

Hosea Chapter 1 – John Karmelich

1. First, welcome back everyone, and I hope you all had a nice summer break. For those of you who are new to this study, I always take off the months of July and August. Among other reasons, it's to prepare for what I write in the fall. Last spring I prayed about which bible book to teach I next teach. God made it clear to me that He wants me to teach on all of the Minor Prophets. For those of you do those who don't know what that term means, there are 12 Old Testament books that are shorter in length than the "big prophecy books" of Isaiah through Daniel. They are not the Minor Prophets because they're less special, but only because they're shorter in length.
 - a) Also realize they don't all discuss the same topic or all occur in the same time frame. They span about 300 years of history. Anyway, God somehow made it obvious to me that these books should be my next project. I remember thinking, all of them? I believe God sort of responded with, "You heard Me, now get going"! So here I am.
2. Now that I've gotten that out of the way, let me talk a little about Hosea. He lived in the 700's BC. He lived during the same time as Isaiah. Isaiah was based out of the Southern Israelite Kingdom of Judah, while Hosea lived in the Northern Israelite Kingdom of Israel. For my newcomers there was a several-hundred year period when Israel split into two kingdoms. The northern one ended around 700 BC. That was about 20 years after Hosea preached to them about their fall. It came to an end when the Assyrian Empire conquered it. They were based out of a place that doesn't exist today (in Iraq) and lasted about 700 years. They conquered the "North" but never "South". About 100 years after the Northern Israelite Kingdom's fall the Babylonian Empire came on the scene. It was an empire that conquered and scattered the rest of the Israelites and destroyed the Assyrians.
 - a) To finish my ancient Israelite history lesson, the Israelites were part of that empire until a new group that I'll refer to as the "Persians" for short, conquered the Babylonians, and as a part of their new empire, they allowed the Israelites to move back to their homeland.
 - b) They remained part of that empire, until the Greeks conquered the Persians and of course the Romans conquered them. This pattern continued for millenniums. Israel was never an independent country again until 1948.
 - c) OK, there's over 2,500 years of Israelite history in a few thoughts.
3. All of that leads us back to Hosea. He wrote a 14-chapter book, with the chapter breaks inserted millenniums after he wrote it. As a simple comparison, the book of Daniel has 13 chapters in the Christian bible, but Daniel has much more text within its chapters. That's why the book of Daniel is not considered one of the Minor Prophets and Hosea is.
4. OK John, that's sort of interesting ancient history. Why should I care? First, Hosea is much more than just a warning to the Northern Israelite Kingdom about what's about to happen to them. It's a warning about what'll happen to any group, be it an individual, a church or even a country that turns it's back on God. When Hosea wrote this book, the Northern Kingdom was enjoying a time of prosperity. Their king would be considered a type of success by our standards. He expanded their kingdom and the spoils of war benefited those living there then. However most people who lived in that kingdom turned their backs to God and were either killed or taken away to captivity as that kingdom came to an end shortly after Hosea wrote this book.
 - a) So is that it? Don't mess with God or we'll eat it? (Yes that's a joke!) Yes I'm well aware I am preaching to the choir. I can assume those who are reading this lesson already believe Jesus is God, and we're using our lives as a witness for Him. So why should we feel guilty as we read this lesson?
 - b) What this book reminds us that despite the mistakes we make, God can't stop loving who He chose to love in the first place. This book as an Old Testament "equivalent" of 1st John. That's because both books emphasize the fact that despite our sins, God won't stop loving who He's chosen to love in the first place. It's a reminder that our salvation is secure even if we mess up our witness for Him to the point where we suffer badly, to put it mildly.

- c) The message of this book is essentially, "There are consequences for turning one's back on God and again to put it mildly, they are very painful. Still, despite that punishment, I am still God and I still desire that those I've called chose to follow Me."
 - i) This is why I call this lesson "God's dilemma". The dilemma is how can God show us that He can't tolerate any sin whatsoever and also show He's not given up on us as a collection of believers at the same time. How can He punish us when we turn our backs on Him and at the same time, show He's not given up on us either? The best answer I know is to not make a punishment that's eternal. For example, Israel as a nation got to return to their land, after being kicked out for roughly a century.
 - ii) Israel as a nation stands today in spite of a lot of effort to end it. Isn't that country today mostly secular? I see that as part of God's dilemma, and I'll let Him sort that out on His timing.
