

Hosea'S Prophecy (Part One)

Hosea 1:1-2:23

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Hosea has been called the “deathbed prophet of Israel” because his was the last prophecy before Israel, the Northern Kingdom, fell to Assyria about 722 B.C. His ministry followed a golden age in the northern kingdom, with a peace and prosperity not seen since the days of King Solomon. Sadly, this propensity led to moral decay, and Israel forsook God to worship idols.

God instructed Hosea to marry a harlot, whose unfaithfulness to her husband would serve as an example of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. Already in this description, we can associate it and connect it with our nation today, and what is going on.

Hosea then explained God’s complaint against Israel, and warned of the punishment that would come unless the people return to the Eternal and remain faithful to Him. The book shows the depth of God’s love for His people, a love that tolerates no rivals at all.

The prophecy of Hosea comes first within the Biblical order of the minor prophets. It is not the first of the twelve, either to be written nor spoken, but it is first in regard to its message. Hosea was a preacher during the reigns of four successive kings of Judah, during the oldest and most southern of the two Israelitish states, and during the reign of Jeroboam II, one of the kings of the northern state of Israel.

The book of Hosea was written between about 753 to 722 B.C., and was primarily addressed to the northern kingdom. We find the details beginning in Hosea 1:1.

Hosea 1:1 The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

We are told nothing about Hosea’s life during those years, except the heartbreaking story with which the prophecy begins. Overall, he probably had a long ministry, possibly as much as 50 or 60 years. It is logical to conclude that on one occasion, probably early in his life, the Eternal came to Hosea to ask him to do a very difficult thing. God may have said something like this:

Hosea, I want you to marry a woman who is going to be unfaithful to you, but

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to whom you are nevertheless going to be faithful. You will love her, but she will disgrace your love. I am asking you to do this because I want to send a powerful message to Israel by your marriage. It is going to be symbolic, a purposeful lesson. You are going to represent Me. The woman is going to represent My people. The reason she is going to run away and be unfaithful is that this is the way My people act in the covenant marriage that I have established with them. You are going to be faithful, because I am faithful to Israel, even though she dishonors My name.

That is a paraphrase, or a supposing, of what God may have said to Hosea, which we can surmise from what goes on from here. God may have said something like that—we are not sure—but we are sure that the intent was there

Hosea married a woman named Gomer, and he tells us about it in the prophecy's opening words.

Hosea 1:2-3 When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord." [So we see there the reason why God is doing this: Israel is departing from Him, and He had to make a very strong point to warn them.] So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

The society of Hosea's time was much like our own today. The lessons of his story are those we also need to hear. The story of Hosea anticipates the manifestation of the Father and the Son's love, as seen in Christ's relationship with His bride, His church.

Hosea, whose name means *salvation*, lived at the same time as Isaiah, who prophesied to Judah in the south. He lived at the same time as Amos, who visited the northern kingdom of Israel from the rural area of Tekoa. It is from these three prophets that we learn what the characteristics of the age were.

For many people, it was a time of a relatively good economy, much like what we have seen in our own lives. It was an age of luxurious materialism, visible religious activity, and relative freedom; even a supposed national security in which politics, law, and religion all seemed to be changing and beginning to be in a state of flux.

Amos is especially clear in diagnosing the spirit. Nevertheless, as Isaiah, Amos, and

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Hosea show, it was the worst of times, because the hearts of the people were empty. Religion was shallow and corruption was rampant at every turn. Every intention was only evil, continually. In particular, law was manipulated to the advantage of the rich and powerful. Much, if not most, of the religious activity was mere show. Hosea's warning was that the people had been unfaithful to God, just as an adulterous wife is unfaithful to her husband.

God had blessed His people and prospered them, both materially and spiritually, just as He has this nation for so many decades and centuries. But they had been living only for pleasure, and they had abandoned hard work, morality, and integrity, in order to live for themselves. The attitude of the society of Hosea's time was very much like our own. However, most people denied it, and they saw only the prosperity and the superficial religious activity.

Even some thoughtful and converted people today, who probe below the surface, can see the parallel with our nation. There is always the majority who just do not see it, because they are too heavily wrapped up in the world. They believe that what is true of our society in general is not true of people who associated with God's church, but are we all truly a part of the faithful remnant, in the midst of an otherwise corrupt world? We must ask ourselves.

