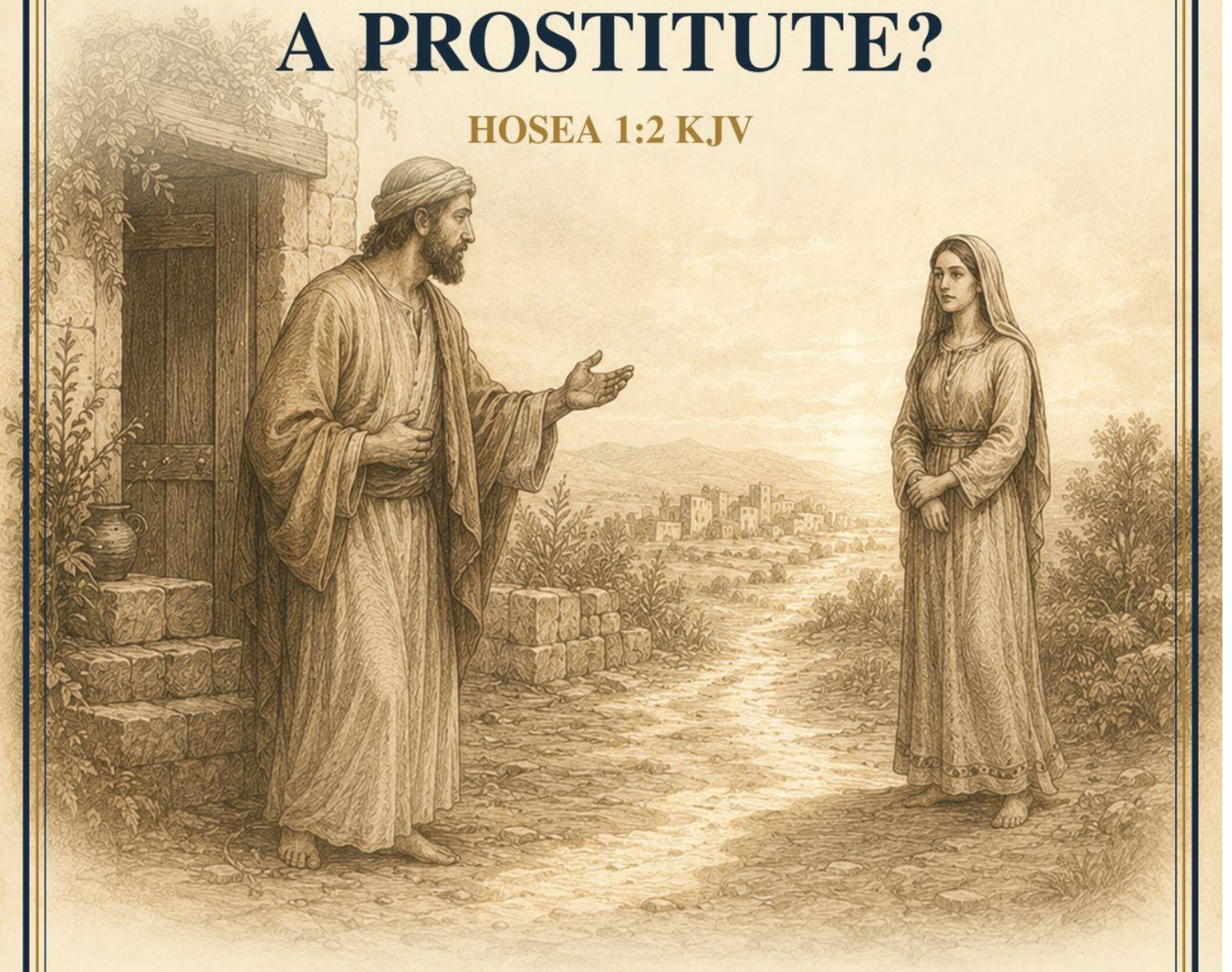


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

WHY WOULD GOD TELL HOSEA TO MARRY A PROSTITUTE?

HOSEA 1:2 KJV



Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

To every member, every friend and every honored guest who is with us today, we are grateful that you are here.

This is a place where questions are not treated as enemies of faith.

We bring our questions.

We open our Bible.

And we Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You that Scripture speaks honestly about sin, honestly about judgment and honestly about grace.

Give us wisdom as we enter a story that is painful, personal and sometimes misunderstood.

Keep us from treating another person's brokenness as entertainment.

Keep us from looking down upon Gomer while overlooking the unfaithfulness in our own hearts.

Help those who have experienced betrayal to hear Your Word without being pushed toward unsafe or unwise decisions.

Help those who have wandered to recognize that Your call to return is still being offered.

Show us the holiness that refuses to call evil good.

Show us the love that refuses to leave the repentant sinner without hope.

And above all, show us Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom who paid the price to redeem His people.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Our principal Scripture begins in Hosea chapter 1.

The Bible says:

"The word of the LORD that came unto 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.

"The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea.

"And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.

"So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son."

Before we begin, let me say something about giving.

Guests are never expected to give to Reason Together Church.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to support your home church.
For those who consider this their church home, there is a giving box available in the back.
Give only as the Lord leads you and give cheerfully.

We do not give to purchase the attention of God.

We do not give to earn His love.

We give because everything we possess first came from Him.

That truth will become especially important today because Israel accepted gifts from God while giving the credit to someone else.

But before we reach that part of the story, I want to begin with a wedding.

Men, I want you to picture your wedding day.

Picture where you were standing.

Picture the people gathered around you.

Picture the room, the sanctuary, the beach or wherever that moment took place.

Picture the moment when your bride appeared.

What do you remember most?

Was she beautiful?

Was she kind?

Was she loving?

Was she gentle?

Was she faithful?

Was she a prostitute?

That last question did not belong with the others, did it?

It probably felt offensive.

No man expects to be asked that question while remembering his bride.

But imagine asking Hosea those same questions.

"Hosea, tell us about the woman God chose for you."

"Was she beautiful?"

"Was she kind?"

"Was she loving?"

"Was she a prostitute?"

For most men, the final question would be an insult.

For Hosea, it was the Word of the Lord.

God said, "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms."

That command should trouble us.

God created marriage.

God declared that marriage was honorable.

God condemned adultery.

God condemned prostitution.

God required holiness from His prophets.

Why, then, would a holy God tell Hosea to enter this marriage?

That is our question today.

Why would God tell Hosea to marry a prostitute?

The answer begins with the fact that Hosea's first recorded sermon was not merely something he preached.

It was something he lived.

Hosea ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the final decades before its destruction.

The nation was experiencing periods of prosperity.

The markets could be busy.

The fields could produce.

Religious ceremonies could continue.

People could look around and assume that everything was fine.

But beneath that prosperity, Israel was spiritually collapsing.

The people had entered into covenant with God.

God had delivered them from Egypt.

God had carried them through the wilderness.

God had given them His law.

God had brought them into the land.

God had supplied rain, grain, oil, vineyards, protection and opportunity.

Israel belonged to Him in a covenant relationship that Scripture often describes with the language of marriage.

But Israel pursued other gods.

Israel sought prosperity from Baal.

Israel sought security through political alliances.

Israel continued using the language of faith while giving its deepest trust to someone else.

Israel had not necessarily stopped being religious.

Israel had become religiously unfaithful.

God wanted the nation to understand that idolatry was not merely an error on a religious examination.

It was not simply selecting the wrong answer from a list of possible gods.

It was covenant betrayal.

It was spiritual adultery.

