**Hosea**

**The Dysfunctional Relationship**

**What you need to REMEMBER:**

The Bible describes how God is working through human history to restore His creation to its original, pristine condition. He first made this intention known to Eve by promising that one of her descendants would destroy the source of evil. He later promised Abraham that this descendant would be born to the nation that would be formed from his family lineage.

The overarching story of much of the Older Testament is the description of how God formed the nation of Israel from Abraham’s heirs and provided them with a strong religious and cultural identity, as well as, a robust legal and governmental system. It also recounts how much trouble God went through to give them a national homeland in order to create the place for the Promised Child of Redemption to be born, live and die.

The counterpoint to the whole story is the rebellious nature of Israel. In spite of the miraculous ways in which God had accomplished the work of establishing the nation and providing them with prosperity and purpose, they habitually turned away from Him – just like we do! Much of the Bible describes the dysfunctional relationship that God’s people have with their Maker. God’s people are consistently faithless, yet, God remains faithful. Part of God’s faithfulness is His persistent attempts to get His people back into alignment with His passions and purposes. The Lord’s relationship with His people results in a see-saw pattern of blessing, rebellion, punishment and restoration.

**What you need to KNOW:**

Having completed our journey through the historical books of Genesis through Esther, the wisdom/poetical books of Job through the Song of Solomon, and the Major Prophets of Isaiah through Daniel, we are ready to begin our walk through the last section of the Older Testament – the Minor Prophets.

But before we do, it’s important to know that the Major-Minor distinction of the prophets has nothing to do with the relative importance of the prophesies themselves. Rather the distinction is simply a reference to the comparative length of the books. In other words, the books of the Minor Prophets are generally much shorter than Isaiah, Jeremiah/Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel. In the Hebrew Bible, the 12 books of the Minor Prophets are grouped together as a single collection.

Hosea is the first book of the Minor Prophets. As a prophet, Hosea, was a specially called and empowered individual who whose task was to realign the thinking, attitudes, and behaviors of God’s people. Prophesies were often spoken through words, but actions were also employed to illustrated the message in tangible ways. The main message of Hosea is conveyed through a shocking instruction. Hosea was commanded by God to ***“go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution” (1:2).*** So, Hosea, a man of God, was told to enter into the commitment of marriage with a woman who he knew would be unfaithful to him. To the point that some their children would be produced by her ‘paying clients!’ The next sentence explains why God gives Hosea this scandalous instruction, ***“This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshipping other gods” (1:2).*** Hosea is instructed to intentionally enter into a dysfunctional marriage with an immoral woman, as a prophetic illustration of the waywardness of God’s people.

Hosea’s marriage to his wife, Gomer, paints a picture of Israel’s adulterous relationship with the Lord. As you journey through the book of Hosea you will see Gomer fully return to her life of sin, resulting in her enslavement. Yet, like the Lord, Hosea is ever faithful, even buying her back from the slave market. Like many prophesies, Hosea contains both ‘a carrot and a stick’ approach to elicit the desired outcome. There are warnings and punishments for disobedience, but promises of blessings for repentance. When God’s people turn toward Him in repentance, He is always ready to turn toward them and say, ***“I will heal you of your faithlessness, my love knows no bounds” (14:4).***

**GET GOING!**

**If you are new to the story of Hosea, you will wonder what other strange stories the Scriptures might contain.**