

Lesson 6

Last week we answered our three questions about verse 1: Why are four of the five kings in verse 1 southern kings? Why are any of the five kings in verse 1 southern kings? And why aren't the six northern kings after Jeroboam named?

But when we started looking at verse 1, we also said that there was a deep theological message lurking in verse 1. What is that message?

We have already seen it. Despite the horrible end for Israel at the hands of Assyria that is proclaimed in this book, Hosea tells us repeatedly that there will be a happy ending for both Judah and Israel. In fact, we see that message in the opening chapter.

Hosea 1:11 – And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head.

We might see how Judah could have had a happy ending (although their judgment at the hands of Babylon was coming later), but how could there possibly be a happy ending for Israel, which was about to be carried off by Assyria, never to return? **The answer to that question is the central message of the book, and it is certainly the central message for us today.**

And what is that answer? We just saw a hint in Hosea 1:11 – “they shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head.”

And who is that one head? We have also see a hint to that question in Hosea.

Hosea 3:5 – Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, **and David their king**, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

So who is that one head from the line of David?

Acts 2:34–36 – For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Do you mean that all of that is lurking in that simple list of kings that we find in verse 1? Yes, that is exactly what I mean! There is no other explanation for how Israel could experience a happy ending – and we see a hint about that explanation starting with the very first verse!

Don't believe me? Well, where else in the Bible do we see the exact same list of four southern kings that we find here in verse 1 of Hosea?

Matthew 1:9 – ... and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ...

Those four kings were part of the line stretching from King David in Matthew 1:1 to Jesus in Matthew 1:16, and there is no way to explain the happy ending in Hosea apart from Christ and the kingdom of Christ. Israel has a happy ending in

Hosea because Jesus rules today on the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Yes, we spent a lot of time on verse 1, but if we don't take the time to study the historical background of this book, then we will never understand it. Every person who originally heard Hosea knew the history that we just studied because they had lived or were living through it. We also need to know that history.

Hosea 1:2

2 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."

On any list of strange verses in the Bible, Hosea 1:2 must be located somewhere near the top! And if we think verse 2 is strange, just think about how strange Hosea must have considered it! And yet Hosea obeyed it.

And perhaps we have an important lesson here about obedience. What is one of the most common arguments that we hear today from those who argue against the essentiality of baptism? Don't they often tell us that it just doesn't make sense? That they cannot see how my physical body getting wet can possibly have any bearing on the eternal destiny of my soul? How should we respond to that?

First, we can, of course, point them to Romans 6 where the Bible explains the relation between the

two. But perhaps we can also point to the example of Hosea and others (such as Naaman) who obeyed God whether or not they understood the reason for the command or understood how obeying the command would accomplish anything. Hosea certainly knew what it meant to **trust and obey!** Do we? We can look to Hosea for an example.

Back to verse 2 – we need to spend some time on this verse. Why? Because there is quite a bit of dispute about what it means. Yes, verse 2 seems straightforward, but is it?

And let's keep in mind the importance of our answer to that question. Our view of verse 2 will color our view of the entire remainder of this book! Everything that we will hear from Hosea in this book is related to God's command to Hosea in verse 2. So it is very important that we properly understand verse 2.

To begin, let's list some of the different views that have been proposed about this verse.

View #1: God commanded Hosea to marry an immoral woman, and Hosea marries Gomer, who at the time of their marriage was already an immoral woman. Gomer gave him one son but soon returned to her old ways and bore two additional children, possibly of doubtful paternity.

View #2: Verse 2 and the events that follow are a parable or an allegory with no historical basis. At most, the whole story is a vision that has no relationship to Hosea's actual marriage or his actual family life.

View #3: Gomer was Hosea's real wife, but she was faithful to Hosea rather than unfaithful to him. What we read about Gomer in chapter 1 is just a metaphor of Israel's sin with no relation to Gomer's actual life.

View #4: Hosea neither did marry nor was commanded to marry an immoral woman. Instead, Gomer became unfaithful later in their married life, at which time Hosea realized that his now unhappy marriage with Gomer was intended to portray God's relationship to Israel.

View #5: Gomer was Hosea's wife, but her sin was not literal adultery against Hosea but rather was spiritual adultery against God because Gomer was an idol worshiper like the people to whom Hosea preached.

Before we start crossing some of those views off our list, let's ask a question: **why do we have so many different views?** After all, verse 2 looks pretty straightforward. Why do some see verse 2 as anything else?

The answer to that question is pretty easy to figure out when we consider the five options that we just listed. Four of those five options have something in common – **they are trying to save the text from itself!** That is, they can't believe that verse 2 actually means what it says, and so they come up with another meaning.

