

Session 1: The Prophet Hosea

H. Another Prophetic Action

Now we turn to chapter 3 to complete the story of Hosea's marriage, as far as we can gather.

Hosea 3:1-5

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

The Hebrew text does not make it clear exactly what happened. Hosea is told to go and love an adulteress. Who is she? The New International Version translates, "Go, show your love to your wife again." The translators have assumed that the adulteress is Gomer. This is probably correct, though some commentators differ.

Perhaps Gomer had left Hosea for another man, but more probably she had returned to her former way of life as a shrine prostitute. Hosea has to buy her back. The fact that he paid for her in both money and kind suggests that he probably did not have the ready money but had to scrape the price together.

Having bought her back, Hosea then shuts her up; he himself does not sleep with her and he prevents her from meeting any other man. Again, this is to be interpreted as a prophetic sign. Its meaning is that Israel is to go into exile, where they will have no king and no priesthood, so no access to God in worship. But, says Hosea, the result will be repentance and a change of heart. And this, as his words make clear, is what Hosea had been looking for all along.

This word of salvation at the end of chapter 3 echoes the final verses of chapter 1, in which Hosea foresees the reversal of the rejection implied in the names of his children. Both of the accounts of Hosea's sad family life end on a note of hope.