

Hosea



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A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

Hosea

Discovering God's Fierce Love

Sue Edwards



 **Kregel**
Publications

Hosea: Discovering God's Fierce Love

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How to Get the Most Out of a Discover Together Bible Study

Women today need Bible study to keep balanced, focused, and Christ-centered in their busy worlds. The tiered questions in *Hosea: Discovering God's Fierce Love* allow you to choose a depth of study that fits your lifestyle, which may even vary from week to week, depending on your schedule.

Just completing the basic questions will require about one and a half hours per lesson and will provide a basic overview of the text. For busy women, this level offers in-depth Bible study with a minimum time commitment.

“Digging Deeper” questions are for those who want to, and make time to, probe the text even more deeply. Answering these questions may require outside resources such as an atlas, Bible dictionary, or concordance; you may be asked to look up parallel passages for additional insight; or you may be encouraged to investigate the passage using an interlinear Greek-English text or *Vine's Expository Dictionary*. This deeper study will challenge you to learn more about the history, culture, and geography related to the Bible, and to grapple with complex theological issues and differing views. Some with teaching gifts and an interest in advanced academics will enjoy exploring the depths of a passage and might even find themselves creating outlines and charts and writing essays worthy of seminarians!

This inductive Bible study is designed for both individual and group discovery. You will benefit most if you tackle each week's lesson on your own and then meet with other women to share insights, struggles, and aha moments. Bible study leaders will find a free, downloadable leader's guide for each study, along with general tips for leading small groups, at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

Choose a realistic level of Bible study that fits your schedule. You may want to finish the basic questions first and then “dig deeper” as time permits. Take time to savor the questions, and don't rush through the application. Read the sidebars for additional insight to enrich the experience. Note the optional passage to memorize and determine if this discipline would be



helpful for you. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated by women who have more time or who are gifted differently.

Make your Bible study—whatever level you choose—top priority. Consider spacing your study throughout the week so that you can take time to ponder and meditate on what the Holy Spirit is teaching you. Do not make other appointments during the group Bible study. Ask God to enable you to attend faithfully. Come with an excitement to learn from others and a desire to share yourself and your journey. Give it your best, and remember that God promises to join you on this adventure that can change your life.



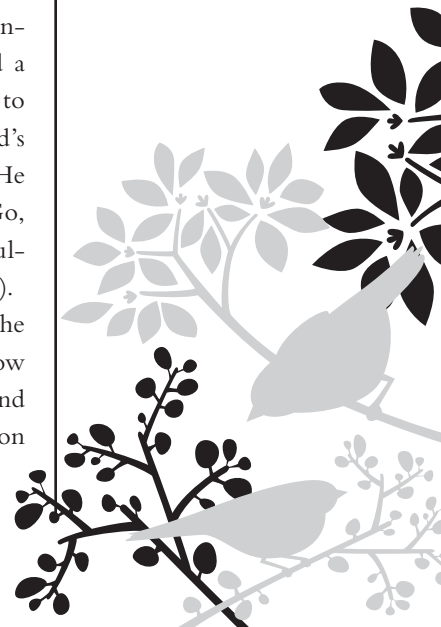
Why Study Hosea?

Have you ever plumbed the depths of Hosea to discover its beauty and practical wisdom for today? If not, you've missed a priceless treasure. Here's your opportunity to discover how much God really loves you, how much sin breaks his heart, and why his tough love is often his kindest act toward you and others.

Recently, I heard a woman say, "We need to stop teaching women that God loves them and instead teach them that God is holy." I understand her concern. Too many women see God as the great Santa Claus in the sky or someone to turn to when they need help out of a jam. But the Bible focuses on God's gracious love *and* his righteous holiness. We need a thorough understanding of both. Hosea intertwines these two great theological themes to give us an accurate picture of who God is and how he relates to us, even when we or others disappoint or betray him. He loves us with a fierce love, but a nonchalant, lackadaisical attitude toward him can result in unpleasant, sometimes painful, discipline. To understand these realities prepares us to navigate our circumstances with insight and to better understand God's work in the lives of others—all valuable lessons.

Hosea was one of twelve "minor" Old Testament prophets, labeled "minor" not because they were less important but because of the shorter length of their books. For hundreds of years, God had been sending prophets to warn the Israelites that betraying him could lead to serious consequences, but they closed their eyes and ears. So God implemented a teaching tool stronger than words, an object lesson. God asked Hosea to become an ongoing living metaphor, to use his own life to illustrate God's righteous, burning jealousy, fierce love, and redemptive discipline. He asked Hosea, the town preacher, to marry a prostitute named Gomer. "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD" (Hosea 1:2).

