

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 11, The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 1-3, Part 1

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 11, The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 1-3, part 1.

I'm excited in this lesson to begin introducing the message in the book of Hosea and the powerful message that's found there of God's love and God's covenant faithfulness for the people of Israel, even in the midst of their judgment. In many ways, I think Hosea is the most memorable of the books of the 12 because of this powerful metaphor that's found in the book, the picture of the marriage between Hosea and Gomer as an image and a representation of the relationship between God and Israel.

Also, a reminder to us of what had gone wrong in that relationship that had caused God to come to this place where he was sending the prophets to warn the people of Israel that judgment was on its way. We have seen from the message of the book of Amos that the first of the prophets that are found in the book of the 12 and really the rise of classical prophecy in Israel, where we have these prophets who concentrate their ministry on the people and whose messages are written down and recorded for us in the Hebrew canon, all of that begins to happen because of the impending Assyrian crisis. So, we have a number of prophets who prophesy both to Israel and Judah, warning them that God's judgment is going to come upon them at the hands of the Assyrians.

Now the date that we gave to Amos is that the ministry of Amos appears to occur somewhere in the years 760 to 750. Hosea is also a prophet to the Northern Kingdom, but he's a younger contemporary of Amos. He is actually going to minister and to serve through the time when the Northern Kingdom falls in the years of 722 and 721.

So many of the things that Amos saw and prophesied about in advance, Hosea will continue to warn the people, but he'll also live through them. We mentioned that the book of Hosea is perhaps the most memorable of the prophets found in the Book of the 12. In many ways, this book also presents some of the most difficult interpretive challenges.

We won't get into this much in the lessons on the video, but the Hebrew text and some of the Hebrew of Hosea is very difficult. As you go to commentaries, there's often discussion of how we should translate certain parts of the book of Hosea, or even a more basic question: what does the text actually read? There are also some

difficult interpretive challenges that we are going to focus on a little bit more. I ran across a quote recently about the book of Hosea.

Jerome, who is one of the leading Hebrew scholars and Old Testament scholars of the early church, said this: If in the interpretation of all the prophets, we stand in need of the intervention of the Holy Spirit, how much more should the Lord be invoked in the interpretation of Hosea? If Jerome felt the need for the Holy Spirit, I definitely feel that. As we approach any part of God's word, we realize that we need the Spirit to open our eyes, not just to what it means, but to its relevance and significance, its importance, and its application to our lives. So we're going to take what Jerome says to heart, and I am asking the Spirit to guide me and lead me as I teach these sessions on Hosea.

One of the interpretive challenges is just to understand the precise and exact nature of the relationship between Hosea and Gomer. One of the things that you will immediately encounter as you go to the commentaries is there is a great deal of discussion about how we should understand the relationship of the marriage that's described. It is particularly highlighted for us in chapters one to three.

The book of Hosea, we have the marriage between Hosea and Gomer in one to three. Then in chapters four to fourteen, we have more the preaching of Hosea to Israel, reflecting on the fact and explaining to the people and indicting them and explaining to them why they have been an unfaithful wife to Yahweh in the same way that Gomer was to Hosea. But the initial command that the Lord gives to Hosea is found in Hosea chapter one, verses two and three.

The Lord first spoke through Hosea the Lord and said to him, go and take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord. So, the analogy between God and Israel and Hosea and Gomer is very clear to see there. But commentators and interpreters of Hosea have discussed what exactly is the nature of this marriage.

As we read that passage and we hear God saying to the prophet, I want you to go and marry an unfaithful woman, that should raise some moral dilemmas in our mind. The first reason for that is that some have noted that in Leviticus chapter 21.7, in the instructions that are given to a priest, it says there that a priest shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled. Neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband, for the priest is holy to his God.

Now, we understand that a priest had a unique role in a ceremonial position in the temple, and his service was related to all of that. But if God gives those kinds of instructions to the priests who were his servants, how can God then say to a prophet like Hosea, who represents him before the people, I want you to go and marry a promiscuous woman? So, in light of that, there have been a number of different

interpretations and understandings of this marriage between Hosea and Gomer that have arisen.

If we want to carry this over to a contemporary context, you can imagine what would happen at your typical local church if a pastor were to suddenly become involved with a promiscuous woman who was known to have a bad reputation. Pastors' wives get excoriated for a lot less serious things than that. So, how could God ask a prophet who was supposed to represent him to marry an unfaithful woman? Some people have argued, and you'll see this in some commentaries, that what we are talking about here is simply a vision, an allegory, or a parable.