Even Herbert Armstrong said that he thought that possibly only half of the church at Worldwide, in the days of its peak (the '70s and '80s), were converted. Hopefully, that percentage is higher with us. But we should ask, just to be cautious and careful, whether we truly are dedicated to our Savior and our Creator.

There is always the majority who do not see it. Interestingly, the book of Hosea is specifically written to those who consider themselves to be spiritual. It is not written to those who are blind. It is written to those who give "lip-service" to God, while actually pursuing their own comfort, excitement, and entertainment.

Apart from the fact that the story of Hosea's marriage is told as a real story and rings true, we know God does sometimes lead His children into situations that are parallel, if not identical, to this. We live in an age where everything good is interpreted in terms of pleasure, economic success, and power. When many people think of spiritual blessing, they think of it in those terms.

Many professing Christians believe that to be led by God and to be blessed by God means that we are guaranteed to be happy and successful in this physical life. In reality, if a Christian does not appear to be happy and successful, there are plenty of people

who are ready, like Job's counselors, to judge him or her on what is seriously wrong. That is shallow thinking and shallow Christianity, because God does not always lead His people into ways that we would naturally regard as happy and filled with success. He disciplines His children as a loving father should.

Was Jesus always happy? He was undoubtedly filled with joy and all of the other fruits of the spirit, but He was also called a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Was Jesus extraordinarily successful? Not by society's standards or by any standards that might have been applied to Him by anyone living at that time. He was not dirt poor, but He was probably middle class of that time, not wealthy. He had some wealthy relatives (Joseph of Arimathea).

God sometimes lead His children to do things that afterward involve them in great distress. We are able to learn something of God's love for us through Hosea's difficulty because the story of Hosea is, in type, the story of ourselves, as the betrothed bride of Christ. But we must not take this analogy too far because it fits the church in some respects, but not all. However, it fits the Israelites perfectly.

As a type, Israel is Gomer, and Christ the Eternal is Hosea. He knew that she would prove unfaithful, again and again, and he knew that she would forsake him, yet still, he loved her. However, when Christ the Eternal married Israel, Israel had been cleaned up. He did not marry a prostitute; He did not marry a whore. Christ did not marry a harlot initially. Israel became a harlot because of her idolatrous adultery with other nations. You find that described in chapter 16 of the book of Ezekiel.

The unfaithfulness of Israel calls for a permanent remedy, which will come in the faithfulness of Christ to the Father, and the faithfulness with which Christ then works through the spirit in His people. God's love for Israel foreshadowed Christ's love for the church.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

So there is an application to the church here. Christ has purchased us for Himself to be His bride, and He has done this even though He knew in advance that we would

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sometimes prove unfaithful. Christ said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

In the way of a definition, let me give you some examples in scripture of spiritual adultery. One, those who reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior are guilty of spiritual adultery.

Matthew 16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign...

Rather than believe that God is who He says He is, people want to see a miraculous exhibition as a sign. That shows not only a lack of faith, but it shows spiritual adultery, because it is a rejection of what Christ Himself has said.

Mark 7:9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."

So if people reject what He says, they reject Him. That is adultery, spiritually.

The second way: those who choose friendship with the world are guilty of spiritual adultery.

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

I John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Three: those who follow false teaching are guilty of spiritual adultery. For members of the church, it is called *apostasy*.

Revelation 2:20-23 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery

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with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

That is a dire warning to the Church of God. Do not allow ourselves to move into spiritual adultery or physical adultery.

The book of Revelation symbolizes the ultimate end of all opposition to God when the angels announce the fall of Babylon. The spiritual adultery spoken of here includes sexual immorality. Satan promotes sexuality in everything in the world: religions, education, and entertainment.

Revelation 19:2 For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.

God takes out His just vengeance of the religious harlot, who murdered the saints. But the great harlot is condemned for twin crimes: she corrupted the earth through enticing pleasure, and she persecuted and murdered God's servants. For this, she is called an adulteress; she is called "the great harlot."

I wanted to establish with those scriptures some of the ways that people are guilty of spiritual adultery.

Getting back to Hosea...at the beginning, the story is really Gomer's story. So what does the prophecy teach about her? It tells us that children were born to Gomer and how they were named to suggest what would happen to her as the result of her unfaithfulness. It was a warning to Israel, whom she symbolizes.

