

THE STATE OF ISRAEL: HOSEA'S LIFESTYLE PARABLE

The Unfaithful Wife

Hosea's prophetic ministry begins with this pronouncement from YHWH:

YHWH said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from YHWH. So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son." (Hosea 1:2-3)

And so Hosea, man of God, prophet of God is instructed to take to himself a "wife of whoredom" (ESV), Gomer.

Wounding God's Soul

Thus Hosea's marriage provides a living symbol of God's relationship with his people. God loves his people (including us) in the same way we love our spouses. He thinks of us as his bride.

However, as the husband to his people, God is in the same position as Hosea—married to a wife who is constantly wandering away from her "marriage" vow. The nation's spiritual adultery (whoredom—ESV) consisted in her breaking the covenant made at Sinai by means of idolatry: When we honor and cherish and seek after and trust our idols more than God, he wants us to know this feels the same to him as it would to us if our spouse was committing adultery.

The Walking Billboard Children

Once married, over the next roughly six years a series of children (a boy, a girl, another boy) are born to Gomer. The text says that the first boy is Hosea's, but hints at the fact that 2nd and 3rd child are not.

In order that God's message of just judgment is made clear in Hosea's lifestyle parable God instructs Hosea to name his children with descriptive names so that they serve as a constant reminder to the people of their calamitous spiritual state. Cf. 1:3-9

Jezreel, aka "Decisive Judgment," "Armageddon"

Jezreel is both a valley and a city in Israel, both associated with the oppressive abuse of royal power and bloodshed.

Lo-Ruhama, aka "No-Mercy," "Not-Loved"

The message in the name of the second child is a bit more straightforward—the time has come for YHWH to stop showing mercy to the northern kingdom (Israel, Ephraim). Their sins have caused the necessity of their judgment.

Lo-Ammi, aka "Not-My-People," "Nobody"

Perhaps the most disturbing appellation for the children is given to the second son, “Not-My-People.” This pronouncement takes an ax to the roots of the tree of Israel’s relationship with God. Since the exodus event the nation had been formed around the principal of being “God’s people.” Rescued, protected, provided for and given God’s word because they among all the rest of the nations were God’s chosen people.

THE JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL: A WIFE JUSTLY CONDEMNED

Starting in Chapter 2 we have a sort of rhetorical courtroom scene: There is an emotional sharpness to the sins as God describes his “wife” and her actions:

- She has had children fathered by other men (2:4) and taken many other lovers (2:5, 7, 10, 13)
- She had lusted after other lovers and the things that they could provide for her (2:5, 13)
- She has ignored the fact that her husband has faithfully cared for her all along and has taken these provisions and used them to worship Baal (2:8, 13)
- She has taken “payment” for her affection from her lovers (2:12)

Likewise the punishments which are appropriate to these actions are both shocking and heart rending. As the nation’s “husband” God is justified in:

- Stripping her naked as a sign of the disgrace she has brought on their relationship and to emphasize her utter poverty (2:3, 9)
- Removing all affection for her and her children (2:3-4)
- Cutting her off and isolating her from all of her other lovers (2:6-7)
- Showing her utter lewdness to her other lovers so that they no longer want her (2:10-11)
- Taking away all blessing she had attributed to other gods (2:12-13)

THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL: A WIFE LAVISHLY REDEEMED

“And now, here’s what I’m going to do:

I’m going to start all over again.

I’m taking you back out into the wilderness

where we had our first date, and I’ll court you.

I’ll give you bouquets of roses.

I’ll turn Heartbreak Valley into Acres of Hope. It will be just like when you were a young girl, those days when you was fresh out of Egypt.

“At that time”—this is God’s Message still—

“you’ll call me, ‘Dear husband!’

Never again will you address me,

‘My slave-master!’

I’ll cleanse your filthiness, get rid of all the dirty false-god names, not so much as a whisper of those names again. At the same time I’ll make a peace treaty between you and wild animals and birds and reptiles, And get rid of all weapons of war. Think of it! Safe from beasts and bullies

And then I'll marry you for good—forever!

I'll marry you true and proper, in love and tenderness. Yes, I'll marry you and neither leave you nor let you go. You'll know me, God, for who I really am.

“On the very same day, I'll answer”—this is God's Message—

**“I'll answer the sky, sky will answer earth,
Earth will answer grain and wine and olive oil,
and they'll all answer Jezreel.**

I'll plant them in the good earth.

I'll have mercy on No-Mercy.

I'll say to Nobody, ‘You're my dear Somebody.’ and he'll say ‘You're my God!’”

Hosea 2:14-23 The Message

Having shown his intentions to his people, YHWH now commands Hosea :

"Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as I love the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." (Hosea 3:1)

And so we come to the climax of Hosea's relationship with Gomer, with God's relationship with us. Hosea again exercises great faith and mercy in order to communicate God's love for his people:

So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley (the standard price someone would have to pay to redeem another from slavery). Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you." For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

Redeemed. Restored. Loved.

FOR MODERN DAY SPIRITUAL ADULTERERS

A Promise of Salvation

I will heal their waywardness.

I will love them lavishly. My anger is played out.

I will make a fresh start with Israel.

He'll burst into bloom like a crocus in the spring.

He'll put down deep oak tree roots,

He'll become a forest of oaks!

He'll become splendid—like a giant sequoia

His fragrance like a grove of cedars!

...

I am like a luxuriant fruit tree.

Everything you need is to be found in me.

The Message--Hosea 14:1, 3, 4-6, 8

A Sample Meditation to Consider based on Hosea 14—

And so my beloved Children, daughters and sons of the king, know this:

I have healed, am healing, and will ultimately, eternally, finally heal your waywardness. In the great Last Day you will follow me without compulsion or difficulty. My name will be on your forehead. I will dry your every tear. I will be your God and you will be my people.

I have already shown you my lavish love in the only way which could express it adequately: by sending the full measure of my anger against your idolatry crashing down on the Lamb, who gave his life for you, who waits for you now.

By the divine mystery of the cross I have taken what was yours, which would as surely as a poisonous viper have killed your soul, and given it to the Son.

By the divine mystery of the cross I have taken what was His, which is almost beyond your ability to understand—perfection in my sight through obedience to the Law, and given it to you.

I am right now making a fresh start with you. I will make thousands upon thousands and ten thousand up ten thousand fresh starts with you if that is what is needed because your sin can never exhaust my mercy, your brokenness is never too much for me to bear, and your rebellion will always be forgiven. My love for you makes you secure, strong. It does so in spite of your weaknesses. So bring them to me dear Child. There is no need to hide them any longer.

Everything that you have ever needed, that you could ever need, I will give to you. The deepest peace, the most secure love, the kindest forgiveness—life everlasting.