Now, in the book of Amos, we saw that in Amos, chapters seven to nine, God communicates his message to the people through a series of visions that were revealed to the prophet Amos. He saw a vision of a locust plague, a vision of a fire, the vision of the plum line, the vision of the basket of summer fruit, and then the vision of the collapsing sanctuary. Perhaps what we have going on here is simply a vision.

Hosea sees the image of God commanding him to marry this promiscuous woman. This simply takes place at a visionary level. In the book of Ezekiel, there are times when Ezekiel, who is living in Babylon, is taken by the Lord and shown visions of things that are going on in the land of Judah.

Ezekiel wasn't physically in Judah. It was simply a vision. Maybe that's what we have going on here.

In the prophet Ezekiel, in Ezekiel chapter 16 and 23, we also have examples of where the prophet gives an extended parable comparing the people of Israel or the people of Judah or the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem. He compares them to unfaithful wives. These are very vivid, very graphic, very powerful passages.

In one of them, the Lord finds his people as an abandoned baby in a field covered with blood because her father doesn't want her. He raises this beautiful young girl. When she comes of age, he marries her, and then she turns around and becomes unfaithful to him.

So, the prophet Ezekiel uses a parable describing the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage. Perhaps that's simply what we have going on here. At other times, prophets carry out their message by performing dramatic acts or sign acts.

Perhaps the marriage of Hosea and Gomer is simply something that is acted out as a drama. So, that's one view of this. We're simply talking about a vision, an allegory, or a parable.

Another interpretation is that Gomer was actually a cult prostitute. One of the things that is going on in the book of Hosea is that the prophet is indicting them and condemning them for their unfaithfulness to the Lord in the fact that they have worshiped other gods. Particularly, they have been involved in the worship of the Canaanite god Baal and all of the fertility rites and the pagan things that went along with that, the worship of the Asherahs.

So, some interpreters will simply say, or some interpreters will actually argue that Gomer was a cult prostitute involved in one of these pagan sanctuaries. However, there is nothing in the terminology. There is nothing in the actual description of her.

There are no explicit statements in the book that clearly identify her in that way. So, that's probably not the most likely way to interpret this passage. Another interpretation is that instead of Gomer being actually a promiscuous woman who cheated on her husband or who was a prostitute or an adulteress, what we should understand this language to be saying is that Gomer, like all of the other Israelites, was guilty of spiritual infidelity.

So, often the terminology of adultery or the language of committing immorality, acting as a prostitute, whoring oneself, is often used. It's used in the book of Hosea to talk about the spiritual infidelity of the people of Israel as they worship these other gods. So, we don't have God actually commanding a prophet to marry a woman who is explicitly going to be unfaithful to him in the physical realm.

But Gomer is unfaithful to the Lord like all of the other Israelites. She's a worshiper of Baal. We see Israel again as a promiscuous, unfaithful prostitute described in very graphic ways in Ezekiel 16 and 23.

Perhaps Gomer is simply one individual who represents what that's all about. Another interpretation, and this one may sound a little strange to us when we first hear it, is that we possibly see, and some interpreters have argued this, that we possibly see Hosea in this book married to two different women. In chapter one, we have the relationship between Hosea and Gomer.

There's a description of the children that are born into that relationship. But then, in chapter three, verse one, the Lord said to me, go again, love a woman who is loved by another man. Hosea buys this woman out of her servitude to another man or from another man, her father, or whatever.

So, the argument here is that this is not necessarily Gomer. We're talking about another woman. The love that Hosea shows to this other woman, perhaps she's taken as a secondary wife, the way that Deuteronomy chapter 21 verses 15 to 17 would allow.

There's nothing that explicitly in the text identifies this woman as Gomer. So, possibly, we have Hosea here being married to two different women. Again, this is strange to us, but it is something that would have been allowed under Old Testament law.

Reflecting some of these ideas that are trying to move beyond simply looking at this as an actual real marriage, Douglas Stuart, in the Word Biblical Commentary, a very gifted evangelical scholar, has written an excellent commentary on the minor prophets. He's going to talk about the relationship between chapter 3 and chapter 1 and how we should understand the marriage relationship between Hosea and Gomer. He says that there is no data in chapter 3 to prove that Gomer is to be identified with the promiscuous wife in chapter 3, as has often been suggested.