God could not have really commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute, they say, and so either it was all just a vision, or it was all just a parable, or she started out good and only later

became immoral, or she started out good and stayed that way even while Hosea was creating an untrue story about her to make a point, or she was faithful to Hosea but unfaithful to God.

And what flaw do we see at once about each of those final four theories? **Not a single one of them can be found anywhere in the text.** And I would say that's a pretty big flaw!

So what about the first view – the view that the entire event is historical and occurred just as it is written? Is there any reason why we can't just adopt that view? Maybe. Some would point to Leviticus:

Leviticus 21:14 – A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, **or a prostitute**, these he shall not marry. But he shall take as his wife a virgin of his own people.

But that verse is directed to priests, and there is no evidence that Hosea was a priest. Some surmise that Hosea was a Levite, but even that does not mean he was a priest. And these rules in Leviticus 21 did not apply to ordinary citizens.

So what can we conclude about verse 2? I think we can conclude that verse 2 means exactly what it says. There is no need to save the text from itself. There is no reason why we should try to soften the command, and in fact there is every reason why we should not do so.

First, if we soften Hosea 1:2 to better fit our own views, then where does that end? What other verses will we edit and soften? If God didn't

really mean what he said in Hosea 1:2, then where else did God not really mean what he said?

And think about Hosea's audience. What sort of impact would Hosea's preaching have had on them if they all knew that none of it was true! Wouldn't they have rightly rejected Hosea as one who was simply slandering his own wife? (Talk about a preacher story!)

And, more to the point, how would Hosea's marriage to Gomer have demonstrated God's marriage to Israel if none of what Hosea said about his own marriage was true?

And, yes, the command was very strange and very difficult, but as we said in the introduction, Hosea is not alone in receiving a very strange and very difficult command from God.

- Jeremiah was commanded not to marry at all (Jeremiah 16:2).
- Isaiah walked around naked and barefoot for three years (Isaiah 20:3–5).
- Ezekiel lay on his side for over a year near a small model of Jerusalem under siege while eating bread baked over human dung (Ezekiel 4:1–8).
- Ezekiel was also forbidden to mourn when his wife died (Ezekiel 24:15–18).

So now that we know that verse 2 means what it says, what does verse 2 say?

Let's read it again:

“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.'”

That first phrase (“when the Lord first spoke through Hosea” in the ESV) is translated “the beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea” in the KJV. As the ESV suggests, the phrase most likely means that this command was God’s **first** revelation to Hosea. What that means is that this strange command was the very first thing that Hosea heard from God!

We aren’t told **how** God spoke to Hosea, but the source of the communication must have been unmistakable to Hosea because we do not see Hosea expressing any doubt here about whether God was really the one asking him to do this strange thing.

The important thing for us to note is that not only did God’s revelation to Hosea began with this strange command in verse 2, but the book of Hosea also begins with this strange command in verse 2. What that suggests is that this command in verse 2 is the foundation of this book. We should not be surprised at all if everything that follows in Hosea is related somehow to this strange command in verse 2. And it also suggests that we should not water it down!

“Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom.” The word “wife” is important here. Hosea was to be bound to this immoral woman by a covenant relationship. Hosea and Gomer were husband and wife.

The next word we need to consider is the word “whoredom,” which is very hard to miss in verse 2 given that it appears three times in just that one verse! What does that word mean?

Was Gomer a prostitute? Or was Gomer just promiscuous?

There is a Hebrew word, “zona,” that means “prostitute,” but that word is not used here in verse 2. Does that mean Gomer was not a prostitute? Not necessarily.

The Hebrew word used in verse 2 is “zenunim,” which means “promiscuity” or “adultery.” And that word is a key word in Hosea. We see it, again, for example in Hosea 5.

Hosea 5:4 – For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD.

That God’s command uses the broader term “promiscuity” rather than the narrower term “prostitute” does not mean that Gomer was not a prostitute. She could have been both. The use of the broader term here may just mean that the focus here is more on her character than it is on her profession.

Also, and this is a point that will be useful for us to keep in mind throughout the entire book, we need to be careful not to read our own modern views into this text, and verse 2 is a good example of that danger.

Today, we may see a big difference between a woman who is a prostitute and a woman is promiscuous, but that has not always been the

case. Here is how one commentary describes the issue:

The whole question of whether [Gomer] was a prostitute or simply sexually loose reflects more of modern social realities than ancient Israelite social realities. In our society of female independence a woman might be sexually loose but not receive payment for it. In ancient Israel this would have been the exception. An immoral woman would generally not have been married or have any other means of support, so she naturally would take payment for her sexual favors. Such women might not have worked in brothels, but if prostitution is defined as giving sex for payment, they certainly were prostitutes.

