Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

Hosea: Infidelity, Jealousy, Punishment, Restoration

I. Overview – Hosea is among the earliest biblical prophetic books (8th c. BCE). Hosea (*Hoshea*) means "God/Yahweh is our salvation." Hosea is first in "The Book of the Twelve" (the Minor Prophets). Over three decades (ca. 750-720 BCE), Hosea interpreted the unfolding disaster in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) as divine punishment. In essence, the Assyrians were merely God's tool, punishing Israel for improper worship (violating exclusive dependence on Yahweh). Hosea is contemporary with Amos, Isaiah, and Micah **(Hos. 1:1, Amos 1:1, Isa. 1:1 and Micah 1:1** all begin by naming similar kings).

Hosea has two major sections:
1) ch. 1-3, Hosea's marriage metaphor;
2) ch. 4-14, Israel's crisis and future hope (4-11 are indictments of Israel for breach of covenant, 12-14 are images of hope and restoration).

II. Hosea's Marriage Metaphor

Hos. 1:2 – "take for yourself a wife of prostitution, and have children of prostitution, for the land commits great prostitution by forsaking the Lord."[1]

(1:4) Son, Jezreel "I will punish…put an end to the house of Israel."
(1:6) Daughter, Lo-ruhamah "I will have no pity…will not forgive."
(1:8-9) Son, Lo-ammi "you are not my people, I am not your God."

This is metaphorical, depicting the relationship between God and Israel.

Hosea 2 contains some of the Bible's harshest marital imagery, including God's threat to "strip her naked" and expose her "as in the day she was born" (**Hos. 2:3**), to make her "like a wilderness" and kill her with thirst, and to "hedge up her way with thorns" (**2:6**) to prevent her from pursuing her lovers. Read literally as a model for marriage, these images can be weaponized to justify coercive control, humiliation, deprivation, and abandonment by portraying a husband as entitled to punish an unfaithful wife. Such interpretations misapply the prophetic metaphor, turning a text about Israel's covenant infidelity into justification for domestic abuse.

III. Contrasting Divine Insecurity/Jealousy with Divine Love.

Read critically, Hosea's portrayal of Yahweh can appear jealous and insecure, inflicting suffering to compel renewed loyalty **(Hos. 5:14–15).** This resembles the Deuteronomistic History – and its explanation of national catastrophe: God has not failed; the people have been punished for disloyalty **(2**

[1] Some scholars interpret the marriage as a real experience that gave Hosea a deeply personal framework for understanding Israel's covenant betrayal. Others emphasize the narrative's literary and theological construction, cautioning that we cannot confidently reconstruct Hosea's private marriage from the text alone.

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Kings 17:7–23). Yet Hosea complicates that portrait when divine compassion interrupts judgment **(Hos. 11:8–9).**

IV. Christotelic Readings of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

Christotelic can be broken down linguistically as *Christ* + *telos* (τέλος), the Greek word for "end," "goal," "purpose," or "culmination."

New Testament writers often read (and write about) Israel's Scriptures in light of Jesus.

Matthew's use of **Hosea 11:1** "When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son" - is a striking example.

Notice Hosea calls Israel "she," "wife," "child" and "son."
(2:15) – "she" came out of the land of Egypt.
(2:19) – God call Israel "wife."
(11:1) – Israel is "my child" and "my son."

In **Hos. 11:1'**s original context, the "son" is **Israel**, and Hosea is looking backward to the exodus. This is not a prediction of a future Messiah (**Hos. 11:1–2; cf. Exod. 4:22–23**). Matthew nevertheless applies the passage to Jesus' return from Egypt (**Matt. 2:13–15**), presenting Jesus as Israel's messiah and as the fulfillment of Israel's story. A **Christotelic reading** of Israel's Scriptures retrospectively points to Christ as their *telos*—their goal or culmination.

Matt. 2:14-15 "Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'"

Matthew develops a **new-Moses portrait—"Moses 2.0"**: a ruler orders the killing of children, the threatened child survives, and a divine instruction announces that those seeking his life are dead **(Exod. 1:22–2:10; 4:19; Matt. 2:16–21).** Jesus subsequently teaches from a mountain, evoking Moses' association with Sinai **(Exod. 19–20; Matt. 5:1–2)**, while the transfiguration places him alongside Moses and culminates in God's instruction to listen to Jesus **(Matt. 17:1–5; cf. Deut. 18:15)**. Matthew's theological project, then, is to narrate Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's story—and where it reaches its culmination.

Disparities between Matthew and Luke:
Matt. 2 - Joseph receives a dream warning him to flee to Egypt.
Luke 2 - Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem for the purification rites.
Matt. 2 - The family stays in Egypt until Herod dies.
Luke 2 - The family returns from Jerusalem to Nazareth after completing (what the Law requires).
Matt. 2 - Joseph eventually settles the family in Nazareth.
Luke 2 - Nazareth is already their home.

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Luke's narrative presents the family as returning to Nazareth after the required post-birth rites, whereas Matthew describes a flight to Egypt followed by a later return. These are not simply different geographical details; they create different accounts of where the family lived and when they arrived in Nazareth.

Harmonizing the narratives requires adding events that neither Gospel explicitly supplies—for example, imagining an initial return to Nazareth, a later move back to Bethlehem, a flight to Egypt, and then another return to Nazareth. This appears to be a reconstructed sequence, an invented synthesis, rather than the story either evangelist actually tells.

Matthew's Gospel can be understood as participating in a Jewish debate over Israel's Messiah. When Christians insist on Christotelic readings of the Hebrew Bible, Israel becomes merely a preliminary sketch, and Jewish readers are denied authority over their own sacred story. This can be called **interpretive violence**: not physical violence itself, but an overriding of a people's historical identity and interpretive voice.

V. The Hope

No prophetic book concerns itself only with punishment. The pattern they all convey is that there is hope after exile, defeat, punishment, destruction, etc.

Hos. 1:10 "…and in the place where it was said, 'You are not my people, it will be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'"

Hos 2:19 – "I will take you as my wife forever…in steadfast love and mercy."

Hosea's vision of reconciliation cannot be embraced without confronting the patriarchal control, possessive jealousy, and threat of punishment embedded in its portrayal of God. Yet neither should we overlook the text's movement toward compassion, healing, and renewed relationship. To hold these tensions together is not to excuse the violence of the metaphor, but to ask whether hope can emerge without requiring silence about harm—and whether genuine reconciliation must make room for justice, dignity, and the freedom of those who have been wounded

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