 - iii) What does any of that have to do with us Christians? The principal also applies to us as well. We could have a booming economy like those Israelites did right before their destruction. The point is God demands obedience. We should not be trying to earn His love. He expects us out of gratitude for what He's done for us to live in a way that we're living a witness for Him. All I'm saying is if we do believe Jesus is God, then "put our money and our time where our mouth is". We're to live like it, which is all about using our time and our resources as His witnesses to the world around us. As to how we do that, we'll get into that later.
- 5. At this point, I'd like to return to discuss the first two chapters of Hosea. Imagine if God wanted you or me to be a prophet for Him. What would we do? How would we live our life differently based on that calling? Would we be willing to do whatever it is that God called us to do? Let me use Hosea as an example of what living for God can be like: He somehow made it clear to Hosea that he was to go marry a prostitute. It's implied that this bride would not be loyal to Hosea after they got married. Consider the dilemma of God asking you to marry someone and have children with them, knowing that person would not be loyal to you. I suspect all of us who've lived some length of time know some divorced people who can relate to this text. What I'm asking is, if you knew in advance all of that was going to happen and God told you to go through with it anyway would you still do it? Are we willing to trust God enough that we're willing to suffer through a really tough personal situation to be an example of God pointing out our collective disloyalty to Him as a living witness for Him? That's what God asked Hosea to do.
 - a) So does that mean I should cheat on my spouse or let my spouse cheat on me, just to show our loyalty to God? Of course not. He called Hosea to live this way as an example of how much He loves us in spite of the fact we're collectively disloyal to Him.
 - b) Let me put it this way: Since we've given our lives to Jesus, have we stopped sinning? Of course not. Yes we should avoid sin as much as possible as it makes us a bad witness for Jesus. At the same time, none of us are perfect, and this book is God's way of showing us He still loves us in spite of those sins we commit as believers.
 - c) Yes there is more to the lesson than just that. The key point of this lesson is simply the fact that God still loves us despite our sinful nature even as believers and despite the fact that we're not always the type of witness for God that He desires us to be. That's this lesson in one thought.
 - d) OK then, what's the title? "Understanding God's dilemma". It's about realizing how much God loves us in spite of our faults. This lesson's one big reminder that when we mess up, He still desires to have an intimate relationship with us. When we fail to act as the type of witness He desires we be, we may suffer individually or collectively for those sins, but it never means God's abandoned us. Yes there is more to the lesson than that, but that's why I go over the text verse by verse.
 - e) Speaking of which, time to start the details of this relatively short, 14 chapter book written by Hosea to the Northern (soon to be destroyed) Israelite kingdom and to us:

6. Hosea, Chapter 1, Verse 1: The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:
- a) First, don't panic over all these names. I can't pronounce them either. Think of Verse 1 as a time stamp. The way Israelites kept track of the years was based on who was the king at any given time. The point to gather here is that God didn't just speak to Hosea on just one given day and "that's that". The book is not Hosea saying, "God spoke to me last night, so I wrote a book based on what He told me". Instead, this beginning shows how God called Hosea to be a living witness for Him in spite during the time frame these kings lived.
 - b) Let me put it this way: If you read the history of the Southern Kingdom of Judah as stated in 2nd Kings through 2nd Chronicles, that kingdom had a mixture of good and bad kings who were either loyal to God or not depending upon the king. The Northern Kingdom of Israel where Hosea was based only had kings that effectively turned their backs on God.
 - i) All I'm saying is despite the fact the Northern Kingdom was one bad king after the next one, God still considered the Israelites living there to be His people. God still wanted someone to be His witness to His people living there, despite the sins they committed and despite the fact they collectively turned their backs on God. That's why God picked Hosea for this mission.
 - ii) Time for one of my "why should I care speeches". How much differently is Hosea from what God called you and me to do as a witness for Him? We may come from a family of nonbelievers or a family of believers. Whether we realize it or not, the majority of people in the world, let alone wherever we live, aren't willing to live as a witness for Jesus, because they don't believe the Gospel message or because it is hard to live differently enough to be a living witness for Jesus. If we believe Jesus is God, died for all our sins, and we say He's the "LORD" of our lives then we have been separated for that purpose. I don't think God calls many of us to go marry a prostitute today as a witness for Him, but He does allow us to go through difficult situations with the ultimate purpose of glorifying Him based on how we live our lives based on being that witness.
 - c) Speaking of comparing Hosea to our own relationship with Jesus, realize that their names essentially are the same. The English word "Jesus" is roughly based on the Hebrew name, "Jeshua" or "God Saves". The names "Hosea", "Jeshua" and also "Joshua", all have the same root meaning, which is essentially "God saves". My point is when you see Hosea, Jesus or Joshua, all three have the same root meaning, that's all.
