

Hosea and Gomer: Forgiving the Unfaithful¹

**SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 15****READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Hosea 1–3.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord said to me, ‘Go. Show your love to your wife again. She is loved by another man. And she has committed adultery.² But I want you to love her just as I love the people of Israel. They turn to other gods. And they love to offer raisin cakes to Baal³ and eat them’ ” (Hosea 3:1, NIV).

MANY BELIEVE THAT THE STORY OF HOSEA AND GOMER IS NOT TRUE. Such people believe that the story should be understood as an allegory in which the people and things that happen in the story have hidden meanings.

But why? God used other people's family lives to show their messages. So, why not this one? Isaiah pointed out that he and his children were signs in Israel from God (Isaiah 8:18). Jeremiah was told not to marry or to have children. This was meant to help make clear his message of doom [bad news] (Jeremiah 16:2–4). God foretold (made known) the death of Ezekiel's wife before she died. And when she died, God told Ezekiel not to show sorrow for her death (Ezekiel 24:16).

Thus, we may take the story of Hosea and Gomer as a true experience of a prophet who had a wife. He lost her to other men but lovingly took her back.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY UP CLOSE: The story of Hosea and Gomer powerfully shows God's love for His people. God still loves His people even when they fall into sin.

1. the unfaithful—persons who break their marriage vows; persons who are not true or loyal to God.

2. committed adultery—breaking the marriage vows by having sex with a person who is not one's spouse; not being faithful.

3. Baal—worshiped by the Canaanites as the god of storms and thunder; in some places Baal was worshiped as the god of the sun.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 16**HOSEA AND GOMER**
(Hosea 2:19, 20)

Marriage is a good example of the closeness God wants to have with His people, now and in the past (Hosea 2:19, 20; Isaiah 62:5). When we understand this, the hidden meanings in the stories of the Bible become much clearer.

From what we can tell, Hosea's work as a prophet⁴ took place when Uzziah (790–739 B.C.), Jotham (750–732 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (729–686 B.C.) ruled as kings of Judah. This covers about 40 years. It supports (helps prove) the idea that Hosea started working for God and got married at about the same time. Nothing more is known about the prophet as a person. His father, Beeri, is not named elsewhere in the Bible. Hosea's hometown is not known. Hosea's messages are for the northern kingdom of Israel, and he surely lived there. These were the last years of Israel's history. But Hosea does not write about how Israel fell to the army of Assyria in 722 B.C. He must have moved to Judah and written his book before that event. Hosea's work for God is dated by kings of Judah.

Based on many examples of bak-

ing in Hosea 7:4–8, some suspect that Hosea was a baker. He describes the oven, its fire, and the kneading (pressing and squeezing) and rising of the dough.

What did God tell Hosea to do in Hosea 1:1, 2? What was the hidden meaning behind this action? Jeremiah 3:1, 2, 9; Jeremiah 13:27; Ezekiel 16:15, 16; Ezekiel 23:17–19.

Was Gomer a prostitute?⁵ The *New International Version* calls Gomer an adulterous wife.⁶ The Hebrew verse does not call her a harlot⁷ but uses the phrase “woman/wife of harlotry.” This could mean different things. (1) She could be the daughter or granddaughter of a harlot. (2) She could be a woman who likes to go out with men. (3) She could have been called a harlot by one who saw what Gomer would become in the future. (4) The book was written years later when her character⁸ was fully known.

Gomer was clearly a real person. Hosea's marriage to an adulterous wife has so much more meaning when we believe he and Gomer were real people. The Lord used this story to give His people a powerful message about being unfaithful⁹ to Him. No doubt God was trying to bring His people back to Himself.

4. prophet—a man or woman sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

5. prostitute—a person who earns a living by taking money for sex.

6. adulterous wife—a person who breaks her marriage vows by having sex with someone who is not her husband.

7. harlot—a woman who earns money by having sex with men; a prostitute.

8. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as the choice to be honest or to cheat.

9. unfaithful—not being true or loyal; not being someone that others can trust or count on.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 17**GOMER'S UNFAITHFULNESS¹⁰
(Hosea 2:4, 5)**

Soon after Hosea married Gomer, she “bore him” a son (Hosea 1:3, NIV). The verse shows that Hosea could claim to be the father of the child. Gomer had two more children. But the verse does not say that Hosea was the father of those children. The verse just says that she “gave birth to a daughter” and “had another son” (Hosea 1:6, 8, NIV). The words suggest that Hosea was not the father. Some versions of the Bible openly say just that.