To someone living in Hosea's day, verse 2 would likely have been enough for that person to conclude that Gomer was a prostitute. And we will see more evidence in the next chapter also suggesting that Gomer was, in fact, a prostitute.

But, even so, we should not think of Gomer as a call girl or a streetwalker as we might think of someone called a "prostitute" today. Instead, we should think of Gomer more as an immoral woman who depended on "gifts" (in quotes) from men for her livelihood.

The most difficult question about verse 2 is what is meant by the phrase "children of whoredom."

The phrase could mean "promiscuous children," but I think we can likely rule that interpretation out immediately. Hosea never accuses his children of sexual immorality, and they are never presented to us as anything other than children.

A second view is that these children were the result of promiscuity, that is they were born out of wedlock. But, of course, an immediate problem with that view is that the children are all born after Hosea's marriage to Gomer. But perhaps one or more of these children were not Hosea's actual children, which could mean that the "children of whoredom" in verse 2 refers to those children that Gomer had with someone other than Hosea.

A third view is that Gomer already had children born out of wedlock when Hosea married her and that Hosea brought those children into his new family. There might be some support for this view in Hosea 2:1, where we will read about brothers and sisters. But that reference could be part of the metaphor that will be developed based on Hosea's family – that is, the brothers and sisters could just refer to other Israelites.

A fourth view is that the phrase "children of whoredom" means children who bore the disgrace of their mother's behavior. And this fourth view seems to be the best view. Why?

Because under this view all three of the children we are about to meet would be included whether or not some of them were actually Hosea's children. (We know from the next verse that at least one of those three children was Hosea's actual child.) That's not to say that Gomer did not already have some children – perhaps she did – but it seems that the phrase in verse 2 would most naturally include the three children to whom we are about to be introduced.

The important point here is that Hosea's goal is not to tell us all the details about his new family. Hosea's goal is to show the similarity between God's family and his own family. Just like Hosea's own children, the people of Israel were children of whoredom – that is, they bore the stigma of their mother's immorality.

Keep in mind a question that we asked earlier but did not answer earlier. Instead, we said that we would try to answer the question as we worked through the text. And that question was this: why does Hosea use both the metaphor of his wife and the metaphor of his children to describe Israel? We aren't ready to answer that question yet, but we see the beginning of both metaphors here in verse 2.

Why was Hosea given this strange command? Verse 2 answers that question. It was because "the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."

That is why we are already talking about metaphors in only the second verse of the book. God specifically tells Hosea to enter into the same kind of marriage that he himself is in. God wants Hosea to experience the same sorrow that he has experienced.

The end of verse 2 may also have been a clue to Hosea that his marriage to Gomer would not always be a happy marriage. God had been forsaken by his wife, and so perhaps Hosea should have expected to be forsaken by Gomer.

One final question about verse 2. Why does verse 2 say that the “land” (rather than the “people”) commits great whoredom?

That word “land” in verse 2 is the bridge between Hosea’s marriage and God’s marriage. It is the bridge between the **promiscuity** of **Hosea’s** wife and the **apostasy** of **God’s** wife.

Hosea’s goal here is not to accuse the people of God of sexual immorality but rather to accuse them of spiritual apostasy. The word “land” drives this point home because it includes the culture, the institutions, the ethics, the idolatry, and everything else that was part of the Israelite culture that had forsaken God and was standing in opposition to God.

Hosea 1:3

3 So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

The first thing we can say about verse 3 is that it does not show Gomer in a very flattering light, to say the least! The command to Hosea is to go and marry a promiscuous woman – “so he went and took Gomer!”

There were other ways Hosea could have responded to that command from God. He could have said, “I don’t know any promiscuous women.” Or perhaps, “I don’t know any, but I’m willing to look for one.” And there may have been more going on here than we are told, but for whatever reason it seems

that Gomer came straight to Hosea's mind as soon as he heard the word "promiscuous."

All I can say is that Gomer must have had quite the reputation! The phrase "town tramp" comes to mind!

And why did Gomer agree to marry Hosea? Perhaps we can conclude that Hosea or his family had some wealth. Or perhaps Gomer had reached rock bottom and was happy to be given an opportunity for a new start. (But we need to hold off on considering that possibility until we get to Chapter 3.)

And what about Beerli? We met him two verses ago – Beerli was Hosea's father. And what about Hosea's mother? What did they think when their son married a prostitute? And what did they think when Hosea told them he did it because God told him to do it? I think we can safely say that there was a lot more Hosea could have said between verse 2 and verse 3.