Nothing in the text is ever actually stated about Gomer's profession or fidelity. The intriguing notion that Hosea married a prostitute at God's command is blunted by the fact that the marriage remained unconsummated. Since it cannot be proved that Gomer is the same wife described in chapter 3, nothing about Gomer's marital fidelity can be learned.

That she is metaphorically a prostituting woman in chapter 1, verse 2 cannot be taken as a literal statement of her profession or practice. She is merely an Israelite, all of whom are prostitutes, all of whom have broken Yahweh's covenant. So, I want to put that out there as a possible interpretation of this book.

But I think the most natural way, the most vivid way, the thing that makes this metaphor especially powerful is the fact that we are talking about a real marriage. If this is simply a metaphor or a parable or an allegory, I think the shock value of what this book is communicating loses some of its effectiveness. It is an incredibly surprising thing that God would ask one of his servants to marry this kind of woman.

It does seem to go against what we see God instructing the priest to do in Leviticus 21.7, but that's part of why the book is so powerful. The situation and the circumstance have become so dire in Israel that it's necessary for God to use these kinds of messages and these kinds of extreme actions on the part of the prophet to really convey the seriousness of their message. If Israel needs to be informed and needs to be reminded of the seriousness of their sin and what God thinks about their defection as they've worshipped these other gods, having a prophet marry a promiscuous woman would have very effectively communicated that message.

Conveying to them the anger, the betrayal, and the hurt that God felt as he watched and observed what they were doing. Actual marriage communicates that in the most effective way possible. So, in spite of all of these other interpretations, I think the simplest, the most natural reading, the way that we preserve the real impact of what we see going on in this book is that it is talking about a real marriage.

Gary Smith says this in the NIV application commentary, and I think this is where I would end up with understanding this relationship as well. He says, "...we believe it is best to accept a literal historical interpretation and to conclude that Gomer was sexually involved with other men before and after her marriage with Hosea." That seems to be the most natural reading of the text. Now, one of the things that I think supports this view is that if you think about the other prophets, there are a number of places where God will use the family of the prophets to convey something that's very important to the people.

So, let me mention just a couple of these examples. In Jeremiah chapter 16, God commands the prophet Jeremiah not to marry and not to have children. I think sometimes we as pastors or graduates of seminary, and we're going out into ministry and we think about a different or difficult context where God is calling us to minister.

We think about going to a part of the world that's going to be hard and where we're not going to have an affluent lifestyle. Think about some of the things that God asks the prophets to do in order to be faithful servants to him. Jeremiah, I'm calling you to ministry.

Jeremiah is called at a very young age. I'm calling you to be my prophet. The people are going to hate you.

They're going to oppose you. They're going to attack you. They're going to persecute you.

On top of that, you can't get married or have children because of the situation that you're living in. You need to convey to these people that this is not a good time to have a family. God is going to bring such devastation on the land of Judah during the time of Jeremiah's ministry that it would be better that people not be married because husbands are going to be taken away into war.

Families are going to be divided and separated. Mothers and fathers are going to lose their sons and their daughters because of the Babylonian invasion. That was a serious way of conveying that.

Vividly saying to the people, look at the terrible things that are going to happen. In the same way that God vividly used the prohibition for Jeremiah not to be married, I think God is using the marriage of Hosea in the same way. When the people of Judah tried to understand why a young man like Jeremiah would not be married, when he explained that, I think it caused the message to sink in further.

We also see with the prophet Ezekiel chapter 24 that on the day that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, on that day, Ezekiel's wife died. God communicated to Ezekiel

that he was not to show any outward signs of mourning as a message to the people. So, here's a prophet who had been faithful to God.

He had responded to God's call. He had preached the word to a rebellious people who would not listen to what he had to say. In fact, they viewed his message with a great deal of cynicism.

So, as a way of getting the attention of these people, the Lord says to Ezekiel, I'm going to take your wife away. To show the people that this is going to be a time of national disaster where you're not even going to have the time to mourn over what's happened. I don't want you to show any physical or outward signs of mourning.

I think at that point, many of us might have said to the Lord, okay, that's the end. I want out of this occupation. I've tried to get these people's attention, and now you're telling me you're going to take away my wife so that they will listen to what I have to say.