It was taking the love, trust and gratitude that belonged to God and giving them to another.

Israel needed more than a lecture about that betrayal.

Israel needed to see it.

So God placed the message into the home of His prophet.

Before Hosea preached about betrayal, he would feel betrayal.

Before Hosea preached about judgment, he would watch the consequences of sin enter his family.

Before Hosea preached about redemption, he would personally pay a price.

Hosea did not merely carry the message home.

The message lived in his home.

Hosea did not merely preach the sermon.

Hosea lived it.

Now we must be honest about something the text does not completely settle.

Was Gomer already practicing prostitution when Hosea married her?

The King James Version calls her "a wife of whoredoms."

The expression clearly associates her with sexual immorality and unfaithfulness.

But Scripture does not give us a detailed account of Gomer's life before the marriage.

Some believe she was already living immorally when Hosea married her.

Some believe she became unfaithful after the wedding.

Some understand the description as anticipating the conduct that would later characterize her.

Others emphasize that she belonged to an entire nation already guilty of spiritual whoredom.

There are also interpreters who treat the marriage as an allegory rather than an event in Hosea's actual life.

But the most natural reading presents a real prophet, a real woman, a real marriage and real pain that carried a prophetic meaning.

We do not need to settle every detail of Gomer's past in order to understand the story.

What the text establishes is sufficient.

Hosea married Gomer.

Gomer became an adulteress.

Her unfaithfulness represented Israel.

And God later commanded Hosea to love her again.

We should not invent a lurid history for Gomer.

The Bible never calls her a temple prostitute.

The Bible does not invite us to use her shame for entertainment.

We do not have to make the story more dramatic than God made it.

We do not have to invent Gomer's past to understand the unfaithfulness Scripture reveals.

Hosea 1:3 simply says, "So he went and took Gomer."

There is no recorded argument.

There is no list of objections.

There is no description of Hosea negotiating for an easier assignment.

God spoke.

Hosea obeyed.

Other prophets were also asked to perform visible signs.

Isaiah's children carried prophetic names.

Jeremiah wore a yoke.

Ezekiel performed actions that allowed people to see the message he proclaimed.

But Hosea's sign was intensely personal.

This prophecy entered his marriage.

It entered his reputation.

It entered his children.

It entered his heart.

Then Gomer conceived and gave birth to a son.

God said in Hosea 1:4:

"Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel."

Jezreel was the name of a place stained by blood, ambition and political violence.

The name warned that Israel's history of violence would not be ignored forever.

God said that the bow of Israel would be broken in the valley of Jezreel.

The nation that appeared secure would discover that apparent strength could not protect it from judgment.

Then Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter.

God said:

"Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel."

Lo-ruhamah means that mercy had not been obtained.

Imagine carrying that name into every room.

Imagine a mother calling, "Lo-ruhamah, it is time to come inside."

Imagine another child asking what her name meant.

"No mercy."

God is merciful.

His mercy is one of the great revelations of His character.

But Israel had treated mercy as permission to continue betraying the God who was merciful.

Mercy should lead us to repentance.

Presumed mercy can tempt people to delay repentance.

Israel assumed that yesterday's mercy guaranteed that tomorrow's rebellion would have no consequence.

Then Gomer bore another son.

God said:

"Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God."

Lo-ammi means "not my people."

Israel continued claiming the privileges of belonging to God while rejecting the faithfulness that covenant required.

The people wanted God's name without God's authority.

They wanted God's protection without God's presence.

They wanted God's gifts without God's claim upon their hearts.

Now some have noticed that Hosea is explicitly connected with the first child.

The text says that Gomer conceived and bore him a son.

When the second and third children are born, the text does not explicitly identify their father.

That may intentionally leave a painful uncertainty.

But Scripture does not authorize us to declare conclusively that another man fathered them.

We should say what the Bible says.

We should acknowledge what it leaves uncertain.

The prophetic meaning of the names is clear even where the family history is not.

Every time those children were called, Israel heard what its sin had produced.

"Jezreel."

Judgment is coming.

"Lo-ruhamah."

Mercy has been refused too long.

"Lo-ammi."

The covenant has been treated as though it means nothing.

Every time Hosea called his children home, the nation heard what its sin had done.

But judgment is not the final word in Hosea.

Almost as soon as the terrible names are spoken, God begins reversing them.

Hosea 1:10 says:

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God."

Then Hosea 2:1 says:

"Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah."

Not my people would become my people.

No mercy would become mercy received.

Jezreel, which could speak of scattering, also carries the idea that God sows.

The place of judgment would not prevent a future work of restoration.

The New Testament later takes up this language.

Peter writes:

"Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

Judgment named what Israel had become.

Mercy declared what God could make them again.

Sin may explain the name we earned.

Grace can give us a name we never deserved.

God's judgment tells the truth about us.

His mercy can write a different ending.

Hosea chapter 2 then allows us to hear the reasoning of the unfaithful wife.

She says in verse 5:

"I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink."

She believed that her lovers supplied everything she needed.

Bread.

Water.

Wool.

Flax.

Oil.

Drink.

That was Israel's explanation for pursuing Baal and the surrounding nations.

Israel believed those other sources could provide fertility, prosperity, pleasure and protection.

Then God reveals the truth in verse 8:

"For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal."

That sentence exposes the depth of the betrayal.

God gave the grain.

Israel thanked Baal.

God supplied the wine and oil.

Israel credited the idols.

God multiplied the silver and gold.

Israel used the silver and gold in worship that dishonored Him.

Israel took gifts from God and used them to pursue God's rivals.

That is not only an ancient sin.

God gives us strength.

We may use that strength without ever serving Him.

God gives intelligence.

We may use that intelligence to explain Him away.

God gives employment and income.

We may trust the income more than the Provider.

God gives relationships.

We may love those relationships more than we love the God who gave them.

God gives opportunity.

We may treat every success as proof of our own superiority.

God gives time.

We may have time for work, recreation, entertainment and conversation, then tell God that we have no time for Him.

God gives influence.

We may use that influence to build our name rather than honor His.

Spiritual adultery is receiving life from God while giving our deepest love, trust and gratitude to something else.

Ask yourself a difficult question.

What do I believe gives me bread and water?

What do I believe makes me secure?

What loss do I fear so deeply that I might disobey God to prevent it?

What blessing occupies more of my heart than the One who gave it?

An idol does not have to be carved from wood.

An idol can be a career.

An idol can be money.

An idol can be reputation.

An idol can be a relationship.

An idol can be comfort.

An idol can even be ministry if our identity becomes dependent upon being needed, noticed or praised.

Israel still spoke about God.

Israel still practiced religion.

But the heart was pursuing other lovers.

God loved Israel too much to make that pursuit easy.

Hosea 2:6 says:

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths."

God would obstruct the path Israel was determined to follow.

The false lovers would disappoint.

The expected satisfaction would disappear.

The way forward would become painful and confusing.

Then she would say:

"I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now."

Sometimes grace opens a door.

Sometimes grace blocks a road.

We must be careful here.

Not every hardship is a punishment from God.

Not every closed door has the same explanation.

We should not look at another person's suffering and confidently announce that we know why it happened.

But in Hosea, God plainly identifies the obstruction as discipline.

He placed thorns in a path because He knew where that path ended.

A relationship may collapse.

A dishonest plan may fail.

A harmful opportunity may disappear.

A sinful pursuit may stop producing pleasure.

Something upon which we depended may prove unable to carry the weight we placed upon it.

We may call it frustration.

