

## Hosea 2-3 – John Karmelich

1. Ever been in a bad situation, that in order to make it better, you had to do something you weren't crazy about doing? Have you ever made a big sacrifice for someone after they've really hurt you? I doubt there is a parent alive who's never had to relate to that situation! What if it wasn't a blood relative? Are we still willing to help someone in a big way after they really hurt us?
  - a) In this text, the hero of the story Hosea, buys his wife back at a slave auction after she left him to become a prostitute. The short version is after her life was ruined, she was sold at an auction and Hosea was commanded by God to go buy her back. That leads back to the my first question raised, how far would we go to help someone we once cared about, who really hurt us? If our spouse abandoned us with the kids and the bills for another life, it'd be really difficult to want to help him or her again. Can we forgive someone that much?
  - b) OK, that's the key point of the story. Why should I care, as that's not my situation right at this moment? The answer is to think about this story from God's perspective. God's using Hosea to be an example of how much He cares about those He's called to be His witnesses to the world and such people were unfaithful to that calling. How hard will God work in order to draw such people back to Him? If one of my children turned away from trusting in Jesus for their salvation, I'd still love and care for them and do what I can for them, but I would not abandon my faith or my principals based on whatever lifestyle choices they'd make. The point is God can't stop loving who He's called to love just as we can never stop loving who we love.
  - c) Now let's suppose this doesn't apply to you. Let's say you're a living witness for Jesus, as well as say, your spouse or your family. How does it apply? Does it mean it's ok to cheat on my relationship with God or say my spouse, because God will do what He can to draw me back in? For starters, of course not. The issue is about being a living witness for Jesus, in all aspects of our lives. When we mess up, we confess it, turn from it, and we can suffer whatever consequences may come from it. The point here is God can't stop loving who He has called to love and He'll do what He can to draw people back to Him.
  - d) Let me try this one more way, and then I'll get back to the text: Suppose someone we care about in church says, "I don't care what you think, I want to go on drinking and nothing is going to stop me." Sometimes they will listen to us talk about the consequences and other times they won't. The most important thing to do is pray for them. Maybe you're not the one who God will use to draw them back. God may use you to help them in a future day. The point is all we can do is be a good witness for Jesus and let Him deal with those who refuse to change their lifestyle.
2. Meanwhile back to Hosea. I'm taking Chapters 2 and 3 together as they finish the marriage story of Hosea and Gomer. As I stated earlier, the key point is that Hosea buys his wife back at a slave auction. It's symbolic of God "buying back" those who make the decisions to turn from Him with their lives. It's God saying, "I've known you rejected Me for a long time, but I'm a God of second chances, and I want to give you one! Come, live as I desire you to live and I'll bring you more joy in your life than you ever had before turning from Me." That's the message of these two chapters.
  - a) To state the obvious some more, if that was it, it'd be very short lesson.
  - b) Yes it's a wonderful love story about a man willing to do what he can to get back his wife who was unfaithful to him. Yes it's a model of how God's willing to do what He has to do in order to draw us closer to Him. However the real joy of the story is about realizing just how much God loves us, that He's willing to do whatever He has to do so as to draw us to Him for all of eternity. The idea is that we can't lose our salvation if we trust that Jesus is God, paid the full price of our sins and is in charge of our lives. My point is once we have made that commitment, God wants to keep it forever and strengthen that commitment.