I mean, that's a shocking thing. But what happened in the family and what happened in Ezekiel's family was going to powerfully convey that message to the people. I think the same thing happens with the marriage of Hosea and Gomer.

We're also going to see in chapter one that as children are born into this relationship, the names of these children are going to have symbolic significance. Again, this parallels very closely what we see happening in life in the ministry of the prophet Isaiah. He has two sons. One of them is named Shear-jashub, a remnant will return. That child accompanies Isaiah when he goes out to meet Ahaz at the waterworks, when he has an important message to convey to Ahaz during the time of the Syro-Ephraimite war. That little child, that son, the name of that child had a message to convey to the king.

Later on, Isaiah is going to have another son, Isaiah 8, my favorite biblical name, my Marher-shalal-hash-baz. We don't know how he got that on the back of his soccer uniform, but that name is swift to the plunder, swift to the spoil. It was also a message to the people of Israel that God's judgment was going to be swift, and then the deliverance, God would swiftly deliver the enemy.

So, there's a mixed message in the names of both of those children. The names of Hosea's children are also going to have a symbolic message. They're also going to have a mixed message because the message of their names at the beginning will be judgment.

Those names are reversed and turned around. Then they speak of the promise and the blessing of restoration that God is ultimately going to bring to his people. So, we have clear examples in other prophetic texts of how God uses the children, the

wives, the families, and the circumstances of the prophet's personal life as a dramatic way of conveying the message, trying to somehow get the attention of a people that will not listen to them.

So, it's not that surprising that God would ask Hosea to do something like this, as shocking as it seems on the surface. Now, when we come to the place where we recognize that it seems likely that we're talking about a real marriage, there are some other interpretive questions, and some other issues come up. Part of this is that as we look at verse 2 here, go and take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.

What exactly does this mean? Commentators have actually, I think, interpreted this in a couple of different ways. Some would argue, and again, as Gary Smith reflected in his quote, the most natural reading is that we conclude that Gomer was sexually involved with other men before and after the marriage. She is a woman of whoredom.

For Hosea to marry this kind of woman, the people in his community would have known about this. There would have been immediate shock value to this. How in the world could a prophet marry someone like this? However, another interpretation of this, and again, I think trying to deal with the moral dilemma of God asking someone to marry a woman and doing something that seems to be in violation of what we normally see about marriage and the marriage of spiritual leaders in Israel, is that some have taken this command to read this proleptically.

What that means is that when it says here that God commanded him to marry a wife of whoredom, is that at the time when Hosea married Gomer, she was not unfaithful. God simply instructs him to go and marry this woman, this specific woman, Gomer. But later on, she becomes promiscuous and unfaithful to Hosea in the midst of the marriage relationship.

As a result of that, Hosea realizes later on, proleptically, that God was commanding him to marry an unfaithful woman at the time when his marriage first started. It wasn't evident at that time because Gomer wasn't an unfaithful woman or promiscuous at that point in her life. That only happens later on.

I'm not sure that we can really resolve this. We want to know certain details about this marriage that the text itself is not really communicating to us. I think we like scandals, we like tell-all stories, we like these confessionals.

I admit when I go to the grocery store, I do take a look at the National Enquirer and see what the headlines are. We kind of want to know all the details about this. We want a tell-all confessional.

Was Gomer unfaithful at the time of the marriage, or was this something that happened later on? What about this idea of and have, and the word take is the word that's used for both of these, take a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom. Is Gomer bringing children that have been born because of these other relationships? Is she bringing that into the marriage? Or is this talking about the children that are going to be born in the rest of the chapter? The text doesn't answer those questions. Some have argued that a proleptic understanding of this commandment, where Gomer is initially faithful to her husband and then becomes unfaithful, is a better illustration of the history of the relationship between God and his people.

They were initially faithful to him and became unfaithful. However, if you really read the story of the Old Testament, they were unfaithful to him from the very beginning. Remember the first time that Israel commits spiritual adultery or cheats on the Lord is when they worship the golden calf in Exodus chapter 32.

Before the ink was even dry on the contract, Israel had already turned to worshipping other gods. To use the marriage analogy, Israel cheats on God during the honeymoon. If you go to the book of Ezekiel and read Ezekiel chapter 20, Ezekiel is going to indict the people and say, you've been worshipping idols from the time that you were in Egypt, and God saved you in spite of that.

In another place, Jeremiah 2 says, I remember the time of our early marriage when you were faithful to me in the wilderness. That's one way of looking at this. There was an initial honeymoon.