 - d) Here's a good question to ponder: If Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, why did he list the names of the Southern Kings at that time? Yes it helps to date the text, but I will also argue, it's where God wanted the Israelites to be. Think of it this way: The kings of the Southern Kingdom were all descendants of King David and God wanted them to be on the lookout for "The descendant of David" who will rule the world forever. Those who lived in the Northern Kingdom were in effect turning from God's will. What the Northern Kingdom was most famous for, among other things is the fact that they never had a king, who was a God-fearing man on the throne. Nothing good is ever said about any of those kings "Up North" as none of them lived as God desires. My point is just as those kings up "North" turned from God, so did the people living in that Northern Kingdom. That's why God called Hosea to be a witness to them. It's God's way of saying, "those people are still My people and I want to draw them back to Me." It's a sign of "God's dilemma" as I call it.
 - i) OK John, we get the fact that the Israelites living up North were "bad eggs" and we get the fact that the Southern Kingdom still had some "good eggs" that still sought after God. How does any of this ancient history affect me? Why should we care in the issue of who's good and who's bad? It's not to learn ancient history. It's so we can realize God's still trying to call people who've turned from Him back to Him.

- ii) The point for you and me as Christians is that God wants us to be a good witness to those who don't care about their relationship with Him. As the old joke goes in the Christian community, "I wish everyone who'll be saved had some big mark on their body so we don't have to waste our time preaching to those who'll never be a believer." (Based on something taught by Charles Spurgeon in the 19th Century.) My point is because we don't know who's saved and who's not, we like Hosea are called to be a witness to "lost and dying world", just like Hosea was giving his own "Last Call" before the destruction came to that kingdom.
 - iii) Anyway, that's why I believe Hosea listed the kings in the North and the South as to make the point about where the Israelites living up North should be mentally.
 - iv) We'll talk a little more about the Northern kings later in this lesson. Meanwhile, I believe we're actually ready for Verse 2:
7. Verse 2: When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD." ³ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.
- a) A classic debate among bored bible scholars is when did Hosea's wife Gomer actually go be unfaithful? Was it before or after she married Hosea? We're all three children those of both Hosea and Gomer? One can argue either way, which is why it's debated. Personally I don't care about such details. The point is God told Hosea to go marry someone who he would realize would not be faithful to Hosea as a spouse.
 - b) If you ever wondered why the name "Gomer" has a negative stereotype, it's because of the story of Gomer as the wife of Hosea here in the bible. Now you know.
 - c) I happen to have several friends going through a divorce at this time in my life. I wonder if they'd go through their same marriage again, knowing what happened down the road. I suspect most of us have dealt with other's anger about having to go through those tough situations. My point is Hosea went into that situation knowing this was going to happen.
 - d) Stop and consider, what are you willing to do to be a witness for God? At first I admit it seems appealing to want to be a prophet of God. But if He told you to go marry someone who would be unfaithful, would you do it as witness for Him? Stop and consider some of the tough things you've been through in your life. If you knew it was all part of His plan for you, would you still go through the tough things you've been through before? All I'm saying is God never said living the Christian life is going to be easy. Sometimes He'll put us in really tough situations with the goal of that situation either to be a witness for Him in that situation and/or help us grow closer to Him by allowing us to go through it in the first place. We may complain about the "Gomer's" that He put in our lives, but often such a "Gomer" is part of God's plan for our lives, so let's deal with it the best we can.
 - e) Anyway, however they met, they got married and "next thing you know" they had a son.
8. Verse 4: Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵ In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel."
- a) One has to remember that no one hears "God's voice" whenever they desire to hear it. The way I look at God is "He's in charge, I'm not. Therefore if He's got something to say to me He'll say it when He wants to on His timing." I never believed I've got to strain to hear His voice. I don't believe I have to work hard to hear His voice. I figure if God is God, He will say what He wants to me when He wants to. We don't have to wait to actually hear from Him to make a decision. We should just study our bible, pray to Him and if He wants to interrupt our lives to say something, He will and that's His business. All that I'm called to do is live as a witness for Him and go about my life realizing He watches all that I do.
 - b) Anyway, Hosea had one of those "God's talking to me" moments, around the time that his son was born. God told him to name the boy "Jezreel". My job is to explain why that is.

- i) The first thing to know about how the Israelites named their children, is it is often based on either a family name or something "godly". Many kings of the Northern Kingdom had "God-based" names maybe for political reasons or possibly because their parents had high hopes, but of course that didn't work.
