

Unfailing Love

God offers grace to His rebellious people



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Hosea 3

August 2, 2020

(Hosea 3:1-5) ¹The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." ²So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. ³Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you." ⁴For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. ⁵Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days.

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- **What is a more hurtful charge against a spouse: "You cheated on me," or "You ignored me?" Explain.**
- **What makes forgiving an unfaithful spouse so difficult? What steps might be required to repair a marriage broken because of an unfaithful spouse?**

Gomer came out of prostitution and she returned to her old ways after she married Hosea. God approached Hosea and gave him a clear directive about what to do next. The actions of the prophet would serve as a living demonstration of the relationship between God and His people who had returned to their old ways, just like Gomer. In the process, we discover that God desires to be restored to His people and provides a way for that to happen.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Hosea married Gomer, a former prostitute. Hosea was faithful to her, but she was not faithful to him. Her continued unfaithfulness led to the marriage crumbling (see Hos. 2:1). Somewhere along the way, Gomer ended up being sold as a slave.

Have a volunteer read Hosea 3:1

- **Think about the Lord's instruction from Hosea's view – how do you think he felt? What questions what he have for God?**
- **Think about the Lord's instruction from Gomer's point of view. How do you think she felt? What questions would she have for God?**
- **How would you describe Hosea's love for Gomer? How does Hosea's love for Gomer compare to God's love for His people?**
- **How did Hosea's life experience give him a glimpse into God's heart?**

God directed Hosea to pursue his unfaithful wife and restore their marriage. In doing so, Hosea would serve as a living example of God's pursuit of His unfaithful people. The people of Israel had abandoned their commitment to God, but that did not diminish His love for them.

Have a volunteer read Hosea 3:2-3

- **What does the price paid and his willingness to pay that price reveal about Hosea's love for Gomer? What does the price Jesus paid for our salvation reveal about His love for us?**

- How did the stipulations placed on Gomer restore trust? What impact would her meeting these expectations have on their future?
- What expectations are placed on believers after salvation? What actions might a believer take to demonstrate that he or she is trustworthy?

Hosea purchased Gomer, gathering all the resources he had to do so. He also gave her expectations to meet that would grow the relationship. Our salvation was secured through Jesus' death on the cross, which is how God demonstrated His love for us. God loves us, but also expects His people to be faithful to Him. A believer's faithfulness to God demonstrates their love for Him.

Have a volunteer read Hosea 3:4-5

- How can religious practices get in the way of a real relationship with God? How have you seen a practice become a substitute for a growing relationship with God?
- How does Hosea's life serve as an example of what God was promising the Israelites?
- What characteristics of God are demonstrated in this passage? How does God demonstrate those characteristics today?

God explained that just as Gomer was placed on restrictions, the Israelites were also placed on religious restrictions. These restrictions served as discipline so that the Israelites would seek a genuine relationship with God and not just the practices associated with God. Everyone has rebelled against God, but He offers them restoration through His Son.

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- Ask God to show you areas in your life where you have been unfaithful to Him. What actions do you need to take based on what God shows you?
- How can you demonstrate God's love to someone who has hurt you or who is living in rebellion against God? What steps do you need to take immediately to demonstrate God's love to them?
- Who do you know that needs to know that God loves them and sent His Son so they could be free from sin and be restored to Him? How can you use Hosea's story to communicate that to them?

PRAYER: Thank the Lord for loving us in spite of our unfaithfulness to Him. Ask Him to help us remain faithful to Him, being intentional in sharing His love with others.

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Isaiah 6, 9
 DAY 2 – Isaiah 44-45
 DAY 3 – Isaiah 52-53
 DAY 4 – Isaiah 65-66
 DAY 5 – Micah 1, 4:6-13, 5

KEY VERSE: Isaiah 53:5

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.
 Explain what the text means.
 Apply the verse to your life.
 Respond to God.

Our team has put together Bible study resources to encourage and inspire you as you engage in God's Story. Visit chetscreek.com/gods-story for videos, study guides, and more.

Interpreting Hosea 3 is challenging. Who is the woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress? Why did Hosea have to buy her (Hos. 3:2)? Most likely this woman is Gomer; she is the only woman named in the book. She is probably called a woman because by her adultery, she has forfeited her identity as Hosea's wife. The most plausible reconstruction of events is that Hosea and Gomer married and had children, but Gomer would not give up her old ways. Her promiscuity inevitably led to a breakup of the marriage, and she lived separately as a prostitute. Poverty overtook her, and she became a slave. Then Hosea, at God's command, purchased her out of slavery and took her back. This scenario corresponds to the story of Israel. The Israelites were "married" to God in the covenant but committed adultery by going to other gods. Ultimately, Hosea announced God would take them back.

