

## Bearded Men-The Minor Prophets-Hosea, Part 2

*The Minor Prophets*

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**Bible Text:** Hosea 14:1-5

**Preached on:** Sunday, May 12, 2013

I would encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the book of Hosea, chapter 14. The book of Hosea, at least in the order that our Bible has them, is the first of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament, the last twelve books of the Old Testament. They have been designated the Minor Prophets. And we're in the midst of a message series that we've entitled "Bearded Men." Why? Because these prophets, much like the character of John the Baptist in the New Testament, the message that they give, the picture of who they are is much like a wild prophet coming out of the brush, speaking prophecies that are true yet hard at times to swallow. These Minor Prophets are not minor because of their message and the quality thereof, they are simply designated Minor Prophets because as a whole their message quantitatively is much smaller than the Isaiahs and the Jeremiahs and Ezekiels.

Today we come to Hosea. As we were in the book of Hosea last week, we're going to finish up Hosea this week in chapter 14. If you were not with us last week, just a little reminder of Hosea and his prophecies, very unique even to the Minor Prophets. It is not simply a message, it is not simply a sermon, it is sixty years of his life, where he grew up and lived and ultimately married a young woman by the name of Gomer. And it is his relationship, it is his marriage with this young lady named Gomer that sets the stage for, is the example of and is the picture of the prophesy that we desperately need to hear. As we addressed last week, the picture that we have in the book of Hosea is Hosea pictured as the Lord himself. You and I are pictured as Gomer. He is faithful, he is generous, he is willing to buy us and yet we are the ones who tend to be unfaithful, we're the ones who tend to be the ones who run away and run out on.

Today we come to the very last chapter and we're going to be back in chapter 4 in just a moment but chapter 4 through chapter 14 in the book of Hosea is what do you do with this picture message? We have the life of Gomer, we have the life of Hosea, we have the three children and how they were born and what that meant. What do we do with this information? What we do with the simple fact that you and I have a horrible tendency to "cheat" on God. As we addressed last week in James 4:4. "You adulterers and adulteresses. Know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God." So what do we do when we realize that the problem is not God, the problem is us? I would encourage you to turn to Hosea 14 and hear what the Lord says to Israel which is a parallel of what you and I need to hear today.

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them

freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.”

In very simplistic words, the Lord is crying out to Israel of what they need to do in light of the fact that they are the Gomer of this story. The question begs us, “What do we do today when we realize in our lives that in this story of Hosea and Gomer, whether we want to admit it or not, we’re the Gomer?” We’re the one who has decided that the world is more enticing than the Lord. We’re the one who said, “I want to try and see what it will give me.” And we end up getting burned. What do we do?

Real quickly, in chapter 14 of Hosea, I think it teaches us three things that need to happen in our lives. The first one is this, we need to return. We need to return from our ignorance. We live in a world today where people say, “Well, ignorance is bliss.” That’s a worldly phrase not a biblical phrase. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we should be ignorant, in fact, if you read through the Proverbs it says, “A foolish man is ignorant in his ways.” We need to return from our ignorance, just the simple word return.

Listen to the first verse, “Israel return to the Lord.” Think about the word “return.” When you go on a trip, you return back home. You think about homecoming of a high school or a college, you return back to the home campus. The term “return” has in it just this idea or context of going where you’re supposed to be. The adventure was fun, it was exciting but back when you really get down to it, there’s a place we’re supposed to be and that place is called home. He says, “Israel return to me.” We need to return from, and here’s the key word, our ignorance.

I want you to turn back to chapter 4 of the book of Hosea and I want you to see that even though we’ve had thousands of years of human history, you and I in our lives and our response to the Lord are not much different than the Israelites in Hosea’s day. Hosea 4:6, “My people...” I want to stop right there, “My people.” In today’s context, in this century’s context you’re his people if you’ve come to understand that you are a sinner in need of saving and you called unto Jesus to save you. That’s what designates you as “My people.” “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” It says here that we are destroyed, that we are in trouble when we begin to exhibit an ignorance and we begin to believe this false premise that God doesn’t know what he’s talking about and the world does.

If you do not know what I’m about to share with you, allow me to give you some information today. You and I are living in a very fast-growing biblically illiterate and ignorant culture and society. And the problem with Israel is that instead of listening to the words of God, they started listening to the words of man. In the New Testament, the book of Ephesians 4:18 says, “My people are ignorant because they have become blinded.” 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that, “The god of this world has blinded us from the light of Christ Jesus that desires to shine in our lives.” In our world today, in our culture today the struggle that even you as a born-again, blood bought believer in Jesus Christ has, is that

for every message you hear from the Lord, you probably hear a thousand from the world. And we get caught in the same trap as we begin to hear the message so often that we think the world is right and God doesn't know what he's talking about.

