

The God Who Keeps Promises (Hosea)

by Stewart Ruch

God is a God who always keeps His promises, and He desires to have a relationship with His people through a marriage of love and faithfulness.

Duration: 35:58

Topics: "Promises"

Description

In this sermon, Bishop Stuart Ruch encourages the congregation to study the challenging books of the Bible, particularly the Minor Prophets. He emphasizes that despite the digital revolution and the decline in reading skills, the members of Church of the Resurrection are capable of understanding these books due to their education and familiarity with the Bible. The sermon focuses on the book of Hosea, highlighting God's promise of a rescue marriage to Israel. Bishop Ruch emphasizes that God initiates and fulfills his promises, and urges the congregation to engage in hard work and study of the Bible together.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruch and is part one of Revealing the Heart of God, A Journey Through the Minor Prophets. Please remain standing.

We'll pray in just a moment. Before we pray, I would like to give you a pastoral word of encouragement as we start to study some very challenging books in the Bible. You can do it.

You can do it. A lot is being said in light of the digital revolution, how people aren't reading anymore and they can't read successive thoughts strung together, that logic is disappearing, etc. And there's some real truth to that.

But I take exception for Church of the Resurrection. Regardless of your education or your familiarity with the Bible, you can understand these books. They require hard work, but aren't so many deeply worthwhile things requiring of hard work? So let's do some good, hard Bible work together this summer as we read through and study eleven of the twelve minor prophets.

Father in heaven, we want to open our mouths wide that you might fill them. We want to feed on the Word of God. And we ask that you would give us that power by the ministry of the Holy Spirit to know you and to know you given to us in the revelation, the revealing of who you are in the Bible in Jesus' name.

Amen. And you may be seated. So I have stood right about here or in similar places in churches throughout Chicagoland, and actually in similar places in churches throughout our country, dozens and dozens and dozens of times as I have been a witness as a priest to a bride and a groom making the most serious and the most public promise that one will ever make in our American culture, which is the public promise that they will remain married to one another.

It happens so often, particularly as we come into the wedding season here in the summer, that you can almost forget that what you are witnessing in that moment is a deep and solemn vow, a promise. Promise is kept. Oh, they bind up so much in a beautiful way.

They protect so much. They create so much growth. A kept promise has unbelievable potential to bring life and joy, strength, health.

But I've also sat in a far more private situation. Maybe it's a husband whose wife has broken her promise or a wife whose husband has broken his promise. Maybe both have come preparing to break their promise, a promise broken, especially a marital promise broken.

Oh, it unleashes such chaos, pain, confusion. What we see in the book of Hosea is a God who always keeps His promises. He is one who makes promises that is central to His character.

And just as central to the character of making a promise and providing a promise is the fact that He always keeps His promises. He always keeps His promises to a people, the people of Israel, people today, us, who are intrinsically inclined to break our promises. Indeed, one of the ways you can understand what it means to have a sinful nature is that you're not a promise keeper.

You're a promise breaker, or you're a pursuer of false promises that you think are greater than the promise of God. And I'll say more about exactly what I mean by that. I want to look this morning with you.

I want us to study the book of Hosea and a God who keeps His promises. But as I do that, even by starting with that picture, which is important because Hosea is also a book about marriage, I recognize that some of you who are here this morning, you had a promise broken to you in marriage. And to even hear it brings up pain.

Some of you may have been the one who broke the promise in marriage. I want you to hear now that the final word of God is that one can always return to the Lord. No, you can't always return to your marriage.

Sometimes you can. But you can always return to the Lord, whether it's broken promises in marriage or the thousands of other broken promises we as sinful creatures will commit. So let's look together.

You can open up to Hosea. I'm going to say a little bit about what Hosea starts out. So if you have a Bible from Rez, you'll be on page 751.

That's the page number for our Rez Bible, 751. Before we look more at Hosea, Hosea is actually the beginning of a whole series of books. They're often called the minor prophets.

The only reason they're called minor is because they're shorter. It's an unfortunate English translation because it really does relegate them in our mind to lower status. But they are equally the word of God as all the other scriptures are.