God may be using it as interruption.

The hedge may hurt.

But the One who placed it knows what waits at the end of the road.

God was not preventing Israel from living.

He was preventing Israel from destroying itself without resistance.

There are people who came back to God because the road away from Him finally became painful.

There are people who prayed again because everything else stopped working.

There are people who rediscovered the Bible because their other sources of confidence failed them.

The thorn that made the path uncomfortable became part of the mercy that turned them around.

Then we reach one of the most surprising words in the entire book.

Israel betrayed God.

Israel worshiped idols.

Israel credited Baal for God's gifts.

Israel refused correction.

Israel pursued other lovers.

Hosea 2:14 begins with the word "therefore."

We expect God to say, "Therefore, I will abandon her."

We expect, "Therefore, I will destroy her."

We expect, "Therefore, I will replace her."

But God says:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her."

Therefore, I will allure her.

After all of that betrayal, God speaks of drawing her.

After all of that idolatry, God speaks of bringing her apart.

After all of those lies, God speaks of speaking to her heart.

Grace does not mean that the sin was insignificant.

Grace is astonishing because the sin was serious.

Israel deserved judgment.

God had every righteous reason to judge.

But the character of God supplied a reason for mercy that Israel could never have supplied for itself.

Sin supplied every reason for judgment.

The character of God supplied the reason for mercy.

God would bring Israel into the wilderness.

The wilderness was not comfortable.

It was a place where false sources of provision could not be maintained.

It was also the place where Israel had once learned to depend upon God.

In the wilderness, there was no field from which Israel could manufacture manna.

There was no river the people could claim to have created.

There was no military strategy that could replace the presence of God.

The wilderness stripped away the illusion of self-sufficiency.

It became a place where God could speak comfortably to His people.

The expression means that He would speak to the heart.

God was not merely demanding that Israel return to religious labor.

He wanted restored affection.

He wanted more than hands that performed duties while the heart remained somewhere else.

Then God said:

"And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

The Valley of Achor was associated with trouble.

It recalled the sin of Achan after Israel entered the Promised Land.

It was a place in Israel's memory marked by disobedience, exposure and judgment.

God did not say that the valley never existed.

God did not rewrite history and call the trouble good.

He promised to place a door of hope within it.

God does not always remove the valley from our history.

Sometimes He places a door in the middle of it.

The place associated with failure can become the place where restoration begins.

The history you wish you could erase may become the place from which you warn someone else.

The humiliation that brought you to repentance may become the doorway through which you discovered grace.

The broken plan may become the interruption that brought you back to God.

The location of yesterday's failure can become the entrance to tomorrow's restoration.

Then God says in Hosea 2:16:

"And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali."

Ishi emphasizes "my husband."

Baali could carry the idea of "my master" or "my lord," but Baal had also become inseparably associated with Israel's idols.

God was cleansing the relationship of the language and allegiance of false worship.

He wanted more than reluctant duty.

He wanted the heart of His people.

It is possible to attend church without loving God.

It is possible to sing without worshiping.

It is possible to give without trusting.

It is possible to serve while quietly resenting every act of service.

It is possible to say all the correct words while keeping God at an emotional distance.

God does not merely want hands that serve Him while the heart belongs somewhere else.

If He has the heart, the hands will follow.

If He receives only the hands, religion may continue while the marriage remains cold.

God then makes a remarkable promise in Hosea 2:19 and 20:

"And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

"I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD."

Notice who supplies everything necessary for the restored relationship.

God supplies righteousness.

God supplies judgment.

God supplies lovingkindness.

God supplies mercies.

God supplies faithfulness.

Israel's hope did not rest upon pretending that the betrayal never occurred.

Israel's hope rested upon the covenant character of God.

Then the names are reversed again.

God says:

"I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God."

No mercy becomes mercy.

Not my people becomes my people.

The relationship that sin shattered is restored by grace.

But the story of Hosea and Gomer is not finished.

Hosea chapter 3 begins with another command.

"Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress."

The chapter does not repeat Gomer's name.

But the woman is an adulteress, which means she belongs within a marriage covenant.

Hosea is told to go again.

The comparison with God's love for Israel strongly indicates that this is Gomer.

God did not merely say, "Find her."

He did not merely say, "Fulfill your obligation."

He did not merely say, "Bring her back so that the illustration can be completed."

God said, "Go yet, love her."

Love her with full knowledge of what she has done.

Love her without calling adultery faithfulness.

Love her without pretending that Hosea's heart was never broken.

God did not tell Hosea to love an imaginary version of Gomer.

He told him to love the woman whose betrayal he already knew.

Hosea 3:1 explains the meaning:

"According to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine."

Israel's appetites had become attached to the gifts and rituals of false worship.

Yet the love of God remained the pattern Hosea was commanded to follow.

Then Hosea says:

"So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley."

Hosea paid silver and barley to acquire the woman who was already his wife.

Her choices had brought her into a condition from which a price had to be paid to bring her home.

The Bible does not tell us that Gomer stood naked upon an auction block.

It does not describe men bidding for her.

It does not identify the person who received the payment.

Those details have appeared in many emotional sermons, but they do not appear in Hosea.

We should not confuse a preacher's imagination with Biblical history.

Some have estimated that the silver and barley together may have approximated the value associated with a slave.

That is possible, but the exact ancient value of the barley is uncertain.

The point does not require an exact calculation.

The indisputable truth is already powerful.

The woman who had cost Hosea so much emotionally now cost him materially.

She had already cost him peace.

She had already cost him trust.

She had already cost him public dignity.

She had already broken his heart.

Now bringing her home required a price.

Love went looking.

Love paid the price.

Love brought her home.

But bringing Gomer home did not mean pretending that nothing had happened.

Hosea said to her:

"Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee."

There would be a period of restraint.

There would be restored exclusivity.

There would be faithfulness from Hosea and faithfulness required from Gomer.

Forgiveness is not denial.

Reconciliation requires truth.

Trust may need time to be rebuilt.

Grace does not call continuing adultery acceptable.

Redemption brought Gomer home.

Redemption also called her into a different life.

This is also where we must apply Hosea responsibly.

Hosea received an extraordinary prophetic command for a specific purpose.

This passage does not command every betrayed spouse to remain exposed to continuing adultery.

It does not require someone to remain in physical danger.

It must not be used to pressure an abused person to return immediately to an unsafe home.

Forgiveness, reconciliation, safety and restored trust are connected, but they are not identical.

Someone dealing with betrayal or abuse needs wise Biblical counsel that takes the entire Word of God seriously.

Hosea's unique assignment reveals the love of God.

It does not eliminate every boundary God provides for human safety and accountability.

Hosea chapter 3 then reaches beyond Hosea's household.

It says that Israel would remain many days without a king, without a prince and without its former national and religious order.

Then verse 5 says:

"Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days."

David had been dead for generations when Hosea preached.

The promise looks toward a coming King from David's line.

It points toward the Messiah.

The story of a redeeming husband reaches toward Jesus Christ, the true Bridegroom.

Hosea paid silver and barley.

Jesus paid with His precious blood.

Hosea sought one unfaithful woman.

Jesus came seeking sinners.

Hosea brought Gomer back into his household.

Christ is preparing a redeemed people as His bride.

The Bible says in 1 Peter chapter 1:

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Hosea purchased the woman who had betrayed him.

Jesus purchased a people who had rebelled against Him.

And now the story turns toward us.

We began by standing beside Hosea and looking at Gomer.

