

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 12, The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 1-3, Part 2

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 12, The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 1-3, Part 2.

In this lesson, we're going to continue looking at the marriage relationship between Hosea and Gomer and what that reflects about the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Don't allow the shock value of what God commands Hosea to do to go away as you read this book because it reminds us of the seriousness of the message.

Hosea is ministering in the context of the Assyrian crisis. This is why the judgment of God is going to be so severe because the people have sinned against him in such a grievous way. But don't let the shock value of this go away because it's a powerful expression of the love of God for the people of Israel.

Then, through that, a reminder of God's love for us as his people as well. There is nothing that we can do that would cause God to love us more. In spite of the sin of Israel, there was nothing that they could do that would cause God to love them less.

God is devoted to this covenant. God is devoted to the relationship. In spite of the divorce that takes place, God is ultimately going to restore his people.

God loves them with an everlasting love. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. I'm reminded of that as I see the covenant fidelity and love of God for Israel throughout the Old Testament.

The message of the new covenant in the prophets is an incredible message of grace and love. After Israel has broken the old covenant for hundreds of years, God says, I'm going to establish a new covenant. It will solve the problem that has caused this broken relationship.

I'm going to erase the sins of the past. I'm going to provide a new enablement for the future. Part of that enablement is the Spirit of God being poured out in the hearts of the people.

Another part of that is the people of God are going to be overwhelmed by God's love, in an even greater way than he has shown in their past. That love that God has for his people is ultimately going to lead the people to love God in the way that he desires.

As we look at the marriage relationship between Hosea and Gomer and the illustration and analogy that it provides for us of God and Israel, we also need to look at the significance of the children that are part of this relationship as well. I'd like to go back to chapter one and I would like to talk about the children. I would like to talk about their names and their significance.

In the same way that the prophet Isaiah has two sons by the name of Shear-Jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and their names have symbolic significance, the role that the children play in the marriage and in the illustration and in the analogy is that their names also convey a message to the people of Israel. Now again, the circumstances of these children and their births and how all of this comes about in the marriage, some of that is not clear. In verse two, go and take for yourself a wife of Horeb and have children of Horeb.

Were there children that were brought into this relationship prior to the time that Hosea was married to Gomer? We don't know. Was God asking him to adopt these children? Were there other children in this relationship? But there appear to be three children that are born during the time of the marriage between Hosea and Gomer. The first of these children, it's very clear that Hosea is the father because it's going to say in verse three, so he, Hosea, went in and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

The language there very clearly conveys that Hosea is the father. However, when we read about the birth of the second and the third child or children, that idea is not clearly conveyed. Verse six says, the second child that's born within the marriage relationship, she conceived again and bore a daughter, and the Lord said to him, call her name, no mercy.

There's no indication here that Hosea is the father. And so, there's been a great deal of speculation. Is Hosea the father? Did she have these children by another man? Do the names convey that Hosea recognizes that they are not his children? We don't know the answers to that.

There are other places in the Old Testament where a woman conceiving and bearing a daughter would simply be the normal way to describe the birth of a child. I think the text may be just simply purposely raising some ambiguity here. Hosea and Gomer, they may not have known if Hosea was the father here.

And that's part of the unfaithfulness of this relationship. When the third child is born into the relationship, it says in verse eight, when she had weaned, no mercy, the second child, she conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said to him, call his name, not my people.

And again, there's not an explicit statement here that Hosea was the father. Did the fact that he called this child, lo-ammi, not my people, does that mean Hosea recognizes that this is not his child? We don't know the answer to that. But what is important is the symbolic significance of their names and what it reflects about the relationship between God and Israel.

So, let's look at the first child, verse four. The Lord said to him after this son is born, go and call his name Jezreel. I think most of us know that Jezreel is a place in Israel, but what does the name of a specific place convey? The meaning of the name Jezreel is, it means God sows.

I think it has something to do with the fertility of this area and the bounty that was associated with this being one of the most agriculturally thriving places in the land of Israel. God would also sow his people in the promised land and he would allow them to enjoy this. But the irony here is that Jezreel is not going to be a positive name.