In the marriage, Hosea represents God and Gomer represents the unfaithful Israelites. What would you do if God asked this of you? How would your hopes, dreams, and expectations change? Hosea obeyed, and his courage astounds me. I'm grateful he willingly and sacrificially took on



the role of God's object lesson to teach us profound truths that can help us live wisely today.

In his book, Hosea shares his life story and the sermons he preached to the wayward Israelites. In Hosea's writings, we observe a vacillating pattern as he moves from sections that express God's jealousy to sections that express the ultimate grace of God, and back again. He uses a variety of literary devices, prose, poetry, images, stories, and prophecies to challenge our minds, touch our hearts, and inspire us to reserve our highest devotion exclusively for God.

God's righteous jealousy is evident throughout the book—not the paranoia, distrust, unhealthy smothering, and possessiveness we observe in sick human relationships but God's courageous, redemptive love for his beloved's highest good. God chose the picture of a healthy marriage bond between one man and one woman to depict his relationship with us. How do you feel about God as your Lover/Husband? It's probably the most developed Old Testament imagery that God uses for our relationship with him. Also, Paul uses this imagery in Ephesians 5:29–32 when he calls the church the bride of Christ, and John speaks of the church as a bride in Revelation.

Scot McKnight wrote, "Prior to Hosea the relationship of God with Israel went something like this: 'I am your God' and 'you are my people.' After Hosea the relationship of God with Israel was 'I am your Lover and I want you, Israel, for myself.' Prior to Hosea no one dared to speak of God as a Lover" (*Jesus Creed*, 44).

As a woman, I find this imagery of God as Lover beautiful. I hope you will too. He created us with an innate desire to love and be loved, to know and be known so we could be in intimate relationship with him. He rightly expects this deep personal bond with us. Our thirst for perfect love won't be met here in this fallen world but only as ultimate fulfillment in a sweet union with the Lord in eternity—but we get a glimpse, a taste here, as Hosea brings these beautiful truths to life.

He lived during a time much like today. Many who had once loved God deeply were turning their backs on him to pursue idols promising fulfillment, love, and happiness only to find them empty, like Jude described in verse 12: "They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead." We live among similar idols hoping to lure us away from God at every corner. The Israelites refused to heed Hosea's warnings and endured a seventy-year captivity as a result. Hosea's book is included in God's Word to protect us from making the same mistake. Nevertheless, God brought the Israelites back into the promised land as a sign of his unconditional love for his own. In addition to protecting us, the book of Hosea should enable us to understand the relationship between God's righteous jealousy, his holiness, and his grace. What a gift!



Discovering God’s Fierce Love

LESSON 1

God teaches us about himself through creation. For example, we learn about God by looking at how he designed us. We experience personal love relationships, and since love is directed toward another person with hopes of reciprocity, we know that God is personal.

God designed us with intrinsic cravings to be loved. That need can be imperfectly met in this life through romantic affections and even *agape* forms of platonic and parental love. Romantic sentiments can blossom into marriages where we treat one another with fidelity, respect one another’s dignity, and love one another well. When we experience that kind of healthy marriage, we can understand more fully God’s tender affection for us.

But when either a husband or a wife betrays their spouse, the wounded partner often experiences deep, even devastating, hurt. We probably all remember a time when someone we cared for betrayed us. Was it in elementary school or high school or as an adult? Did you know that God also experiences this kind of deep heartache when his loved ones betray him? His response is righteous jealousy.

GOD PURSUES YOU WITH A FIERCE PASSION

God passionately desires intimacy with you right now. He insists that your relationship with him take top priority in your affections, above your love for all others, even covenant spouses, precious children, and special friends. Like a jealous lover, God will not share you with others—and the beauty of his ferocious love is pictured in the writings of the Old Testament prophet Hosea. He awakens us to the splendor of God’s devotion and his demand that we reciprocate that devotion. He also shows us God’s agony when our sin spoils this intimacy. Many of us have felt waves of that agony through the death of a loved one, the betrayal of vows, or the devastation of divorce.

