

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Lesson 05, Chapter 2 Continued

The first 3 verses of Hosea chapter 2 sought to make something very clear about the words that came before it, and those that would follow. It is that the goal (and the outcome) of God's harsh discipline of Israel (symbolized by Gomer) was restoration of relationship and revitalization of blessings, not abolishment of the covenant He had made with them (the Covenant of Moses) nor a divorce from them. It is with this underlying theme and purpose that we are to study and understand the Book of Hosea. I'm sorry to say that the bulk of biblical commentaries on this book ignores these opening verses and instead concludes that God was permanently through with Israel and this opened the door for Him to adopt a new covenant people, the gentile Church, to replace the one He now rejected: Israel. And to adopt a new covenant, replacing the Covenant of Moses. I suppose I could end this thought right here, but the question must be rolling around the minds of at least some you: why would Bible commentators hold such a view that seems so counter to what the Holy Scriptures tell us?

Perhaps the answer is simpler than we might think. The notable Christian Philosopher Douglas Groothuis says this about the subject of biblical truth:

"Truth is a daunting, difficult thing; it is also the greatest thing in the world. Yet we are chronically ambivalent toward it. We seek it... and we fear it. Our better side wants to pursue truth wherever it leads; our darker side balks when the truth begins to lead us anywhere we do not want to go."

Just as the doctrines and traditions of the strange sort of hybrid Hebrew/Canaanite faith that King Jeroboam led the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to adopt were meant to pursue his agenda and not God's truth, so it was that as early as the 4th century the Rome-based leadership of the new gentile faith of Christianity made a fateful decision to create doctrines and traditions that led gentiles to adopt their agenda instead of Scriptural truth. One of the foundational assumptions of these new Romanized Christian doctrines and traditions was that God abolished the covenant He had made with Israel, and transferred the blessings that should have belonged to Israel, instead to the newly created gentiles-only Church. Virtually all doctrine that followed was based

upon that bedrock principle. What that means for us is that there's a lot of undoing to do in order to return us to a truth that most of our brothers and sisters in the faith do not want to hear, because, as Professor Groothuis comments, it takes us where most do not want to go. This same dynamic of being taken where they do not want to go is why Hosea was shunned by the 10 tribes of Israel and it cost them dearly... for millennia. Shunning God's truth brings enormous consequences that may not be immediate, but are certain to come, and can have devastating effects for very long periods of time.

Let's re-read a portion of Hosea chapter 2.

RE-READ HOSEA CHAPTER 2:4 – 15

What we just read is symbolism that is spoken within a literary context consisting of a mix of metaphor and allegory. Therefore, I prefer to think of it more as poem. There is reasonable scholarly debate over whether or not it is actually meant as poem or just bears the earmarks of ancient Hebrew poetry without it necessarily being that. Nevertheless, the backdrop for this interesting poetic narrative is a court case; a judiciary setting. The accuser, judge, and jury are God who is portrayed as the aggrieved husband, Hosea. The accused, the wife, is Israel that is portrayed as the adulterous woman, Gomer. In verse 4 the children of Gomer are added to the mix with God (Hosea) declaring that his children (symbolic of the people of Israel) are to accuse Israel of adultery (at this moment the term Israel cannot mean much else but Israel's leadership). We need to keep in mind that adultery is strictly a human-to-human offense. Adultery in relation to God is but a metaphorical expression because there is no actual marriage between humans and God. As concerns God, then, adultery towards Him means idolatry.

So, this entire scene is meant to represent a seriously bad circumstance between Yehoveh and His people, Israel. However, at this time Israel only refers to the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and not to the 2 tribes of the Southern Kingdom that is called Judah. The statement that "she isn't my wife and I'm not her husband" is not a judgment; it is a statement that when adultery occurs this estrangement between husband and wife is the theoretical condition that it necessarily thrusts both parties into. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we ever hear of such a statement being made as some sort of Hebraic word-formula in a

divorce proceeding. In fact, in this narrative the hope of the husband is to reform and regain a wife that behaves as a wife should. This isn't my conjecture; it is clearly stated in verses 16 and 17 after the series of accusations and threats have concluded. We'll leap ahead there for just a moment.