Minor means shorter. Actually, if you were reading this in the Hebrew scriptures, you would understand this if you were a Hebrew reader as the book of the twelve. They were all collected together, and they were understood to be a cohesive unit, the book of the twelve, because there's twelve books, because they have similar themes.

God keeps His promises. Humanity breaks their promises. God returns to humanity after their broken promises.

God pleads with them to return to Him. He loves them deeply, and yet God also judges humanity for their resistance to His deep love. You'll see those themes throughout the teachings this summer.

You might notice that we're only doing eleven books, not twelve. Nahum did not make the cut. I know.

Nahum. Shorter, even short on a minor prophet scale, and a lot of similar themes to the rest of the books. They only had eleven weeks, so there it is, you guys.

All right, prophets. Whoa. I've got to get used to these.

I've got to start wearing glasses when I preach, you all. It happens. Okay, so prophets.

A prophet speaks for God on behalf of God. They speak in such a way that God's Word becomes real now. So you can think about the word now connected with prophecy.

He ministers, a prophet ministers, he or she ministers the reality of who God is and the ministry of God's presence, the ministry of God's character now. Prophecy has a kind of immediacy to it. Now, how can that work if prophecies are just thousands of years old, like this prophecy is? I mean, this prophecy is more than 2,500 years old.

How does that work? Because prophets speak, and then ripples go out. So when you read a prophetic book like Hosea, like Joel, like Amos, you have to understand it's about prophecy. The prophet's Word hits the water like a rock, boom, in that time.

In this case, this is 750 years before Jesus, called 750 BC. That's when the rock hit the water, boom. And it was for that time.

It had relevance to that day. But it's prophetic. It's God speaking to us now, also about the future.

So another ripple goes out, and in 25 years, what's being prophesied in Hosea, that the northern kingdom of Israel will be overcome by the Assyrians, will actually happen. So 25 years later, there's another ripple, and you go, whoa, that actually happened. It'll ripple out from there.

New Testament writers will pick up verses from Hosea all over the place and teach about who Jesus is, based on the teachings of Hosea. So it has ripples out to the New Testament, and it has ripples out to 2018, June 3rd, right here in Wheaton. That's how powerful prophecy is.

It was for then, it was for after that, and it's for now. Okay, don't normalize the prophets. They will not be domesticized, these prophets, unless the domestic unit you're talking about is the house of God.

And even there, they get in a lot of trouble. Don't suburbanize these prophets. I'm not saying that a prophet couldn't have lived in Wheaton.

I'm just saying it had been messy. Okay. They will unsettle you.

They will use metaphors, and they'll use images. They'll actually live out things that are unsettling, like God wants to be married to humanity. Huh? I mean, maybe you've never heard that before.

You go, that seems weird. I mean, marriage is a male and a female, and why would you use that imagery? I didn't use the imagery. The prophet did.

As a matter of fact, God had Hosea so in on this marriage theme, He didn't just say, tell Israel that I want to be betrothed to them, which is a verb saying marriage. He said, as a matter of fact, I want you to go marry someone who's like Israel. In this case, her name is Gomer.

She's a prostitute. She's constantly unfaithful. He said, I want you to live out who I am so that people will see.

I am so zealous for the people to know who I am, what my love is like. I will not only tell them through prophets. I will actually have prophets, not in a theatrical way where it's over in two hours.

I'll have prophets live out who I am. I'll have Hosea go and marry a faithless wife because I will come and marry Israel and the people who are faithless, and you will see it before your very eyes. It's unsettling.

It's disturbing. It's the minor prophets, okay? All right, Hosea, first book in the twelve. So, Hosea is our opening.

Many themes in Hosea will be worked out throughout the other eleven books. It's intensely put there in the first. It's not the oldest book.

Amos is the oldest book, but it is one of the oldest books, and it's set around 750 BC. Again, 25 years or so before Assyria, the strong man country at that time, will come in and sweep through the northern kingdom. At this point, the kingdom of Israel is divided.