- c) Therefore, as we read about Hosea, don't think, this is a cute 2,700 year old love story, that we can admire for his commitment. What we have to see as we go through these chapters is a realization that when we commit our lives to Jesus "that way", we too will become one of the people who God will use by whatever means necessary in order to draw us back to Him. If you get that, then you've got the story.
- d) Oh, and my lesson title is, "Realizing the lengths God will go to draw us close to Him".
- 3. There is one more cute thing to realize about these chapters. In Chapter 1, we learned Hosea had three children. All three were given negative prophetic names. How would you feel if you had to go through life with a name like "Slaughter", "No Mercy" or "Not My people". That's the effective names Hosea gave his three children. A key point in Chapter 1 is Hosea gave them an equivalent of those names to show how God's going to treat those Israelites who were unfaithful to Him. At the end of the second chapter, Hosea renames his three children with "good names" to imply God will give the Israelites a second chance. For example, Hosea renames two of his children "Mercy" and "My People", to teach how God never gives up on those he's called to be a witness for him.
  - a) Then we get the big scene of Hosea buying back his wife at a slave auction. It's a dramatic way of saying, when we're desperate and hit bottom in our lives, God's more than willing to do what He has to do to draw us back to Him. It's a wonderful realization that He will do for us what we can't do for ourselves, draw us into an eternal relationship with Him. It shows us that even when we're willing to give up on life, God never gives up on us. This is an example of showing how much God loves us that He's willing to "buy us back" after a point where we've run out of other options in life and only by trusting in God can we be at a mental place where our lives can have meaning and joy.
  - b) What if you say, that's not me? I'm already living a Christian life. Like I said, we have no idea who is and who won't be saved. All we can do is be a good witness to those around us and pray for others. It's a reminder that those God has called, He'll never give up on.
    - i) All I'm saying is it's not up to us to lead everyone we know into salvation. All we are called to do is be a witness for Jesus. God's the one who actually draws others to Him. It's often when people are at "rock bottom" mentally where He can do His best work and "buy back" what was lost. So should we encourage nonbelievers to go hit "rock bottom"? Of course not. What we should do is show kindness to them as that is living a different lifestyle than how the "world" lives. If we show love to others, it naturally gets people to respond in kind and may draw them to seek God just as we did in one time of our life.
- 4. Finally, let me say a few quick words about Chapter 3. It's only five verses, but many scholars do consider it one of the most powerful chapters in the Old Testament. That's because Chapter 3 will effectively repeat God's key message that He can't abandon those He has called. Just as the book of Romans uses the Israelites as an example in Chapters 9-11 that God can never go back on His unconditional promise to eternally give the land of Israel to the Israelites, so God can't go back on His promise to redeem back those He's called. So does that mean every Israelite is saved today? No, because salvation is still up to us to accept His free gift of Jesus and live as if He's in charge of our lives as well as accept the idea of Jesus being God and paying for our sins. However God has to reconcile His commitment to the nation of Israel with the forgiveness of our sins. All that I am saying is salvation is an individual thing, but there has to also be a day, where it's a "group thing" for the nation of Israel as Jesus will literally rule the world from there. How God will work it out is a key point in Romans Chapter 11 as well as here in Hosea Chapter 3. If you're still confused on that issue, you're welcome to join me as I go through the details of this lesson.
  - a) With that said, let's jump into Hosea and see what we can learn from those details:
- 5. Chapter 2, Verse 1: "Say of your brothers, 'My people,' and of your sisters, 'My loved one.'<sup>2</sup> "Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.
  - a) To understand this, let's remember who is talking to who: It's God talking to Hosea.

- b) What we have in these two verses is God giving Hosea instructions on what to say to his fellow Israelites. It's important to understand that when God tells Hosea to "rebuke your mother", it's not literally referring to Hosea's mother. It's a way of describing Israel (that is the Northern Kingdom of Israel as the Israelites were split into two separate nations at this point in history.)
  - i) If it seems strange that Hosea refers to fellow believers as "His mother", realize that Jesus did the same thing. Jesus said: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21, ESV). My point is Jesus Himself refers to His followers as "His mother and His brothers". To state the obvious, Jesus isn't being literal, but just making the point that if we desire to spend eternity with God in heaven we must be willing to be obedient to God and live as He desires we live. Being a Christian is not a matter of reciting a prayer of forgiveness and then living however we want to live: It's about using our lives as a witness for Jesus after we have made that commitment.
- c) Believe it or not, that little lecture leads me perfectly back to these two verses. Hosea was told by God to rebuke Hosea's fellow Israelites. A little background here would help us to understand why Hosea's doing this in the first place. In the Northern Kingdom of Israel at that time, the vast majority of Israelites worshipped a false deity called Baal. This deity is associated with good weather. Realize that most Israelites were farmers, so they wanted a deity that would bring good weather to produce good crops. In the several-hundred year history of the Northern Kingdom, there was never one God fearing king. They all turned from God and essentially worshipped Baal. Such political leaders were reflective of what their people were like: Ignoring God and practiced Baal worship.
  - i) At the time Hosea wrote this, the economy was doing well, and life was going on as if all is well. That's when Hosea started lecturing his fellow citizens "up North" that destruction is coming soon. That's why Hosea gave his 3 children names that imply bad things are going to happen. Does this mean we should be all doom and gloom about the future? For the future of non-believers, effectively it's going to be all "doom and gloom" for eternity. Let me put it this way: This has nothing to do with the economy or politics. It's about having the right perspective for our eternal future. For people who only care about making a good living or enjoying this life, in effect it is a "gloom and doom" scenario whether they realize it or not. When we use our lives to prepare for eternity by being a witness for Jesus, it is only then that our lives have real meaning. That's the point here.
  - ii) Anyway, Hosea starts this section with a "rant" against his fellow Israelites as they are wasting their lives away by ignoring the God who's blessed their lives to begin with and turning to other things to live out their lives.
- d) One final thing before I move on. For those who don't know, in the bible, if we do commit adultery or if we commit idolatry, they are synonyms in the bible. Think about it logically: To commit adultery is to cheat on one's spouse. Commit idolatry is about cheating on our relationship with God. That's why the terms are used interchangeably in the bible. That's when Hosea is told to tell his fellow Israelites to stop committing adultery, he is not being literal about them cheating on their spouses. It's a dramatic way to tell them how they've collectively turned from God to worship other things, in this case a false god.
- e) If Verses 1 and 2 explain what they were doing wrong, Verse 3 explain the consequences:
  - 6. Verse 3: Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst.
  - a) Remember how I just said life without God will become a "doom and gloom" scenario? It is effectively what Hosea is saying to his fellow Israelites. The way God did confirm what He said to Hosea, is that the Northern Israelite Kingdom was destroyed within 20 years of this message. If nothing else, it teaches us "don't mess with God".

