

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers the books of Hosea and Joel.

[You can find the LDS outline of the study and resources here.](#)

LDS Study Focus

Israel’s covenant with the Lord was meant to be so deep and meaningful that the Lord compared it to a marriage. The covenant, like a marriage, included eternal commitment, shared experiences, building a life together, exclusive loyalty, and most of all, wholehearted love. This kind of devotion came with high expectations—and tragic consequences for infidelity. Through the prophet Hosea, God described some of the consequences the Israelites faced for breaking their covenant. And yet His message was not “I will reject you forever for being unfaithful.” Instead it was “I will invite you back” (see [Hosea 2:14–15](#)). “I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness,” the Lord declared ([Hosea 2:19](#)). “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” ([Hosea 14:4](#)). This is the same message He gives us today as we seek to live our covenants with love and devotion.

Joel shared a similar message: “Turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” ([Joel 2:13](#)). “The Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel” ([Joel 3:16](#)). As you read Hosea and Joel, ponder your own relationship with the Lord. Think about how His faithfulness inspires you to be faithful to Him.

The Life and Times of Hosea the Prophet

Hosea takes place at a point in time when Israel had mostly turned away from God and was worshipping false gods. Although God was faithful to Israel, Israel continually “cheated” on God. In this context, God told his prophet Hosea to go and marry an “adulterous wife,” Gomer.

Why would God tell Hosea to do this? It was a picture of how the Israelites were treating God: He was good to them, and they kept “running around” on him. Even after Hosea and Gomer married and had children, she continued her adulterous life. Each time she left Hosea for another man, God instructed Hosea to **take her back**. It’s a tragic story on the part of Hosea, but when you see the bigger picture, it’s quite beautiful.

The Message of Hosea

God intended the relationship between Hosea and Gomer to illustrate his relationship with his people, the nation of Israel. God loved and protected Israel, but his people repeatedly left him to follow the trendier pagan gods of neighboring countries. Each time they left, God called them back through a prophet. They’d return, but only to soon leave again. Hosea’s relationship with Gomer is a picture of God’s amazing love. And so often, when we hear this story, we are told it teaches us how to forgive. But that moral misses the main point. Yes, we are to forgive. But in this story, we’re not Hosea. **We are Gomer!**

Like with God, Hosea’s pain was more than the hurt of infidelity. His pain is a sadness—almost a pity—for a woman who can do no differently. She walks a path of self-destruction as she tries to find

fulfillment. But where it is that she hopes to find fulfillment, she doesn't know. Meanwhile, Hosea does his best to protect her, but she only pushes back.

The Book of Hosea, specifically his relationship with Gomer, highlights several important points.

The infidelity of Gomer is our infidelity.

When we pursue selfishness and indulgences, we're leaving the side of our groom. When we set out and trust solely in our own abilities and capacity to do good, we throw off the protection and care of our groom. When we prioritize anything besides Jesus—financial security, achievement, even family—we're calling something else our beloved.

Sin is spiritual adultery against God.

Sin is unfaithfulness, just as marital adultery is an act of unfaithfulness. God even warns, "You will think that you have everything, and you will first forget me, and then you will forsake me, and then you will run after other gods, other lovers."

The acquittal of Gomer is our acquittal.

As much as we've scorned and abused him, our husband advocates for us. Jesus is our only defense, and he's a sure defense. Without any reason to be acquitted of our sin, we will walk free because Jesus has already paid the punishment for us. Our defense is his substitution. Once more, our Savior bids us to "come home, darling, all is forgiven, so come home quickly."

The acceptance of Gomer is our acceptance before God.

Our God takes spiritually adulterous people, pays the penalty for their unfaithfulness, and buys them back by his redeeming grace so that we may be wed to him in an eternal, spiritual union.

How amazing is that!

We bring no righteousness, no worthiness; we bring nothing but our sin. Christ places his love on us and will not turn his back on us. Jesus takes every ounce of our rejection, so, in our marriage to our Lord, we would never again see the back of his head walking away from us in disgust or disappointment.

Conversation Starters

- How do you feel about being compared to Gomer? What does this teach us about our sin?
- What do we learn about God in how Hosea responded to Gomer's behavior?
- How do you feel about Hosea's relentless pursuit of Gomer? Does this relentless reckless pursuit make you uncomfortable? Why?
- How does God relentlessly pursue? Does this relentless reckless pursuit make you uncomfortable? Why?
- What ultimately was God teaching in the Book of Hosea and through the lives of Hosea and Gomer?

Sharing Personally

How does God feel about your adultery problem? (Wait, I don't have an adultery problem!) Yes, you do.

Whenever we worry, trust in money, medicine, politics, science, or in our own abilities above God, we are "cheating" on him. Yes, we are an adulterous people.

In the Book of Hosea, God is pictured as a committed husband, and Israel is his unfaithful bride. Yet, despite his bride's continued adultery, he recklessly forgives her.

"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord" (Hosea 2:19–20).

Those same words, my fellow adulterous friends, are spoken to you.

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her" (Hosea 2:14).