God inspired Hosea to help us understand his jealous love for us through a true account—the story of Hosea’s marriage to an unfaithful

OPTIONAL

Memorize Romans 8:38–39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Have you ever considered why God created life with changing seasons? I believe they speak of the spiritual reality of redemption. Every year we experience the birth of life and growth in spring and summer, death in fall and winter, then new birth again in the spring, as the earth bursts into life after a cold, bare winter. —Sue



wife, Gomer, who betrayed him by going after other lovers. In this story, Hosea represents God and Gomer represents Israel, as well as all of us when we are unfaithful to God.

As you work your way through the book of Hosea, my hope and prayer are that you will discover the ferocious love of God for you in a brand-new way, and that this discovery will inflame you to devote yourself more fully to God as the supreme relationship in your life—now and forever.

OUR PERSONAL LONGING FOR LOVE

When I was a little girl, I was in love with love, as defined by the world. My daddy and I enjoyed tender playful times during my preschool and grade school days, but when I entered my teen years, he grew emotionally distant and preoccupied. An only child without the guidance of a Christian home, I sought to fill the hole in my heart through an obsession with romance. Starry-eyed, I'd flirt, find a boyfriend, and expect our relationship to mimic what I saw in the movies, and when it didn't, I'd look elsewhere. I wasn't promiscuous, but I loved to be cuddled and kissed, hoping that this encounter would meet the deep ache in my heart to be known and loved well. It never did. Later I married a good man and we found Christ together. We've spent more than four and a half decades together, going on five, and we love each other deeply. But even a healthy marriage hasn't totally filled that ache—and I've come to believe that it was never meant to. God created this desire within us to draw us to himself, now and for eternity. Digesting Hosea has strengthened that conviction even more.

THE UNIVERSAL LONGING FOR LOVE

Some in the media understand this ache and use it to their advantage. According to an article entitled “What Are the Most Popular Literary Genres?” romance fiction sells the best of any genre, generating \$1.44 billion a year with a dedicated fan base of thirty million readers (Verrillo).

In her article “11 Romance Readers Reveal Why They Love the Genre,” Stephanie Topacio Long describes why these books sell so well. One reader, Stephanie, 26, explained why she reads romance novels: “I've always loved reading the genre . . . because it satisfies the part of me that was never able to let go of childhood fairy tales.” Molly, 29, added: “To me, romance novels are all about hope, hope for two people to find each other and fall madly in love and all will be OK. . . . Even though I know how they are going to end . . . I still like the hope/dream that a happily ever after is possible.” Hear the universal ache to love and be loved well.

In addition, a recent media phenomenon illustrates this universal desire: Hallmark movies. Beginning in 2016, cable ratings for Hallmark movies jumped 28 percent, while everyone else's declined. Cristina Ford

writes, “There’s something at play here that goes beyond cheesy plots. . . . The predictable characters and déjà-vu story lines offer a stark contrast to our tumultuous world. They subconsciously give us a taste of the stability and comfort that we’re so desperately seeking. That’s why they work—and not just with your mom” (“Why Do Moms Prefer Hallmark Movies”).

Whatever, your attitude toward romance novels, you must admit that they play on the reality that God created women with this personal and universal longing for love. How can our desire for connection find complete fulfillment? Journey with me through the pages of Hosea to find out.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Where does the prophet Hosea’s ministry fit into biblical history? Here’s a bird’s-eye view:

- About 2000 BC, God founded the nation of Israel when he made a covenant with Abraham. His son Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob became the father of twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel.
- A famine relocated the twelve tribes to Egypt where they eventually were enslaved. After several hundred years, Moses led them to freedom and “the promised land” where they made their home and were ruled by various “judges.”
- About 1000 BC, the Israelites demanded a king like the pagan nations around them had. God granted their desire by giving them a foolish king, Saul, and later David and his son Solomon.
- Under Solomon, Israel prospered, but because he did not follow the Lord, after his death the nation officially split in 931 BC. Ten tribes became the Northern Kingdom and they retained the name “Israel.” The other two tribes living in the south became the Southern Kingdom and took on the name “Judah.”

Hosea came on the scene during the time of the divided kingdom, and he spoke mostly to the Northern Kingdom, Israel, although his messages were appropriate for Judah, just as they are still fitting for us today. We’ll discover the fate of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms as we work our way through Hosea’s six sermons.

Disclaimer: When Hosea penned his story and sermons into this book, God had made a conditional covenant with the nation Israel called the Mosaic covenant. If the nation loved and obeyed God, they would be blessed as a nation. If they did not, they would experience national curses. In our study we will observe the playing out of these national curses as consequences for their corporate sin. However, today, as church-age believers, we are not under the Mosaic covenant. We are under the unconditional new covenant in which God deals with each of us as individuals.