- b) In fact, just to prove that God says what He means and means what He says, the Southern Israelite Kingdom was spared the same fate. When that same army that wiped out all of the Northern Kingdom came south to destroy Jerusalem, God killed that entire army one night by one angel. (See 2nd Kings 19:35 or Isaiah 37:36.) My whole point here is simply that God isn't to be messed with, and we will suffer consequences when we do.
- c) So does this mean we should go all "doom and gloom" on the unbelievers around us? Ask is that how Jesus told us to be a witness to them? Of course not. Jesus command for us is to show love to others. I love to quote the late Walter Martin here, who said, "If they won't listen to Jesus, give them Moses". What he meant by that was if people aren't willing to be influenced by the love of Jesus, then we need to warn them about the eternity of hell. It is a great balance of explaining God's love and God's judgment at the same time.
- d) Coming back to Hosea, that's what he is doing in this verse. If people don't care about His love for us then they have to realize judgment is coming. So should we be like Hosea and tell people our lives as we know it will end in 20 years? That wasn't Hosea's message. It's if we refused to our lives over to Jesus, we too are effectively committing adultery. We're being disloyal to the God who created us in the first place. We may live another 100 years or we may live a few more days. Either way our eternity is based on our knowledge about Jesus and how we live based on that knowledge. If we got that we're then to use our lives to make a difference for Him because we accept the Gospel message, then all of us should be willing to join Hosea as he "gives them Moses" (condemns their unfaithfulness) as they refuse to turn to the God who created us in the first place.
- e) OK I know I'm getting all "hot and heavy" on you, and we're only on Verse 3. However, it is also what Hosea is doing here as well. Now let's look at the rest of that verse. Let's read the second sentence again, "I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst."

- i) I want you to grasp how literal was the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. The policy of the Assyrian Empire was, when a city or land was conquered, the people who live through it, were separated and relocate elsewhere in the empire. The way the Assyrians prevented revolts against their empire was by separating those who were conquered. That's why Hosea used the analogy here of describing Israel as a land like a desert (wasteland). Remember that God separated the Israelites so they would be witness for Him. Now God's saying because they failed to be the type of witness He desired them to be, now they'll be separated from their land/families.
- ii) So does that mean God can or will wipe us out if we fail to be a witness for Him? I would say it happens all the time. Think of all the churches and ministries that no longer exist as a lead pastor got caught in some sin. My point is His judgment on a group of believers or even a nation is evident all around us if we think about it. So does that mean we Christians should preach "doom and gloom?" No. It means we should use our lives as witness for Jesus and as Walter Martin said, "If they are not willing to listen to Jesus, tell them about Moses (destruction is coming)!"
- iii) Now for the good news. This whole lesson is not all doom and gloom. It does get a lot better in a few verses. Meanwhile Verse 4:

7. Verse 4: I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery.

<sup>5</sup> Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.'

- a) Before we can get to the positive verses about how God is a God of second chances, Hosea still needs to pound the point home about what the Israelites are doing wrong. Realize he is using his own wife as a living example. Apparently about that time, Hosea's wife didn't want to be his wife anymore. Let's face it, if your husband gave your children names like "No Mercy" and "God won't forgive" (rough English translations), it must have been hard to live with a husband who only seemed to care about God and nothing else!

