

Israel's Discipline for Spiritual Adultery

Hosea 2:1-13

Hosea 2:1-13 - "Say to your brethren, 'My people,' and to your sisters, 'Mercy is shown.' ² "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; ³ Lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.

⁴ "I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. ⁵ For their mother has played the harlot. She who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' ⁶ "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. ⁷ She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them. Yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.' ⁸ For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, And multiplied her silver and gold— which they prepared for Baal.

⁹ "Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time and My new wine in its season, and will take back My wool and My linen, given to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall deliver her from My hand. ¹¹ I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her New Moons, her Sabbaths— all her appointed feasts. ¹² "And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she has said, 'These are my wages that my lovers have given me.' So I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. ¹³ I will punish her for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers. But Me she forgot," says the Lord."

Background Notes

In Hosea 1 God told Hosea to marry Gomer, a woman who would run away from him and become a prostitute slave. Why would God ask Hosea to marry a woman who would abandon her loving marriage - and become a prostitute? The reason: Gomer's life was an object lesson of Israel's spiritual adultery, and God would use it to illustrate Israel's departure from Him.

As God loved the nation of Israel and considered her his "wife," so Hosea loved his wife Gomer. But as Gomer ran away and committed adultery, so Israel turned away from the Lord and committed spiritual adultery with the foreign gods of the surrounding nations. These foreign religions involved idolatrous practices.

Various forms of sexual immorality were part of the fertility rites for worship of the false god, Baal. Baal was the Canaanite deity that supposedly controlled the weather and the fertility of the land. If Baal was appeased by pagan religious rites, then the worshipers believed this false god would provide agricultural and economic prosperity.

Sometimes the singular “Baal” is used, as in verse 8, and sometimes the plural “Baals” is used, as in verse 13. What’s the difference? The Baals were local manifestations or images of the one Canaanite deity, Baal. Local images and shrines for the Baals were scattered throughout the land. Because of their departure from Him and their involvement in this idolatry and immorality, God would have to judge this spiritual adultery of His people.

Doctrinal Points

1. The nation of Israel would be disciplined and punished.

Look at the beginning of verse 2: *“Bring charges against your mother, bring charges, for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband!”*

“Your mother” here refers to the nation of Israel. Just as the husband-wife relationship between Hosea and Gomer had been severed by adultery, so the honeymoon was over between God and Israel. Now God would have to discipline and punish His wayward people. The faithful remnant in Israel, addressed in verse 1 as *“brothers and sisters,”* was to speak out against the nations’ unfaithfulness.

Notice that Israel was giving credit to the foreign gods for meeting her basic needs: *“For their mother has played the harlot. She who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink’”* (v5).

How terrible that God’s people gave false gods the credit for their prosperity, instead of giving the credit to the one true God. *“For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold— which they prepared for Baal”* (v8). God had provided Israel with her food and her wealth, but Israel only gave credit to Baal for these material blessings.

The people made images of Baal out of the very silver and gold that God gave her! We think, “How terrible!” - but many of God’s people today are involved in the same sin. The more God blesses them with material prosperity, the more they take credit for success to themselves, and buy or do things that take them away from the Lord. I know many Christians who have drifted or turned from the Lord because of the material possessions that God gave them. This is idolatry - and it is spiritual adultery!

God's discipline of Israel would bring shame on the nation. All joy would come to an end. *"I will also cause all her mirth to cease: her feast days, her New Moons, her Sabbaths—all her appointed feasts" (v11)*. God would make Israel's life difficult.

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths" (v6). This reminds us of Proverbs 13:15, doesn't it? *"The way of the transgressor is hard."* This is just as true today as it was then.

Not too many years after Hosea's prophecy, the Assyrian armies overran and conquered Israel, and the foreign gods could not help her. *"Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall deliver her from My hand" (v10)*. The nation of Israel would be disciplined and punished.

2. The land of Israel would be devastated and forsaken.

Because of Israel's idolatry, not only would the people suffer the consequences, but the land would suffer the consequences as well.

Verse 3: *"Lest I strip her naked... and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst."*

Verse 9: *"Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time and My new wine in its season, and will take back My wool and My linen given to cover her nakedness."*

And verse 12: *"And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she has said, 'These are my wages that my lovers have given me.' So I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them."*

Not too many years after Hosea gave these prophecies, all these dire predictions literally came true. The Assyrian Empire conquered the land of the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BC. Because of the effects of the depopulation of the land by the Assyrians, the grain fields and vineyards were reduced to an overgrown forest and thicket, or jungle. The population of the wild beasts of the forest increased, and they even devoured some of the people. This devastation is described in 2 Kings 17.

Read about the "curses" that were given in God's Law in Deuteronomy 11, 28 and 29. The Law prescribed that there would be no rain - and no blessing on the land - if the people of Israel disobeyed and abandoned the Lord. The productivity of Israel's land came to an end, just as God's Law had stated, and just as Hosea predicted. So much for Baal and his fertility powers! The land of Israel would be devastated and forsaken.

Practical Application

Analyze your obstacles.

Are you facing any obstacles in your life? Obstacles in the believer's life must be analyzed, because obstacles can be raised by Satan to hinder Christian growth or ministry. On the other hand, God may allow obstacles in our lives to challenge us, or discipline us, or redirect us.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:18, Paul wrote, *"Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us."* In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul said **Satan** used obstacles to "hinder" the apostle's ministry. But in Romans 15:22, Paul wanted to travel to Rome - but he was "hindered" so that he would preach the gospel to those who hadn't heard. In Romans 15, **God** used obstacles to redirect the apostle Paul's ministry.

So you can see that we need to analyze our obstacles, because obstacles can be used by Satan, or they could be placed by God. Here in Hosea 2, God deliberately put obstacles in Israel's way to discipline her and turn her around from her sinful paths. *"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them. Yes, she will seek them, but not find them"* (v6-7).

The end of verse 7 gives us a hint of the good news that's to come in the second half of the chapter. The nation of Israel will return to the Lord! *"Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now'"* (v7).

Romans 11 makes it quite clear that Israel's literal return to the Lord will take place in the future - but notice that God would use obstacles to bring Israel to this point. Think of the obstacles that God has used to confront the Jewish people over many hundreds of years - and even at the present time - to bring the nation to the place where they desire to return to the Lord. What better phrase than verse 6 can be used to describe Israel's dilemmas? *"I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths"* (v6).

By way of practical application, let me ask you a question. Are you facing any obstacles in your life or your ministry right now? Analyze those obstacles. Maybe Satan has placed problems in your path because he wants to hinder you in your walk with the Lord. As you analyze these obstacles, if you believe that's the situation, look to the Lord for help. Ask Him to direct you and empower you to overcome these obstacles.

But maybe the Lord Himself has allowed the obstacles you're facing. Maybe there's some sin in your life, and God needs to discipline and correct you. Maybe you've become too proud - or selfish - or complacent - or too comfortable - in your life as a believer. Or maybe God has placed an obstacle in your life because He wants to redirect your path. Perhaps He is opening new doors of ministry for you, and you haven't recognized that yet. If so, you need to stop and analyze the reason for the obstacle – and be willing to follow God's redirection.

Analyze your obstacles!