

August 2021

Introduction to Marriage in the Prophets: Amos and Hosea

Most of us think about prophecy as prediction of future events. While there is some truth to that, the primary role of the prophet was to speak God's word to people about their concrete historical situations. Their words had a "best if used by" quality to them; they were current, often urgent. When they referred to the future, they were usually pointing out the immediate consequences of breaking the covenant. Their goal was to cause a change in the lives of their countrymen: "Repent, change, so that you won't be destroyed by the enemy that is just over the horizon."

When the prophets talked about the future, they often used phrases like "the day of the Lord," "in those days," or "in the days to come." The day of the Lord was not a single day; rather, it was a complex set of images that included, on one hand, specific announcements of punishment for breaking the covenant and, on the other hand, less specific, more poetic images about the fulfillment of the promises that God had made to Abraham, Moses, and David. The warnings about severe punishment for covenant breaking would often be followed by promises of a remnant that would be saved, the land restored, enemies defeated, the arrival of the Messiah, the promised descendant of David, the temple once again filled with the presence of God, and restoration of creation itself in a new heaven and a new earth (see the examples from Amos below). The day of the Lord might arrive in a generation, in a century, in a millennium.

Depending on the context, this was described as either a great and terrible day or a great and glorious day. We Christians understand that the glorious day of the Lord began with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; it will find its conclusion in the wedding feast of the Lamb and his handing over of his kingdom to his Father. Then God will be "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Today, we live in an often puzzling and difficult overlap of two ages. We still experience living in the present evil age (Galatians 1:4) that began with the first sin, and we will be judged at the second coming of Jesus. Judgement day will be great and terrible for those who reject Jesus. But the same day, which has already begun, will be glorious, thrilling, and marvelous, filled with mercy for those who love the Lord Jesus. The present evil age will end and the age to come will endure for all eternity.

To understand how the prophets use marriage imagery, we must briefly sketch the historical situation. Again, the prophets spoke God's word to real human beings in real-life situations. Their words were politically charged, and their profession was dangerous. They could, and often did, get killed for speaking up. Their words challenged powerful people with vested interests in the status quo. Religion was not a game for the fainthearted; it could not be relegated to the Sabbath and special feasts and then have no impact on the rest of one's life. The prophets challenged Israel to come to grips with reality, with the way things really are. They did this with words and actions and with their very lives.

The Historical Setting and the Prophet Amos

The meditations in this section will be from Hosea, but we turn to Amos to help paint the historical picture. The united kingdom of David and Solomon had split in two shortly after Solomon's death

around 931 B.C. The northern kingdom was called Israel; its capital was Samaria. The southern kingdom was called Judah; its capital, and the home of the temple, was Jerusalem. In the next two sections we will examine the work of four prophets whose ministries were roughly contemporary. Two, Amos and Hosea, were prophets to Israel in the north; two others, Isaiah and Micah, were prophets to Judah in the south.

On the international stage, Assyria was the dominant world power from 911 BC to 609 B.C. It was nearing the peak of its power at the time that Jeroboam II was king of Israel (786–746 B.C). Jeroboam II was a formidable king, and Israel became a regional power under him. With power came corruption. The rich were getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer. Israel was drifting into a religious crisis that, according to the prophets, would bring about its ruin. Its prosperity and confidence were illusory—built on injustice, oppression, and infidelity to Israel's God.

Amos was a farmer-turned-prophet from Judah, the neighboring kingdom to the south. He warned that the Israelites' religion was all external show. They worshiped Yahweh, the God of their fathers, and at the same time went to the sacred prostitutes and participated fully in the fertility religion of their pagan neighbors. They oppressed the poor, the widows, and the orphans.

They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—⁷ they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; ⁸ they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed. (Amos 2:6–8)

They looked forward to the day of the Lord, expecting it to be the day they would triumph over all their enemies and rule the world. But Amos warned them that the day of the Lord was certainly coming, but it would not be what they expected.

Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light; ¹⁹ as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. ²⁰ Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?
(Amos 5:18–20)

Amos' biting critique got him into serious trouble with the religious–political establishment. He ran afoul of the king's priests and prophets and was most likely killed for his efforts. Something was radically wrong in Israel. God had sent his prophet to bring about change—or if not change, judgment.

Seek the LORD and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it. (Amos 5:6)

There was another side of the day of the Lord. It would be a day in which creation would be restored, and all of God's promises would be fulfilled. On that day, as other prophets said, even death would be defeated!

"On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; ¹² in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," says the LORD who does this. ¹³ "The time is surely coming," says the LORD, "when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them," says the LORD your God. (Amos 9:11–15)

But Amos declares that idolatry and syncretism, which is combining of worship of the idols with the worship of the Lord, had led to oppression of the poor and lowly, which would in turn lead to judgment. Right worship of the Lord and covenant fidelity had to translate into real-life action. There was no distinction between religious and secular. There was one sphere of activity, and one had to be consistent, because the one covenant and the one God covered all human activity.

Israel was on a collision course with the world superpower Assyria. Its political situation had deteriorated radically. Four Israelite kings had been assassinated within fourteen years of the death of Jeroboam II. Assyria was gobbling up nations, sending whole peoples into exile—and there was no one to stop them. Why was Israel to be handed over to such a people? Very simply, they had abandoned their covenant and forsaken their God; they had given themselves to other gods, and that had led to all manner of wickedness and sin. Marriage, divorce, and adultery provided the most heartbreaking images for understanding this reality of unfaithfulness.

We now turn our attention to Hosea. He was roughly a contemporary of Amos, and he addressed a country that, if anything, had gotten worse. How would God get their attention? They had not listened to Amos; perhaps they would hear Hosea.

Hosea

Israel had given herself to other gods. Punishment was threatened, but it was a threat intended to bring her to her senses. Yet she would not return. Still, God in his great mercy would buy her back, and after a period of discipline, would give her back her status as wife. And Hosea himself would show us what this meant to God.

What little we know about Hosea's life comes from the first three chapters of the book that bears his name. The prophet acted out in his life and proclaimed with his words that Israel was like an unfaithful wife. Hosea, like their God, experienced the unbelievably painful heartbreak of being rejected by the one he loved.

Unlike Amos, Hosea was a native northerner. His prophetic career involved not only a series of prophetic oracles, but a dramatic action as well—his marriage to Gomer bat-Dbiliam and the birth of his children. Hosea was a man deeply in tune with God. He looked at his country and he knew that things were not going well. He was offended by their callousness to the poor. He was offended by the fact that there were shrines to Baal all over town. He was astute. Perhaps he was familiar with Amos, that farmer from the south who had had a short but fiery ministry at Bethel. Perhaps he also knew of the early work of Isaiah in Judah. In any case he was convinced that Israel was in grave danger of serious punishment because of their sin. He saw the same things that Amos had seen oppression of the poor, religious practices that had no internal substance, and outright idolatry. They were playing at their religion.

Hosea may have been so distraught by the political and religious situation that he had decided to remain single. That would explain the unusual command to marry—unusual because in that culture it would be normal to marry, so God’s initial command was probably something like, “Hosea, I want you to get married, not remain single.” Whether his relatives were involved in the choice of a spouse or not, Hosea also must have had a sense that it was the Lord who wanted him to marry Gomer bat-Dibliam, whom the text calls a whore (Hosea 1:2).

One of the most perplexing questions for scholars and the ordinary reader alike is this: How do we understand God telling Hosea to do something as abhorrent as marrying a woman who is a whore? Why is there no mention of the families having arranged this marriage, in the normal way of doing things? Marriage was too important an institution to leave something as crucial as choosing one’s spouse to a couple of star-crossed lovers. That was simply not how it was done in the ancient world. As Hosea understood the process, it was God who arranged the marriage, God who asked him to choose Gomer—and Hosea agreed. Whether he would have liked it or not was irrelevant in the ancient world. Still, in the end, it was Hosea’s choice.