CJB Hosea 2:16-17 ***¹⁶ "But now I am going to woo her- I will bring her out to the desert and I will speak to her heart. ¹⁷ I will give her her vineyards from there and the Akhor Valley as a gateway to hope. She will respond there as she did when young, as she did when she came up from Egypt.***

I jumped ahead to make this point early in the process of studying this portion of Hosea. The rather standard idea that this is a divorce proceeding is as preposterous as is the popular idea that Hosea was told to go find a prostitute and marry her. This would be breaking God's laws to the max. Prostitutes were, by God's commands, unclean and off limits to men. The thought of a righteous Hebrew male marrying a prostitute was out of the question. The same concerns divorce. Who can forget what we read in Malachi about God's attitude regarding divorce?

CJB Malachi 2:16 ***"For I hate divorce," says ADONAI the God of Isra'el, "and him who covers his clothing with violence," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and don't break faith.***

However, should a divorce occur, a man was not to remarry his former wife. This would especially apply in the case of Hosea and Gomer (were it actually a divorce proceeding), because God is involved.

CJB Deuteronomy 24:1 ***"Suppose a man marries a woman and consummates the marriage but later finds her displeasing, because he has found her offensive in some respect. He writes her a divorce document, gives it to her and sends her away from his house. ² She leaves his house, goes and becomes another man's wife; ³ but the second husband dislikes her and writes her a get, gives it to her and sends her away from his house; or the second husband whom she married dies. ⁴ In such a case her first husband, who sent her away, may not take her again as his wife, because she is now defiled. It would be detestable to ADONAI,***

and you are not to bring about sin in the land ADONAI your God is giving you as your inheritance.

Biblically speaking, a wife committing adultery has (theoretically) already married another man. This is essentially the argument that God (as Hosea) is making by saying that the result of Gomer's harlotry is that "she is not my wife and I am not her husband". So, if Hosea were to actually divorce Gomer for her adultery no remarriage... no resumption of relationship... would be possible. This is a law of God, not a manmade tradition.

It is the 2nd half of verse 4 that explains what Gomer (the unfaithful wife) must do to remediate this untenable situation. ***She must remove her whoring from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts.*** Whatever, exactly, this means, Gomer must do has to do with her outward appearance. This is nearly certainly referring to some combination of make-up and jewelry or amulets. Some scholars think it is that there were women Baal worshippers that wore special jewelry to indicate their devotion, but in truth nothing has ever been found to support that theory. So, how she appears in public is, according to God, step #1 towards being restored. Ladies, take heed. What this is speaking to is how much appearance can indicate your identity and your morals. Throughout the Bible modesty is put forth as a high virtue of the godly woman. I am not about to step on a landmine by saying exactly what that modesty is to look like in today's cultures and societies. But I think we all know within our own society when we see pretty suggestive attire that crosses over some difficult-to-define boundary of feminine and flattering and into wholly inappropriate for a God fearer. As a Believer, your conscience that has been reformatted by the Holy Spirit to more conform to the will of The Father, will tell you where that boundary is; the issue is whether you'll pay attention to it.

Verse 5 speaks of what happens if she refuses to take this 1st step: God says He'll strip her naked. By not taking that first step Gomer would be admitting her guilt and her determination to remain on her ruinous path. Let's revert back, now, to who Gomer represents: Israel at large. What are the outward appearances of Israel's adultery (their whoring) before God? Worshipping Baal and all the visible trappings of idols, attending those pagan festivals, and setting aside of the commands of the Law of Moses that necessarily go with it. The phrase "to be

stripped naked” or “to be stripped like a whore” is found in other ancient Near East covenants and peace treaties. That is, it refers to the breaker of the covenant in those rather nasty terms. The idea is that to be stripped naked means to publicly shame the covenant breaker, and this sort of action is nearly unthinkable for a person of the ancient Near East societies. It’s not that a person necessarily had all their clothes removed; it’s like our expression of warning to someone that we’ll “skin them alive”.

