



Lesson 23 / October 8, 2017

## THE MAGNIFICENT LOVE OF GOD

Hosea 1-3

### Key Verse

“And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.”

Hosea 2:19-20

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do we want to be loved so deeply? Do you feel loved?
2. Describe Hosea's marriage. How is it a symbol of Israel's relationship with the LORD?
3. Read Hosea 4:1-3. Which of the 10 commandments has Israel violated?
4. Reflect on Hosea 11:2. How do we turn away when the LORD calls?
5. How is idolatry like adultery?
6. How do Hosea's children represent the LORD's judgment?
7. When Israel returns to the LORD, how will Israel flourish in Hosea 14?
8. How can we “return” to the LORD?
9. Is the LORD wooing you? Do you know the love of the LORD?

### Question 45: How does the LORD love us?

Short Answer: *The LORD loves us deeply, immensely, and affectionately.*

Full Answer: *The LORD loves us deeply, immensely, and affectionately, and by his love he woos us, shows us mercy, and betroths us to himself, that we might flourish in his steadfast love.*

### Question 46: Why does our sin grieve the LORD our God?

Short Answer: *Our sin grieves the LORD greatly because the LORD loves us deeply.*

Full Answer: *Our sin grieves the LORD greatly because the LORD loves us deeply, so when we forget him, rebel, and turn to false gods, we violate his covenant with us in the same way adultery violates the covenant of marriage.*

## Summary

Popular songs reveal that our world is infatuated with the idea of love. We sing, “All you need is love,” and then romantically promise, “I will always love you.” Indeed, “Love, love will keep us together,” but then we worry, “Will you still love me tomorrow?” We all know that “What the world needs now is love, sweet love,” after all, “It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of.” Yet in a world where we sing so positively about love, why do we often feel so unloved?

We now reach the final twelve books in the Old Testament, the “minor prophets” (Hosea – Malachi) whose writings are shorter but no less significant than the “major prophets” (Isaiah – Daniel). The first of these minor prophets is Hosea.

Hosea prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel around the years 758-722BC, all the way back in the days of Isaiah, in the years preceding when Assyria would take Israel captive in 721BC. Like many of the prophets, Hosea’s message confronts Israel’s unfaithfulness, warns of the LORD’s impending judgment, and offers hope of restoration. But Hosea is unique among the prophets because his message contains an unprecedented emphasis on the love of the LORD and because his own family provides an illustration for his message.

First, the LORD instructs Hosea to enter into a marriage that will be defined by unfaithfulness and adultery (Hos 1:2-3). Hosea must marry Gomer, a promiscuous wife with a history of immorality and perhaps even prostitution. And though Hosea loves Gomer and remains faithful to her, Gomer will violate the covenant by committing adultery against Hosea. This illustration is vivid and it is personal. We all recognize the horrible destruction that accompanies adultery, and Hosea must personally endure the pain that follows such betrayal.

Hosea’s experience in marriage provides a real-life illustration of Hosea’s message regarding Israel’s unfaithfulness to the LORD. Like Hosea’s relationship with Gomer, the LORD sets his love upon Israel and betroths her to himself in a covenant relationship (Hos 11:1-3; cf. Ezek 16), yet Israel never reciprocates the LORD’s faithful love. Instead, Israel’s love is fleeting, like the morning dew that soon evaporates (Hos 6:4), and Israel’s “spirit of whoredom” leads her to betray the LORD by repeatedly sinning against him and worshipping foreign gods (e.g. Hos 4:1-19). Such idolatry is tantamount to adultery committed against the LORD himself.

The intensity of our pain when we are betrayed is directly proportional to the magnitude of love we have invested into the relationship. Adultery hurts so deeply because it violates the intimate and exclusive love-bond of the marriage covenant. Likewise, when Israel violates the exclusive covenant they have with the LORD, who loves them abundantly, they thereby inflict immense pain and grief upon the LORD. Our sin against God hurts him so deeply because he loves us so richly.

Next, the LORD brings Hosea’s three children into the illustration by giving them bizarre names as a symbol of God’s impending judgment against Israel (Hos 1:4-9). First is Jezreel, named after the Valley of Jezreel, where Israel will be defeated in battle by the Assyrians. Second is *Lo-Ruhama* (= “No Mercy”), so named because the LORD will no longer show mercy to Israel. Third is *Lo-Ammi* (= “Not My People”), whose name directly reverses the LORD’s covenant promise to Israel that “You shall be my people, and I shall be your God” (e.g. Exod 6:7). Israel is no longer the covenant people of the LORD; the covenant itself is now revoked.

Yet there is hope. With the LORD, there is *always* hope. Hosea speaks in 1:10–2:1 of a day of restoration, when God will reverse his judgments and establish a new covenant whereby Israel will again be the children of the living God and Hosea’s children will be renamed *Ammi* (= “My people”) and *Ruhama* (= “You have received mercy”). Further, even as Hosea must retrieve Gomer from her adulterous relationship and renew his love for her (Hos 3:1-5), so also the LORD will woo his people back to himself, speaking tenderly to Israel and redeeming her from her wickedness and renewing his covenant love with her (Hos 2:14-23). In that day, Israel will return to the LORD and they will be betrothed together forever in perfect and steadfast love (Hos 2:19-20).

The LORD loves his people with a magnificent love. He loves *you* more abundantly than you ever dared to hope or dream. Indeed, God has now demonstrated the full measure of his love by sending Christ to save you from your sins (Rom 5:8). His love knows no measure. He loves you not because you are special or have done special things, but he loves you simply because he loves you. He woos you and he invites you into his sacred covenant of love. Will you accept his proposal by denying all other loves, repenting of your rebellion, receiving his mercy, and betrothing yourself to him alone? As his betrothed, you will enjoy his affection and flourish in his love, for his love truly is “better than ice cream.”