

November 2

Scriptures: Read Hosea 1, 2, 3 & 4

Key Verse: “I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.”
(Hosea 2:20)

Overview

Hosea and his wife parallel the relationship of God, the divine husband, with Israel, the sinful harlot. Some find it hard to believe that God would ask one of His prophets to marry a harlot, so they propose a theory that she was pure at the time of marriage and only afterward fell into sin. This position is based upon the consideration that since Israel had been pure in her youth, Gomer must likewise have been pure at the time of their marriage (since their marriage parallels God and Israel. This is not a true parallel, however, for even before the redemption of the children of Israel from Egypt and before the institution of the covenant with God, they were idolatrous and played the harlot in Egypt; this is why they so easily backslid in the wilderness by worshipping the golden calf (cf. Ezek. 16:3; 23:3, 8, 19-21; Ex. 32:1-8). Therefore, if one is to use this parallel, it follows that before Hosea married Gomer, she was a harlot. At the time of their marriage, she would have repented of her evil ways but later on she would become dissatisfied and return to lead the type of life she had before marriage. It is likely that she was among the temple prostitutes who were employed by some of the Canaanite pagan cults.

After their marriage and before she became unfaithful to Hosea, she bore him three children who were given names with symbolic meanings to communicate God’s messages to Israel. The first son’s name, “Jezreel”, means “God sows” or “scatters”, and likely signifies that after God would punish Israel by scattering (or “sowing”) them in captivity, He would bring forth something good—a purified and righteous remnant. “Jezreel” was the name of a fertile valley and a town connected with past sins of Israel, including the undue ravish with which Jehu had shed much blood when he took the kingdom from Ahab (cf. I Kings 21; 2 Kings 10:7, 11). Their second child’s name “Lo-Ruhamah” means “no mercy, pity, or compassion”. This signified that God would soon turn His back on them when they would cry out for deliverance from the coming Assyrians. In contrast, when the Assyrians attacked the Southern Kingdom of Judah, God was merciful (cf. 2 Kings 19:32-37).

The name of Gomer’s third child, “Lo-Ammi”, meaning “not My people”, signified that God had rejected them because of their apostasy and spiritual adultery. Although they were of the fleshly seed of Abraham, they were not true Israelites. There was, however, a small faithful remnant from the Northern tribes (cf. Rom. 9:6-8; 11:1-5), but by this time most of them had moved to the Southern Kingdom. Amid this dark picture, Hosea prophesies hope for the future (1:10-11; 2:1). In the plan of God, the covenant blessings promised to Abraham would indeed be fulfilled. The Apostle Peter made it clear to the early church that the only way to become the people of God is through belief in Jesus the Messiah (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Chapter two describes both the attitude of Hosea toward his unfaithful wife and that of God toward Israel. Her sin of harlotry was condemned, yet He loved her and desired her to return to Him, whereupon He would graciously forgive her and take her back. He gave her many warnings,

but they were of no avail. Israel (Gomer) sought the necessities of life from her lovers (idols) and not from her husband, the Lord. Instead of giving the credit and thanks to God for all the blessings she received, she gave credit to her lovers, the idols (2:12). With so much provocation, the Lord had to punish Israel. All her good things were destroyed by the Assyrian invasion (Isa. 10:5-6). This chapter, like the previous one, ends on a note of hope, for after God has judged her He will draw her unto Himself and she will return and be forever faithful to Him and have a close relationship with Him. This will be ultimately fulfilled when the Bride of Christ is betrothed to Him forever in His new and glorious Kingdom (2:14-23).

Chapter three illustrates the great love of God. While Israel was still in sin, He redeemed her, just as Hosea bought his estranged wife back from the slavery into which her sin had led her. The life of seclusion and separation (exile) from all those things that had once ensnared Israel (and Gomer) would bring her to repentance. Only after a certain period of probation, wherein Gomer would have to prove her faithfulness, would Hosea restore her to the full privileges due a wife. This chapter also ends with hope, for “in the latter days” the true Israel will arise. They will obey and seek not only God the Father but also “David their king” (3:5), who is the Messiah, our Lord Jesus.

A new collection of prophecies begins in chapter four. The Lord, through Hosea, declares many accusations against Israel. He shows how they deliberately opposed Him, rejected Him, and chose to disobey His laws. Their stubbornness and rebellion against God by worshipping idols would lead them to fall and bring shame and punishment. In the Northern Kingdom, some from the house of Levi, who had been priests of God, had become cultic priests when Jeroboam instituted calf worship. They knew better but chose to reject the knowledge of the truth; therefore, the Lord rejected them, and they too would be punished and put to shame (4:6, 9). During his rebuke of Israel, Hosea takes this opportunity to warn Judah, the Southern Kingdom, not to participate in the idolatry of the northern tribes (represented by the largest tribe of Ephraim) nor go to her pagan shrines in Gilgal or “Beth Aven”. “Beth Aven” (house of wickedness) was Hosea’s rendition of “Beth-el” (house of God), which had become a centre for calf worship (cf. 2 Kings 10:29). Idolatry was so much a part of Ephraim that the Lord had given them up to suffer the full consequences of their sin (cf. Matt. 15:14).

Prayer

Thank ‘You, Lord, for ‘Your rich grace, that even while we were in sin, having our back turned to You, You would still extend Your love and forgiveness to us. We embrace Your love and forgiveness today.