

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: A Prophet, a Wife, and a Faithless People

Hosea 1:1–2:23

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, these chapters put before us the covenant love of God set against the unfaithfulness of His people, and they refuse to let us soften either side. Sin is shown to be real betrayal with real consequences; the names Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi are not poetry only but verdicts on a people who personally and repeatedly broke faith. At the same time, the reversal in 1:10–2:23 shows a God whose mercy does not cancel His justice but triumphs through it. Guard the class from two errors: treating God's love as mere sentiment that overlooks sin, and treating His judgment as the final word. The promise that 'not my people' becomes 'my people' is fulfilled, as Paul and Peter teach, in the gospel age and in Christ's church, where Jew and Gentile are gathered as the people of God, not in any future earthly political kingdom.

But this lesson aims past information at formation. The student should leave seeing his or her own face in Gomer and Israel, feeling both the seriousness of wandering and the staggering tenderness of a God who goes looking anyway. Help the class hear God say 'you are my people' to them personally, and let that naming call them to return, repent, and remain faithful. The text is written for our instruction (Romans 15:4), so press it home: a heart that grasps how relentlessly it is loved is a heart finally free to come home and stay home.

Question 1

Student Question:

Hosea 1:1 anchors the prophecy in the reigns of named kings of Judah and Israel. Why does it matter that God's word comes to real people in real history, and what does this opening teach us about how God works through actual times and places rather than abstractions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea opens by rooting the prophecy in datable history, naming Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. This is the mid-eighth century before Christ, a season of outward prosperity in the northern kingdom masking deep spiritual rot. God does not deal in vague generalities; His word lands in a particular place, among particular people, at a particular hour. That precision is itself a comfort, for it means God meets us where we actually live.

The phrase 'the word of the Lord that came to Hosea' tells us the prophet is a receiver, not an inventor. The message originates in God's own heart. Israel's later prophets and the apostles share this conviction: revelation is given, not manufactured (2 Peter 1:21). When we teach this

book, we are handling something God spoke, addressed first to a real nation and preserved, by His providence, for our instruction (Romans 15:4).

That these kings are named also quietly judges the age. Jeroboam's reign looked successful, yet under him Israel was sliding toward the judgment Hosea announces. Prosperity is no proof of God's favor, and history is no neutral stage; it is the arena where God's purposes unfold. The student should see that the God of the Bible is the Lord of actual times and places, and that he or she stands inside that same accountable history today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture is revelation given by God, not human invention.
- God works through real history, not abstractions; providence is concrete.
- Outward prosperity can coexist with deep spiritual decline.
- The Old Testament is preserved for our instruction (Romans 15:4).

Discussion Prompts

- Why might God anchor a hard message in named kings and datable years?
- How does knowing God works in real history change how you read your own circumstances?
- Where do we mistake prosperity for God's approval?

Question 2

Student Question:

God told Hosea to take a wife knowing the heartbreak it would bring, so that his life would preach his message. Where is God asking you to let your own life, and not only your words, become the sermon He is preaching to those around you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God commands Hosea to marry a woman who will be unfaithful, so that the prophet's household becomes a living sermon. This is costly obedience of the deepest kind. Hosea is asked not merely to announce God's heartbreak but to feel it. There is a principle here that runs through Scripture and into the church: God often forms His message in the very life of His messenger.

We should handle the marriage imagery with reverence and restraint. The point is not the scandal but the covenant: a faithful spouse loving an unfaithful one mirrors a faithful God loving a faithless people. Hosea's willingness to obey, knowing the pain ahead, models a discipleship that does not bargain with God for an easier assignment.

For the student, the question becomes personal. We are quick to offer God our words and slow to offer Him our lives. Yet the gospel is often most clearly preached through a life of patient,

costly faithfulness, a marriage kept, a wrong forgiven, a quiet integrity that words alone could never convey. God may be asking the student to let his or her life become the sermon.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God often forms His message in the life of His messenger.
- Costly obedience does not bargain for an easier assignment.
- A faithful life can preach more powerfully than words.
- Handle marriage and fidelity imagery with reverence.