There is a southern kingdom. It's called Judah. This gets confusing.

You got to get this. If you read Hosea last week, you didn't know this. You're like, why are there so many names? Judah, Israel, Ephraim.

I'm confused. Judah, southern kingdom. Israel is called the northern kingdom, and just to keep it interesting, it's also called Ephraim.

So, Israel, Ephraim, northern kingdom. This is the only prophetic book that goes to the northern kingdom. All the rest of them go to the kingdom of Judah or the southern kingdom.

The overview of Hosea is this. God calls Hosea to marry Gomer. She gives birth to three children, all who are given prophetic names that describe the people of Israel at that time.

Gomer leaves Homer. As a matter of fact, two of the three children may not be, excuse me, Gomer leaves Hosea. Two of the three children may not even be Hosea's.

They may be from other men. So, she leaves him. And then in chapter three that was read today, Hosea goes back and remarries her and gives everything he has so they can have a relationship with her again.

And then all of a sudden, Gomer and Hosea, explicitly they're gone after chapter three, and you have 11 more chapters that are now about Israel and God. So, God gives us this reality, a lived reality, a lived parable or story, and then he teaches on it and gives prophecy about it for the rest of the book. Here's the outline for this morning.

God is a God who always keeps his promises. First, he promises us a marriage. Primarily chapter two and chapter three.

God promises us a marriage. Two, God's promises will not be mocked. It's very important in the book of Hosea and through all the prophetic books.

God's promises will not be mocked. That's because they're real. Chapter eight and chapter nine primarily get us there with God's promises will not be mocked.

God promises us a marriage. Okay, you guys, turn over. Actually, stay on page 751, Hosea chapter one.

Let's look at this marriage. This marriage is a rescue marriage. God promises a rescue marriage, but six weeks ago, I taught on baptism, and on baptism, I taught how God does everything.

We do something. Remember that back and forth? It's the same in this marriage that God wants to have with Israel. God does everything.

He initiates. He moves, but Israel is called to receive his initiation. She is called to be a bride, to be a wife, to say yes to God, and we see this begins with the word of the Lord that came to Hosea.

Here to Hosea, here's an initiating impulse. God begins this. Then go over to chapter two, verse 16.

Chapter two, verse 16. This is how God wants to have relationship with Israel and how God must have relationship with us, and in that day declares the Lord, you will call me my husband, and no longer will you call me my Baal or Baal. Okay, stop right there.

All right, so God is saying, Israel, you will be a wife. I will be your husband. That's what I want you to understand.

Now, we may go, oh wow, so we're supposed to understand it like marriage between a husband and wife. Well, yes and no. Actually, what we know from the New Testament in Ephesians chapter five is that the primary marital relationship is God with humanity who received God.

That's the primary marital relationship, and then we understand marriage between a husband and wife, male and female, based on that relationship. So this is actually the primary reality, and we now understand what happens on earth as a way of living out that primary reality. Okay, so no longer you will call me my Baal.

Okay, Baal, it's very important to understand Baal when you're reading the Old Testament. There's some other idols as well. This is the name of an idol.

It means Lord in an ancient Near Eastern language, but Baal was an idol. It was an actual carved idol. It had immense power.

It had spiritual power. We now understand it had demonic power, and the people of Israel were very tempted to trust that Baal would bring them an excellent harvest, that Baal would bring them complete security, that if they worshipped Baal, and one of the ways they worshipped was through illicit sexual relations with Baal prostitutes. It's possible that Gomer was a Baal prostitute, although some scholars argue that no, she was just a very unfaithful wife.

We're not sure about that. What we are sure about is that Baal was a profound counter promise to the promise of God. That Baal was a competing promise to the promise of God.

God promises marriage. Baal promises security. Baal promises prosperity.

Baal promises the presence of Baal, that I will care for you, that I will provide for you, that I will give you sexual satisfaction and relational perfection. Baal made all these profound promises, and people would connect their hearts to Baal. They would connect their minds to Baal.