Obviously, in the midst of this broken relationship, Jezreel is going to take on a negative connotation. So, the idea of God sowing may have the idea here of God sowing judgment on his people. It may convey something about the idea of sowing and reaping.

Hosea will later say Israel has sown the wind, and in the whole principle of reaping and sowing, they're going to reap the whirlwind. The consequences are going to be multiplied against them as they experience God's judgment for their sin. So, what seems to convey a positive idea, God sowing agricultural bounty, there's the idea of sowing and reaping judgment.

Beyond that, the historical significance of Jezreel is why the name is used here, I think, even more than its actual meaning. Jezreel, in the recent history of Israel, had been a place of bloody massacre. It was a place where a bloody, violent event had taken place.

So, if a child is given this name in Israel, it may have had a significance that was something like this. I live in Virginia. Many people there still believe that the Civil War is being fought.

So, if a Southerner were to name his son Gettysburg, it would convey something to a Southerner about violence and bloodshed. My wife wanted to call the name of our son Grant, and I told her that I could not do that as a native Virginian. So Jezreel would convey what Gettysburg did to a southerner.

Maybe to make this more modern and contemporary, this might be like giving your child the name Columbine, because it would immediately convey something that was horrific and violent. What was it that had taken place there? The house of Jehu and

the dynasty of Jehu was still in power through Jeroboam II. The house of Jehu had wiped out the house of Ahab in an extremely bloody purge.

Remember that this had taken place in the environs of Jezreel. Part of this was the punishment of Ahab and Jezebel, because they had shed the blood of Naboth, wanting his vineyard that was in Jezreel. The punishment would fit the crime, and that bloodshed would come against the house of Ahab as a result of this.

Now it says here, and it definitely alludes to this event, because it says in verse 4, So there is going to be a bloody purge in Israel that will be like the bloody purge that took place when Jehu wiped out the house of Ahab. Now, this raises an interpretive problem and a dilemma for us because the passage seems to convey that God is going to punish the house of Jehu for the violence that they had committed against the house of Ahab. What's the problem with that? The problem with that is that God had endorsed the violence of Jehu against Ahab.

In fact, God had raised up Jehu, prophetically announced his rise, and had announced ahead of time that Jehu would be the instrument of purging Israel of the family of Ahab and of the idolatrous worship practices that they had brought in through their devotion to the god Baal. So, God called Jehu to do this, and God endorsed what he did. So, how do we understand this? Why is God now punishing the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel? One possible explanation is that some people will look at this and how extremely bloody the purge was and say it appears that maybe, in certain circumstances, Jehu was excessive in the way that he carried out this violence.

Yes, God called on him to purge the people of Israel, to purge the nation of Israel, the house of Ahab and Baal worship, but Jehu seems to enjoy his job just a little bit too much. In addition to purging the house of Israel, one of the other things that Jehu did as he rose to power is that he also put to death the king of Judah in the south, Ahaziah. So, did Jehu go beyond what God had asked him to do? He put Ahaziah to death because even the king of Judah, who was a part of the house of David, was related to Ahab's family by marriage.

So again, did he go beyond what God wanted him to do? We read in 2 Kings 9, verses 27-29, when Ahaziah, the king of Judah, saw this in the context of battle, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan, and Jehu pursued him there and said, Shoot him also. And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam, and he fled to Megiddo, and he died there. His servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem and buried him in his tomb with his fathers in the city of David.

And so, was God punishing Jehu for going too far in not just putting to death the family of Ahab, the king of Israel, and not just killing Jezebel and having her thrown out of the window? Did he go too far in killing the king who represented the house of

David? Another example of how extremely bloody this purge ended up being is found in the next chapter, in 2 Kings 10, verses 12-14. Then he set out and went to Samaria. On the way, while he was at Beth-eked of the shepherds, Jehu met relatives of Ahaziah, the king of Judah.

And he said, Who are you? And they answered, We are relatives of Ahaziah, and we have come down to visit the royal princes and the sons of the queen mother. He said, Take them alive, and they took them alive and slaughtered them, 42 persons, and he spared none of them. So, again, he doesn't just wipe out the house of Ahab.