The first child, at least, was Hosea's, and not another man's. No doubt Hosea married a woman who was pure at the time, though he knew the outcome of God's prediction. Maybe Hosea and Gomer even lived together happily for years. In any case, during the early period, three children were born into the family: a son, a daughter, and another son. When each was born, God intervened to give the children symbolic names.

Hosea 1:3-5 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Then the Lord said to him: "Call his name

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Jezeel, for in a little while, I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. It shall come to pass in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

God named the first child Jezreel. Jezreel means *God scatters*. We can imagine that when Hosea first heard the name, he thought the Eternal had made a mistake, because in Hebrew, Jezreel is almost identical both in spelling and sound to Israel, which means “God perseveres.”

Scattering has a connection with sowing, as in planting seed. So Jezreel also implies the meaning *God sows*. Here in Hosea, we find that God sows destruction, and after Israel repents, God will sow restoration.

Hosea 2:23 Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, “You are My people!” And they shall say, “You are my God!”

That is an indication of future restoration.

So Jezreel, meaning *scattered*, is a word of judgment. God was revealing that He was soon to scatter Israel throughout the world for her unfaithfulness. This is happening again today.

There are three areas to which this specific prophecy applies. First, there is a political application to the house of Jehu, for the massacre at Jezreel. This story is found in I Kings 21-22. In the days of Ahab, before Jehu, that wicked king had wanted a certain vineyard that belonged to Naboth, who came from the valley of Esdraelon, south of Mount Carmel, called Jezreel. Ahab first offered Naboth another piece of land for his vineyard. When Naboth refused to give up his vineyard, because it was a family inheritance, Ahab offered him money for it. But Naboth would not sell.

So on the advice of his wife Jezebel, Ahab had Naboth killed and then took the property. God pronounced disaster on Ahab's family because of this, saying that judgment would come on them in the valley of Jezreel, where Naboth had been slain. Ahab himself fell dead at Ramoth Gilead. Jezebel was slain in Samaria. But hundreds of others were struck down at Jezreel, through Jehu, who then assumed the throne. In this judgment, Jehu is fulfilling God's prophecy on the house of Ahab.

But the terrible massacre of the family, friends, prophets and hanger-on's of the wicked Ahab, by which Jehu ascended to the throne, was itself a horror and called for judgment, too. Although God passed over Jehu himself, because he was God's tool in judging Ahab, God indicates in this prophecy that Jehu's descendants, the house of Jehu, will be judged.

A second and fuller application of the prophecy is to Israel itself. Jezreel means *God scatters*. Since Hosea is prophesying not long before the fall of Samaria, and the captivity of the people of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., he is really predicting the scattering of the Israelites that began in 722 B.C., and then continued through successive disasters and deportations in the south. You cannot help but wonder if this does not apply, maybe even directly or specifically, to our nation today. Some of this, specifically, will happen to the nations of Israel today.

Third, this is an application to those other than physical Israelites. When we read prophecy, we tend to apply it only to others, but we should apply it to ourselves as well. The principle involved here is that when *anyone* rejects God, nothing good comes of it, and he is cursed.

Hosea is a story of God's faithfulness and love, but one expression of His love is discipline. Just as the love of a father for a son will cause him to discipline that son when he is disobedient... God's disciple of Jonah comes to mind. Jonah ran away from God, but he never arrived at his intended destination. When anyone runs away from God, he always pays dearly for it. But when he lives according to God's will, he is blessed abundantly. Not always physically, but definitely spiritually: an abundance of blessings, spiritually.

God is faithful, but one negative expression of his faithfulness is that when we run away from Him, things will not go well. In fact, God guarantees that they will not go well. We may think that we are going to satisfy ourselves by seizing hold of the world and its pleasures, but God will eventually cause the pleasure to turn to dust in our mouths, even as we devour it greedily.

The Apostle John put it this way:

I John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

When Gomer's second child, a daughter, was born, we are not told that she was born to Hosea, as was the case with the first child. This indicates that by this time, Gomer had already been unfaithful to Hosea, and the daughter is not his child. This is supported by Hosea 1:2: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry." The first one was his, but the next one, and the next one, were not.

Hosea 2:4-5 I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully.