Some very good commentators say that the term Israel has in this verse sort of momentarily morphed into meaning the land. This is because the next threat is making Gomer like a desert wilderness and killing her with thirst. I cannot rule this interpretation out; but I think it is less likely than this being an allegorical reference to the woman being barren and infertile (like a wilderness) and her dying of thirst (meaning longing for children she cannot produce). This is a rather standard biblical curse on a prostitute or adulterous woman. On the other hand, one could see it referring to the land of Israel being denuded of trees and vegetation, and suffering drought. It’s just the idea of a sudden switch mid-sentence from Israel being people to being the land that I’m skeptical about.

Verse 6 sort of throws a curveball when it says that those same children that were told to accuse their mother of whoring are now condemned as “the children of whoredoms” and thus God will show them no pity. Here’s such an important truth to take from this. Because the children are referring to the people of Israel, and because they are accusing their mother of being adulterous, they are essentially doing the same thing and so condemning themselves. While the mother is leading them that way, nonetheless God holds the children responsible for their own choices and actions.

I regularly point to the pulpit and say that God holds, above all, the leaders of our faith responsible for how we lead and teach you. We are held to a higher standard because the Lord put us in a position of leadership, and leadership affects many. However, you are not mindless robots. You have every means to see if what any of us are saying matches up with Holy Scripture. When it doesn’t, then it shouldn’t be followed. In ancient times, however, it was nearly impossible for an average Israelite to be able to fact-check what their leader said whereas in our day it takes only a little effort and time. So, while I will be held accountable

before God for what I teach you, you will be held accountable before God if you are too disinterested or lazy to read those same words to be certain I'm not leading you astray. Bottom line: the people of Israel (the children) might **wish** they could defect the blame for their idolatry towards their leaders (Gomer, their mother) and therefore not suffer the consequences, but God says that is simply not going to be the case.

So now that the children and their mother (the people and the leadership of Israel) are being more or less lumped together in their guilt, God says that she ran after her lovers. Her lovers are the Baals and the pagans of other nations with whom Israel made peace treaties. These treaties nearly to a fault involved economic benefits to both sides. The treaties were made to increase prosperity. This is expressed by saying that the woman's lovers would provide her with "food, water, wool, flax, olive oil and wine". That is, the full spectrum of what a husband was to provide for his wife. Converting this thought to God and to Israel, it means that Israel went to the false gods of the pagan worship systems of other nations hoping to receive fruitfulness in return. And when fruitfulness happened, they praised those other gods, and presented their Firstfruits offerings to them, instead of honoring the God of their Forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In cultural terms of that ancient era, this is a rather full definition of the term idolatry.

I suspect I could spend the remainder of our time together today overlaying this onto the landscape of our modern Western cultures; I'll try to keep it brief. The principle is basic: we are to seek out Yehoveh for our well-being in virtually every area of our existence. We should not seek out those opposed to God, or offering other gods, to bolster this hoped-for well-being. There are today, as there have been throughout history, nations and substantial people groups that might best be called pariahs. Often in order to obtain some type of increase to our wealth, or perhaps to give us some necessary raw material or devices that we think we need, we'll make a "pact with the Devil" (so to speak). This nearly always involves a dilution of our principles and will inevitably lead to some amount of adoption of, or tolerance to, the principles and practices with whomever it is that we make a treaty. We are seeing this play out today before our eyes, and no one is sure how to extract ourselves from it because we have become dependent on

these pariahs for many things that we desire, or because these other nations provide us with a profitable market to sell things to.

