

God Rescues His Unfaithful Wife

Hosea 1:1-2:23

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Many of us have or will experience the hurt caused by broken trust or unfaithfulness. You can experience it when the person you thought liked you is seen in the embrace of someone else. You can experience it at work when a client you've devoted years of service towards suddenly picks up and takes their business elsewhere. A work colleague takes your idea and presents it as their own. Someone you've mentored announces they're leaving for more money with one of your competitors. You can experience unfaithfulness in friendships. You share some fear or insecurity. They share it publicly at a party. You share something confidential with a family member. At a family gathering several know about it.

We can experience unfaithfulness with those closest to us. Marital unfaithfulness rocks the foundation of a family to a core. When parent's break trust of a child towards a child destabilizes their world. Children's unfaithfulness or lies can break a parent's heart. And siblings can do deep damage to one another because of the familiarity that comes with living in the same house.

Now maybe you can think of someone who has been unfaithful in some way to you. With that person or people in mind, would you ever try to rescue them?

Would you work towards and even initiate restoring the relationship with them? Such a work seems impossible for our frail human hearts. It hurts when someone is or has been unfaithful to us. We naturally want to strike back, cut off and dismiss them from our lives.

But I want you to think of this from another perspective. Maybe you have been unfaithful to someone – a friend whose confidence you broke; a business associate that you left for a competitor; a child to whom you spoke too harshly; a spouse you were unfaithful to in body or thought; a parent who you lied to; a family member that you embarrassed; a boyfriend or girlfriend that you cheated on; an appointment that you didn't show up for; an employer that you didn't come through for? How would you hope to be treated by a person whose trust you broke? Would you appreciate any effort they made to reach out to you in restoration?

You might say, "no one has ever done that for me. I've never broken anyone's trust. I've just had my trust broken." You may be right to a point. But you'd also be wrong about God at least. We were unfaithful to Him in our rebellion. We are unfaithful to Him when we sin. We break the closeness of relationship with Him when we pursue

something or someone else as our first love. Yet He pursues us though He is the aggrieved party. He initiates restoration of our relationship though we caused the initial breakup. Today, we are going to see this restorative pursuit of God in action. We will see Him rescue His unfaithful wife.

We have studied the minor prophet Amos in the Old Testament through September and October. Amos prophesied during a time of prosperity for Israel because of the temporary weakness of the superpower Assyria. Amos criticizes the people's lives and worship. God did not accept their worship because their lives showed no concern for the vulnerable. They believed that they could show up and do the ritual. Then they could go on living however they wanted. Amos preaches against all this from the years 760-750 BC.

God raised up another prophet. Hosea was a northerner. He lived in the nation of Israel and God empowered him to preach for 30-40 years. He might have preached up the last years and months of Israel's existence.

Hosea messages reveal the changing landscape for Israel. Assyria has dealt with her internal issues. She now looks out with expansionist ideas. She threatens Israel's very existence. But the people still enjoy some prosperity. It's like they party on the Titanic while it sinks.

Hosea also reveals another development in Israel's religious life. In Amos, Israel practiced a syncretistic religion – they blended worship of the Lord with some sort of idol/nationalistic worship. In Hosea, things have changed. There's no more syncretism. They are now wholly devoted to Baal. This local Canaanite god has stolen the hearts of Israel. Hosea speaks about Baal again and again. He will expose how Israel diverted her worship from the one true God to the false idol of Baal. Israel, the figurative wife of God has betrayed Him for Baal.

What would the Lord do? The Lord will rescue His unfaithful wife. He will initiate a painful yet restorative process of reconciliation. Today we will see how He does that. I pray you be encouraged with the Lord's persistent love for Israel and for us even though we are unfaithful to the Lord. Then I pray that the Spirit will move us to respond to His love and gain strength to offer that to others.

So please find Hosea in your Bibles. We will start at chapter 1, verse 1 to chapter 2:1. I will read from the ESV. It's on page 640 in the Bibles in front of you. Let's see how God rescues His unfaithful wife.

Hosea 1:1-2:1 (ESV)

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beerī, 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.

²When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” ³So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

⁴And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

⁶She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, “Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. ⁷But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”

⁸When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹And the LORD said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

¹⁰ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.” ¹¹ And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

2 Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.”

How does the Lord rescue His unfaithful wife? He commands a prophet to marry an unfaithful woman to illustrate the nation’s unfaithfulness. The Lord calls Hosea to marry someone who will break his heart. He will go into this marriage with eyes wide open. Some commentators think Gomer was already a prostitute. We don’t know. But the Lord wants to make Israel’s unfaithfulness obvious. He will accomplish that through the prophet’s family.

