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The Book of Hosea, A Survey, Part 9

Hosea 2:14-23, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

¹⁵ And there I will give her her vineyards
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁶ "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. ¹⁸ And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹ And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

21 “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
23 and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’;
and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’ ” ¹

God’s People are Sinners

In Matthew 5 we read of that which God would have characterize His children.

Matthew 5:3-4, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Poverty in spirit and mourning over one’s sinfulness truly is where God would have each of us live. Yet, unfortunately this is characteristic of so few of us. Though we claim Christ, nevertheless we claim a whole lot more. We want to be people who are known for their...

- Devotion to the Lord.
- Hard work.
- Superior morals.
- Knowledge of the bible or theology.

And so we go about our day pursuing these ideal and pretending when we fall short. Now there are those in our midst who continue to pretend, but simply to avoid embarrassment. Theirs is not a passion for these things. They love their sin such that their hearts have long since grown cold. Now I wish I could say, “To be saved is no longer to struggle with sin, but to arrive at a place of victory and conquest.” Yet the Bible does not bear this out.

After spending three years walking with his Lord, Peter stood before a crowd of people and invited God’s condemnation on himself to save face.

Mark 14:71, “But he began to curse and swear [this doesn’t mean he used bad language. Rather, he invoked a curse upon himself, ‘God, condemn me to hell if I’m lying...], ‘I do not know this man you are talking about!’”

Years later when after he was restored, this same apostle would proclaim such a false gospel that Paul said this:

Galatians 2:11, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”

¹ *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ho 2:14–23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Yet Paul was not casting stones. He openly confessed his own struggle with sin.

Romans 7:18-19, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.”

In fact, so brutal is this struggle Paul could say this:

Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

David (who is credited for writing up to half of the Psalter) in 2 Samuel 11, lusted so much for a woman that he forced her to himself, committing adultery. Then to hide the fact, he lied, schemed, manipulated, and eventually committed murder. In fact, in the process of being confronted for this sin by Nathan, David hypocritically said that any found guilty of such fowl revolt “deserved to die” (2 Samuel 12:5)! I remind you that David is described in the Old Testament as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

You know that Abraham and Isaac had a lying problem. Jacob was a life-long deceiver. And Noah was given to drunkenness. And on and on I could go. Truly, the track record of genuine servants of God is not pretty! It is littered with unspeakable sin in various degrees. In fact, that which separates a true believer from the false is NOT his moral superiority, BUT the grief that results when confronted with his sin.

So what does God do in the face of such hypocrisy and cold-heartedness? He goes about the work of Spiritual Reclamation!

We see it in Hosea 3. As you know, Hosea was written at a time when God’s people had exchanged the worship and service of God for Baal! Accordingly, God sent Hosea around 750 B.C. (1) to rebuke His people, (2) to warn them of their pending judgment, and yet ultimately (3) to reclaim them!

The Call to Spiritual Reclamation

We pick it up in Hosea 3 and we see the call to Spiritual Reclamation.

Hosea 3:1a, “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go again, love...’”

Recall that Hosea 1-3 represent a literary unit as it has been written in the form of a chiasm.

A: Hosea 1:2-9: Hosea’s Marital Dealings with Gomer conveying a message of judgment

B: Hosea 1:10-2:1: An Oracle Pronouncing Hope

C: Hosea 2:2-13: An Oracle Pronouncing Judgment

B¹: Hosea 2:14-23: An Oracle Pronouncing Hope

A¹: Hosea 3:1-5: Hosea’s Marital Dealings with Gomer conveying a message of hope

The counterpart to Hosea 3 is Hosea 1:2-9 where God charged Hosea with these words, “Go, take...” (Hosea 1:2). In Hosea 3 the command has been altered and improved. Rather than, “Go, take...” it now is “Go, love!”

Did you get that? In Hosea 1, the prophet was simply called to marriage. Here he is called to the reclamation of a marriage which had been destroyed on account of Gomer’s sin! Yet that is the will of God in His marriage with His people! Talk about amazing grace! When it comes time for dealing with His people’s sin, God does not say:

- Go, judge!
- Go, condemn!
- Go, destroy!
- Go, torment them with bitterness and suffering!

Rather, He says, “Go, love!”¹ That is how God deals with rebellious Christians. That is how God deals with you!