Scholars suggest that Gomer did not become a cult prostitute until after she was married and after the children were born. We know that Hosea believed that God had told him to marry Gomer; we think that it was later that she became a promiscuous woman. Gomer left her husband and most likely became a prostitute in the cult of Baal. At the very least, she became sexually promiscuous and committed adultery. This was a capital crime, and legally, Hosea could no longer live with her. He had the right to have her executed, but at the very least, he would have had to expel her. One could certainly understand this being the end of the marriage. The surprising thing is that it was not. God further instructed Hosea to find Gomer, buy her back, and after a time of purification make her his wife once more.

One of the most beautiful descriptions of married love is woven into this story of infidelity, betrayal, and adultery—because it is also the story of a betrayed lover who is willing to pay any price to redeem his beloved, the betrayer. It is the story of God and his people. More personally, it is the story of God’s love for me, for you, for your spouse.

In the end, Israel would not listen to this love story. Samaria, their capital, would be destroyed, and the ten tribes of the north would be deported in 721 B.C. Thousands would lose their lives.

Soldiers would force tens of thousands to put their possessions on their back, and march 700 miles into the mist of history—forever to be known as the ten lost tribes of Israel.

Kings, Prophets and Empire at a Glance

Southern Kingdom: Kings of Judah	Prophets	Northern Kingdom: Kings of Israel	Prophets	Major World Power
<p>Uzziah 783–742 BC</p> <p>Jotham 742–735 BC</p> <p>Ahaz 735–715 BC</p> <p>Hezekiah 715–687 BC</p>	<p><i>Isaiah</i> 742–670 BC</p> <p><i>Micah</i> 740–686 BC?</p>	<p>Jeroboam II 788–748 BC</p> <p>Zechariah (6 months)</p> <p>Shallum (one month)</p> <p>Menahem 748–737 BC</p> <p>Pekahiah 736–735 BC</p> <p>Pekah 734–731 BC</p> <p>Hoshea 730–722 BC</p> <p>Samaria destroyed 722 BC</p>	<p><i>Amos</i> 770–760 BC</p> <p><i>Hosea</i> 750–725 BC.</p>	<p>Assyrian Empire 745–627 BC</p> <p>Tiglath-Pileser 744–727 BC</p> <p>Syria and Israel against Judah in Syro-Ephramite War 735 BC (see Isaiah 7)</p> <p>Shalmaneser V 726–722 BC</p> <p>Sargon II 721–705 BC</p> <p>Sennacherib 705–701 Surrounded Jerusalem 701 BC</p>



Hosea 1:2–3

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 1:2–3

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." ³ So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

Meditation

It is helpful to think that Hosea only gradually came to realize that Gomer was an unfaithful woman, so that he did not at first understand Gomer as a "wife of whoredom." It is more likely that at first, he fell in love with her wholeheartedly. We cannot surely recreate how Hosea heard the Lord say, "Take Gomer as your wife," but we can certainly imagine a very sensitive young man being moved by his bride, moved by her beauty, her gracefulness, her presence. Without reading this story as a 21st century romance novel, we should not leave out romance and emotion. Then as now, love involved a commitment of the whole person—including what we would call romantic love. For Hosea it would not have been simply physical, yet that must have been part of it. He was moved by her. She captivated him. He desired to start a family, to have a life with her. Later, in a moment of reflection, he would understand that the Lord felt the same way about Israel. God had not asked him to do something abhorrent, like marrying a whore—any more than God had done something abhorrent in choosing Israel. Hosea was in love. He knew that God's love for his people, like his own love for Gomer, was rich, deep, and personal. It included, but also went beyond, what we would call romance. Later, after Gomer had left him for other men, after she had become promiscuous and involved in cult prostitution, Hosea would understand the Lord's deep grief and anger, rising from the rejection and betrayal of his beloved.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Hosea 1:3–10

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 1:3–10

So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴ And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵ On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." ⁶ She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, ¹ for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. ⁷ But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen." ⁸ When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ Then the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God." ¹⁰ Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

Meditation

They were married and had three children. Their names were what we would consider strange, but what is important here is that they were his children, they were their children. How his world must have shattered on the day he came home to find her gone, gone to the abusive lovers. They had offered her money and pretty things. She sold herself, her body, her dignity. She brought shame on herself and on her husband. In a culture that was defined by honor and shame, her behavior was unthinkable.