It is quite remarkable that Hosea remained faithful to God, and did not chastise her or demand a divorce, which was his right by law. Instead, he continued in the marriage, naming the second child Lo-Ruhamah, as the Eternal directed.

Hosea 1:6-7 And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: "Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away. Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horsemen."

Lo-Ruhamah is composed of two Hebrew words. *Lo* meaning *no* or *not*, and *Ruhamah* meaning *pity* or *loved* or *mercy*. God was saying, "We are going to call this child *not pitied*, because the time is coming when the sin of the people will cause me to have no pity on them."

Throughout the Bible, God is repeatedly referred to as a God of great love and constant pity, or mercy, or love. The Psalms repeatedly express these attributes of God.

Psalms 86:5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.

Psalms 103:13 As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.

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In Psalm 136, we are told 26 times that the love or mercy of God endures forever.

But when we insist on our own way, and persevere in our sin, the time eventually comes when the daily mercies of the Eternal are withdrawn from us. If we persist, we are temporarily turned over to our folly, so that we might learn to turn back to Him.

When we think of this prophecy in relation to Israel, and we look at Israel's history as recorded in scripture, we see the great suffering that the Israelites brought upon themselves down through the ages. The name *not-pitied* is an appropriate description of them.

Hosea 1:8-9 Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. [The third and last child was a son.] Then God said: "Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not My people, and I will not be your God."

Lo-Ammi is a compound name composed of the negative *Lo*, meaning *no* or *not*, and the noun *Ammi*, meaning *my people*. God was saying "The time is coming when the Israelites will no longer be My people."

In the future of the Israelites, upon repentance and the acceptance of Christ's blood, will again be God's people. But in this present age, God's people are those who have entered into the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ, that is, the church composed of both physical Israelites and Gentiles.

Ephesians 2:11-13 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands [the Uncircumcision being the Gentiles and the Circumcision being the Jews]—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Physical Israel had a choice of being of the black and dark night of Egypt or in the Eternal. Today spiritual Israel, the church, has a choice of being of the world or in Christ Jesus. So the book of Hosea shows the course of God's judgments with regard to physical and spiritual Israel. Hosea applies even to this age, because some of those who have profited by God's redemptive acts in Christ have proven unfaithful.

Paul writes in his letter to the Romans after having agonized over God's stern dealing with Israel, showing that God has broken off the Israelites, like branches of an olive tree, so that the Gentiles might be grafted in.

Romans 11:17-22 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. [There is a call for humility, realizing that we do nothing; God does it all when calling us.] You will say the, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

That is basically what God did to Israel: He cut them off because of their unfaithfulness.

Paul's point is not that we may lose our salvation, but rather that we are to make certain that we really are converted, through faith in and obedience to Christ. If we are believers, we are to be certain not to lose that place of blessing that we have by grace and also suffer chastisement.

II Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.

Since we do stumble, we can deduce that sometimes we fail at our due diligence to live God's way of life, to continue in God's goodness.

Hosea's story is a story of God's faithfulness. Hosea was to represent God, and he was to be faithful in his love for Gomer, to show that God is faithful in His love for us. So far, however, the story is only one of judgment. The names *scattered*, *not pitied*, and *not my people*, were the names of Hosea's children, all negative in context. But this is just the beginning, and the beginning of the story is a story of disobedience and judgment.

God is going to change Jezreel, with the meaning *scattered*, to Jezreel, with the meaning *planted*, the same word in Hebrew. God will take His people and plant them in their land

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again. Jezreel has these two meanings, because the same gesture with which a person would throw something away—a backward flip of the hand—is a gesture which a farmer would also plant grain with.

Eventually, God will change the name Lo-Ruhamah to Ruhamah, dropping the negative. Instead of *not pitied*, she will be pitied, or find mercy, or be loved. God will have pity on His people again.

Finally, He will change Lo-Ammi to Ammi, *not my people* to *my people*. They will be God's people again in that day.

The three verses from Hosea 1:10 to Hosea 2:1 are a millennial blessing on Israel. Here is the way God puts it in Hosea 1:10. This section in my Bible says "The Restoration of Israel."

Hosea 1:10-11 "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.' Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!

Hosea 2:1 Say to your brethren, 'My people,' and to your sisters, 'Mercy is shown.'"