Discussion Prompts

- What makes lived obedience harder than spoken belief?
- Whose faithful life has preached the gospel to you?
- Where is God asking your life, not just your words, to testify?

Question 3

Student Question:

Trace the meaning of the three children's names in Hosea 1:4–9: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah (no mercy), and Lo-Ammi (not my people). What do these names reveal about the seriousness of covenant unfaithfulness and the just consequences of persistent sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Each child receives a name that carries a verdict. Jezreel recalls a valley of bloodshed and announces coming judgment on the house of Jehu and the kingdom of Israel. Lo-Ruhamah means 'no mercy,' signaling that God's patience with persistent rebellion has limits. Lo-Ammi means 'not my people,' the most chilling of all, for it touches the very heart of the covenant: 'I will be your God and you shall be my people.'

These names teach that covenant unfaithfulness is not a private matter with no consequences. Sin genuinely fractures relationship with God. In keeping with personal accountability, Israel is held responsible for what Israel actually did; this is not an inherited fate but the just fruit of real, chosen unfaithfulness sustained over generations. God names the consequence honestly before He acts.

Yet even the severity is purposeful. By spelling out 'no mercy' and 'not my people,' God lets His people feel the full weight of where their wandering leads, so that the reversal to come will land with full force. The seriousness of the verdict is the measure of the love that will overturn it. Teach the class to take sin as seriously as God does, neither minimizing it nor despairing of it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin genuinely fractures relationship with God.

- Guilt is personal and earned, not inherited.
- God names consequences honestly before He acts.
- The severity of the verdict measures the love that reverses it.
- Covenant means 'my God' and 'my people'; sin assaults both.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God spell out the consequences so plainly?
- How do we keep from minimizing sin without sliding into despair?
- What does it mean that guilt is earned, not inherited?

Question 4

Student Question:

Lo-Ammi declares that a once-claimed people had become not God's people. Have you ever sensed a distance growing between you and God, a drift toward not my people? What specific steps return a wanderer to the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Lo-Ammi, 'not my people,' describes a relationship that has drifted to the breaking point. Few of us fall away in a single dramatic moment; most drift, one small compromise and silence at a time, until one day the distance is real. The name confronts us with where unattended drift finally arrives.

Scripture is clear that a child of God can wander and even fall away, and just as clear that the way back is open. Returning is the great theme of Hosea: 'come, and let us return unto the Lord' (Hosea 6:1). Repentance is not a vague feeling but a turning, a concrete change of direction, a forsaking of the idols and a coming home to the Giver.

Help the student name the practical steps of return: honest confession, renouncing the specific sin, restoring neglected worship and prayer, and seeking the fellowship of God's people. The God who saw Israel drifting toward 'not my people' had already planned to call her 'my people' again. No distance is beyond the reach of genuine repentance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Drift, not just dramatic falls, leads people away from God.
- A believer can wander, and the way back remains open.
- Repentance is a concrete turning, not a vague feeling.
- Return involves confession, forsaking sin, and renewed fellowship.

Discussion Prompts

- How does spiritual drift usually begin in a life?

- What are the first honest steps a wanderer takes to return?
- Why is repentance more than feeling sorry?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Hosea 1:10–11 the verdict is suddenly reversed: the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, gathered together under one head. How does God's character explain this turn from judgment to restoration without God ceasing to be just?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Without warning, the tone turns. The children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, the very promise made to Abraham, and the scattered will be gathered under one head (Hosea 1:10–11). The God who pronounced judgment now points beyond it to restoration. This is not God going back on His justice; it is God's deeper purpose breaking through.

The key is the unchanging character of God. He is just, and so He named the consequences of sin honestly. He is also faithful to His covenant purpose, which from Abraham forward was to bless all nations through his seed. God's judgment and His mercy are not at war; His mercy fulfills the very promise His justice seemed to threaten. He remains entirely just while making a way to restore.

