

Today we continue our 8 week series covering some of the Minor and Major prophets of the Old Testament. We're done with Amos and for the next few weeks we will turn our attention to Hosea. Like Amos, Hosea addresses issues that could easily be headlines today. Although one of the minor prophets, the issues he discusses are major. Issues with the potential for drastic changes in the lives of their intended audience.

**Our scripture today is from the first chapter of Hosea. And I don't know about you, but it got me to thinking about baby names. Every year there are those lists of number one baby names. For example in 2024 the number one name for a baby girl was Olivia and the number one name for a baby boy was Liam.**

**It's always fun to see what the top baby names are, but there was another list that caught my attention. The worst baby names. Here are a few of them.**

**Someone named their baby boy Lordmeister Swifteagle. Now, they could've had a Swifty, but instead they chose the nickname Lordy. Can you imagine what happens when he turns 40?**

**The very worst name listed was ABCDE. Yes, a name made up of the first 6 letters of the alphabet. That kid will never find a gas station license plate with his name on it.**

**Another family named their little boy Trout because...he was conceived on a trout fishing trip.**

**There was the Hanger family who named their baby boy Cliff. Yes they had a Cliff Hanger.**

**What about the family who had their boy named Seven? He was one of four. His other brothers were named Blue, River, and... Dave. Dave must have felt so out of place.**

**Finally, and my favorite. The Cotton family who named their daughter Polly. That would seem normal name until you knew that her middle name was Ester. So yes they presented to the world Polly Ester Cotton.**

If this list had existed in Hosea's time, his kids definitely would have made the list. His three children are given terrible names with terrible meanings. We will meet Hosea's dysfunctional family here in a moment.

But first a little bit about Hosea. And this won't take long because little is known about this prophet. The superscription of this book tells us that Hosea is the son of Beerī. That's it. That's all we get. The name Beerī means well of nothing. So given the theme of Hosea, it could be a symbolic name. Hosea lived in Northern Israel during the time of King Jeroboam. You remember that guy from Amos. The one who encouraged Northern Israel to pursue wealth at all costs and made the worship of Baal a-ok. In Judah Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah would rule during this time. Northern Israel was on the brink of being invaded by Assyria.

One thing is clear from both Amos and Hosea, Northern Israel forgot who they were. They forgot how they were raised. They walked away from God, disregarded God's instructions, and thumbed their noses at God's authority.

Enter Hosea. He was unmarried at this point, and what does God tell him to do? Go and marry a prostitute. What in the world? What was God thinking?

The image of marriage becomes the center of Hosea's prophecy. His marriage to a prostitute serves as a metaphor to describe Israel's religious apostasy or their intentional rejection of their religious foundation. The relationship between God and God's people is frequently compared to the marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Israel has abandoned her end of the relationship. Israel has betrayed God. And now Israel brings judgment on herself.

Hosea chose a woman named Gomer. Gomer means “to end or come to an end.” That is a perfect description of the relationship between Israel and God.

Hosea and Gomer have children together. Their first child, a son, is named “Jezreel”. Jezreel means God will scatter. It also refers to a valley about 50 miles north of Jerusalem and was the site of a bloody coup by Jehu, a general in the army of King Jehoram of Judah who became a king of Northern Israel. At first Jehu’s efforts were applauded by the prophet Elisha, but Jehu slaughtered many more people than was needed or expected. He even killed King Ahaziah of Judah, who was visiting King Jehu. For these gratuitous and terrible acts of violence, God promised to bring retribution on Northern Israel.

Gomer’s second child, a daughter, was named Lo Ruhamah, which means “No Mercy” or “Not Pitied”. God would no longer have pity on Israel but would instead bless Judah. This happened when the Assyrians invaded Northern Israel soon after this, while Judah prevailed another one hundred years.

The third child born to Hosea and Gomer, a boy, named Ammi, which means “Nobody” or “Not My People”. This is the symbol of the broken relationship between Israel and God.

Jezreel, Lo Ruhamah, Ammi. Terrible names, terrible meanings. And what a terrible prospect. But as we read on, we learn that his isn’t the final word. Our last verse from today says so. It reads, “In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” The stormy relationship between Israel and God would be healed and judgment would be replaced by salvation.

Ok, so Rev Amy, this was so long ago? Way in the past. How can this be relevant today?

I can think of a few reasons. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute. Can you imagine that happening here in Kingman? God asking Rev Amy to marry a prostitute? Hosea showed that

even today God's people do not remain faithful, but God does! God as our divine spouse still endures violations of trust yet remains faithful to us. We don't deserve this, but it is still our gift.

Hosea is an example of trusting obedience. Hosea did not argue with or complain to God. He did not consult with his friends. He did not find himself a more appropriate wife. He simply did as he was told. He didn't ask questions. Instead, Hosea showed up to obey his orders. How well do we do when God's call us to obedience? Hosea is a good example of what it means to trust God fully and without reservation.

Can we be honest and see Gomer in ourselves. I know it is hard to identify with a prostitute, but as a symbol of Israel's turning away from God it's uncomfortably easy. We are not always faithful. We are not always truthful. We are not always obedient. We can and do fall short of what God has in mind for us. We are guilty of allowing other things in our lives to take priority over a relationship with God.

Look at Hosea and Gomer's first child. Jezreel was the valley where horrible sins were committed against God. Sins have consequences, even when far removed from the original act. I believe that God forgives our sin, but I also believe it doesn't prevent us from dealing with the consequences of our mistakes.

Their second child was Lo Ruhamah, "Not Pitied" or "No Mercy." Mercy was shown to Judah for a time, while Israel was left to suffer the consequences of sin. I don't always understand the justice, judgment, and mercy of God. Sometimes God withholds judgment, as in the case of Judah, and sometimes God decides that the time for judgment is at hand. But think about this. Don't we more often experience the mercy of God than the judgment we deserve? (Repeat) Can we be thankful for that?

The third child of Hosea and Gomer was Ammi, "Not My People" or "Nobody." When we choose to give up on God, I believe that God will honor our request to ignore him, no matter how difficult that is for him. Can't you see the tears in God's eyes when granting this wish.

Well, that's the story. That's Hosea's dysfunctional family. But the story doesn't end here. Let's recall again our last verse from our reading. "In the very place where they were once named Nobody, they will be named God's Somebody." Fast forward to Peter and his first letter. Chapter 2 verse 10, "Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (**I Peter 2:10**). How have we been made God's people and received mercy? Jesus

You are somebody. You are not forgotten. (Repeat)

We might forget who we are. We might forget how we were raised. We might disregard or ignore God. We might choose to walk away and go our own way. But thank God that grace is always on the horizon. Grace is always available. God held the prospect for grace up for the people of Israel and also offers it to us.

Perhaps you've wandered away. Maybe even disgraced yourself. You might be telling yourself that it's too late, or that what you've done cannot be forgiven. To that I say, Poppy cock. The path of return is so much easier than you'd ever imagine. All you have to do is say, "Lord, I want to come back. I want to come home. I will no longer live like this. I give myself totally and completely to you." This is the day you will find what has always been true. You are somebody and you are not forgotten. Let us pray.