

# HOSEA

BY MICHAEL KASTING

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

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NIV text and notes on Hosea by Jack P. Lewis. Many insightful specifics.

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Popularly written for a lay audience. Lots of real-life examples. Study questions at the end. The idea of God's "relentless" care for us rings through the study.

Hubbard, David Allan. *Hosea*. (Volume 24 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries). (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989).

Useful for both pastors and lay people. Thoughtful observations.

McComiskey, Thomas Edward. *Hosea*. In *The Minor Prophets* (Volume 1: Hosea, Joel, and Amos). Edited by Thomas McComiskey. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

More heavily technical with extra emphasis on Hebrew vocabulary.

Norden, Rudolph F. *Hosea: Critic and Comforter for Today*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996).

A congregational study of Hosea with study questions. Norden suggests many connections with other Scriptures. Designed for laypeople.

Rivers, Francine. *Redeeming Love*. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1997).

The story of Hosea and Gomer written as a novel set in 19<sup>th</sup>-century California.

## BIBLE

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# PROPHET OF GOD'S PASSION

## Lesson 1

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### When Romance Arrived

Many of us can remember the entrance of “romance” into our lives. Remember your first crush? The ardent infatuations in high school? Daydreams? Love letters? “ILY” texts? Holding hands? That first kiss! Vows of “forever”! Those blooming passions matured and eventually rearranged our universe.

Astonishing as it may seem to some, it was all God's idea. He Himself is the designer of love and marriage, the inventor of passion. One of the things that amazes the writer of Proverbs is “the way of a man with a maiden” (Proverbs 30:19). The great story that unfolds in the Bible is a love story! God, the heavenly Bridegroom, sought His bride and betrothed her to Himself. So the old hymn says:

*The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is His new creation by water and the Word. From  
heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He  
died. (LSB 644:1)*

God Himself, the Bible says, is the pattern for and a participant in our human passions. Jesus “sought.” He “bought.” He “died” for her. For us!

Love can thrill. It can also hurt. The root meaning behind the word “passion” is “suffering.” The “Passion of the Christ” that we narrate every Lenten season is the story of Christ's suffering and death referenced by the hymn. God's love for us went to the incredible length of sacrificing His only-begotten Son to buy us back and make us His own.

### The Prophet of God's Passion

All of that is a perfect introduction to our study of Hosea, who has been called “The Prophet of God's Passion.” Hosea does not merely WRITE about God's passion for His people; he becomes a LIVING ENACTMENT of it. Other prophets (notably Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel)

are commanded to undertake symbolical actions that put God's message into vivid visual display before wide-eyed watchers. But Hosea is instructed to go even further. His marriage is his message! His marital estrangement from Gomer is itself the occasion God uses to indict His wayward people of their faithlessness. His anguished retrieval of his adulterous wife is the proclamation of God's fervent desire to redeem Israel. Hosea's suffering love is God's passion choreographed in a human life. His family portrait is a picture worth a thousand words.

And what words we encounter in this book! Because the subject matter is God's "passion" for Israel, the prophet's writing style is definitely "passionate," even fiery. David Allan Hubbard says that the pathos surrounding Hosea's marriage is "let loose toward Israel in speech after speech, irony after irony, metaphor after metaphor, question after question" and gives the book a fire the reader cannot miss.

What grips many a reader is how Hosea himself suffers. This is a love story with a prodigious helping of personal pain for the prophet. Pastor Rudolph Norden recalls the appearance of Hosea in the play *The Green Pastures* by Marc Connelly. In a scene set in heaven, God asks the angel Gabriel the identity of the man constantly passing His door, casting a bent shadow on the celestial wall. Gabriel tells Him it is Hosea, who wants God to have compassion on a sinful people. How did Hosea come to have such compassion, God asks. Gabriel's simple answer: "Through suffering." Suffering born out of love is one motif in Hosea's prophetic music.

The love of God portrayed in Hosea is not only passionate, but persistent. He will not give up! Sharla Fritz centers her study of Hosea on the word "relentless," an apt summary of how God, though consistently rebuffed by His adulterous bride, pursues her with an astonishing ardor.

