

ADVENT IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

The Prophetic Witness of the Twelve on the Threshold of the Incarnation

Class Four — Faithfulness, Betrayal, and Scandalous Mercy

Hosea, Jonah, and Obadiah

Session Four of Four

PRIMARY TEXTS

Prophets: Hosea 1—3, 4, 11; Jonah 1, 3, 4; Obadiah

Advent Fulfillment: Matthew 2:15; Matthew 12:39—41; Romans 9:25—26; Ephesians 5:25—
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Opening Prayer

Almighty God, You set Your love upon a people who had nothing to commend them, and when they betrayed You, You would not let them go. Teach us this Advent that Your love is not a reward for our faithfulness but the cause of it. Break our hearts over what our sin costs You, and let us hear in the cry of an infant the voice of the Husband who came to buy back His bride. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

I. Opening and Framing

Why Did God Bother?

Three sessions have traced what the prophets said and what it cost. This one asks the question underneath all of it. Why did God not simply walk away? Israel broke the covenant in every dimension; the sentence was pronounced and executed; the temple stood empty for four

centuries. Any reasonable party to a contract this thoroughly violated would have declared it void. Hosea, Jonah, and Obadiah answer with one Hebrew word that the whole series has been circling: 'ahavah (אָהָבָה), love. And they answer it from three angles that are almost impossible to hold together — the faithless wife, the enemy nation, and the treacherous brother. The love that pursues all three is the reason there is an Advent at all.

Discussion Question

God tells Hosea to marry a woman who will be unfaithful to him, and to buy her back after she has been. He sends Jonah to preach to the empire that will destroy Israel, and spares it. He condemns Edom for standing by while its brother was destroyed. Three impossible situations, one God. What kind of love is this, and what does it tell us that God chose to make a prophet live it rather than merely say it?

1. Over three sessions you have heard twelve prophetic voices describe a covenant broken, judged, and left in silence. Before we begin the last one: in your own reading of the Old Testament so far, has God seemed to you more like a judge who is reluctant to forgive or a lover who is reluctant to condemn? Hold your answer; Hosea 11 is going to make it difficult.

One caution before we start. This session is full of marriage imagery, and it is not decorative. When Scripture calls idolatry adultery, it is not softening the offense. It is telling us that the covenant was never a contract but a marriage, and that what was broken was not a term of service but a heart.

Key Vocabulary

'Ahavah (אָהָבָה): "Love." In Deuteronomy 7:8, the reason God chose Israel — not because they were numerous or good, but simply because He loved them. The word is its own explanation.

Chesed (חֶסֶד): "Steadfast, covenant love." The loyal love shown by one who is able to help toward one who cannot help himself. It has run through all four sessions and comes home here.

Zanah (זָנָה): "To play the harlot." Hosea's governing metaphor for idolatry. Deliberately shocking, because the reality it names is worse.

Yada' (יָדַע): "To know." Not intellectual assent but the relational, one-flesh knowing of a covenant partner. Its absence is the charge in Hosea 4:1.

Chus (חָוָה): "To pity, to spare." The verb on which the book of Jonah ends, and the last word God speaks in it.

II. The Original Gift — The Love That Had No Reason

Before the betrayal, the marriage. And before the marriage, a choice with no explanation but itself.

Read Deuteronomy 7:6–8 and Ezekiel 16:8–14 aloud.

Deuteronomy 7:7–8 (ESV)

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.”

Ezekiel 16:8, 14 (ESV)

“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine ... And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you.”

Key Hebrew Terms:

’Ahavah (אהב): “love.” Deuteronomy 7:8 gives it as the reason for the election and offers no reason behind it. The word terminates the question.

Chashaq (חשק): “to be attached to, to cling with longing.” Deuteronomy 7:7. With God as subject it occurs only here and at Deuteronomy 10:15; elsewhere it describes Shechem’s lovesick longing for Dinah (Genesis 34:8).

Segullah (סגולה): “treasured possession.” The core idea is movable personal property, as opposed to real estate — the treasure a man carries with him.

Deuteronomy 7 rules out every reason we would supply. Not because you were numerous — you were the fewest. Not because you were righteous — Deuteronomy 9:6 says so explicitly. The sentence turns back on itself: He loved you because He loved you. And Ezekiel 16 tells the same story as a rescue: an abandoned newborn left in a field, unwashed, taken up, raised, and married. The beauty that made her famous was not her own. “It was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you.”

