

# Spiritual Adultery<sup>1</sup> (Hosea)



## SABBATH—MARCH 30

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Hosea 1:1–3; Ezekiel 4:1–6; Hosea 2:12–15, 18; Hosea 4:1–3; James 5:1–7; Revelation 14:6–12.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘I will plant her in the land for myself. I will show my love to the one I called Not My Loved One. I will say, “You are my people” to those who were called Not My People. And they will say, “You are my God” ’ ” (Hosea 2:23, NlrV).

**KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT:** God’s people were unfaithful to Him. But God’s love for His people never fails.

**THE PROPHET (SPECIAL MESSENGER) HOSEA** worked at the close of a very successful period in Israel’s history. It was just before the fall of the nation<sup>2</sup> to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. At that time, God’s chosen people no longer worshiped the Lord alone. They also served Baal, a Canaanite god.

Hosea’s book is the first book of a series of books written by the Minor Prophets. It asks a central question during this time, a time when Israel is backsliding (falling back into sin): Does God still love Israel, even though His people have turned away from Him? Does God still have a purpose for them even though they have sinned against Him?

Hosea’s personal story and prophecy<sup>3</sup> are closely tied together in his book. The prophet has forgiven his unfaithful wife and is willing to take her back. In the same way, God is willing to forgive His people.

What can we learn from the experience of Hosea and the way that the Lord deals with backsliding Israel?

1. adultery—sex outside of marriage.

2. the fall of the nation (of Israel)—in the time of Hosea, God’s people were divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel. In 722 B.C., Assyria invaded the Northern Kingdom of Israel and carried the people away to other countries. What was left of God’s chosen people was the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

3. prophecy—a special message from God, often explaining what will happen in the future.

**SUNDAY—MARCH 31****A STRANGE COMMAND  
(Hosea 1:2, 3)**

For hundreds of years, students of the Bible have argued about the command God gave Hosea in Hosea 1:2, 3. They have asked questions such as: Was Gomer a prostitute<sup>4</sup> or just an unfaithful wife? Was she that way before she married Hosea? Or did she become unfaithful afterward?

We do not know the answers. But one thing is sure: when the Lord spoke to Hosea, God wanted to turn people's attention from Hosea's story to God's love story with Israel. For example, Gomer was an Israelite. So, the story of Gomer's marriage to the prophet ties in closely with the story of God's covenant<sup>5</sup> with Israel.

There are important comparisons between Hosea's story and God's experience with Israel. On a human level, Gomer has been unfaithful to Hosea. On the spiritual level, Israel has been unfaithful to God. Gomer's unfaithfulness has hurt her husband's heart. In the same way, Israel's idol worship has deeply hurt the great heart of God. Hosea also has to deal with a broken heart and a broken marriage. And he must have suffered public dishonor and embarrassment. The more Hosea experiences Gomer's unfaithfulness, the more he understands God's pain and frustration with Israel.

**God often asked other prophets to do something different from**

preaching. Read Isaiah 20:1–6; Jeremiah 27:1–7; and Ezekiel 4:1–6 and explain how the actions of the prophets show God's feelings and actions toward His people.

**What kind of witness for the Lord are not just your words but also your actions? What is it in your life that shows that you are a true follower of Jesus?**



**Hosea had to deal with a broken heart and a broken marriage.**

**MONDAY—APRIL 1****SPIRITUAL ADULTERY  
(Hosea 2:8–13)**

Hosea's wife, Gomer, acted unfaithfully in their marriage. So, Hosea suffered shame. To the neighbors and friends who saw his pain, Hosea gave God's message through words and actions: Israel, God's wife, was acting just like Gomer. God's chosen people were involved in spiritual adultery.

4. prostitute—a person who has sex with someone in exchange for money.

5. covenant—an agreement or promise.

The prophet Jeremiah compares<sup>6</sup> God's unfaithful people to "a prostitute" who lives with many lovers (Jeremiah 3:1, NIV), even though God has given His people everything they have. In much the same way, the prophet Ezekiel calls idol-worshiping Israel "an adulterous [unfaithful] wife" who has left her true husband (Ezekiel 16:32, NKJV). For this reason, idol worship in the Bible is often seen as spiritual adultery.

**What warning is given in Hosea 2:8–13? How could we, as Seventh-day Adventists, be in danger of doing the same thing?**



Israel offered God's gifts to idols.

The wording "grain, new wine and oil" also is used in the book of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 7:12–14, NIV). It describes the main crops of Israel. God had given the people these crops as a gift, just as He promised Moses He would. But in Hosea's time, the people were deeply unthankful to God. They were so caught up in the world around them that the people gave God's gifts to their false idols. What a warning this is to all of us: we should use our gifts to serve the

Lord. They should never be used in the wrong way (Matthew 6:24).