- ii) The next thing to know is that last names essentially didn't exist. You were known as say, "John, son of Ben" if someone wanted to refer to you by one's "full name".
- iii) Now that I got the "general" out of the way, let me talk about the specifics. Hosea was to name his son after a famous massacre in the history of "North" Israel. It'd be like saying this baby will be living witness for God not based on what he'll do, but just on his name alone!
- c) OK, while I'm in the neighborhood what was the "massacre at Jezreel", and why does God want the Israelites to remember it? When the "North" king's grandfather ruled a massacre occurred because that king wanted some land that didn't belong to him. At that time, God raised someone up to murder the king and his wife for that act. Since God made the guilty suffer for that act, I don't think that's what God really had in mind by having Hosea name his son Jezreel. (This historical act is from 2nd Kings Chapters 8-9.)
- d) To explain what's going on, I need to talk about a false god named "Baal". Realize that the worship of Baal occurred in the land of Israel long before the Israelites ever set foot in that land to begin with. Moses himself warned the Israelites to avoid any Baal worship during his "farewell speech" (most of Deuteronomy) to the Israelites even set foot in that land. See Deuteronomy 4:3, on that point.
 - i) What Baal was, was a god of agriculture. Most Israelites were farmers and it was a great temptation to honor Baal, since he was associated with producing weather so that the crops would grow well. Baal had a female counterpart that was known as "Asherah". The Israelites would make Asherah poles (think giant phallic symbols) that were worshipped. The idea was to have sexual intercourse next to those poles would "turn on" Baal and produce good weather. Yes there is more to it than that, but my point is it was tempting for the Israelites to worship Baal, in order to have a great crop (to survive) and had to be tempting to worship Baal by that method.
 - ii) Realize that despite the fact that God strictly forbid the worship of Baal before the Israelites even stepped foot in that land, it was a problem for hundreds of years. It didn't come to an end until both Israelite kingdoms were taken into captivity. My point is God will do what He has to draw us back to Him, even to the point of His willingness to let us suffer greatly, if that's what it takes to draw us back to Him.
 - iii) As far as the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom, "Baal worship was all the rage" and there was only a small percentage of people living there who still didn't "bow the knee" to Baal which was a required ritual for them in that day.
- e) That speech about the false god Baal was necessary in order to understand why God told Hosea to name his son Jezreel. It wasn't for the specific incident of the king's grandfather killing an innocent man to get his land, as God allowed that king and his wife to be killed for that act. The idea of remembering that incident is because the "grandfather" king and his wife named Jezreel were both heavily associated with Baal worship. Their grandson, who was the king when Hosea lived, was also into Baal worship. Even though that king brought prosperity to the Northern Kingdom back then, he was still associated with Baal worship. By Hosea naming his son Jezreel, it's a way to tell those living in the Northern Kingdom that they are in "big trouble". Just as God allowed the big massacre to occur in the "Valley of Jezreel", so He will allow a bigger massacre to occur because His people are worshipping Baal even when that event occurred.
- f) One last thing on these verses and we can move on. The text mentions the breaking of the bow at that time. A symbolic way of defeating an enemy was to break the bows (think of bows and arrows) as a way to say the enemy is defeated.

- g) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. We don't worship Baal. What's the point? The issue for you and me has nothing to do with that. The point is God has separated you and me as a witness for Him. If we've given our life to Jesus, we've been separated and we have to accept that fact. If we fail to live as God calls us to live, we can be punished in this lifetime for that choice to walk away from God. Think of this as God's motivation to keep us on our toes. However, that's not the main point of the chapter. This is: despite the sins we commit, despite the suffering we have to go through in our lives, He still loves us and desires that we continue to be a witness for Him in spite of whatever it is we have to deal with at any given time.
- h) Speaking of things to deal with, Hosea's wife Gomer is pregnant again.
9. Verse 6: Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them.
- a) Short version: Hosea named his new baby daughter "No Mercy". It was a way to tell all the Israelites living in the North that God's going to wipe them out as a nation soon, as if He's having "No Mercy" on that slaughter.
- b) Before I move on I have to admit, I admire the name translated "No Mercy". Back when I was young, I remember young single friends referring to their "others" as "No Mercy" as a reference to their sexual desires. I have friends going through a divorce now who'd refer to their ex-spouses as effectively having "No Mercy" for making unreasonable demands. I even know of people who refer to their bosses as "No Mercy". All I'm saying is it's easy to relate to someone as having a "No Mercy" reputation.