Does this mean that no amount of interacting or trade can occur between a God worshipper and someone who is not? Not necessarily. The issue is the depth of involvement and commitment; what a God worshipper has to acquiesce to or to give up in order for it to happen. There was nothing wrong with the Israelites buying spices and unique goods from traveling merchant caravans that came from far away places; no cultural, religious or governmental ties were established. Nor was there any need for Israel to have been hostile towards those merchants or to their pagan neighbors. But that's not what Israel did; they connected themselves through treaties and in time intentionally formed a deeper level of relationship with neighboring nations. They co-mingled societies. They encouraged their sons and daughters to marry into families of those pagan neighbors (and vice versa), and the Israelites would attend their pagan festivities in order to be good neighbors and promote peace (and probably some of those pagans would attend some of Israel's festivals). Far before these past few years in modern times that the cry has arisen to a fever pitch for tolerance and diversity at all costs in the Western world, Israel thought that tolerance and diversity was their pathway to economic success and security.

Because all ancient societies had their own god systems, then those god systems played a large role in the everyday lives of those citizens. If one was going to have good relations between nations, a respect for one another's gods was a requirement. From a human standpoint that might sound pragmatic, even intelligent, kind and wise. But from God's standpoint it is foolish, it is an affront to Him and bound to lead to sin and worse. Today, with the resurgence of Islam in the world on the one hand, and atheistic humanism on the other, there has been a rush among the nations and even within the Christian community to find a way not only to peaceably coexist but also to exploit this vast market of people for economic and other reasons. I have personal knowledge of large Christian missionary organizations that, in order to fulfill that agenda of peaceful coexistence, openly contend that Islam is good, and that their holy book (the Quran) should not be seen as less correct or holy than our holy book, the Bible. They declare that we are all merely worshipping the same God. Alternatively, our recent national leaders have told us that faith in anything is a good and valid faith,

but faith in science is the best faith. Ladies and gentlemen, this is precisely what we're reading about that was happening within Israel in Hosea's day, and Israel was about to lose God's blessing and their nation in consequence. Unfortunately, they didn't believe that. For some reason a widely accepted Christian mantra exists that Jesus changed all of God's rules so that we **can** do the very things that Israel could not. This goes back to what I opened with, today. There is a truth that so many Believers don't seem to want to hear. Why?

Many years ago, I was having a talk with my father (about a subject I don't honestly remember what it was about). Whatever it was, I must have been pretty seriously off-beam because my father did something he rarely ever did: he told me I was wrong and why. I told him I didn't believe him. He looked at me, studied me for a moment and said: "Oh, I think you believe it. You just don't like what it means." Even though I'm quite sure I still did what I thought best (no doubt with poor results), nonetheless his words have never left me. I believed what I wanted to believe, because I wanted what I wanted.

Verse 8 says that because of how unfaithful Gomer (Israel) has become, Yehoveh is going to erect barriers to block her way. That is, since the delinquent wife (Israel) hasn't got the sense to restrain herself (behaving more like a dumb animal that has a tendency to wander off), God is going to try to fence her in. Or better, God is going to create a kind of barrier that will result in Israel's race after her lovers not producing what she had hoped for. Rather, God would see to it that the previous advantages that Israel had been receiving for these illicit relationships would begin to disappear. How? History shows that Assyria would keep gobbling up the many nations around Israel with whom Israel had made treaties, thus changing how Israel and those nations could relate and do business. Israel's foolish dependence... perhaps addiction is a better term... on those pagan nations, and now Assyria cutting them off from it, led to a rapid decline in Israel's prosperity; but even that wasn't the end of it. Soon it would mean that Assyria would lay their sights on Israel's territory and expel them from their own land. The sins of the adulterous wife, Israel, would finally find their devastating consequences.

