

Box #

**PORTRAITS OF GOD IN HOSEA**

**By**

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BIB 5113 – Prophets

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April 29, 2015

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### **INTRODUCTION: OPPOSING PORTRAITS OF GOD**

**Justice and mercy meet.** The prophet Hosea was commissioned by God to confront the people of Israel about their spiritual adultery. A spirit of whoredom had led the people of Israel astray, and they had left their God to play the whore (4:12). When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, He commanded Hosea to take a wife of whoredom and to have children of whoredom as a symbol for the spiritual adultery committed by the people (1:2). The land had committed great whoredom by forsaking the LORD. Hosea's marriage and unfaithfulness therein are used as prominent metaphors for the marriage of the LORD and Israel—the LORD's perfect covenantal faithfulness, and Israel's covenantal adultery.

**Within the book of Hosea, there are, painted throughout the pages, portraits of God.** These portraits are seemingly in opposition to one another, portraying a God who is just, yet a God who is merciful. They portray a God who is a gentle lover, but also a mighty lion. The portraits portray a God who is a healer, yet a God who destroys. He is a loving Father (11) and the One who relentlessly judges Israel (13). God is almighty—He is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness He will not violate (Job 37:23). The LORD, the LORD, is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6). The LORD will reject Israel (Hosea 9:17); yet His heart recoils within Him, and His compassion grows warm and tender towards Israel (10:8).

**In the book of Hosea, justice and mercy meet.** The LORD is perfect in all of His ways and just in all of His works. The LORD is just, and the LORD is merciful. Hosea paints a portrait of the God whose mercy graciously extends to a people underserving—a God whose mercy goes far beyond our understanding—for He is God and not a man, the Holy One in our midst (11:9).

## PORTRAIT OF GOD: LOVER

*“I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.” Hosea 2:19*

**God is the faithful husband.** Israel went after her lovers and forgot the LORD (2:13).

As Hosea’s wife was loved by another man and was an adulteress, so Israel had turned to other gods and loved cakes of raisins (3:1). There is a beautiful word connecting verses 13 and 14 of chapter 2—the word “therefore”. Israel went after her lovers and forgot the LORD, *therefore*, the LORD will allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her (2:14). In spite of all that Israel had done, God remained her faithful husband—her lover who sweetly wooed her back to Him. He is Israel’s faithful lover, speaking tenderly to her and bringing her into a land of refuge and provision. In that day, Israel will call the LORD her ‘Husband,’ and no longer will she call Him her ‘Baal’ (2:16). The LORD will remove the names of the Baals from Israel’s mouth, and they will be remembered no more (2:17).

**The LORD is the faithful husband who relentlessly pursues His wayward bride at great cost to Himself.** The LORD commands Hosea to go after his wife when she has again left him for a life of whoredom. Hosea buys his wife back for fifteen shekels of silver, a homer, and a lethech of barley. Hosea paid a heavy price to redeem his wife. This act paints a picture of selfless, unconditional love—the type of love the LORD has for His bride, Israel. No price is too high a cost to redeem His people, to bring them back to Him.

**The portrait of God as lover is filled with covenantal language.** The LORD will make for Israel a covenant, and He will betroth His beloved Israel to Him forever (2:19). He will betroth Israel to Him in righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness (2:19-20). Perhaps the language in 2:18 is alluding to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15—a unilateral covenant of which the LORD is incapable of breaking. Israel has broken the covenant (4:1-2).

There is no faithfulness or steadfast love and no knowledge of God in the land. Albeit, the LORD will never forget His covenant with His beloved wife. Though Israel has broken the Law, has turned away to worthless idols, and has forgotten her God, the LORD is the loving and forgiving husband who relentlessly pursues His wayward wife. He chases after her, He woos her, He forgives her, and He loves her unconditionally.

