



12 faith journeys
of the minor prophets

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INTRODUCTION

Outside Nathan's upstairs office stands a tiny, three-foot-tall door. It's not this little, rarely used aperture to a dusty attic that really catches his eye, but the laminated paper sign pinned to the top of its frame. It simply reads: "Minor Prophets".

This strange sign is likely the result of a former resident's wry wit, but to us, it speaks volumes about how people perceive the 12 books of the Bible labeled just like that sign—the Minor Prophets. Minor. Strange. Little. Unimportant. Unused. Dusty. These are all words so many people of the Christian faith think of when they encounter these Old Testament writings. And so, therefore, let's state the obvious, the Minor Prophets don't get much attention.

The excuses for skipping these books are plentiful. For starters, the Minor Prophets' writings are short, merely a brief few chapters or just a chapter, hence the designation "minor." The Old Testament is comprised of thirty-nine books, but the combined 12 books of the Minor Prophets comprise less than 7% of the entire Old Testament. So, when compared to the massive writings of the Major Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, the writings of the Minor Prophets can seem minuscule and unimportant. Because of their short length, these books are often deemed of little value, and so are easily overlooked.

Then there's the fact of popularity. They are "fringe" by almost any definition of the word, trapped on the outskirts of the Old Testament and written by a dozen guys who would be considered by today's standards strange and unpopular. Sure, since grade school we've all learned about the runaway Jonah who was swallowed by a "whale." But, other than Jonah, who has heard of these other oddly named men: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi? Try even pronouncing Habakkuk! And so, because we believe we cannot possibly feel any connection to such "fringe" men, their names are never spoken of from the pulpits.

In addition, while other well-known Bible heroes have compelling stories, many of the Minor Prophets seem to have missed the memo when it comes to including their own personal narratives. From the opening line of Scripture, God paints a compelling story and immediately builds in suspense and mystery. We see cosmic forces at play like in the Flood faced by Noah. We follow the Exodus from captivity boldly led by Moses. The stories of Abraham and David and Ruth and Samson are exciting and filled with colorful personalities. But, what can we say about Malachi? Where does the personality of Amos shine through? Except for a few brief examples, the Minor Prophets can seem like faceless mouthpieces for God, not interesting individuals in their own right. They end up being treated as Minor League players, stuck in God's dugout, fervently wishing to ascend to the Majors.

Oh, what a tragedy! How wrong we would be to ignore the Minor Prophets. When we just take the time to understand their stories, the Minor Prophets and their messages turn out to be amazingly profound. They fill us with hope and wonder, all the while convicting and challenging us to faithfully follow God.

MEET THE PROPHETS

To better appreciate these spokesmen and their impact, let's start by understanding their role. At certain periods of time, Yahweh God made clear both His intentions and plans through the work of individuals He called in the Hebrew *nabi*, which we today call prophets. While that job title currently causes most people to think about telling the future, a prophet's main role wasn't prediction. Prophets were simply individuals who would receive and then declare God's messages. These twelve authors were, as the Apostle Peter explained, "holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Some prophets spoke God's messages. Nathan, for example, confronted King David regarding his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). Elijah challenged evil King Ahab and the false prophets of Baal (1 Kings 17).

Other prophets acted out God's messages, communicating by deed. The deeds could range from the mundane (naming a child), to the eye-catching (wearing an oxen's yoke), to the outrageous (walking about naked), to the miraculous (calling down fire from heaven).

Still other prophets wrote down God's messages for people to read. The majority of our information about prophets comes from the books written by the "classical" or "writing" prophets who flourished during Israel and Judah's political turmoil with the Assyrian, then Babylonian, and finally the Medo-Persian Empires. Using their experiences and personality, the writing prophets translated their visions and oracles from God into amazing poetry and prose that shared a perspective different from the rest of Scripture.

Some of the books in the Bible tell us about the actions of God and His people. These books of history are filled with facts and stories that tell us the "what" of God's actions. Other biblical books tell us about the reactions of people to the work of God in their time. These books of poetry, also called Wisdom Literature, are filled with songs and poems and proverbs that remind us of how we should respond to what God has done. But, the books of prophecy are different. While they sometimes mix in "what" and "how" thoughts in their writing, their bigger concern is the "why." In the prophetic books, we best find God's motivations for the actions He takes involving justice, as well as His nature of compassion and forgiveness. As God is speaking through these men, we are granted a breathtaking, bay window-sized view into our Heavenly Father's heart.

Yahweh called the prophets to share important messages because He cares about His people. There were messages for the nations of Judah, Israel, and the surrounding nations of their time. They contained dire warnings of coming judgment for their moral failings and emphatic calls to repentance. God even pointed out events that would occur in the far distant future, such as the coming of the Messiah and the events of the end times. Each message was delivered through the filter of the prophet's language, style, and situation, but all of the messages poured forth God's heart.

PROPHETS OF FAITH

When one truly digs into the lives of the Minor Prophets, one will discover not something minor, strange, little, unimportant, unusable, and dusty, but the real-life stories of 12 men who were thrust into quite perilous situations. They will discover that these guys were everyday people, just like so many of us. They hailed from diverse backgrounds such as farmers and construction workers, some clergy and a few aristocrats, and a mix of ages from teens up to senior citizens. What tied them all together was a specific call by God to wear the burdensome mantle of a prophet and deliver His messages. And what messages they were! So full of fire from the pain of betrayal and the joy of fatherly love that their ears must have burned upon hearing them.

Those impassioned messages revolved like the planets around the sun, all around one key subject—faith. Faith is that strong or unshakeable belief in something, especially with little or no proof or evidence. The Bible itself defines faith simply as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is primarily tied to the idea of trust and confidence, for as King David pled, “Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust” (Psalm 16:1). When it comes to daily living, we’re told “the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4), and that followers of God “walk by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7). And then there’s the warning that “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Confidence. Reliance. Credence. Belief. Trust. We could all use some of that in our relationships with God. And so, too, did the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets needed a healthy dose of faith in God, for despite their position of honor in being chosen to relay the Lord’s oracles, these messengers were often treated quite badly by the very people God had sent them to.

*“Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others
were chained and put in prison. They were stoned;
they were sawed in two, they were put to death by
the sword. They went about in sheepskins and*

goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them” (Hebrews 11:36-38).

Because of this treatment, the prophets gained a unique perspective into the challenges surrounding faith, and that makes them highly relevant to us today. The tremendous faith these men had to demonstrate was sometimes rooted in their situation, as they had to learn to trust in God and obey His calling, even if it meant being dropped into life-and-death dilemmas with little hope of survival. Other times their faith was revealed as they boldly trusted God and proclaimed a surprising or challenging message, knowing that it wouldn't be popular. Faith is shown as they wrestled with questions, as they observed injustice, as they saw devastation, and as they anticipated the future.

These men didn't start as super-soldiers of the faith, but instead were humble men who painstakingly had to learn the meaning of faith. Their faith journeys were in no way dull, nor were they insignificant, but exciting and insightful and very applicable to us today.

