

III. “A Door of Hope”

21-Dec-03

Hosea 2:2-23

Bentley Chapters 3-4

Theme: God is a loving Husband who pursues His people with a relentless love.

Key Verses: Hosea 2:14, 23 – ¹⁴I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. ... ²³Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ and they shall say, ‘You are my God!’

Review

Last week we looked at Hosea chapters 1 and 3. These are the two biographical chapters in the book of Hosea. They describe the commands of God given to Hosea regarding his family. Hosea was commanded to go and marry an adulterous woman, because his marriage was going to symbolize the relationship between God and His people. Even though God loved Israel, they proved to be faithless, seeking after other gods. The three children of Gomer further symbolize the sorry state of the nation: they were like Jezreel, to be scattered by their enemies; they were like Lo-Ruhamah, for they would no longer receive mercy; they were like Lo-Ammi, for God had disowned them from being His people. Faithless, scattered, unloved, disowned. This is the status of the natural man.

But then God goes on to give us hope, using covenant language reminiscent of Abraham, Moses, and David to reverse the curses implied in the names of the three children. God takes His faithless people and makes them faithful. Instead of scattering, He gathers His people (Jezreel again). Instead of being unloved, He now shows mercy (Ruhamah). And instead of disowning them, He uses covenant language to declare them “My people” (Ammi). Gathered, loved, adopted. This was the promise to Israel. And this is the promise for you and me today if you trust in Jesus Christ.

For Jesus Christ is the one who actually accomplishes this reversal. He is the Redeemer, the action figure, the Greater One to whom Hosea chapter 3 points. We were like Gomer, slaves to our sin, until Christ came and redeemed us from under the law and rescued us from slavery. We need a new exodus. Christ is the new Moses to redeem us from our sin. We need a new head, a new king. Christ is our greater King David. In Christ, the promises made to Abraham are made real.

Eaton: The overall point of the story is the greatness of God’s love. God was deeply committed to His people. Just as Hosea knew from the beginning what sort of woman He was getting, so God knows what sort of people He is taking when he takes us, his ‘Israel’.

That’s why Boice calls Hosea’s story the second greatest story in the Bible, because it points to the greatest story in the Bible – the love of God displayed towards sinners through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It is this love of Christ that enables us to return to our loving Husband. And that’s the Gospel according to Hosea.

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Introduction

If Hosea chapters one and three are the outside of the Oreo cookie, then chapter two is the creamy middle. Hosea chapter two covers the same ground as chapters one and three, although in a more poetical style. It starts out describing the harlotries of Gomer, but quickly shifts its emphasis to the spiritual infidelity of Israel, to which Gomer points. As we saw in Hosea chapter one, the first section of Hosea chapter two delivers the message of judgment, while the second half speaks words of hope and restitution. Again judgment and blessing – the two sides of the coming of the Lord. First He comes in judgment, then He comes in blessing.

Exposition

Bentley: This section of Hosea's prophecy can be seen at three levels. It is all about the faithful one and the adulterer. At the first level Hosea is the faithful husband and Gomer is the adulterous wife. At the second level God is the one who is faithful to His promise, and Israel is the nation who has turned away from her God and prostituted herself with other gods. And at the third level our God is the one who is always faithful to His word, and we are those who have forgotten Him and have been disobedient to His commands.

I've called the first section (verses 2-13) "The Wayward Wife," because that accurately describes the theme of the section. The second section (verses 14-23), with words of hope and restoration, is entitled "The Loving Husband," for that is how God is portrayed here.

A. The Wayward Wife (2:2-13)

1. What She Wants (2:2-5)

The tone is immediately set in this section by the declaration, "She is not My wife, nor am I her Husband!" (2a). Why this declaration of divorce? Because of the adultery, of the infidelity, of the waywardness of the wife. Who is the wife here? On the first level, it appears to be an accurate depiction of Gomer, the wife of Hosea. The charge is to be given by the children against the mother because the children "are children of harlotry" (4b). Their mother has "played the harlot" and "she who conceived them has behaved shamefully" (5a). Gomer's conduct is so bad that even her children recognize it.

Why did Gomer behave the way she did? Because of what she believed she would get. It was all about Gomer. Her self-centeredness and selfishness is staggering. Does she care about her husband? No. Does she care about her children? No. Who does she care about? Only herself. "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'" (5b). Did you hear the "*my my my*"? She was in it for the money. She was in it for the things that money could buy. She wanted the best food, the best clothing, the best perfume, the best wine, the best lifestyle that money could buy in ancient Samaria. She was in it for herself alone.