## **PORTRAIT OF GOD: LION**

*“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah.” Hosea 5:14*

**In the first mention of the LORD as a lion, He is a predator.** Israel has disobeyed the LORD, and the LORD’s just character demands their punishment. In chapter 5, the LORD is portrayed as a lion who will tear and go away; He will tarry off, and no one shall rescue (5:14). The LORD is depicted as a lion returning to His lair to wait for the people of Israel to realize and to repent of their transgressions. He will return to His place until His people acknowledge their guilt and earnestly seek Him (5:15). This passage alludes to the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant. The conditional covenant stated, “And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, *if* you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them” (Deuteronomy 28:13). However, curses would ensue for disobedience. Israel’s love for the LORD was like a morning cloud and like the dew that goes early away (Hosea 6:4)—fickle and quickly diminishing. Israel had transgressed the covenant and dealt faithlessly with the LORD. Therefore, the LORD is depicted as a mighty lion exacting justice on the whoredom of Israel.

Chapter 9 delves deeply into the LORD’s punishment for Israel. Israel has loved a prostitute’s wages on all threshing floors (9:1). Egypt shall gather them, and Memphis shall bury them (9:6). The days of punishment and recompense have come to the house of Israel, and the

LORD will bereave them until none is left (9:7, 12). The LORD will put Ephraim's beloved children to death. He will reject them because they have not listened to Him or obeyed His commandments. The LORD will remember the sins of Israel and punish their iniquity (8:13-14). The LORD will put an end to, He will lay waste, and He will punish Israel for their unfaithfulness (2:11-13). Justice will be served.

**In the second mention of the LORD as a lion, He is calling His people back from exile.** The LORD roars like a lion, and when He roars, His children come trembling before Him (11:10). Out of exile the Israelites will come, and the LORD will return them to their homes (11:11). This particular angle of the LORD's portrait as a lion is more merciful. However, within the great mercy, there is great power and might. The people of Israel come trembling before the LORD. He is a God who is to be feared and worshipped. He is far superior to the idols they have whored after. It is He who answers and looks after His people (14:8). He is the supplier of all of their needs (14:8).

## **PORTRAIT OF GOD: PHYSICIAN**

*"I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely; for my anger has turned from them."*

*Hosea 14:4*

**The LORD is depicted as a healer.** He is the Great Physician, the one who mends that which is broken. The LORD, as a lion, tore, but, it was in order that He might heal. The Lord is not content to give Israel their idols, but, graciously, albeit painfully, works to rip them away. One by one, He works, tears, and rips in order to teach Israel to long for something better—to long for *someone* better—to long for Him instead. The LORD is the healer who strikes down in order to bind Israel up (6:1). He desires for Israel to replace their idols with Him, the only One who can satisfy their deepest longings, the only One who can give them true and lasting joy.

**The LORD will revive and raise up His people in order that they might *live*.** True life is not found in the worship of idols. True and lasting life is found in the worship of God alone. The LORD, the lion, yet the physician, will use His claws to pierce Israel's hardened heart and will work to remove the sin that enslaves them, bringing them back to life. The Lord will heal. He will heal their apostasy (7:1; 14:4).

## **PORTRAIT OF GOD: FATHER**

*"Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms...I led them with cords of kindness...and I bent down to them and fed them." Hosea 11:4*

**The LORD's perfect love for Israel is displayed in His portrait as Father.** The LORD, the perfect father, loves and cares for His child Israel as they grow, but they reject Him for petty things. They leave Him for worldly pleasures. They leave their God to play the whore. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols (11:2). As their father, the LORD taught them how to walk, but Israel walked away from Him. He held them up by their arms, led them with cords of kindness, and eased the yoke on their jaws (11:4). Heartbreakingly, the LORD says that Israel, His beloved child, is bent on turning away from Him. As a parent mourns for his wayward son or daughter, the LORD mourns for His wayward children.

**Israel is bent on turning away from the LORD, but the LORD is bent on faithfulness and steadfast love toward Israel.** The LORD affectionately looks at His prodigal child and asks, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O, Israel?" (11:8). The LORD's heart recoils within Him, His compassion for His child growing warm and tender (11:8). The LORD is a compassionate father, eager to bestow mercy on His children. He will not execute His burning anger—He will not come in wrath (11:9). In the LORD, the orphan

finds mercy (14:3). Hosea pleads with Israel to return to the LORD. The LORD will surely heal their apostasy and love them freely (14:4). When Israel returns to their loving Father, they will dwell beneath His shadow and they shall flourish like the grain and blossom like the vine (14:7). Vain idols cannot hear or help Israel. As mentioned previously, only the LORD, their perfect Father, answers and looks after them (14:8). The LORD, their Father, is the provider of all of their needs.