It doesn't matter that these books are often overlooked. What matters is that they are in our Bibles, and their lessons of faith are available to us if we will just take the time to look. We should strive to have a faith like that of the Minor Prophets, for we too need to learn how to have that kind of faith and benefit from its spiritual riches.

GOALS FOR THE READER

In the following pages, you'll have the chance to meet Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. All the introductory stories you'll read are elaborations on Scripture, imagining scenarios that the text hints at but doesn't necessarily describe. We ask that you take these stories as intended—as historical fiction to illustrate historical fact. We use narratives to help you fall in love with these prophets and see them as humans, instead of merely hard-to-pronounce names. We want to

show their diverse backgrounds, their unusual settings, and their varied experiences in a way that should spark your imagination.

Second, we also want to take some time to explain their messages. Each prophet wrote with a specific audience in mind, and each dealt with issues that require some background information to understand. We'll walk you through each message and cover the important points. Our goal is not to provide an academic assessment or a full-blown comprehensive commentary. We simply want to help you get the most out of each book and hear God's message with fresh ears.

Third, we also want the information to be practical. In ministry, we encounter so many people who each and every day experience challenges to their faith in God. We believe we can help, and we can do that by learning from how the Minor Prophets reacted to the challenges they faced and the lessons they learned and then applying that wisdom to our own lives. So, in each lesson, we have applications for Israel, the Nations, the Church, and for You. We hope that the applications learned will invigorate the reader's walk with our Heavenly Father into something so much deeper and richer.

Often the best journeys are those we take with others whom we care about. So, we have added practical questions for discussion so that you and someone special, or a group of someones special, can share your varied insights. Sharing lessons learned acts like plant food further speeding along the growth of faith.

Fourth and finally, each chapter comes with a complete list of the prophecies recorded by that particular Minor Prophet. You will discover that numerous prophecies have already been fulfilled in amazing detail, substantiated by historical records during Old Testament history and the First Coming of Christ. Fulfilled Bible prophecy provides some of the greatest proof that the Bible is truly indeed the Word of God and, therefore, you can put your faith and trust in what it teaches. And, knowing that God's prophetic word always comes true, you can with certainty trust that the other prophecies uttered by the prophets will indeed be fulfilled later in the future, either during the Last Days (our age), the Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom, or the Eternal State, or even

across multiple ages. Few things in life validate our faith more than fulfilled Bible prophecy.

And so, with these goals now laid out, we welcome you to come along with us on the 12 faith journeys of the Minor Prophets!

FAITH JOURNEY 1

HOSEA: FAITH WHEN YOUR HEART IS SHATTERED



THE AUCTION

She stood motionless and forsaken atop the high wooden platform. Stripped of all clothing, hands held together by a loosely tied rope and hanging limply before her, she made one last futile attempt to search her well of emotions and to no real surprise found its depths too dry to stir up any care. The indignity of the public display no longer held any horror for her, for long ago she had shed whatever dignity she once possessed.

Darkened, murky images of her life over the last few years played out in her mind's eye. Head hung low, gaze empty, staring down upon the roughhewn boards below her bare feet, she tried to remember the face and features of the man she had once known long ago as her husband. How old were her three little children now? Puzzled, she couldn't quite remember. She had left them all behind. They had offered her nothing but stress and embarrassment and poverty.

Oh, the poverty! She had wanted so much more than a provincial life. She had desires. Her beauty was widely admired and so she believed worthy of rich adornment in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry. She had wanted to know the joys of wine with friends at parties in the evening and with various lovers at private parties throughout the night. She had craved the attention and high position in society that she believed she rightfully deserved.

There were always many, many men who could fulfill her heart's desires. A long litany of suitors cascaded across her memory, and like her abandoned husband, she could no longer quite clearly picture them now. How many men had she given herself to procure these favored gifts? She could no longer remember that either. These lovers all seemed the same, so full of promises for a better life, yet each one eventually failed her, proving empty once they had gotten what they'd wanted out of her.

It started so wonderfully with pleasures untold she had thought, but over time the procession turned into a nightmare. With every bit of her body she sold for fancy baubles, a piece of herself was ultimately lost. The parties and the pleasures and the hard living rapidly took their toll. She found her soul was dying on the inside as rapidly as her body was aging on the outside. Face worn and cold, eyes empty of life, hair streaked with grey, shoulders slumped, the young woman appeared decades older than her true age. To her horror, as she declined, she found she had less to offer, and so too dropped the quality of her lovers. She finally resorted to paying them for just an inkling of the attention she had once received. And then the abuses and neglect had begun.

So, there she stood atop that platform—cold in both body and soul, friendless and oh so utterly lonely; face dirty and cheek bruised, long hair bedraggled, eyes bereft of the spark of life, reeking of prison stench—absolutely desolate. She remained somber, utterly crushed, and defeated. And, also indebted beyond all hope of repayment.

The sweaty auctioneer bellowed the call for bidding.

Across the busy market center of the capital city, hidden among the colorful merchants selling their various wares, stood a man used to being completely alone even in a bustling crowd. Head covered, cloak pulled tightly around him, the man attempted to be company with only his thoughts. For hours he'd been there waiting, pacing and wringing his calloused hands. Strong and powerful emotions assailed him, wave after wave, until he was quite sure he could stand against them no longer. Then she was standing before him on the auction block, and his strength almost caved.

Taking in the crowd with only quick and furtive sidelong glances, the man took the measure of the people around him. While some seemed more interested in the pungent smells of the exotic spices and fine textures of the fabrics the market had to offer, a greater number seemed intent on ogling the latest procession of slaves being sold to market, hoping to be titillated by some sordid, tragic story from the auctioneer. They were to be disappointed by this sad creature of a woman now brought before them, for in her worn condition, the auctioneer knew she would fare little to no value, so he barely made any effort to up-sell her.

Some knew who she was though. She had a past. He noticed cliques of women whispering and laughing to one another, spiting bitterly without pity: “Good-for-nothing man stealer.” “Adulterous!” “Her own husband couldn’t control that wretch.” “Deserved what she got.” The watcher cringed inwardly, for painfully he knew the words were all too true.

At the booming call of the auctioneer for the first bid, the milling crowd responded with skeptical silence. He called again, this time dropping the bid even lower, but was met only by pockets of quiet laughter. A third time the auctioneer called out the lowest possible price, yet still nothing.

Gathering his fortitude, the man took down his hood and revealed his face. Eyes fixated only on the woman, voice cracked with emotion, he called out. “I bid 30 pieces of silver! But all I have is 15. Will you, uh, take the other 15 in barley?” The words having escaped his lips, the man self-consciously believed all eyes were now boring into him. And so they were. Who would pay even a pittance for such a treacherous and defeated creature, much less the full price set by their law for a healthy slave? It seemed like a preposterous offer. And then, with looks of absolute shock revealing recognition, they knew. The people began to whisper one to another. “Isn’t that her former husband?” He paid no attention to the unkind words that flowed around him. The auctioneer was quick to respond, knowing he’d get no better price. “Sold!”