On this Mother's Day let me give you a very practical illustration. Some years ago Traci and I found ourselves in what we thought at the time was a predicament. We already had one little baby boy, we were expecting number two. We would admit to you that we were ignorant and didn't have a clue how to be parents but when you go from that mental state of thinking, "We've got 2 on 1, to we're about to go to man-to-man coverage," you go into panic mode. Many of you know that by the time you have the third it just doesn't matter anymore, it's survival that's all you're striving for. But at this point, Marshall was small, George was in the womb and there was a very nationally recognized, much touted child and parenting counselor/psychologist expert was going to be coming to our community. Realizing that in fact we didn't have a clue what we were doing, much less what we were about to get into, we went to this conference and heard at the very beginning one of the most remarkable things I've ever heard in my life.

This individual stood up and began to ask us a series of rhetorical questions that were actually in the form of a statement. And I don't remember all the ones that he said but it went a little something like this. He asked us, "If you agree with what I'm about to say, simply raise your hands." He said, "If you believe that children today as a whole are more disrespectful to authority than they were 100 years ago, raise your hand." Every hand in the building went up. "If you believe that children today have a greater sense of entitlement than they did 100 years ago, raise your hand." Some people put two up on that one. And he went on and on and what he basically said is that everybody was in the room because they knew something wasn't right, we just didn't know what it was. At the end of his rhetorical statements, he said, "And if you know the solution to the problem, raise your hand." It was eerily quiet until one very sarcastic voice spoke up and said, "Hey, that's what we paid a lot of money to come here."

And here's what he shared, he said, "Allow me to give you the meat before I give you the message." He said, "A hundred years ago when a young lady, a young mother was struggling with raising her family, she had one that was, what we would call, in elementary school, she had one that was just out of diapers and she had one on her hip. When life was chaotic and she didn't have a clue what to do, she didn't know how to discipline, she didn't know how to be, life was just so out of kilter, do you know what she would do to get advice? She would walk across the street to the woman who was in her late 70s or early 80s who had raised eight children of her own, 18 grandkids and half the county and say, 'What do I do with these kids?'" He said, "The problem today is when facing the same situation, parents go on the internet or to the local bookstore and read a book by a so-called expert that's got 13 degrees behind his name and who has probably never even had kids."

You know what's happened folks, in our quest for intelligence we have bred ignorance. What has happened is, we, just in the world of parenting, have forgotten that for thousands of years, there were principles and precepts and ways of raising children and

that's what God is telling the Israelites. He says, "You have forsaken my laws, you have gone for the neatest, latest, greatest thing and where is it getting you?"

I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts 17. He finds himself in front of the Athenians, a group of people that were so obsessed with their culture they even worshipped the "god of the unknown god." Paul comes in, and says, "You know what your problem is? You spend so much time looking for the newest, greatest thing, you have forgotten the foundations and the principles that you need to adhere to." That's what he's telling Israel and that's what I'm saying today. We need to return from our ignorance of believing every headline, every twitter, every Facebook statement, everything that comes our way and say if there's one thing that is tried and true, we've got to get back to doing it the way God said to do it. And it's not what your friend posts; it's what He said in his Word. So in Hosea 14 when he says, "Return to me Israel." Please understand, if we want and desire change in our life, much less in the world, we've got to return from our ignorance.

The second thing that we've got to do to repent from our inconsistencies. Go back to chapter 14, we pick up chapter 14, verse 2, "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

The word "repent," we addressed it last week, simply means this: to be headed in one direction, to stop the madness and turn and go the opposite direction. Though the actual word "repent" is not used in this passage, we get the idea by coming with words of our mouth saying, "We will no longer do *this*, we will now do *that*." Repentance is being described.

What do we need to repent from? The same thing that he told the Israelites, from our inconsistencies. You say, "Well, I don't see the inconsistencies there." Listen to the words, "Asshur will not save us." Rather than leaning upon God to save them, they were actually going to another country and asking, "Would you come and help us?" The horses will not help us, the chariots will not help us, the gold will not help us. What happens is that we fall into this predicament. Why? Because we are ignorant, because we've adopted the ways of the world and the words of the world, and we begin to believe that adding the concepts and ideas of the world to our lives, it will actually make us stronger. What it does is it makes us weaker.