- c) However, that isn't the point here. The point is God and not any person will allow a thing that seems so cruel it would be as if God had no mercy. Let me describe how a city would be defeated in those days: A large army would surround a city with the intent of starving it out. People would die of hunger. If they surrendered to the Assyrians, they'd be taken captive as a slave and taken hundreds of miles away never to see their families ever again. The philosophy of both the Assyrians and the Babylonians was in order to prevent future uprisings, they split up who they captured so they couldn't unite to form a rebellion.
- i) As payment for the army that starved out a city, they got to keep whatever stuff is found in that city. Anyway, the Northern Israelite Kingdom suffered through that siege within a relatively short time after "No Mercy" was born.
- d) So does that mean if I turn my back on God, He's going to starve me into submission? No. However, I've watched a lot of people ignore what God called them to do and watch them be miserable the rest of their lives as they ignored His desires for their lives. Consider the people you know who are wasting their lives away doing things that won't matter for all of eternity. Then you'll get a flavor of what happens a person who's made the decision to ignore God's plan for their lives. As to us believers, it's God way to remind us to stick to the path He's called us and we avoid the suffering of our loyalty.
- e) Does it also mean that if we stick close to God, we'll never suffer? Of course not. I'm sure that Hosea and his family suffered along with the other Israelites when their kingdom got destroyed. Even if we're as "pure as the wind driven snow" (which none of us are), we are still part of a community of believers or a country that's been called to serve God. All I'm saying is sometimes we have to suffer the consequences as being part of the larger picture. We may also suffer simply because God wants to see if we still trust Him in spite of all of the things we have to face in our lifetime.
- f) OK enough bad news. Time for the good news.
10. Verse 7 Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them--not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God."
- a) Translation: The Southern Israelite kingdom won't suffer like the North will here!
- b) Remember the "house of Judah" is a nickname for the "Southern Kingdom".

- c) Let's recall a few facts about both the Northern and Southern Israelite Kingdoms:
- i) The North never had any God-fearing kings. Every last one of them were called "bad eggs" as I jokingly refer to it in the history of the Israelite kings.
 - ii) The South had a mixture of "good and bad eggs" as some of them did worship the true God. What He hoped is that the soon-coming horrid fate of the "North" will scare those Israelites living in the South to learn from that lesson and turn to God. Historically it didn't work as about one hundred years later the Southern Kingdom was also conquered.
 - iii) So if God knows all things, why bother doing all of this? Because He gave us free will. It's about some people realizing God exists, He's in charge, and through our free will, some will choose to follow Him.
 - iv) The Northern Kingdom reached a point where it was beyond hope. It's like when one has to shoot a wounded horse, as its now the most merciful thing we can do at that point. That's why God allowed the "North" to be destroyed and the "South" to be destroyed about one hundred years later.
- d) OK John, that's neat. What does any of that have to do with this verse? It's Hosea making the prediction that the Southern Kingdom won't be destroyed the same way or around the same time as the Northern One. Realize that the people living in the "North" knew well of the threat of the Assyrian Empire. They were "knocking on the door" so to speak.
- i) When that same Empire threatened Jerusalem, God performed a mighty miracle as the bible tells us in several places how their entire army got wiped out by an angel as they surrounded Jerusalem. (See 2nd Kings 19:35 or Isaiah 37:36.)
- e) Now for the important question: Why should we care about any of this ancient history?
- i) For starters, it's a reminder that until one dies, it's never too late to turn one's heart over to Jesus. However, I assume my readers are Christians, so that's "old news".
 - ii) The issue for believers is no matter how bad we mess up, God wants a relationship with us. It's a reminder to the Christian that no matter how bad we messed up our life, God still wants that relationship. No it's not a free license to sin. We can suffer in this lifetime for our mistakes, however eternity is a separate story.
 - iii) Just as God can't abandon His eternal relationship to the nation of Israel, so He can not in any way, shape or form His relationship with those He's called as Christians to an eternal relationship with Him. Again, that's the "God dilemma" which again is the title of this lesson. The dilemma is God's "zero sin tolerance policy" mixed in with His desire for an eternal relationship with those He's called to be with Him.
 - iv) In the last two verses God's reminding the Israelites how He will have "No Mercy" in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, but still have mercy on Israel as His chosen people.
 - v) I remember a radio talk show where someone called in to asked, "Is it fair that the Israelites are God's chosen people?" The man who answered that question was a Roman Catholic Priest. He responded with, "The Israelites were His chosen people and still are God's chosen people. Now get a life and deal with it!" That's how I'd summarize my view about that issue too!