## First Among the Twelve

Hosea heads the list of twelve so-called "Minor Prophets." Imagine the Bible as a house. Those twelve books would NOT be the Bible's living room or kitchen where people want to spend their time. For most of us, they are more like a closet, an attic, or a basement seldom visited where a pile of unfamiliar and mostly forgotten items are stored.

Why is that? The word "minor" may be part of the issue. That designation makes them feel like books with minimal value. No need to read them! But when St. Augustine dubbed them "the Minor Prophets," he was NOT disparaging them as unimportant. He was simply noting their smaller size. All of them could be fitted onto a single scroll, roughly the equivalent of the scroll of Isaiah or the scroll of Jeremiah, two of the "major" prophets. In the Tanakh (the Jewish scripture), they are a single book called "The Twelve."

Their order in our present-day Bibles reproduces the order in the Jewish canon, which was thought to be their chronological order. Hosea was placed at the start, partly because it was thought to be the earliest of the twelve (even though Amos was likely written a little earlier), and partly because it is the most theologically complete, making clear proclamation of God's Law (wrath against sin) and His Gospel (gracious promise to redeem and forgive). The very name Hosea, a variant form of the name "Joshua" in Hebrew and "Jesus" in Greek, means "salvation." This book brings us the whole salvation message of the Old Testament: God's covenant love, His judgment on sin, and His promised restoration.

*This book brings us the whole salvation message of the Old Testament: God's covenant love, His judgment on sin, and His promised restoration.*



## Hosea in Outline

The book is easily divided into two major sub-sections – a) the story of Hosea’s marriage and family, and b) the messages of judgment and hope that comprise the rest of the book. Those messages are diverse and not easily grouped, so suggested outlines vary significantly. David Hubbard divides Hosea in the following manner:

### **Hosea’s Experiences (Chapters 1-3)**

*Title (1:1)*

*A Significant Family (1:2-2:1)*

*A Tragic Separation (2:2-13)*

*A Gracious Restoration (2:14-3:5)*

### **Hosea’s Messages: Part One (4:1-11:11)**

*Introduction (4:1-3)*

*The covenant shattered (4:4-5:7)*

*The politics run amok (5:8-7:16)*

*The cult ripe for destruction (8:1-9:9)*

*The calling unfulfilled (9:10-11:11)*

### **Hosea’s Messages: Part Two (11:12-14:8)**

*Ephraim and Judah, now (11:12-12:1)*

*Jacob, then and now (12:2-14)*

*Ephraim, then and now (13:1-16)*

*Israel and Yahweh, their future (14:1-9)*

I find Hubbard’s rationale more compelling than others, and as a result this study will, for the most part, follow Hubbard’s cues in arranging the lessons. In the process, we will read and reflect on the entire book, taking the chapters in order.

Along the way, we will stumble on many uncertainties in translation or meaning. Hosea presents students more difficulties than any other Old Testament book, and there will be many cases where this study can only lay out some options. Even so, the overall message will be clear.

## Hosea in its Historical Setting

Hosea is the only prophet from the northern kingdom (Israel) whose writings have survived. We read in the superscription that Hosea’s ministry was carried out “during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel” (1:1).

Here is a listing of the probable dates when those kings reigned:

#### In Judah

*Uzziah (792-740 BC)*

*Jotham (750-732 BC)*

*Ahaz (735-715 BC)*

*Hezekiah (729-686 BC)*

#### In Israel

*Jeroboam II (793-753 BC)*

*(successors omitted)*

The dates of the kings in Judah overlap one another. This is because co-regency was a common practice. As he neared the end of his life, the father might share the throne with his son, ensuring the transition when he himself died.

