



The Unfaithful Bride

God offers grace to people even when they are unfaithful to Him.

HOSEA 1:2-9; 3:1-5

One of the most difficult offenses for us to forgive is betrayal. The difficulty is even greater when the betrayal has been going on for an extended amount of time. That being the case, it is mindboggling to contemplate God's compassion toward His people when we are unfaithful to Him, considering all He has done for us. God directed Hosea to marry a woman who would betray their marriage vows, thus illustrating God's love for His people.

Which portion of the wedding vow would you rate as the most difficult to maintain? Explain.

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

HOSEA 1:1–3:5

Hosea was one of the eighth-century prophets, along with Amos, Micah, and Isaiah. Like Amos, he preached primarily to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. During the beginning of Hosea's ministry, Jeroboam II was king of Israel. It was a time of affluence, national stability, and military might. With a strong economy and hope of a bright future, people were optimistic. But when Jeroboam died, the nation faced grave uncertainties. With six kings over the course of thirty years, the nation could never achieve the same stability it had under Jeroboam. Four of those six kings were assassinated, further demonstrating the volatile political climate. At the same time, Assyria reemerged as a power and its threats loomed over Israel until the threats became realities when Samaria fell in 722 BC.

The religious climate of Israel was worse than its political climate. Hosea continually spoke against the worship of Baal (Hos. 2:8; 11:2; 13:1). Baal worship involved a fertility cult which included sacred prostitution at the "high places" or altars to Baal (2 Kings 17:7-12). Through Hosea's marriage with a promiscuous woman, God detailed the ruin and disaster that would occur to Israel because of its sin.

Remarkably little is known of Hosea the prophet prior to his ministry. His father's name was Beerli (Hos. 1:1), but beyond that not much else is known about him. We do not know where his home was, what events shaped his early life, or how he was educated. We do not know about his call to ministry, other than the command God gave him in Hosea 1:2. We can gather that he was a relatively young man when God called him because he was of marriageable age and ministered for forty years. Beyond that, all we know is that Hosea was a man who married his message and lived that marriage as a symbol of God's faithfulness to Israel.

Read Hosea 1:2-9 and 3:1-5. What parallels do you see between Israel's unfaithfulness to God and Gomer's unfaithfulness to Hosea?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

OBEDIENCE DEMONSTRATED (HOSEA 1:2-7)

² When the LORD first spoke to Hosea, he said this to him: Go and marry a woman of promiscuity, and have children of promiscuity, for the land is committing blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the LORD. ³ So he went and married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴ Then the LORD said to him: Name him Jezreel, for in a little while I will bring the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu and put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵ On that day I will break the bow of Israel in Jezreel Valley. ⁶ She conceived again and gave birth to a daughter, and the LORD said to him: Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel. I will certainly take them away. ⁷ But I will have compassion on the house of Judah, and I will deliver them by the LORD their God. I will not deliver them by bow, sword, or war, or by horses and cavalry.

VERSE 2

The first verse of Hosea indicated that the word of the Lord came to Hosea (Hos. 1:1). That word was not a word for the prophet to preach but an action to undertake. The Lord told the prophet: ***Go and marry a woman of promiscuity.*** Interpreters have disagreed on the exact meaning of these words. Some have sought to soften this command by indicating this woman was not immoral when he married her but would later become immoral. However, all indications are that Hosea was to marry a woman who already was known for her immorality. This was the heart of the message Hosea would preach to his people—that God came to them when they were immoral and loved them through their unfaithfulness.

Some believe *woman of promiscuity* referred to a prostitute, though the text does not use that term. This seems to be the meaning of Hosea 2:5, where she expected food, water, and clothing from her lovers. This also could have been a reference to sacred prostitutes in the fertility cults of Israel. If this were true, Hosea was indicting the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom for committing adultery against God by attending these sacred shrines and joining themselves to those like Hosea's wife. Hosea's marriage

would be the foundation of his ministry as he acted out the part of God and his wife acted out the part of Israel.

In addition to marrying an immoral woman, Hosea received a charge from God to have *children of promiscuity* with her. Again, scholars disagree about this term. Did the use of this phrase indicate that the children would not be his, but he would raise them? Or did this mean they would be Hosea's children but their paternity would always be called into question because of the life Hosea's wife was living? The latter is where most interpreters fall, indicating that both Hosea and his children would bear the brunt of an unfaithful wife and mother. The purpose of Hosea's union with an adulterous woman was to demonstrate how Israel was *committing blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the LORD*. Hosea entered the same type of union as the Lord did with Israel. In doing so, the prophet was uniquely qualified to speak of God's faithfulness and love to those who rebelled against Him.

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary.

Read an article on the Jezreel Valley in a Bible dictionary. Make a list of the events and the people involved in those events from the Old Testament. How do these people and events connect to Hosea's naming his son Jezreel? How does the naming of the son illustrate the importance of learning from the past?

VERSES 3-7

Hosea obeyed the voice of God and took *Gomer* as his wife. He also obeyed the command to have a child, which he obediently named •*Jezreel*. Jezreel was a town between Galilee and Samaria,

and it was also the name of the valley running between them. It was there Jehu had killed Joram and Jezebel, destroying Ahab's line and establishing a new dynasty as the new king of Israel. The name *Jezeel* meant "God Sows," and it seems that this child was pointing to the fact that God would judge the house of Jehu for not heeding the lessons of his predecessors whom he killed at Jezreel. Because of Israel's unfaithfulness, He would ***break the bow of Israel in Jezreel Valley***. This would happen through the hands of Tiglath-pileser, leader of the Assyrians, when Shallum assassinated Zechariah in Jezreel, ending the dynasty of Jehu (2 Kings 15:10).