2. Deuteronomy 7:8 gives the reason for God’s choice and the reason is simply that He loved them. The sentence refuses to go behind itself. Why is a love with no reason outside itself more secure than a love earned — and why do we so persistently prefer the second?

3. The verb in Deuteronomy 7:7 is *chashaq*, used with God as subject only twice in the Bible, and used elsewhere of a young man's lovesick attachment. That is startling language for divine election. What does it do to your picture of God to hear that Scripture describes Him as smitten?
4. Ezekiel 16:14 says Israel's beauty was perfect "through the splendor that I had bestowed on you." Nothing she had was hers. Where does the Church still try to take credit for a bestowed beauty, and what happens to a congregation that starts believing the compliments?

III. What Israel Lost — The Covenant Lawsuit and the Divorce

God gave her everything, and she credited it to somebody else.

Read Hosea 4:1–3 and Hosea 2:2–13 aloud.

Hosea 4:1–2 (ESV)

"Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed."

Hosea 2:8 (ESV)

"And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal."

Key Hebrew Terms:

Zanah (זָנָה): "to play the harlot, to commit whoredom." Hosea's governing metaphor. Israel's pursuit of other gods is described in sexual rather than legal terms because the covenant was a marriage rather than a contract.

*Da'ath Elohim (דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים): "knowledge of God." The same verb, *yada'*, is used of marital intimacy. Its absence in Hosea 4:1 is not an information problem.*

Historical Context

Hosea and Jonah prophesied during the same eighth-century prosperity that Amos and Micah addressed in Class One. The Baal cult had so thoroughly infiltrated Israelite worship that the people could no longer distinguish the LORD from the fertility gods of Canaan; ritual prostitution was practiced at the high places. Baal was believed to give grain, wine, and oil — precisely the gifts Hosea 2:8 says Yahweh had been supplying all along. Obadiah addresses a different moment entirely: the destruction of Jerusalem in 586/587 BC, when

Edom, descended from Esau, gloated over Judah's fall, looted the ruins, and cut off the fugitives.

Hosea 4:1 lists three things missing from the land, and they are the three pillars of the covenant: 'emeth (faithfulness), chesed (steadfast love), and da'ath Elohim (knowledge of God). Then verse 2 lists what filled the vacuum, and it is essentially the Ten Commandments recited backwards. Remove the relationship and the ethics collapse. The order is not accidental.

5. Hosea does not say Israel broke a contract. He says she committed adultery. What is lost when we think of sin primarily as rule-breaking rather than as unfaithfulness — and what does the marriage metaphor let us see that a legal metaphor cannot?

6. In Hosea 2:8 God says she did not know that He was the one giving her the grain and the wine and the oil — and she used the silver and gold for Baal. She was not ungrateful; she was grateful to the wrong party. Where do we thank the wrong source for what God has given?

7. Hosea 4:1 lists faithfulness, steadfast love, and knowledge of God as the missing pillars, and 4:2 lists the resulting collapse: swearing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery. Why does the loss of the relationship produce the collapse of the ethics, rather than the other way around?

IV. The Prophetic Word — Three Faces of the Same Love

The faithless wife, the pagan enemy, and the treacherous brother. One God, three impossible situations.

Read Hosea 1:2–9, 3:1–5, 2:14–23, and 11:1–9; Jonah 1:1–3, 3:1–10, and 4:1–11; Obadiah 1–4, 10–15, 17, and 21 aloud.

Hosea 3:1 (ESV)

“And the LORD said to me, ‘Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.’”

Hosea 11:8–9 (ESV)

“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst.”

Jonah 4:10–11 (ESV)

“And the LORD said, ‘You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?’”

Key Hebrew Terms:

Patah (פָּתַח): “to allure, to entice, to persuade.” Hosea 2:14. The Piel is deliberate and intensive. God does not summon Israel back by decree; He courts her.

Mohar (מָהָר): “bride-price.” The payment a groom makes for his bride. Hosea 2:19–20 lists five, and the Groom pays them Himself.

Nehpakh (נִהְפָּךְ): “is overturned, is turned over.” Hosea 11:8, of God’s own heart. The same root describes the overthrow of Sodom.

Shuv (שׁוּב): “to turn, to return.” Jonah 3:10, on the lips of a pagan city — the word this series began with in Class One.

Nacham (נָחַם): “to relent, to reverse a threatened verdict.” Jonah 3:10. With God as subject it never means remorse for sin.