We saw her unfaithfulness.

We saw the damage she caused.

We saw the price Hosea paid.

It is easy to judge Gomer.

But before we finish, we must decide where we belong in the story.

We are not primarily Hosea.

We are Gomer.

We are the people who received gifts from God and often credited someone else.

We are the people who pursued security in things that could not save us.

We are the people who used God's blessings while ignoring God's heart.

We are the people who promised faithfulness, then allowed another love to occupy His place.

We began by looking down upon the unfaithful woman.

Scripture places us beside her.

Ask yourself:

Have I received blessings without thanking God?

Have I trusted money more than God?

Have I allowed another relationship to determine my worth?

Have I used success to build my name while neglecting His?

Have I served God outwardly while loving something else inwardly?

Have I called upon God mainly when my other sources of confidence disappointed me?

Have I treated His mercy as permission to delay repentance?

The scandal is not merely that Gomer wandered.

The scandal is that Hosea went after her again.

The wonder of the Gospel is not merely that humanity wandered from God.

The wonder is that God came after us.

Hosea 11 allows us to hear the heart of God asking:

"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?"

God's holiness is real.

His judgment is righteous.

He does not call evil good.

But God is not cold or indifferent toward the people He judges.

Sin does not merely violate God's rule.

It betrays God's love.

At the cross, holiness and love meet without either one being diminished.

God did not excuse our sin.

Jesus bore it.

God did not pretend that no price was necessary.

Jesus paid it.

God did not wait for unfaithful people to make themselves worthy.

Christ came while we were yet sinners.

Ephesians chapter 5 says:

"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

"That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

Christ did not purchase a faithful people because their faithfulness deserved Him.

His purchase is what begins making His people faithful.

He does not redeem us so that we may comfortably return to our former lovers.

He redeems us to belong to Him.

He forgives.

He cleanses.

He changes.

He restores.

The Book of Hosea does not end with the command, "Go away."

It ends with an invitation to return.

Hosea 14:1 says:

"O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

Then God promises in verse 4:

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."

God offers more than forgiveness for the last place we wandered.

He offers healing for the heart that keeps wandering.

God does not merely forgive where we have been.

He heals what keeps taking us there.

Perhaps you recognize yourself today.

Perhaps you have never trusted Jesus Christ.

You have received life from God, but you have lived as though life belonged entirely to you.

You have pursued other sources of identity, security and satisfaction.

Perhaps religion has remained somewhere in your life, but God has not possessed your heart.

Perhaps you believe that your history has placed you beyond mercy.

Listen to the names God reversed.

Not my people became my people.

No mercy became mercy received.

The Valley of Trouble received a door of hope.

The unfaithful woman was sought, purchased and brought home.

The Gospel is not that your sin does not matter.

The Gospel is that Jesus paid for sin that mattered eternally.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The wages of sin is death.

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus died upon the cross for our sins.

He was buried.

On the third day, He rose from the dead.

Redemption has been purchased.

You cannot buy yourself back with silver.

You cannot earn your way home with religious effort.

You cannot erase your past by promising to try harder.

You must repent, believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ and receive the salvation He purchased.

Perhaps you are already a believer, but you have wandered.

The Word of God says, "Return."

Do not wait for the false lovers to become faithful.

They cannot supply what only God can give.

Do not curse every hedge of thorns.

It may be the mercy that keeps you from going farther.

Do not decide that the Valley of Trouble has no exit.

God can place a door of hope within it.

If you are ready to trust Jesus Christ today, I invite you to pray.

The words of a prayer do not save by themselves.

Jesus saves.

But you may use these words to express the repentance and faith of your heart.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.

I confess that I have wandered from God.

I have received Your gifts without giving You my heart.

I cannot redeem myself.

I believe that You died upon the cross for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and rose again.

Please forgive me.

Cleanse me from my sin.

Bring me into Your family.

Heal my wandering heart.

Be my Savior and my Lord.

I receive the salvation You purchased with Your precious blood.

Help me to belong faithfully to You.

Thank You for loving me and coming after me.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer sincerely, please tell someone before you leave.

We want to pray with you, encourage you and help you begin following Christ.

If you have wandered as a believer, let today become the beginning of your return.

Do not merely feel sorrow over the road you traveled.

Turn toward the One who is calling you home.

If betrayal has wounded your marriage, do not make a hurried decision because Hosea received an extraordinary command.

Seek wise Biblical counsel.

Forgiveness does not require pretending that danger, adultery or abuse never occurred.

God understands betrayal.

He also understands truth, safety, accountability and the time sometimes required to rebuild trust.

For every person carrying a name supplied by shame, remember what God did in Hosea.

Judgment named what Israel had become.

Mercy declared what God could make them again.

For every person standing in a Valley of Trouble, look for the door of hope.

For every person encountering a hedge of thorns, ask whether God is interrupting a road that would carry you farther away.

For every person who believes God wants only reluctant service, listen as He speaks comfortably to the heart.

He does not merely want your hands.

He wants you.

The greatest scandal in Hosea is not that God told a prophet to marry an unfaithful woman.

The greatest scandal is that after everything she did, he was told to go and love her again.

The greatest wonder of the Gospel is that God has done something even greater for us.

Love went looking.

Love paid the price.

Love opened the way home.

May the Lord teach us to recognize every gift as coming from His hand.

May He keep our hearts faithful when the world offers other lovers.

May He use every necessary hedge to turn us from destruction.

May He place a door of hope in every valley of repentance.

May He heal our backsliding and teach us to love Him freely because He first loved us.
Aloha Nui Loa.

The Question Behind the Command

Hosea 1:2 And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.

The opening command is meant to shock the reader. Marriage ordinarily signifies covenant loyalty, shared life and exclusive love. God commands Hosea to enter a marriage that will make Israel see the ugliness of covenant betrayal in human form. The prophet will not merely announce a message. His home will become part of the message.

The command does not mean that God approved prostitution, adultery or exploitation. Marriage itself was not sinful. The moral horror in the passage belongs to the unfaithfulness that the marriage exposes. Israel had received the LORD as covenant husband and had pursued other gods as lovers.

The question therefore moves beyond why Hosea married Gomer. Why would the holy God remain in covenant with a people who repeatedly treated His gifts, His name and His love as though they came from someone else? Hosea answers by holding judgment and mercy together.

GOVERNING ANSWER: God made Hosea's marriage a living sign of Israel's spiritual adultery and of the LORD's holy, wounded and redeeming love.

Hosea in the Northern Kingdom

Hosea 1:1 The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea ... in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

Hosea ministered principally to the Northern Kingdom, commonly called Israel or Ephraim. The reign of Jeroboam II brought prosperity and territorial success, but outward strength concealed idolatry, injustice and political instability. After his death, kings rose and fell rapidly until Assyria conquered Samaria in 722 BC.

Baal worship is essential background. Baal was associated with rain, fertility and agricultural abundance. Israel accepted grain, wine, oil, wool and flax from the LORD while crediting those provisions to false gods. Idolatry was therefore more than an intellectual mistake. It was theft of gratitude and betrayal of covenant love.

Hosea speaks before national collapse, when many people could still interpret prosperity as evidence that all was well. The prophet reveals that comfort without faithfulness may conceal approaching judgment.

HISTORICAL SETTING: Israel appeared prosperous, but its worship, politics and gratitude had already become unfaithful.

The Beginning of the Word by Hosea

Hosea 1:2 The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea.