Hosea and Gomer had a second child, a daughter named ***Lo-ruhamah***, which meant "not loved" or "no compassion." It may seem cruel to name a child "Not Loved," but Hosea was living his words of prophecy and acting out God's commitment to judge Israel for its sin. God had given Israel plenty of chances to repent and turn to Him, but they would not. Therefore, through Hosea's child, God revealed that He would ***no longer have compassion*** on Israel and would ***take them away*** into exile by the Assyrians. However, He would have compassion on ***Judah***, the Southern Kingdom, and He would deliver them by His own hand rather than the strength of their army. Judah had shown signs of repentance, but Israel had only grown more wicked, and God was ready to discipline the Northern Kingdom. Israel would fall to Assyria in 722 BC, but Judah would last until 586/587 BC. Hosea's marriage to Gomer, in the coming pages of his prophecy, would reveal what God was doing with His unfaithful children.

How does Hosea's marriage mirror the relationship between God and His people?

UNFAITHFULNESS SEEN (HOSEA 1:8-9)

⁸ After Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. ⁹ Then the LORD said: Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people, and I will not be your God.

VERSES 8-9

Some interpreters have pointed out that Jezreel was definitely identified as the child of Hosea (v. 3), but neither the second nor third child include that type of declaration. Such was the uncertainty of Hosea in his life with Gomer.

The Lord gave the third child the name *•Lo-ammi*, which meant “not my people.” Did this indicate the child was not Hosea’s or that it was uncertain whether the child was his? Certainly Israel was not acting like the children of God, and Gomer was not acting like a wife to the prophet. As Gomer had broken her marriage covenant, Israel had broken their covenant with God. A hint of this breaking of covenant is found in the expression *I will not be your God*, which could also be translated, “I am not I Am to you.” This was a clear reference to God’s establishing His covenant with Moses by revealing the name *Yahweh* (Ex. 3:14-15). Because Israel was acting adulterously toward God, they were not acting like His people, just as this new baby was called into question by Gomer’s unfaithfulness to Hosea.

In Exodus 6:7, God said to the Israelites, “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.” He said in Leviticus 26:12, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” Through the birth of Hosea’s third child, God revealed that Israel was no longer keeping the covenant and called into question their identity as His children. He reversed the covenantal language found in Exodus and Leviticus. They were calling into question who their Father was, and God declared them *Lo-ammi*, “not my people.”

Verses 10-11 reveal that this disowning of the Israelites would not spell the demise of God’s children. They would one day be as numerous as the sand of the sea and would be called sons of the living God (Hos. 1:10). This would happen for both Judeans and Israelites, and it would occur under the reign of a single ruler. This was ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ to bring together the children of God.

What does the naming of Lo-ammi reveal to us about God’s expectations for His covenant people?

RESTORATION SOUGHT (HOSEA 3:1-5)

¹ Then the LORD said to me, “Go again; show love to a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”

² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and nine bushels of barley. ³ I said to her, “You are to live with me many days. You must not be promiscuous or belong to any man, and I will act the same way toward you.” ⁴ For the Israelites must live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. ⁵ Afterward, the people of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come with awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the last days.

VERSES 1-2

Apparently, Gomer left Hosea after the birth of their third child to go after one of her lovers. Perhaps she had sold herself into slavery. The Lord spoke again to Hosea, telling him to demonstrate grace and love to Gomer yet again, even though she had turned her back on Hosea and their marriage. He was to do this to show how God continued to love the unfaithful Israelites.

Israel’s unfaithfulness was seen in two ways. They decided to *turn to other gods*. They were sacrificing on pagan altars. Their unfaithfulness was also expressed by their affinity to *love raisin cakes*. This was a reference to a food that was an aphrodisiac (Song of Sol. 2:5) and was part of the religious ceremony of the fertility cults. The Israelites preferred raisin cakes to the faithful love of God.

Hosea went to the slave market and bought Gomer back for *fifteen shekels of silver and five bushels of barley*. This was not an exorbitant amount of money, which only increased the shame for Hosea. Notice that Gomer’s name is not even mentioned in this passage, only *a woman*. She had forfeited her right to Hosea’s love, but he gave it to her anyway, traveling to the slave yard to purchase her freedom.

Why might someone seek anyone or thing other than God, knowing that He will welcome them with loving arms and acceptance?

VERSES 3-5

God put some restrictions on Hosea and Gomer. She was not to *be promiscuous or belong to any man* and he would *act the same way* toward Gomer. They refrained from physical relations for a time. Verses 4-5 reveal the reason. They were again acting out a parable of God's relationship with Israel. Just as Hosea and Gomer were isolated from each other, God would isolate Himself from Israel until they seek Him again. In Assyrian exile, they would learn their need to turn to God.

Hosea revealed that *afterward*, Israel would *return and seek the LORD their God*. Absence from God would make their heart fond for God. They would also seek *David their king*, which indicated a future reconciliation of Israel and Judah under a Messianic King who would reunite the two nations. These days were called the *last days*, which referred to the inauguration of Jesus's ministry. As Jesus instituted the Messianic Age with His coming, God brought the true Israel together under His rule and reign. This led to both Jew and Gentile seeking God again.

Hosea's life revealed the extent of God's faithfulness to His unfaithful people. Like Hosea, who came to the slave market for Gomer, God came to those enslaved in sin. Restoration did not begin with Gomer's seeking Hosea; it began when Hosea proved his love by going to a place of humiliation to redeem his bride. Through Jesus, God demonstrated His love by ransoming us from the wages of our sin and setting us free from our past. Restoration with sinners was first sought by God, not sinners (1 John 4:19). Reconciliation is available because of the One who is faithful.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See Psalm 32:1-5; Ephesians 2:8-9.)