That's what she wants. And for a while, that was what she got. But notice, I said, "and for a while." Because in a short while, things are going to change, and what she wants is not going to be the same thing as what she gets.

On the second level, we can see that what Gomer wants is exactly the same thing as what Israel wants. Israel acted like her relationship with the Lord God was simply a marriage of convenience, to be ignored whenever she wanted. Israel had forgotten that she had pledged to be faithful to God and His covenant back at Sinai. So Hosea reminds them of this in verse 3. "In

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the day she was born” first speaks of Gomer’s natal day, but it also reminds us of the birth of the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness. The images in the rest of verse 3 of wilderness, dry land, and thirst, take us back to the foundation of the nation. In fact, Ezekiel 16 gives us a graphic image of the birth of Israel (Ez. 16:1-8). Ezekiel 16 goes on to describe God’s provision for Israel and her later rejection of Him through multiple harlotries, that is worship of pagan gods (e.g., Ez. 16:32, 35-36). God says the same thing in Ezekiel as he does here in Hosea 2:3 – He threatens to strip her naked and expose her to shame for her harlotry.

How did Israel “play the harlot”? By looking to anything and everything else other than the one True God for their daily provision and eternal hope. The Canaanite religion seemed mighty attractive to them, with its emphasis on fertility and sacred prostitution. Baal worship was the spirit of the age. Anything goes – and it apparently did. You read on in Ezekiel 16 to see the reckless way in which Israel abandoned her husband for other gods. Israel had the same motivation for doing so as did Gomer. “What’s in it for me?” Baal-worship seemed like a short-cut solution to solve all her material needs. It was easy, it was fast, it was pleasurable. Why not? It was certainly easier than following the Law of Yahweh. It was easier to blend in with the pagan culture around them than to stand alone above it all. After all, it seemed to have worked. The era of Jeroboam II was a golden age. There was peace and prosperity for all. There didn’t seem to be any consequences, and so they lived a hedonistic, decadent lifestyle apart from God.

On the third level, how are we any different today? Sure, our society doesn’t worship idols and statues of Baal, thinking some pagan God can fulfill all our desires. But our society does engage in pagan worship. We worship at the altar of youth and beauty, of sex and sex appeal, of money, luxury, and all the things that money can buy. Bigger is better. In the movie *Wall Street*, the main character Gordon Gecko says, “Greed is good!” And the more we take our eyes off Christ, the more likely we are to fall into this subtle trap, that greed is good and bigger is better. And so churches begin to compromise with the world. We have seeker services; we have “worship bands” that entertain; we water-down the gospel; we build bigger buildings to have bigger ministries; we elevate individuals and form “cults of personalities;” we begin to lose focus on the things that really matter. Because we need to remember what happened to Gomer and Israel can also happen to us. What she wants isn’t necessarily exactly what she gets.

2. *What She Gets (2:6-13)*

At this point, the rest of the chapter can be seen as three responses of God, introduced by the word “Therefore” in verses 6, 9, and 14. Each use introduces something that God does when we refuse to come back to Him.

a. *The Thorn Hedge (2:6-8)*

The first “therefore” introduces us to a hedge of thorns. God sets a wall of thorns around Gomer (Israel) to hedge her in, to restrict her activity, to limit her sin. “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths.” The first thing I would like to point out here is the sovereignty of God with respect to our depravity. From the fall of Adam to now, all mankind are born into a state of sin and misery. There is nothing in us that is not touched by sin. We call this the doctrine of “total depravity.” But this is different from “absolute depravity.” While mankind is totally depraved or sinful in every aspect and area of our lives, we are not absolutely the worst we can be in every area. In the days before the Flood, the depravity of man increased greatly, to the point that God “repented” that He had created man and vowed to destroy mankind off the face of the earth, except for Noah and his

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family. After the Flood, God vows never to again destroy the earth by Flood, even though the “intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” God keeps this promise by restraining sin in the hearts of the wicked, so that mankind does not reach the absolute depravity of the days before the Flood. God “hedges us in,” He restrains our wickedness.

Notice that the picture of a restraining “hedge” is also found in Job 1:8-11. In this hedge, God protects Job from Satan. God’s hedge protects Job and blesses Him. And in a sense, that is what is happening to Gomer as well. God sets a hedge around her to protect her from herself, from the sin she desires to commit. Thanks be to God that He hedges us in, that He restrains our wickedness, that He protects us from ourselves.

Secondly, notice that the picture of a hedge of “thorns” returns us back to the Garden of Eden and the curse on mankind. “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:17b-19). Thorns are a result of the curse of sin. And now God uses thorns to hedge Gomer in, to restrain her sin.