- b) The other thing to realize about these verses is that Hosea can't be talking about his own relationship with his wife. It's hard to imagine any father saying "I will not show love to my children because they are children of adultery." Even if we are angry with our spouse for leaving us, I can't see one stating how much they hate their own children. The point is we're reading in a colorful way about God's anger at those He's called to be His, have now turned their back on Him. Of course I believe God is perfect by definition, so therefore He is incapable of changing His mind. However, we do grieve God when we refuse to live as He desires we live.
    - i) The way I look at God's relationship with us, is He's always perfect. That means:
      - a) He's always perfectly angry at sin. That never changes.
      - b) He's always perfectly loving to people and willing to express that love to those of us willing to commit our lives to Him. That never changes.
      - c) His timing is always perfect in terms of when to act within our world.
      - d) All I'm saying is if God is perfect, then He acts "perfectly" all the time.
    - c) With that said, God had called the Israelites to separate themselves from the world not to ignore non-believers, but to be witnesses to them about Him (hint hint!). When we fail to live that way, God can find ways to express His anger at us for failing to live the way He wants us to live. That's why I gave that little lecture about God's "perfection".
    - d) The reason I'm giving this little lecture here is that just as God's lecturing the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom who've collectively turned from Him, so in effect He's also telling us that He's angry when we aren't living as He desires, which is as a witness for Him.
    - e) To state the obvious some more, messing with God has some horrid consequences. Let's put it this way: God allowed His people to be conquered within a generation of the time Hosea wrote this. What makes us think God won't "damage us badly" if we fail to live as He desires? So John, are you trying to scare us into loving God? No. I just want all of us to realize there are consequences in this lifetime for failing to live, as He desires.
      - i) OK John, you've beaten that point over our heads for a good while now. What is it we're supposed to do? First, it's easier than we think. It's mainly about how we're living. I'm not saying we have to preach Jesus 24-7. What I'm asking is, if it were a crime to be a Christian, would we be arrested? Do we regularly attend a church not to impress our family or neighbors, but just out of love for God and our fellow believers? Do we put other's needs as priority over our needs? That's how we are a witness for Jesus. Am I perfect? Of course not. The point is our lives should be full of evidence that we care about our relationship with God and we want to live in a way that we're putting our mouths where our hearts are!
    - f) In the meantime, while Hosea's trying to do the right thing, his wife Gomer made a choice to go elsewhere. Let's face it, if you don't care about God, you wouldn't want to live with a person who does. If someone is always lecturing you about say, going to church and it's not an issue for you, I can see someone leaving over that. We don't win people over by us telling them what to do and not do. We win people over when they see us being joyful as we do things for them. All I'm saying is a positive attitude and caring for others will do a lot more than lecturing them. Anyway, Gomer's fed up in these verses, and apparently is leaving her husband to go back to her prostitution lifestyle.
      - i) One of the saddest things I watch in life is when people reject God because they do want to get the most out of this life here and now. They don't realize what a "dead end" street that is. The positive news of this story is that Hosea will rescue his wife from that lifestyle albeit at God's command for him to do so!
      - ii) In the meantime we're going to read how God's going to help her:
8. Verse 6: Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way.
- a) God's saying He will make her life "miserable" for the choices she has made.

- b) When we get selfish about our lifestyle choices, we rarely think about how those decisions affect those around us. Here is the wife of a man called to be a prophet of God, essentially saying, "I didn't sign up for this gig. If my spouse wants to be a godly person, he can do it all by himself. I'll go live however I want to live!"
  - c) That's when we often turn to prayer and effectively say, "God I give up. The one you have called me to love wants nothing to do with my relationship with You." If You care about the one I love as much as You claim You do, then draw them back to You."
    - i) My point is this verse is an answer to that type of prayer. Let me add Verse 7 here as it ties into the same theme:
9. Verse 7: She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.'
- a) This is God effectively saying, "When we realize what life is like serving Him and we turn from that lifestyle, God will work to draw us back to Him, His way on His timing."
  - b) If there is one thing I've learned from living the Christian life, is God will never do for us what we can do for ourselves. If we can't win over our spouses or someone else by living as God desires, we should always pray for them. God will do what we can't when it's His will to have something done. I don't think God's working on Hosea's wife as to make him a better witness for God. God's doing this out of His love for Gomer (Hosea's wife). It's a reminder to us that He will go to whatever lengths are necessary to draw us back to Him.
  - c) Verse 7 is a short-term prediction of Gomer's future. It's saying a day will come when she will realize she was better off with Hosea, then when she turned from him.
    - i) The point for you and me is that God can't abandon who He's chosen to love. He's just as capable of making our lives miserable when we turn from His will than He did here in this story. So how do we know if our problems aren't just "bad luck" or God wanting us to try other things? We don't. All I know is when we learn to live as He wants us to live and turn from bad lifestyles, we start realizing all those who sank to "rock bottom", because they refused to make God their life focus. I am not saying we can't enjoy other things in this life. I'm just saying when we ignore God He finds a way to draw us back to Him.
    - ii) What about people who don't care for Jesus and they don't care what we say? All we can do is pray for them and be good witnesses to them when we get a chance.
    - iii) I don't know who is saved and who isn't. I just know I've been called to be a living witness for Him. We don't get "notches in our bible" for every person we save. We just live as a witness for Him, and we let Him work on people's hearts.
    - iv) Speaking of working on people's hearts, God's busy here working on Gomer. He's working to make her life miserable without Hosea (a model of life without God) so she will desire to turn back to Him.
10. Verse 8: She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold-- which they used for Baal. <sup>9</sup> "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness.
- a) Have you ever paused to thank God for the simple things in your life? If you have a roof over your head, or food to eat, do you show gratitude to God for those things? When we spend time going after things that won't matter for eternity, whether we realize it or not, we are giving to "idols" ways God has blessed our lives. So are you saying we can't go to a movie or concert that isn't godly? I'm not saying we can't enjoy life. I'm saying that He wants to be a part of every aspect of our lives. As an old saying goes, "if you go shopping take God with you".
  - b) Anyway, what we're reading here is about God helping Gomer hit "rock bottom". All the things she desires, she will lose because she's one of His.