Zadon (זָדוֹן): “insolence, presumption.” Obadiah 3, from a root meaning to boil over. The root of Edom’s sin.

Melukhah (מְלִיכָה): “kingship, royal dominion.” The last word of the shortest prophet: “and the kingdom shall be the LORD’s.”

Read the three in order and watch the object of the love change. Hosea addresses the faithless wife, Jonah the pagan enemy, Obadiah the treacherous brother. Together they cover the full spectrum of broken relationship, and the same ’ahavah addresses all three. Notice also that in each book somebody objects: Israel objects to being pursued, Jonah objects to Nineveh being spared, and Edom objects to nothing at all, which turns out to be the worst response of the three.

8. A. HOSEA. God does not merely describe His love in words. He commands a prophet to marry a woman who will betray him, and to name their children “God Scatters,” “Not Pitied,” and “Not My People.” What does it cost Hosea to preach this sermon? What does it tell us about God that He chose to have it lived rather than merely said?

9. A. HOSEA. In Hosea 3 the prophet buys his wife back for fifteen shekels of silver and a measure of barley. Reckoned together, that comes to about thirty shekels — precisely the value Exodus 21:32 assigns to a slave, and the sum Judas was paid. She has become so degraded that her own husband must purchase her at the price of property. What does it mean that the redemption price of the bride is the price of a slave?

10. A. HOSEA. Hosea 2:14 says, “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.” The verb for “allure” is the one used elsewhere of seduction, and the phrase for “speak tenderly” is literally “speak to her heart” — used of Shechem to Dinah, Joseph to his brothers, and Boaz to Ruth. God does not summon her back. He courts her, using her lovers’ own methods. Why would God choose to win rather than command?

11. A. HOSEA. Hosea 2:19–20 lists five things God gives in the new betrothal: righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the mohar, the bride-price — and because the bride is destitute, the Husband pays her bride-price Himself. Why does it matter that these are the purchase price rather than qualities she is expected to produce?

12. A. HOSEA. In Hosea 11:8 God says, “My heart recoils within me” — the Hebrew is *nehpakh*, “is overturned.” The commentators refuse to dismiss this as a figure of speech. Then in 11:9: “I will not execute my burning anger ... for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst.” A human husband would justly walk away. Why is God’s holiness the reason He does not — rather than the reason He should?

13. B. JONAH. Jonah does not flee Nineveh out of fear. Jewish tradition puts his reasoning in his own mouth: “Since the Gentiles are more inclined to repent, I might be causing Israel to be condemned.” He runs because he is confident the sermon will work, and to Assyria of all places. What does it reveal about a person when the prospect of God’s mercy toward someone else is unbearable?

14. B. JONAH. Jonah preaches five Hebrew words with no invitation, no conditions, and no promise of mercy — and an entire pagan city repents. The Hebrew for their turning is *shuv*, the word Israel would not do for four centuries of prophets. What does it mean that the repentance God sought from His own people was performed by the enemy?

15. B. JONAH. In Jonah 4:2 the prophet quotes Exodus 34:6–7 — Israel’s most cherished confession, given after the golden calf — and hurls it at God as an accusation. He also edits it, stopping before the clause about not clearing the guilty. He is angry at God for being the God of Exodus 34. Which of God’s attributes do you find yourself quietly wishing were more limited?

16. B. JONAH. The book ends with God’s question and no answer: “Should not I pity Nineveh?” Jonah never replies. The silence is deliberate, and it works like Nathan’s “You are the man.” The author hands the reader the pen. So: who is your Nineveh, and what would it cost you if God spared them?

17. C. OBADIAH. Obadiah’s indictment escalates in five steps: you stood aloof (v. 11), you gloated (v. 12), you entered the gate (v. 13a), you looted (v. 13b), you stood at the crossroads to cut off the fugitives (v. 14). Nothing in that list is a sudden departure from the step before it. What does it mean that the man who does nothing on the first day is at the crossroads with a sword on the fifth?

18. C. OBADIAH. Edom's crime is against "your brother Jacob" — the Hebrew is 'ach, and Esau and Jacob were twins from the same womb. Jerome wrote that Edom, in destroying mercy, was "despising the womb of Rebekah." Jesus says that what is done to the least of these is done to Him (Matthew 25:40). Where in our own lives do we stand aloof from the suffering of those to whom we are bound?

