

“You Are My People”

Sermons on the Minor Prophets: Hosea (3)

Hosea 1:10–3:5; Romans 3:21-31

YHWH has divorced Israel. The name YHWH gives to Gomer’s third child in Hosea 1:9, is Lo-Ammi. The boy’s name means “not my people.” His name functions as YHWH’s symbolic declaration regarding Israel’s present standing in relationship to the Sinai covenant: cut-off, the covenant rendered null and void. Yet in the very next verse of Hosea (1:10), YHWH announces that Israel will again be “children of the living God.” A dramatic reversal in Israel’s standing occurs as the covenant curse—YHWH’s divorce of Israel—becomes the basis for a future reunion of Israel (both kingdoms). YHWH will again pronounce the covenant promise, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Those named “no mercy” in the days of Hosea, will be those “who have received mercy,” in the latter days—a people who will seek God, and be restored to the House of David. In this dramatic reversal of divine verdicts, Hosea gives us a lesson in covenant theology, while at the same time pointing us ahead to the messianic age and the coming of Jesus.

This raises the question, how do we go from a rather shocking divine decree of judgment (Lo Ruhmah – “no mercy”) and divorce (Lo-Ammi – “not my people”) to a promise of future redemption from sin and the reconciliation of a divided people? This complete reversal of fortune makes perfect sense against the backdrop of the broad panorama of redemptive history—which is the history of the administration of various biblical covenants, as we have seen throughout our time in the Minor Prophets so far.

There are three covenants revealed to us in the Old Testament. The first is the covenant of works (creation) which YHWH made with Adam in Eden—Adam representing entire human race. Upon condition of perfect personal obedience to YHWH’s commands—“do not eat from this tree”—Adam would have been confirmed in righteousness, and then glorified so as to enter eternal life. But when Adam rebelled against God and sinned, the entire human race (all those represented by Adam) was plunged into the curse of that covenant, sin and death. Hosea will refer to this event in chapter 6:7. The covenant of works demands perfect obedience and issues in death if there is not. It is universal and still in effect today as evidenced by Forest Lawn. We die because of human sin, not because we were designed with a short shelf-life. We die because in Adam, we sinned and are guilty for his act of rebellion (original sin).

The second covenant found in the Old Testament is the covenant of grace, which God establishes immediately after Adam’s Fall. This covenant is not universal, as is the covenant of works. The covenant of grace is made with God’s elect—those who are in Christ. In Genesis 3:15 shortly after Adam sinned, we read the first promise of the gospel. “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*” This is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ, whose death upon the cross (the bruising of his heel) crushes the head of the serpent (Satan). This covenant is in view in Genesis 17 when God promises Abraham, “I will be your God, and you and your offspring will be my people.” It is reaffirmed a number of times throughout the Old Testament and comes into its fullness in the New Testament as the “new covenant,” ratified through the shed blood of Jesus (as seen in the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper).

Under the covenant of grace, God promises to freely give those who trust his promise, exactly what he demands of us under the covenant of works—a full and perfect payment for the guilt of sin, and perfect

obedience to his commandments—a justifying righteousness. In the new covenant, this comes through faith in the person and work of Jesus (the condition of this covenant). This covenant of grace was promised to Adam, ratified with Abraham, reaffirmed to David (specifically the promise of a Messiah, who possesses an everlasting kingdom) and then foretold in the prophets (especially Jeremiah 31:31-34, which foretells of a new covenant). The covenant of grace is grounded in God’s promise to justify all those who renounce their own righteousness and seek Christ’s through faith.

The third covenant—and the predominant covenant in the Old Testament—is that covenant YHWH made with Israel at Mount Sinai. It is a hybrid of sorts. It is a national covenant made with the people of Israel, and therefore unlike the covenant of works which was made with all of humanity (those in Adam), or the covenant of grace which is made with God’s elect (those in Christ). The Sinai covenant functions as Israel’s declaration of independence and constitution. It is not grounded in natural law—but in YHWH’s revelation to Israel in the giving of the law (the Ten Commandments) and the renewal of the covenant (the Book of Deuteronomy). The Sinai covenant reaffirms YHWH’s promise to be God to his people whom he calls out of Egypt. It is a national covenant made with this nation only, and is conditional—grounded in the blessing/curse principle. It remains in force from the time YHWH gave Israel the law at Mount Sinai until the death and resurrection of Jesus, when the Sinai covenant becomes null and void. This is why we as Christians do not live under the Mosaic law in the same sense Israel did—even though the moral law (the Ten Commandments) remains in force even today.