You may also note that only one northern king (Jeroboam II) is mentioned. Hosea seems to dismiss the rough parade of successors (six of them in about 30 years!) as phonies, chosen without God's consent (8:4). Most were devoured (7:7) in a chaos of serial assassinations which claimed four of the final six kings. Here is their order and suggested dates of their reigns (following Hubbard):

<i>Zechariah 753 BC</i>	<i>murdered by Shallum</i>
<i>Shallum 752 BC</i>	<i>murdered by Menahem</i>
<i>Menahem 752-742 BC</i>	
<i>Pekahiah 742-740 BC</i>	<i>murdered by Pekah</i>
<i>Pekah 740-732 BC</i>	<i>murdered by Hoshea</i>
<i>Hoshea 732-723 BC</i>	<i>deposed by Shalmaneser V</i>
<i>(Hoshea is the last king of Israel)</i>	

Hosea's prophetic ministry spanned nearly 40 years, says the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (hereinafter noted as *CSSB*), from approximately 763 to 725 BC. Other scholars argue for a beginning date as late as 752. In any case, his was a lengthy ministry at a critical time. He preached during the tragic final days of the northern kingdom under the looming shadow of the terrifying Assyrian menace (Assyria is named as the enemy in 7:11; 8:9; 10:6; and 11:11). While it was a time of great economic prosperity, a "vital spiritual sickness" sapped the nation's moral fiber and led to idolatrous worship and frightful mistreatment of the poor. The leaders, meanwhile, fearful of the Assyrians, attempted to strengthen the country's decaying structure with international alliances. None of them would bring any help. The nation was doomed.

## Study Sources

In addition to utilizing many of the notes in the *CSSB* by Jack P. Lewis, a teacher at Harding School of Theology in Memphis, TN, this study will make frequent reference to the works of several other scholars. They include Thomas McComiskey, former professor at Trinity Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois; David Allan Hubbard, an Old Testament professor who later became president of Fuller Theological Seminary, and Sharla Fritz, a popular writer and speaker who recently authored her own study of Hosea for Concordia Publishing House.

There is no substitute, however, for reading Hosea yourself. This course will invite you to read this prophet's message, reflect on it, and share what it says to you with other students. I also encourage you to read the story of Hosea as it has been novelized by author Francine Rivers in her book *Redeeming Love*. There is nothing so compelling as a love story, and no love story as compelling as God's unconditional, redemptive, passionate love for us!

## Personal Application

Hosea 1:2-2:1

**Prayer as we prepare:** *Gracious God, as I open the Book of Hosea, engage both my mind and my heart! Help me hear this story not simply as a history lesson, but as a love letter from You. Invite me to take an honest inventory, then make a heart-felt response to You. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

### FOR REVIEW

1. What did you learn from the introduction about the “Minor Prophets”?
2. How do you react to the image of God as a passionate Husband?

### HOSEA 1:2-9

3. Do you have family portraits on the walls in your home? If so, how long ago were they taken? What has changed in the years since? How do you feel as you look at them?
4. In addition to Hosea, list the other people in his “family portrait.” What astonishing command is given to Hosea in verse 2? How does God explain it to him?
5. Imagine yourself in Hosea’s place. How would you have reacted to God’s instruction to marry a prostitute?
6. The metaphor of adultery is common in the Bible as a description of idolatry. How is the image employed in the following passages?

Jeremiah 3:1

Deuteronomy 31:16

Ezekiel 23:1-8

Revelation 17:1-5

7. What's the name of the first son? \_\_\_\_\_ For the background story of the "massacre" there, read 2 Kings 9:14-37. The name is a reminder that God is about to do what?
  
8. Supply the names of the second-born daughter \_\_\_\_\_ and the third-born son \_\_\_\_\_. According to your Bible's footnotes, what do these names mean? What do they suggest that God is about to do?
  
9. Consider your own name for a moment. Is there a story you've been told about how you got your name? Does it have a special meaning?

### **HOSEA 1:10-11**

10. There comes a dramatic change in tone in verse 10. How would you characterize what God says in verses 10-11 compared with what He has just said in verses 2-9?
  
11. Read Romans 9:26 and 1 Peter 2:10. How do the New Testament writers employ the promise God here makes to Hosea?
  
12. Have you seen such a dramatic change in your own life or that of a friend? If so, share it with the members of your small group.
  
13. As a listener to sermons, which tends to leave a greater emotional impression on you: the threat of punishment or the promise of forgiveness?



