

1. Week 19: Prophetic Rewind, Part 3 (Hosea)

2. Recap & Preparing for CG:

Daily Reading for Week:

- Isaiah 61-64, Psalm 120
- Isaiah 65-66, Psalm 121
- Hosea 1-5, Psalm 122
- Hosea 6-10, Psalm 123
- Hosea 11-14, Psalm 124
- Joel, Psalm 125
- Amos 1-5, Psalm 127

Resources for Week:

- Read Scripture Videos: Hosea, Joel, Amos
- Read: Hosea 3-4

3. Focus of time together:

To understand and feel God's heart for Israel, despite their constant disobedience, through the story and words of Hosea.

4. Weekly ground rule / goal / value:

Value: To practice the act of empathizing with God and others. To empathize with someone is to identify yourself with them and to feel what they are feeling. As you read through and reflect on Hosea, try to put yourself in his and God's shoes emotionally.

5. Connection and Unity Exercise (Mutual Invitation, 15 minutes):

Share with the group in one minute a high or a low from this week.

6. Opening Prayer:

Pray a unity prayer together. Pay special attention and try to feel what other people voiced during the Connection and Unity Exercise. Offer these feelings to God.

7. Intro to Discussion:

Congratulations! You made it through the first major prophet, Isaiah. This week, we get to dive into some of the so-called minor prophets. The first one we get to meet is Hosea. While Isaiah spoke to the kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom, Hosea's prophecies are for the people of the northern kingdom, Israel. Hosea's life and ministry took place a few generations before Isaiah — and therefore, before Israel was destroyed by Assyria. Israel, or Ephraim or Jacob as Hosea referred to it, was under the reign of Jeroboam II when Hosea started his ministry. Over the next 20 years, Israel saw four of its kings assassinated or forcefully removed from kingship. Hosea takes place during this incredibly tumultuous, unsettling time. Not only was Israel in the midst of political upheaval but it was also in a state of deep moral decay. Hosea describes it this way:

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites,
because the LORD has a charge to bring
against you who live in the land:
“There is no faithfulness, no love,
no acknowledgment of God in the land.
There is only cursing, lying and murder,
stealing and adultery;
they break all bounds,
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.
Because of this the land dries up,
and all who live in it waste away;
the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky
and the fish in the sea are swept away.
But let no one bring a charge,
let no one accuse another,
for your people are like those
who bring charges against a priest.
You stumble day and night,
and the prophets stumble with you.
So I will destroy your mother—
my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.

“Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also reject you as my priests;
because you have ignored the law of your God,
I also will ignore your children.
The more priests there were,
the more they sinned against me;
they exchanged their glorious God for something disgraceful.
They feed on the sins of my people
and relish their wickedness.

And it will be: Like people, like priests.
I will punish both of them for their ways
and repay them for their deeds.
They will eat but not have enough;
they will engage in prostitution but not flourish,
because they have deserted the LORD
to give themselves to prostitution;
old wine and new wine
take away their understanding.
My people consult a wooden idol,
and a diviner's rod speaks to them.
A spirit of prostitution leads them astray;
they are unfaithful to their God.
They sacrifice on the mountaintops
and burn offerings on the hills,
under oak, poplar and terebinth,
where the shade is pleasant.
Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution
and your daughters-in-law to adultery."

Hosea 4:1-13

God speaks to Israel through Hosea in the midst of the corruption of its kingdom and people. Hosea is ministering to an Israel that had become just like every other nation, doing whatever was right in their own eyes and prostituting themselves to other gods rather than worshiping and following YHWH, their Rescuer, who had led them out of Egypt and made a covenant with them. Hosea is given the unenviable and dreadful task of not only calling out Israel for her sin, but also living firsthand God's emotional experience of being cheated on by His people (or bride). God actually calls Hosea to marry a "promiscuous woman." In doing so, God is inviting Hosea to experience what it is like to be in a marriage covenant with an unfaithful spouse, which is what God is experiencing with Israel.