## **PORTRAIT OF GOD: THE CROSS WHERE JUSTICE AND MERCY MEET**

**The book of Hosea depicts several portraits of God.** The LORD is both just and merciful. He shows His perfect justice by punishing Israel for their apostasy and unrighteous deeds. The LORD also displays His unceasing mercy by forgiving and lavishing love upon His wayward child, Israel.

**The greatest picture of the “opposing” portraits of God in the Bible is found at the cross of Christ.** It is ultimately at the cross that justice and mercy meet. Proverbs 17:15 is central to the Gospel: “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD”. The cross of Christ is the answer to how God can be both perfectly just in punishing sinners and, at the same time, be perfectly merciful in saving sinners. On the cross, Jesus, the perfect Son of God, is treated as the unfaithful son. He is treated as the adulterous wife. He is treated as the whore. On the cross, Jesus, the perfect Son of God, is treated as Hosea’s children. As a result, the LORD is able to treat rebellious sinners with mercy and able to call lost sinners His people. For our sake, God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). God put Jesus forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith in order to show God’s righteousness, because in God’s divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. In God’s

divine forbearance, He was able to “pass over” the sins of the Israelites, looking ahead to the cross of Christ. The cross was to show God’s righteousness so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26). On the cross, the opposing portraits of God meet, and hope and life are offered to the perishing. On the cross, the following is made possible:

*“And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”*

*Hosea 2:23*

**As in the book of Hosea, at the cross, God is a relentless husband, pursuing His wayward wife.** He is a mighty lion exacting justice and pouring His wrath due humanity’s sin upon His sinless Son. At the cross, God is the great Physician, healing mankind’s deepest wound of sin and reconciling those who repent and believe to Himself. At the cross, God is a loving Father, forgiving His wayward children and graciously welcoming them into His loving arms. At the cross, justice and mercy meet.

## **CONCLUSION: PORTRAITS OF GOD AND THE GREAT COMMISSION**

*“Mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 2:13*

**God, the lover and pursuer, has drawn us to Himself (John 6:44).** Believers have been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Being rich in mercy, He has wooed us because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, and made us alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5). God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God, the faithful husband, has redeemed the Church, His Bride, at great cost to Himself. We have whored after the gods of this world, worshiping creation over the Creator, and, while we were still weak, Christ died for the helpless and spiritually dead. Christ has redeemed us from the transgressions under the first

covenant (Hebrews 9:15). Behold, God's redeeming love! In light of the redeeming love that we have received, we are commanded to go into the world and to make disciples of all nations. We are to share the good news of redeeming love to the ends of the earth.

**God, the avenging lion, has waged war on sin and death and conquered through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** For Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us back to God (1 Peter 3:18). Christ absorbed the wrath due our sin in order to bring us back to the ultimate satisfier of our souls—God. He tore down every barrier that kept us from the ultimate good, our deepest treasure, and our hearts' truest longing and fulfillment. Jesus brought us back to God. This is all from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). We, the reconciled, have been given the ministry of reconciliation. We have been entrusted by God with the gospel. We are to implore others to be reconciled to God.

**God, the great Physician, heals our brokenness and calls us to the broken.** In Christ, we do not find condemnation, but we find healing. We, the once broken, the once haters of God, the once alienated and hostile, have been brought near to God through the blood of Christ. In Christ, we are new creations—the old has gone, behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are called to the broken—to the widow, the fatherless, the poor, and to the lost. We go to the broken with the only remedy for their brokenness: the gospel of Jesus. We go to the broken, showing no partiality, and offer to them the hope of forgiveness and life through faith in Jesus.

**God, our Father, has given Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth; authority which is now given to us.** As we are going, we are commanded to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We are to teach them

all that Jesus has commanded, and we can rest assured that Jesus is with us, always, to the end of the age. As believers we pray, with expectant hearts, for our heavenly Father's kingdom to come, and for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1)! Our Father has lavished His love upon us, and we lay our lives down at His feet, pick up our crosses daily, and go to the ends of the earth sharing of His great love.

Revelation 7:9 depicts a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" To this end, we give our lives. And, we eagerly await the day when we will, at last, be home with our Father. Our Father will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and we, His beloved children, will see His face.

*"He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"  
Revelation 22:20*