The woman couldn’t look up—didn’t dare look up—for where once emptiness was there was now mortal fear rising within her at the sound

of her husband's voice. As a slave, she was property, and her former husband and now master had the legal right to stone her to death for her infidelities. Would he take his revenge? Her mind was a torrent of panic as the man paid the auctioneer. And now he stood before her on the auction block, all eyes hungrily watching for the drama to unfold.

She braced herself for the inevitable blow, only to be confounded by the sensation of a warm cloak slipping around her slight shoulders. The man—the husband she had betrayed and abandoned time and again—now her master, lifted her trembling chin gently in his hands and tenderly spoke. “You are to live with me now for the rest of your life. You will no longer cheat on me. I forgive you, and I love you.” Her eyes darted up to meet his and was utterly stunned by the warmth within them. Like a marionette whose strings are cut, she collapsed as an ocean of guilt washed away from her soul. To the stunned silence of the market crowd, the husband caught her in his strong arms, lifted her off her feet, and carried her back home.

A SHATTERED HEART

Have you ever had your heart shattered into a million painful pieces? Maybe the cause was betrayal by a loved one such as a wayward spouse or rebellious child. Possibly it's by a failed career, crushed dreams, lost hopes, or personal failure. The experience is rather like running through an obstacle course of emotions. One minute we feel such stabbing emotional pain that it attempts to overwhelm us. The next minute, we experience an uncontrollable rage at the injustice of it all. We cry, we plead, we call out, we lose sleep, and our health diminishes, but in the end, we're ultimately left feeling hollow, bitter, and oh so very alone.

The book of Hosea, the first of the twelve Minor Prophets recorded in the Old Testament part of the Bible, introduces us in the first three chapters to two people who have also had their hearts shattered, though for very different reasons. They were real people. They may have lived long ago, well, very long ago, approximately 740 years before Christ's birth. They may have lived in a nation very different than your own, which was the ancient Northern Kingdom of Israel set on the

eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. The culture may have also been very different, being the Hebrew people whom we now call the Jews or Israelis. They ate different foods, they lived in a farming and livestock-based economy, they rode donkeys and mules, their clothes were made of a coarse woven fabric, and their footwear consisted of sandals.

But, as for the heart, they were as human as we are today. They had thoughts, emotions, desires, and dreams and yearned to be loved and accepted. Where it matters most, people are people no matter where and when they may be found. And, like us, they suffered pain and the subsequent trials of maintaining faith in God when their hearts were shattered.

The shards are lying all scattered about us. Therefore, let's learn why the trials in life happen, as well as discover how to gain the faith that repairs the broken pieces of your heart. We'll do that by delving into the lives of these two iconic characters from the book of Hosea. Though long deceased, their life stories continue to be lived out by so many of us today.

Gomer, the Faithless Bride

Though the book is called Hosea, and that is the name of the man in our story and the author, the life experiences of Hosea revolved around his wife, so we'll start with her.

We find in chapter one that Hosea's wife was named Gomer. Not a great name by today's standards, nevertheless she caught Hosea's eye, though possibly not for the right characteristics one may look for when choosing a wife. You see, Yahweh God had told Hosea to find a wife who at first may have been just as pure as the infant nation of Israel was upon entering the Promised Land, but who also had a wandering eye which would eventually get her into serious moral trouble. So, whatever virtue Gomer may have had when their relationship began, she also started with some serious character flaws.

In that ancient culture, Hosea would have gone to Gomer's father, Diblaim, and paid the bride price for her. Then Gomer, after a time of engagement and wedding ceremony, would become Hosea's wife. The

women of that time rarely had a say in who they married, so a wild-hearted woman such as Gomer may have during the engagement period already begun exhibiting the unfaithful behaviors that would spell trouble for their coming marriage.

Not too long into Hosea and Gomer's marriage, we discover in chapter two that Gomer had other major character deficiencies. For starters, she was quite vain, which led to a self-centered materialism that ached for the finer things in life. Her era's Saks Fifth Avenue was where she'd be at each day, window shopping the expensive fashions and jewelry. She was consumed by greed and never satisfied, incessantly nagging her husband to pick up that third job to provide her with more fun money, which she then had the nerve to spend on her boyfriends. The life of the all-night party, Gomer was the crazy drunk dancing it up on the tabletops. Her wandering eye turned into full-blown adultery, and like a dog in heat, she chased after her long list of boy toys who could give her the goods she craved. For a gold anklet or the next high, Gomer prostituted her body as payment.

On the home front, Gomer bore three children, but it's questionable whether the second and third were actually even Hosea's children. With all the affection of Cinderella's stepmother, Gomer thought of her babies as brats who stole precious time away from her parties and attentions, and so she abandoned them for her latest lover's house. In between hook-ups, she managed to make fleeting appearances back at home, but was always quickly out the door again when she thought the next best offer beckoned.

Hosea and his God repulsed Gomer, so to be spiteful she chased after the pagan gods of the land. These demonic gods demanded she ritually burn incense and feast and prostitute herself before their stone altars used in the heinous practice of child sacrifice.

Two things happened to Gomer by chapter three. First, after a wild ride of a life, she was doused by the cold, hard reality that living in such a manner provided her with absolutely no joy whatsoever. No matter how much she had filled her life with material and sexual pleasures, she still felt utterly miserable. Nothing seemed to fill that empty hole in her

heart. Second, hard living had taken its toll on her body, and soon only the dregs of the back alleys wanted to be with her.

Eventually, she owned nothing but debt. In that culture, a person would have to work off the payments as a slave, and that's where we find Gomer. She'd sold her body for mere pleasures and trinkets, and then eventually to survive, because that's all that she had left to offer. She became impoverished, hopeless, pitiless, defiled, and unwanted by all those around her. Gomer had made herself toxic to her people, and they rightly wanted nothing to do with such a wretched individual. Having betrayed everyone by her treachery, and inevitably now all alone, she was left with nothing but a broken, shattered heart, and all of her own making.

Hosea, the Faithful Servant

Whereas Hosea's wife Gomer was utterly faithless, those same first three chapters show Hosea was the complete opposite. He was a man whose life was dedicated to being totally faithful.

Hosea placed Yahweh God first in his life, and so lived defined by his faithful service to Him. One would think Hosea's father, Beer, may have had an inkling of his son's destiny, for he named Hosea "God is salvation." God called Hosea to be a Nabi, which in Hebrew means Prophet, to his people in that Northern Kingdom of Israel. As a prophet of God, Hosea would share God's messages with the people. Sometimes God would have Hosea write out His messages in letters, sometimes shout them from the balconies in speeches, and at times even more dramatically—act out God's messages using his own life as a type of living symbol.