"How does God feel about our failure to appreciate His blessings? When we use God's gifts to us in the wrong way, our hearts and hands are closed against Him. But those who have received God's merciful gifts day after day, and year after year, misuse His gifts and fail to care for the souls for whom Christ has given His life. God has given gifts to people to use for doing His work and building up His kingdom. But they use them instead to buy houses and lands. And this builds up false pride and selfishness. And then the people soon forget God."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 7, 1886.

**Think about how easy it is to take the gifts God gives you and to use them in a selfish or wrong way. What are useful ways of preventing this sin in our lives?**



When we misuse God's gifts to us, our hearts and hands are closed against Him.

6. compares—shows how two or more things are the same or different.

**TUESDAY—APRIL 2****A PROMISE OF RESTORATION<sup>7</sup>  
(Hosea 3:1, 2)**

**What is God’s basic message to His people in Hosea 2? How is the gospel shown in this chapter?**

Hosea’s message gives the profound (deep) truth of God’s steadfast (firmly fixed) love for an undeserving people. In Hosea 2, the Lord gives a long speech about Israel’s backsliding. Israel’s unfaithful actions are the opposite of God’s unfailing love for His people. Hosea tells us that the husband (God) will lead the wife (Israel) on a trip to the wilderness, where they will be remarried.

So, the chapter ends with a picture of a better time in the future. At that time, God will encourage Israel to love Him as before (Hosea 2:12–15). The wild animals of the field will no longer eat the wife’s vines and fig trees. Instead, the animals will become partners in the new covenant (Hosea 2:18). And all the children will have new names. These new names show God’s willingness to heal and forgive the past sins of His people.

**God freely offers to pardon our sins. How much does forgiveness cost God? What was the personal cost of this lesson to Hosea? See Hosea 3:1, 2.**

Growing up as a male in Israel,

Hosea was meant to enjoy certain privileges (special rights). He could expect to hold a special standing as a man in society. But this honor came with a great responsibility. For example, it would have taken a huge effort for a man in Israel in Bible times to forgive and take back an unfaithful wife. He would also have had to accept, as his own, children who may have been fathered by another man. To be loyal to an unfaithful wife and her children, as Hosea was, meant being shunned or not accepted by society. That must have been one of the most difficult experiences of Hosea’s life.

But Hosea “bought” Gomer back. God also did the same thing for all people. But the cost was the death of Jesus on the cross. It is by looking at the Cross in this light that we can get a much clearer picture of what it cost God to buy us back from the ruin that sin has caused.

**WEDNESDAY—APRIL 3****THE CASE AGAINST ISRAEL  
(Hosea 4:1–3)**

Hosea 4:1–3 shows God as one who brings a legal charge<sup>8</sup> (Hebrew *rîb*) against Israel. The chosen nation stood guilty before her God because the people had failed to obey the covenant. Truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God were to be proof of Israel’s special relationship with Him. According to Hosea 2:18–20, these

7. restoration—the act or process of returning something to its original condition.

8. charge—an accusation that someone has done something wrong; a claim that someone is guilty of wrongdoing.

things were gifts that God gave to His people when He renewed the covenant with them.

But, because of sin, Israel's life was without these gifts of grace.<sup>9</sup> The crimes listed by Hosea brought the nation close to anarchy.<sup>10</sup> The religious leaders, both priests and prophets, shared responsibility in the downfall of Israel's way of life. And theirs was a heavy responsibility. If they did not face and deal with the sins and abuses, they themselves would be held responsible by God.

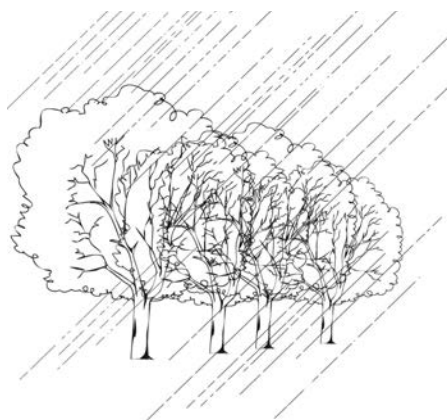
One of the problems the religious leaders had to face was idol worship. In the Old Testament, idol worship was thought to be the most serious sin. This is because it denied the role of the Lord God in the lives of the nation and the person. Due to the dry climate, rains in the land of Israel were a matter of life and death. The Israelites came to believe that their blessings, such as life-giving rain, were coming from Baal, a god of storms. So, they built temples to foreign gods and began mixing sinful practices with worship.