# A SHOCKING FAMILY PORTRAIT

## Lesson 2

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### Pictures on the Wall

In most of our homes there are family portraits on the walls or atop a chest of drawers. Some are contemporary. Others betray the passing of decades. In this writer’s home are two sets of anniversary photos. One set features our wedding day photo alongside a picture of us vacationing in Hawaii on our 25<sup>th</sup>. The second set has that very same wedding photo, but this time paired with our much older selves standing before a flower garden. The occasion is our 50<sup>th</sup>, and the aging process is strikingly obvious!

How about your own home? Is there a family portrait of dad, mom, and the children taken for the church’s pictorial directory? A posed gathering of the grandchildren? Whether a formal pose or a zany candid shot on the back porch, the subjects are probably smiling. And why not? We celebrate our families as a gift from God, one of the greatest blessings in our lives. For those widowed or divorced, those pictures carry additional emotional freight, but they still remind us of treasured memories.

### A Shocking Family Portrait

#### *HOSEA 1:2-9*

The first chapter of Hosea is a shocker! The family portrait held before us there is unconventional, to say the least. There in the photo beside Hosea stands “an adulterous wife” (NIV – the original literally means “wife of fornications”). There beside them are “children of unfaithfulness” (literally “children of fornications”). There is a long, painful story behind the portrait. It is the story of a whole nation gone wrong.

Hosea begins in marked contrast to other prophets. There is no “call story.” No dramatic encounter in the temple, as with Isaiah. No summons with visions, as with Jeremiah. No language of recruitment, no excuses offered, no divine reassurances. Instead, there simply comes a summons to get married: “Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife.” It is the first of four commands God gives him in sequence. Each of the three that follow is a command to name the children that arrive on the scene one after another:

“Call him Jezreel,”

“Call her Lo-Ruhamah,”

“Call him Lo-Ammi”

It doesn't happen instantly. The unfolding personal drama surely took years, since the second child was “weaned” before the third arrived. For Hosea those must have been long, arduous years with a generous helping of distress, but for the reader, it all spills out in 8 verses. David Hubbard's description gives us focus: “It all began with a marriage. But the marriage of Hosea and Gomer was no ordinary nuptial. Initiated by the Word of God, it was permeated with the purposes of revelation ... heavy with tragedy and buoyant with hope.”

The story of Hosea and Gomer is not the normal “love and marriage” tale we are used to hearing. God has His hand on this family drama. We must slow ourselves down, therefore, and have a longer look at each person in this portrait.

## Gomer – The Adulterous Wife

### HOSEA 1:2-3

Gomer, the “daughter of Diblaim,” is not mentioned outside this book. The narrative does not describe her, and we hear her speak no words. She is introduced to us as simply “adulterous.” God as matchmaker offers a simple explanation for His astonishing instruction to Hosea: “Because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.” What will happen to you, Hosea, is what has happened to me!

The metaphor of adultery is common in the Bible as a description of idolatry. God was the bridegroom and Israel His bride. Marriage was a metaphor for the covenant relationship He established with them at Sinai. But Israel was unfaithful to Him early and often. Even while God was drawing up the covenant provisions with Moses on top of the mountain, the people were playing the harlot down below, urging Aaron to “make us gods” (Exodus 32:1), then bowing to the golden calf he fashioned for them. While they were still in the wilderness, preparing to enter Canaan, God had warned Moses that the Israelites would take this path: “These people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them” (Deuteronomy 31:16). Jeremiah framed his denunciation of the nation the same way, charging the Israelites with living “as a prostitute with many lovers” (Jeremiah 3:1).

But what does “an adulterous wife” mean? Was Gomer a normal Jewish girl who was later unfaithful to Hosea, or was she already a promiscuous woman, possibly a harlot, when he married her? There is a substantial scholarly debate about this. David Hubbard and most others take the former view, arguing that “adulterous” describes what Gomer would later become and that the only children in the narrative are the three named in the verses that follow. A few other scholars, including Thomas McComiskey, argue that Gomer was already a promiscuous woman when Hosea married her. Further, they

*The story of Hosea and Gomer is not the normal “love and marriage” tale we are used to hearing.*

*The metaphor of adultery is common in the Bible as a description of idolatry.*

say, it is possible that Gomer already had children by her previous liaisons, children that Hosea would have adopted when he married her. They point to the mention of “your brothers” and “your sisters” (plural) in 2:1 as evidence that there are other children in the family portrait.