Verse 9 explains that Israel, despite the warning from Hosea, will nonetheless continue the pursuit of her lovers... those same pagan relationships that up to

now have profited her. She will be determined to do so to her own destruction. The idea is that only then will Israel discover that her only hope is in Yehoveh and NOT in some non-existent Baals. But it's too late. Disaster is going to overcome Israel as the wheels of her destruction have been set in motion by Assyria and they aren't about to relent because they are winning. In panic, Israel will say **"I will go and return to my first husband; because things were better for me then than they are now."** This isn't a statement that there would be a divorce and then remarriage. The return is an expression of regret more than of repentance. It is a hypothetical statement that captures what the adulterous woman's attitude will probably be, because her character is so poor. It is self-serving. Whatever benefits her the most she'll do. If serving the Baal's (her lovers) gets her the most she'll choose that. If serving Yehoveh (her husband) gets her the most she'll choose that. Right and truth have nothing to do with it. This is a thoroughly ruined woman... ruined as a result of her adultery...her flirtations with other gods.

Why is she behaving as she is? Why does she think she can just step in and step out of God's favor according to her will and whim? Verse 10 tells us.

CJB Hosea 2:10 *For she doesn't know it was I who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil; I who increased her silver and gold, which they used for Ba'al.*

Let those words sink in for a second. Israel does what she's doing because of a lack of knowledge. A lack of knowing that it was her husband (Yehoveh) who had been providing her with these good things all along. Instead, she took what Yehoveh provided and presented thanks to Baal for them. A couple of chapters from now, this same thought of a lack of knowledge will be repeated and expanded.

CJB Hosea 4:6 *My people are destroyed for want of knowledge. Because you rejected knowledge, I will also reject you as cohen for me. Because you forgot the Torah of your God, I will also forget your children.*

The more familiar quote we get is that it is "because you forgot **the law** of your God". What law? The only law. The Hebrew is very specific: the law of the Torah. Israel has substituted customs, traditions, and doctrines for the truth. She has

set aside the Torah in favor of manmade rules and regulations... and economic treaties. Manmade religious rules and regulations are foolishness. The Torah is knowledge; and Israel no longer has this knowledge so she continues to make the poor decisions she has been making for the past century.

I'll confront you all with a personal question. Have you forgotten God's Torah? The term "forgotten" in biblical terms can mean you knew it at one time but it has left your memory; or it can mean that you never actually knew it in the first place because you placed little value in it. Do you think this warning in Hosea is only for the ancient people of Israel? The Church, for many centuries, has said that it is. In fact, much of the Church says it is sin to learn the Torah and doing so could even drive you away from Christ. What does Jesus, the one who supposedly said that we should forget the Torah, actually have to say about it? Our good fortune is that it is recorded so we don't have to guess.

CJB Matthew 5:17-19 ***¹⁷ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. ¹⁸ Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. ¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

To not know God's Torah is to reject knowledge. To reject Torah knowledge is to reject truth. And when that happens the result is catastrophic, even though the catastrophe might be a long time coming. Verse 11 speaks of the arrival of that catastrophe for Israel.

CJB Hosea 2:11 ***¹¹ So I will take back my grain at harvest-time and my wine in its season; I will snatch away my wool and flax, given to cover her naked body.***

Judgment. God had been providing for Israel (Hosea had been providing for Gomer), but Israel credited her lovers for it. I will reiterate something I said a few minutes ago. Because every nation's god system was part and parcel of their everyday life, then for Israel to credit neighboring nations for their prosperity automatically meant to credit those neighbors' gods for it. All parties would have

seen it that way. The day has come that the provision from God ends. He will stop giving Israel good grain and grape harvests. The sheep that provide wool will no longer thrive; flax for linen won't grow. Gomer, with her nakedness, will be exposed for her shame with nothing to cover her up. In other words, Israel's confidence in their abundance comes to a halt. The house of cards finally falls. All their bravado as to why they have such abundance is muted. People of the modern Western world I'll say this bluntly: whatever abundance we have enjoyed (and it is enormous) is because God has provided it. However, the new gods of science and human intellect are what is being given the credit. Don't for a moment think this isn't idolatry or think that this isn't how God judges it. Science and human intellect are wonderful things; but these, too, are God's provision and He is to be praised and glorified for them. The truly terrifying issue is this: long before on earth we see the fruits of our idolatry and sin come upon us, it is decided and put into motion in Heaven; so, it is unstoppable. And once a crisis level on earth has been reached, and all of man's attempts to fix it ourselves have proved weak and ineffective, and then we finally turn to God and admit our sin, it is too late. This chapter in Hosea is explaining this to us in unflinching terms. Do we have the ears to hear?