I used to hate [Hallmark movies] . . . for the same reasons I hated Thomas Kinkade paintings: . . . too tidy, too perfect, too idyllic—absent the pain, ugliness, and darkness that gives meaningful and resonant texture to real life. But then I noticed how much delight my in-laws got from watching these movies. . . . And then my wife and I started watching them too, not only to ridicule their ridiculousness (which we do), but also to find comfort in their beauty. Yes, their beauty.

—Brett McCracken
 (“Formulaic for a Reason”)



Hosea through Malachi, the last twelve books in the Old Testament, are labeled “The Minor Prophets.” These prophets warned the Israelites that God was grieving over their idolatry; he saw their disloyalty and lack of love for others and for him. Judgment would come in the form of exile to the lands of foreign conquerors, the Assyrians and Babylonians. They would suffer under these pagans’ cruel treatment as a form of discipline to wake them up from their spiritual malaise. But the minor prophets also announced that after this discipline would come ultimate redemption and restoration, a beacon of hope calling them to purity, humility, justice, and love for God and others. —Sue

Therefore, be careful in applying the predictions of national disaster we observe in Hosea to any nation today.



Read Hosea 1:1–2:1.

Hosea did know this marriage would symbolically mirror God's relationship with Israel, so he realized God had a higher purpose for it. . . . Hosea knew people would look at his family and learn something about the ways of God. To some extent, people today still learn something about God's transforming power through observing what God does in people's lives.

—Gary Smith (*NIV Application Commentary*, 53)

God asked Hosea to use his own love life to illustrate a spiritual reality that was occurring in Israel during those days and ever since.

1. What did God ask Hosea to do and why (1:2)? What would this mean for Hosea's life?
2. How would you feel if God asked you to do this? Why might you struggle to obey God if you were in this situation?
3. What do you think could have possibly prompted God to make such a request to one of his choice servants?

4. Why do you think God chose a marriage metaphor as a symbol of our relationship with him? What do the following verses reveal about marriage and our relationship with Jesus?

Ephesians 5:30–32

John 14:3

Revelation 19:7–9

James 4:4

5. What did Hosea do (1:3)? What does this tell you about his relationship with God?

Hosea's experience demonstrates the importance of obeying God's will even when it may seem unusual or contrary to conventional wisdom. God instructed Hosea to marry a woman who seemingly would not enhance his prophetic career or respect in the community. This woman with a checkered moral past would undoubtedly undermine some of the moral principles the prophet stood for and preached against. She would likely bring endless distress, sorrow, and embarrassment to him when she became unfaithful to him and their children. . . . After all, would any of us think it wise to advise a young person planning on going into the ministry to marry a spouse involved in prostitution?

—Gary Smith (*NIV Application Commentary*, 53)

6. Consider Hosea's and Gomer's daily personal interactions at home. What relational complications can you imagine?

7. Have you ever found yourself betrayed in a dating relationship, engagement, or marriage? Has a family member or friend experienced this? What emotions and challenges accompany these kinds of betrayals?

8. What happened in 1:3 to complicate their relationship even more? Did Hosea have any way of knowing if the child was actually his?

9. Who named the little boy and what was his name (1:4)?

When people saw this little boy, Jezreel, they would be reminded about what had already happened in the Valley of Jezreel in 841 BC. In addition, Hosea would use him as an object lesson concerning a future prophecy. The child's name means "he sows," which will be important later.

What had happened in that valley? Israel's King Jehu had gone too far and slaughtered innocent people to solidify his own political power. God vowed retribution for this unnecessary bloodshed, and that prophecy was fulfilled in 752 BC when Jehu's descendants were assassinated, ending Jehu's dynasty forever.

As Hosea or Gomer walked with their first son through the town hand in hand, the boy reminded the people that if they continued in their adultery toward God, Jehu's fall would be accompanied by their own downfall. In addition, God would "break Israel's bow." This phrase refers to the future destruction of Israel's military might, allowing the powerful aggressor Assyria to make Israel its puppet state and later carry the Jews into exile to serve their captors in a faraway land. This prophecy was fulfilled between 734 and 722 BC.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

—Matthew 22:36–38

10. Next, Gomer conceived and gave birth to a daughter (1:6). What did God name her and what did her name mean? In your opinion, what would people think when they saw this little girl or when Hosea used her as an object lesson in one of his sermons?