That is a story of all who have ever been called into God's church. Originally, scattered, not pitied, not my people; but now in God's church, planted, pitied, the people of God. And pitied could be either loved or mercy.

It must have been a terrible shock to Hosea, that first night when he came home to find Lo-Ammi crying in the corner, and Jezreel and Lo-Ruhamah sitting silently at the table, unfed. Gomer was out cavorting; she was too busy partying to take care of her own children. She was a narcissist. Hosea had been told what was coming; the Eternal had revealed it to him. He had even known of Gomer's adulteries, and had asked the children to plead with their mother, after his own cries had proved useless. But her departure was still a shock, and now, if it had not happened before, Hosea's heart was broken.

Continuing on, concerning God's unfaithful people:

Hosea 2:2-5 "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.'"

What was Hosea to do? What is God to do with this nation of ours, who has done exactly the same thing stated here? What would Hosea say to Gomer or do for her that he had not already said and done repeatedly? What does the grief of Hosea teach us about the grief of God?

Of course, God does not grieve exactly as we grieve, because He controls all things, and always works them out in accordance with His good pleasure. Nevertheless, there is a parallel between God's feelings and ours. In this case, the entire story is designed to show the nature of God's love toward those who have proven unfaithful to Him.

To the philosophers of Greece, their god or gods were unfeeling, even incapable of any feelings whatever. Their word for this was *apatheia*, from which we get the word *apathy*. That is the way they looked at their gods: apathetic. But the Greek god is not the God of the Bible: in the Bible, God weeps for his people, yearns for them, and works for their deliverance. He also remembers the past and grieves over it.

Jeremiah portrays Him as saying:

Jeremiah 2:2 (NIV 1984) "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown."

God grieves because now the Israelites have forsaken Him, but God does not give up. He works to turn sorrow into joy, and the tragedy of unfaithfulness into the triumph of love.

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Gomer must have been a woman of beauty and personal charm, but her desires were shallow. As she embarked on her path of sin, she was soon to see where these shallow ideals would take her. In this present culture, people tend to glamorize adultery. If you watch TV at all, you cannot get away from it; it is even shown in the commercials sometimes. It is shown on the news, it is shown in the movies; it is shown everywhere. The songs on the radio have it, and on the Internet. It is the primary product of Hollywood, but the Word of God tells of life as it is, and Gomer is an example of life in this area.

Gomer left Hosea first for pleasure, and second for the material things she imagined her lovers could provide. In Hosea 2:5, Hosea quotes her as saying, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink." I cannot help but think of all that we are importing from China, as if we are longing and lusting for all of those things, because it costs less and we can get more.

What a pity that this poor woman had not learned to value the pure and faithful love of Hosea, above these mere earthly pleasures. For not valuing such love, she was bound to lose it, and the material things too. What happens to a woman who lives this kind of life? Her life is all downhill, always; a deterioration, always; a degeneration—and that is what we are seeing in our country today, and all of the nations of Israel.

The first year, she will be living with a man who is able to take care of her fairly well. In contemporary terms, we would say that he is able to provide for her with amusement and expensive clothes. But the year after that, after the first lover has grown tired of her, and she is a bit jaded, she will be living with a man who is only able to provide her with occasional fun and mediocre clothing. The year after that, it will be a one-night stand, and worn-out clothing. Eventually, she will be pulling something out of the trash heap, and that is what happened to Hosea's wife. She dropped lower and lower on the social ladder of the city of Samaria, until the time came when she was living with a man who was not even able to take care of her. They were probably both addicts; we know that it mentions that he supplied her with drink, so probably an alcoholic as well. The loser could not provide her with enough food to eat, clothes to wear, or booze to drink. She was hungry and was clothed in rags.

The moral of the story is, when we run away from God, things go from bad to worse. It does not necessarily happen within this time frame; it varies.

One might think that this is the point where God says, "You ran away from me, you may be sorry, but I hope you are miserable." That is the way people usually reason, but that is not the way God thinks. In time, even though God is merciful, sin does lead to

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destruction. Later on in the story, Gomer will be deprived of things, but the first thing God does here is to intervene in order that the child of God will not lack for necessities.

Hosea 2:5-8 “For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.’ Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.’ For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold—which they prepared for Baal.”