He also kills the family of Ahaziah, and these sort of seem like innocent bystanders. Did Jehu go too far in the violence that he carried out? When we read the story of this purge, it is a very bloody event. Remember what happens to Jezebel?

She's thrown out of the window. Her blood spatters on the walls. The dogs eat her corpse, and there's nothing there but a few bones left.

Ahab is killed, and his blood is going to leak out as well. They're going to wash it away, and the dogs are going to lick it up. Jehu did not kill Ahab, but he did slaughter other members of his family.

He has members of the family slaughtered, and they bring their severed heads and baskets to him at Jezreel. This is a bloody purge. As he's getting rid of Baal worship and of the priest of Baal, he has them all gather in the temple.

He says, If you think that Ahab was an enthusiastic supporter of Baal, wait until you see my support. When he has them trapped inside, he seals the temple and has all of them slaughtered and murdered. He's a bloody figure.

Was God calling Israel to account for all of this bloodshed? Again, I think in light of 2 Kings and the fact that God endorses this and God sanctions this, I'm not sure that this is the way that we should read Hosea chapter 1. We could simply have a statement here about where the house of Jehu has come to represent simply the house of Israel. This could simply be saying history is going to repeat itself. In the same way that it was necessary for there to be a bloody purge as Jehu took over from the family of Ahab, there is going to be a bloody purge on the house of Israel as a whole.

This historical event is going to repeat itself. It could also be a judgment on the house of Jehu specifically for the fact that even though there was a regime change and even though there was a purging of Baal worship, Jehu was really, in some sense, no more faithful to the Lord than any of the other kings in the house of Israel. It is not going to tell us in Kings that Jehu was the exception, and because he wiped out Baal worship in Israel, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Jehu is going to be castigated for his apostasy in the same way as all the other kings. It is going to say Jehu did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. There was a real opportunity with the rise of the family and the dynasty of Jehu for there to be a change in Israel.

For there to be a return to covenant fidelity and commitment and that never really happened. As the line of Jehu continued, there really was no return to the Lord. During the reign of Jeroboam II, God had blessed Israel with prosperity.

God had expanded their borders. Jeroboam II, in many ways, had been a very effective ruler, but he is dismissed in Kings as someone who does what is evil in the eyes of the Lord. In light of the fact that the house of Jehu did not bring about the changes did not take advantage of the blessings and the opportunities that God had given them, I think that is more the specific reason for the judgment here than the fact that God is holding Jehu accountable for things that he had sanctioned in the first place.

Violence and bloodshed have continued to be a part of the northern kingdom. The rich had oppressed the poor, and the problems of social justice that we have already talked about in the book of Amos and in Jeroboam, in God's eyes, that was bloodshed. That was violence depriving people of their livelihood.

It was something that was displeasing to God as murder. So, in a sense, Israel is guilty of crimes that require bloodletting. There is going to be another bloodletting in Israel.

So, the name Jezreel, God sows, takes us back to this event and reminds us and announces to the people of Israel that there is going to be another bloody time in Israel's history. This is a very apt way of warning them of the military invasion and defeat that they are going to experience at the hands of Assyria. The name of the first child, Jezreel, we already realize that there is a terrible judgment that's coming on Israel.

The second child's name is going to be the daughter that Gomer gives birth to in verse 6, and the Lord said to him, call her name Lo-ruhama, no mercy. Again, in the same way as Jezreel, this is conveying a message of judgment. God is at the point where he will no longer show mercy to his people.

Remember, Exodus 34.6 is going to say God is a compassionate God. He is a God of hesed. He is a God of mercy.

He is a God who is slow to anger and who forgives sins. But there are points where the people if they persist in their unfaithfulness and their disobedience to God, they

will exhaust the mercy of God, and they run out of opportunities to experience his grace and forgiveness. And the Lord says I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel to forgive them at all.

But I will have mercy on the house of Judah and I will save them by the Lord their God. So, the northern kingdom has exhausted the mercy of God. The southern kingdom is not at that point yet.

