

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 9 – God's Ridiculous Love Hosea and Gomer

Introduction

Perhaps you wondered why we entitled this section of our Bible series, *God's Ridiculous Love*. We did so because God's love is *always* extravagant and relentless; *but never is this more clearly demonstrated than in the life and ministry of Hosea the prophet*. A little background: After the exodus from Egypt (1440 BC) God formed a covenant relationship with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19-40). Yahweh would be their God and they would be His "priests" representing Him to the world. This covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel was often depicted as *a marriage*: Yahweh was the husband, Israel His wife (very much like in the New Testament where Christ is the bridegroom, the Church is His bride). Of course, any covenant requires *faithfulness* on the part of those in the relationship. Unfortunately, Israel proved to be a constantly *unfaithful* wife to Yahweh.

The prophets of the Old Testament were raised up to enforce the terms of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. They were "covenant cops" calling the nation back to obedience whenever they strayed. Often, God would ask prophets to engage in *symbolic actions* to illustrate His message to Israel. The most dramatic of all the symbolic actions came through Hosea, who ministered during the long reign of Jeroboam II, in the final decades leading up to the Assyrian invasion of Israel and the end of the Northern Kingdom (722 BC). To illustrate God relationship with unfaithful Israel, Hosea was commanded by God to *marry an unfaithful woman*. Thus, Hosea's home life became a living parable of the heart-breaking relationship between God and Israel.

Outline

The first 3 chapters focus on Hosea and Gomer. The last 11 chapters focus entirely on God's case against unfaithful Israel.

1. Unfaithful Gomer – Faithful Hosea: chs. 1-3
2. Unfaithful Israel – Faithful Yahweh: chs. 4-14

Overview

1. Unfaithful Gomer – Faithful Hosea: chs.1-3

Hosea's Marriage to Gomer: Ch.1

When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD” (1:2).

The phrase used to introduce Gomer has been interpreted in various ways: “a promiscuous woman,” “an unfaithful wife,” “a prostitute,” “a temple prostitute,” “a wife of harlotry.” It is unclear what Gomer’s life was like prior to her marriage to Hosea. At the very least, she was prone to promiscuity; at most, she might have been an active prostitute in Israel. In any case, the main point in the analogy of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was to provide a living illustration of God’s “marriage” to Israel: “. . . *for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.*

Gomer bore 3 children. The first, Jezreel was Hosea’s child. (The name Jezreel reminded Israel of their history when king Jehu killed all of Ahab’s living descendants, even going too far - killing Judah’s King Ahaziah and 42 of his relatives. Israel as a nation would be punished for the sins of Jehu.)

The second and third children were the product of Gomer’s adulterous lovers. Lo-Ruhamah means “No mercy” while Lo-Ammi means “Not my people.” God would have “no mercy” on Israel because they had strayed from Him and they were “not His people” any longer.

What a sad commentary the home life of Hosea presented to his people. His wife was unfaithful and his children were illegitimate. Surely the nation watching Hosea would have heard the message loud and clear: *This is how God feels about His marriage to Israel.*

Yet, even as the opening chapter ends, there is a vision of hope for the future based on *God’s faithfulness and loyalty* to His people (the major theme of the entire book of Hosea):

“Someday it will be impossible to count the people of Israel, because there will be as many of them as there are grains of sand along the seashore. They are now called ‘Not My People,’ but in the future they will be called ‘Children of the Living God.’ Israel

and Judah will unite and choose one leader. Then they will take back their land, and this will be a great day for Jezreel” (1:10,11).

The FAITHFUL LOVE of God stands at the center of the book of Hosea. Similarly, in the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah sings of God’s faithfulness, even on the eve of the nation going into captivity: “The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:23,24). Again, in the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes: “Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2Timothy 2:13). This is one attribute of God that we all need to hold tightly to and thank Him for daily. He loves us faithfully, steadily and relentlessly. HE is a covenant-keeping God.

God Laments His Marriage to Israel: 2:1-13

The second chapter of Hosea summarizes the message of the entire book. Here, Hosea and Gomer become the backdrop as God begins to describe His relationship with His “wife,” Israel. The “children” represent the people of Israel while the “other lovers” are the false gods that Israel has worshipped in place of Yahweh.

“But now bring charges against Israel—your mother—for she is no longer My wife, and I am no longer her husband. Tell her to remove the prostitute’s makeup from her face and the clothing that exposes her breasts. Otherwise, I will strip her as naked as she was on the day she was born. I will leave her to die of thirst, as in a dry and barren wilderness. And I will not love her children, for they were conceived in prostitution. Their mother is a shameless prostitute and became pregnant in a shameful way. She said, ‘I’ll run after other lovers and sell myself to them for food and water, for clothing of wool and linen, and for olive oil and drinks’” (2:2-5).