Here is how the events must have unfolded in Hosea's story. We have to reconstruct it from the incidental things the prophet says. God must have spoken to Hosea to ask:

“Hosea, do you know that your wife is living in the poorest area of the city, and that she is living with a man who is not even able to take care of her?”

“Yes,” said Hosea.

“Well,” God said, “I want you to go down to the marketplace, buy the food and clothing she needs, and see that she gets it, because I will not totally abandon my people when they run from me.”

It might have been hard, but Hosea did what God commanded. As we read the story carefully, we are struck with the sharp sense of sadness of the moment. Hosea must have brought the food, gone to the area of the city where his wife was living, and then looked up, not his wife, but the womanizer that she was shackled up with. Continuing with what the conversation may have been:

“Are you the man who is currently living with Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim?”

The womanizer said, *“What business is it of yours?”*

"I am Hosea, her husband."

The womanizer must have drawn back, thinking that Hosea was there for revenge. It would certainly be natural for him to think that.

But Hosea said, "I am not here to cause trouble. I understand that you are not able to take care of her, so I brought these things because I love her. Here, take them and see that she does not lack anything."

The womanizer would have thought, "What a fool this man is!" But he took the groceries, the scoundrel that he was, and then went to Gomer and said, "Look what I brought you," taking the credit for it. And she, being the foolish woman that she was, believed him and threw her arms around his neck and thanked him, with the thanks that should have been given to Hosea. Hosea may very well have been hanging around in the shadows to make sure Gomer received what he provided because he comments on the nature of her folly.

Does human love act like that? Does human love take valuable money, and spend it on a difficult, immoral woman? Not very often, but this is the way God acts constantly. We spurn His love and squander His resources as a people, but still He loves and provides for us. But that is not to say that He will not discipline us (speaking in general terms of our nation and the nations of Israel in general).

Love is of God, and it is infinite. And so it was with Hosea, as a type of Christ. Because he was playing the part, representing the part, that God has played with us. Does God really act like that? Does He love us, provide for us, even while we are running away? The answer to this story, and indeed to the entire Bible, is that He does, indeed.

When we see this love at work, through the heart of Hosea, we may wonder if God is really like that. But everything in the Word and experience shows that He is. He gives man the trees of the forest and the iron in the ground. He gives to the man the brains to make an ax from the iron, to cut down the tree, and fashion it into a crucifixion stake. He gives man the ability to make a hammer and nails, and when man has the stake and the hammer and the nails, the Eternal allows man to take hold of Him and bring Him to that stake. And He stretches out His hands on it, and allows man to nail Him to that stake. In so doing, He takes the sins of man on Himself and makes it possible for those who have despised and rejected Him to come to Him and know the joy of sins removed and

forgiven; to know the assurance of pardon and eternal life and to enter into the prospect of the hope of glory with Him forever. This is our God, and there is none like Him.

But this is not the end of the story, because although it is true that God provides for us and may pursue us, even when we run away, this does not mean that our way will automatically be smooth. As if God were to say, "I want you to come to Me, but if you do not want to come, I will still pave the way for your disobedience and aid you in it." Of course, He is not going to do that.

It does not work that way, and the love of God is a pursuing, faithful love, but it is also a disciplining love. Consequently, when Gomer failed to perceive the hand of Hosea in the provision for her necessities, the next step was for God to begin to withhold even these things from her. The outline of the second chapter of Hosea is conveyed to us at this point by a threefold repetition of the word *therefore*, in verses 6, 9, and 14. Each use introduces something that God does when we refuse to come back to Him.

First, God says that He will hedge up Gomer's path with thorns.

Hosea 2:6-7 Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now."

This word *hedge* in verse 6 reminds us of the entirely contrasting, but instructive use, of the same word in the story of Job. The book of Job begins with a description of who Job was, followed immediately by a scene in heaven, in which Satan came with the angels to present himself before God. God initiated a conversation with Satan, which is recorded in Job 1, in which He called his attention to Job.

Job 1:8-11 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

We know the end of this story, but the last part of this retort is untrue: Job did not curse God, even when his substance was taken away from him, and his sons and daughters were killed. Nevertheless, we notice that the first part was true, and that it contains a great admission. Satan imputed wrong motives to Job: He implied that Job served God only because God protected him. But the true part, the interesting part in view of the story of Hosea, is that God had been protecting Job by setting up a hedge around him—and He did it for Gomer, as He began to protect her, in a sense. He did it for Job in the entirely opposite way. Both were meant to protect.