They would actually enter into illicit relationships sexually as a way of being bonded to Baal. But God is saying, no, I want to rescue you from your idols. Now, don't you for a moment think this is an ancient, near-recent phenomenon.

Here go our prophetic ripples. Okay, now that, boom, hit that water. That was Baal.

They're also called Ashereth. There's another idol called Ashereth, another idol called Moloch. These are terrifying and very spiritually real demonic realities, but the ripples go out.

The idolatries have not stopped. There are some regions and cultures and countries that still have actual carved idols, but let us not think ourselves more sophisticated than them. Let us not think that we too are not vulnerable to Baal, just a name.

Hosea is being called to rescue as God is being called to rescue. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. Verse 19, chapter 2. And I will betroth you, Israel, to me forever.

I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love. Very important Bible word, steadfast love. It's one word in the original language and in mercy.

I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. That's the rescue. That's the work that God is desiring to do.

That's why God then sends Hosea out to live out incarnationally what he desires with Israel, to live out in a very real and embodied way. And so Hosea takes Gomer to himself. She's unfaithful.

He takes her to himself again in chapter 3. Okay, let me, this needs clarity I think maybe for some of you. There's much to be imitated in this book. The sacrifice of Hosea for Gomer should be imitated in marriage.

But I want to be really clear. Don't try all of this at home, okay. There's a particular calling on Hosea to live this out, which is what, here's what I want to say.

Don't be involved in a rescue marriage. If you're not married yet, don't marry to rescue somebody and think that you're Hosea. Some of you may get that in your head, and I don't want you to do that.

If you're in a rescue marriage, then we need to help you as a church move out of that pattern. In this way, God's marriage is unique to humanity because He is without sin, and humanity is riddled with the reality of sin whereby we break promises. So we do need a rescue, but it's not just Hosea who's come to rescue Gomer.

And the God who came to rescue Israel will become even more fully known, and another who will be called a bridegroom. He'll be called a husband. Indeed, He will be one who is greater than Hosea, who like Hosea will sacrifice His entire life, but He will do so as Jesus of Nazareth.

One greater than Hosea will come on a rescue mission for all of humanity, and it's very important to see the ministry of the Lord Jesus springing from this heart of God. He will be a bridegroom. We who choose Him will become His bride, and the church from there on out will always be known as the bride of Jesus.

What are we being rescued from? We're being rescued from idolatry. Let me define idolatry this way. Idolatry is when we believe there's a promise greater than God's promise.

Idolatry is when we come to believe and we commit ourselves that there is a promise that is greater than God's promise. They came to believe that Baal's promise was greater than God's promise of marriage, that Baal's promise was more dependable, that Baal's promise was more able to be apprehended, that Baal's promise had more relevance to their life, more immediacy to their life, and there's a way in which we still consistently come to believe that there must be a promise out there that's greater than God's promise, that's somehow the promise of financial security. This is not a financial affluent congregation.

People don't try to wear their wealth on their sleeve. Indeed, I think for us the potential idol is that idol of financial security whereby we secretly and quietly are storing away resources. So when we look at them on that screen, we go, oh, I'm going to be okay.

It's going to be all right. Everything else may be crazy. Everyone else may be challenged, but I was careful.

I worked ahead from the beginning. I've got financial security. I've got a promise in that financial security.

Everything else may go absolutely insane, but I'm going to be fine. I'm going to be fine. I'm going to hold on to that.

And maybe we've just come to believe that that promise is greater than the promise of God who says, I will always provide for you. I can preach that with energy because that's an idol for me. I can never get very far with that idol, but it hasn't seemed to stop me.

Oh, man, I'd love that. That promise is very enchanting. Or maybe it's the promise of relational perfection, that promise out there that there's a perfect friend, there's a perfect boyfriend or girlfriend, there's a perfect spouse, and that somehow God has held out on me, and I'm in a marriage, but there's a perfect marriage out there that I just wish I had.

And I actually see other people's wives or other people's husbands, and I think, oh, if I was only married to them, oh, I'd have a perfect marriage. I'd have a phenomenal life. This kind of idol of relational perfection can absolutely consume thoughts.