Allow me to give you an unfortunate, real-life example from the Meyers' household in recent days. About five years ago, we were privileged to purchase the home that we currently live in. Just to give you a little background here, my wife Traci drove about 20,000 miles all over east Atlanta to find out where we were going to live. Hey, you mothers love to nest, that's what you do. She had to find the perfect nest in the perfect tree and she found it. And you could say that we were picky, you could say that. But one of the things that we discovered in the process was that one of the things that we really wanted in a home was a house that had off the kitchen what some people call, a keeping

room or a play room. Why? Because at the time all the boys were very young and what do you do when you have three boys in your house? You fix food, clean food, fix it again and clean it up again. All we do is eat, that's why we call the van the chuck wagon. That's all those guys do is eat, eat, and eat.

So one of Traci's desires was to have a kitchen that actually fed into a room where the "boys could play." The problem was, all the houses that we found that had one of these rooms was much bigger and more expensive than we wanted. But we finally found this house that we loved, she loved everything, was great with this one exception, it did not have this certain addition.

So we came up with this bright idea, why don't we just add to the house? It sounds like a brilliant idea, right? So, we called the builder up, he met us at the house and we told him what we really wanted. He walked around a little bit and said, "I'll tell you what, I can knock out that wall and I can build the room that you're talking about, attach it to the house and life will be great." From that day forward we probably spent more of our time in the kitchen and that room than the whole rest of the house combined.

About a month ago I was in that certain room, I was sitting at the computer which actually faces the kitchen and in the process of waiting on the computer to load up or something, I don't know what it was, I looked down and I saw evidence of something that I had heard about in this great state but never experienced. I've heard you've either got them, have had them or get them from your neighbor. They're called termites. And I saw the evidence of them and here's what was interesting, they weren't on the exterior, they were coming from the middle of the floor where those two rooms had been joined together.

The great news is, I called an expert termite killer and he came and we experienced death and carnage all over our house, it was wonderful. We caught it when it was early, there was no swarming, it wasn't a big mess, in fact, it was in the very "infant stages of the problem." But I marveled here because I'm thinking to myself how do you get these varmints at this place at your house? I thought they came from the outside, not from the middle of the house. To which he explained to me that when they added that room, they had to pour a second slab. I don't know about you, I don't have a basement because I live on top of Stone Mountain basically. I have a rock under my house. When they poured that second slab, they did all the preparations they knew to do, they put all the chemicals down they needed, they did everything they could. But here's the problem, over the course of five years with the heat going up and the heat going down, rain coming, droughts coming those two foundations began to separate and close, separate and close, separate and close. Unbeknownst to us, there was something coming from the crack.

That's what happens in our lives, when we say, "You know what, I'm not going to trust God with this, I'm going to trust Asshur. I'm not going to trust God with this, I'm going to trust my horses. I'm not going to trust God with this, I'm going to trust my gold." And your answer is probably not the exact answer of Israel, but what happens is, when we live inconsistent lives and say, "This part of my life God has control of, but that part I yield to

something else.” What’s going to happen? You’re going to get some of the smallest yet vilest things known in life creep up in your house. And what did those little guys do? They eat away the home.

In this passage it says we need to return from our ignorance and we need to repent from our inconsistencies. In other words, if we’ve added that, “I’m confident in the Lord in all areas except this area and I’ve trusted this person in this area,” we need to literally cut that area off. We need to go back to the original foundation, the original slab. That’s why 1 Corinthians 3, says, “There is no foundation which we can build upon except the foundation of Christ Jesus.” When you take anything else and you add it to your house, so to speak, you’re going to get inconsistencies and eventually you’re going to end up with problems. One of the things that he told the Israelites is, “You need to return from your ignorance and repent from doing this. I am enough.”

Do you remember the story of Moses in Exodus 3? “God, I’m nervous, who do I tell them sent me?” “I AM THAT I AM.” When we put that in 21<sup>st</sup> century English, “You tell them I am enough, they don’t need anything else.” And my question to you is, how much do we struggle with that? How often does that bother us and we think, “Just the Lord?” And yet that’s what he’s telling Israel. “Just me, I’m enough, quit trusting all this other stuff.”

We return from our ignorance, we repent of the inconsistencies and finally in verse 5, we remove the idolatry. Verse 5 speaks about this lily of the valley being planted and its roots in Lebanon. And much like you’ve probably experienced in your life, when you see something growing in your yard that you don’t want to be there, by the way the definition of a weed is something growing that you don’t want there, you remove it by the roots because if you don’t, it’ll just grow right back. And what is the goal? To plant back in its place that which you desire to be there. And it says that the roots of the lily, in other words, where this lily is growing, there is something that was there that had to be removed and it is what we know as idolatry.