The KJV phrase by Hosea can also carry the sense that the LORD spoke through Hosea. The prophet is not presenting a private theory about marriage or national decline. The word originates with God and is communicated through the life and speech of His servant.

The wording also gives the command a programmatic place. Hosea's family is not a strange interruption before the real prophecy begins. The marriage, the children and their names introduce the accusations, judgments and promises that govern the book.

A sign-act does not make the prophet less human. Hosea obeys the word as a man who will know affection, shame, grief and costly pursuit. Divine revelation enters the painful particulars of ordinary life.

PROPHETIC FRAME: Hosea's household is not background decoration. It is the opening form of the LORD's message to Israel.

What Is a Wife of Whoredoms?

Hosea 1:2 Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms.

The Hebrew language behind whoredoms comes from a word group used for prostitution, sexual immorality and unfaithfulness. In the prophets it frequently describes idolatry because covenant worship belongs exclusively to the LORD. The plural form intensifies the pattern rather than providing a professional biography.

The expression is stronger than a vague statement that Gomer came from a sinful culture. Yet it does not by itself prove every detail commonly supplied in sermons. It does not say that she served as a temple prostitute, stood on an auction platform or was forced into sexual slavery.

The phrase children of whoredoms may describe children born within a household marked by unfaithfulness, not necessarily a divine declaration that every child was conceived through adultery. The language is intentionally painful, but careful exposition must stop where the text stops.

TEXTUAL CAUTION: The passage identifies real sexual unfaithfulness without authorizing an invented biography for Gomer.

Was Gomer Already a Prostitute?

Hosea 1:3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.

Three readings are commonly proposed. Gomer may already have lived in sexual immorality when Hosea married her. She may have been vulnerable to later unfaithfulness that God knew would develop. The description may also characterize the marriage through what it became. The grammar permits discussion, but the narrative does not settle the chronology beyond dispute.

The sermon title uses the traditional and arresting word prostitute because Hosea 1 speaks of whoredom. The commentary must still distinguish the inspired statement from later reconstruction. Certainty about the sign does not require certainty about the day Gomer first became unfaithful.

The theological point survives every responsible chronological reading. God knew the cost of the command. Hosea entered a marriage that would embody Israel's betrayal, and the LORD used that wounded covenant to expose the nation's sin.

RESPONSIBLE CONCLUSION: Gomer's unfaithfulness is certain. The precise chronology of that unfaithfulness is not.

Was the Marriage Literal or Allegorical?

Hosea 1:3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim.

Some interpreters have treated the account as a vision, parable or extended allegory. Such approaches often arose from concern that a holy God would not command a prophet to marry a sexually immoral woman. The concern is understandable, but it does not require removing the events from history.

The natural narrative presents Hosea, Gomer and their children as real persons. Gomer is named as the daughter of Diblaim. Conception and birth follow the marriage. The later command to love the woman again continues the personal story. A literal marriage can also carry symbolic meaning, just as other prophets performed real sign-acts.

The command did not require Hosea to participate in sexual sin. He entered marriage. The sin belonged to unfaithfulness, not to the covenant he formed. The literal reading allows the sign to retain its full emotional and prophetic weight.

INTERPRETIVE JUDGMENT: Hosea's marriage was a real covenant that God used as a prophetic sign.

Gomer the Daughter of Diblaim

Hosea 1:3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim.

The narrative gives Gomer a name and a family identification. She must not be reduced to a sermon prop or a vulgar stereotype. Scripture records little about her thoughts, motives, coercion, childhood or later response. What is not revealed should not be supplied for dramatic effect.

Proposed symbolic meanings for Gomer and Diblaim are uncertain. Gomer has been connected with a root involving completion, while Diblaim has prompted suggestions involving fig cakes. These possibilities are too unstable to carry the argument of the passage.

Gomer's silence also calls for pastoral restraint. People touched by prostitution, trafficking, addiction or sexual exploitation should not hear her name used as an insult. The text exposes sin, but it does not grant permission to deny human dignity.

HUMAN DIGNITY: Gomer is a person within the story, not a license for lurid speculation or contempt.

Jezreel: Judgment in the First Son's Name

Hosea 1:4 Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.

Jezreel was both a place and a word associated with sowing or scattering. The valley had witnessed royal violence, including Jehu's bloody destruction of Ahab's house. Although Jehu had executed announced judgment, his dynasty continued in the sins of Jeroboam and used violence without wholehearted obedience.

The child's name announces that the LORD will call the house of Jehu to account and break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel. Military power will fail where the kingdom presumed itself secure. The name turns a family introduction into a national warning.

Jezreel will later be transformed from a sign of scattering into a promise of sowing. God does not pretend the bloodshed never occurred. He judges it, then reserves the right to write restoration into the same name.

THE NAME SPEAKS: Jezreel announces that God remembers bloodshed, breaks false security and can later sow what judgment scattered.

Lo-ruhamah: Mercy Withdrawn

Hosea 1:6 Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel.

Lo-ruhamah means not pitied or no mercy. The name does not describe a defect in the child. It announces the covenant consequence facing the Northern Kingdom. Israel had presumed upon compassion while persisting in rebellion.

The verse must be read with the distinction in verse 7. Judah would receive a temporary deliverance not accomplished by bow, sword, horses or military strength. The contrast reminds both kingdoms that rescue belongs to the LORD rather than human power.

No mercy is a terrifying word precisely because mercy had been repeatedly offered. Judgment is not evidence that God never cared. It is the holy response of the God whose patience Israel had treated as permission.

SOLEMN WARNING: Mercy must never be converted into an argument that rebellion has no consequence.

Lo-ammi: The Rupture Israel Caused

Hosea 1:9 Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

Lo-ammi means not my people. The language reverses the covenant formula in which the LORD claims Israel as His people and gives Himself as their God. It describes the rupture produced by persistent covenant infidelity.

The statement is judicial, not casual. God is not forgetting an affectionate nickname. He is declaring that Israel cannot possess the privileges of covenant while publicly repudiating the covenant Lord. Their worship has made their chosen alienation visible.

Yet the next verses prevent Lo-ammi from becoming the last word. The sentence is real, but it is not the exhaustion of God's purpose. Divine judgment tells the truth about the relationship before divine mercy announces a future Israel could not create.

COVENANT CRISIS: Israel wanted the LORD's benefits without the LORD's claim, and Lo-ammi exposed the contradiction.

The Reversal Begins Before the Chapter Ends

Hosea 1:10 In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

Judgment names are followed immediately by promises. Israel will again be beyond numbering like the sand of the sea. Not my people will become sons of the living God. Judah and Israel will be gathered under one head, and the day of Jezreel will become great.

The reversal does not cancel the warnings. Assyrian conquest and exile still come. Biblical hope is not denial of consequence. It is confidence that consequence cannot defeat God's covenant purpose.

Paul applies the language of Hosea to God's calling of a people in Romans 9, and Peter uses similar language for believers in 1 Peter 2. The apostles do not erase Hosea's setting. They recognize the same divine pattern: God creates a people by mercy where judgment had declared no claim.

MERCY INTERRUPTS: Before the first chapter closes, God begins reversing the names that Israel deserved.

Hosea 2: From Household to Covenant Lawsuit

Hosea 2:2 Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband.

Chapter 2 moves fluidly between Hosea's family language and the LORD's case against Israel. The children are addressed, the mother is accused and the marriage becomes a national metaphor. The shift does not make Gomer unreal. It interprets what the household sign means.