- c) One of the hardest things in life is to watch someone we love either slowly or quickly ruin their lives. We try to intervene. Usually people have to learn themselves that live without God will make them miserable. Some never want to change from the way they are living.
    - i) That's why hell exists. Hell is literally giving people what they do want: Eternity without God's presence. Every now and then I like to quote C.S. Lewis, who said that, "The gates of hell will be locked from the inside". He meant that it's a place where people go who refuse to live as He desires and choose it for eternity.
  - d) I have to admit, I keep thinking about my favorite story of "rock bottom". This was from a television show many years ago. A person had a gambling problem. At one point he was in a bathroom of a subway. He sees someone he knows who essentially is a bum. He asks the bum to borrow a few dollars for a bet. The bum says, "Your sitting in a bathroom in a subway asking me for money? Welcome to rock bottom!" The bum was then the one who helped him deal with that addiction. Yes it's a television show and life doesn't always go that easy. All I'm saying is like this woman named Gomer, God will do what He wants in order to draw us back to Him. Of course God will never force us to obey Him, but He can make life miserable for us when we choose to ignore Him. That's the point here. Speaking of hitting "rock bottom", let's get back to Gomer.
11. Verse 10: So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. <sup>11</sup> I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days--all her appointed feasts. <sup>12</sup> I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. <sup>13</sup> I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD.
- a) Now that we've gotten the flavor of the story, we can speed it up a bit. The short version's that this woman is going "all out" to turn to another god. We don't know if she became a "Temple Prostitute" or just someone who was doing what most of her fellow Israelites did at that time. As we all know, sin is always enticing at first. I can just picture a man saying to her, "I'll take care of you and give you all kinds of good things. Just trust me and who I worship (Baal) and I will give you everything you can possible desire." Most of us realize that some turn to alcohol or drugs because they want an escape from an unhappy life or if they think such things will bring them happiness or they can fit in with their friends when they act this way. I've seen many a life ruined as people turn to "things" in order to make one happy. Yes that's the story here and it's played out many times in history.
  - b) That's essentially the story of this woman named Gomer here. She wanted to be happy in this world without God. She turned to prostitution to pay for what she wanted. Now she is about to suffer the consequences. Notice Verse 13 for a moment: It appears that Gomer had rings and jewelry, but forgot about God. I've met many a person who has everything this world has to offer or a good share of it, but ignore the God who blessed them with all of that stuff in the first place. That's Gomer's story, and unfortunately it's also the story of many people in the world today. Show me a person who the world thinks has everything they could possibly want and I'll show you a person who's still seeking more because they are not happy with what they have.
  - c) Anyway, God was working in this woman's life and is about to take it all away from her. We are approaching the "rock bottom" point in Gomer's life from God's perspective.
12. Verse 14: "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. <sup>15</sup> There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.
- a) If there is one thing I know for sure about God, is that He never gives up on those He has called to be one of His. We may give up on someone, but God never stops trying until we reach a point of death. God doesn't want to see anyone go to hell, period.

- b) Notice Verse 14 says I (God) will allure her. I will lead her into the desert and speak...to her". First let me say I'm not one of those people who believe we have to strain in order to hear God's voice or go to some especially quiet place. My view is "God is God". If He has something to say to us, He can do it when He wants and however He wants. The point of leading this woman into a desert place is about getting her to think about the choices she's made in life. Sometimes we have to get to a mental place where we realize the choices we are making are not right. All I'm saying is I don't know if Gomer literally had to go into a deserted place to realize all this, or just realize she's hit "rock bottom" and now it's time to realize she needs God's help her through this. As all people who've gone through "AA" do know (Alcoholics Anonymous), the first step to get better is realizing we need something greater than ourselves to get healthy. It's a way of saying we need God's help in order to turn our life around. That's what we're reading here about Gomer.
- c) There's an old biblical idea that God will "Give back with one hand what he's taken away with the other". That means the things we often desire we'll get anyway once we learn to trust God with my life. Does that mean being a Christian will make me rich or famous? I have never seen that direct cause and effect. Many people who have a talent to succeed as they've given their lives to Jesus have then used that combination for God's glory. All I'm saying here is that God wants to bless Gomer as "one of His" and that starts with our trust in Him to guide our lives. Continuing my "rock bottom" theme, the first step to a recovery is to seek God's help. In this story, He promises to bless her based on that trust. I've seen many a life turn from hopeless to useful when people make that choice.
- d) Then we get this strange reference to the Valley of Achor. To understand, realize that the English translation can also be "Valley of Trouble". The reference is to an incident in Israel history when they first came into that land. The short version is the first city conquered by the Israelites had the stipulation by God that they couldn't keep anything from that city. It is a way of saying "the first" belongs to God. Anyway, one man broke that rule as he kept some valuable souvenirs from that event. God brought the whole "conquest of Israel" to a grinding halt until that man confessed and paid for that sin. (From Joshua 7:25-7:26).
- i) The reason that story is here is after that incident was resolved, the Israelites went on to conquer the land. The land of Israel changed from "Valley of Trouble" to be a "Valley of Hope". Just as Gomer's life had problems, (I'll say it one last time, she was at "Rock Bottom"). God's using her as an example as one who wasted her life to date, now being made whole again just as the "Valley of Trouble" incident was a turning point in Israel's history as God then lead them to great victories there.
- e) Now notice the "double reference" to both Gomer and Israel as a nation. Verse 15 appears to be a reference to both Gomer and the nation of Israel itself. What God's saying through Hosea here is that just as the nation of Israel was in a good mood after being rescued from a life of slavery in Egypt, so they will once again be in a joyful mood as I'll once again do a rescue operation in her life. To state what may be obvious, it refers on one level to Gomer herself as we'll read of her husband buying her back from slavery. It will refer to Israel as the Northern Nation as they will be rescued from the Assyrian Captivity over 100 years in the future when the Persian Empire is in charge and allows Israelites to move back to that piece of real estate that we call Israel. If there is one thing I'm sure about when it comes to God and prophesy, it's that God loves to work in "patterns". The pattern of God working in a dead nation is alive today as Israel is an independent country again. That pattern will continue to work in the future as when Jesus returns, He needs a place to rule from. That is why Christians are convinced Israel has to exist when Jesus returns so He will have His place to rule from.
- i) Well, that just covered a lot of topics in one paragraph. You can sense God getting excited about the idea of a restored relationship and how much that means to Him for us to act that way. It continues in the next verse. Speaking of which:

13. Verse 16: "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me `my husband'; you will no longer call me `my master. '
- a) In my lesson on Chapter 1, I mentioned a comment by a Catholic Priest who said on a talk show that, "The Jewish people are God's chosen people. Deal with it, accept it and go get a life." All I'm saying is if you believe the bible is the word of God, then you must accept the concept that God still has a wonderful plan for the Israelites as a separate nation.
  - b) Let me put this another way: If you ask most religious Jewish people if they consider God to be "their husband", they'd laugh at you. They think of God as someone who's in charge of their lives. They think of God as a God of justice. It's pretty inconceivable to a religious Jewish person to think of themselves as "God's spouse". What Hosea is saying here is that those Jewish people who are around when Jesus returns and realize "They've blown it big time", or people of Jewish backgrounds today who realize Jesus is the Promised Messiah, will like us Christians have an intimate relationship with God so close that the best way to describe it would be like a long term married couple who know each other intimately.
14. Verse 17: I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked.
- a) If you've forgotten, "Baal" was a local deity that was worshipped even before the Israelites set foot in the Promised Land and are still at it. Therefore, we're back to that topic.
  - b) Notice the reference is to Israel and not just to say Hosea's wife. You can tell Hosea's back to the big picture of describing God's relationship with the Israelites and "Baal" was all the rage at that time. Every now and then I like to mention that the archeological evidence of life in Israel before and after the Assyrian and Babylonian conquest was that a good thing in the sense that it "cured" Israel (collectively) of their desire to turn to idols. In effect that is "what it took" to get Israel collectively to change. No God doesn't desire to go that deep in order for us to change, but it also shows that God will do whatever it takes for those of us called to be His witnesses "back to Him".
    - i) It is another classic example of don't mess with God as the suffering is not good!
    - ii) The point is this verse came literally true, but it took the Northern Kingdom being destroyed by the Assyrians and the Southern Kingdom being destroyed about 100 years later by the Babylonians for Hosea's words to come true.
15. Verse 18: In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.
- a) One thing that one gets from pretty much studying all the Old Testament Prophets is that when they want to give a positive message, they always turn to the long-term future. It is a message that God still has great plans for this nation despite the tragedies that are going to occur in the near future. Imagine being an Israelite living in Hosea's time. You learned that the Assyrians will destroy the Northern Kingdom. Then about 100 years later another empire based out of Babylon will destroy the Southern Kingdom. After that Israelites will be part of other empires (Persian, Greek, Romans) and will not be an independent country again for thousands of years. Even after all that, the Messiah still hasn't "set up shop" yet. Would you trust in Hosea's message here that the Messiah will set up a kingdom of peace with all the animals living there as part of that kingdom?
  - b) To state this idea another way, why should we trust that Jesus will return one day since it has now been about 2,000 years and it hasn't happened yet? Why should we trust in all of this, since it's been so long? The reason the bible is full of predictions is just as we can see all of the short term predictions have come true as the bible said, so we should trust in His ability for the long term predictions. It's been estimated that the bible contains over 2,500 predictions, 2,000 of which have already been fulfilled. My point is if the bible has had a great history of accuracy to date, we should trust it for the future. That little speech leads us back to Hosea who is saying good things will come in the future, despite all of that!