In living out these messages, God would ask Hosea to do some of the most difficult things to get His messages across. Regardless of how drop-dead gorgeous Gomer may have been, it must have worried Hosea when God asked him to marry a woman such as her, but Hosea obediently did so. It must have caused no small resentment from Hosea's children towards their father, by God's command, to give them names with prophetic implications. The name of Hosea's oldest son, Jezreel, meant "God scatters; the threatened judgment." His daughter

Lo-Ruhamah's name meant "not pitied; mercy not obtained." His youngest son Lo-Ammi's name meant "cast out; not my people." And, when Hosea's life crashed upon the craggy shoals of his wife's endless betrayals—the woman God had commanded him to marry—Hosea refused to divorce her. He then without question obeyed God yet again and bought his wayward wife out of slavery.

In such acts of obedience, Hosea showed how deep his relationship with God was and how totally selfless his faith was towards his Lord. Should God have asked Hosea to hop into a wheelbarrow He was pushing across a tightrope spanning the raging Niagara Falls, Hosea would have jumped right in, no questions asked. That's how strong Hosea's faith and trust in God were. Even with his heart shattered into a million pieces by his failed marriage, and also by his people who could care less about his prophetic warnings, Hosea knew that the only real choice was to keep the faith and just trust in God's divine purposes.

ISRAEL, THE FAITHLESS NATION

On the surface, it appears that Yahweh had set His messenger up for failure. That's led some readers to conclude that God is some kind of sadistic monster who enjoys seeing His children suffer. "God is the source of all our suffering and shattered hearts!" they conclude. Those are actually viable observations about His character and motive, but Hosea dispels them in chapters 4-14 by explaining God's relationship with the nation of Israel.

The culture in which Hosea was called to proclaim the Lord's messages existed during a very difficult time politically for the people of Israel. Internally, the people of the Northern Kingdom suffered through an ever-changing list of unstable kings who rose to power through assassination. The leaders were as self-serving and corrupt as any banana republic dictator.

External political pressure came from the ruthless Assyrian Empire, based in what is today Iraq. They were constantly breathing down the necks of Israel's kings, demanding allegiance and extorting protection money. If the oppressed nation didn't submit, in Mafioso style the cruel Assyrians would then ride down into Israel's lands and have their thugs

mercilessly beat up on the people. As Israelite kings waffled from paying the demanded tribute to outright rebellion, Assyrian kings with challenging names would come breaking down the doors. This time period is quite succinctly described as: “Anarchy, chaos, feuds, and broken covenants were visible on every side.”¹ This is the tumultuous political atmosphere in which Hosea had to survive to serve as God’s “prophet of Israel’s zero hour.”²

Ironically, despite all the corrupt politicians and flying arrows Israel was ducking during that time, according to 2 Kings 15-17, the nation was doing pretty well financially. Go figure! Economically the nation was prosperous, but spiritually it was their darkest hour.³ Israel may have been as prosperous as any Western nation is today, but its soulless people were continually shaken by ceaseless turmoil and frequent foreign attacks. Corrupt leaders have always been a symptom of a corrupt people, and Israel’s people had by then devolved morally. When that happens, inward corruption in a nation is more dangerous to its existence than its external enemies.⁴

God explained how the people of Israel got into such a dire predicament by comparing Israel to Gomer. In personality, they were the same. Gomer suffered a shattered heart of her own making, and so too did Israel, bringing about her own suffering and heartbreak. What a sad situation.

After all, like Gomer was to Hosea, Israel as a people group has always had a very special place in God’s heart. The steadfast faithful obedience of their forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (called Israel)—in a world that had shunned God had touched His heart. In response, God made Israel and his descendants a special covenant, meaning a sacred agreement one makes with another. In this eternal covenant, God promised the people of Israel that if they just kept His righteous law and remained faithful to Him, God would shower His loving blessings all over the Promised Land (Genesis 17:7-8; 26:2-5; 28:1-4,13-14; 1 Chronicles 16:17-18; Psalm 105:8-11).

Listen to the great love by which the Lord describes His covenant people Israel, found in Deuteronomy 7:6-8:

"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth... because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers."

As this passage proves, Israel was chosen by the Lord God Himself. He even called them a "special treasure." In agreement with the covenant, Israel was to be pure, holy, and dedicated to the One who loved them. Such love and commitment, bound by a life-long agreement, sounds rather like a marriage vow. That was and still is how God views His covenant.

God in Deuteronomy 7 commanded His Chosen People when they entered the Promised Land to utterly destroy the heinously evil tribes—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—who occupied its hills and valleys. Long having rejected Yahweh God, they instead worshiped the gods of metal and wood that their own hands had crafted. These idols represented the demon "male" gods El, Baal, and Dagon and "female" gods Asherah, Astarte, and Anath. These pagan people believed their fertility gods had to be enticed to mate, so that man, animal, and field would become fertile. To arouse these gods, these tribes performed various horrific acts including sacrificing their own children in the fires, reveling in drunken orgies, and openly having sex with temple shrine prostitutes and even animals.

God was deeply troubled that if the Israelites didn't destroy these evils, they'd become captivated by them and succumb to their temptations. As Deuteronomy 7:4 explains, "For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods." Tragically, the Israelites failed miserably in following God's command. Many of the evil peoples and practices remained throughout the land, and so God's concerns became quite realized. For Israel, just like Gomer, did not remain faithful to her "husband" for very long.

Israel, a Profile in Faithlessness

The parallels of Gomer to Israel in personality and behavior were remarkably uncanny, as in truth they were meant to be, for Gomer was a living symbol of Israel. Marvel at the comparisons!

Vanity. The more Yahweh blessed Israel the more the Israelites began to think of themselves as too good for everyone else, even for God. They stopped thinking of Him as their provider and instead pridefully patted themselves on the back for their good fortunes. Just like a socialite with a titanium MasterCard, Israel's focus was solely on what new things they could buy for themselves. As God dejectedly bemoaned, "Me she forgot" (2:13; 5:5; 7:10; 13:1).

Greed. It wasn't enough for the Israelites that God had given them their own lush land, rich agricultural bounty, military protection, good health, and most importantly a special place in His heart. No! Never having enough to satiate their cravings, Israel had the gall to ask their evil enemy neighbors for more of those things and pretended the bill would never come due (2:5,12; 10:1).

Drunkenness. Israel partied like the world was coming to an end. The people didn't just drink, they were inflamed with wine morning, noon, and night, and so were often found staggering past the Betty Ford Centers of their day (2:11; 4:5,11; 7:5,14).

Shamelessness. The lack of inhibition and stupidity that drunkenness invariably produces caused the people to behave shamefully, just like the wild donkeys to which Hosea compared them. The people, even their own supposedly holy men—the priests—debased themselves with public nudity and engaged in every form of lewdness (2:5,9-10; 4:7-9; 6:9; 8:11).