Hosea 2:14

Hosea says that Israel, like a lustful fool, had stepped out on her husband (Yahweh) to chase down her lovers (the Baals). So the Lord "will *patah* her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her [literally, 'to her heart']." *Patah*, usually translated "allure," carries dicey overtones of "entice" (**Judges 14:15**) or "seduce" (**Exodus 22:16; Judges 16:5**), especially when men and women are concerned.

Patah is a risqué word. Hosea pictures God as a desperate and daring husband who will try every romantic ploy to win back his cheating bride. He will entice her into the wild, speak to her heart, seduce her with his love—whatever it takes to recapture her wayward heart.

This over-the-top romantic imagery is a prophetic way of depicting the lengths to which God will go to retrieve his beloved people—even if it means becoming one of them, being spit in the face, spiked to wood, and treated like a dog. For the love of us, God will push every boundary.

[HT: Chad Bird](#)

Hosea 11:1–3

The cross of Christ and the punishment Jesus bore stand out clearly in God’s words through his prophet Hosea.

**“When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.**

**² But the more they were called,
the more they went away from me.**

**They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.**

**³ It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.**

**⁴ I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love.**

**To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.”**

Like a parent who never stops loving his defiant child, God persists to care for his children despite their hatred for him. This love climaxed at the cross, where God himself bore the punishment for our rebellion, purchasing healing for his people (**Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24**).

And yet, as he gives himself entirely—pouring himself out over the heads of his enemies—they did not know that he was healing them (**Luke 4:23, 23:35**).

And to this day, many do not know that the slain and risen Lord has healed them at the cross. By the Spirit who alone can give this sight, may hearts that hate Christ be made to adore him before their time on earth is through.

HT: Chris Powers

The Life and Times of Joel the Prophet

Unlike Hosea's life, we know very little about the prophet Joel. His name means "Jehovah is God," and he was the son of Pethuel. Unlike most of the other prophets who give us a timestamp, Joel does not date his book by referring to the kings who ruled during his time of service to God. Therefore, there is considerable debate about when he lived and prophesied.

The Message of Joel

Although we know very little about Joel's life and times, the book's message that bears his name is quite clear. God presents for his people through Joel the bad news and the good news of the Day of the Lord. The Book of Joel presents a God who will, on the one hand, bring about destruction and desolation on the Day of the Lord, but also a God who will bring about deliverance on that same day.

Devastation on the Day of the Lord (Joel 1:1–2:11)

Through a series of events, including a locust plague, God declared himself the creator and controller of all the universe. He used the devastation of the plague to teach the people about his judgment over sin and to show that he was and would always be their only means of salvation. The prophet explained that the devastation of this plague would pale in comparison to the ultimate Day of the Lord when he would come to judge all nations.

A Call for Repentance (Joel 2:12–17)

As he did with his other prophets, God used Joel's mouth to call the people to repentance. With a reminder of God's love and faithfulness, he pleads with the people to turn from their sin to their saving God, who will replace curses with his blessings. God says, "Turn to me, and I will turn from my judgment to mercy."

God's Response to His People (Joel 2:18–27)

Even with the judgment of the locust, God still loved his people and had their future good in mind. Using the blessings of renewed resources, God demonstrated that his goal with his people was not to destroy them but to deliver them. Renewed physical blessings were a reminder to his people of his daily presence and power. God gladly turns his wrath to giving additional blessings when his people turn to him. Isn't that beautiful? Not physical blessing, but the blessing of his love, the blessing of his grace, the blessing of his indwelling Spirit.

God's Promise of His Spirit (Joel 2:28–32)

During all his talk about destruction and deliverance, Joel prophesied about a great day when God would send his Spirit to fill all of humanity. Joel's words in 2:28–32 would be fulfilled vividly on the Day of Pentecost and the early church.

God's Judgment of the Nations (Joel 3:1–16)

Once more, Joel returns to the bad news and describes in great detail the destruction God will bring to all unbelieving nations. Although it might have looked like the nations were having their way with God, the reality would soon become evident as God would judge them and bring them to their knees.

God's Blessing of Israel (Joel 3:17–21)

But in the midst of this judgment, God would rescue and redeem his people. God would save his people and bring them to himself as a holy people, cleansed from their blood guilt by one who would bring them pardon and peace and the privilege of dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.

Conversation Starters

- What was the “bad news” that Joel shared? What was so surprising about it?
- What was the “good news” that Joel shared? What was so surprising about it?
- What does it mean to repent?
- Is calamity always a call for repentance? Why or why not?
- Does obedience always predicate blessing? (Consider Job and Ecclesiastes in your answer.)

Sharing Personally

Is God unloving when he inflicts calamity on his unrepentant people?

In the Book of Joel, God allows a severe plague of locusts to ravage the land of rebellious Israel. The people are so devastated that they have nowhere to turn but back to God. And thus, God relents and lavishes his people who have returned to him with blessings.

Although we can't say for sure which plagues of our day are from the hand of the Lord, I am thankful for the times he has used them to call my heart back to him. Sometimes, we can only see God when we have been stripped of all hope and all reliance on the world and self. When we are flat on our backs, looking up, that's when we can finally see God.

And when we truly see him, we realize we have a God who rescues us from the greatest plague of sin to bring us home to heaven with himself.