The New Testament tells us where this gathering lands. The one head under whom the people are gathered is Christ, and the great ingathering is the church, where the promise to Abraham reaches the nations (Galatians 3:8, 28–29). This is not deferred to some future earthly kingdom; Christ reigns now, and the gathering is happening in the gospel age. Help the class hold justice and mercy together as God does, and to see the church as the fulfillment of this hope.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's justice and mercy are not in conflict.
- Restoration flows from God's unchanging covenant faithfulness.
- The promise to Abraham was to bless all nations through his seed.
- The gathering under 'one head' is fulfilled in Christ and His church now.
- Kingdom hope is realized in the gospel age, not a future earthly reign.

Discussion Prompts

- How can God judge sin and still plan restoration without contradiction?
- What does it mean that the gathering happens 'under one head'?
- Where do you see God's faithfulness outlasting human failure?

Question 6

Student Question:

Hosea 2 pictures God pleading with an unfaithful people, even hedging up her way with thorns so she cannot find her lovers. How have you experienced God lovingly blocking a path you were determined to take, and how did you respond?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 2 portrays God pleading with His unfaithful people, and one of His mercies is severe: 'I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths' (2:6). Sometimes the kindest thing God does is to frustrate our pursuit of what would destroy us, to let the path we chose run into a wall.

We rarely thank God in the moment for a closed door, a thwarted plan, a relationship or opportunity that fell through. Yet in hindsight many believers can trace God's protecting hand in exactly those frustrations. The hedge of thorns is not punishment for its own sake; it is love refusing to let a wanderer reach the cliff edge.

Invite the student to remember a time God blocked a determined path, and to reconsider it as mercy. The very same verses move toward 'then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband' (2:7). God's hedging is meant to turn us homeward. The question is whether we respond with resentment at the wall, or with the homesickness that drives us back to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God sometimes blocks our paths as an act of love.
- Closed doors can be protection we only see in hindsight.
- Divine frustration aims to turn us homeward, not merely to punish.
- Our response to a blocked path reveals our hearts.

Discussion Prompts

- When has a closed door turned out to be God's mercy?
- Why is it hard to receive a 'hedge of thorns' as love in the moment?
- How can frustration become an invitation to return?

Question 7**Student Question:**

In Hosea 2:8 God says she did not know that He gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil she lavished on idols. What does this reveal about the nature of idolatry and ingratitude, and how does forgetting the Giver lead a heart astray?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Hosea 2:8 God exposes the root of the idolatry: 'she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil,' the very gifts she then lavished on Baal. Idolatry is, at its core, a failure to recognize and thank the Giver. The blessings themselves were never the problem; the forgetting was.

This is a searching diagnosis for any age. Ingratitude untethers a gift from its Giver, and a gift unmoored from God quickly becomes an idol, something we trust and serve in His place. The good things God gives, work, family, provision, even health, can silently take the throne when we stop tracing them back to His hand.

Teach the student that gratitude is not a minor virtue but a guardrail for the heart. The remedy for practical idolatry is a deliberate, daily acknowledgment that every good gift comes down from the Father (James 1:17). When we keep naming God as the Giver, we keep our affections rightly ordered, and the gifts stay servants rather than becoming masters.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Idolatry is fundamentally a failure to honor the Giver.
- Good gifts become idols when unmoored from gratitude.
- Forgetting God's hand leads the heart astray.
- Gratitude guards the heart and orders our affections.

Discussion Prompts

- How does forgetting the Giver turn a blessing into an idol?
- What good gifts are most likely to take God's place for you?
- How can deliberate gratitude protect your heart?

Question 8

Student Question:

God promises in Hosea 2:14 to allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. Where might God be drawing you into a quieter, harder place in order to win back your heart, and will you let Him speak there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God's strategy of restoration is breathtakingly tender: 'I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her' (2:14). The wilderness was where Israel first fell in love with the Lord, and God means to take her back there, away from the noise and the lovers, to win her again with words of comfort.

There is often a wilderness on the way home. God draws His people into quieter, harder, simpler places, stripped of the distractions and idols, because it is there we can finally hear Him. What

looks like loss can be the Lord clearing the room so He can speak. The wilderness is not abandonment; it is courtship.