In any case, the focus on the detestable idolatry of the people is clear, as is the determination of God to execute judgment on them for it. The naming of the three children born into this marriage says so plainly.

## Jezreel – A Name of Looming Judgment

### HOSEA 1:4-5

Each child’s name is a clear harbinger of that coming judgment. The first child, a boy, is to be named “Jezreel.” That name, which literally means “God scatters,” points to a punishment God is soon to administer. The Jezreel Valley, one of the few places in Israel where chariots, cavalry, and marching armies could be maneuvered, is one of the prominent battle sites in Israel. There Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 6:33). There too came the bloody massacre of King Ahab’s family by Jehu (2 Kings 9:14-37). This later event, in fact, is the reason God gives that He will soon “punish the house of Jehu,” the dynasty currently represented by King Jeroboam II.

The text implies that this boy is Hosea’s own child. Gomer, says the text, “bore him a son.” The births of the other two children do not mention “him” (Hosea) in the same way, and some have guessed that the other two are products of her unfaithfulness to him. That omission by itself is not sufficient proof that those children are illegitimate, though God later makes it painfully clear to Hosea that Gomer has cheated on him (3:1).

Hubbard says that the name Jezreel warrants two other comments. One is that the name’s meaning (“God scatters”) is actually a pun that can have both a negative and a positive meaning. Here it is the negative – the looming threat that God will “scatter” Israel’s armies and “break Israel’s bow” there. But in Chapter 2 there is a positive meaning - a good kind of “scattering” (of seeds as a farmer plants) that will reverse the former judgment. “In that day ... I will plant her for myself,” God promises (2:21, 23).

The second is that in Hebrew, “Jezreel” (*yizre’el*) forms a pun-like wordplay with “Israel” (*yisra’el*). Jezreel turns out to be more than a place name. It is, says Hubbard, “a figure descriptive of the whole nation, ripe for judgment, yet to be restored to a covenant relationship when the judgment has done its necessary work.”

## Lo-Ruhamah – A Name of God’s Heartbreak

### HOSEA 1:6-7

A second child is added to the family portrait. There is a change in the announcement of this daughter’s birth. Of Jezreel, it was said that Gomer “bore him [Hosea] a son,” but here we read that Gomer “gave birth to a daughter.” No mention of “him” (Hosea), and many conclude this girl was a product of Gomer’s adultery.

But the real attention, once again, is on the baby’s NAME: “Call her Lo-Ruhamah.” The meaning is plain and frightening: “not loved”! The Hebrew root word *raham* is related to the word for “womb” and connotes a deep physical and emotional attachment. There is no ambiguity here. This child’s name announces a sharp change in God’s attitude toward His people. After centuries of patient love and repeated forgiveness, God says “No more!” It is a gut punch, the equivalent of hearing your spouse say, “I don’t love you anymore.”



It is a cry of passionate heartbreak from the God whose very nature is love (1 John 4:8). That heartbreak brought a firm resolve:

*I will no longer show love for the house of Israel,  
that I should at all forgive them.  
Yet I will show love to the house of Judah;  
and I will save them.*

The word translated “forgive” in the NIV text is Hebrew *nasa*, which literally means “snatch away” or “carry off.” It may refer to snatching away sins (i.e., forgiving them). “No love” for Israel translates into “no forgiveness”! This very same word appears again in Hosea 5:14, where God describes Himself as a lion attacking and snatching away both Ephraim (the North) and Judah (the South). There, quite literally, God announces His determination to carry away both North and South into exile.

Can you imagine the impact of this on Hosea himself? He sits and ponders the dreadful news: “God no longer loves us, will no longer forgive, and will see to it that we are carried off!” Can you imagine the stares and glares of the neighbors as they looked on these three children with their frightful names?