V. History Vindicates the Prophets — Samaria, Nineveh, and Edom

All three prophecies came true. One of them took six centuries.

Read 2 Kings 17:5–8 and Nahum 3:7 aloud.

2 Kings 17:6–7 (ESV)

"In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria ... And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God."

Samaria fell in 722 BC, and the narrator of 2 Kings names the prophets who had warned them — the very prophets of this series. Nineveh, spared under Jonah, returned to its cruelty and fell in 612 BC, as Class Two saw. And Edom's fate unfolded slowly: Nabonidus broke their strongholds, the Nabateans pushed them out of Petra entirely, and the survivors drifted west into what became Idumea. By the first century their descendants had been absorbed into Judea — and an Idumean named Herod was sitting on the throne of Jerusalem when Christ was born.

19. Nineveh repented under Jonah and was spared, and fell to Babylon a century and a half later. Both the mercy and the judgment were real. What does that arc teach about God's patience — and about repentance that does not endure?

20. Edom gloated over Jerusalem's fall and eventually lost its own identity entirely; its descendants were absorbed into the nation they had despised. The brother who would not act like a brother ceased to be a people. What is Obadiah saying about the long-term cost of refusing kinship?

VI. The Advent Fulfillment — The Husband Comes in Person

At the end of all the prophetic words, God does not send another message. He comes Himself.

Read Matthew 2:13–15; Matthew 12:39–41; Romans 9:25–26; and Ephesians 5:25–27 aloud.

Matthew 2:15 (ESV)

"This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

Ephesians 5:25–27 (ESV)

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

Hosea 11:1 was not a prediction. It looked backward at the exodus and it was an accusation: God called a son out of Egypt, and the son failed. Matthew quotes it of an infant carried into Egypt and back, and he quotes the Hebrew rather than the Greek so that the singular “my son” survives. Israel’s history did not need a prediction fulfilled. It needed a completion.

21. Hosea 11:1 says God called His son out of Egypt, and the whole point of the verse is that the son failed. Matthew applies it to Jesus, deliberately quoting the Hebrew so that “son” stays singular. Christ is not merely predicted by Israel’s history; He is Israel reduced to one, going where they went and succeeding where they failed. What does it mean for you that your salvation depends on someone else’s obedience rather than your own?

22. Jesus says the only sign His generation will get is the sign of Jonah — three days in the heart of the earth. But Jonah’s story does not climax in the drowning; it climaxes in his coming up onto dry land. And Jonah was sent reluctantly to a Gentile enemy, while Christ went willingly. Where does Christ exceed Jonah, and where does He simply do what Jonah refused?

23. In Romans 9:25–26 Paul takes the names of Hosea’s children — “Not Pitied” and “Not My People” — and applies their reversal to the Gentiles. God renames the enemy as family. If God could reclaim Israelites who had made themselves indistinguishable from pagans, why is it no stretch at all for Him to claim actual pagans?

24. Ephesians 5:26 says Christ cleansed the Church “by the washing of water with the word.” In the ancient custom the bride was bathed and adorned by attendants before being presented to the groom. Paul inverts it: the Groom does the bathing Himself. What does that reversal say about what happened to you at the font?

25. Ephesians 5:27 says Christ presents the Church “without spot or wrinkle ... holy and without blemish.” Hosea 3 had a husband buying back a degraded wife at a slave’s price. Ezekiel 16:14 had a bride whose beauty was bestowed rather than earned. Where does the spotlessness come from, and when does the Church actually receive it?

26. THE HINGE. You are Gomer: faithless, degraded, and bought back at a price you could never have paid. Nineveh sits in your pew: the people whose repentance you would secretly resent. And the temptation is to be Edom: the brother who watches his own kin suffer and does nothing. The ‘ahavah of God addresses all three at once, and it does so at a cross. If Christ is the

true and faithful Husband who purchased His bride with His own blood, does this series end in a love you must return, or in a love that has already secured you? Explain what difference that makes to how you keep this Advent.

Synthesis and Closing

Text	Contribution to Session Theme	Key Term
The Original Gift	Election grounded in nothing but love itself; a bestowed beauty (Deuteronomy 7; Ezekiel 16)	'Ahavah
What Israel Lost	The covenant lawsuit; gifts misattributed to Baal; knowledge of God gone (Hosea 2; 4)	Zanah / Yada'
Hosea	The prophet marries the metaphor; the bride bought back at a slave's price; the heart overturned (Hosea 1—3; 11)	Mohar / Nehpakh
Jonah	Mercy for the enemy; a pagan city turns; the book ends on a question (Jonah 1; 3—4)	Shuv / Chus
Obadiah	The treacherous brother; five steps from standing aloof to the sword (Obadiah)	Zadon / Melukhah
History Vindicates	Samaria 722, Nineveh 612, Edom absorbed; an Idumean on the throne at Bethlehem	'Ach
Advent Fulfillment	Israel reduced to one; the Groom washes the bride Himself (Matthew 2; Ephesians 5)	Loutron

Series Conclusion

This four-session series has traced a single arc through the twelve Minor Prophets: from corrupted worship (Class One: Amos, Micah, Joel), to the Day of the Lord (Class Two: Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk), to glory through exile and silence (Class Three: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi), to the covenant love that drives it all (Class Four: Hosea, Jonah, Obadiah). At every point the prophets were pointing forward to Christ. They diagnosed the disease that only the Incarnation could cure. They proclaimed the judgment that only the

cross could satisfy. They promised the glory that only the resurrection could deliver. And they revealed the love that only God in the flesh could enact. The Minor Prophets are not minor. They are the voice of God crying in the wilderness, preparing the way for the One who is coming — and the child in the straw is the answer to every prophetic question that was ever asked.

27. Across four sessions you have heard twelve prophetic voices. Which image of God has changed the way you hear the Christmas story — the betrayed husband, the God who is silent in His love, the refiner who sits down at the crucible, or the one who pitches His tent among us?

28. The 'ahavah of God is not a feeling; it is an action. It cost Hosea his dignity and it cost Christ His life. What does it cost you to receive it — and what does receiving it free you to do?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, true and faithful Husband of Your Church, You loved us while we were still unfaithful, and bought us back not with silver and gold but with Your holy, precious blood. Wash us in the water and the Word, clothe us in Your own righteousness, and give us hearts that will not turn away. Make us glad for mercy shown to those we would not have chosen. And bring us at last to the marriage supper of the Lamb. To You, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all glory, now and forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Appendix: Liturgical, Lectionary, and Hymnic Connections

Liturgical Connections

The bridal imagery of this session is not a metaphor the Church invented; it is the shape of the liturgy. Every baptism enacts Hosea 2:19–20 — “I will betroth you to me forever” — and Ephesians 5:26 names the font as the place where the Groom washes His own bride. The Supper is the betrothal feast, and the Church has always called the last day the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). When the congregation confesses its sin and hears absolution, it is Gomer being bought back again, at no additional cost, because the price was paid once.

Lectionary Connections

Hosea 11:1–11 appears in Series C (Proper 13), and Hosea 11:1 is read at Christmas 1 in connection with the flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13–23). Jonah 3:1–5, 10 is the Old Testament reading for Epiphany 3 in Series B, paired with the calling of the first disciples. Matthew 12:38–42, the sign of Jonah, appears in the Series A lectionary and in the historic propers for Lent.

Obadiah is not appointed in either lectionary, which is one reason a class like this is worth teaching.

Hymnic Connections

LSB 357: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” — The culminating hymn of the series. The cry of the bride for her Husband, and four centuries of silence answered in one child

LSB 387: “Joy to the World” — Isaac Watts on Psalm 98, written not as a nativity hymn but under the heading “The Messiah’s Coming and Kingdom.” Stanza 3 makes His blessings flow “far as the curse is found”

LSB 370: “What Child Is This” — Set to GREENSLEEVES, a sixteenth-century ballad that begins “Alas my love, ye do me wrong, to cast me off discourteously.” The tune of a jilted lover carries “This, this is Christ the King”

LSB 606: “I Lay My Sins on Jesus” — Horatius Bonar’s first hymn, written for Sunday School children, grounded in Isaiah 53:6 — the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all

LSB 547: “The Lamb” — Gerald Coleman, written in a single three-hour seminary class in 1985. Stanza 3 has the Shepherd dying for sheep that loved to wander; stanza 4 is Luther’s joyous exchange

A note on the tune of LSB 357. Neale reported finding VENI EMMANUEL in a French missal in Lisbon that has never been located; the melody survives in three manuscripts from about 1500, all associated with convents of the Poor Clares in France, and in every one of them it carries a trope to the funeral chant Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna — “Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death.” The Advent hymn that closes this series is carried by a melody written for the dead.