11. What do verses 6 and 7 tell you about God’s emotional responses to Israel’s and Judah’s adulterous sin?

12. After her daughter was weaned, Gomer gave birth to a third child, a second son (1:8–9). Although the first son may have been sired by Hosea, the next two children were probably not. What did God name this third child and why? What does this name reveal about how God feels about Israel now?

The book of Hosea contains six sermons that reveal God's heart as he pronounces judgment on his disobedient children, followed by sections that show us his redeeming love despite their adulterous sin. We observe the first redemptive oracle in 1:10–2:1. Verse 10 begins with the word “yet,” telling us that a contrast follows. These verses read like a love letter.

13. What's the first image God uses to express his unconditional love (1:10)? (See also Genesis 22:17.)

14. Have you ever been unconditionally loved by another person? What impact has this had on your life?

15. What's the promise in the second part of verse 10? (“The place” referred to is Israel, and the incident is the birth and naming of Hosea's second son.) What does God call his people now?

Silence is required for deep change to occur. Once we are silent, it is possible for us to look into God's eyes and discover His response. We anticipate fury, yet what we find is fondness; we expect, at least, cool indifference in light of our disregard and anger, yet what we discover is passionate joy at our return to a relationship with Him.

God's disruptive and scandalous response to our hatred transforms fury into gratitude and deadness into life.
—Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III (*Bold Love*, 66)

DIGGING DEEPER

Hosea refers to God's covenant with Abraham in 1:10. Is this covenant conditional or unconditional? How does Genesis chapter 15 inform your answer?

A wonderful promise of future restoration immediately follows this gloomy revelation of judgment. It provided encouragement to Hosea's audience by assuring a glorious and secure future for Israel eventually.

—Tom Constable
(*Notes on Hosea*, 18)

DIGGING DEEPER

How do these additional prophecies add insight to Hosea's words (Isaiah 9:1-7; 41:8-16; Joel 3:9-21; Amos 9:11-15)?

16. Although God made these initial promises to the Israelites, and he keeps his promises, how might these promises also apply to Christians today? What do the verses below reveal about the family of believers?

Mark 3:20-21, 31, 35

Galatians 6:10

Ephesians 2:19

2 Corinthians 6:18

1 Timothy 5:1-2

17. We all grew up in different family situations—some healthy and some dysfunctional. Some of us may have been orphaned while others enjoyed the company of multiple siblings, cousins, and other relatives. Regardless, when we come to faith in Jesus and accept what he did for us on the cross, we enter into a new family. What does it mean to you that now you are part of God’s family “which cannot be measured or counted” (Hosea 1:10)?

18. What are ways that you can invest in your new eternal family now?

DIGGING DEEPER

Will many Jews be part of God’s forever family along with Christians? What does Paul say in Romans 11:1–6, 11–16, 25–32?

19. What is Hosea's prophecy in 1:11?

This prophecy has both a near view and a far view, as do many biblical prophecies. The near view occurred after the Jews served out their seventy years in exile and returned to Israel as one united nation where they could openly worship God again. The name Jezreel means "he sows" and may refer to Israel bursting forth in vegetation and plenty as a result. What a great day that was when the Jews returned to the land from captivity. The far view refers to end times when the Jews will reunite in the land under their Davidic king and Messiah, Jesus Christ. What a glorious day that will be!

20. Look back over Hosea 1:1–2:1. What is your overall takeaway? How will this change your heart attitude toward God and your actions right now?

For above all else, the Christian life is a love affair of the heart. It cannot be lived primarily as a set of principles or ethics. It cannot be managed with steps and programs. It cannot be lived exclusively as a moral code leading to righteousness. . . . The truth of the gospel is intended to free us to love God and others with our whole heart. When we ignore this heart aspect of our faith and try to live out our religion solely as correct doctrine or ethics, our passion is crippled, or perverted, and the divorce of our soul from the heart purposes of God toward us is deepened. (Curtis and Eldredge, *Sacred Romance*, 8)

TRUE LOVE IS A SPLENDID HOST

There is love whose measure is that of an umbrella. There is love whose inclusiveness is that of a great marquee. And there is love whose comprehension is of the immeasurable sky. The aim of the New Testament is the conversion of the umbrella into a tent, and the merging of the tent into the glorious canopy of all-enfolding heavens. . . . Push back the walls of family love until they include the neighbour; again push back the walls until they include the stranger; again push back the walls until they comprehend the foe. (Jowett, *Epistles of St. Peter*)