I suspect that everyone who knew Hosea was shocked to their core about what Hosea did here. And wasn't that the point? Was it any less shocking that God would still be trying to talk Israel into coming back to him after all that the people had done? Was it any less shocking to find out that God was married to people who worshipped Baal and who sacrificed their children to their false gods?

What can we say about the names in verse 3? Gomer and Diblaim? What we can say is that Gomer was a real person who had a real father named Diblaim.

Gomer was no vision. Gomer was no parable. Gomer was no allegory. Yes, God used Gomer as a metaphor, but Gomer was a real flesh-and-blood human being.

And Gomer's children were real as well. We meet the first child right here in verse 3: "she conceived and bore him a son."

We need to pay close attention to the three children we are about to meet. As one commentary describes them, "in a real sense, they are the prophecy, and everything else is just exposition." I think we may find that the entire book of Hosea is modeled around these three children.

Later we will have some cause to wonder about whether Gomer's children with Hosea were actually Hosea's children, but here the text is clear: "she conceived and bore him a son." Hosea's son in verse 3 was Hosea's actual son with Gomer. Hosea was married to Gomer, and that marriage was consummated. These are real people. This was a real marriage.

Hosea 1:4-5

4 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. 5 And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

God's commands to Hosea extend to the names he was to give his children, and God tells him to name his first born son Jezreel.

Jezreel does not seem to have been a common name. We find it used as a person's name in only one other place in the Bible (1 Chronicles 4:3).

But Jezreel was the name of a well known place in the days of Hosea. (We can see it on the map from the Lesson 3 in the northern part of Israel, and also on the handout for Lesson 6.)

Jezreel was both the name of a town and the name of a valley that were located between Galilee and Samaria. The town of Jezreel was northwest of Mount Gilboa in the valley of Jezreel. And this area of Jezreel was the scene of several significant and violent events in Israel's history.

- In Judges 6:33, Jezreel was where the Midianites and the Amalekites were encamped when Gideon defeated them with 300 men.
- In 1 Samuel 29:1, Jezreel was where King David was encamped when he was sent back by the Philistines while they were on their way to fight King Saul.
- In 2 Samuel 2:8-9, Jezreel was part of the kingdom of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, whom Abner wanted to be king in place of David.
- In 1 Kings 21:1, Jezreel was where Naboth had his vineyard until he was framed and murdered by Jezebel, wife of King Ahab.

- In 2 Kings 9:24–10:11, Jezreel was where Jehu killed King Joram, Jezebel, and the rest of Ahab's household.

In the mind of an Israelite, Jezreel signified bloodshed. Naming a child Jezreel in Hosea's day would have been similar to naming a child Gettysburg or Leipzig or Stalingrad in our own day.

In the long history of Jezreel, the one event that stands out for our purposes here is the event that involved Jehu. Why? Because God explains the reason for the name Jezreel in verse 4: "for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel."

Hosea was told to name his son Jezreel in around 760 BC because of something Jehu had done in 841 BC, which was 80 years earlier!

And, of course, we have many questions: To what event does "the blood of Jezreel" in verse 4 refer, and why and how is the house of Jehu going to be punished for that event 80 years after the fact?

As for "the blood of Jezreel," we can read about what happened there in 2 Kings 9. In that chapter, the prophet Elisha told a young man to go to Ramoth-Gilead and anoint Jehu "king over Israel."

2 Kings 9:6–10 – So he arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I

may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.” Then he opened the door and fled.

So Jehu is proclaimed king, and he sets out to do what God had just commanded him to do: “strike down the house of Ahab your master.”

2 Kings 9:16 – Then Jehu mounted his chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to visit Joram.

In 2 Kings 9:24–26, Jehu shoots King Joram with an arrow (see the examples on the handout for Lesson 6), and his body is thrown out on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite.

In 2 Kings 9:27, King Ahaziah of Judah sees what happened to King Joram and starts to flee, but Jehu also shoots and kills him.

2 King 9:27 – When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued him and said, “Shoot him also.” And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo and died there.

In 2 Kings 9:30–37, Jehu commands that Jezebel be thrown down and killed to fulfill the prophecy of Elisha that “in the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel.”

In 2 Kings 10:7, it was in Jezreel that Jehu

received the heads of the 70 sons of King Ahab in baskets. And in verse 11, "Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men and his close friends and his priests, until he left him none remaining."

Finally, in 2 Kings 10:18-27, Jehu tricked and killed all the priests of Baal and "demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day."