

# HOSEA—WEEK 1

## PUNISHMENT AND MERCY



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## *Hosea, Week 1 — Punishment and Mercy*

The study of Jonah introduced the concept of “Thinking Like a Christian.” Specifically, we saw how to have the right mindset. With Hosea, we’ll learn the right heartset.

Hosea gets set up as an example of how God’s love and grace work. Unfortunately for Hosea, that will mean displaying love and grace in tough situations. Welcome to the kingdom, Hosea; God does this, too.

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1 Matthew 6:19–21 (NKJV)

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

This familiar passage sounds like a variation of, “You can’t take it with you.” Is Jesus saying to store up treasures where you’ll have them after you die? No. The next verse gives a completely different reason.

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* — Matthew 6:22 (NKJV)

God sees things from a different perspective. Learning that perspective is the essence of discipleship. He’s saying, “Forget your earthly treasures; what’s important is your heart.” That’s why it’s listed first here.

*Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.”* — Matthew 22:37–38 (NKJV)

Love for God should be, first and foremost, from the heart. But what does that mean?

We may have seen an answer in the COVID-19 pandemic. Being isolated by the pandemic produces a longing in everyone’s heart. We miss just hanging out with the people we love. Zoom doesn’t satisfy.

That’s what this DEEP series will be all about.

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In the Jonah study, I learned something that I didn’t know that I didn’t know; acting like a Christian should come from thinking like a Christian. Having the right perspective makes a world of difference.

For example, we should obey traffic laws. I don’t care if you obey traffic laws because you respect laws or because you have an irrational fear of people in uniform and are terrified at the prospect of getting pulled over. It doesn’t make much difference.

Conversely, if you’re reading this, then you must have some sort of “Bible study” or “quiet time” routine. Why? If you do it out of a sense of obligation, it isn’t as valuable as if you do it with a sense of longing to connect with God and discover what He has in store for you. Perspective makes all the difference.

The Jonah study taught us who we are. In Jonah, we saw the right mindset of a prophet (or a Christian). Actually, we saw the wrong mindset but learned the right one in the process.

The right mindset is to see oneself as a part of the kingdom of God and to view everything from that perspective. Being a member of His kingdom is exciting; it’s easily the most important thing in our lives. The importance of everything else derives from its relationship to the kingdom.

It turns out that Jonah was only part one of a larger series, which could be titled, “How to be a disciple.”

Part two will be Hosea. Jonah taught us the right mindset. Hosea will teach us the right heartset.

2 Hosea 1:1–3 (ESV)

*The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.*

*When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.*

Life in the kingdom of heaven is a supernatural life—a life of communion with God, where His presence is felt, and His directions are clear.

But who doesn’t also want a good life? By that I mean an enjoyable one that’s reasonably trouble free. No one wants to live a nightmare.

Thus, it’s normal for God’s people to hope and pray that He’ll give us both, that the LORD will protect us from suffering and allow us to serve Him effectively, free from the slings and arrows that would slow us down.

But for many of God’s servants, that’s not the deal. Prophets like Hosea get a supernatural life but not a pain-free one. Here, God starts Hosea off with a tough command—especially in the culture of that day. “*Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom,*”

God explains that, “*for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.*” Hosea is getting the “life of communion with God, where His presence is felt, and His directions are clear” in spades.

So, Hosea takes the critical next step; he obeys God and marries Gomer.

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The irony here is that chasing after “the good life” can lead to anything but. Devote your life to self-gratification and you’ll experience the ultimate pain—emptiness. The good life can be excruciatingly boring.

Hosea sets himself up for a world of hurt, but only if you define hurt in purely secular terms. Yes, he’ll endure heartache, and being disrespected isn’t fun.

But a supernatural life is so exciting that anyone who has heard the voice of God can’t live any other way. That would be unbearably bland. Consider this analogy.

If you could be President of the United States, would you want the job? How about if you were guaranteed that you’d be good at it? Sure, the job is tough. People will hate you so much that you’ll need the most elite security detail on earth to keep you safe.

But it would be an awesomely full life, right?

The Bible uses an interesting word to describe what it’s like to be a Christian—alive.

3 Hosea 1:4–5 (ESV)

*And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”*

What does the LORD mean by “*the blood of Jezreel*”? Who or what was Jezreel? What happened that was so awful that the LORD *will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel* as punishment?

