

Hosea 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Hosea chapter 2. Say to your brothers, you are my people, and to your sisters, you have received mercy. Plead with your mother, plead, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband, that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts, lest I strip her naked, and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst.

Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom. For their mother has played the whore, she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.

Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them, and she shall seek them, but not find them.

Then she shall say, I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now. And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for bail.

Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

[1 : 2 9] And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts. And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.

I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. And I will punish her for the feast days of the bales, when she burned offerings to them, and adorned herself with her ring and jewellery, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the Lord.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the valley of Achor a door of hope.

And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, declares the Lord, You will call me my husband, and no longer will you call me my Baal.

For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.

[2 : 3 6] And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land. And I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord. And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord. I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. And the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil.

And they shall answer Jezreel. And I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on no mercy. And I will say to not my people, you are my people.

And he shall say, you are my God. In Hosea chapter 1, as a prophetic sign, the Lord had instructed Hosea to take a wife of Hordom, a woman of shameful sexual reputation, and to have children by her.

Hosea had married Gomer and fathered three children by her, which the Lord commanded him to name Jezreel, no mercy, and not my people. In this way, Hosea symbolized the Lord's relationship with his unfaithful people and the judgment that would come upon them.

[3 : 41] At the end of the chapter, however, there was a remarkable change of tone from judgment to mercy, as the Lord promised the regathering and restoration of his people. The prophecies of chapter 2 have the actions of chapter 1 as their background.

The chapter opens with a statement that seems to be distinct from, yet related to, the prophecy of grace with which chapter 1 concludes. As with the concluding verses of chapter 1, it plays off the names of the children, reversing the judgments that they spoke of.

The naming of the second son, not my people, is answered with the statement, you are my people. And the naming of the daughter, no mercy, is answered with the statement, you have received mercy.

Paul refers back to Hosea chapter 1 verse 10 to 2 verse 1 in Romans chapter 9 verses 25 to 26. There he also relates its statements to Gentiles, who were never formerly God's people, yet who were made part of the people of God through the work of Christ.

As Joshua Moon argues, the metaphors drawn from chapter 1 that chapter 2 explores should be treated as loose-fitting metaphors exploited for rhetorical ends. For instance, in verse 2, the children are charged to plead with their mother to reject her whoring.

[4 : 51] Of course, within the metaphor, both the mother and the children are Israel. A similar metaphor is developed in places like Jeremiah chapter 3. Perhaps this use of the metaphor allows the more faithful Israelite to figure themselves into the picture.

They are children of a disgraceful mother, now disowned by her former husband, on account of whom they suffer great shame and stigma. However, as Andrew Dearman observes, it is possible that the mother is supposed to represent Samaria as the capital of Israel.

While some of the children may not even be party to or supportive of their mother's whoring, they are ostracized on account of it. The best that they can do is to plead with their mother, with the nation more generally, to abandon its gross unfaithfulness to the Lord.

If the nation does not repent, it will be stripped naked. It will both lose all of the riches it gained from its divine husband, and will suffer great public shame and indignity.

The disgraced and disowned wife seems to relate to the land here, which will be made like a parched wilderness, unable to sustain life. Stripping naked is elsewhere used to refer to the spoiling of the land and the capture of its people by their adversaries.

[5 : 58] For instance, in Ezekiel chapter 16 verses 36 to 39. Thus says the Lord God, Because your lust was poured out, and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, therefore behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated.

I will gather them against you from every side, and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy.

And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare.

The children of this mother will also be disowned. The nation went after its lovers, its false gods, wrongly attributing to their generosity the manifold blessings that she enjoyed in the good land that she inhabited, when all of these really came from the Lord.

The Lord, however, would frustrate this adulterous wife in all of her ways, hedging them up with thorns and dooming her pursuit of her lovers to futility. All she would succeed in would be bringing ruin upon herself.

[7 : 14] Like the prodigal son in Luke, this shameful woman would seek to return to the one that she had dishonored by her behavior, recognizing that her condition had been better formally.

According to the laws of divorce in places like Deuteronomy chapter 24 verses 1 to 4, a return to a former husband would be closed to her. Jeremiah the prophet makes a similar point in Jeremiah chapter 3 verse 1.

However, perhaps we are supposed to regard the whoring wife here more as hopelessly estranged from a man who is still technically her husband than as one divorced. Israel had ignorantly regarded the bales as the source of her blessings and had also devoted her riches to the service of them.

The Lord, as he stripped her of his gifts and of all the things with which he had provided for and sustained her, would leave her naked and uncovered in the sight of her lovers. She had exposed herself to them in her idolatry, but now she would be exposed to them in shame.

The Lord would cut off the festal occasions that mark the regular seasons of the life of the nation. He would give her cultivated orchards and vineyards over to the wild forest and make their fruits food for the beasts.

[8 : 20] In all of this, her actions in going after the bales and forgetting the Lord would come back upon her own head. As in chapter 1, however, the dark message of judgment is followed by a surprising message of restoration.

Despite all that Israel had done, all of the ways that she had betrayed the Lord as her husband, the covenant bond would be restored and the Lord would deal with her tenderly in ways which recall the early years of the marriage, when he had first led her out into the wilderness in the Exodus.

Earlier in the book, the wilderness was the result of judgment, yet here it represents the hope beyond hope of a return to the intimacy of the earliest period of the covenant, after all of the treachery and infidelity that had subsequently occurred.

While earlier the unfaithful wife had rather presumptuously sought to return to her husband, whom she had greatly dishonoured, now it is the husband who is pursuing the wife who betrayed him, not merely bringing her home in disgrace, but wooing her once more.

The valley of Achor is presumably here presented as a door into the promised land, first receiving its name in Joshua chapter 7, after the execution of Achan after his sin at Jericho.

[9 : 31] Israel would respond to the Lord as she once did. Although she had formerly worshipped the Lord in a syncretistic manner, treating him as one of the Baals, now she would express a more fitting covenant intimacy, addressing the Lord as her husband.

Baal, in the sense of master or Lord, was a term occasionally used for husbands, but here it would be replaced by the mutual intimacy conveyed by the term husband. The names of the Baals, her former lovers, would be removed from her mouth, as she would no longer call upon them in worship.

The Lord would provide for and protect them, saving them from predatory animals and warring neighbours. He would secure the relationship once more, betrothing them to himself in covenant faithfulness.

This restoration would demonstrate his character, faithfulness and sovereignty. Knowing the Lord here also implies the intimacy appropriate to the marital relationship. As Israel calls upon the Lord once more, the Lord will answer, and the reciprocity between heavens and earth that sustains the fertility of the land would be established.

The heavens would drop down rain, and the earth would answer with fruitfulness in grain, wine and oil. The end of the chapter brings with it the reversal of all of the negative connotations of the names of Hosea's prophetically named children by Gomer.

[10 : 47] Jezreel is no longer associated with the bloody rise and fall of the dynasty of Jehu, but with its meaning, God sows. God will sow the people in the land, much as he speaks of doing in Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 27.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. No mercy will receive mercy, and not my people will be told, You are my people, and will answer, You are my God.

A question to consider. The prophetic sign act of taking the wife of Hordom and having children of Hordom and the prophecies associated with it would have played out over several years.

How do you imagine this would have affected the way that Hosea's message was received? Why do you think that the Lord appointed such a sign act?