As you turn to chapter 13, just one page to the left, I want to introduce you to a concept that is frequently visited in our lives but often ignored. When we think of idolatry, we think of the voodoo practice of South America, we think of the pantheism of continents of Africa, we think of the Hinduism of eastern Asia, but you know the Bible speaks of idolatry in all forms. In fact, in 1<sup>st</sup> John 1, it says, “The root of idolatry is when we say we don’t believe we have any sin.” An idol will creep into our lives.

Look at chapter 13, “When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal,” the false god, “he died. And now they sin more and more, and have made themselves molten images of their silver and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves. Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney. Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me.”

In this passage of scripture, the Lord concludes before chapter 14 saying, “What you need to do is take your idols and remove them, get them away.” Why? Because eventually idols will rust, fade away and become worthless. Let me go back to the voodoo of other places, and pantheism and false faiths. We look at those entities that oftentimes we see on the History Channel or we see in some National Geographic magazine and we say, “Aha, *that* is idol worship.” Let me define for you what an idol is. An idol is anything in your life that gives you more satisfaction than God himself. That one should’ve hurt. An idol is anything in your life. You say, “Jeff, that means my marriage can be an idol?” Absolutely. “My kids can be an idol?” Yes. “My job can be an idol?” Yes. “My bank account?” Absolutely. “My perceived success in life?” Absolutely. An idol is anything that we trust upon more than we trust in God. And what it says to do here is take that thing and root it out of your life and replace it with something else.

This morning I thought it would be apropos to give you an illustration of a modern-day idol. That which so many people get trapped into and fall into. And at first, when I do this, it’s not going to look like an idol, in fact, what it’s going to look like is success. It’s going to look like the price of hard work, the qualities that our culture supposedly extols and celebrates. I’m going to do something that I have not done in 22 years this morning.

This is my high school varsity, a little too tight, letter jacket. You’re all about to be amazed. Look at this. I’m actually going to button it as I squeeze in. Look a little foolish don’t I? Let me ask you a question, how many people compromise their faith in Jesus Christ so they can receive a reward? How many people sacrifice and compromise their values and ethics so that they can get up the next step of the corporate ladder? How many people give up what God said never to give up just so they can wear a jacket or have an award or receive something that has sat in a closet for 22 years.

That’s the thing about idols. Whether it’s a relationship, finances, success. Eventually whatever it is that we’ve put our attention before the Lord cannot sustain itself. It will rot, it will crumble. Even that which is made of gold and silver will fall away.

This lesson came to life in my family yesterday. It was the end of the soccer season, praise God, it was the end of the soccer season. We still have some tournaments but it was the end of the soccer season and in the youngest division in which my children play, they gave out trophies. My middle child, George, received a trophy. His name on the trophy was spelled “Geroge” and his last name was spelled “Myers.” And we were laughing about, they didn’t even get one of the names right. They got them both wrong. What a lesson to sit down as a parent and say, “Son, I know you’re excited about this trophy and you deserved it, but 22 years from now, I hope you still don’t have it on the mantle. I hope that you have walked with the Lord at such a degree that you realize this was a stepping stone and this was great but this isn’t what life is to be about.”

I want you to look back at verse 5 of Hosea 14, the lily of the valley. This is a unique plant and I know I don’t have a degree in agriculture but throughout my lifetime of study one of the most fascinating things I ever learned when it came to biblical agriculture was

this lily in verse 5. Notice how it talks about its roots in Lebanon and being shallow. This lily is a large, giant “flower” that has some of the shallowest roots known to man. But here’s the thing that gets me about the lily, you ready? You can plant it anywhere. This lily will grow in the swamps, this lily will grow in the desert, this lily will grow in the midst of the rocks. It’s one of those, if you were drop the seed in your driveway it would grow up between the cracks. This flower can grow anywhere. Look at what God is telling Israel, “If you return and you repent and you root out your idols, I can grow Me through you anywhere. It doesn’t matter where you’ve been, what you’ve done, how bad you’ve perceived it or what you think has happened, I can grow you.” So many times we say, “Oh, but it’s been so long and I’ve done so much and I’ve sacrificed so much, surely God can’t do much with this.” He says, “No, I’m the lily. I can grow where nothing else can grow.”

So the question today is not what God can do in our lives, it is will we allow him to do so.