As a hybrid covenant, the Sinai covenant is, in one sense, a republication of the terms of the original covenant of works that God made with Adam (the law—the Ten Commandments). This is why Israel is under the works principle—“do this and you shall live”—which gains blessings for obedience, but becomes subject to curse for disobedience. At the same time, the Sinai covenant is administered under the covenant of grace. YHWH is present with Israel through the tabernacle and then the temple in Jerusalem. YHWH gives Israel priests and animal sacrifices to deal with sin. He provides his people with a covenant mediator (Moses), the primary Old Testament prophet who speaks the words of YHWH. YHWH gives Israel the promised land after leading the people out of Egypt (the Exodus), he provides protection from Israel’s enemies (the Canaanites), he promises them a king (David and his royal line).

But under the Sinai covenant, all promises are provisional and conditional. Israel can forfeit blessing and come under curse—which is expulsion from the promised land. This is especially the case with idolatry and the worship of false gods. But these conditional and incomplete institutions (the temple, the priests, the sacrifices), do point to the unconditional promises of the covenant of grace (as types and shadows). Jesus is a mediator greater than Moses. He is a king greater than David. The promises of dwelling in the good land and protection from enemies, pre-figure heaven and the new creation.

When Hosea speaks of YHWH keeping his promises, but then divorces Israel, we are taken aback if we are not clear the role these covenants play in the Minor Prophets. Under the Sinai covenant, YHWH is warning Israel of national curse resulting from national sins, idolatry, and spiritual adultery. Under the terms of the Sinai covenant, YHWH warns the people of Israel (in this case, specifically the Northern Kingdom) of the supreme covenant curse—being cast from the land. In the marriage metaphor used by Hosea, the curse comes in the form of a divine decree of divorce, “Lo-Ammi.”

But even as the curses of the Sinai covenant are administered to the Northern Kingdom (the Assyrian invasion), YHWH’s unconditional promises of the covenant of grace remain in force, as they have from the time of Adam’s fall. These promises still stand even as the curses of Sinai are meted out upon disobedient Israel. The promises of the covenant of grace are realized with the coming of Jesus Christ,

who is the true Israel, and YHWH's obedient son. If Israel was rendered Lo-Ammi ("not my people") under the curse of the Sinai covenant, then any who are reckoned as "Ammi" (my people) are those included within the covenant of grace by the work of Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

The seeming reversal of Hosea 1:9 – "*not my people*" and Hosea 1:10 "*you are my people*" is not in any sense a contradiction, or YHWH changing his mind. Rather, it is the application of two different covenants: the Sinai covenant which Israel has repeatedly broken, and subjects the nation to YHWH's decree of divorce; and the covenant of grace under which YHWH will save his people from the guilt and power of sin through the saving work and merits of Jesus Christ. The ultimate curse of Sinai is about to fall upon the Northern Kingdom—conquest and expulsion from the land. But the promises of God's covenant of grace remain. In the days of Hosea, shortly before Israel is conquered by the Assyrians, YHWH reveals the truth. Israel is Lo-Ammi, not my people. But when the Messiah comes, the promises of the covenant of grace will be fulfilled, and true Israel will be identified as "*you are my people.*"

With this important background in mind, we pick up with our text, verses 10-11 of Hosea chapter one. When we left off last time, Hosea gave us three oracles of judgment coming from YHWH's command to name Gomer's children Jezreel (recounting a place associated with bloodshed and death), Lo-Ruhamah (which indicates that Israel's covenant status has now changed and is now being shown "no mercy"), and Lo-Ammi ("not my people"), which tells us that Israel is now cut-off from the Sinai covenant. Verses 2-9 speak of a terrible disaster brought about by the fact that Israel is a spiritual adulterer and its children are the sons and daughter of Gomer—no mercy, not mine.