The first son was named Jezreel. This name means “God scatters.” The next child was a girl. She was named Lo-ruhammah, which means “not loved.” God gives the names, but it would be easy to understand if Hosea could not show love to a child that was not his. The final child is a son named Lo-ammi, meaning “not my people.” Again, this could be a sign that Hosea does not accept the child as his. In fact, Hosea does say that he cannot show his love to Gomer’s children, because they are the result of adultery¹¹ (Hosea 2:4, 5).

What are Hosea's charges against Gomer in Hosea 2:5, 8?

It may seem foolish to think that

any person might not know who brings home the food. But there are several ways to understand and use these verses. We may take a hint from other examples about the Israelites. They gave thanks to Baal (the god of storms and thunder) for their harvests of grain and wine and for their wool and oilseeds. They believed their gold and silver also were gifts from Baal. They used these metals in large amounts to make idols of him (read Hosea 8:4 and Hosea 13:2). Imagine how God felt about their worship of Baal. God was the One who was giving rain for the people’s crops, as well as all their other blessings.



The Israelites gave credit to Baal, god of storms and thunder, for their harvests instead of thanking God.

Sin destroys our powers of understanding. This causes people to foolishly believe things that are not true. Then they have “good” reasons for their stupid actions.

10. unfaithfulness—the act of breaking your promises and not doing the things you say you are going to do; not being true or loyal; not being someone that others can trust.

11. adultery—breaking the marriage vows by having sex with a person who is not one’s spouse; not being faithful.

How has the power of sin weakened your mind? What has it caused you to do or think? What other Bible stories show the danger of letting sin control (have power over) our minds? Read John 9. What steps can you take to protect yourself from falling into this trap?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 18

UNFAITHFULNESS¹² TO GOD (Matthew 5:32)

The Bible uses the idea of marriage to show how close God wants to be with His people. If so, adultery¹³ offers clear symbols¹⁴ of what happens when God's people are not faithful (true) to Him in their hearts.

What can we learn from Christ's words in Matthew 5:32 about how bad adultery is?

But the real issue in the story of Hosea is not unfaithfulness in marriage but unfaithfulness to God. This is about God's people going after other gods. Today most of us do not worship idols. (Satan knows we are too smart for that.) But unfaithfulness

to God is still happening among us today. There are many ways in which we can fall into this kind of adultery.

What are some things that we face today that could lead us as individuals (persons), or even as a church, into unfaithfulness to God?

We must not be fooled. Bit by bit, little by little, sin can slowly pull us away from being true to God.

None of us is safe from falling into the trap of spiritual adultery.¹⁵ What are some Bible verses that could keep us safe? Find the verses, write them down, and bring them to class on Sabbath. For example, Philippians 4:8; Colossians 2:6; 1 Peter 4:1.

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 19

THE FRUIT OF UNFAITHFULNESS (Hosea 2:1–13)

Sin has always been the most deadly force in the universe.¹⁶ Sin may please in one way or another. But it always brings in bitter results. How many men and women thought

12. unfaithfulness—the act of breaking your promises and not doing the things you say you are going to do; not being true or loyal; not being someone that others can trust.

13. adultery—breaking the marriage vows by having sex with a person who is not one's spouse; not being faithful.

14. symbols—objects, marks, signs, or persons that stand for, or mean the same thing as, other objects, ideas, or things.

15. spiritual adultery—breaking our promise to love and serve God with all our hearts and souls and minds and bodies; not being faithful to Him by putting other things in life before Him and by loving those things more than we love Him.

16. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered or that we know of.

they would find happiness through their adulterous affairs¹⁷ but ended up bringing only sadness and pain to themselves and others?

What happens to Gomer as she plays the harlot¹⁸ in Hosea 2:1–13?

What parable¹⁹ of Jesus does this story, especially the part in Hosea 2:7, remind you of?

All through the Old Testament history of Israel, the people were tempted to worship idols. These idols were made from “silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know” (Daniel 5:23). Again, we might not be tempted today to bow down and worship idols. But we can be just as easily swept away from God by things of the world that in the end do not give us peace or joy. These idols cannot meet the deepest needs of our hearts.