Lustfulness. The people's passions burned without any marital or social constraint whatsoever. The old taboos of fornication, adultery, homosexuality, pedophilia, and bestiality were torn down and replaced by San Francisco-style gay pride parades. Israel went after her lovers, and when she couldn't find any consenting parties, she hired lovers. The people made love openly on every threshing floor for all to see. The rampant sexual promiscuity resulted in begotten pagan children

who rarely knew who their fathers were. So defiled were the people, and so unable to quench their sexual lusts, they devolved into kissing calves, both beast and graven image. The people had degenerated into nothing more than wild, rutting animals (2:7,13; 5:3,7; 8:9; 9:1; 13:2).

Wickedness. The question when playing the game Limbo is, “How low can you go?” And, for Israel, there was just no low to their rottenness. Hosea compared their stubborn hearts to an oven that burned for every kind of wickedness. Every one of them was cursing liars who brazenly bragged that they were in reality “good” people. They voted in or bribed leaders who would let them skirt the laws so that they could sin as often as they wanted and with great abandon (4:16; 5:11; 6:8; 7:1,3,6; 8:3; 9:7,9,15-16; 10:9,13,15; 12:8; 13:2; 14:4).

Murderous. To satiate their selfish desires, treachery was business as usual. What they wanted they got; most often by committing fraud, through lying, moving property lines, swearing false testimony, breaking covenants, or just plain murder. The populace was killing, stealing, committing adultery, and engaging in bloodshed upon bloodshed until they were “utterly defiled with blood.” Even their priests were murderers! All laws were broken, and any judge who took a stand was found hanging on his own gallows. Murderous bands of thieves lay in wait on every road seeking their next victim. Nobody helped those in need, and anyone who dared act righteously was openly mocked. Never sorry for whatever treachery they engaged in, the people refused to repent, and so continued committing every dirty deed possible under the sun as if some Clint Eastwood Western B-movie bad guy (1:4; 4:1-2,8,18; 5:1-2,10; 6:7-10; 7:1,5,7,16; 10:4; 11:5; 12:1,14).

Idolatrous. Israel was set apart for Yahweh God alone, but the people quickly dumped Him to engage in the pagan acts that Gomer was so frequently found committing in her vindictiveness towards Hosea. They left God in the dust and instead put all their energies into worshipping the abominable Baals. The more they worshiped the Baals and other false gods—these false lovers—the more the people shamed themselves by burning incense on the hills, asking counsel from their wooden idols, constructing shrines and temples, and participating in

cruel human and animal sacrifices on stone altars atop the mountains. Instead of joining in a mutually loving relationship with the one true living God, the people cratered into becoming pagans enslaved to loveless blocks of wood (2:8,11; 4:12-13,17; 5:4; 8:4,13-14; 9:10; 10:1; 11:1).

Adulterous. There didn't appear to be a good marriage among the Israelites. Adultery was rampant. The divorce rate must have been up in the high 90th percentile. Even the brides committed adultery on their wedding days!

Despite all the references to female prostitutes in Hosea's messages, God didn't leave out the men. They could be found after hours up at the Baal shrine red light district offering "sacrifices" by having sex with the temple harlot, the very job Gomer took as her fortunes declined.

Adultery committed against one's spouse is bad enough, but the people as a whole committed greater harlotry by cheating on their Lord. By going after man-made idols fashioned in the form of demonic forces and creatures of nature, the "bride of God" played the harlot against her husband. God compared Israel's faithfulness to a morning cloud, which like the early dew, evaporates away (1:2; 2:2; 4:12-13,18; 6:4; 7:4; 8:9; 10:2).

Rebellious. God gave His cherished Israel the Ten Commandments and other precepts in the Mosaic Law so right and wrong and good and evil could easily be identified. Knowing how to choose what's right would save them from heartbreak. But, for Israel to engage in their sinful desires and then attempt to justify their evils, they would have to do away with God's Law and the boundaries that it set. Ultimately, so too must the Lawgiver be done away with. And so, for the sake of their sin, Israel treacherously rebelled against their Heavenly Father.

Much of the book of Hosea is filled with tear-stained page after tear-stained page as Yahweh God in first person explains the rebellious nature of His covenant "bride" Israel. In fitful pains of mournful agony, wailing and weeping and raging, and at times even seemingly disjointed ranting, the reader can only be struck by how staggeringly hurt God truly was by the devastating betrayal by His people.

Read the very words God bemoaned to Hosea when describing Israel's rebellion. The reason God's people "ceased obeying the Lord" and "transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law" was because they considered the "great things of My law... a strange thing." God's law didn't fulfill the selfish desires, lusts, and impulses of their sinful hearts, so in response, Israel from peasant to prince rebelled against their Heavenly Father (4:10,18; 7:14; 8:1,12; 9:1,15; 13:16).

Dealing a devastating blow, Israel in their desire to reject God's law also rejected Him personally. Like the chest-thumping Atheists of today, they even went as far as pretending God no longer existed. In response, God cried out, "They forgot Me!" Yes, Israel had "forgotten his Maker" (4:1,6; 7:7; 8:14; 11:3; 13:6).

Deeply wounded, God, like a parent who's just heard their tween yell "I hate you!" lamented over Israel's betrayal. "They do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him." No longer having a healthy respect for the Lord, they did not obey Him and so "did not cry out to Me" in their distress. Craven and ungrateful, "they have fled from Me" and "transgressed against Me, though I redeemed them." The betrayers were only ever "bent on backsliding from Me." God just wouldn't go away, so the people went on the offense and sought to "devise evil against Me." They have "spoken lies against Me," and "encircled Me with lies and deceit" to tarnish and smear the name of the Lord (5:7; 6:7; 7:10,13-15; 9:17; 10:3; 11:7,12).

Rejecting God as their king, Israel installed their own flawed and worthless leaders, an act hauntingly parallel to today's nations which leaves us with presidents who make confounding decisions, congresses being stuck in gridlock, and activist judges who just make up laws as it suits them. Israel had put all their trust in their military and endlessly tried to appease their two-faced enemies by making peace treaties not worth the clay tablets they were etched on (8:4,14; 10:13; 12:1).

As the rejection of God progressed over the decades, soon a youth culture arose who barely even knew the name of the Lord as anything but a curse word. Those who did know God held Him in absolute contempt and tried to provoke Him to anger most bitterly through their language, music, and lifestyle choices. They could care less if God was

offended, forgetting that in His all-knowingness the Omniscient always remembers (7:2; 11:7; 12:14; 13:1).

Unhappy. Israel thought a rebellious heart would bring them all God had ever denied them, but other than a fleeting kick, they just couldn't feel a contentment and satisfaction that lasted. None whatsoever! For, like Gomer, Israel after a life of committing every evil possible under the sun could only heave a dejected, "For then it was better for me than now."

Their response seems strange, but only at first, for when one realizes that without God's knowledge and the wisdom He provides, mankind becomes trampled down by our own lack of discernment until finally we're destroyed. When selfishness enslaves the heart, senseless people can only blindly stumble about through life making bad decisions. As Hosea so colorfully stated, "When one sows the wind, they reap the whirlwind."