And remember, they're going to continue as a separate entity from 722-586, and ultimately, they're going to go the way that the northern kingdom did as well. But in Israel, specifically at this point in history, the job of Hosea is to announce that they've exhausted God's mercy. The third child and Hosea verse 8 tells us that Gomer, after she had weaned at no mercy, Lo-Ruhamah, conceived and bore a son.

And the Lord said to him, call his name not my people for you are not my people, and I am not your God. So, the name of the third child, Lo-Ami. And this indicates a complete break and a fracture in the covenant relationship.

They no longer have the privilege of saying that they are God's people, and they no longer have the exclusive right of calling God their God. I am your God, and you are my people. That is a covenant formula that is all throughout the Old Testament.

That relationship temporarily is being broken and fractured. And that's the seriousness of the exile. And that's the extent of how serious Israel's sins were.

Now, the incredible thing is that after God has said, you are not my people, I will not show you mercy, we come back to Exodus 34, 6, and 7, and we ask that question, well, what about God's hesed? Have the sins of Israel been so severe and so serious that God has finally said, I'm rid of my relationship with this people? It's time for a complete break. The amazing thing, and again, don't lose the shock value of what happens in all of this.

Because it is a powerful reminder to us of the love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God. Because even though Israel has broken this covenant for hundreds of years, even though there is going to be a divorce, there is also going to be a restoration. The way that we see this specifically in Hosea chapter 1 is that the names of these three children convey judgment and the idea of a broken covenant; these names are reversed in the promise that is given to us at the end of chapter 1. These names that have this terrible, horrible connotation of judgment are going to be transformed to where they become promises of future restoration.

We go back to the very beginning of our discussion of the prophets at the beginning of this course, where we talked about the covenantal message of the prophets. You

have sinned, you have broken the covenant, you need to repent and get right with God. If there is no repentance, there will be judgment.

The three names of Israel's children indicate we're at that point. But remember what the fourth element was, is that after there is judgment, there is going to be restoration. The prophets who speak of God's judgment, no matter how intensely they speak of that, even the prophet Amos, after nine relentless chapters of judgment, there is always ultimately a promise of restoration.

We see that in these names. Very powerfully, it does this. So, it's going to say in chapter 1, verse 10, after verse 9, You are not my people, I am not your God.

Does this mean the covenant is over? Listen to verse 10. What part of the Old Testament should this remind us of? This is Genesis chapter 12. This is the Abrahamic covenant.

I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. In the previous verse it just said, we are no longer your people. The reaffirmation of this covenant promise reflects the idea that God is going to restore this relationship.

The fracture of the covenant, the dissolution of the covenant is only a temporary thing. And he says, and in the place where it was said to them, you are lo-ammi, not my people, it shall be said to them, children of the living God. So, Israel right now has become lo-ammi, not my people, but they will become children of the living God.

And the children of Judah and the children of Israel, there's even going to be a reunion of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, they shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head, and they shall go up in the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. And so now the name Jezreel that is used in the name of Hosea's child to talk about bloodshed and violence talks about Israel and Judah being regathered to the land and being restored. So, the names that are used in a completely negative way are going to be turned around, and they're going to be used in a positive way.

We have the same thing, the wordplay on the names of Hosea's children. This comes out in Hosea chapter 2, verses 21 to 23 it says. In that day, the day of restoration, the future time, when this occurs, here's what's going to happen.

I will answer, declares the Lord, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil. Remember the things that God was going to take away from them as part of the deprivation of the exile? They had attributed the wine, vine, and grain to the gods, to the Baals. So, the

Lord says, I'm going to deprive them of those things and ultimately allure them back in the wilderness and bring them back to the land.

The Lord will give them back the crops and the products that he had taken away. They will realize finally that Baal, the god of the storm, did not provide us with these things. Yahweh, the god of Israel, as a result of his love for us and his promises to the covenant, that's why we have these things and they're going to experience this lavish prosperity.