What happens to Gomer? She is frustrated in her pursuit of sin. She runs into God’s hedge of thorns. And in her desperation, she begins to say the very thing that the hedge is designed to do: “I will go and return to my first husband.” God sets up the hedge of thorns, He restrains our wickedness, in order that we might repent and return to Him.

The amazing thing is that while Gomer was out there looking for love in all the wrong places, when she was in it for herself and the pleasurable things of this world, that all the time God was the one providing them to her, and she didn’t recognize it! “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” (8). This is the first use of the word “know” in the book of Hosea. It is used repeatedly (2:20; 4:1,6; 5:4; 6:3,6; 13:4). Hubbard says that the word ‘to know’ “captures the essence of his understanding of what God wants and what Israel is lacking. Intimacy, loyalty and obedience — the threefold cord of the covenant — are braided together in this word.”

Do you see how Gomer pictures Israel? God gave her everything she was looking for, and she didn’t know it or recognize it. What she wanted was only to be found in God, not in Baal. How much like Gomer are we? How much do we search for fulfillment in all the wrong places? When God hedges us in, we need to say, “I will return to my first husband, to the Lord Jesus Christ.”

b. Lost Necessities (2:9-13)

The second “therefore” introduces the next level of God’s intervention. Even though Gomer said she would return to her first husband, it is apparent from chapter 3 that she did not do so of her own accord. Remember that Hosea had to go and redeem her from a slave auction. In the same way, Israel did not repent and return to God. So what does God say next? He says that He will begin removing the very things that that we want and need. At first, God sets up a hedge to withhold the attainment of Gomer’s sinful desires. Now he begins to remove the grain and the wine, the wool and the linen, the very things that she lusted after in verse 5, but she didn’t even know that were provided to her by God in verse 8.

All these things happened to Gomer, and they happened to Israel. Israel began to lose the material blessings of God. The golden age of prosperity under King Jeroboam II came to an end.

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The prosperity of the nation failed because of her sin in seeking prosperity from Baal and not from God. And we are in danger of the same downward spiral if we do not seek, if our church and nation do not seek God first rather than the fading pleasures of the world.

And then it just spirals down from there. Gomer's lewdness is exposed – she is shamed because of her sin (v. 10). We see that in chapter 3 because she has fallen into slavery – her sin has degraded and shamed her, not elevated and blessed her. And so Israel was shamed by falling into slavery under Assyria. Her religious ceremonies could not save her (v. 11), because long ago under Jeroboam I they had ceased to be appropriate ways in which to worship the true God. The “new theology” of Jeroboam was idolatrous. Israel was a “religious” country. They believed in God. They worshipped God. But her worship was corrupt, and ultimately of no avail. Eaton says, “The only spirituality that will be of any value to us is one that is God-given. Ritual and religiosity will be of no value. Traditional religion will not help, not even evangelical or charismatic religion. Nothing will stand when God acts, except that which has been introduced by God Himself and is within His will.”

Verses 12-13 acquaint us with the concept of lost necessities. The images of vines and fig trees are used throughout the Old Testament to picture God's blessing upon the nation of Israel. They are symbols of fruitfulness, prosperity and security (Mi. 4:4; Zech. 3:10). God says that He is the One that provides these things. They are not found by seeking other lovers, by seeking other gods. Why did Gomer forsake Hosea? Why did Israel forsake God? Because in her lust and selfishness she *forgot* her first love. What a tragic statement at the end of verse 13. She “‘went after her lovers; but Me she forgot,’ says the Lord.” “Forgetting” is the opposite of “knowing.” Hubbard says: “To forget God is to act as though He had never made Himself known, never redeemed His people in the Exodus, never provided for them in the land, or laid His gracious and constraining claims upon them.”

How do we live? Do we live as if we know God, or as if we have forgotten God? What did Gomer get? She didn't get what she wanted; she got what she deserved. And so did Israel; and so will we if we forget that every good and perfect gift comes from God, and instead seek our satisfaction and pleasure in the things of the world. Let us repent of our sin and return to God.

B. The Loving Husband (2:14-23)

The last “therefore” in chapter two takes us in a completely different direction. It was going from bad (being hedged in) to worse (losing the things that were being sought). So, naturally, we would expect the third “therefore” to really be a terrible thing. And instead we read these words, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her” (14). Wow! Talk about an unexpected turn of events! As we look at the Loving Husband, we will see how God gives His people 1) a new hope; 2) a new purity; 3) a new covenant; 4) a new betrothal; and 5) a new relationship.