Rebelliousness in reality is a sickness that devours one's strength. The very sinful pleasures the people of Israel craved were sapping their youth and vitality, essentially destroying them. And, crazy enough, the people didn't even realize their emaciated condition until they were too far wasted away. God's denials were in truth protection, not sadism (2:7; 4:6,11,14; 5:5,13,15; 7:9,11; 8:7; 14:1).

GOD, THE FAITHFUL KING

Doubts about the goodness of God's character can come to mind when one first begins reading the book of Hosea, for on the surface it appears as if Yahweh had set poor Hosea up for failure by dooming him to a terrible marriage with a wayward woman. The reader can then jump to the conclusion that God must be heartless, even believing He is even now deliciously plotting our eventual downfall and subsequent shattered heart.

As one reads deeper into the life story of Hosea, though, it becomes abundantly clear that Israel was the heartless one, and not God, for in every conceivable way she was at fault for shattering her own heart. Then we've got to remember that Gomer was the living embodiment

of the faithless nation of Israel. Every wicked desire Gomer craved, and evil deed committed, reflected Israel's wayward heart. The faithless bride Gomer was the living symbol, a type, of the faithless bride Israel.

This is where it can get difficult, for God can at first seem uncaring for asking Hosea to marry Gomer. But remember, Hosea's job was the messenger for Yahweh. For Hosea to most effectively share the heartache God was enduring with His wayward people, Hosea needed to also experience the same betrayal firsthand. As one commentator explained, "Not until a heart is crushed by love's indescribable sorrow is it truly fitted to preach the deeper things of God's matchless love."⁵ Hosea relating to his Lord's suffering imbued him with the ability to effectively communicate God's heartache. Yahweh's and Hosea's hearts were bound together by the same heartache and united together by the same love for a wayward wife.

Hosea was willing to take this plunge into pain for His Heavenly Father and obeyed. By doing so, this faithful messenger's life emerged as one of the greatest types of symbolic Bible prophecies ever to walk this earth. After all, who so willingly gives their life over to become a symbol of misery, and who because of obedience chooses to have their life become a "succession of sobs"?⁶ Hosea became a living symbol, just like Gomer, for he modeled the very faithfulness and forgiveness that God was demonstrating to Israel. Hosea was, of course, merely a man, but his character and heart are a beautiful reflection of the character and heart of God, and that's precisely why God chose him.

God, a Profile in Faithfulness

To better understand the vastness of the Divine's heart, let's experience who Yahweh really is as portrayed in the book of Hosea.

Communicative. The heart of God communicates. One of the most common complaints from skeptics today is that God, if He's real, is distant and never talks to His creations. Even the Deists of the early years of America thought this, believing God had wound up the universe and then stepped away. Not true! We find ample examples throughout the Bible where God has communicated about who He is to Man.

God actually wants to communicate with us, but sin stands in the way. When the eternal state comes, mankind will be reunited with God once more. There we'll walk, talk, and fellowship one-on-one with our Heavenly Father, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden before sin separated humanity from Him. God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to do the Good Work of restoring that relationship. But, while we wait for that heavenly state, God uses other avenues to communicate to us about who He is and what good He desires for us.

One such avenue is through the speeches, writings, and symbolic lives of Israel's prophets, such as Hosea. Many times, the rebuking messages given to Israel were to help keep them from making the wrong choices, but more often it was to reveal the person and character of Yahweh. Those messages to Israel became a conduit for revealing God to the larger world so that every person in every land in every age since can know their Creator. When God commanded Hosea and the other prophets to hear the words of the Lord, He was speaking not just to the prophet or Israel, but to you and me as well. Our Father God communicates to us through these messages, and when we call out to Him, He responds, "I will answer" (1:2; 2:21; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1-2,9; 6:5; 9:8; 12:4,10,13).

Loving. The heart of God is loving. It's easy to think that Almighty God would be altogether self-sufficient, and yet the book of Hosea reveals that God is loving and seeks those who will love Him in return. Drink in the poetry of God's love for His people when verse after verse He proclaimed: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son," and "I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them" (11:1,3-4).

Faithful. The heart of God is faithful. When Yahweh makes a promise, He is faithful and will never, ever, ever break it. When God says, "I will make a covenant," the recipient can be 100% absolutely sure that the promise of God will never be altered, stretched, forgotten, or rescinded. So, for God to declare, "I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness," His loving character remains totally faithful to the covenant He has established. All 66 books of the Bible pour forth the

testimony of God forever remaining faithful to the promises He has made. Promises matter to God (2:18,20).

Pained. The heart of God can be pained. That so massive a deity concerns Himself over being betrayed by so small a people is because God also has the most massive of hearts. God's giant heart tears and shatters the greatest of all. As unfathomable to us mere mortals is God's capability for love, for God is love, so too is His susceptibility to pain. Those who love the most feel pain the hardest.

And so, in hair-pulling and teeth-clenching fiery-righteous anger, the Broken-Hearted handed down a series of judgments upon Israel. For that generation, "I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more." And yet, even though Israel provoked Yahweh to anger most bitter, God through His anguished rage cried out as from the heart of a parent forced into disciplining His wayward child, "How can I give you up, Ephraim?... My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred." As an anonymous wise man once shared, "By chastening, the Lord separates the sin that He hates from the sinner whom He loves" (9;15; 11:8; 1 John 4:8,16).

Sovereign. The heart of God is sovereign. That God had the right to be angry over Israel's backstabbing betrayals should by now go without saying, but then that brings up the matter of His right to be angry over our rebellion today. It's easier to understand God's anger over past wrongs, but oddly so much harder when we ourselves today are personally committing those very same wrongs. We then begin to question just what kind of authority God holds.

First, the authority God holds dwells within the very nature of who God is. "For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst... I will be your King, the Lord God of hosts" (11:9b). So, as King of the Universe, there's nobody higher, and so, therefore, God possesses ALL authority.

Second, Hosea reveals God's power is supreme. Yahweh has all knowledge and power. Nothing is hidden from God, for He sees all. Nothing—nothing—can stand against God's might!

Third, because of God's holiness and sovereign position, He invariably holds the right to judge us. God's decision to end the

kingdom of Israel was indisputable, for Yahweh reigns supreme (1:4,5; 4:6; 5:3; 7:2; 11:9; 12:2,5,9; 13:4,10).

Just. The heart of God is just. Not only is God a loving God, but He is also a just sovereign. Hosea revealed that God rules with righteousness and justice because the ways of the Lord are right. What a blessing! For every evil committed, every wrong deed done, every injustice that escapes man's earthly justice, the Righteous Judge will deal with each in fairness, either in the present or at time's end during the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

At least 35 judgments are stated within the book of Hosea, too many to list here, but they pour forth justice for the wrongs Israel committed against God and His universal moral law by their refusal to repent. "My God will cast them away, because they did not obey Him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations." And God did just that. By 722 BC, within Hosea's lifetime, God had allowed the Assyrian King Sargon to conquer and carry off Israel into exile (2 Kings 17:24). Foreigners were brought in to settle in Israel's abandoned homes. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and its people were forced to become wanderers among the nations, exactly as God warned Hosea would happen. Many believe God to be an impotent judge, but He's only being patient, for judgment inevitably comes as swiftly and destructively as a Category 5 hurricane (1:4; 2:13,19; 3:4; 6:5; 9:3,9,17; 10:2; 14:1,9; 2 Peter 3:9).