The language resembles a covenant lawsuit. Charges are named, consequences are announced and restoration is promised. She is not my wife does not imply that the covenant had never existed. It describes the relationship as violated by public and continuing unfaithfulness.

The repeated command to plead shows that prophetic confrontation seeks repentance. Exposure is not gossip. It is truth spoken so that false lovers may be abandoned and covenant fellowship restored.

LITERARY MOVEMENT: Hosea's wounded household becomes the vocabulary through which God addresses a wounded covenant.

Israel Pursued the Gifts of Her Lovers

Hosea 2:5 I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

Israel explains her pursuits through provision. The lovers appear useful because they promise food, water, clothing, oil and drink. Idolatry often presents itself as practicality. The false god is defended because it seems to keep life functioning.

Baal worship claimed influence over rain and fertility. Political alliances promised security. Trade and royal power promised abundance. Israel joined these supports to worship and treated created means as rival sources of life.

The verse exposes a continuing temptation. A person may receive through employment, medicine, government, family or markets while forgetting the Giver who stands above every instrument. Gratitude does not deny ordinary means. It refuses to enthrone them.

MISPLACED GRATITUDE: Israel loved the gifts and pursued the supposed givers while forgetting the God who actually supplied them.

God Gave the Corn, Wine and Oil

Hosea 2:8 For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

This verse reveals the central offense beneath the fertility cult. The LORD gave the produce. He multiplied the silver and gold. Israel then used His provision in the service of Baal. The sin joined ingratitude, idolatry and the misuse of stewardship.

She did not know does not necessarily mean that Israel lacked information. The law, history and worship of Israel identified the LORD as provider. The nation refused to acknowledge in life what it possessed in revelation.

The passage challenges every generation that enjoys creation while excluding the Creator. Gifts can become material for idolatry when health, money, talent or influence is used to strengthen the very allegiance that opposes God.

PREACHING CENTER: God gave the grain. Israel thanked Baal.

The Hedge of Thorns

Hosea 2:6-7 Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns ... and she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them.

God announces that He will obstruct Israel's path. The hedge is painful because rebellion has become determined. She will search for her lovers and fail to reach them. The frustration is judgment, but it also prevents a faster journey toward destruction.

When the lovers fail, Israel remembers her first husband and recognizes that her former condition was better. The text does not portray every hardship as proof that God is blocking a sinful path. Scripture elsewhere presents suffering for many reasons. Hosea interprets this particular national judgment.

Discipline can be merciful without being pleasant. God may remove the illusion that an idol can sustain what it promised. The loss does not earn restoration, but it may expose the lie that made repentance seem unnecessary.

SEVERE MERCY: The hedge wounds the pursuit because the pursuit is leading Israel farther from life.

The Removal of Misused Gifts

Hosea 2:9 Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof.

Because Israel credited the gifts to Baal and employed them in idolatry, God announces their removal. The repeated my is important. The corn, wine, wool and flax never ceased to belong to the Giver merely because Israel claimed them as the wages of false lovers.

The threatened exposure uses severe prophetic imagery. It strips away false protection and public pretense. Preaching should preserve the moral force without turning humiliation into entertainment or using sexualized details that the text does not provide.

Stewardship is theological before it is financial. Human beings never become absolute owners. What God entrusts may not rightly be used to deny Him, oppress neighbors or worship substitutes.

DIVINE CLAIM: The gifts Israel called hers were still God's, and He would not allow them to testify forever on behalf of Baal.

The Surprising Therefore

Hosea 2:14 Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.

The therefore is surprising. The preceding verses catalogue pursuit, ingratitude, false worship and judgment. A reader expects the conclusion to intensify rejection. Instead God announces that He will allure, lead and speak to the heart.

The word allure is not divine manipulation. It describes persuasive wooing and renewed courtship. God does not pretend Israel has been faithful. He acts after exposing the lovers and removing their false gifts. Grace speaks on the far side of truth.

The wilderness recalls both dependence and beginning. Israel first learned covenant reliance where ordinary sources could not sustain the nation. God will bring His people to a place where the noise of rival claims is silenced and covenant speech can be heard again.

THE TURN OF GRACE: Israel's sin explains the judgment, but God's love explains why judgment is not the final word.

The Valley of Achor as a Door of Hope

Hosea 2:15 And I will give her ... the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth.

Achor means trouble and recalls Achan's sin and judgment in Joshua 7. It was a place where hidden theft threatened the covenant community. Hosea does not erase that history. God promises to make the valley of trouble itself an entrance into hope.

The vineyards and singing recall the joy of Israel's youth and the exodus relationship. Restoration is not mere return to comfortable circumstances. It is renewed response to the covenant Lord.

Christian hope does not require calling trouble good. God can judge sin truthfully and still make the place associated with consequence the beginning of a restored future. The door exists because He opens it.

REDEMPTIVE REVERSAL: God can turn the valley named Trouble into the doorway named Hope.

Ishi, Not Baali

Hosea 2:16 Thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.

Ishi means my husband. Baali can mean my master or my lord, but the word had become inseparably associated with Baal worship. God promises a renewed relationship in which even the rival names are removed from Israel's mouth.

The verse is not simply a rejection of authority. It is a cleansing of covenant language from idolatrous confusion. Israel will know the LORD as husband rather than blending His worship with the titles and assumptions of Baal.

False worship rarely remains isolated from vocabulary and imagination. It trains people to think about provision, power and relationship in distorted ways. Restoration includes learning again how to name the One who has loved and redeemed them.

RESTORED SPEECH: Grace changes not only where Israel goes but how Israel names the covenant Lord.

A Covenant of Peace

Hosea 2:18 And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field ... and will make them to lie down safely.

The promise extends beyond private romance. Beasts, birds, creeping things and weapons appear in a vision of reordered creation and national peace. The bow, sword and battle will be broken. The people will lie down safely.

Hosea therefore joins reconciliation with the larger kingdom purpose of God. Sin disordered worship, land, politics and human relationships. Restoration reaches outward. It is not merely a private feeling between God and an individual soul.

The promise begins within Israel's prophetic horizon and reaches toward the peace associated with Messiah's reign. Its fullness awaits the King who can reconcile all things under righteous rule.

KINGDOM HORIZON: The restored marriage points beyond one household toward peace under the rule of God.

Betrothed for Ever

Hosea 2:19-20 And I will betroth thee unto me for ever ... in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

God repeats I will betroth three times. The promise sounds like a new beginning, not a reluctant return to an unchanged arrangement. Righteousness, judgment, lovingkindness, mercies and faithfulness define the renewed bond.

Lovingkindness translates the rich covenant word often represented as hesed. It includes steadfast love, loyal mercy and committed faithfulness. The word must not be reduced to softness. In this passage steadfast love stands beside righteousness and judgment.

The final result is knowledge of the LORD. Biblical knowing is relational and covenantal, not merely the possession of facts. Israel had information about God while living as though Baal supplied life. Restored knowledge joins confession, loyalty and lived dependence.

COVENANT LOVE: God's mercy does not abandon righteousness. It creates a restored relationship marked by righteousness, mercy and faithfulness.

The Names Answered and Reversed

Hosea 2:23 I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people.

The chapter closes by answering each judgment name. God will sow Israel unto Himself in the earth, reversing the scattering associated with Jezreel. Lo-ruhamah receives mercy. Lo-ammi is again addressed as my people.

Israel responds, Thou art my God. Restoration includes divine initiative and human confession. The people do not rename themselves. God speaks the new verdict, and the restored people answer the One who claims them.