God determined to discipline Israel by showing her the emptiness of her pursuit of other lovers, all in the attempt to woo her back.

“For this reason I will fence her in with thorn bushes. I will block her path with a wall to make her lose her way. When she runs after her lovers, she won’t be able to catch them. She will search for them but not find them. Then she will think, ‘I might as well return to my husband, for I was better off with Him than I am now’” (2:6,7).

We are reminded of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) who finally “came to his senses” and determined that he would be better off going back to his father’s house (Luke 15:17-19). We could call the story of Gomer the *parable of the prodigal wife!*

God was pained by the fact that Israel had taken the many gifts *He bestowed on her* and used them in her pursuit of other gods.

“She doesn’t realize it was I who gave her everything she has—the grain, the new wine, the olive oil; I even gave her silver and gold. But she gave all My gifts to Baal . . . I will punish her for all those times when she burned incense to her images of Baal, when she put on her earrings and jewels and went out to look for her lovers but forgot all about Me,” says the LORD (2:8,13).

How often do WE take God’s good gifts and use them in ways that dishonor Him? He is the source of all our blessings, including life itself. In what ways are you using TIME, TALENT, and TREASURE in ways that dishonor God? Are there changes that you can make to better honor God with the gifts that He has given to you?

The Lord’s Loyal Love for Faithless Israel: 2:14-23

Characteristic of the prophets’ writings, there are quick shifts in the picture as God looks to a future day when He will renew His covenant relationship with Israel and win her heart back to Him. Such a shift occurs right in the middle of the second chapter of Hosea. One moment God is lamenting His unfaithful bride; but the next He is planning on how to win her heart back to Him again.

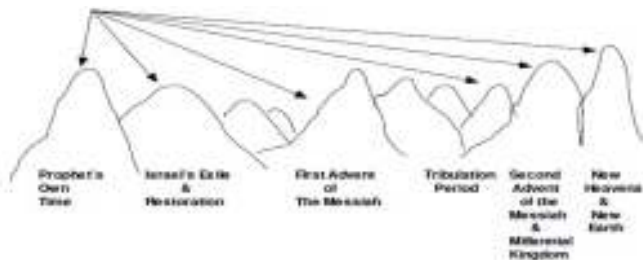
“But then I will win her back once again. I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there. I will return her vineyards to her and transform the Valley of Achor into a gateway of hope. She will give herself to me there, as she did long ago when she was young, when I freed her from her captivity in Egypt” (2:14,15).

This passage contains the *heart of God* in one picture. The “*valley of Achor*” was the place where the people of Israel committed their first act of unfaithfulness against Yahweh after entering the Promised Land (see Joshua ch.7 and the sin of Achan in the valley of Achor – “Valley of Trouble”). God says, in effect: *I will take you back to the place where you first committed adultery against Me, and there I will renew My marriage vows with you. The place of your unfaithfulness will become a door of hope for us.*

In the remainder of ch.2, God paints a vivid picture of His future life with His restored bride, Israel:

“In that day,” declares the LORD, “you will call Me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call Me ‘my master.’ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD. In that day I will respond,” declares the LORD— “I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I will plant her for Myself in the land; I will show My love to the one I called ‘Not My loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not My people,’ ‘You are My people’; and they will say, ‘You are My God’” (2:16-23).

The prophets saw future events like a series of distant mountain peaks. They often did not distinguish clearly between events in the *near future* and those in the *distant future*. Thus, a vision of return from captivity (50 years off) would overlap with a vision of the time of Messiah’s arrival (100s of years off) or even the distant end-times when God would restore Israel and set up His kingdom on earth (1000s of years off). Hosea 2 provides a good example of this complex prophetic foresight. When Hosea prophesied of times of restoration for God and Israel, he was likely prophesying of some measure of restoration and renewal for Israel that would take place after the Assyrian invasion (post 722 BC); but he was also seeing events of cosmic proportions that would take place in the days of Messiah’s appearance, and on into the end times when Israel would be replanted in her God-given land once and for all.



Hosea redeems Gomer: 3:1-5

The most impactful moment in the Hosea-Gomer story came when Hosea was commanded by God to go and “love his wife again” even though she had left him for other lovers. The fact that Hosea had to “buy” his wife back indicates that Gomer had been cast off by her other lovers and was forced to desperately offer herself as a slave to anyone who would purchase her. Hosea went to the place where slaves were being auctioned, and he bought back his wayward wife!

The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes. So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. 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 behave the same way toward you.” For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. 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” (3:1-5).

Again, the Hosea-Gomer relationship served as a picture of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Thus, the message is that God would someday “buy back” His beloved people from their captivity (presumably the Assyrian captivity that began in 722 BC, but also the Babylonian captivity after 586 BC, and even later captivities that Israel would endure). God would “bring His people back home” and gradually “restore” them to Himself in purity and faithfulness.