Forgiving. The heart of God is forgiving. If only Israel had heeded Hosea's messages by asking for forgiveness and repenting of their rebellion and other evil deeds, God would have been merciful. Loving-kindness and mercy are at the heart of our Heavenly Father. The Righteous Judge declared, "I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy." If Israel would have repented, God promised, "I would have healed Israel" (1:7; 2:19,25; 3:5; 6:6; 7:1).

Saving. The heart of God saves. God's mercy towards Israel has not been extinguished, even to this day, for He promised His people: "Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land." In that future day, God will turn His anger away,

and the “fatherless” people of Israel who will be regathered back in the Promised Land will proclaim, “For in You the fatherless find mercy.” This very day, we are first-hand witnesses of the beginnings of that promised time of mercy, for the Lord God declared with absoluteness, “For there is no savior besides Me.” God alone saves (1:7,11; 2:1,17-18; 13:4,14; 14:3-4; 6:1).

Generous. The heart of God is generous. When one is restored to a right relationship with God, they are continually bathed in His generosity. When a believing remnant of Israel is fully restored to Yahweh and the Holy Land once more, “O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, when I return the captives of My people.” No longer will Israel be under constant attack by world powers, for God will make them lie down safely, for God will be refreshing “like the dew to Israel.” When God’s Son, Jesus Christ, returns to set up His Kingdom on earth, great will be the day for those who have accepted Him as Savior! “The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil.” A believing remnant of Israel will finally dwell in their houses in peace and safety (1:10-11; 2:18,22; 6:11; 14:5).

HOSEA’S FAITH LESSONS

The book of Hosea offers invaluable life lessons concerning how to maintain faith when the heart is shattered. These lessons can be applied to four groups: Israel, the Nations, the Church, and you personally.

Lessons for Israel

The nation of Israel today can maintain faith when its heart is shattered. For the many Jews who’ve made *Aliyah* back to the land of Israel, they continue to feel the sting of the nations raging against them. In their dismay, they wonder why the Jews over the centuries have been so hated. It just seems so illogical. And so, they wonder if God has abandoned them.⁷

Israel must realize that God continues to see their nation as a wayward wife, like Gomer, who broke her covenant relationship. The modern-day nation of Israel continues to lack the very faithfulness,

devotion, and knowledge of God which condemned her in Hosea's time. Every day Jews are coming out of exile and back to the Holy Land just as the prophets said they would, but the nation remains wholly uncommitted to God. It wavers suspended in that purification time Hosea described before she can be reunited with her husband (3:3-5). Though Israel was reborn as a nation on May 14, 1948, she awaits that glorious day when God will move her to have a heart that will truly and fully love Him once more.

And what a day that will be! Hosea described that future day, the "latter days" as he called them, when the nation of Israel will be once again reconciled to God and remain faithful to their covenant: "Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days" (3:5). No longer rebellious, they'll know the ways of the Lord are right and walk righteously in them. They shall love the Lord, pursue the knowledge of the Lord, prosper in His goodness, and finally understand how to keep His covenant.

Once redeemed and restored to a right relationship with Yahweh God, Israel in these not-so-distant days Hosea so colorfully described will have God's love lavished upon them once more. They'll know joy, for "she shall sing there in their land as in the days of her youth." True safety will finally exist, for Israel will "lie down safely" and "live in His sight." Spiritual growth will define them, for the people of Israel will "grow like the lily," "lengthening her roots" and their "branches shall spread." Israel will be a thing of beauty to the whole world, like a fragrance whose "scent shall be like wine" (1:11; 2:15,18; 3:5; 6:2; 14:1,5-7,9).

By embracing Israel's promised, glorious, and soon-to-be-realized future, the nation of Israel today can survive the shattering and place its faith in its God.

Lessons for the Nations

The nations of today can maintain faith when their collective hearts are shattered by natural disasters, wars, financial problems, social unrest, and other traumas. Hosea gives no comfort when reminding the

nations that their days are numbered. No matter how powerful or successful, or how many centuries a nation has stayed on top, God's prophetic word reveals that all human nations are in rebellion against Him and so will not last. One day human government will be supplanted by the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the nations, as we know them today, will cease to be. As long as the nations remain in rebellion, so too will they continue to experience a shattering.

But, citizens of the nations can have hope by becoming citizens of a kingdom not of this world—the spiritual kingdom Jesus now reigns, culminating in the day when He will return to set up His Millennial Kingdom here on earth. They can embrace that eternal citizenship and the hope that brings by accepting King Jesus as Savior.

Lessons for the Church

The Church can maintain faith when its heart is shattered by external persecutions and inward troubles. While God in the book of Hosea compares Himself to a groom and Israel to a bride, so too does His Son, Jesus Christ, compare Himself to a groom and the Church to a bride. The Church is, as Ephesians 5:22-33 explains, the universal body of believers who have accepted Jesus as Savior, from the day of Pentecost up until the coming day when the Church is raptured up to Heaven. This special group of believers, which if Jesus is your Savior you belong to, are set aside by Him and for Him, like a bride is for a groom.

Knowing this, Hosea would warn that we must be very careful that in our privileged position of redemption, we do not grow proud and self-reliant. Doing so will cause the Church to fall into the same trap as Israel did when they forgot God's sustaining hand and believed they could cut themselves off from the power that sustained them.

Church brethren, remember your condition when you were saved. Heed the command of Jesus in John 8:11 to the woman caught in adultery: "Go and sin no more." Never forget how terribly low we had once fallen, and only through salvation in Christ how we are now lifted to such incredibly new heights. Only when the Church is fully connected to our Lord can it maintain its faith and effectively do the Good Work as a messenger bearing Good News.

Lessons for You

You can remain faithful to your Heavenly Father when your own heart is shattered and all hope seems lost. To understand how, let's look at the broken heart as if it was a physical condition. When your body gets hurt, you go to the doctor, right? The doctor then performs two actions: 1) discerns the problem, and 2) prescribes a cure.

So, first, let's discern the problem. God and Hosea both suffered because of what was done to them, but in contrast, Israel and Gomer both suffered because of what they did to themselves. In all cases, though, the underlying cause of all their suffering was a disease most today loath to even whisper—SIN. Sin is the problem. Sin erodes the foundation of your faith until nothing more is left than a few grains of sand. Sin tears, it washes away, it shatters your heart and all the hearts of those your sin collides against.

Now, let's prescribe the cure. Hosea teaches us the cure to healing both our broken hearts and our tattered faith is the restoration of the relationship back to its former mutually loving and trusting condition. That is accomplished through our repenting of our sins and by God granting forgiveness, which is called reconciliation.