*Can you imagine the  
stares and glares of  
the neighbors as they  
looked on these three  
children with their  
frightful names?*

## **Lo-Ammi – A Name Warning of Coming Divorce**

### **HOSEA 1:8-9**

The names of the children grow progressively more harsh. The third child, a boy, receives the most chilling name yet, a name that signals a total change, not only in God’s attitude but in God’s relationship to Israel. *Lo-Ammi* means “Not my people.” It is tantamount to a divorce decree. The ancient covenant is annulled. “We’re finished! It’s over!”

Could it be? Hadn’t God promised to Abraham long ago “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant ... to be your God and the God of your descendants” (Genesis 17:7)? Hadn’t He “proposed” a marriage relationship through Moses: “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7)? Hadn’t He entered into that covenant at Sinai and renewed it again and again with them?

But Israel had crossed the red line, as surely as a wayward wife who ran to the arms of another lover and abandoned her husband. Their unfaithfulness was the crassest un-Valentine ever: WE ARE NOT YOURS! Now this baby signals God’s awful reply. For the first time, God is not speaking to Hosea *about* the people. He is addressing them directly. “Them” becomes “you.” “You are NOT MY PEOPLE [emphasis added], and I am not your God.”

It is an altogether shocking family portrait.

## Family Reflections

The portrait of Hosea's family invites us to reflect on our own families. Just as the creation of the world itself was no "accident," but the result of God's intentional working, couldn't we say the same of our families? In counseling sessions, a pastor sometimes asks a troubled couple, "What first attracted you to him/her?" Have we stopped to consider the mysterious providence of God in bringing us together (even in a marriage we later deemed "unhappy")? In the happy or unhappy playing out of that marriage, it would be useful to consider what God is trying to tell us about ourselves and our path forward.

And what about our children? How often have we pondered not only the timing of their arrival, but the unique package of gifts (and challenges!) they brought into our lives? This writer remembers vividly the disagreement that attended our having a third child. She said yes, I said no. We finally agreed we needed to pray earnestly before making a decision, and prayer made all the difference.

Whatever the shape of your "family" right now, it is fruitful to think, talk, and pray about what God might do in us and through us.

## A "Marriage" of Doom and Hope

### HOSEA 1:10-2:1

Suddenly at verse 10 the tone changes, the wind shifts. The troubled marriage and the disturbing family portrait recede into the background for a time. They are replaced with another kind of "marriage" – words of hope are wedded to the pronouncement of doom: "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand ... which cannot be ... counted ... they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" It is the first of several places in Hosea where announcements of judgment and promises of hope (the Law and the Gospel!) are uttered back-to-back. So dramatic is this reversal, says Sharla Fritz, that it "feels like spiritual whiplash"!

These two kinds of words – judgment and hope – flow from two basic kinds of covenants in the Old Testament. And both address adulterous Israel. The covenant enacted at Sinai was a covenant of *mutual obligation* – God to people and people to God. It carried blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The greatest of the curses was the threat of exile. This covenant, Hosea announces, has been irretrievably broken and the curses are now turned loose. The "marriage" of God and people is broken. Punishment is certain. A divorce is coming. Exile will sweep them out of the land and scatter them.

Is there any hope left? Ah, yes! For there is another, older covenant that God made with Abraham. It is a one-way covenant of *divine commitment*. God made promises to Abraham and his descendants which were NOT contingent on their obedience but on God's faithfulness.

The hope held out in verse 10 ("like the sand") literally echoes the promise to Abraham: "I will surely ... make your descendants as numerous as ... the sand on the seashore" (Genesis 22:17). Israel will not only be repopulated, but the Israelites themselves will get a new name: "In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" This latter phrase makes its very first appearance in the Bible. And Hosea is the one to utter it. Centuries later Paul would quote this verse to exult in the wonder of God calling both Jews AND Gentiles "sons of the living God" (Romans 9:26). Yes, judgment is certain, but God has not forgotten His ancient promise to Abraham, and that promise is their hope.

