

“For Worse”: Hosea and Gomer’s Covenant Love

HOSEA 1:1-2:1; 2:2-8; 2:14-23; 3:1-5

One of the most dangerous things happening today is that people are entering marriage with the thought that they can leave it. Most people insert an emotional loophole in their vows, at least mentally, in case the marriage turns out to be “for worse.” But the marriage covenant is for keeps. Whoever enters an unconditional marriage covenant must renounce the possibility of leaving it. Probably no biblical couple illustrates this better than Hosea and Gomer. Theirs was a marriage that reversed the normal order of the vows: “For worse” came first but was followed by “for better.” The reason for this happy turn of events was the creative power of covenant love to make even a bad marriage good. Whoever marries with no thought of divorce will also enjoy the best possible marriage.

1. Why do you think so many people today want to “try” marriage to see if it will work while holding on to the possibility of leaving the relationship?

READ HOSEA 1:1-2:1.

2. Why did God call Hosea to the scandalous action of marrying someone who was a public adulteress, perhaps even a prostitute? What special problems do you think this brought to them as a couple, since Hosea was known as a prophet of God?
3. What double message did Hosea communicate by the names he gave to the children Gomer bore him?
4. What hope did Hosea hold for God's wayward people (and his own wayward wife)?

READ HOSEA 2:2-8.

5. Hosea's ministry was wrung out of his marriage experience, and his marriage became an object lesson to the Lord's people about the agony and ecstasy of the Lord's covenant with them. What complaint did both these husbands (God and Hosea) voice about their brides?

How is this description fitting for many marriages today?

6. For what reason did these two husbands let their brides experience the hard consequences of their actions (verses 3-4)?

READ HOSEA 2:14-23.

7. It has been said that both the Lord and Hosea sought a solution "beyond marriage" (because they could legally have divorced their brides, and their marriages were almost legal fictions). What did they do to renew their covenants?

Note: "Allure" and "speak tenderly" (verse 14) are Hebrew expressions for wooing—that gentle, responsible persuasion by which a man pleads for a woman's heart with no other right than faithful love.

8. What qualities did Hosea and the Lord bring to the sensitive work of mending their marriages and renewing their covenants (verses 19-20)?

READ HOSEA 3:1-5.

9. In what way was God's second call to Hosea (verse 1) even more demanding than the first call (Hosea 1:2)?
10. According to this story, what positive benefits might be experienced by a couple who seek God's help in turning a "for worse" marriage into a "for better" one?