What a beautiful picture Hosea paints of God’s redemption of all of us! Through the death of Jesus, God paid the price to buy us off the slave-market of sin and death. He takes us home and begins to restore our lives and our relationship with Him. No matter how far we have gone from Him, His ridiculous love reaches out to bring us home!

2. Unfaithful Israel – Faithful Yahweh: chs.4-14

The longer section of Hosea details God’s case against His people. Their sins of unfaithfulness are enumerated, along with the

penalties for breach of covenant. Hosea and Gomer do not appear in this section of the book.

God's Complaint

“Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: ‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away’” (4:1-3).

Recall God's original purpose for Israel to be His “priests” representing Him to the world (Exodus 19:5,6). Now, their privilege is being revoked due to disobedience.

“Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children” (4:6).

Israel had stubbornly spurned the correction of the Lord.

“The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow? Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone! Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways. A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame” (4:16-19).

God has given us a free will so that we can choose to follow Him or not. While God is very patient, and lovingly pleads with us to follow Him, there is a point when He says: “Have it your way.” To use the apostle Paul's words in Romans 1:24,26,28 – “God gave them over” to their own desires. It is a sad day when our stubbornness becomes so great that God says: ‘YOU are joined to your idols. I will leave you alone.’ To King David God wrote: “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control” (Psalm 32:8,9). Is there any area of your life where you are being “as stubborn as a mule” toward God? Be careful! He might let you have your own way.

God Reminisces

In certain passages, God looks back at how deeply He loved Israel,

His wife, from the very beginning even to the present day.

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called My son out of Egypt. I Myself taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand. But he doesn’t know or even care that it was I who took care of him. I led Israel along with My ropes of kindness and love. I lifted the yoke from his neck, and I Myself stooped to feed him” (11:1,3,4).

“I have been the LORD your God ever since I brought you out of Egypt. You must acknowledge no God but Me, for there is no other Savior. I took care of you in the wilderness, in that dry and thirsty land” (13:4,5).

“She doesn’t realize it was I who gave her everything she has—the grain, the new wine, the olive oil; I even gave her silver and gold” (2:8).

God Laments

Then, there are many passages where God laments how it felt to have a “wife” that left Him for other gods:

“I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. But when you had eaten and were satisfied, you became proud and forgot Me” (13:6).

She said, “I’ll run after other lovers and sell myself to them for food and water, for clothing of wool and linen, and for olive oil and drinks” (2:5).

“She went out to look for her lovers but forgot all about Me,” says the LORD (2:13).

“For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold” (2:8a).

“They deserted me for Baal, giving themselves to that shameful idol” (9:10).

“She gave all My gifts to Baal” (2:8b).

“Your love vanishes like the morning mist and disappears like dew in the sunlight . . . You broke My covenant and betrayed My trust” (6:4,7).

“Though I wrote for them ten thousand precepts of My law, they are regarded as a strange thing” (8:12).

“Like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me” (6:7).

“They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises” (7:4).

“For their hearts are like an oven as they approach their plotting; their anger smolders all night, in the morning it burns like a flaming fire” (7:6).

“Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria” (7:11).

“I trained them and strengthened their arms, but they plot evil against Me. They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow” (7:15,16).

“For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey all alone; Ephraim has hired lovers” (8:9).

Calls to Return

In the midst of the case against Israel, the voice of Hosea rises issuing calls to return to God. These calls are founded upon the faithful, merciful character of God. Surely Hosea knew something about showing mercy to an unfaithful person!

“Come, let us RETURN to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge Him. As surely as the sun rises, He will appear; He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth” (6:1-3).

“RETURN, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for your sins have brought you down. Bring your confessions, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer You our praises. Assyria cannot save us, nor can our warhorses. Never again will we say to the idols we have made, ‘You are our gods.’ No, in You alone do the orphans find mercy” (14:1-3).

Sadly, this “return to the LORD” did not happen in the lifetime of Hosea the prophet. Thus, in the years after he died, the Northern

Kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians. This ultimate punishment for disobedience had been spelled out in the original covenant Yahweh made with Israel (see Deuteronomy 28). In 722 BC, the Northern Kingdom (Israel) came to an end. The historical account of the end is found in 2Kings 17.

God Restores

Yet, the book of Hosea does not stop with the “end” of Israel. Instead, God points forward to a future day of restoration.

“Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy. For someday the people will follow me. I, the LORD, will roar like a lion. And when I roar, my people will return trembling from the west. Like a flock of birds, they will come from Egypt. Trembling like doves, they will return from Assyria. And I will bring them home again,” says the LORD (11:8-11).