- c) Let's face it, Hosea's been getting all "doom and gloom" on us. He's predicting the fall of the land where he lives. He compares his unfaithful wife to his country as both of "them" turned from whom they were called to love. Now he's saying, in spite of all of that, God's still got a wonderful plan for our eternal future. This verse gives us some hope about the future of God's chosen people despite all they will suffer in the future.
  - d) The specifics are that a day will come where there is war there and all the Israelites living at that time will live in peace. To state the obvious this hasn't happened yet, which is why all us place our trust in a God to make our eternal future positive. He "backs it up" by His telling us of the future in advance so we know what is our long-term future as believers.
  - e) In the meantime, I interrupted Hosea as he was getting on a role:
16. Verse 19: I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD. <sup>21</sup> "In that day I will respond," declares the LORD-- "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; <sup>22</sup> and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. <sup>23</sup> I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.' "
- a) These verses finish Chapter 2. Chapter 3 is only five verses and together they finish what Hosea was asked to do in relation to God's dealing with Hosea's family life as a witness to Him. All I'm saying is Hosea's got more to say to us as God's witness to the world, but at this point, God's done using his wife and children as illustrations. That's why we've got a bunch more chapters to go. However, I'll save that for next time. In the meantime, we've got to finish the last part of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.
  - b) Notice the word "forever" in Verse 19. No it does not mean every single Israelite is saved. It means God made an unconditional promise to the Nation of Israel and God won't back out of it no matter how bad things will get for the Israelites in their future. He'll continue to care for them as a unique nation as that's what they've been called to do. As I stated in the lesson earlier, "Israelites are God's chosen people. Accept it and get a life!" Of course I believe God's working through Christians today, but at the same time I accept that God is not done with Israel as a unique entity. In other words, I believe "forever" means just that: Forever. Just as God will forever be faithful to them, so I believe Israelites will be around until the day Jesus returns whenever that occurs.
  - c) In the meantime, God gives us evidence that He still created all things and He continues to operate "all things" until He returns. Let me put it this way: Since all of this occurred, we still live in an "eco-system" where clouds form, produce rain and bring water to lands so that we can grow things to eat. That's my rough translation of Verse 21. God's saying all of that will continue until He returns to "set up shop" as I like to call it.
  - d) Now I want you to think about Verse 23 for a second: Many people wonder if the modern nation of Israel is part of God's plan. Verse 23 says, "I will plant her for myself in the land" to start that verse. Again in world history, no nation has ever been conquered, scattered and came back to be a nation again. Except Israel, who's now done it twice in history! If that isn't proof that God's working through that nation, I don't know what is. So does that mean Jesus should return soon as they're back in that land? God's timing is His timing so I don't worry about that! All I know is that God promised they'd be back in that land one day and after about 2,500 years of them being under other empires, they are back in their land as an independent country again!
  - e) Realize that the chapter breaks were not added until millenniums after this was written. I remind you of that fact because Chapter 2 is actually a good place to break the chapter. At the end of "Chapter 2", Hosea goes "full circle" on us. He takes the names of his 3 children not listed since the start of this chapter, and renames them with positive names to remind us that God never gives up on us despite the mistakes we make in life.

- i) I admit, I wonder if Hosea told his children when they were young, I know you've got negative names. However a day will soon come when I will rename all three of you to something positive. In effect Hosea's asking his three children to also act as witnesses for God by their names. I just wonder how much his kids were inside on the game here, or was it a shock to them when Hosea renames them here.
  - ii) Now for the details, I'll make this quick. Hosea's first child was named Jezreel. He was named after a famous battle in Israel's history where a lot of people when God wanted revenge on some bad leaders in that land. Here Hosea's saying that God's no longer to seek such revenge in the day when the Messiah literally comes to rule over the land of Israel. Child #2 was effectively named "No Mercy". Now Hosea's saying God will have mercy on the Israelites in spite of the fact that nation will be completely destroyed in the near future. Child #3 was effectively named, "Not My People". Here Hosea says that despite all the suffering the Israelites will endure in the near future, the Israelites will still be His chosen people, because He can never stop loving who He's chosen to love.
  - iii) The big point here is Chapter 2 ends on a reversal of how it opens. It opened with a big condemnation of the Israelites and ends with a message of their salvation.
  - iv) Before I get into the very short Chapter 3, let me ask again, is Hosea implying that all Israelites automatically go to heaven? Of course not. It simply refers to the fact that God's not done with Israel as a nation and He'll always keep that relationship with them for eternity. That's why Israel has to exist as a nation when the Messiah "sets up shop" one day in the future! If you ever wondered why the non-believing world is so hell bent on it's destruction, now you understand why.
17. OK, then, Chapter 3, Verse 1: The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."
- a) All of that theology in the last part of Chapter 2 gets practical with an example here as we start and quickly finish Chapter 3. If you haven't figured it out by now, God didn't tell all of this to Hosea in one big moment. Remember Chapter 1 covered the birth and naming of Hosea's three kids. Therefore this ministry did cover some sort of time span. I'm bringing that up here because in Chapter 3, God tells Hosea essentially go buy his wife back again.
    - i) If Hosea is asked to do this, it must mean he lost her at some point. We don't know how Gomer left. The text says she is "loved by another" and by biblical definition, that makes her an adulteress. We can speculate all day why Gomer left Hosea. All we know is she's gone and for Hosea to love her as God commands us to love our spouses. What we can guess by the text is Gomer left Hosea for someone who was into "Baal worship." It's been hinted at all through the text.
    - ii) In fact the reference to "sacred raisin cakes" (I looked it up) is what was offered to a Baal statue as part of their ritual. Remember that Baal is a god of the weather, so it would be logical that there would be sweet food in offerings to that false god.
  - b) It's also important to consider the text another way: For an Israelite woman to leave her husband was not only a sin, but a death sentence. The sad part of reality in those days is that women we're not much more than property in terms of their rights. Women who did turn to adultery did get financial benefits even if the town turned against such women. In the Northern Kingdom at that time, most of the Israelites turned from God to pretty much do whatever they wanted, included Baal worship. Therefore, I don't it was that big a deal to see an Israelite women become a Temple prostitute or another man's husband who was loyal to Baal.
  - c) The sad realty is that any sinful life always has a price to pay. Let's be honest, if sin wasn't tempting in the first place, nobody would turn to it. Gomer benefited until it "cost her". In the next few verses we read of her being sold in a slave market.