The Lord was trying to teach His people a message through the story of Hosea and Gomer. This message was, Be faithful²⁰ to the only true God. This God loves you. Only He can save you and care for your deepest needs.

How has God worked in your life to keep you close to Him? How have you answered Him? What changes do you need to make that will help

you better answer His leading?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 20

WONDERFUL LOVE (Hosea 2:14–23)

What does the Lord tell Hosea to do in Hosea 2:14–23? What is the message there for us?

Hosea had already said his wife was unfaithful²¹ to him. He listed his reasons for her guilt. He tells us what he will do to keep her from going out with other men. (1) “‘Therefore I will block her path . . .’” (Hosea 2:6, NIV). (2) “‘Therefore I will take away my grain . . .’” (Hosea 9, NIV). But in the end, what Hosea finally decides to do about his wife turns out to be a surprise.

Hosea’s first method²² of keeping his wife at home was not a very good answer. She probably would escape sooner or later. And even if she did not, there could be no real joy for him in keeping her home against her will. The second method had a better chance for success. Hosea had worked to win Gomer back once before. So, he could do it again. But he must truly want her back. God told Hosea to both take her back and love her as the Lord loves the Israelites.

17. adulterous affairs—sexual relations that a married person has with persons other than the person he or she is married to.

18. harlot—a woman who earns money by having sex with men; a prostitute.

19. parable—a short simple story that teaches a truth.

20. faithful—being true and loyal; being someone that others can trust and count on.

21. unfaithful—not being true or loyal; not being someone that others can trust or count on.

22. method—a way of doing something.

What happens in Hosea 3? And what does it also tell us about God's love for us even when we have been unfaithful to Him?



Hosea paid for Gomer's freedom with some barley and silver.

Note that God asks Hosea to take Gomer back and to love her. Not just love her but love her as God loves His people. Hosea did what God asked and bought her for 15 shekels of silver (which is about 150 grams or about 1/3 pound of silver) and some barley. A slave usually costs 30 shekels (Exodus 21:32). But maybe the barley made up for the difference, or Hosea bought Gomer at a good discount (low price).

This is the story of how Hosea took back his unfaithful wife. This story mirrors (shows) how Israel was unfaithful to God. God loves His people Israel even though they have not

been faithful²³ to Him. This is the message given by Hosea in words and in action. The Israelites can accept the faithfulness²⁴ of God so much more easily when they see the example of Hosea's faithfulness in taking back an unfaithful wife.



God asked Hosea to take Gomer back and love her. This was to show Israel how God would love them and take them back after they sinned.

Are you where you should be in your daily walk with the Lord? Have you been unfaithful to Him? What hope can you get from the message that God has given us through these chapters in the book of Hosea?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 21

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "Moral Standards,"²⁵ pp. 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*.

23. faithful—not being true or loyal; not being someone that others can trust or count on.

24. faithfulness—the act of being true and loyal; the act of being someone that others can trust and believe in.

25. moral standards—having to do with right and wrong actions; what is good and right. Moral standards are rules or models of good living that help us to do what is right and live a life that is holy.

"Look away from self to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. It is a sin to doubt. The smallest amount of unbelief fills the soul with guilt, and brings great darkness and discouragement.²⁶ It is the same as saying that the Lord is false, and that He will not do as He has promised. In this way, the Lord is greatly dishonored."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*²⁷ p. 426.



"Look away from self to the Lamb of God."
Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 426.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ As a class, go over the Bible verses you used to answer the question at the end of Tuesday's lesson. What useful principles²⁸ can you take from these verses that can help protect us from unfaithfulness to God?
- ❷ As a class, talk about what basic message is found in the first three chapters in Hosea. What is the Lord telling us as a church today through this story? What lessons should we not get from it?
- ❸ Have some church members fallen away? As a class, make an effort to reach out to these people. Show them that you care about them and are interested in them. In what ways can you show them the kind of grace²⁹ and mercy that God has taught us through this story?

26. discouragement—the feeling of a loss of hope or belief that you can do something.

27. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the news of salvation.

28. principles—laws upon which other laws are based. The principles on which the Ten Commandments are based are our love for God and our love for God's people (Matthew 22:37–40).

29. grace—God's gift of mercy to us.