Verse 12 sort of expounds on verse 11 by linking the "naked body" remark with "uncovering shame" (the two are essentially synonymous). Gomer's lovers will be witnesses to her fall into shame and deprivation, and certainly no longer be her lovers. That is, those with whom Israel had such tight relations in the good times, Israel crediting them for the good times, will flee in the bad times even mocking Israel for her troubles.

Yehoveh is showing Israel and their region just who is in charge. It's a very hard lesson that if Israel only had the knowledge of the Torah they never would have to be suffering. Her former lovers gawk at her new and terrible condition, while Yehoveh stands at a distance and lets it happen. He has withdrawn His covenant obligation to feed her, clothe her, and protect her because she has been unfaithful to the covenant agreement while He has been completely faithful.

This next verse warrants some extra scrutiny.

CJB Hosea 2:13 ***13 I will end her happiness, her festivals, Rosh-Hodesh, and shabbats, and all her designated times.***

Here it is in the King James Version.

KJV Hosea 2:11 ***I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.***

I'll begin by telling you the way this is most widely interpreted to mean. Since the conclusion is that God is divorcing Israel, then this means God is abolishing His covenant with Israel (the Covenant of Moses). Therefore, quite naturally, the feast days, new moons, sabbaths and other festive occasions that are contained as commands in the Covenant of Moses must also be abolished. Because the beginning assumption is biblically incorrect, then the final assumption concerning feasts and sabbaths is also incorrect.

What this verse is speaking about is this: Israel will no longer be in their own land and able to celebrate these several appointed times as listed in the Torah. The reality for Israel at this time was that most Israelites had ceased traveling from the Northern Kingdom to Jerusalem in Judah, in order to go to the Temple and worship and sacrifice there as per the Torah commandments. Rather, King Jeroboam had instituted other places of worship (one in Dan, and another in Bethel) for His citizens to go to sacrifice and worship. So, for most of the people of the 10 tribes, they had long ago stopped observing the Torah related commands regarding these special holy days in the ways and the place where they were supposed to be observed. Instead, some manmade imitations of these occasions were substituted for what the Torah prescribed. However, since it will dawn on Israel what they have done wrong and why this terrible evil has befallen them, due to their exile and oppression by pagan nations they now won't be able to repent and go to the Temple, observing these holy days as they should have been all along. They won't be able to celebrate the biblical feasts and new moons that involve sacrifices. All of these happy and holy occasions will be removed from their ability to celebrate them; it's not that they've been abolished. In fact, Judah will continue to celebrate these same appointed times for another 130 years or so after Assyria exiles the Israelites in the North. To be clear: nothing was abolished. It's only that Israel would be barred from being able to participate

mostly due to the vast distances that the places they would be sent to, which were far from Jerusalem.

In verse 14 God turns to the land and says that He will cause the trees and fields to stop producing, because Israel has given credit to the Baals for the former abundance. Instead, the fields and orchards and vineyards will go fallow, become overgrown, and only wild animals will eat of what grows there now. Verse 15 continues the theme of punishment for their idolatry by saying that Israel offered incense (offered ritual worship) to the Baals on the feast days of the Baal god systems, with Israel fully joining in with their pagan neighbors by bedecking themselves in the jewelry and revelry of these occasions.... and they did this because instead of pursuing God, they pursued their lovers... the pagans and their Baals.

If this was the end of the story, it would be fully a just end for Israel. Yet our just God is also a merciful God and so what we see next, beginning in verse 16, is God revealing His character of loving-kindness (*chesed* in Hebrew) to His wayward people. That's where we will pick up next time.