18. Verse 2: So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.<sup>3</sup> Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."
- a) So why was she sold at a slave market? What I suspect was she was past the age of being any use as an adulteress or a temple prostitute. The promises of riches and a good life are now at an end and she is being sold to the highest bidder!
  - b) Exodus 21:32 implies the price of a slave was 30 shekels of silver. Scholars suspect it was not a hard fast rule, but just a guideline to replace a slave who was killed. Since Gomer is a sale for an older "used" slave, I think she just went for the highest bidder.
  - c) I have to admit I think about these things. Did Hosea outbid everyone? Did he say I have 15 shekels on me and some barley, so here's all I got? Did he greatly out-bid others? All we know is Hosea got his wife back whether he wanted to do it or not. Hosea looked at it as "God commanded me to love this woman, so although she cheated on me, I'm going to do what God commanded me to do. That's how I picture Verse 3 taking place.
  - d) I suspect Gomer was at a major low point here. Whoever she trusted in when she cheated on Hosea just sold her off to the highest bidder. Gomer had to be publicly embarrassed to a point where she wondered what would become of her life. It had to be a big shock, that of all people her ex-husband was willing to buy her back. She had to be thinking, well he is the father of my kids and he's a godly man so at least he won't beat me. Yes he's hard to live with, which is why she left him in the first place, but she must also be letting go of the situation to realize, "OK, there is a God and He wants me to be one of His whether I like it or not." To state the obvious, it is a model of God restoring us when we hit "Rock Bottom" as I love to state.
19. Verse 4: For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.<sup>5</sup> Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.
- a) You know if this was just a cute story of Hosea getting his ex back, that'd be interesting all to itself. However, Hosea is obviously using this situation to demonstrate God's love for all the Israelites. Of all things, we jump from "getting Gomer back" to the fact that Israel as a nation will be without a king for a long time. To paraphrase Hosea, based on exactly how history has played out: The Kingdoms of Israel will still come to an end, because the Northern Kingdom refuses to collectively trust in Me and the Southern Kingdom will also come to an end (about 100 years later) for the same reason. For millenniums after that, no king will rule over the Israelites. Yet one day they will be an independent country again. A day will come when another king, a descendant of King David will rule over the world from there. As surely as the Israelite kingdoms will end soon, so it will return in a future day. Bottom line, it's not over for the Israelite people as being part of a kingdom!
  - b) I have to admit I'm fascinated by the word "trembling" in Verse 5. I sort of picture a large group of Israelites seeing Jesus and saying, "Oh boy, did we blow it and He must be angry at us!" In the same way Joseph's brothers were nervous about living with Joseph after the father past away, so their "trembling" will turn to joy as they accept His rule in our world.
  - c) Let me end with a wonderful quote by radio commenator Dennis Prager. He responds to the idea that the only reason Christians support Israel is because they believe Jesus will be ruling there one day. Dennis response as a religious Jew, Who cares? Either way we win! The idea is if Jesus is not the Messiah, modern Jews were right. If the Christians are right, then the Jewish people still win as Jesus will rule over the world. Obviously I agree with the Christian view, but I want to end saying how Israel wins in the end, accept it!
20. OK time to wrap this up in a quick prayer: Heavenly Father, may we never forgot that You alone paid the full price for our sins. We too are welcome to be one of Yours and we can't lose that if we wanted too. Help us to stay close to you so you don't have to use "Gomer" measures on us! Help us to use our lives as living witness for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.