Once reconciled, great will be the day of your salvation! Hosea compares it to passing through a door of hope. We are promised by God that mercy will be shown. "And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy." Forgiveness will be granted, made possible through Jesus' sacrifice which He bought at the cost of His own life. We are restored to a mutually loving and trusting condition with God. The relationship transforms from enmity to affinity. We become sons of the living God whom He calls "My people." As God promises, "And it shall be in that day you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master'" (1:10-11; 2:1,15-16,20; 3:2).

Maybe, like Hosea, you are going through a painful marriage ordeal that challenges you to maintain your faith in God. Maybe you find yourself in the same disastrous marriage as Hosea and Gomer had which was battered by unfaithfulness and failed trust, leaving your heart broken and shattered. If that is the case, look at how both God

and Hosea handled it. Remember that as faithless as Gomer was, no matter how badly she betrayed Hosea, Hosea remained faithful and loving to her. Likewise, Jesus Christ has always remained faithful and loving to you and is ready to forgive any lack of faith.

When it comes to marriage, remain as faithful as Hosea was, even if you are in a difficult situation. Show God's unconditional love to your spouse no matter what. When others are faithless, you remain faithful and committed, just like your Heavenly Father. Wait patiently and expectantly for when God restores the shattered heart, for when faith is restored, the blessings will follow.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you know people who are like the faithless Gomer? Can you see yourself in her at all?
2. Do you know people who are like Hosea, who remain faithful even through the worst of trials?
3. What lengths did Hosea go to restore Gomer?
4. What lengths did God go to restore Israel to Himself?
5. What lengths has God gone to restore you to Himself?
6. Have you asked God to put the pieces of your life back together again by asking for that new life in Jesus Christ?
7. Could you live your life as faithfully as Hosea, even doing the seemingly impossible when God asks? How so?
8. If you have accepted Jesus as Savior, what joys have you experienced since?
9. How do you maintain faith when your heart is shattered?

LIST OF PROPHECIES

The following is a complete list of prophecies found in the book of Hosea. Some of these prophecies have already been fulfilled, substantiated by historical records during Old Testament History and the First Coming of Christ, thus adding to the proof that the Bible is truly indeed the Word of God. Other Bible prophecies were prefilled in symbolic type first before they will be completely fulfilled later in the future during: the Last Days (our age), the Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom, and the Eternal State.

Understand that the prophets often looked into the future and prophesied a series of prophetic events yet did not realize that these events would be separated by long time intervals. Thus, numerous singular prophecies can find their fulfillment within multiple periods.

Statistics

Total Verses: 197

Prophetic Verses: 96

Prophetic Percentage: 49%

Prophetic Count

- ✓ Historically Fulfilled: 4
- ✱ Partial Fulfilment: 4
- ✱ Awaiting Future Fulfilment: 11

Prophecies

Hosea 1:4-6

Then the Lord said to him: "Call his name Jezreel, for in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. It shall come to pass in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel..."

- Prophecy: Jehu's dynasty will end, and Israel will be destroyed (by Assyria).

- ✓ Status: Historically Fulfilled (2 Kings 15:8-12; 17:5-23; also see Hosea 10:1-8)
- ⌚ Period: Old Testament

Hosea 1:7

Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horsemen.

- Prophecy: Judah will be devastated but also saved.
- ✓ Status: Historically Fulfilled (2 Kings 18:13; 19:35-36; also see Hosea 8:14)
- ⌚ Period: Old Testament

Hosea 1:10-11

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," there it shall be said to them, "You are sons of the living God." Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!

- Prophecy: The Jewish people will be reunited as one nation and David's house will once more rule over a united Israel.
- ★ Status: Partial Fulfilment (May 14, 1948), Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Last Days, Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom

Hosea 2:14-15

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.

- Prophecy: After an intense time of judgment, the surviving Jews will be judged and a righteous remnant gathered to a restored Israel.
- ✳ Status: Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Tribulation, Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom

Hosea 2:14-17

"...And it shall be, in that day," says the Lord, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master,' for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more."

- Prophecy: The Lord will bring salvation to a regathered Jewish remnant who will forsake all idolatry and worship God alone.
- ✳ Status: Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom

Hosea 2:18

In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely.

- Prophecy: The Messiah's reign over the earth will usher in an age of peace, where no war will be waged, and the people and animals will live in safety.
- ✳ Status: Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Millennial Kingdom, Eternal State

Hosea 2:19-20

I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.

- Prophecy: The reign of the Messiah over the earth will usher in a time when peace, righteousness, and justice abound and when God renews His vow to Israel.
- ✳ Status: Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom

Hosea 2:23

Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, "You are My people!" And they shall say, "You are my God!"

- Prophecy: The Messiah's life and ministry will be accepted by the Gentiles.
- ✓ Status: Historically Fulfilled (Acts 13:44-48; 28:28)
- ⌚ Period: Last Days

Hosea 3:4-5

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

- Prophecy: The Jewish people will lack their own ruler, a priesthood, and a Temple to worship in until a God-fearing remnant is regathered and seeks the Lord and His Davidic King.
- ✳ Status: Partial Fulfilment (after 70 AD), Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Last Days, Second Coming

Hosea 5:15 - 6:3

"I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me." Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight...

- Prophecy: God will hide from the Jewish people for "two days" (2,000 years) until during a time of great affliction (the Tribulation ending in Armageddon) a Jewish remnant will confess their initial rejection of Christ's messiahship and then He will save them. At the onset of the "third day" (third millennia), the Old Testament faithful will be resurrected and glorified. (Also see Psalm 90:4; Isaiah 53:1-9; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 23:37-39; 28:6; Acts 2:31; 13:33; Romans 11:25-27.)
- ✳ Status: Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Tribulation, Second Coming

Hosea 11:1

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.

- Prophecy: The Son of God would in His youth sojourn to and from Egypt.
- ✓ Status: Historically Fulfilled (Matthew 2:14-15)
- ⌚ Period: First Coming

Hosea 11:10-11

"They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, then His sons shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses," says the Lord.

- Prophecy: The Jewish people will heed the call to make Aliyah, and in their distress will regather from all over the world into the nation of Israel, and there they will dwell in their own land.

- ✱ Status: Partial Fulfilment (20th Century), Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Last Days, Tribulation, Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom

Hosea 12:9

But I am the Lord your God, ever since the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast.

- Prophecy: The Jewish people will once more celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in their own land.
- ✱ Status: Partial Fulfilment (20th Century), Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Last Days, Millennial Kingdom

Hosea 13:14

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes.

- Prophecy: The Old Testament faithful will be resurrected and glorified.
- ✱ Status: Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Second Coming

Hosea 14:4-7

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

- Prophecy: The return of the Messiah will bring salvation to a Jewish remnant, and a believing Israel will be revived to bless the entire world.
- ✱ Status: Awaiting Future Fulfilment
- ⌚ Period: Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom