

The Book of Hosea

Chapter 3

3:1

In the third chapter of Hosea, Hosea describes his reconciliation to his wife Gomer as an anticipation of God's reconciliation with Israel.

"Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman..." Most commentators argue that God really did command Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer, although some argue that the Lord only gave Hosea a vision of such a scenario and that vision was to teach the Israelites of God's relationship to His bride, Israel. Either way, the marriage of Hosea and Gomer parallels the relationship between God and the Israelites, which today represents the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church.

God says that this woman was "a woman *who* is loved by *her* husband, yet an adulteress." Some women who commit adultery may rationalize that they were not treated with sufficient kindness by their husbands. But what makes this story all the more shocking is that Gomer (who represents Israel) was indeed loved by her husband. He behaved very kindly toward her and faithfully performed all his duties to her, yet she still proved unfaithful to him. Despite Hosea's great love for his wife, she is an adulteress. In a similar fashion, despite God's great love for Israel, she has played the harlot and committed spiritual adultery.

". . . even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." God loved the people of Israel, even though they prostituted themselves by turning to other gods. Like drunkards, they became intoxicated as they ate the "raisin cakes" that may have been used in the worship of Baal.

God here tells all His faithful people that they may be assured of His unfailing love, even when they receive His chastening. The Israelites during their exile were to remain hopeful and patiently bear God's chastisement, even in the midst of their bitter sorrow.

From this passage, we learn that God loves us even when He is severe toward us. Even if God seems to cast us away due to our unfaithfulness, He will always retain some affection, even in the midst of His wrath. Most men would find it hard to retain such love for an unfaithful wife who continues to cheat on him. Yet, in contrast to mortal man, God is infinitely loving, which means that God's infinite mercy and goodness are displayed even in the midst of His people's shameful ingratitude and unfaithfulness.

At the same time, we ought to see how wicked the people were in forsaking this God who had treated them with such love, such grace, such patience, and such kindness.

As sinful human beings, by nature we have a tendency to create idols and to embrace superstitions. At the same time, we have a natural tendency to reject God's eternal truth. But God tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that "if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

If we are Christians, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and we must desire to renew our minds daily with God's word. Let us hold fast to the word of the Lord and resist the

devil's attempts to captivate us with the world's distractions and lead us astray from the narrow way that leads to eternal life.

3:2

Hosea says that he bought his wife Gomer for a small price—" for fifteen *shekels* of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley." This payment amounted to about thirty shekels altogether, which is the approximate price of a slave (Exodus 21:32). The provision of the cheap barley bread may have been a lesson to the Israelites that God in His love for His people would provide for their needs during the exile.

Just as Hosea purchased Gomer, so also Christ has purchased us, His bride, from the slave market of sin. He has redeemed us not with gold or silver but at the cost of His own blood.

1 Peter 1:18-19 says, "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

3:3

And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man -- so, too, *will I be toward you.*"

In other words, Hosea tells Gomer that she will remain as a widow, for he desires to put her to the test, to see whether she will sincerely repent of her sinful deeds and remain chaste and faithful to him. So also will God put Israel to the test during her exile. She will have to wait many days until her husband, Christ, shall appear to redeem her.

The prophet Hosea shows that Israel was still bound to the Lord, despite her unfaithfulness. Although the majority of the people would be alienated from God and cast away, God would save His chosen remnant.

3:4

"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim."

God wanted to prepare the Israelites for their long exile. Though their exile was to be long, He wanted them still to retain strong hope in their hearts, for such a long trial was necessary in order to bring them to true and lasting repentance. On many occasions, the Israelites had pretended to turn back to God. Each time, they were soon after proven to be hypocrites. When their hypocrisy was discovered, they only proceeded to harden their hearts against the Lord. Therefore, the Lord wanted them to know that they had to endure a long chastisement. It was the only way to break through their hearts of stone and to give them hearts of flesh.

You may recall back in the book of 1 Samuel when the people of Israel cried out for a king even though God was their king. The prophet Samuel warned them that having a king would not be a positive thing for them; in fact, he would make them his slaves (1 Sam. 8:17). Yet, the people were belligerent. They cried out, "No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

As an interesting historical note—in early American history, the colonists who sought to liberate themselves from the yoke of the British king declared, “No king but King Jesus.” Our nation was founded on this Biblical idea that an earthly king was not in the best interests of a nation. Due to the curse of the fall and man’s sinful tendencies and corruptions, a balance of power—between an executive, legislative, and judicial branch—was far more wise. Thus, the founding fathers of America gave us a president, not a king.

In any event, in Hosea, chapter 3, the prophet announces that God will strip the people of their political ruler as well as their outward religion. The Israelites since the days of Samuel had placed their trust in their king and found happiness and comfort in having a powerful ruler. Now, God will deprive them of a king or prince.

He also took away their sacrifices and sacred pillars, their ephod and teraphim. Teraphim were no doubt images, which the superstitious used while worshipping their fictitious, manmade gods. The king of Babylon is said to have consulted the teraphim or household gods. So also Rachel stole these household idols from the house of her father Laban and shortly after Laban called the teraphim his “gods” (Gen. 31:30).

Why is the ephod mentioned? The ephod was a part of a sacerdotal (priestly) attire worn by the Levitical priests, and the priesthood continued among the tribe of Judah. So why does Hosea declare that the children of Israel will be without an ephod? When Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, introduced false worship, he used the ephod to make the Israelite religion appear to be the same as true religion in its outward form (cf. 1 Kings 12:28). He wanted his religion to appear like the true Jewish religion. He did not want it to appear that he had departed from the only true God. So he made his altars appear like true altars and added the ephod and various ceremonies so that the Israelites might think that they still were practicing the true worship of God.

In 2 Timothy 3:5, the apostle Paul warned Timothy that in the last days people will hold “to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power.” Thus, this passage provide a timeless warning to us today to beware of being deceived by false appearances. We should not judge a book by its cover, nor should we judge a church by its outward traditions and practices. We need discernment to look below the surface and evaluate whether any church is obeying Scripture in all things, neither adding to nor taking away from what God has prescribed.

3:5

Hosea continues, “Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.”

Despite their chastisement, Hosea, chapter 3, concludes on a most positive note. Though they must endure the temporary wrath of God, he promises that afterward they shall return and seek the LORD their God. In Acts, chapter 2, at Pentecost, many Israelites repented with a full desire for intimacy with God in fulfillment of Hosea’s prophesy (Acts 2:38-41).

The name of God, *LORD*, or *Yahweh* in Hebrew is the covenant name of God. Although the Israelites had professed to be followers of the LORD, Yahweh, remember that they equally esteemed the Baals. The Baals were the Canaanite gods of fertility and rain.

They had incorporated these false gods into their worship, which in God's eyes had extinguished His pure worship. Hence, the prophet declares that the children of Israel shall return and seek the Covenant LORD their God; He alone is God.

They also will seek "David their king." Israel could not seek their king, David, who had long been dead. No, they were to seek that King whom God had promised to be the descendent of David. This prophesy, then, no doubt, looks forward to the Messiah, Christ. The only hope the people had was that God had promised them that He would give them a Redeemer. The very first verse of the New Testament declares Jesus to be "the son of David" (Matt. 1:1; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Rom. 1:3). He is a descendant of David. Jesus is the Messiah, and He is our Redeemer. He is our King, and He reigns over David's kingdom, which is the kingdom of God.

The prophet Hosea says, "They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days." The people of Israel at the time of Hosea did not fear God. They had cast off His holy laws. They did not want to do things God's way but their way. They worshipped God the way they wanted to worship Him, not in the way He commanded in Scripture. They devised a new religion that incorporated teachings from the Bible and teachings from the Canaanite fertility religion.

Interestingly, this new religion they created did not have the same moral restraints as God's true religion. They gave themselves over to gross sexual immorality—and all this with the sanction of their religion. How similar this seems to the situation today in which churches that call themselves Christian not only give their approval to sexual immorality but also ordain pastors and elders who are openly involved in sexually immoral relationships. Evidently, they have no fear of the God of Scripture.

God says that in the future, there would come a time in the last days when "they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness" (NAS). After a long period of affliction, God will send the Son of David, Jesus Christ, to show the world His goodness. What greater display is there of God's goodness and Fatherly love for His people than that He sent His one and only Son to die for the undeserving, to die for sinners.

No longer should we dread God if we have come to know His goodness. Hosea says that God will sweetly allure His chosen people to Himself that they might obey him freely and spontaneously and even joyfully. God often gives us a taste of His goodness so that we can truly and reverentially fear Him. If we did not see His goodness, we might hide from God because His majesty strikes terror in us. In Psalm 130:4, David declares, "But *there is* forgiveness with You, That You may be feared."

God tells us that He is already at peace with us and desires to show His benevolent kindness to us, if we will but seek Him. Knowing and trusting that God is good, we ought to trust Him and obey Him.

As long as we are alienated from God, we are miserable. Yet, God promises us that if we will submit to His authority, then we will have true happiness. True happiness comes when we obey God and keep His commandments.