It didn't last very long. But another way to look at this is Ezekiel chapter 20 saying, you were idol worshipers even when you were in Egypt. So, I think we don't necessarily need to see Gomer being faithful to Hosea at the beginning of the marriage to accurately convey what is going on in the history of Israel.

I think more vividly, if this woman was unfaithful at the time of the marriage, it would have immediately conveyed to the people, this is your status right now. We don't need to make this parable walk on all fours or make the marriage give us an illustration of the entire history of Israel. This reflects the status of Israel and their relationship with God right now.

They are in the midst of committing spiritual infidelity and adultery toward him. Again, I think, as Smith said, we believe it best to accept a literal historical interpretation and conclude that Gomer was sexually involved with other men before and after her marriage with Hosea. So, whether there were children that were brought into this relationship, I think the children of whoredom in this text are referring to the three children that we're going to look at in a few minutes.

The details of all this are not clear, but we don't need to read this command: go and marry an unfaithful woman. We don't necessarily need to read that proleptically. So, one morning Hosea is married to this person who has a reputation for promiscuity.

This is going to convey to the people throughout the time of Hosea's ministry what the Lord feels about their unfaithfulness. All right. Now, if we go into chapter two, I want to talk about some of the details of this marriage.

And again, as we're working our way through Hosea chapter one to three, at the human level, you need to see the marriage between Hosea and Gomer, but it merges throughout with the marriage between God and Israel. Sometimes we see Hosea as the husband, other times we see Yahweh. So, seeing that kind of human and divine level, let's go to what's said about the marriage in chapter two, verses two to four.

Say to my brothers, you are my people, and to your sisters, you have received mercy. Hosea is to remind the people of their family's covenantal relationship with God. Plead with your mother and 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.

So, in the same way that Gomer ultimately was unfaithful to Hosea, the Lord is telling the prophet Hosea to tell the people, this is what you have done to me. Now, when we talk about Gomer, was she a prostitute, or was she simply an unfaithful wife? Again, the terminology doesn't answer for us all the details that we would necessarily like to know. The two words that are used to describe her infidelity, *naaph*, is the word for adultery.

It's talking about a woman who has committed sexual immorality against her husband. Remember the seriousness of that offense in the Old Testament. It was a capital crime.

The other word, *zanah*, is a word that does not necessarily talk about someone who is a prostitute, someone who sells their sexual services or their body. It is a generic word for immorality and sexual promiscuity in general. So, there's a tradition where we talk about Hosea and his wife and Gomer being a prostitute.

But the language may simply convey that she is an adulteress and a sexually promiscuous woman. The problem with Israel is that they are not simply promiscuous. They have not simply committed infidelity and adultery.

It's larger than that. They have done this on a recurring basis. It is something that has become a pattern in the relationship of the marriage and the relationship between God and Israel.

So, God tells Hosea to confront the people about their serial infidelity to him. As that's going on, the context and the backdrop of this is that Hosea has experienced this in his own marriage as well. The sad part of this is God is calling on his wife, even as he's about to divorce her.

The prophets will talk about the exile being a time of actual divorce. In Jeremiah 3, God has already divorced the northern kingdom, and he is about to do the same to the southern. They need to wake up and realize what's going on.

They need to return to him. So, there is going to be a divorce that is going on here, but God is calling the people back to repentance. If they do not repent, here's what's going to happen in verse 3, "...lest I strip her naked, and make her as in the day that she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her a parched land, and kill her with thirst." So, the Lord is going to physically punish his unfaithful wife.

Again, physical punishment, corporal punishment, was a part of the culture of the ancient Near East. We need to understand it against that backdrop. That's what God is going to do to his people.

The problem is that infidelity has become so ingrained in the life of Israel that it's something that they can't turn away from. They do not have a heart to turn back to their husband. So, what the Lord is going to do is that the Lord is going to use the judgment of exile as a way of ultimately changing the heart of his unfaithful wife and bringing her to a place where she recognizes the futility and the stupidity of trusting in these other gods and her heart is changed to where ultimately, she will love her husband.

And so, here's the drama that's working itself out. God says, in verse 5 of chapter 2, "...for their mother has played the whore. She who has conceived them has acted shamefully, and she has said, I will go after my lovers who give me bread and water, my wool, my flax, my oil, my drink." And so, in spite of recognizing the blessings that God has given to them, the people of Israel attribute the produce and the blessing and the prosperity and the agricultural products that God has given to them.