Hosea 3:1b, “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go again, love a woman *who* is loved by *her* husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes’”

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) is rather muddled at this point. Most of the other big translations — ESV, KJV, NKJV, NIV — represent the calling as it was originally intended. The word translated as “husband” in the NASB is *רֵאָה* (*rēa’*) which is variously translated as “husband,” “friend,” “companion,” or “confident.” In this context, it clearly is NOT referring to Hosea (Gomer’s husband), BUT another person, and so is best translated as in the ESV, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man...”

In fact, we can be even more specific. It is clear from Hosea that Gomer had become a temple prostitute in the worship and service of Baal (recall our discussion on chapter 1). As such, she would have had a pimp who protected her, directed her, and so benefited from her labors. It most likely is that man who is referenced here. Evidently in the course of her work, Gomer incurred a debt to this man which placed her in bondage to him. Now in the course of time, the relationship between pimp and prostitute had been muddled such that we learn here that this man had begun a relationship with Gomer, he loved her. So not only was Gomer a prostitute who served the cause of Baal, and was enslaved to a pimp who farmed her services out to the various temples of Baal, but the two had become lovers! He loved her, and she clearly loved him!

Hosea 3:2, “So I bought her for myself for fifteen *shekels* of silver and a homer and a half of barley.”

In spite of the religious revival that occurred in Israel in and around 765 B.C., by Hosea’s day 753 B.C., God’s people had exchanged Yahweh for the worship of Baal. Now the worship of Baal was a fertility cult in which the individual participated in the worship of the deity using vestal virgins.

Prior to this time it should be noted that throughout Israel, many altars had been constructed for the purpose of worship (recall 1 Samuel 7:15-17 where Samuel oversaw these high places on a yearly basis). At these places, trees had been planted so that the Israelite might eat of the peace offering with his family beneath the shade. Well sadly, when God's people rejected God for Baal, they used the shade of these many trees to engage in unspeakable acts in the name of worship.

Jeremiah 3:6-8, "Then the Lord said to me in the days of Josiah the king, 'Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. And I thought, "After she has done all these things, she will return to Me. But she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.'"

Now in Hosea's day, the worship of Baal was so popular that the cult ran out of vestal virgins (note well, Hosea 3:1 and the statement that Israel "loved raisin cakes" which in their context was an aphrodisiac!). As such, the local prostitutes were hired to serve in this capacity. This would have afforded the prostitute much benefit, including the legitimizing of her trade. For the first time in her life, she was rather important, in fact crucial to society. We have already suggested that it was this to which Gomer gave herself while married to Hosea (cf. Hosea 1:2; 2:2).

By the time of Hosea 3 (which was twenty plus years later) Gomer was all but used up. And because of economics, her pimp put her on the auctioning block to pay off his own debt. It was at this moment Hosea showed up and participated in the bidding. Now again, it is worth noting that the typical slave at the time sold for thirty shekels; Gomer was gotten cheaply for fifteen shekels!

She went only for fifteen shekels because her looks had faded, her youth was lost, and her use as a commodity was all but spent!

Once again, that is what God's people had become in their sin. When God took action in Hosea's day to reclaim His adulteress people, they were not longing to be redeemed. Yet they were used up and unwanted (recall that when Israel was taken into captivity, the Baal priests at the time said, "Good riddance!" [cf. again Hosea 2:10]). Such was Gomer at this time and such was Israel.

This ought to put to rest once and for all any notion that we might have that God's restoring grace is prompted by our good intent, religious devotion, contrition, or brokenness. See, we tend to think that as Christians, righteous living secures blessing from the Lord. In contrast, we tend to think that as Christians, unrighteous living secures cursing from the Lord. Both are wrong.

When God brings about the work of salvation (whether that be our conversion or our sanctification), it is done on behalf of straying, sinning children and such we are! Aren't we? Even when we are at our best, our righteousness amounts to filthy rags before the Lord (Isaiah 64:6).

Do you see the amazing love of God here? It is given to rebellious children like you and me. Hear this carefully: When we gather on a Sunday, it is so easy to play the game of church and so...

- Look like we have our act together.

- Sound like we are devout servants of the Lord.
- Appear to have no problems at all.

Yet all the while we have serious struggles with our faith, devotion, and with sin. Now because we've all learned to hide it well, we falsely conclude that no one struggles like me! And so we muse, "How God could ever forgive me, much less desire me?"

Family of God, what was the state of Gomer when God told Hosea to "Go, love..."? Do you see the point? No one is as guilty as was she, and yet she remained the object of redemptive love.