At the same time, social unfairness was found everywhere in the land. The rich classes in Israel worked the peasants very hard and gave them less than they deserved. The rich did this so that they could pay taxes to Assyria. Many of the rich also were guilty of stealing and cheating (Hosea 12:7, 8). It was because of this social unfairness that the peaceful and suc-

cessful period gave way to a time of political and social turbulence (disorder and violence). The country was close to total lawlessness.

"There are 'poor' rich men who pretend to serve God. But they are to be pitied. While they claim to know God, in works they deny Him. How great is the darkness of such! They claim faith in the truth. But their works do not show it. The love of riches makes men selfish. Wealth is power. And often the love of wealth makes and paralyzes all that is noble and good in man."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Special Messages] for the Church*, volume 2, page 682.

**Read James 5:1–7. How do these words fit in with present truth of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12? No matter how rich or poor we are, how can we protect ourselves from the dangers of the love of money?**



**Israel believed that their blessings, such as rain, came from Baal.**

9. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

10. anarchy—a situation of confusion and wild behavior in which the people in a country, group, or organization are not controlled by rules or laws.

**THURSDAY—APRIL 4****A CALL TO REPENTANCE<sup>11</sup>  
(John 17:3)**

**“ ‘And what is eternal life? It is knowing you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’ ” (John 17:3, NlrV).**

The name *Hosea* in Hebrew means “the Lord saves.” It is also related to the names *Joshua*, *Isaiah*, and even *Jesus*. It makes sense then that the prophet Hosea asks the people to turn away from sin and be saved. They are to find safety in their Lord God because He is their Creator and Redeemer (Savior). The reason for God’s punishment in the book of Hosea is to make the sinners remember that their life and strength come from the One they must return to. So with all the warnings of judgment (punishment), Hosea’s book is about human repentance and God’s forgiveness.

The prophet encourages the nation, which is dying in sin “ ‘because they do not know me [God]’ ” (Hosea 4:6, NlrV). It is the people’s failure to know God that leads them to rebellion (turning against God) and punishment.

But they are to know God fully and live in peace with God’s eternal principles (laws). Through faith and obedience the people learn that they can come to know the Lord for themselves. This knowledge can make the Lord and His people very close, just

like a marriage. That is why marriage is a symbol of the kind of close relationship that the Lord wants with us.

That is also why the Christian life means having a close relationship with the living God. That is why the Lord calls people to know Him and follow His will for their lives.

The sin problem brought a fearful separation between God and His people. But, through the death of Jesus on the cross, God made a way for each one of us to have a close walk with the Lord. It is in this way that we know Him for ourselves.

**What is the difference between our knowing about God and our knowing God? How is this difference shown in our everyday lives? What would you answer if someone asked you, “How can I come to know God?” What do Exodus 33:12, 13; Jeremiah 9:23, 24; Daniel 11:32; and 1 John 2:4 teach about the importance of “knowing the Lord”?**

**FRIDAY—APRIL 5**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “As time went by, Hosea understood that his personal experience was a mirror of God’s suffering and sadness. In his suffering, the prophet probably understood why God asked him to marry Gomer. . . .

“Because he experienced in his own life what God experienced, Hosea

11. repentance—being sorrowful for our sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

the prophet was better able to have sympathy for God's situation with the people of Israel."—Adapted from Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Massachusetts: Prince Press, 2001), page 56.

"Hosea used symbolic [word-picture] language to show the ten tribes [the Northern Kingdom] God's plan of restoring [renewing] to God every sorrowful soul who would unite [join] with His church on earth. Hosea also showed the blessings given to Israel in the days of their loyalty to Him in the Promised Land. The Lord wanted to show mercy to Israel by saying, 'So now I am going to draw [call; charm] her back to me. I will lead her into the desert. There I will speak tenderly to her. I will give her back her vineyards. I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope for her. Then she will love me, as she did when she was young. She will love me just as she did when she came up out of Egypt (Hosea 2:14, NIV).' "—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 298.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We like to think that idol worship is people bowing down to idols. In what ways can idol worship be something that is much more hidden than that?
- ② In class, study more deeply the idea of what it means to know God. If you say that you "know the Lord," what do you mean by that? How can you receive this knowledge of God?
- ③ Some thinkers in Bible times argued that God is impassible (unemotional). This means that God does not experience pain or pleasure because of things that other living things, such as humans, do. What might cause people to argue that position? But why should we not accept this idea?
- ④ Think more about the fact that our salvation is so "expensive." For example, why did Jesus pay the price of dying on the cross in our place? What does that tell us about how much God thinks we are worth?