 - vi) The point is God picks whom He picks whether we think it's fair or not. We live in His world so He has every right to do with it what He wants. The point for us who are Christians are also God's chosen those of us who have accepted His gift of free salvation by trusting in His payment for our sins. My point is even though we are not "His chosen people", we too will receive "Mercy" for our sins. That just means complete forgiveness and the privilege of spending eternity with God in heaven.
 - vii) So what about the Jewish race? The short version is God's plans for Israel and His plans for the church have always been mutually exclusive. We live in an era where being saved means accepting Jesus. A future day occurs where Israel is "central".

- viii) God still has plans for Israel as a nation, but until that day comes we too have will have to "deal with it" and accept His eternal plans for mankind as well as use our lives as a witness for Jesus until we die or until that day comes.
- ix) Let me end this discussion this way: If God will have mercy for all of eternity for those who trust in Him, that's a pretty good reason to dedicate one's live to make a difference for Him now. Realizing He'll have "No Mercy" on those who'll reject the free gift of salvation is a good reason right there to use our lives for His glory!
- f) Meanwhile, Gomer's pregnant again, and it's time for "Baby #3!"
- 11. Verse 8: After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. ⁹ Then the LORD said, "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.
 - a) You've got to say this for Hosea and Gomer, despite the fact that Hosea was told to go get a wife who was a prostitute and despite the fact God was naming their children that never stopped them from having sexual relations to have more children.
 - b) I can picture Hosea telling his wife, "God's been naming our kids, so why stop now? Let's go for #3 and see what God's got in store for us."
 - c) Well the good news is they had another baby, a son this time. The bad news is God said to name the son "Lo-Ammi" which means "You are not my people!"
 - d) Pause and let this sink in for a moment: Imagine your children going to a birthday party. You learn the names of Hosea and Gomer's three kids are: "Jezreel (a famous place where a massacre took place), No Mercy and I'm not Your God". It must have been a downer to go to their house and hear those names. It makes you wonder how those kids turned out in life given those names. (The bible doesn't say!)
 - e) What I suspect is that since Hosea knew he was a prophet of God, he must have told all of his children, "That we're living witnesses for the true and living God, and one must accept that is our role in life! (Hint hint!). Therefore, they had to deal with their names. I can just see all three kids joining dad as he preached the coming destruction!
 - f) Enough of that. Back to the text itself. Here was God telling Hosea to call his new son by the name, "I am not your God". Obviously Hosea trusted in God despite the fact it was all the "rage" to worship Baal at that time. By having those names and Hosea publicly telling of the coming destruction of the Northern Kingdom, must have been a powerful "one-two punch" to those living in the Northern Kingdom at that time.
 - g) So here's a question to ponder: Do you love Jesus so much, that we're willing to name one of our children "Jesus is coming back deal with it" or something to that effect? Remember that God didn't call us to the same ministry as Hosea, so there is zero pressure on us to go do that specific act. However, God's always looking for someone who's wiling to take the time to be available for Him and He'll work with us accordingly.
 - h) The short version of all of this is God's announcing, "It's too late to collectively repent as a nation". Of course it's never too late for any individual to repent, but as a collective group it was too late. OK John, that's sad ancient history. Why should we care? Because God is just as willing to say to our church group, our city or our nation, "It's too late. I have given you (plural) lots of chances to repent and sent lots of people to witness to you. Now it has gotten to the point where the most merciful thing I can do is "bring this to an end, just like when one has to shot a horse as the most merciful thing one can do at that point!"
 - i) So how do we know when it's too late for our group or country? The only way we can know is watch the results. Our jobs as Christians to be a witness for Jesus, but when the "hammer comes down", it happens God's way on His timing, period!
 - i) OK, enough of the bad news. I said in my introduction that Hosea is a book like 1st John, where the emphasis is on how much God loves us in spite of our mistakes.
 - i) Realize the final few verses of this chapter, teach us something positive about His relationship with His people. All I'm saying is Hosea likes the style of giving us the bad news to set us up to receive the good news after that. Speaking of which:

12. Verse 10: "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'
- a) If I had to guess the Israelites must have loved hearing this verse much more than the first nine verses of this chapter. Here was a man who loved God and named his three children with the names of a city of a famous massacre, "No Mercy" and "You are not My people."
 - b) All I'm saying is just being around that family had to be a downer, let alone having Hosea preach to us about God. Remember the time: The Northern Kingdom of Israel was about 20 years away from ending as a nation. The great majority of people living there ignored the fact they were Jewish and worshipped a false deity called Baal.