The LORD says, “Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; My love will know no bounds, for My anger will be gone forever. I will be to Israel like a refreshing dew from heaven. Israel will blossom like the lily; it will send roots deep into the soil like the cedars in Lebanon. Its branches will spread out like beautiful olive trees, as fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon. My people will again live under my shade. They will flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines. They will be as fragrant as the wines of Lebanon” (14:4-7).

Thus, the picture of Hosea buying Gomer back from the slave market, bringing her home and restoring her (ch.3) now finds its parallel. God promises to someday redeem Israel, bringing her out of captivity and restoring her dignity and beauty . . . and most of all, reuniting her heart to His in a new and permanent covenant relationship.

Postscript: Hosea pictured a very glorious restoration of Israel. While certain aspects of this restoration have happened in the 2,700 years since Hosea (returns from captivity, resettling in the land, recovery of national identity, even the existence of Israel as a nation today), the ultimate fulfillment of his vision of restoration

awaits the millennial kingdom of Messiah, yet future. All the prophets contain visions of a time when Messiah will establish His kingdom on earth, with the center in a renewed, righteous and restored Israel. Many scholars believe that this “millennial kingdom” will be established in the 1,000 years prior to the new heavens and new earth (see Revelation 20 for the 1,000 year period, followed by the eternal kingdom of Revelation 21,22).

Additional Notes on Gomer

Gomer’s Role

Gomer was the ‘promiscuous woman’ Hosea married. She would break her marriage vows and commit adultery against Hosea. She gave birth to one legitimate and two illegitimate children, leaving Hosea to raise them. Gomer broke Hosea’s heart. Yet, he married her trusting in God for His bigger story. This marriage depicted the impact of Israel’s spiritual adultery against Yahweh. As the people of Israel watched Hosea’s pain, they would see God’s pain and His broken heart. Unfaithfulness and betrayal are painful to every human heart . . . and they are painful to the heart of God!

Gomer’s name means “full of idolatry.” Her father’s name, Diblaim,” means “full of sensuality. Gomer probably learned about sensuality and unfaithfulness from her own father. She would learn the opposite from Hosea, her faithful husband.

Her Feminine Strengths

Gomer used her strengths to do life her own, self-willed way. Hosea had chosen her to be cherished and loved ‘just because’ (not because she deserved it). He had blessed her, provided for her and adorned her. She could have used her strengths to love her husband and bless her children. Instead, she became proud and decided to use her gifts and beauty to pursue other lovers. She satisfied her own desires and invited other men to be intimate with her (just as Israel took their blessings from God and went their own way, worshiping false gods).

Gomer returned home to give birth to 2 illegitimate children. God told Hosea to name the daughter “Lo-ruhamma” (not loved). God was saying that He would no longer show love or pity to Israel. The illegitimate son was to be named “Lo-ammi” (not my people). Israel was no longer God’s people, and he was no longer going to be their God. After the birth of these children, it seems that Gomer left the home, intending to never return.

God on Display

God was put on display through the love of Hosea for Gomer. Eventually, when her lovers began to replace her, she had no one else to turn to. She became destitute and homeless. She was worthless, helpless and hopeless. Her only choice was to offer herself for sale as a slave, hoping that someone would buy her and care for her. She never expected that her husband, Hosea, would show up that day to purchase her and take her back home! Hosea pictures our relentless, loving Savior. In fact, the name “Hosea” means “Salvation.” God had commanded Hosea to redeem Gomer, take her home, love her again, care for her, bind up her wounds and bring healing to her soul *and* restoration to their marriage. Wow! What a picture of God’s ridiculous love for us.

How God Used Her Life

Gomer represents *each one of us*. From God’s point of view, all of humanity has strayed from Him. We each wander away in small and big ways, to find out if life is more satisfying apart from Him. Yet, God has paid the redemption price through His Son, Jesus Christ, to buy us back to Himself.

Often, it takes a wake-up call to hear His voice calling out our name. When we respond to His love, He begins to restore the broken places in our lives and to walk with us through the rest of life. Gomer shows us that there is no *shame* when standing in the light of God’s loving gaze. The longer I stand in His gaze, the more I can see how my identity has, in the past, been shaped by other voices. As I learn about His love, He exchanges those other voices with His true and gracious view of me. This beautiful story of God’s relentless, ridiculous love gives me hope! God told Hosea that in time, his illegitimate daughter would be called “loved” and his illegitimate son would be called “My people.” God has already written a grand divine story, and all who believe in Him are a part of it. When we respond to His love, we also get new names: “Loved.” “Son or Daughter of God.”

Discussion Questions

1. How has the story of Hosea and Gomer impacted you?
2. What stands out most to you about the character of God as you reflect on the book of Hosea? Are you surprised by His character?
3. How does Hosea’s faithful love challenge you to be faithful?