Did their love mean nothing? Did she not remember what he had done for her? She was not content with the material possessions, food, and status that she had as Hosea's wife. And most of all, she was not content with him. But what more could he have done? Was it now over? Hosea must have found himself torn between great anger and deep hurt. He wanted to punish her, let her experience humiliation—but more than that he wanted her back. He loved her. He had been captured by her and was still her captive—willingly.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Hosea 2:1–13

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 2:5–8, 13

Their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." ⁶ Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. ⁷ She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now." ⁸ She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal. ¹³ I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the LORD.

Meditation

Can you feel Gomer's embarrassment and humiliation, brought on by her own actions? Can you feel the anger of the betrayed lover, her husband? Husband and wife, God and Israel—for the prophet, they mirror one another. Everything is intertwined. Gomer's sin is Israel's sin and, tragically, it is our sin too. The poor, deluded woman pursues lovers whose promises are illusory, whose love is false. Hosea's pain and anger are God's pain and anger.

The sinner deserves punishment, the goal of which is to correct and redeem. The sin, the idols, the false lovers are to be destroyed because of the danger they pose to the beloved. It is good to pause here, in this moment, and examine our lives, our marriage, our family. Let us ask: who are we pursuing?

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Hosea 2:14–15

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 2:14–15

Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵
From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

Meditation

In this, one of the tenderest passages in all the Scriptures, the Lord speaks of luring his wayward wife out into the wilderness. There he will renew the experience of Exodus. Freedom again! What a great day! God and his people will be in love as in the early days of their relationship. They will drink the heady wine of young and passionate love. Only this time it will last forever. The covenant will be restored, creation will be healed, and there will be peace in the land. All that has gone wrong in Genesis 3 will be put right, and more.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Hosea 2:16–17

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 2:16–17

On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more.

Meditation

Marriage, like our relationship with God, is not about ownership or slavery. On the day that the Lord restores the relationship with his people, their marriage covenant will be about love, not ownership. It will mean rescue from slavery once again. God's people are enslaved by a false god, Baal. The interesting thing about this word is that *Baal*, in addition to being the name of the Canaanite god, also means "husband, lord, or master." The Hebrew phrase *Baali* means "my lord/master/husband." The Lord says that when all is made new again, that rather we will not call him lord/master/husband, the name of a false god and tyrant. Instead, we will call him *'ishi*: "my husband." The new name is that of the trusted friend and partner in the Genesis 2 creation story. The husband–wife image is not that of master–slave. It is tender and intimate. It is intended to evoke the freedom of Exodus and the dignity of one who is deeply loved. It is the story of the unity and equality of the partners. What a picture of God and us.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation.*

Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.



Hosea 2:18–20

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 2:18–20

I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹ And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. ²⁰ I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

Meditation

There are many stunning images here: covenant renewal, restoration of creation, end of war, the promise of safety/salvation. But the promise of the Lord to take his people as his wife is the most stunning. One of the most beautiful descriptions of married love is woven into the story of infidelity, betrayal, and adultery. We learn that true spousal love is permanent; it is forever. It is righteous, just, merciful, faithful, tender, and compassionate. It is, above all, intimate. We will “know” the Lord as a spouse. To “know” in the Bible is often a polite euphemism for sexual intercourse. For example, Adam *knew* Eve and she conceived and bore a son. It is not that God is physical and that the humans could have physical intercourse with God. Rather, the best metaphor for the intimate union of God and his people is the tender, intimate sharing of one’s whole person with the other. This is the story of a lover who is betrayed, but willing to pay any price to redeem his beloved, even handing his son over to death. It is the story of God and his people. More personally, it is the story of God’s love for me and my spouse. One day, God’s love will so transform us that we will be one with him, sharing his very nature and life.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord’s Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Hosea 3:1–5