Is it possible that you who are struggling with less unbelief, rebellion, and sin could receive anything other than this from the Lord? Absolutely not! Let us not walk, but let us run to Christ this day. For His is a love that is greater than all our sin! God won't allow us to remain in sin, but rather is ever and always going about the work of reclamation!

The Severance

Now speaking of this reclamation, notice the severance that is involved.

Hosea 3:3, "Then I said to her [N.B., this is the first and only time Hosea speaks directly to Gomer in this prophecy- and what an address! As now the owner of his wife, Hosea could have had her killed on account of her adultery. And yet, rather than killing her, we read...], 'You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.'"

This verse details three elements to the reclamation of Gomer which would serve as a picture of what God was going to do with Israel (and with all in Christ). First, "You shall stay with me for many days."

The first thing God does is to draw near to the sinning child and so bring him to Himself- by His side! Now we've already seen that that place of intimacy is the wilderness- which is what awaited the Northern Kingdom. Here all distraction would be removed such that all that God's people would have is God.

Truly, in the words of Hosea 2:15, in Christ every bitter providence brings with it a "portal of hope" whereby the child of God is brought closer to the Lord! Now if we do not go through the fire relying upon Christ, we shall indeed be burned. But if we rely upon the Lord, we shall discover the richest blessings in "the valley of Baca" (cf. Psalm 84:6)! So the first thing Hosea did was isolate his wife and so bring her to his side.

Secondly, "You shall not play the harlot."

This is the second demand placed upon his newly purchased wife: the termination of her sinful activity. No longer was she to participate in any form of harlotry, whether on a street corner or in a temple. When it came to this sin she was to cease and desists.

Now by itself this command could seem harsh, "This is your sin; stop it!" Yet that she has been placed

by his side means that Hosea would be there to help and encourage her all the way. Accordingly, she was not alone in her battle against sin; he would be there to help.

Thirdly, “Nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.”

Hosea also would not enjoy the marriage bed with Gomer though she was his wife. The idea here was to separate his sinning wife from any and all stumbling blocks- that which might draw her back into sin. If that meant abstinence as a married couple for a time, so be it!

This is how God brings about our growth in grace. He brings us to Himself and so isolates us from our sin- and what is this place? The wilderness! There He calls for the termination of all sinful activity as well as anything that might serve as a spring board into sin. That is what the exile of the Northern Kingdom was all about...

Hosea 3:4, “For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar, and without ephod or household idols.”

This is speaking of the exile which soon would come to Israel. At that time, God’s sinning people would be separated from six of the key elements which led them to sin and which constituted their sin! In 931 B.C. when Solomon died, the nation divided into two separate kingdoms, between Rehoboam in the south and Jeroboam in the north. As this time, in order to keep the Northern Kingdom from rejoining the Southern Kingdom, Jeroboam altered the religion of Israel, an alteration which involved the five characteristics mentioned here in Hosea 3:4:

1. With Jeroboam and his successors, Israel had an illegitimate king and illegitimate princes. God removed these in 722 B.C.
2. To prevent the Northern Kingdom from rejoining the Southern Kingdom, a false/phony priesthood was enacted and so a sham sacrificial system. Recall, any who wanted to serve as a priest could (cf. 1 Kings 12:31). This too God removed in the exile!
3. Furthermore Jeroboam established two pillars/high places/shrines at which the citizens of the northern kingdom could worship- one in Bethel and the other in Dan (1 Kings 12:29). These were destroyed.
4. And of the “ephod”
5. And “household idols,” recall, the beginning of the worship that occurred in Dan came from the priest who hired himself out to Micah in Judges 17 and so oversaw the man’s “ephod” and “household idols.” The priest was then brought to Dan where his self-styled religion was promulgated. In time, this false worship had a large impact on the worship that occurred throughout the Northern Kingdom such that these became a stumbling block to the nation.

Accordingly, these too were taken away!

From all of this, do you see how God “went and loved” His people of the Northern Kingdom? He brought them to Himself in the wilderness where the “drug” which held them captive- the elements of their false religion- would be no longer. There without anything that might prompt them unto spiritual adultery, God’s people would turn to the Lord. And so they did!

And so, the process of sanctification continues in our lives as well.

Romans 6:12-13, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God."

In the name of holiness, God exhorted His people to isolate themselves from any and all sin. Yet they are not simply to seek to be isolated from sin, they are to replace the sinful conduct with the fellowship and service of Christ! We see it in 1 Timothy 6.