There are different possibilities (for example, see 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kings 9), but the context makes this clear. The book of Hosea is about Israel’s unfaithfulness to the LORD. Specifically,

*“for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”* — Hosea 1:2b (ESV)

That fits 1 Kings 21, where Ahab allowed Jezebel to knock off the prophet Naboth to get his field in Jezreel. More to the point, Ahab led Israel into idolatry and worshipping the Baals.

*(There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel.)* — 1 Kings 21:25–26 (ESV)

As bad as killing Naboth was, that’s not the issue.

Worshipping other gods is.

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The first commandment is more strongly worded than some folks realize.

*“You shall have no other gods before me.”* — Exodus 20:3 (ESV)

In Hebrew, the first commandment literally says, “You shall have no other gods upon my face.” The English translation makes it sound more like the LORD wants to be first among gods. Actually, the commandment is more like when a parent says, “I’d better not see any ...” Ahab was way over that line.

And Ahab didn’t do this alone.

*He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.* — 1 Kings 16:32–33 (ESV)

*because you have made Israel to sin.* — 1 Kings 21:22b (ESV)

Killing Naboth was bad, but merely a sinful, evil, selfish act. Ahab’s (and Israel’s) whoring after other gods was insane. There are no actual other gods.

They abandoned their relationship with the creator of the universe to worship trinkets and superstitions.

4 Hosea 1:6–9 (NIV)

*Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, “Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means “not loved”), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the LORD their God, will save them.”*

*After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the LORD said, “Call him Lo-Ammi (which means ‘not my people’), for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”*

This feels like a declaration of divorce. If Israel isn't going to love the LORD, the LORD isn't going to love them back.

But the point of this book isn't simply to declare Israel's downfall; it's to explain it. The LORD is making an example of Hosea.

Usually, the expression “making an example of” means that the one who has done wrong will be punished in a clearly visible way as a teaching example.

But not here. Hosea isn't the guilty one. He's been chosen to be the teaching example through no fault of his own.

And think about the children! How'd you like to grow up with a name like Not Loved or Not My People? Imagine the teasing. “A boy named Sue” has got nothing on these kids.

This leads unavoidably to an uncomfortable conclusion. The pain inflicted on Hosea and his kids is not some unexpected turn of events. God planned the whole thing.

Their suffering is perfectly okay with the LORD.

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“It's not perfectly okay with me,” I can almost hear you saying, “He doesn't have the right to do that to people.” “Okay, maybe He has the right—He can do anything He wants—but it's not just and the Bible says that God is just.”

*For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! – Isaiah 30:18b (NIV)*

Yes, but God has all eternity to settle the justice. We can't see the whole picture, and what we can see may not look all that fair.

But our vision is limited; we're not qualified to second guess God on this.

*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. — 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)*

Don't do Monday morning quarterbacking before the game.

5 Hosea 1:10–2:1 (NKJV)

*“Yet the number of the children of Israel  
Shall be as the sand of the sea,  
Which cannot be measured or numbered.  
And it shall come to pass  
In the place where it was said to them,  
‘You are not My people,’  
There it shall be said to them,  
‘You are sons of the living God.’  
Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel  
Shall be gathered together,  
And appoint for themselves one head;  
And they shall come up out of the land,  
For great will be the day of Jezreel!  
  
Say to your brethren, ‘My people,’  
And to your sisters, ‘Mercy is shown.’”*

This feels like God is changing His mind. He just said that He doesn't love them, and they aren't His people anymore. Now He proclaims their bright future. Is He having second thoughts?

No, He's making a point. In those days, getting conquered often meant genocidal extermination. But that's not going to happen, because it would break God's promise to Israel.

*“For You said, ‘I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’” — Genesis 32:12 (NKJV)*

So, He renews the promise. The covenant stands.

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This is a lesson in the foundations of what grace is. Israel has broken the covenant in spades. God would be perfectly justified if He canceled the whole thing.

But He doesn't. He thwacks Israel pretty hard—getting conquered and carried into exile is no picnic—but that's an object lesson. His promises are on a different level. Hosea isn't just being commanded to expose Israel's unfaithfulness to the LORD; he's also commanded to model God's grace towards Israel. Everyone will feel Hosea's pain. This should open their eyes to the pain they're causing God.

Hosea will model God's response to that pain, which isn't anything like the tantrum we'd throw. This displays the glory of God's grace almost as much as the cross. Think about how important this is.

What's the purpose of the universe? To glorify God.

How does it do that? By displaying His character.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What do you expect to get out of a Bible study?
2. Would you want to be President?
3. What are America's "other gods"?
4. When has suffering caused you to doubt?
5. Do you see God's grace in your life's path?

*Items for prayer:*