They will answer when this happens, Jezreel, God sows. Why is the wine, why is the vine, why is the oil, why is it there? Because God has sown it and God has provided it for us to enjoy. Jezreel becomes a positive name, and the whole idea of the agricultural prosperity of the Jezreel Valley is returned here.

I will sow her for myself in the land. God will not just sow the crops there; God will actually sow Israel in the land, and they will permanently dwell there. There will never be a time when the final restoration occurs for Israel to ever be driven out of the land because they will obey him.

The Lord says, and I will have mercy on no mercy. I'm going to have this motherly compassion. The word Raham is related to the word for womb and so there is this idea of a motherly compassion here.

I will have compassion for no mercy, and I will say to Lo Ami, not my people, you are Ami, you are my people, and he shall say you are my God. So, the marriage of Hosea and Gomer reflected Yahweh's abiding commitment to his people. God tells Hosea to marry an unfaithful woman.

She is unfaithful to him. She goes after her illicit lovers, and even after that has happened, even after there is likely a formal decree of divorce, Hosea goes back and purchases his wife and restores that relationship. The restoration of the covenant is reflected in the marriage of the husband and the wife.

The restoration is also reflected in the names of the children. Because initially Jezreel, Lo Ruhamah, and Lo Ami have a negative connotation. They are turned around and ultimately given a positive connotation to talk about all of the blessings that God will provide for Israel when again the covenant relationship is restored.

Alright, so those are the things that are going on here. Now, when it talks in chapter 1, verse 5 that God is going to punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, that specific punishment on the house of Jehu happened very soon. The fall of the house of Jehu took place in 752 BC.

But ultimately beyond that, there is going to be an accounting for the house of Israel that will take place with the fall of the nation of Israel to the Assyrians in 722. I want to just mention one last thing about the promise that's conveyed through the names of the children. As we look at this, Paul takes the passage where God talks about the relationship being restored in Hosea chapter 1, verses 10 and 11.

It says, You are not my people, but it shall be said of them: You are children of the living God. And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head, and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Clearly, in context, that passage is talking about the relationship of God and Israel and how God is going to restore these people who have been lo-ammi, not my people.

However, Paul does something very interesting with this passage in Romans chapter 9, verses 24-26. Paul is going to say, Even us whom he has called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles. So Paul is going to talk about the fact that God has formed a people that is made out of Jews and Gentiles.

Why has God brought Gentiles into the family of God? As indeed he says in Hosea, Those who are not my people I will call my people. And her who was not beloved, I will call her beloved. And in the very place where it was said to them, You are not my people, and they will be called sons of the living God.

Where have we read that passage? It's a quotation of Hosea chapter 1. Paul uses that to talk about the fact that God has taken Gentiles who were not part of God's people and brought them into the family of God along with Jews. So, in a passage in the Old Testament that focuses exclusively on the restoration of Israel, Paul theologically applies to the Gentiles, who also were not God's people. It becomes this beautiful passage of how God is forming a people that is made of both Jew and Gentile.

So, there's a lot of negativity conveyed by the image of this broken marriage, children of whoredom. But there's also an incredibly positive message that grows out of this as well. I'd like to take a few minutes to just think theologically about the idea of the comparison of the marriage between God and Israel or God and Judah as a marriage.

And just summarize briefly some of the key concepts that I think are being conveyed by the use of this metaphor. We've talked about this already that in the Old Testament God's relationship with Israel or the nature and character of God is generally not described to us or relayed to us in the forms of philosophy or systematic theology. It's often conveyed in the form of metaphor.

And so, we have God in the book of Amos. He's a roaring lion and a thundering storm. And we saw the ways that that worked through the book.

One of the powerful metaphors and images that is used for God in the relationship with his people in the Old Testament is family relationships. God is both a father for Israel, and God is a husband for Israel. Now there are things about marriage in the ancient Near East that were different, that definitely are different from marriage today.

But I think there are some clear ideas and concepts that this metaphor is trying to convey. As the prophets use this metaphor, one of the things that it's trying to say to the people of Israel, it's reminding them of the seriousness of their sin. And so, there are a number of places in the prophets where the prophets don't simply use the metaphor of a marriage and Yahweh as the husband and Israel as the wife.