The reversal demonstrates that judgment names were not stronger than covenant mercy. Yet mercy is not cheap because the book has already faced bloodshed, idolatry and betrayal without disguise.

THE FINAL WORD ON THE NAMES: Scattered becomes sown, no mercy receives mercy and not my people becomes my people.

Love Her Again

Hosea 3:1 Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel.

The command of chapter 3 renews the personal sign. Hosea is told to love again. The woman is loved and yet adulterous. Those two descriptions stand together without allowing either to erase the other.

Most interpreters identify the woman as Gomer, although her name is not repeated. The continuity of the marriage sign and the word again strongly support that reading. The omission of her name may also keep attention on the prophetic meaning.

God interprets Hosea's costly love as corresponding to His own love toward Israel, even while the people look to other gods. Divine love is not ignorance of betrayal. It is the holy resolve to pursue restoration without calling adultery faithfulness.

LOVE WITH OPEN EYES: Hosea is commanded to love again, not because betrayal is imaginary but because God's covenant love is real.

The Flagons of Wine

Hosea 3:1 Who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

The KJV phrase flagons of wine is better understood as cakes of raisins. Such cakes were ordinary food, but in this context they appear connected with the attractions or rituals of false worship. The issue is not a divine prohibition of raisins.

The phrase captures the trivial exchange at the heart of idolatry. Israel turns from the living God toward other gods and their desirable accompaniments. Sacred covenant is traded for immediate appetite.

Responsible teaching should explain the older English wording without mocking the translation. The KJV accurately preserves an inherited phrase, while comparison with the underlying term clarifies the object being described.

CLARIFY THE WORDING: Hosea condemns Israel's appetite for idolatrous worship, not the ordinary eating of raisin cakes.

The Price Hosea Paid

Hosea 3:2 So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley.

Hosea gives fifteen pieces of silver and one and one-half homers of barley. The mixed payment suggests a significant personal cost, but the text does not state the recipient, the market setting or the legal mechanism. Bought can describe acquisition without establishing a public slave auction.

The total is sometimes calculated as equivalent to thirty shekels, the compensation associated with a slave in Exodus 21. That comparison may be suggestive, but the ancient value of barley varied. It should not be preached as an exact equation established by the verse.

The certain point is stronger than the invented scene. Gomer's condition requires a price, Hosea personally bears it and love acts at cost. Redemption is not a word of sentiment alone.

TEXTUAL CERTAINTY: We do not know the scene in which the payment was made. We do know that restoration cost Hosea something.

Restoration With Boundaries

Hosea 3:3 Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot ... so will I also be for thee.

Hosea does not purchase Gomer and immediately pretend that trust has never been broken. He establishes a period of abstinence and exclusive commitment. The language is restrained, serious and ordered toward renewed covenant faithfulness.

The sign corresponds to Israel's coming many days without king, prince, sacrifice, image, ephod or teraphim. The nation will be deprived of both legitimate institutions and idolatrous objects. Exile becomes a suspended condition before return.

This distinction is pastorally important. Forgiveness, reconciliation, restored trust and restored access are related but not identical. Love may establish boundaries. Repentance must bear fruit. Safety and truth are not enemies of grace.

WISE RESTORATION: Hosea's love is costly, but it is not careless. Renewal includes exclusivity, time and changed conduct.

Many Days Without King or Sacrifice

Hosea 3:4 For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice.

The verse anticipates prolonged national deprivation. Israel's throne, political structure and worship will be disrupted. The absence of image, ephod and teraphim also indicates the removal of practices and objects entangled with corrupt religion.

The list is not an endorsement of every item. It places legitimate and illegitimate supports together under the condition of absence. Israel will discover that neither royal government nor religious equipment can substitute for returning to the LORD.

The many days prevent a shallow restoration in which circumstances change but allegiance does not. Waiting exposes dependency and prepares the final movement described in the next verse.

THE DISCIPLINE OF ABSENCE: Israel will lose the structures it trusted before it learns again to seek the LORD.

Afterward They Shall Return

Hosea 3:5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king.

Afterward is one of the great hope words in Hosea. Judgment and absence have a duration, but God has appointed a future beyond them. Israel will return and seek rather than merely endure.

The reference to David their king cannot mean that the historical David returns to resume ordinary rule. The Northern Kingdom had rejected Davidic kingship. Hosea points toward the promised Davidic ruler, the Messiah in whom covenant kingship reaches fulfillment.

The people will fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days. This fear is reverent awe before holy generosity. God's goodness is not a reason for presumption. When rightly seen, it produces humble return.

MESSIANIC HOPE: The marriage sign ends by looking toward repentant return and the reign of David's greater Son.

Judgment and Compassion Across Hosea

Hosea 11:8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? ... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

Chapters 1 through 3 introduce a tension that continues throughout the book. Israel's sin is described without euphemism, and judgment is announced with terrible clarity. Yet divine compassion repeatedly interrupts what appears to be a final sentence.

In Hosea 11 the LORD remembers teaching Ephraim to walk and drawing the people with cords of a man and bands of love. The question How shall I give thee up does not mean God has lost control of His emotions. It reveals covenant compassion in language human hearts can hear.

The book closes with another call to return and a promise to heal backsliding. Hosea never chooses between holiness and love. The holy God loves, and the loving God refuses to treat destructive rebellion as harmless.

WHOLE-BOOK BALANCE: Hosea's warnings are severe because covenant love is holy, and his promises are astonishing because holy love remains merciful.

Israel Is the Unfaithful Wife

Hosea 2:5 For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully.

A sermon can easily leave the congregation standing beside Hosea and condemning Gomer. The prophecy does not permit that safe distance. Gomer's unfaithfulness interprets Israel's unfaithfulness. The worshipping community is the accused wife.

The charge includes idolatry, political trust, ingratitude and misuse of divine gifts. Spiritual adultery is not confined to bowing before a carved image. Any rival allegiance that receives the trust, gratitude and obedience belonging to God participates in the same covenant disorder.

The proper question is not merely What kind of woman was Gomer? It is What lovers do we pursue when obedience feels costly, provision seems uncertain or another power promises control?

THE MIRROR TURNS: The scandal of Hosea is not only that he married Gomer. It is that God's covenant people must recognize themselves in her.

Christ the Bridegroom

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

The New Testament identifies Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the people for whom He gives Himself. Hosea is not a complete allegory in which every payment or object predicts a precise detail of the cross. Yet the pattern of betrayed covenant, costly love and restored relationship prepares the heart to understand the Gospel.

Christ does more than Hosea could do. He bears sin, satisfies divine justice, cleanses His people and presents the Church to Himself. His sacrifice does not purchase God's willingness to love. It is the historical action of the love that determined to save.

The Bridegroom theme also guards against a purely commercial account of redemption. The price brings sinners into covenant fellowship. Salvation is forgiveness, cleansing, belonging and future life with Christ.

GOSPEL FULFILLMENT: Hosea pays to restore a wounded marriage. Christ gives Himself to redeem and cleanse His covenant people.

Bought With a Price

1 Corinthians 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

The language of purchase in Hosea 3 naturally resonates with New Testament redemption. Believers are bought with a price, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and delivered from bondage that they could not escape by self-reform.

The comparison must be made with care. Hosea's silver and barley are not a mathematical prophecy of Calvary. The inspired New Testament, not imaginative arithmetic, explains the price of Christian redemption. Christ gave His life and shed His blood.

Redemption creates a claim upon the redeemed. Paul moves from bought with a price to therefore glorify God. Grace does not return a person to the same master and the same pattern. It creates belonging, holiness and grateful obedience.

