

HOSEA

People Who Forgot GOD

by S. Franklin Logsdon

"For Israel hath forgotten his maker." (Hosea 8:14)

"My people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32)

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CHAPTER FOUR -

THE INTERLUDE OF LOVE (Hosea 3)

THIS IS BY FAR the briefest chapter of this prophetic book. In a sense, it is the most comprehensive. It is panoramic in its sweep, touching upon Israel's hideous past, her current dispersion, and her certain, glorious future.

The five verses which comprise the chapter are pregnant with deep significance. They constitute something of a summary of all the subject matter which has been treated before - something of a recapitulation of the appeals of JEHOVAH.

The chapter opens with an authentic note: **"Then said the Lord unto me"** (v. 1). It continues with a renewal of an earlier symbolism - an adulterous wife. It confirms, unmistakably, the analogy which the LORD was establishing between Hosea's wife and His own unfaithful people - **"the children of Israel who look to other gods."**

The chapter then emphasizes the wonderful truth of redemption - **"So I bought her to me."** It sketches the long period of destitution for the descendants of Jacob as the severe price of their rebellion against God - **"the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice."** etc. Then it envisions a brighter, better day, a day of restoration and blessedness - **"the children of Israel [shall] return."**

The woman whom Hosea is commanded to love is none other than Gomer, his lawfully wedded wife. GOD did not say, "Take a woman," but rather **"Love a woman."** She is undeserving of his love for she has been, and is yet, an adulteress. Described as **"a woman beloved of her friend"** (v. 1), it is apparent that there has been an alienation of affection. She has dishonored the family name, grieved her husband, and betrayed her children.

Her unchastity is an embarrassment and a stigma. But the LORD commanded Hosea to love her still. And how is he to love her who no longer merits his love? He is to love her "**according to the love of the Lord**" (v.1).

This is the only effective way to love the unlovely. This is how a missionary loves the odious leper, the superstitious native, the savage, uncivilized people of the jungle.

This is how rescue mission attendants love the alcohol-saturated, vermin-infected wrecks of humanity which are gathered from the skid rows of the world. This is how children's workers love the little tots who require an affection that is kind and patient. This manner of love, with all other good and perfect gifts, is from above. It is in reality GOD loving through the believer.

What may be said concerning the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel? Much indeed! It is an exhaustless subject. His love abounded when He entered into covenant relationship with these people. Every choice He makes but magnifies His transcendent greatness, for "**God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty**" (I Corinthians 1:27).

Thus, the Israelites did not come into divine favor because they were more numerous than the other races. Love is the answer (Deuteronomy 7 :8). "**When Israel was a child, then I loved him,**" is a very tender divine reminiscence (Hosea 11:1). That is to say, from the nation's infancy, GOD loved the people. He loved them in spite of their rebellion and waywardness (3:1), and will love them forever, for His is an "**everlasting love**" (Jeremiah 31:3).

By implication, the LORD is saying to Hosea, "Your wife has turned her affections to others. I know your heart is grieved. However, this is precisely My own experience with the children of Israel, for they '**look to other gods, and love flagons of wine**'" (v. 1). Of course, we need not rely on implication for the true reaction of the Almighty to the alienated hearts of His people. "**Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord**" (Jeremiah 3:20).

The looking "**to other gods**" (v. 1) speaks of diverted devotion; while their delight in "**flagons of wine**" describes their false and blasphemous worship - an utter denial and rejection of the divinely ordered ceremonial procedure.

The "**flagons of wine**" were pressed raisin cakes, customary elements in idol worship, the preparation of which involved the whole family. "**The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of Heaven**" (Jeremiah 7:18). Yet GOD loves them still. O matchless heart of love!

The prophet might have said, "LORD, I cannot further tolerate Gomer. I have pleaded with her to amend her ways, if for no other reason, than for the sake of the family. The reports of her escapades embarrass me at every turn. Her persistent unfaithfulness has destroyed all the love I ever had for her." But, no, he moves to effect a reconciliation. He gets together fifteen pieces of silver and approximately sixteen bushels of barley to meet an immediate need in her case.

Many reason that, since fifteen pieces of silver were but half the price of a slave (Exodus 21:32),

Gomer was all but worthless. This is profitless conjecture. Better that we suggest the full meaning is obscure. But since love is going to act - indeed is now acting - worthlessness of the one loved, in spite of her downfall, could scarcely fit the picture.

Doubtless Gomer's sin had gotten her into a deplorable situation, but even in such sad cases, when love begins to operate, the need is met freely and without misgiving. Love makes every attempt to recover the erring one from his predicament. The cost of doing so is never a measure of the worthiness or unworthiness. It is heart willingness to assist a loved one in need, regardless.

Who fixed the amount in this case is not revealed, nor are the circumstances which demanded the sum. Hosea met the need. This is the prominent and impressive fact at the moment.

The word "bought" in this connection is rarely used. It is said to be a special application of the Hebrew *kawraw*, conveying the idea of planning as implied in bargaining (Strong's Concordance). It means "*to open*" and "*to prepare*." This is precisely what love in the heart of the prophet has in view - to open the way and to prepare for better relationship.

The analogy of an unfaithful wife which runs throughout this book, and which is especially prominent in this chapter, continues in verse 3. As Gomer must wait for full restoration, so the children of Israel have a period of waiting before their restoration.

It is especially emphasized that, in the meantime, she must not involve herself in licentious matters. "**Thou shalt not play the harlot,**" her husband warned (v. 3).

The period prophesied in verse 4 is described as one during which Israel would be without either civil polity or spiritual worship. She would also lack the accouterments of idolatrous engagements - the former by unspiritual choice; the latter, by divine restriction (cf. 2:6).

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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