We don’t know what Hosea thought of this arrangement. We aren’t told what his parents thought. Would you want your son or daughter to marry someone who had a reputation for or tendency towards unfaithfulness? Yet Hosea obeys. Perhaps he recognized the high calling this placed on him. Maybe he loved his people so much that he was willing to make this personal sacrifice so some would turn back to God.

But he obeys and takes Gomer in marriage. She conceives and bears *him* a son. Then the Lord intervenes in the naming ceremony. “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel”. Jezreel was a valley in Israel where armies faced each other.

About a hundred years before, God commissioned a king named Jehu to eliminate the evil house of Ahab. But Jehu took God’s commandment way too far. A blood bath followed with much killing happening in the valley. So the name Jezreel became synonymous with injustice. Now the Lord announces justice will come through their baby boy’s

name. Every mention of his name reminded those who heard of the coming judgment upon the rulers who were descendants of that brutal king. This would happen when Assyria invaded Israel and struck down her army in the Valley as described in verse 5.

Gomer conceives again. Many point out this second child is introduced differently. She didn't bear him (Hosea) a son like in verse 3. She conceived and bore a daughter. Was Hosea the father or was this a child of unfaithfulness? We don't know but God intervenes again in the naming of the child. She is to be called "No mercy," for the Lord will no more have mercy on the house of Israel or forgive them at all." This sounds like a strange way to restore a relationship with Israel. But the Lord does not ignore Israel's unfaithfulness. He makes them aware of it through the naming of these children. Many times, people involved in some sort of unfaithfulness think there's nothing wrong or it's no big deal. But they need to see the unfaithfulness if there's going to be reconciliation.

Gomer weans the little girl "No Mercy" and conceives again. The text states not that she bears Hosea a son but simply bears a son. So is it Hosea's or someone else? We again don't know. The Lord designates the name of this child "not my people," "for you are not my people and I am not your God." Now this is not a statement of complete abandonment. I think the Lord declares the current state of their relationship. The people of Israel have not acted like His people. So He will not act like He is their God.

This family will become a living testimony to the reality of the situation. The children's names will point out the spiritual reality of the nation. Jezreel – their royal family has a legacy of injustice. "No mercy" reminds them of God's change in attitude towards them. "Not my people" points to the breach in their relationship.

You'd think this section would end here with this such a sober warning. But we get hope in verses 10, 11 and 1 of the next chapter. "Yet the number of children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. Where it was said to them 'You are not my people,' it shall be said, 'Children of the living God.' The children of Judah and Israel shall be gathered together and appoint themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Say to your brothers, "You are my people" and to your sisters "You have received mercy."

It's like the Lord almost instantaneously reverses the warning coming through Hosea's children's names. This is a wide vision of hope. In the immediate context, Israel would fall to the Assyrians and cease to exist as a country for

almost 2700 years. But that was not the end of Israel. They would look forward to millions of descendants. They will be adopted as God's people and children of the living God. They will reunite with their people from the southern kingdom of Judah. They will appoint for themselves one leader or king. They or their descendants would experience reunification; prosperity; flourishing and harmony in their relationship with God.

When would this happen? The New Testament writers apply verse 10 to the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God. Paul does it in Romans 9:26 and Peter does it in 1 Peter 2:10. So there would be a unification not only of northern and southern Israel but of all people groups. They would be able to say to one another that "the Lord considers us His people to whom He shows mercy." Who could be this one head under whom they unite but Jesus Himself?

So in His restoration plan, the Lord first unveils Israel's unfaithfulness through the living parable of Hosea's family. Yet the Lord promises a greater and wider future for the people. What is the next step in the Lord's rescue of His unfaithful wife?

Hosea 2:2-13 (ESV)

² "Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—

that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts;

³ lest I strip her naked
and make her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and make her like a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.

⁴ Upon her children also I will have no mercy,
because they are children of whoredom.

⁵ For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.

For she said, 'I will go after my lovers,
who give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'

(Skip from verse 5 down to 8).

⁸ And she did not know
 that it was I who gave her
 the grain, the wine, and the oil,
 and who lavished on her silver and gold,
 which they used for Baal.

⁹ Therefore I will take back
 my grain in its time,
 and my wine in its season,
 and I will take away my wool and my flax,
 which were to cover her nakedness.

¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness
 in the sight of her lovers,
 and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

¹¹ And I will put an end to all her mirth,
 her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,
 and all her appointed feasts.

¹² And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,
 of which she said,
 'These are my wages,
 which my lovers have given me.'
 I will make them a forest,
 and the beasts of the field shall devour them.

¹³ And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals
 when she burned offerings to them
 and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry,
 and went after her lovers
 and forgot me, declares the LORD.

How does the Lord rescue His unfaithful people (wife?) He exposes their (her) sin and will strip them (her) bare. (2:2-5; 8-13)

In graphic imagery, the Lord portrays himself as a husband, appealing to his children to plead with their mother to stop the unfaithfulness. It's like a husband who doesn't have contact with his unfaithful wife but the children still do. So He goes through the children to plead for her to stop. Why? If she doesn't she is will go through great suffering.

In verse 3 the Lord talks about what will happen to His unfaithful people. It's important to keep in mind that this is an image the Lord uses to illustrate a spiritual reality. He was not affirming that husbands could treat wives like this.

He doesn't tell Hosea to threaten Gomer with this. He uses marriage to picture His relationship with Israel, a people and a land.

So we need to think of 'her' as land & people in verse 3. The land will be stripped bare so the people and their security will be made bare. The land will be made like a wilderness, like a parched land that dies from lack of water. That's what lands looked like after the Assyrians got through with them. They defeated the local army. They carried away the people into captivity and they burned everything. It prevented rebellion and warned other nations.

But what about verse 4? Is it fair for God to have no mercy on the children? If we think specifically of Gomer's children this seems unfair. We don't know if the children turned out to be rebellious themselves. But if the children represent the people, then the idolatries and behavior of the leaders have left a mark on the people. Most followed the kings into idolatry. . Some will not. But the Lord collectively will have no mercy on the nation because in verse 5 she went after other lovers. She sought the basic necessities of life from them - bread, water, wool, flax, oil and drink. She thinks other lovers can provide these necessities. Isn't that what we think when we are unfaithful to the Lord? We think our pursuit of whatever sin we harbor or alternative purpose will give us what we need in life. We think it will somehow satisfy or save us from whatever we face.

But in verse 8, the Lord exposes the mistake in this assumption. They thought they received life's necessities by pursuing other gods. But it all came from the Lord. God provided for them the necessities and the prosperity they enjoyed. But the people used what He provided to worship Baal. They took what the Lord provided and they offered it to an idol.

So the Lord promises to act. "I will take back my grain, wine, wool and flax which covered her nakedness." In times of blessing fields full of grain; vineyards full of grapes; pastures full of sheep and fields full of flax covered the land's barrenness. But if they were all stripped away, the land would be naked.

The Lord will allow this to happen through the Assyrians desolation of the land. It will happen, verse 10, in the sight of her lovers. In the sight of the supposed god Baal, the Assyrians will strip the land. If Baal was a true god, he would stop this. But Baal will be shown to be powerless in the face of the Assyrian assault. He will not be able to "rescue" Israel from the hand of God. He will not be able to overpower the Lord and prevent him from carrying out this judgment.

And the Lord will not only strip the land in Baal's plain sight. He will stop Baal worship. In verse 11 of chapter 2, He will end Israel's feasts, new moons, Sabbaths and appointed feasts. That list describes Israel's complete religious year. Israel had completely replaced worship of the Lord with the worship of Baal. They even practice Sabbath in honor of Baal. But the Lord would stop it through the Assyrians who destroyed worship centers of conquered nations to prove that the superiority of Assyrian's gods.

This sounds like a pretty harsh way to initiate restoration with an unfaithful person. But for true restoration to occur, unfaithfulness has to be exposed, confessed and dealt with. Sometimes we only recognize our unfaithfulness to the Lord or others when our lives get stripped bare. We hit rock bottom; we come to the end of ourselves; we end up in the pig sty like the prodigal son before we realize the emptiness of the path we pursued.

But you'll notice I skipped two verses in this passage. Verses 6 and 7. True to the style of Hebrew poetry, a central point is often made in the middle of the passage. Here comes a beautiful piece of Scripture.

Hosea 2:6-7 (ESV)

⁶Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.
⁷She shall pursue her lovers
but not overtake them,
and she shall seek them
but shall not find them.
Then she shall say,
'I will go and return to my first husband,
for it was better for me then than now.'