Yet in verse 10 we read of a complete, if not miraculous reversal of Israel's fate. "*Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'*" There is a very loud echo of the covenant promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 22:17. The forsaken children will be given new names. There will even be a family reunion of sorts.¹ Their number will expand greatly. We know from 2 Kings 15:19-20, that there were some 60,000 landholders in Israel at this time, a small number in comparison to the Assyrians sweeping down upon Israel, and small again in comparison to the numbers YHWH now reveals.²

But the actual numbers are not near as important as is the fact that under the terms of that covenant God made with Abraham (the covenant of grace), there will be so many children of Israel (i.e. believers in Jesus) that they cannot be possibly even be counted. We think of a passage like Revelation 7:9, where John sees an amazing scene: "*after this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.*" The Sinai covenant is provisional and transitional. Because it cannot save nor justify, it points ahead to the coming of Jesus—the mediator of the covenant of grace—and to an outcome which could only be grasped by faith. Israel's 60,000 landholders is a minuscule number compared to those who will be Christ's.

As part of this reversal, we are told in verse 11, that the divided kingdom will one day be reunified. "*And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for*

¹ Kidner, The Message of Hosea, 24.

² Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 38.

themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.” God will gather those who will “go up from the land,” is a phrase, which, in prophetic terms, implies that those who return from exile are those raised from the dead—spiritually resurrected.³ Ezekiel also speaks of this in the famous vision of the dry bones in 37:12-14. “*Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.*” Hosea’s declaration is a prophecy of the messianic age (and of the new covenant), when Jesus, in and through the Holy Spirit, gives new life to those who were previously dead in sin. This spiritual resurrection (i.e., the new birth, being born again, regenerate—cf. John 5:25-29), in turn, guarantees the resurrection of the body at the end of the age when Jesus returns—cf. Ephesians 1:13-14.

YHWH now commands his people (through Hosea), “*Say to your brothers, ‘You are my people,’ and to your sisters, ‘You have received mercy.’*” When the Messiah comes, Israel will be restored. Both Peter (1 Peter 2:10) and Paul (Romans 9:25-26) refer to this passage in Hosea when speaking of Jesus’ messianic mission as including both Jews and Gentiles. In Romans 9, Paul writes, “*as indeed [YHWH] says in Hosea, ‘Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’*” “*And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’*” The great irony is that Israel’s sin and spiritual adultery brings down the covenant curse (i.e., under the Sinai covenant). Yet, because the covenant of grace still stands (the promise God made to Abraham), YHWH will use Israel’s sin, disobedience, and judgment at the hands of the Assyrians, as the means to one day fulfill his promise to save both Jewish and Gentile sinners (so many they cannot be counted), under a Davidic king (Jesus), in a return from the exile of sin and death (in the new birth). There is no contradiction here, but there are two covenants—Sinai, and the covenant of grace. Israel is condemned by the one, but will be restored under the other.

As we move into chapters 2:2-15, we find the beginning phase of YHWH’s legal brief against Israel—in other words, the details of the covenant lawsuit. YHWH’s call of Hosea to prophesy, involves Hosea speaking forth YHWH’s legal indictment of Israel which issues in the divine decree of divorce.⁴ We move from the oracles of the children’s names (1:2-9), and from the promise of redemption (1:10-2:1), to the account of the reading of the transcripts of the heavenly court—YHWH’s evidence against Israel. The sins of Gomer and nature of her children, are that of Israel and its citizens.

In verse 2 of chapter 2, Hosea instructs Gomer’s children, who represent the people of Israel, “*plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst. Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom.*” We find an adulterous wife striped bare by her husband (an act in the ancient world which exposes both guilt and shame), yet which amounts to a call to the people of Israel to renounce the spiritual adultery and

³ Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 39.

⁴ Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 45.

decadence which characterize their own land.⁵ “Pleading” here is more of a rebuke than an entreaty.⁶ The children of Gomer must renounce her actions, just as the people of Israel are to repudiate those (i.e., the kings and priests) who lead them after false gods.

Gomer’s lust and desire for lovers other than her husband provides a graphic illustration of Israel’s lustful passion for Baal and the ease in which Israel’s kings made treaties with foreign kings—all symptoms of those who reject YHWH’s ways to go their own in a futile search for pleasure, sensual gratification, and autonomy. We read of Gomer’s adultery and judgment in verses 5-7, followed by the application of this to Israel in verses 8-13

For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’ Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me than now.’”