Satan was admitting that he had been attacking Job, either himself or one of the other fallen angels, but he had been unsuccessful because of the protecting shield that God throws around all who put their trust in Him. Later in the story, God lowers the hedge a bit to allow Satan to touch Job's property, but not Job himself, to show that Job truly loved God, but not merely for the protection that He had been providing.

However, the point of the story is that God controlled even the level of these temptations and did not allow Job to be tempted more than he was able to bear.

Hebrews 2:18 For in that He himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

So Christ knows exactly what we feel with our temptations and when and how to help us.

Contrast this with the case of Gomer. In the case of Job, God set up a hedge against Satan for Job's protection. In the case of Gomer, the same God, who would use the hedge to protect Job, erected a hedge to keep one of His children from the evil thing that she desired. There is the difference: Job desired righteousness, but she desired unrighteousness.

It is similar, in our lives, if you take the talents God has given you and then run away from Him to seek whatever it is you want out of this world. God will first come gently to remind you, that He is the source of the gifts you squandered, and that you are wrong to squander them. But if you will not come to your senses through such a reminder, God will bring you up short so that you will not attain your desires. You may think that you are attaining them, but ultimately, you fail. If you think you are going to get rich through a job that excludes God in a Christian witness, God may let you get close to success and wealth, but it usually will not last long, and God may let you get close enough to see that the seeming rewards are not fulfilling.

He is faithful to His nature and will not allow the one He loves to be destroyed through an idolatrous, adulteress infatuation with this world's idols. In the New Testament, the term *idolatry* is used to designate covetousness.

Ephesians 5:5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

I think that quite often, even those of us in the Church overlook that last commandment against being covetous. But it is one of the Ten, which means that it is a major sin. Covetousness is adulterous infatuation; it is a lustful passion.

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

When we refuse to respond to God's gracious blessings of life's necessities, God begins to remove those necessities. Up until recently, this has not happened on a large scale to this nation, but now it is beginning to happen. There is a rapid deterioration of the quality of our life, and this drought is going to make major changes in our lives if it continues very much longer. That is just one example of the many hundreds that there are, that we could come up with.

In Hosea's story, God has merely withheld the attainment of Gomer's sinful desires, setting a hedge around her. Now God begins to remove the grain, and the wine, the wool and the linen. This change is introduced by the second *therefore*.

Hosea 2:9-13 "Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time and My new wine in its season, and will take back My wool and My linen, given to cover her nakedness. Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall deliver her from My hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her New Moons, her Sabbaths—all her appointed feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she has said, 'These are my wages that my lovers have given me.' So I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. I will punish her for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot." says

the Lord.

When God had first blocked Gomer's path, she said, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now." But she had not done it, and now she must go through hard days.

What a contrast between this and the earlier days of Hosea's and Gomer's courtship. Then, Hosea had showered his goods on her, and had rejoiced with her, at the time of Israel's festivals. By removing these things, Gomer is now to be brought to the place where she will remember the former days, and turn back from her folly.

This brings to mind another case when this also happened. The prodigal son had asked for his proper share of the father's wealth, and it had been given to him. He then went off to squander his wealth, in out-of-control living. He had his fling, but the time came when the money ran out. So he had to hire himself out for hard, physical labor, to someone who could barely afford him. He was sent into the field to feed the pigs. I do not believe there is a nastier job on earth, having smelled a pig sty.

Luke 15:16 And he [the prodigal son] would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

What happened? When he had money, and had settled-in comfortably in his pleasures, he had no thoughts for his father or his father's home. But later, with the pangs of famine gnawing at his insides, he came to his senses, remembered the days of his youth in his father's house and determined to return to him.

Luke 15:17-19 But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servant have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

So he got up and he returned to his father. I will not elaborate on that story, because you know the story very well and the principle is obvious.

We cannot say that every case of deprivation fits these categories. The principle we are looking at has nothing to do with those who are not yet Christians. It does not even have

to do with all who are Christians. Some, like Job, suffer merely so God may be glorified. Whatever the case may be, we must see that we benefit from our knowledge from Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

So we must not take for granted the knowledge we get from Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, the opening of our mind to understand those things.