On top of this hopeful word comes another, equally breathtaking: “The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader.” The centuries-old divorce between North and South will be healed. Two nations will be merged again into one as in the glory days under King David. Is a new David to be that “one leader”? Is this an anticipation of the Messiah, the heir of God’s promises to David more than two centuries earlier that he would never lack a man on the throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16)? It seems so, even though the New Testament never cites this verse in speaking of Jesus. Further, God promises that the Israelites “will come up out of the land,” probably a reference to their return from the land of their exile (*CSSB*). The verse closes with an exultant “great will be the day of Jezreel” (a “planting” that will reverse the “scattering” that formerly destroyed the nation).

The first verse of Chapter 2 is really the last verse of Chapter 1! It provides a fitting climax to this hope-filled oracle by summoning Jezreel to announce to his “brothers” and “sisters” their new names – “My people” and “My loved one” – which perfectly sum up the restoration of the whole nation in the great day to come. The singular “brother” and “sister” rendered in the RSV follows the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament). If singular, Jezreel is addressing his brother and sister that their names have been changed by God’s grace.

But the plural of the NIV and most translations reflect the original Hebrew. A few commentators think that the “brothers and sisters” here are Gomer’s children before her marriage to Hosea. The context indicates the more likely audience is the whole nation of Israel, here receiving their new names after the judgment has passed.

## Prophecies Fulfilled

It all happened as Hosea foretold. There was a return from exile at the direction of the Persian King Cyrus in 538 BC. Then there came “one leader,” the Messianic Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth, in whom were met all the hopes of the nation. Finally, there came the “new Israel” called the Church, which united Jews and Gentiles by the millions right down to our own day. Once we were “not a people” who had “not received mercy.” Now we own the new names – “people of God” who have “received mercy” through Jesus (1 Peter 2:10). Though not the usual liturgical response, “WOW” would be the right word for all of it!

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## Personal Application

## Hosea 2:2-3:5

**Prayer as we prepare:** *Lord God, as I study Your Word this week, grant that it be a mirror which shows me the truth about myself. Then move me to come to You for help and healing. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### FOR REVIEW

1. What discoveries did you make about the significance of the name “Jezreel”?
2. What are two types of covenants in the Old Testament? How does each play a part in Hosea’s prophetic message?

### HOSEA 2:2-13

3. We commonly say that “the punishment should fit the crime.” If it were left for you to decide, what punishment, if any, would you put in place for adultery?
4. Make a listing of the punishments God was considering for adulterous Israel.
5. Baal worship was the primary form Israel’s idolatry took. Summarize the deceptive belief that Baal-worshippers held (v. 8).
6. As you read through this section, what hints can you find that God’s real goal was not a final “divorce” but a “reconciliation” with His estranged people?
7. Think about the punishments you received as a child, or the ones you have administered (if you are a parent). What was the goal of those punishments?

**HOSEA 2:14-23**

8. In the marriage rite, the pastor invites the bride and groom to seal their covenant with the words, “I will.” In this section, how many times does God say, “I will”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. If you have been married, what “vows” did you make on your wedding day? Did you write your own, or say the words the pastor gave you? Did you ever “renew” your vows publicly or privately? If so, what prompted you to do that?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. In verse 15 comes mention of the Valley of Achor. Read Joshua 7:1-26, especially the last three verses, for the background story. What does “Achor” mean (see Bible footnote)? How will it be transformed?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What’s the significance of the “new name” the people will call God (v. 16)? See the footnote in your Bible for the word translated “master” here and note verse 17!
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Until this point in your life, which of the following descriptions of God would you have been more likely to use?
  - a. A Master whose rules I ought to obey.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. A Spouse who loves me ardently and intimately.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. The section ends with an announcement of the changing of the children’s names. What do the changes signify?

14. Why do you think that in our culture the bride traditionally adopts her husband's surname? Why do you think that in some traditions (Catholic and Orthodox) new Christians adopt a new name (perhaps a saint's name)?

### **HOSEA 3:1-5**

15. What did it cost Hosea to buy Gomer back? What might be the other costs of taking back an unfaithful spouse, also in our time?
16. Hosea enforced a period of celibacy ("many days") on Gomer when she returned home before they resumed marital relations afterward. To what national situation ("many days" followed by an "afterward") was this comparable?
17. Can you recall an event in your life that chastened you and led to a change of heart?