REDEMPTIVE CLAIM: The price of grace does not make sin insignificant. It establishes that the redeemed now belong to the Redeemer.

Hosea Is Not a Universal Marriage Command

Hosea 1:2 And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms.

Hosea received a unique prophetic command. The passage does not instruct every Christian to seek an unfaithful spouse, marry someone engaged in prostitution or remain indefinitely in a marriage marked by continuing adultery.

Jesus and Paul address sexual immorality, separation and covenant responsibility elsewhere. Those passages must be studied directly when counseling an actual marriage. Hosea cannot be isolated from the rest of Scripture and turned into a weapon against a betrayed spouse.

The story reveals God's redeeming character and may inspire costly forgiveness, but description and prophetic commission are not identical to universal command. Faithfulness to the text includes respecting that distinction.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD: Hosea's assignment was prophetic and particular. It must not be imposed upon every betrayed husband or wife.

Hosea Does Not Require a Person to Remain in Danger

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

Nothing in Hosea requires a person to remain exposed to violence, coercion, sexual danger, financial control or threats to children. Immediate safety may require separation, trusted help, law enforcement, medical care or professional counsel.

Forgiveness can release vengeance before trust is restored. Reconciliation requires truth and the willing participation of both parties. Trust is rebuilt through demonstrated faithfulness over time. Access is not owed merely because an offender says the word sorry.

Church leaders should never use the language of submission, grace or Hosea's pursuit to silence a report of abuse. Protecting life and bringing hidden conduct into the light are consistent with truth, justice and love.

SAFETY IS NOT UNBELIEF: Biblical grace does not require secrecy, denial or continued exposure to abuse.

A Word to the Betrayed

Psalm 34:18 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Hosea gives language to the wound of covenant betrayal. The injured spouse may recognize grief, humiliation, anger and the collapse of a shared future. Scripture does not demand that these realities be minimized so that forgiveness can sound easier.

The LORD sees betrayal from the inside of covenant language. He is not distant from the pain. At the same time, a betrayed person is not Hosea by divine command and is not responsible to reproduce every feature of the prophet's sign-act.

Healing may involve lament, boundaries, wise counsel, patient discernment and a long rebuilding of life. The church should accompany the wounded without forcing a timetable or making reconciliation the condition for receiving care.

PASTORAL COMFORT: God does not ask the betrayed to pretend the wound is small, and He does not abandon them inside it.

A Word to the Wanderer

Hosea 14:1 O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

Hosea offers no excuse for the wanderer. Iniquity causes a fall, false lovers fail and judgment is deserved. Repentance begins by agreeing with God about the betrayal rather than renaming it as freedom, need or circumstance.

Yet the command return proves that the door is being addressed to people who have gone away. God promises to heal backsliding and love freely. The sinner does not create mercy by returning. The offered mercy makes return possible and meaningful.

Genuine return includes abandoning rival gods, receiving the LORD's word and bringing changed conduct. Grace welcomes the repentant without telling them that their former master may remain in the house.

CALL TO RETURN: The God who names the sin also speaks to the sinner as someone who may still come home.

A Word to the Church About Prostitution

Matthew 21:31 The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

Jesus could name the sin of prostitution without treating people in prostitution as beyond grace. He warned respectable religious hearers that publicans and harlots who believed the call to righteousness were entering ahead of the self-satisfied.

The church must reject both exploitation and contempt. Some people enter prostitution through deliberate choices, some through coercion, poverty, addiction or trafficking and many through tangled combinations that outsiders do not fully understand. Every person bears God-given dignity and needs truth, protection and the Gospel.

Hosea should not become a joke about marrying the wrong kind of woman. It should humble a congregation that has received mercy and summon believers to oppose exploitation while offering a credible path toward safety, repentance and restored life.

CHURCH POSTURE: Condemn exploitation, tell the truth about sin and never speak as though any human being is beneath the reach of Christ.

What the Story Does Not Tell Us

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children.

Hosea does not describe Gomer standing naked at an auction. It does not identify her purchaser, pimp, creditor or captor. It does not state that Hosea secretly supported her while she lived with another man. It does not record the children's private conversations or Gomer's final words.

Such additions can create emotional sermons, but they transfer authority from Scripture to imagination. Illustrative possibilities must be labeled as possibilities, and details that risk sexualizing or humiliating a person should ordinarily be omitted.

The revealed facts are sufficient. God commands the marriage, names Israel's betrayal, announces judgment, directs renewed love, records a price and promises eventual return under David's king. A faithful sermon gains power by trusting what God chose to reveal.

EXPOSITORY DISCIPLINE: Do not make an invented scene carry the sermon when the inspired text already carries it better.

Commentary Summary

Hosea 2:20 I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

Hosea's literal marriage becomes a prophetic sign of Israel's covenant betrayal. Gomer's description establishes unfaithfulness but does not settle every question about chronology or occupation. The children's names announce scattering, withdrawn mercy and covenant rupture, then God begins reversing those names before the first chapter ends.

Hosea 2 interprets the sign. Israel pursued false lovers, credited them with gifts the LORD had supplied and used divine provision for Baal. God hedges the path, removes misused gifts and exposes the lie. Then the surprising therefore introduces wooing, renewed speech, a door of hope and betrothal in righteousness, mercy and faithfulness.

Hosea 3 returns to the household. Hosea loves again, pays a real cost and establishes a disciplined path toward restoration. The sign points to Israel's future return to the LORD and David their king. In the wider Biblical story it prepares the heart for Christ, the Bridegroom who gives Himself to redeem His people.

FINAL ANSWER: God told Hosea to marry Gomer so that Israel could see its own unfaithfulness and so that judgment, costly love and promised restoration could be made visible.

A Final Word

Hosea 14:4 I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

The deepest scandal in Hosea is not that a righteous prophet loved an unfaithful woman. It is that the holy God continues to speak of healing and free love to people who used His gifts in the service of rivals.

No listener should leave merely comparing personal respectability with Gomer's public shame. We have all trusted gifts, powers and loyalties that could not save. We have taken breath, strength, opportunity and mercy from God while withholding the gratitude and obedience that belong to Him.

The Bridegroom has come. Jesus Christ gave Himself for sinners, rose from the dead and calls wanderers to return. The Gospel does not say that betrayal was harmless. It says the price has been borne, cleansing is offered and those who were not His people may be called the people of God.

CLOSING AFFIRMATION: Grace does not deny the betrayal. Grace pays the cost, heals the backslider and brings the repentant wanderer home.

Selected Sources for Further Study

Primary Biblical texts: Hosea 1-3 and Hosea 11-14. Related passages include Joshua 7, Jeremiah 2-3, Ezekiel 16 and 23, Matthew 9:15, Matthew 21:28-32, Romans 9:22-26, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, Ephesians 5:22-32, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Revelation 19:6-9.

Selected commentaries: Douglas Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, Word Biblical Commentary 31; J. Andrew Dearman, The Book of Hosea, New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, Hosea, Anchor Bible 24; Thomas Edward McComiskey, Hosea, in The Minor Prophets; and Duane A. Garrett, Hosea, Joel, New American Commentary 19A.

Useful background and theological studies include Hans Walter Wolff, Hosea; Ehud Ben Zvi, Hosea; and Gale A. Yee, Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea. These sources represent differing conclusions on Gomer, the marriage sign and the book's composition. Their proposals should be weighed under the wording and canonical context of Scripture.