They not only use the image of infidelity and spiritual adultery, but they're going to use some pretty shocking statements. The language is going to become very graphic. Some people, and more feminist critics of the Old Testament, have even referred to this as porno-prophetic language.

I don't want to go as far as classifying as that, but I do think it's important for us to understand how shocking some of this language and imagery is. For example, in the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah says, Long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds. You said I will not serve.

Yes, on every hill and under every green tree, you have bowed down like a whore. And so, the prophet Jeremiah is going to say, you have not just prostituted yourselves, you have done this repeatedly and in numerous places. He's going to go ahead, he's going to go forward in chapter 2, and he's going to say, You are like a restless young camel running here and there, a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind, who can restrain her lust? You're like an animal in heat chasing after your false gods.

I think that message might have been somewhat offensive to the people who heard it. I'm not willing to want to try that one in church myself. In chapter 2 of Jeremiah, the prophet says, How well you direct your course to those who seek love so that even to wicked women you have taught your ways.

You're not only unfaithful to God, you're not only a prostitute. You can give lessons on this because you're really good at it. Even the most wicked of women could learn from you. Again, that message would have really been in the face of the people who heard this.

And in the culture of shame, when we think about adultery and infidelity and sexual immorality and all that conveyed, and the fact that adultery itself was a capital crime, why is God going to judge Israel so severely? It's not because he's an angry and

capricious God. It's because Israel deserves this. When Ezekiel uses the metaphor of Jerusalem or Samaria or the people of Israel or Judah as a prostitute, again, it's not just the idea of immorality. There are some pretty shocking statements that are made there.

He's going to say, you have done this repeatedly, so that Jerusalem is worse than Sodom. Sodom's a wicked city and a wanton city. Jerusalem is worse in the sense that they're more accountable to God.

Jeremiah will say, the northern kingdom of Israel, God divorced them. In the southern kingdom of Judah, in their adultery, they are more guilty because they should have learned the lesson from what God did to the people of Israel in the north. Ezekiel is going to say the difference between my people and a prostitute is that a prostitute is paid for her services.

You pay your lovers to sleep with you. At least the prostitute gets paid for it. You go out pursuing your lovers, and you pay them.

The prophets use this shocking language. Isaiah, at the beginning of the book of Isaiah, Sodom and Gomorrah, is the epitome of wickedness in the Old Testament. The leaders of Jerusalem are referred to as the rulers of Sodom.

Ezekiel 23.20, Israel and Judah lusted after Egypt and with alliances because their soldiers had genitals the size of horses or donkeys. It's like, wow, these images are pretty graphic. They remind us of the seriousness of Israel's sin.

God is a holy God, and God has been betrayed by the sin of Israel. God's holiness, the Lord is the Holy One of Israel, which means that he cannot remain in a relationship with an unholy people unless the sin is purged away. It's also a reminder to us of the fact that as we sin and in our own lives when we break God's commands when we do not follow the dictates of his word and his instructions for our lives, sin does not simply break God's law.

It's not just simply a legal relationship here. Our sin and our betrayal ultimately break God's heart. Anyone who is a pastor can tell you that the most painful things and the most painful experiences that you have to help people through are when one spouse has been unfaithful to another.

It takes incredible grace and incredible love and strength from God himself to ever heal that kind of relationship. Every Jewish male who heard the message of the prophets would have understood the shock and the anger and the betrayal and the shame that was associated with this. Remember, these are the people that the prophets are trying to communicate to.

They are the ones that are primarily responsible for the sins that are present in Israel's society. They take the male-female role and flip it around and say, don't just think about your wife being unfaithful to you. Put yourself in the role of a wife with Yahweh as your husband.

You have been unfaithful to him. Again, feminist critics are often going to say that this imagery is something that we need to redact out of the Bible because it conveys the fact that women are the source of wickedness. However, if you understand how the metaphor works, you realize that God is ultimately confronting the fact that the men are the ones who have corrupted Israelite society, and they are the ones who need to change their ways.