1. A New Hope (2:14-15)

Verses 14-15 take us back to the days of Israel's youth, when everything was new and fresh (cp. Jer. 2:2). God will take Israel back “into the wilderness” (14b) to recapture that first blush of love, “as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt” (15b). Back at the nation's founding, there was such hope. They had been redeemed from sin and slavery in Egypt, and freed to serve God. The future looked bright. But remember what happened. The people murmured and complained and rebelled, and so they died in the wilderness until a new generation could take their place. At first, they also got off to a good

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start, crossing the Jordan and taking Jericho. But then they ran into more trouble, for Achan sinned at Ai, and the nation stumbled. Achan's sin was uncovered, and as a result he was stoned to death in the Valley of Achor (Jos. 7:26). The Valley of Achor means the "valley of trouble" and signified for generations the trouble that God's people got into when they sinned. The valley of trouble was a place of death, of separation from God because of sin. Bentley says, "it remained as a permanent reminder to everyone of what the Lord will do to those who misuse His blessings."

Our God is a God of new beginnings; He is a God of hope. For He transforms that valley of trouble into a "door of hope" for God's people. Boice asks, "How can a place of such swift judgment be hopeful? How can the destructive troubling be changed? We cannot change it certainly. But there is One who can and who does. God sets hope before us when all seems most lost. He does it by taking our trouble on Himself." Christ did this at the cross. It is at the cross, the place of death and separation, that our "valley of trouble" is transformed into the "door of hope." Through Christ's death, all those in Christ have a new hope. And so we see through God's words of comfort to Gomer, to Israel, and to us, that *new hope* can arise through the active love of Christ.

2. A New Purity (2:16-17)

Next, verses 16-17 present to us a *new purity of faith*. Gomer had been guilty of seeking sexual pleasure and fulfillment of her lusts in order to meet her physical desires. Israel was guilty of the very same things. The pagans around Israel viewed Baal as a fertility lord or master, a god that controlled the rain and growing of crops. Fertility rites in the pagan shrines mimicked their desire for fertile crops and the riches that would result from nature's favor upon them. "Baal" meant "lord" or "master", but it also held the same connotation as "husband." These are titles that belong to the true Lord of Heaven and Earth, Yahweh. He is our Lord, He is our Master, He is our Husband, He is the true source of fertility and blessing. So eager will Israel be to pursue a new purity of faith that they will stamp out all references to the pagan worship of Baal. No longer will they say "My Master" (Heb. *Baali*), but they will say "My Husband" (Heb. *Ishi*).

Like Israel of old, we are often guilty of mixing in a little paganism into our Christian worship. "Cleanliness is next to godliness" may sound nice, but it doesn't come from the Bible. Humanism and ungodly culture influence us greatly. When we accommodate our pagan culture in our Christian worship, we are in danger of watering our faith down, of compromising God's word. We need to guard the purity of our faith carefully, so that our worship remains pure. Let us pray that God continues to give us a *new purity of faith*.

3. A New Covenant (2:18)

The next promise of God is one of a *new covenant*. Notice here how it reaches backward to remind us both of God's covenant with Noah and also the perfect creation of the world in Eden. Here in Hosea, the covenant is "with the beast of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground" (18a). These are the same categories that man is given dominion over in Genesis 1:26b – "Let them (man) have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." In Genesis 9:9-10, God makes a covenant with Noah and every living creature on the earth to preserve the earth from future destruction by water. Furthermore, He seals His covenant by Noah by hanging up His war bow – His rainbow – up in the sky to indicate that hostility is

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over. Here in Hosea, the covenant is sealed by destruction of bow and sword – a removal of the weapons of war to indicate that God’s perfect peace has been ushered in.

So, in this new covenant, there is a reminder of God’s perfect creation and His dealings with His creation. Specific threats of hostility through creation (represented by the beasts, birds, and creeping things) and through warfare amongst mankind, have been dealt with. There is peace and there is security – “to make them lie down safely” (18b). This is a picture of conversion, of the Christian life. If we are Christians, we have the peace that passes all understanding in Christ. We have eternal security, knowing that no one can separate us from the love of Christ. We have these spiritual benefits now in Christ (Jer. 31:31-34). And we shall also experience these benefits of peace and security in the new heavens and the new earth, as Isaiah describes (Is. 11:6-9). All this is because God has made a *new covenant* for us.

4. *A New Betrothal (2:19-20)*

Verses 19-20 speak of a *new betrothal*. In the Old Testament, betrothal was a formal agreement to marriage including negotiation with the bride’s parents and the settling of a bride price (cp. 2 Sam. 3:14). Betrothal was much more binding than our modern day engagements. God uses the term *betroth* three times in these two verses, indicating the depth of His commitment toward His Bride, His people.