The significance of this command is profound. This wasn't about God calling Hosea into symbolic behavior that would prove a point to the people. Rather, God asked Hosea to spend several years of his life embodying the experience of being cheated on by a disloyal spouse. God did this in order to instill in Hosea a deep, whole-body empathy with God's heartache over Israel's idolatry. Only after this experience was Hosea then fully able to communicate God's anguish to Israel on His behalf. As we read and reflect, consider how important it is for us to empathize with God's emotional response toward the world and His people.

8. Questions for Large Group Discussion (45 minutes):

Questions for Basic Understanding:

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

1. God tells Hosea to marry a “promiscuous woman” and name their kids “not loved” and “not my people.” And then, after Hosea’s wife is unfaithful, God tells him to buy her back and remain married to her. How do you think the community around Hosea viewed him?
2. Reading Hosea 4 in the Introduction and remembering what you read in the book of Hosea and in the latter part of the book of 2 Kings, try to paint a picture of the current state of the northern kingdom. What do you imagine day-to-day life in Israel looked like in those days?

Questions for Listening to Scripture:

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

1. What do you think Hosea must have felt when he heard God’s command to marry a “promiscuous woman”?
2. Read Hosea 11:1-12. What does this chapter show you about the heart of God over Israel?
3. What is God wrestling with in this chapter?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savor its richness, and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

1. What is it like for you to engage with such an emotional God as depicted in Hosea? Does it bother you or comfort you to consider God experiencing heartache, jealousy, and humiliation?
2. Do you typically interact with God on such emotional terms, or do you find that your relationship tends to assume a pattern where you and/or God are simply calm, cool, and collected?
3. Hosea married a promiscuous woman not merely as a symbol for what Israel was to God — unfaithful to their covenant — but to actually experience what this felt like for God. Have you ever had an experience where you felt God’s disturbed yet gracious heart toward you and your people? How did you feel in that moment, and what did it bring up in you?

9. Questions for Small Group Discussion (25 minutes):

Questions for Self-Examination:

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture, and consider any appropriate action.

Hosea 6:6 says, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God, rather than burnt offerings.” Abraham Heschel writes:

The relationship between God and Israel, conceived by Hosea in terms of marital love, desertion, and the hope of new betrothal, calls not only for a right action, but also for a feeling for each other on the part of those involved. It implies not only a legal obligation, but also inner attitudes. In the light of his own complete emotional solidarity with God, Hosea seems to have seized upon the idea of sympathy as the essential religious requirement. The words *daath elohim* means *sympathy for God*, attachment of the whole person, his love as well as his knowledge; an act of involvement, attachment or commitment to God. The biblical men knew of no bifurcation of mind and heart, thought and emotion. He saw the whole person in a human situation. “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, *daath* of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6); *daath* corresponds to *hesed* or love. What is desired is an inner identification with God rather than a mere dedication to ceremonies. Thus the expression *daath elohim* must be understood in the framework of Hosea’s thinking of the God-Israel relationship as of engagement, marriage, betrayal, and remarriage.

Guided Empathy Exercise:

1. Have you ever been cheated on? Or have you ever cheated on someone else? Whether you have or haven’t, sit for five minutes in silence reflecting on the felt experience of betrayal. If you find yourself completely unable to identify with this feeling, spend these few minutes mentally putting yourself in the shoes of someone like Hosea whose spouse is cheating on them and try to imagine what it would feel like.
2. Spend five more minutes in silent reflection. This time, ask yourself what this causes you to feel toward the person who did the cheating? Alternately, what do you feel toward the person cheated on?
3. Now do one final five-minute reflection, this time focusing your attention toward God, your loving Father and the “husband” of the church. Are you able to picture God as the victim of such betrayal? What does it feel like to picture the King of the universe experiencing the humiliating heartache of being cheated on? Are you able to identify with the feelings of the cheater who cheats on God in this sense?
4. Share what you are feeling and processing with your small group. Who did you empathize with and what was it like to go through this reflection? How are you feeling right now?

10. Closing (5 minutes):

Finish your time together by praying Hosea 6:1-3 aloud together:

Come, let us return to the Lord.
He has torn us to pieces

but he will heal us;
he has injured us
but he will bind up our wounds.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
that we may live in his presence.
Let us acknowledge the Lord;
let us press on to acknowledge him.
As surely as the sun rises,
he will appear;
he will come to us like the winter rains,
like the spring rains that water the earth.”