan to grow and mature in accordance with His good and pleasing will. This is for our joy and His glory.



# LITERARY GENRES

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# LITERARY GENRES

As a collection of literary works, the Bible offers us a variety of genres, ranging from stories to psalms and songs, law, proverbs and letters. This diversity testifies to God's limitless creativity and gracious desire to communicate with His people on multiple levels. With each genre comes a set of distinctive features that should be considered in order to interpret the text appropriately.

The book of Hosea belongs to a category known as the 'prophetic books'. Through the life and voice of Hosea, the Lord expresses His inner struggle with the unfaithfulness of His chosen people. He further promises blessing or judgment should they turn away or to their evil ways. Of the 17 prophetic-type books of the Old Testament (i.e. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Ezra, etc.), Hosea presents several unique characteristics.

In terms of language, it is one of the most difficult Hebrew texts to translate due to complexities in both form and content. Rather than adopting a uniform literary style and tone, it blends prose and poetry, uses conflicting images and tones, and borrows from direct and indirect forms of speech.

It is therefore best described as a prophetic discourse with strong affinities to poetry. Chapters 1 to 3, for instance, are generally prosaic, staging a dialog between the Lord and the prophet and setting the narrative context for the prophecy. From chapter 4, the text becomes mainly poetic, making frequent use of parallelisms and symmetry in structure, as well as correspondences in sense, sound, pauses and repetitions.

# LITERARY GENRES

These techniques all serve to support the prophet's message by drawing our attention to key words and images. For example, in 11:8, the repetition of 'How can I' at the top of every line emphasises the Lord's anguishing heart over a treacherous people He loves and rejects at once. In addition, the poetry is generally smooth and balanced when the Lord expresses emotions such as love and tenderness. However, it is short, sharp and unbalanced when pain and sorrow are communicated, as if words were coming out with great difficulty, between tears of supplication.

Poetry is also a means of evoking powerful images in order to touch and move the heart of the beloved.

The metaphors employed to represent Israel are often striking and contradictory. She is compared to a 'whore' (5:3), then a 'dove' (7:11) but one that is 'silly and without sense'. On the other hand, the Lord is likened to a pursuing lover (2:14), a father that cares for his son (11:1), but also a 'lion', a 'leopard' and a 'bear' ready to destroy Israel (13:7-8). By creating these tensions, the prophet can convey the full range of the Lord's powerful emotions and hope to shock, touch and turn the hearts of His people.

Today, Hosea's literary masterpiece continues to resonate with us not only because poetry is a genre that is timeless but more importantly, because these are the words of our loving Lord.

# RECOMMENDED READING

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# RECOMMENDED READING

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# ABOUT US

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# ABOUT US

City on a Hill began at the end of 2007 with a small team and a big vision to see Melbourne renewed with the great news of Jesus. Since then, God has gathered men and women of all ages with a passion to know Jesus and make Him known.

As a community we meet every Sunday for our main services at 9am, 10.30am and 6pm (Hoyts Melbourne Central) where we hear relevant and practical messages from the Bible about God, life and the world we live in. We pray, we sing, we hang out, and then through the week we commit ourselves to being people of light and love in our city.

To find out more about what God is doing in and through this community and how you can partner with us visit [www.cityonahill.com.au](http://www.cityonahill.com.au)

## CONTACT

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