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 3:1–5

The LORD said to me again, "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine. ³ And I said to her, "You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you." ⁴ For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. ⁵ Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Meditation

Hosea suffered and was shamed by her, yet he was still in love. His desire for punishment for so deep a betrayal was not the only emotion that he experienced. As we shall see, beyond belief, almost beyond reason, the betrayed husband raised the money needed to buy her out of slavery, to bring her home, to bring her back into his life. Here is the mystery of the great love of God. God, like Hosea, will pay a great price to redeem the one he loves. What Hosea said, God said. What Hosea did, God did. Hosea loved Gomer, in the same way that God loves Israel, loves us. The risk Hosea took is the risk God takes.

See A Meditation on the Price of Love on the next page.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

A Meditation on the Price of Love

The bag of silver coins hangs heavy from Hosea's belt and his poor donkeys labor under the burden of 10 bushels of barley, almost 480 pounds. The money and the grain represent half of his earnings for that year. It is also the price of the slave he has set out to redeem. Hosea abhors slavery. The thought of purchasing another human being repulses him. But this is a rescue mission. He trudges up the hill to the high place where the altar, pillars, and Asherah pole stand. Smoke and ashes from recent sacrifices swirl in the wind. The smell of burnt meat competes with the smell of animal dung and piles of rotting guts from recent animal sacrifices. The donkeys stumble and bray under the load as he leads them past the open-air sanctuary to the priest's house. Hosea calls out, and the priest appears at the door. Behind him is his lackey, the local prophet who also serves at this shrine. Priest and prophet are both in the service of the king. They take payment for sacrifices to Baal, to Yahweh, or to any god—what's the difference? They petition the gods for answers by rolling dice or consulting their magic staffs. They also sell the services of prostitutes who have intercourse with worshippers there in the sanctuary. For this they make a pile of money for themselves and for the king. They care little whether or not Baal responds to the orgies. If rain doesn't come, then the ignorant people will pay still more money for more sacrifices. Nor are they troubled by the man who stands in shame before them.

Behind the priest and the prophet, in the shadows, is the woman Hosea has come to purchase. She is dressed as a prostitute. But she is no ordinary prostitute. Her name is Gomer, daughter of Dibla'im. She is Hosea's wife. Shamed and deeply wounded by her betrayal, Hosea hands over a half-year's wages and takes his wife home with him for a time of purification. She will one day live as his wife again, but a time of healing must begin.



Hosea 6:4–6

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 6:4–6

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. ⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. ⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Meditation

Hosea had a sense of how God felt about the fact that Ephraim and Judah had forsaken him. He knew that they had forgotten the Creator of the whole universe. He knew too that the God who had rescued them from Egypt was also a jealous god. They were worshiping gods who were not real gods, and they did not care. Hosea was appalled. He knew God was dismayed and hurt. They had not understood what God really wanted from them. He wanted constancy and fidelity. It was not that sacrifice and burnt offerings were wrong, but without the tender, intimate, freely given, and deeply personal love of a people who regarded him as their devoted spouse, they meant nothing. Their love was as lasting as the morning dew in an arid land; because of that, they would be punished. But God's punishment was designed to bring them back to him. His love was irrevocable and unconditional.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*



Hosea 11:1–4

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Hosea 11:1–4

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ² The more I called them, the more they went from me; ² they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. ³ Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

Meditation

Before we leave Hosea, we meditate on one last familial image, that of the tender love of a parent for his/her child. In addition to love which is central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family, another virtue stands out. Tenderness is often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships. In other biblical texts (e.g., Ex 4:22; Is 49:15; Ps 27:10), the union between the Lord and his faithful ones is expressed in terms of parental love. Remember the moments when you were deeply moved by the sight of your small child's first steps, the sound of his laughter, her giggles, their first words. Remember the smell of a freshly bathed baby, their warmth as they lay peacefully asleep in your arms. That is the tenderness of the Lord for us as well.

Quiet reflection: *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

Prayers and Intentions: *As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

Lord's Prayer: *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

Blessing: *May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Unity Prayer: *God, make our hearts one. Amen.*