What is the bride price of this betrothal? It is the five terms given in verses 19-20: *righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, mercy, and faithfulness*. These are qualities that God both brings to the relationship from His side, and also implants in us as the bride of Christ. Let’s briefly look at these five betrothal gifts of our Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, there is *righteousness*. Bentley points out that “Jesus has taken away our sins and has clothed us in His own righteousness.” As such, we now enjoy a right standing with God, one that we could not earn through our own merit. Second, there is *justice*. Bentley continues: “God’s justice takes all the unfairness away from our salvation. Because Christ has taken our guilt upon him, then our salvation becomes just in God’s sight and we are justified (made right with God).” Third, there is *lovingkindness* or *steadfast love* (Heb. *hesed*). This is God’s covenant love – it is the devoted love of a husband for a wife. It is the kind of love Hosea displayed to Gomer, and the kind of love that Christ has for us. Next, there is *mercy* or *compassion*. This gift reminds us of Lo-Ruhamah, and anticipates that sinners who had not received pity would receive pity, mercy, and compassion. Finally, there is *faithfulness*. God brings His perfect faithfulness, dependability, and reliability into the relationship with one who is as faithless as Gomer. God plants His faithfulness in us, that we may grow more and more faithful, like Him.

What a wedding gift! The God who is these things gives them to us. He takes the unrighteous, the unjust, the unlovable, the unpitied, and the unfaithful, and gives us these attributes of Himself. Psalm 36:5-7 has this same cluster of divine attributes:

“Your *mercy*, O Lord is in the heavens;
Your *faithfulness* reaches to the clouds;
Your *righteousness* is like the great mountains;
Your *judgments* are a great deep;
O Lord, You preserve man and beast.

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How precious is Your *lovingkindness*, O Lord!

Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.

The end result of this bride gift is that “you shall know the Lord” (20b). Here again we have the theme of knowing God. To know God is to be intimately involved with God. In summary, through Christ, God gives us Himself in a *new betrothal*.

5. *A New Relationship (2:21-23)*

Finally, we can see in verses 21-23 a *new relationship*. All of the things that Gomer had wanted – grain, new wine, oil (5) and that God had supplied (8) but had taken away because of her sin (9) – would be restored (22). Prosperity returns to God’s people when they are restored to a right relationship with God. No longer are God’s people interested in chasing after Baals; they are renewed with a new covenant and a new betrothal and thus have entered into a new relationship. This is indicated by the three-fold reversal of the children’s names. Remember that the three children of Gomer – Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi – were signs of God’s judgment upon Israel. Scattered, unloved, and disowned. That is who Israel was. That is who each one of us is before Jesus Christ transforms our life. You can see that transformation in verse 23.

First there is Jezreel – “Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth.” Jezreel has been transformed from meaning “scattered” to meaning “planted.” Israel will no longer be scattered among the nations, but they will be gathered and planted and established to become fruitful. Second, Lo-Ruhamah becomes Ruhamah. “And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy.” Finally, Lo-Ammi becomes Ammi: “Then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’”

God promises restoration. He brings those who were far off close. These promises are not just for Gomer or for Israel. They are for all of us who have been “called out of darkness into His light.” Both Paul and Peter apply these promises to Gentiles who have been added to the church:

Rom. 9:25-26 ²⁵As He says also in Hosea: ‘*I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved who was not beloved.*’ ²⁶‘*And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, “You are not My people,” There shall they be called sons of the living God.*’

1 Peter 2:9-10 ⁹But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰*who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Conclusion

Once again, Hosea paints for us a picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are all like the wayward wife – Gomer. We are all in it for ourselves, selfishly making our own way, unaware and ungrateful for the good things God bestows upon us in His common grace. Thanks be to God that He doesn’t give us everything we want, but that He hedges us in to protect us from ourselves, and that He takes away the things that we lust after in order to drive us towards Him. But even more so, He is the Loving Husband who pursues us with a relentless love, and gives us a new hope, a new purity, a new covenant, a new betrothal, and a new relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

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Bentley: Achor and Jezreel were two valleys which spoke of Israel's failure. We all have our valleys of Achor — times when our sin brings us into great trouble. But this is the good news: there is a door of hope. Jesus said, 'I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly' (John 10: 9-10).

Boice: No wider door of hope could possibly be set before us. If you think all is hopeless, hear God as He speaks these words to your heart: "I will betroth you to me forever. . . . I will respond. . . . I will plant. . . . I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.'"

Next week: Lesson 4 – "Like People, Like Priest" – Hosea 4:1-19 – Bentley Chapters 6-7

Close in Prayer.