

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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I Will Betroth You Hosea 2:19, 20

Hosea was a contemporary of Isaiah prophesying during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah and during the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel (1:1). Other kings from the northern kingdom are not mentioned but Hosea prophesied throughout those reigns as well. Why they are not mentioned when the kings of Judah are more prominently mentioned is unknown, since Hosea was speaking a word primarily to Israel in the north. The reigns of these kings can be found in 2 Chronicles 26 – 32. The prophet was initially instructed to go and take a wife from among the prostitutes (1:2) and to have children by her.

Commentators are divided as to whether this was literally done by Hosea or whether it was designed as figurative lesson to Israel. Certainly the idea of taking a prostitute as a wife would have concerned the prophet, commissioned and called of God to be a holy spokesman for God. This command in verse 2 has frightened commentators also from interpreting the verse literally.

The idea of betrothal and marriage as a covenant relationship is prominent throughout the book. It is this relationship that dominates the prophecy. The unrepentant adulterous nation should seek God and return to God since this relationship exists. In order to demonstrate their unwillingness to do this and to reveal their proclivity to willful sin, Hosea is to marry Gomer (see 1:2, 3). Her repeated unfaithfulness would be a sign that the nation was like Hosea's wife (see 1:2 – 11; 3:1 – 5).

God promises incredible hope to this people through the actions of the prophet and his wife. The book of Hosea should be read in the light of the book of Deuteronomy. It is Deuteronomy that reveals the covenantal obligations of the people of God. These obligations are to be first of all expressed through the worship of God only. There were to be no idols in Israel. Idolatry was forbidden in the Moral Law of God. The Lord expected and required His people to maintain loyalty to Him by worshipping Him alone, and through obedience to His Law.

Hosea repeatedly points out the divorce in actions brought about by the rebellion of the people against God. God repeatedly calls upon the nation to repent. God has not abandoned His people. They need to be aware of their covenantal responsibilities and return to the Lord (see 2:9 – 19; 3:5; 4:1 – 3, 6 – 14; 5:2, 4, 15; 6:1 – 7, 11; 7:10, 13; 8:7, 14; 9:1, 9, 12, 17; 10:2, 3, 10, 12, 13; 11:7, 11; 12:2 – 6; 13:4, 6; 14:1, 2, 4, 9).

During the first half of the eighth century, the Assyrian influence declined in the West, which allowed the kingdoms of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel to flourish and expand. This situation began to change and Assyria began to assert herself through her aggressive expansionist policies. As a result, Assyria soon cast her eyes to the West and looked upon the flourishing kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In 722 BC, of course, the ultimate demise of the northern kingdom took place when Assyria removed them into captivity, but during Hosea's initial prophecy those days were in the future. In 734 BC the Assyrians made Israel a puppet state (2 Kings 15:29), but the end came swiftly in 722 BC.

The rejection of God by His people brought about the covenantal curses of Deuteronomy 28, 29. Hosea's prophecy exposes the sins of the people, then God promises judgment upon them, and then God promises

salvation. This is what Hosea reveals – sin, judgment and salvation. It has always been this way with God. He always deals with sin. He always punishes sin, but God also saves sinners. God's salvation is demonstrated through repentance and faith and a return to covenantal loyalty.

In Hosea we see that the people of God were guilty of idolatry which truly provoked God (see 4:17; 8:4, 6; 10:5; 11:2; 13:2). Israel's covenant relationship to God was a marriage, and Hosea viewed the nation as the Lord's "wife." He accused the nation of spiritual adultery. Israel had turned to Baal worship, the Canaanite god of storm and fertility (see 2:8; 11:2; 13:1). Why did they turn to these pagan idols? Israel believed that these idols would bring agricultural success and promote fertility among themselves. Hosea's marriage to Gomer was designed to point out to the nation their sin.

Hosea also points out other sins that Israel was guilty of – injustice (12:7); violent crimes (4:2; 6:9; 12:1); political rebellion (7:3 – 7); religious hypocrisy (6:6); foreign alliances (7:11; 8:9) and unthankfulness (7:15).

The prophet Hosea did not expect Israel to return to the Lord. They were so immersed in their sin, and because of this, judgment was certain. Too often we accuse God of failing to keep His promises simply because we do not see beneficial results flowing to ourselves. This was the position of Israel. They were experiencing agricultural failures – drought and crop failure. They were barren in the womb – infertile, and so they blamed these on God. Instead of looking to God to see and find out why they were going through these things they resorted to further iniquity. Therefore, God promised to visit them with further severe judgment. Hosea stresses that the justice of God is demonstrated through His perfect judgment which corresponds to the sins of the nation.

God will not abandon His people – He is in covenant relationship with them. God's intention in discipline is restoration. This is always the biblical model regarding chastisement from God. It is designed not to drive His people away from God but to cause them to return. Their failure to repent and return is not the fault of God but their hardness of their hearts, and unwillingness to return.

God speaks as a Husband who will allure His people (His wife) back to Him (2:14 – 16). God desires that they give up their Baal worship and return to Him as their Husband. God will do this by causing them to hate Baal so much, that they will look to Him. God can make sin so reprehensible to us that we despise it and want nothing to do with it anymore. It becomes a stench in our nostrils. We should always pay attention if the desire for sin increases.

God promises in 2:18 that he will bless them with abundance. There will be no more violence in the land – they will dwell securely. God's promise of betrothal suggests a fresh new start, a new beginning. It is not a repairing of what existed previously, but a brand new beginning. Betrothal in ancient Israel was much more binding than our modern engagement period. Betrothal spoke of marriage in such a way that you viewed the betrothal as if marriage had occurred (Deut. 20:7; 22:23, 24).

This new relationship will be characterized by permanence (forever – 2:19); by righteousness and justice (2:19); in steadfast love and mercy (2:19); in faithfulness (2:20) with the result being that Israel will know who her husband is – the Lord (2:20).

The Church is the Bride of Christ. As such we are betrothed to our Lord in a permanent relationship. It can never be broken or destroyed. There can never be divorce from our Husband. From Him flows righteousness, justice, love, mercy, faithfulness and knowledge. This has occurred because of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31 – 34) between God and His people (the Bride). We who once were not a people are now the people of God (Hos. 1:10; 2:23; see also 1 Pet. 2:10). God has had mercy on us – let us live in righteousness and faithfulness since we are betrothed to Him forever.