It can consume feelings. It can consume sexual desires. It can begin to have one send emails that are a little bit inappropriate or a text that maybe just goes a little bit across the line of being too warm or affectionate with somebody in another marriage.

It's a relational perfection picture. Oh, this is what I want. This is what I need.

This will provide for me even more than the promise of God, the promise of a prosperous and ideal future, that somehow I can manage my life in such a way that my future will always be great. I don't know if God can manage my future, even though God has promised that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever. I'm already in the future.

I created the future. How tempted we are to give over to the idol of a prosperous future or of perfect health. This is not to say that the Bible wouldn't teach that we should watch our health and care for our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, but how quickly that could become an idol.

I do this. I exercise this way. I eat this way.

I'm going to have perfect health. Others may not. That's their problem.

I'm going to. You see how idols do that too? Idols create a judgmental spirit like that, because they're jealous. And they have incredible spiritual power.

So I'm just describing a psychological disposition you may have or a bad habit. I'm talking about an idolatry hold on our minds and our hearts and our bodies. God says, I've come to rescue you from that.

I've come to free you from the Baal idol. I've come in my person, in my presence. I've come ultimately in Jesus Christ.

And I want to be close to you. I want to be in a kind of marital relationship with you. I want you to live and move and have your being in me.

God promises that. But these promises will not be mocked. That may be a phrase that's new to some of you.

It's actually not in the book of Hosea. It's in a book called Galatians in the New Testament, chapter 6. And in that, Paul, the writer of Galatians, says this, God will not be mocked. Do you not understand that we will reap, it's a garden image, what we sow? What Paul is saying, and what is said in Hosea over and over again, is that reaping and sowing is a very important biblical truth to understand in your Christian life.

It's very important to understand it. It's throughout the Old Testament. It's throughout the New Testament.

God promises a reaping. You'll see this. Okay, come with me, guys, to chapter 8. We see in chapter 8 that God is warning Israel.

He's saying, Israel, here's what will happen if you don't come into close relationship with me. Here's what will happen if you don't obey me. Here's what will happen if you continue to give me false worship from your lips but not from your heart.

Here's what will happen. Verse 7, you will sow the wind and you will reap the whirlwind. One of the beautiful poetic couplets here in the book of Hosea.

You will sow the wind. This is not wind in a positive way, which can sometimes be a positive image in the Bible. This is wind as chaos.

This is wind as disorder. This is wind as something that you're in over your head. There's a power greater than yourself.

You will sow chaos. You will sow rebellion from God, and you will reap super chaos. You will reap super rebellion.

You sow isolation. You sow a kind of ungodly independence, and you will reap absolute alienation. That God is saying, here's the bottom line on how this works.

My love is real. My marital promise to you is real. God is not trying to trick us with sowing and reaping.

This is not some kind of mean way that God is saying, now you get what you deserve. No, what God is saying is, my love is real. So if you move apart from my love, there'll be a consequence to being apart from my love.

If you live apart from my teachings and my laws, there's a consequence because they're real. They matter. Sowing and reaping is just another way of saying, God really, truly, incarnationally, deeply, profoundly, in tangible ways, loves us.

Gomer reaped isolation and alienation and chaos when she rejected Hosea's love. Another way of saying this is what I preached on a few weeks ago from Ephesians chapter five. Look carefully how you walk.

Sowing and reaping has an element that is honoring and an element that is humbling. Sowing and reaping is still good news. By the way, sometimes good news is hard news.

Here's how sowing and reaping has an honoring reality. Many of you are trying to live your life with God. I know because I know you.

Many of you are trying to give generously. You're trying to live lives of sexual fidelity in marriage or as celibates. You're trying to obey God from the Bible.

You're trying to live humbly. You're trying when you are a promise breaker and you reveal that reality in your life, you're trying to repent of that and return to the Lord. Do you know that that really matters? Do you know that right now you'll be making very difficult decisions in your life in regard to your children or your spouse or the fact that you're deeply same-sex attracted and you're not acting out of that or living out of that? Do you know how much that matters? Do you know that as you are sowing faithfulness, do you know as you are sowing diligence, do you know as you're sowing obedience, you will reap a harvest? It matters.