A second thing that the marriage metaphor conveys to us, it reflects for us Israel's misplaced devotion. In the book of Hosea, we have at least two important references to the love of God for his people. I want to just mention these and call attention to them.

God is absolutely devoted to Israel. He always has been. He always will be.

He has always been faithful to the covenant. In chapter 3, verse 1, when it says, And the Lord said to me, Go again and love a woman who is loved by a friend. The love of Hosea for this woman is a reflection of God's love for Israel.

At the initiation of this relationship why did this relationship come about in the first place? Why was there a covenant between God and Israel? Hosea 11, chapter 1 says this, When Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son. And the amazing thing in the book of Hosea, and again, don't let the shock value of what's going on in this book sink away, because it does remind us of God's love.

The Lord says this in 11, 8, and 9: How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like the cities that I destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah? My heart recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender. And so, at the human level, we can imagine an angry husband simply carrying out his vindictive revenge on an unfaithful wife.

The Lord gives us a model of saying, Even after this woman has been unfaithful to me, I still love her. There's a powerful message of God's love for Israel. The contrast for that, or the contrast to that in the book, is that whenever the book speaks of Israel's love, Yahweh is never the object.

There are references in a number of places in the book to either Israel's lovers or the things that they love, and those things are never Yahweh. In fact, they are the other gods that they attribute the blessings that they've enjoyed. They believe that those gods are the source of that, rather than Yahweh, and as a result of that, they have a

misplaced devotion to Baal and the fertility gods and goddesses that were associated with Canaanite worship.

We see references to Israel's love, chapter 2, verse 5, verse 7, verse 10, verse 12, verse 13, chapter 3, verse 1, chapter 4, verse 18, chapter 9, verse 1, chapter 9, verse 10, chapter 12, verse 7, and the Lord is never the object of this. As we see an unfaithful wife contrasted with a loyal and beneficent husband who has always taken care of his wife, and she's turned around and attributed that care and that love to other gods, I think it's a great illustration of Israel's misplaced devotion. It also reminds us of the things in our lives that we often give misplaced devotion to and anything in our life that takes the place of God as the thing that we ultimately value, as the thing that we look to as our ultimate source of security and significance, as the thing that we give devotion and service to that belongs only to God, it's a reminder of all the things that we give misplaced devotion to as well, whether it's our careers or even our families, for pastors that is often our ministry, for athletics, for recreation, for jobs, for advancement, for career, for prosperity, and I think in the culture that we live in, if there were prophets today, those would be the kinds of issues that they would be addressing with us.

Israel has misplaced devotion. In the midst of this, a third thing that we're reminded of, and we've already touched on this, is that the image and the metaphor of the husband and wife and even God's abiding and continuing love in the midst of this unfaithfulness, we're reminded of the depth and the passion that God has for the people of Israel. And we've already seen this.

Chapter 11, verses 8 and 9. How can I give Israel up? That would be the human inclination. But God's compassion recoils within him. And we look at this and say, why do you want to stay with this woman? Why do you want to continue this relationship in the covenant? Why not start over with another people? God is committed to the covenant.

And so in the message of the prophets, there is often this idea that the exile was a divorce, where God temporarily ended the relationship with his people, but the message of the prophets is that divorce is not permanent, and God will restore the relationship. Isaiah chapter 50, verse 1, says this. Encouraging the people of Israel to return after the time that they will experience the exile.

Isaiah says, When God brings his people back, the certificate of divorce that had ended the marriage relationship during the exile is no longer going to be there. And Isaiah says, There's going to be a restored relationship. Isaiah 54, verses 4-6, conveys what we just talked about.

For you will not be disgraced. For you will forget the shame of your youth and the reproach of your widowhood. You will remember it no more.

For your maker is your husband. The Lord of Hosts is your name. So, God's going to restore the relationship.

Chapter 62 in Isaiah the same thing. Hepzibah. Sounds better in Hebrew.

And your land will be called married. Beulah. Because the Lord's going to restore that relationship.

Now let's think about this for a minute. In Old Testament law, Deuteronomy chapter 24 said this. That if a man found something that was displeasing in his wife, something that was morally indecent, short of adultery, that man had the right to give her a certificate of divorce and to send her away.