1 Timothy 6:11, "But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness." - so careful ought we to be when it comes to holiness, that God calls the one struggling with sin to go beyond just isolation from sin. They must replace it with a healthy longing for and service of Christ. You don't just "stop pleasing yourself," rather you "start living to please the Lord!"

And yet, this is not all. Our flight from sin necessarily will involve abstinence even from lawful activity if that activity could serve as a spring-board back into sin.

Hebrews 12:12-13, "Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."

The Hebrew writer calls us to far more than just refraining from sinful activities. Rather, we are to cultivate a life which protects us from sin altogether. In fact, we are to "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV))

Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts."

Matthew 5:29a, 30a, "...if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you... And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you..."

If you are one this day who finds yourself cold to the things of the Lord (as no doubt Gomer was toward Hosea at first), do not allow your feelings to drive you. Rather, walk the path of spiritual renewal as outlined in God's word. In time, you will reap the consequences.

The Consequence

Hosea 3:5, "afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days."

This is the consequence of God's sanctifying work, a fruit which would not be reaped among the immediate exiles of Israel, but among their children.

Notice that God here is speaking of a time in the future, in the last days, when their children would return to the Lord and to David (that is, his line and so his heir which we know to be Jesus). At this time, notice what would take place:

Hosea 3:5, “the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king.”

This began on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. Thousands upon thousands of Israel’s children returned to the Lord and to His Christ, the son of David (cf. Jeremiah30:9; Ezekiel34:23-24; 37:24ff). This has continued for the past 2,000 years up and unto today!

Hosea 3:5, “they will come trembling to the Lord.”

The idea here is that of reverence. When a sinner is brought from darkness into the light, they behold the glory and greatness of God. The result is a bowing of the knee and the humble confession, “Jesus Christ is Lord!”

Hosea 3:5, “they would come trembling ... to His goodness.”

I love this; don’t you?! When God comes to His people, His greatness might frighten them, but His goodness overwhelms them and so they come! And so it is today. Each of us in Christ have “tasted and seen that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 34:8). We boldly enter into His presence (where else would we want to go?), yet we do so with fear and trembling! Theodore Laetsch wrote this:

The knowledge of this goodness overcomes their fears and doubts, so that trustingly they cast themselves into the arms of Him who has loved them with an everlasting love, who therefore with loving-kindness hath drawn them (Jeremiah. 31:3). (Laetsch, 1987 (Reprint of 1956 Edition), p. 40)

This is the end and the culmination of the sanctifying work of the Lord. This is a revelation of God’s blueprints for the suffering and difficulty that He might ordain for our lives. This is the place where God would bring each of us in our walks: a longing for Christ, a proper and due reverence for the Lord, and a heart that has been overwhelmed by His goodness.

Accordingly, as we live out our days on this earth, it behooves us to understand THE Plan by which God is working in and through all things. In and through all things, what is God doing? What is He after?

- You ever go through enough trial that you are brought to the point where you say, “God, what do you want from me?” And of course by this we mean, “What can I do to placate you so that my pain will stop?!”
-

Hosea 3 provides the answer!

- First, there is nothing you can do to placate God so that your pain will stop; for your current struggle is not about “getting you” on account of your sin.

- So what is God after when it comes to the bitter providences of life?
- It is that we might return and zealously seek the Lord, Jesus Christ, grow in our reverence and awe of the Lord and His greatness, and come to taste and so know that the Lord is good. That is what God is after; these are the blueprints and so the design behind the valley of weeping.

Now if that is the case, how do you and I go about “improving upon” our trial? Prior to any difficulty and in the difficulty we understand the fruit that we are looking for. We encourage this fruit. We sow to this fruit. This means we are not about getting the trial over, but growing in our relationship with Christ. I remind you of the words of Thomas Sherman:

As it is the duty of God’s children to prepare for affliction before it comes; so it is also their duty to improve affliction when it does come... If we do not prepare for affliction, we shall be surprised by it; and, if we do not improve it we are likely to increase it. He who takes more care to avoid afflictions than to be fitted for them, or is more solicitous to be delivered from them than to be bettered by them, is likely to come soonest into them and to live longest under them! (Sherman, 1860)

May God give us the grace not to kick against the goads when they come, but to respond in loving faith and a longing for Christ!

End Notes

¹ What a contrast: Hosea- representing God- was to love a prostitute/Israel. Israel in turned loved raisin cakes! How sad!

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About the Preacher

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