 - c) Just as most people we encounter today claim to honor God, but when it comes down to using their lives as a witness for God, they'd rather do their own thing and ignore all the things He calls us to do to be a witness for Him. Just as God has separated us so we can be His witness to the world around us, God has separated Hosea and his family to be His witness to the world around him!
 - d) That leads to the positive news. God's saying that despite all the upcoming destruction of the Jewish nation, "it won't be the end". In fact, the Jewish population in Israel will grow to a point where trying to count them will be like trying to count the sand at the beach!
 - e) Does that mean Israel as a nation will grow to a point where we can't even count everyone who is Jewish? Yes and no. I've always held the view that if I have a choice of taking the text too literally or not literally enough, I'd rather error on the side of taking it too literal.
 - i) Let me put it this way: If God said He will bless those who bless the Israelites (as it does in Genesis 12:3), why would I want to mess with that? As the old joke goes, "Our arms are too short to box with God".
 - ii) Does it mean that all Christians become Israelites? In the literal sense, no. I'd also say "yes" in the sense that the word "Israel" means to "struggle with God" as it's the desire of Christians to please God but we constantly have to fight our sin nature. That's how we "struggle with God".
 - f) To understand Verse 10, put yourself in the sandals of Israelites living at that time: If you witnessed your whole country being destroyed by a foreign army and the survivors were dragged off to a foreign land, how much hope would you have in a promise that God said the number of your people will be like "Sand on a seashore?" Is that literal? I don't know. I just know that despite numerous attempts in history to wipe out the Jewish nation from any form of existence, God manages to keep them going. Therefore, I don't worry about a massacre by Israel's enemies, because I trust in God's promise that a future day will occur that the number of Israelites there will be as "The sand of the seashore". Is it possible that country could be destroyed and rebuilt again? Of course. However, I'm positive Israel as a nation will be restored in glory greater in size than it ever has in history, simply because I trust in the God who says so. In other words, who am I to "box" with God?
 - g) Remember that Hosea's third child was named, "You are not my people" as the prophetic way of saying God's not going to have any mercy when He allows the Israelites to go into captivity. At the same time God's saying, "it's not THE end" of the Israelite nation. Just as He allowed that tragedy to occur, He's going to do wonderful things with the descendants of the Israelites and let them grow and prosper to a point where they're numbers grow to a point where it'd be difficult to count.
 - h) I remember reading about a conversation that the current president of Israel had when he met with an official from China. They were talking about the fact that both nations had a long history. Yet the number of Chinese is in the billions and the number of Israelites is in the millions. The Israelite leader said, that's because the world hasn't been hell bent on the destruction of your nation, as it has been ours for the last several millenniums. Despite the efforts to wipe out Israel from existing it's still there and it'll grow more again.

- i) The reason I'm getting into all of this is I'd like us to consider the modern nation of Israel in a perspective of history. Aren't most Israelites living there today ignoring God as they were when Hosea preached? Yes. At the same time, God promised there's coming a day when the Israelites will be called "Sons of the living God" as it is translated here in Hosea. All I am saying is the modern nation of Israel is only a partial fulfillment of what are His plans for that nation. So how will it work out? No idea. I just accept the fact that Israel will collectively turn to God during the time era when the Messiah rules from that land. Yes that promise given by Hosea is 2,700 years old and counting! If Israel can become a nation again after 2,700 years of being under the domain of other nations and empires, it won't be that much of a shock to me that Israel will collectively be a God-fearing nation again, while their population growing in great numbers. My point is God's still working through that nation again and will do more so in the future.
 - j) Our job in the meantime is to be like Hosea and be a good witness for Jesus until all of this begins. Speaking of a happy ending, time to give the last verse in the chapter.
13. Verse 11: The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.
- a) If you were living in either the Northern or Southern Israelite Kingdom at that time, it had to be a shock to announce that Israel would be united again under one leader. Realize that from the time the Southern Kingdom was taken into captivity (about 600 BC) until the day Israel became an independent nation again, was about 2,500 years. All I'm saying is we're living in a time era where we got to see this literally fulfilled within the last 100 years. So is that it? With Israel back in the land, will Jesus show up any day now? I don't know His timing and neither does anyone else. Is it possible Israel can be destroyed and come back another day? Sure, but I doubt it. Too many things are falling into place and I'm guessing we're pretty close. In a sense, it doesn't affect what God calls us to do: Be a living witness for Him either until we go to heaven or until He returns. All I'm saying is God's in charge of His timing and we use our time for His glory until that time occurs.
 - b) Anyway, here's Hosea 2,700 years ago, describing Israel being reunited again. Yes it came true after the Babylonian captivity, but it "really came true" in 1948. Remember that bible prophecy is often in "patterns" and not just single events.