Now if that divorce occurred, one of the protections that's placed in this for women is that the man was no longer allowed to go back and remarry that woman if she married another man. Once the divorce occurred, the natural expectation was that the woman would remarry, and the first marriage could not be resumed or restored ever again under any circumstances. The amazing thing in the relationship between God and Israel is that even though the divorce has occurred, and even though Israel has done something that is far more serious than simply remarrying, they have committed serial infidelity against the Lord throughout their relationship.

God says I am willing to set aside my own law even to take my people back. And I think if Gomer has married this other man and God tells Hosea to go and buy her back and restore the relationship, we actually have an example of God setting aside the law of Deuteronomy 24 because of his love for the people of Israel. Jeremiah is going to say the same thing.

In Jeremiah chapter 3, verses 1 and 2, Jeremiah is alluding to the divorce law. He is making an intertextual reference to the divorce law in Deuteronomy 24. He says this: If a man divorces his wife and she goes away from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? The answer that you would expect is no.

God's law doesn't allow it. However, what happens in the rest of the chapter is there are numerous places where the Lord says to his people, return to me. God was willing to set aside even his own law because of the depths of his love for Israel.

The marriage metaphor also conveys for us that within the relationship between God and Israel, God demanded absolute loyalty and devotion. Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 13 and 15. Israel is not allowed to worship God and other gods.

They must choose to worship God alone. That's the way that a marriage relationship is. We do not take our best friend along on our honeymoon because that sort of interferes with what the purpose of that is.

A marriage is to be a relationship of exclusive loyalty and devotion. God's permanent love and commitment to Israel, the severity of the punishment, was a capital offense. God must respond in this severe way because of the seriousness of the sin.

Israel cannot look at what God is about to do to them and say this is unfair and unjust. They are deserving of this because they have not simply been unfaithful to God once, they have been unfaithful to God throughout their history. Finally, in the book of Hosea, I believe that the marriage metaphor and the idea of adultery and infidelity is an especially apt metaphor, not simply because of the fact that they are worshiping other gods and the loyalty and devotion that they're giving to God is like the betrayal of a husband or a wife, but the worship of Baal and the Canaanite gods and goddesses that were associated with Baal often involved sexual immorality and fertility rites.

The idea of sexual immorality is a part of this. Literally, that's what was going on as part of this worship. Canaanite worship seems to include and involve a form of sacred prostitution. This doesn't necessarily mean that they believe that by having sex with a prostitute at the temple, they are guaranteeing some type of fertility for the land.

Prostitution at the temple, cultic prostitution, may have simply been a way of satisfying people's sexual lust and raising money for the temple. But there are pagan, immoral, sexual fertility rites that God wanted to be no part of Israel's religion. Unlike the gods of the Canaanites, Yahweh does not have a wife.

Sexual aspects are not brought into Israel's religion as a way of keeping the Israelites away from these things. The reason the Israelites were to wipe out the Canaanites was that God did not want them to participate in the pagan practices that were an abomination and that were of horror to the Lord. We have a reflection of this and how these fertility rites and these aspects of sexual immorality had been brought into Israel's religion in Hosea 4, verses 10-14.

I'm going to close this session by reading this passage and then just making a brief comment. The Lord says, The people of Israel will eat, but they will not be satisfied. They shall play the whore, but they will not multiply because they have forsaken the Lord to cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding.

My people inquire about a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles and a spirit of whoredom has led them astray. And they have left their God to play the whore. They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains.

They burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore, your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes.

They were the ones that were ultimately responsible. And they sacrifice with the cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin. Don't lose the shock value of the analogy and the sign act that is carried out in the marriage of Hosea and Gomer.

It is a reminder of the greatness of Israel's covenant on faithfulness to God, but ultimately an assurance to us of God's abiding commitment to the covenant and the fact that he is going to restore this relationship and ultimately turn Israel away from their love for other gods into a love that is pure and holy and completely devoted to him.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 12, The Marriage of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 1-3, Part 2.