They recognize them as coming from these other gods. And so, God says, I am going to use a purging judgment. Not to simply carry out my vengeance and my anger, although God as a betrayed husband is angry and is going to physically punish his people, but the purpose of this judgment and the purpose of all of the horrible things that Israel experiences in exile is ultimately to transform their hearts, to take away this insatiable desire to follow after other gods and to give them a desire instead to follow the Lord.

And so, the Lord says in verse 6, "...therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her path. She shall pursue

her lovers but will not overtake them. She shall seek them but not find them." And then, here's the change that's going to come about.

"...Then she will say, I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now." And so, ultimately, all of this judgment, again, is not simply to pour out God's wrath and God's anger on the people. It is ultimately to change their hearts. They cannot seek after God because their idolatry and their promiscuity is ingrained in their character.

The deprivation of exile and the suffering of exile is going to make them realize that we should have remained faithful to the Lord because he is the one who is the source of our blessing. God is going to do some pretty terrible things to his people. Chapter 2, verse 12, "...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 beast 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 her jewelry, and went after other lovers, and forgot me, declares the Lord." But again, all these horrible things are not simply a jealous, vindictive husband punishing his wife. It is ultimately to change her heart.

It is ultimately to create the love relationship between God and Israel that the Lord had desired to have with his people from the very beginning. So here is what it says in chapter 2, verse 14. It is kind of the culmination of this between God and Israel.

"...Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and I will bring her into the wilderness, and I will speak tenderly to her, and I will give her vineyards, and I will 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." God is not just going to destroy his people. God is going to use what he takes away from them and bring them to a place where they realize it is futile for us to trust in other gods.

In love, he is going to draw them and allure them. That is going to be the thing that changes their hearts. I believe that what we have here in these opening chapters of Hosea is not just the beginning of Hosea's message; it is the beginning of the message of the book of the Twelve.

Throughout the book of the Twelve, we have a people that cannot return to God, that do not listen to God during the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian crisis, and even in the post-exilic period when they have come back to the land and they are supposed to be experiencing the blessings. They have only returned partially. God is going to transform their hearts in the midst of all of this judgment, pain, and adversity.

God is ultimately going to do a work of salvation that will establish the right kind of love relationship between himself and his people. He will be their God and they will be his people. They will love him and obey him and follow him.

Israel cannot just fix themselves. Israel cannot simply say, we are not going to be Baal worshippers anymore. They are devoted to these things.

They have a heart that is committed to sin, but God is going to transform them. We can work our way through the book of Hosea at the end of this. Chapter 14 verse 3, after God has called the people to return and they are not able to return, I will heal their apostasy.

We go to the prophet Joel, and Joel says, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and giving to people the spirit will transform them. Zechariah, I will pour out on them a spirit of repentance. Malachi, I will send the eschatological prophet Elijah, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the hearts of the children back to their father.

There is a message of salvation that God is doing all of these works of judgment to ultimately transform the hearts of his people. In the context of marriage here, God is going to ultimately cause Israel to love him in the way that he had designed from the very beginning. The Lord says in Jeremiah, I have loved you with an everlasting love.

I have drawn you with my hesed. Israel had not responded to that. God is going to increasingly do greater works of salvation.

He is going to bring them out of exile. He is going to send Jesus to be their savior to take care of their sin problem. He is ultimately going to create a new covenant people that will be devoted to him in the way that we did not see throughout the Old Testament.

Now, that does not mean that spiritual transformation had not been available to the people of Israel throughout the Old Covenant. God did not give the people of Israel the Mosaic Covenant and say, well, here are the laws, 613 of them, do it. God had provided enablement throughout the Old Testament to those who knew him in a real and personal way for them to obey God.

God had redeemed them out of Egypt. God had transformed their heart through that. As an individual Israelite responded in faith and obedience to the Lord's commands and believed and trusted in the Lord's promises, spiritual transformation was available.

I believe that there was a ministry of the Spirit. There was a regenerating ministry of the Spirit, even in the Old Testament, that gave God's true people the capacity and

the ability to obey God. The problem throughout the Old Testament, and you can go back to the wilderness generation, is that many of the people who were part of the Old Covenant people of God, who were part of this national entity that was called Israel that had been chosen as God's people, they had never experienced that personal individual transformation.