3:1. God called on his prophet to restore his marriage to an unfaithful wife. Gomer must be brought back into the prophet's house even though she was loved by Hosea's neighbor or companion. Hosea must accept back into his arms his adulterous wife. Only in this way could the prophet demonstrate how the LORD loves the Israelites. Israel must see that their sins were as rotten in God's eyes as Gomer's adultery was in Hosea's. In fact, Israel's spiritual adultery with other gods was worse than Gomer's physical adultery.

Raisin cakes, made of dried, compressed grapes, provided a rare delicacy in Israel's diet (Song 2:5). They apparently were part of the fertility rituals in Baal worship (Jer. 44:19). They represented part of the pay Israel thought they earned by worshipping Baal (Hos. 2:12).

The prophet had to pay for the privilege of getting his sinful wife back. Scholars debate why and to whom Hosea made such payments. Did he pay off (1) the impoverished woman's accumulated debts? (2) the new owner after she had fallen into slavery? (3) the new husband with whom she committed adultery? (4) Gomer herself to give her a dowry and parallel God's enriching of Israel through giving them rain? (5) the temple at which she plied her trade as a religious prostitute? or (6) her father to pay again a bridal price as God had again redeemed Israel after buying them out of Egypt?

The text does not answer this question. The most likely solution would involve a bridal price parallel to God's bridal payment. The amount Hosea paid for Gomer raises some problems. A shekel was a measure of weight equal perhaps to four-tenths of an ounce or 11.5 grams. A homer was about six bushels or 220 liters of grain, while a lethek was apparently one-half of a homer. This price was not excessive. A slave cost thirty shekels (Exod. 21:32). The bride price when Deuteronomy was written was fifty shekels (Deut. 22:29). Hosea may have had to scrape the money together. Perhaps unable to secure enough cash, he had to include payment-in-kind with grain. The important thing was the prophet's attitude in this transaction. He obeyed God without question.

The new marriage had strict limits. Gomer had to sit and wait many days before she would again "have" Hosea. This would be a new experience for a prostitute who was accustomed to short-term relationships. She must not return to harlotry. Her past had shown how difficult this was for Gomer. She was forbidden from having sexual relationships with another man. This had been her daily routine. The final phase of the verse, "And also I to you," apparently warns Gomer that Hosea will not be her escape hatch, substituting sexual relationships with him for those to which she was accustomed. Gomer is on "probation" so to speak, as Israel is with the Lord for "many days" (Hos. 3:4).

3:4-5. As Gomer faced restrictions, so did Israel. They would lose their political freedom as Gomer had lost her sexual freedom. They would also lose religious freedom. The sacrifice and ephod were not intrinsically evil but may have been corrupted by their use in idol worship. Israel could no longer participate in the religious practices their ancestors may have enjoyed because Israel had turned those practices into forms of Baal worship. They could no longer enjoy the pleasure of worship with its sacrifice to Baal, sacred stones, ephod for revelation, and idol to adore and adorn. Israel would be brought back to God.

Sacred stones were large pillars set up at Canaanite worship places. Archaeologists have discovered some in Gezer that were almost ten feet tall. They generally represented apostasy from God (Deut. 7:5; 2 Kgs. 23:14). Still, some texts show Israelites expressing worship to the Lord through setting up such stone pillars (Gen. 28:18).

The ephod was a part of the priest's clothing, particularly that of the high priest. The breastplate was attached to the ephod, and it contained the Urim and Thummim by which the priest gained revelation from God (Exod. 28:30). Elaborate ephods were created for foreign idols (Isa. 30:22).

Idol represents a significant Hebrew term, teraphim, that appears to mean "image" in a variety of contexts. Some Bible students believe a type of facial mask representing the god is meant. They were used in the worship centers devoted to other gods but were sometimes used in worship that combined legitimate and illegitimate practices (Judg. 18:17-20). They were also connected to divination practices by which a god's will was determined (Ezek. 21:21).

God's probationary period for Israel has a purpose: it will lead Israel to return and seek the LORD. The word return points in several directions. It can mean turn away from idols and to God. It can mean repent from sin and serve God. It can mean return from exile and live in the homeland again. The prophet hints at all these meanings. "Seek the LORD" can refer to seeking the Lord's direction (2 Sam. 21:1) or to praying for his favor (Zech. 8:21-22) or to trusting and obeying the Lord (Prov. 28:5). God's probation means the people of Israel will confine their seeking to one God. Returning in repentance to him, they will worship him alone.

Such return to God will be an emotional affair. Israel will come trembling—with trepidation, dread, and fear. They knew they did not deserve to approach his presence. They were fully aware of their repeated sins that deserved punishment. Still, they will return to God seeking grace and hope. And they will find his blessings in the last days.

Hosea's long speech is finished. He has acted out in his marriage the sad story of God and His rebellious people. Now he must wait for his marriage relationship to heal while the nation waits to see how God's promised future will turn out. Meanwhile, both Gomer the adulterous wife and Israel the adulterous nation must be quarantined, serving their probation until the Lord's timetable is up and the last days arrive.