We come now to the last of the three *therefores* that provide the outline to Hosea chapter 2. We have had a series of *therefores* in which the hand of God's judgment has been pressed down, increasingly more firmly, on Hosea's rebellious and unfaithful wife. She has been hedged in by a wall; she has been deprived of necessities. What further judgment will follow on these inevitable chastisements? Will it be sickness, or pain, or death? It could well be any of these, because the way of wickedness is hard.

But just as we are expecting such things, God opens the hand of His grace and offers hope. Hosea indicates God's plan to restore His marriage with Israel. From verses 14 to 23 of Hosea chapter 2, the Eternal promises millennial blessings on the peoples of Israel.

Hosea 2:14-15 Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.

Achor means *troubling*, and the phrase "Valley of Achor" means "valley of troubling." It occurs three times in the Bible. The first is in Joshua 7:26, in connection with the story of Achan and his sin. When the people of Israel had conquered Jericho, in the first wave of their invasion of the Promised Land, Achan had taken spoil of Jericho that the people had been told by God they were not to do. For this, they lost the next battle at Ai. "What was wrong?" they asked. At last, an investigation was made, and the sin of Achan was discovered and judged. Achan and his family were stoned in the Valley of Achor, which took its name from this incident.

The second time this valley is mentioned is in Isaiah 65:10, when he speaks of a day when it will become a resting place for herds. The third time is in Hosea, and here the place of troubling is to become a place of hope for God's people.

How can a place of such swift judgment be hopeful? How can the destructive troubling be changed? We certainly cannot change it ourselves, but there is One who can and who does. God sets hope before us when all seems mostly lost. He does it by taking our trouble on Himself.

Do you remember those words of Jesus Christ in the final hours of his life? As He thought ahead, His mind was troubled by what was about to take place in the next few hours.

John 12:27 "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I came to this hour."

In John 13:21, we are told that Jesus was troubled in spirit. Why was Jesus troubled? He was troubled in our place. God troubled Him with our sin that we might be saved from the penalty of the law and be brought back to God. It is on the basis of His death for that sin that He can now say to us what is recorded by John:

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives to I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Jesus takes our trouble upon Him. The expression *peace* from the Hebrew *shalom* has a much richer connotation than the English word does, since it conveys not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil, but also the concept of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God. This is often manifested very clearly in the midst of trouble, persecution, and tribulation from the world.

Even in Hosea chapter 2, the chapter of judgment, notice how God pours forth His blessings once again.

Hosea 2:16-23 "And it shall be in that day," says the Lord, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master,' for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground.

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Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely. I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. It shall come to pass in that day that I will answer," says the Lord; "I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer Jezreel. Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' and they shall say, 'You are my God!'"

Hosea 2:23, along with Hosea 1:10, are quoted in Romans 9:25-26 and I Peter 2:10. Paul quoted those Hosea passages to say that both Jews and Gentiles who were called by God will be converted during the church age. Paul extracted from Hosea's prophecy a principle concerning God's gracious plan of salvation, for the church and later for all of mankind.

There is no greater promise than that. What greater hope could possibly be set before us? So when you feel down, and think all is hopeless, hear God as He speaks these words to you, that He mentioned here in Hosea: "I will betroth you to Me forever. I will respond, I will plant, I will have mercy. I will show My love to the one I once called 'not my loved one.'"

God had a marriage relationship with Israel, but Israel turned to other gods, made alliances with other countries, and took on their pagan culture. As a result, physical Israel became Lo-Ruhamah, not having obtained pity or mercy from God, and Lo-Ammi, not God's people or not My loved one. In other words, they were cut off from God; divorced. Today, the Church of God is the Israel of God, and we have become Ruhamah, having obtained mercy, and Ammi, God's people.

Physical Israel was commanded to repent and turn to God, but this will not happen until toward the end of the Great Tribulation, and on into the beginning of the Millennium. At that time, God will have mercy on all Israel. Through the Israel of God, most, if not, of the Gentile nations will eventually enter into a covenant relationship with God, and then all the world will have obtained mercy and be God's people.

The next time we will come to the redemptive work accomplished by Christ in Hosea chapter 3; and the rest of the book illustrates and explains God's assertion and intermittently reminds Israel of their need for repentance.