God in the minor prophets, and here in the early chapters of Hosea as he's talking about this marriage, is promising to fix that problem. When David had sinned and committed adultery with Bathsheba, in Psalm 51, he says, Lord, create a new heart within me, or give me a new heart, and renew a right spirit within me. I believe there that David is praying for the kind of spiritual transformation that God gave to every true believing Israelite.

God gave them a new heart. God put his Spirit within them. What David is saying there is, don't just forgive me for my sin. Transform my character so that I won't be inclined to do that again.

The prophets are promising that God is going to do that on a national level for Israel. The way that God is going to do this is that God is going to bring them through all of the things they experience in exile. God is going to purge them in judgment.

God is going to remove sinners from the land, the prophet Zephaniah will talk about. Then God is ultimately going to create a people who will love him. If we are going to convince people to love God and to follow Christ, we have to help them to understand that God's love and the love of Christ is something far greater than all of the other loves in their life.

That is what God was ultimately going to have to do for the people of Israel as well. The transformed relationship and the transformed marriage that is going to come about is talked about in chapter 2 verse 16. In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me my husband, and the Hebrew word there is she, the word for husband, just the Hebrew word ish, man or husband.

You will no longer call me my baal, which is the Hebrew word that simply means Lord or master or husband. They are not going to use the term baal, Lord or master, because of all the associations that they had with their previous commitments to the Baals. They are instead going to be devoted to the Lord, and they are going to say, you are my husband, we love you, we are devoted exclusively to you and to you alone.

When God transforms the heart of the people and creates a love within them that is greater than their love for idols, wealth, prosperity, or any of the other things in their lives, then they will ultimately become the people that God wants them to be. In the midst of this divine drama that is going on between God and Israel and God divorcing

his people in exile, and it is a divorce, God sets them aside. There is also the human drama that is going on that allows the people of Israel to see what's happening in their relationship with the Lord. There is the unfaithfulness of Gomer to Hosea.

In the same way that Israel had repeatedly been unfaithful to the Lord, Gomer has been repeatedly unfaithful to her husband as well. The resolution of that is what happens in chapter three. In chapter three, the Lord said to Hosea, go again, love a woman, and the ESV, as I'm reading it here, says, who is loved by another man?

Remember Doug Stewart and other commentators have noticed, it doesn't specifically mention for us the name of Gomer here. So possibly we're talking about another woman and this is simply being brought into the story as an analogy of God's love and commitment to Israel. But as other commentators have pointed out, if this is not Gomer, it somewhat destroys the analogy and the illustration.

Again, it takes away from the power of the story. So, I think it's best here to read this as talking about this is Gomer. After she has gone after her illicit lovers and after it seems that an actual divorce has taken place between Hosea and Gomer, whether she was married to another man or not, she may have simply returned to her father's house after all these things.

Maybe she has become the slave of one of her illicit lovers. Gomer, in this situation, has no reason for Hosea to do this. Hosea goes, and it says he buys her for 15 shekels of silver and then restores the relationship to her.

Now, it says in verse three, you must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore or belong to another man, so I will also be to you. So the relationship isn't immediately restored to what had been before.

She is going to have to live with him many days, but ultimately, he will become her husband again. Hosea and Gomer are going to be restored. That speaks of how God will restore his relationship with the people of Israel.

When it says in the text, the ESV chapter three, verse one, go again, love a woman who is loved by another man. The Hebrew there literally says, who is loved by a friend. So, the friend there may not actually be another man.

It may be talking about Hosea himself. Hosea is the friend. Hosea is the one who loves her in spite of what she has done.

After he takes her back and they live separate from one another, and then that marriage is restored and the relationship is restored. This is a picture of God's love for Israel. Chapter three, verse five, afterward, the children of Israel shall return and

seek the Lord their God and David their King, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.

God throughout the minor prophets is attempting to try and cause the people, he's calling the people through the prophets to seek him, to return to him. They will not do that. But ultimately through the judgment that God is going to bring about, God is not simply pouring out his wrath.

God is not simply getting his pound of flesh because he's angry at his unfaithful wife. God is ultimately working to restore them and to produce this love relationship that will cause Israel to be perpetually faithful to him. The marriage of Hosea and Gomer was an effective illustration.

It was a powerful way of demonstrating to Israel their need to return and the depths of God's love for them.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 11, The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 1-3, part 1.