How does God rescue His unfaithful people? **He frustrates their (her) pursuit of sin to help them (her) realize the good life they (she) had with the Lord (her husband) (2:6-7).** Verse 6 – Therefore, in response to their unfaithfulness and pursuit of alternative gods from whom they think they will receive life, I will block her way with thorns and will build a wall so she cannot find her paths to these other gods." It is an image of intervention and protection. God puts Israel in a detox center to remove her from the temptations.

She reacts as expected. She craves her addictions. She pursues it. She wants to find her lovers and go back to them. But she cannot reach them. The more time she spends away, the more her head clears. So by the end of verse 7, she comes to her senses. Then she shall say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than

now.” That sounds like a New Testament parable told by Jesus where a son betrayed his father and squandered his inheritance. He ended up working among the pigs. “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father.’” That story ended with the Father running to meet his lost son. Here, the unfaithful wife, the people of Israel begin to realize that life with God is better. She desires to return.

But the Lord isn’t yet done with His rescue. He will complete it in the last half of Hosea 2.

Hoses 2:14-23 (ESV)

¹⁴ “Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

¹⁵ And there I will give her her vineyards
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁶ “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. ¹⁸ And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹ And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

²¹ “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,

²² and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,

²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land.

And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’;
and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”

How does the Lord rescue His unfaithful people?

He wins them (her) back to Him as their (her) first love. The Lord will bring his wife or people to the wilderness. Where they first got married or entered into covenant. At Mount Sinai the Lord proclaimed the covenant and the people agreed to it. It’s like He’s saying “let’s go back to where we first started – just you and me. By blocking her from

access to her other lovers and awakening in her a remembrance of life with Him, the Lord invites her to get away with Him and spend time together. And like a young man courting a young woman, the Lord will allure or appeal to her and speak tenderly. He not only wants her back in his home, He wants to win her heart. He not only wants us to be members of His organization. He wants a deep love relationship with us.

Verses 19-20 are like a renewal of wedding vows where the Lord describes His love for His people. It will be a *righteous love* – a commitment to relate to them with strength, loyalty and honesty. It will be a *just love* - fair as he honors their obedience and corrects their waywardness. It will be a *steadfast love* of absolute loyalty along with guidance, protection and rescuing efforts. He will offer a *merciful love* which glows with tenderness and compassion especially to the weak, needy and oppressed. It will be a *faithful love* - utterly dependable, reliable in all his words, deeds and promises.

This overpowering love will result in the bride's response – the people's response – And you shall know the Lord. The bride will make the appropriate response to the Bridegroom by committing herself as fervently and faithfully to the terms of their relationship as He has. The Lord's love will extend to her children. For He will have mercy on "No Mercy" and He will adopt "Not my People" so he can say "You are my God."

This is the kind of love God offers to us. Not only would He rescue His unfaithful people, He has rescued those of us who have already received Him. He continues to pursue us with this kind of love today.

So how will we respond to the Lord's rescuing love in our lives?

Maybe you have been running or pursuing some life apart from God for your whole life. But God has pursued you. He has hedged you in and built a wall so you cannot get to your sin – you can no longer find satisfaction in it. Will you stop pursuing life apart from God and come to Him today? Respond by checking the box – I asked Jesus Christ into my life today.

Maybe you once loved Christ. You once enjoyed a love relationship with Him. But you have wandered. You have pursued other things. But today you have been reminded of your first love and called back to that. You know Jesus is calling you back. Will you check off "I recommitted my life to Christ today?"

Maybe your love for Christ has been hot and cold. Sometimes you're close and sometimes you're far. Maybe you have never gotten baptized because of this. Maybe you've never committed to a church because of your hot and

cold relationship with the Lord. But Jesus is calling you to take that next step. Will you check off Baptism or Membership?

Maybe you have been reminded today of God's lovingkindness and faithfulness in your life today. But you are struggle because of someone else's unfaithfulness or your own. Will you acknowledge your need for help. You can check off the box "I would like a pastor to contact me."

Or maybe you have just been reminded today of the great love of God towards you – throughout your life or today. You could proclaim that response or celebrate it by just writing some thanksgiving or praise to the Lord on the connect card. I would like to collect your responses and share them at a future date of a testimony of the people of SVBC about the love of God in their lives.

I'm going to give you a few moments to think and pray about this. Then I'd invite you to write down your response. Then, I would invite you to show your response to the Lord and His lovingkindness to you by coming forward and placing your response into the basket (box).

The worship team will play through our last song. Then they will sing our last song. You can come while they play or while we're singing. But please respond to your Lord and then come.

The Lord rescued His unfaithful wife and He continues His rescuing work today. Will you respond to it?