 - i) Notice the phrase "come up out of the land". That doesn't refer to the land of Israel. It refers to coming up out of say Babylonian captivity back to that land. When the modern state of Israel was formed, people moved there from all over the world to be a part of that nation. All I'm saying is modern history (last 100 years) repeated that pattern of God's people being united under one leader just as it happened in the time that some Israelites came back to that land when the Babylonian Empire came to an end.
 - c) But doesn't that "one leader" refer to the Messiah? In the ultimate fulfillment of this verse I'd say the answer is yes. Just because most Israelites don't think about or don't care when and if the Messiah comes, that doesn't mean God's still not working on His timing to deal with human history to accomplish His results. All I'm saying is God created our world for a purpose. That purpose is for God to draw close to those He created so He can spend an eternity with us showing us His love for us. That's why we exist. So if that's true, why is it taking so long? For starters, none of us would enjoy it if it occurred 100 years ago. Next just remember that God knows how many people there are who will be saved. My point's that there is a fixed number of people who will spend eternity in His presence just as we'll have a fixed number of people who will reject God for all of eternity. Life as we know it, will not go on forever. There has to be a "wrap up" day when Jesus "sets up shop" and in that day, the number of Israelites will be immeasurable as it includes all those who will be resurrected to spend eternity with Him, along with all Christians who've dedicated their lives to making a difference for Him in this life.

- d) Like I said, despite the depressing names Hosea gives his children, this book is upbeat in its tone about the future. It's essentially saying, "The short term is bad, but the long term is very good, so hang tough through the short term as the eternal rewards of using our life to make a difference for Jesus is worth the time and trouble.
 - e) I have one final phrase to discuss before I wrap up this lesson. Notice the final phrase of Verse 11 says, "For great will be the day of Jezreel".
 - i) Without getting into specifics the day of Jezreel was a day where the Israelites saw God's "vengeance" work in a mighty way. Hosea uses a fairly recent example from the history of the Northern Israelite kingdom as a reminder that once again God is going to do a mighty work in Israel.
 - ii) Consider what a shock it had to be to those Israelites that they would all be wiped out as a nation, and then come back united with the Southern Kingdom to only be one independent nation again with one ruler over it.
 - iii) If you still think this is "no big deal", realize that in world history, there has never been a nation that was destroyed, scattered and came back together again to form a new nation. Except for Israel, who's now done it twice in history. All I'm saying is if one wants proof that God is real, consider the history of Israel as a nation. All that history is proof alone of God's involvement in our world as to make its events go the way He wants it to go.
 - iv) Therefore while we may have little knowledge of what was the "day of Jezreel", all we need to know is God's capable of working a mighty work in our world again in the future just as He did back then.
 - f) I have to admit this would be a wonderful way to end the book. However, we've only got into the first 11 verses of a 14-chapter book. All I'm saying is God's got a lot more to tell us through Hosea, so I invite you to join me through the future lessons on this book.
 - g) Let me end this lesson by returning to my theme of "God's dilemma." That dilemma is the fact He can't tolerate any sin. Further, sometimes God has to go to drastic measures so we will do His will. Such drastic measures include the fact He'll allow His chosen people (us as well as the Israelites) to die in dramatic fashion or even kicked out of our lands in order to get His point across that "He's not to be messed with!" At the same time, God wants us to understand just how much He loves us and has wonderful plans for our future. That is why for example, this chapter describes horrible things for the Israelite nation in the short term and wonderful plans in the long term. God deals with this "dilemma" by working in ways that seem harmful in the short term, but work out for His glory in the long run!
 - i) Confused? Let me end this lesson by making this simple: God cannot tolerate any sin whatsoever. At the same time He wants to work through those of us who have been called to be a witness for Him. What happens to those who He's called when they turn from Him? He does what it takes to draw us back to Him? God's willing to let some of us suffer or even die as to make the point that He's not to be messed with in order for them or us to learn from those mistakes.
 - ii) Shorter version: God loves us but demands obedience for us to live, as He desires we live. Deal with it, accept it and realize it's the best way to live life!
 - iii) With that said, let me end in prayer and hopefully I can explain it a little better.
14. Let's pray: Father, we don't always understand why You allow us to go through all the things we have to deal with in our lives. We just know that You've separated us to be a witness for You. We ask that You continue to guide our lives for Your glory. Help us to use our lives to be the type of witness You desire us to be. Help us to be the type of witness You desire so that we can make a difference for You until You return. Guide our lives as we use it for Your glory. As always, we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.