Ask the student to consider where God may be doing this now, in a season of loss, loneliness, illness, or stillness that has quieted the usual noise. The invitation is not to resent the wilderness but to listen in it. God 'speaks comfortably,' literally to the heart. The question is whether we will let Him lead us there and whether we will hear His voice when He does.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God often draws His people into a wilderness to win their hearts.
- Hard, quiet seasons can be courtship, not abandonment.
- God strips distractions so we can finally hear Him.
- The wilderness invites listening, not resentment.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might God use a wilderness season to draw you closer?
- What distractions has a hard season cleared away in your life?
- How can you learn to listen for God in the quiet?

Question 9

Student Question:

Hosea 2:19–23 reaches the heart of these chapters: God betroths His people to Himself forever in righteousness, mercy, and faithfulness, turning Lo-Ruhamah into mercy and Lo-Ammi into 'you are my people.' Paul and Peter apply these very words to the church (Romans 9:25–26; 1 Peter 2:10). What does this passage teach about the depth, cost, and reach of God's covenant love that redeems the unfaithful and gathers a people to Himself in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the two chapters reach their summit. 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies' (2:19). The relationship that sin had shattered God now reestablishes on the firmest possible footing, grounded not in the people's faithfulness but in His own righteousness and steadfast love. And the broken names are healed: 'no mercy' becomes mercy, 'not my people' becomes 'thou art my people,' and they answer, 'thou art my God' (2:23).

This is covenant love that redeems the unfaithful, and it is the beating heart of Hosea. God does not merely forgive; He betroths, He binds Himself, He pledges 'for ever.' The love that does this is not blind sentiment that overlooks sin. It is love that has reckoned honestly with sin and chooses to redeem anyway, at cost to itself. The depth of the love is measured by the depth of the betrayal it overcomes.

The reach of this love is wider than Israel. Paul quotes these very verses to explain the gathering of both Jews and Gentiles into the church: 'I will call them my people, which were not my people' (Romans 9:25–26). Peter does the same: 'which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy' (1 Peter 2:10). This is fulfilled now, in Christ and His church, spiritual Israel, not in a future earthly political nation. The full cost of this redeeming love is finally seen at the cross, where Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25).

For the student, this is the gospel in seed form. The names sin tried to fasten on us, unloved, unwanted, not God's, are overturned by a God who says, 'thou art my people.' To grasp this love is to be undone by it and remade. It calls for a wholehearted return, and, having returned, a faithful remaining, for the betrothal asks for fidelity in answer to its 'for ever.'

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's covenant love redeems the unfaithful at cost to Himself.
- Betrothal 'for ever' grounds restoration in God's faithfulness, not ours.
- This love reckons honestly with sin rather than ignoring it.
- Paul and Peter apply Hosea to Jews and Gentiles gathered into the church.
- Fulfillment is now in Christ and His church, not a future earthly Israel.
- The cost of redeeming love is fully revealed at the cross.
- God's claiming love calls for return and faithful remaining.

Discussion Prompts

- What does 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever' reveal about how God restores?
- How does it change you to hear God say 'thou art my people'?
- How do Paul and Peter show this love reaching the church?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across Hosea 1–2 as a whole, where has the Lord most pressed on your heart, and name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this story of a faithless people and a faithful God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As the class looks back over Hosea 1–2, gather the threads: a real word in real history, a costly lived-out message, the honest verdict of sin's names, the unexpected reversal, the hedge of thorns, the forgotten Giver, the wilderness of courtship, and the betrothal that redeems the unfaithful. Through it all runs one steady note, a faithless people and a faithful God.

The aim now is personal and specific. It is not enough to admire the story; the student is meant to be formed by it. Where has the Lord pressed in? Perhaps on a drift that needs reversing, an idol that needs naming, a wilderness that needs accepting, or a name that needs replacing with His 'thou art my people.'

Encourage each person to name one concrete way Jesus is shaping them through this passage and to take a single, definite step in response this week. The God who goes looking for wanderers is at work in this room. The right response to such love is to come home, and to stay.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The whole passage testifies to a faithless people and a faithful God.
- Truth is meant to form us, not merely inform us.
- Genuine response is specific and concrete, not vague.
- Christ shapes us as we return and remain faithful.

Discussion Prompts

- Where did the Lord most press on your heart in Hosea 1-2?
- What one specific way is Jesus forming you through this story?
- What single step of return will you take this week?