The sowing and reaping can be humbling and we'll get to that, but you know it's also honoring. It matters how you're living your life. You may not feel it right now.

You may not see the fruit of it right now, but you will see the fruit. You will bear righteousness. You will know on this earth and in the days to come and the heaven on earth come, the kingdom come, you will know a fullness of harvest.

And some of you need to hear this this morning. There's some of you who think it's not worth it. The wicked prosper and I don't do well at all.

Well, it's not true. The wicked will not ultimately prosper. They will reap what they sow, and you faithful, humble, broken, little Christian, there will be a harvest.

And I just say to you now from the Bible, don't become weary in well-doing, but there's a humbling word, and that humbling word is that unless we return to the Lord, which is the final promise, unless we return to the Lord, there's a reaping. Indeed, what we see and the go with me on chapter six, you guys, this is this is a bit of a complicated passage, but I think it's really important to understand how reaping and returning are connected. Likely Israel is saying this with a bit of a mocking tone is very possible, but come let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us that he may heal us, i.e. what kind of God is this? I know you feel that way sometimes.

Aren't you encouraged that over 2,500 years ago somebody wrote that as well? That you're not alone? You have a 25-year-old friend. His name's Hosea, and the people of Israel, primarily the people of Israel here. He has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

After two days, he will revive us. On the third day, he will raise us up. They may not have been saying it with a sincere heart.

God says in verse four, what shall I do with you, Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? You love like a morning cloud that goes away. But what they were saying was true. They may not have said it with full heart, but it's true.

There is a reaping which can humble us, and we can go, wow, my life is not working. Wow, I'm actually in more destruction and chaos and fear and anxiety. What is this? They can then call us to return to the Lord, because God, while he promises a reaping, ultimately always promises a return to him, always.

How does that work? I have a friend. A few years ago, they made the decision to leave their marriage. They made a very conscious and intentional decision to break their promise to the person that they'd married, and they left the marriage.

The other spouse didn't want a divorce, but they divorced them, and then several years later, with horror, they realized what they'd done, and they repented. They returned to the Lord. It's beautiful.

It's very powerful, and that's the most important thing in our story, is that they returned to the Lord, and they now know the love of the Lord and the closeness of the Lord, but they had remarried. Their spouse had remarried. Their life is still marked by a significant sadness.

Ultimately, they will know the Lord. Ultimately, they will be fully restored, and they see him face to face. But there has been a reaping of what was sown.

Even though God's return overcame many of the effects of that, the pain, the choices, the decisions, still real. There was a tearing, and there was a return. Israel will not return to the Lord, ultimately, in this scenario, and 25 years later, they will be invaded by Assyria.

God warns them in chapter 10 that Assyria will come, and Assyria does. But God will promise a return. Look with me in the last chapter, chapter 14, which is the last chapter, because it's meant to be the last

word.

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to the Lord, take away all iniquity, except what is good.

We will pay with bowls, with sacrifice, the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us. We will not ride on horses.

And God says, I will heal their apostasy, their unbelief, and I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. Israel would ultimately return to this land that they were exiled from. They would rebuild their temple, and then they would be exiled yet again, and their temple would be destroyed in the first century yet again.

But one greater than Hosea would come, Messiah, Jesus. And he would promise that ultimately God can overcome even our sinful nature, even our sinful decisions, even our idolatrous bonds. And he would promise that if we would return to him and repent, he would give us life and life eternal.

Family of God, let us return to the Lord. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanks for listening. Our vision at Church of the Resurrection is to equip everyone for transformation. As part of that vision, we love to share dynamic teaching, original music, and stories of transformation.

For more of what you heard today, check out the rest of our podcast. To learn more about our ministry, visit churchres.org.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28762.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/stewart-ruch/the-god-who-keeps-promises-hosea/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net