And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts. And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, ‘These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.’ I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD.

In this allegory, Hosea punishes his unfaithful and adulterous wife, who was attracted to lovers who never could give her what she seeks. Yet, Hosea still loves her, and as we will see shortly, he seeks to restore her to himself—just as YHWH punishes his sinful and disobedient people before calling them back to himself. Just as Gomer must learn that her lovers can never give her the things they promise, so too Israel must learn that the source of the nation’s prosperity is YHWH—the faithful covenant Lord. Baal cannot bring forth wine, nor supply YHWH’s people with grain. If Israel forgets YHWH, YHWH will allow Israel to experience famine and poverty, and he will bring an end to pagan feasts, the celebration of new moons, and improperly observed Sabbaths. Just as Gomer came to realize that she was far better off with her husband, so too Israel will learn that the nation should never have forgotten YHWH.

Yet, YHWH will bring Israel back, just as Hosea seeks to win Gomer back from her lovers. YHWH will make a new appeal to this wayward people, once his bride. As one commentator puts it, “the language is passionate,”⁷ as YHWH declares, “*therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness,*

⁵ Garrett, Hosea, Joel, Logos on 2:2.

⁶ Garrett, Hosea, Joel, Logos on 2:2.

⁷ Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 45.

and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.” YHWH will “romance” Israel as in the days in the wilderness and in the conquest (the mention of war fought in the Valley of Achor – Joshua 7:24). What was a time of trouble is now said to be a picture of hope, illustrations of how YHWH brought Israel through trial and trouble in the past.⁸

As we have seen (and will continue to see) in the prophets, YHWH speaks to them of a time in the future when all these things will be accomplished—when the promise becomes a reality. In verse 16, we read, *“And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.”* When YHWH romances Israel, the nation will return to him, never to speak the name Baal again. In the messianic age, God’s people will worship him in Spirit and in truth. We will confess that Jesus is Lord. We will never affirm that of anyone else. Baal will be long forgotten and unconfessed.

On the great day to come, YHWH promises that *“I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.”* The image we are given here is clearly eschatological—looking forward to the new heavens and earth in which every hint and trace of human sin are removed. The covenant spoken of here is not a covenant which never before existed, but is an existing covenant imposed or reaffirmed on behalf of God’s people,⁹ which is the final blessing of the covenant of grace, in which God’s people dwell forever with him in a new heaven and earth, having at long last entered into our sabbath rest—this is what we commonly refer to as “heaven.” It is the fulfillment of the great covenant promise, “I will be your God and you will be my people,” as we see in verse 23. *“I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”*

This can be seen in verses 19-20, when YHWH declares, *“and I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.”* There is coming a time when Israel’s sin is a long distant memory, when Baal is long forgotten, and all traces of the curse (sin and death are gone). In that day, when the Messiah comes, YHWH will renew his covenant oath in the presence of all creation. *“And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel.”* Whatever terrible fate is about to fall upon Israel, YHWH will restore the nation and not only remove the nation’s sin, but undo all the effects of the Fall and the curse. No more death, no more bloodshed, no more want, no more war. It is by looking to the final outcome that God’s people avoid despair. The curse is gone. The ultimate blessing has come. This is where Hosea and those believers still in Israel are to look for hope.

In chapter 3, (a very short chapter), the story of Hosea and Gomer is briefly retold. It were as though YHWH directs our attention from the glories of the time of the end to the stark realities at hand—Gomer’s sin and Israel’s imminent fate. *“And the LORD said to me [Hosea], ‘Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.’”* There is some debate about whether this woman is Gomer (or

⁸ Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 53.

⁹ Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 58.

another prostitute), but I think it makes the most sense to see chapter 3 as the sequential end to the Gomer-Israel enacted parable, once again illustrating Israel's current predicament, and setting the stage for the second half of Hosea (chapters 4-14).

Remarkably, Hosea does now for Gomer what YHWH will do for Israel—romance, redeem, and then restore her. Hosea tells us in 2, “*so I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.*” The price was not exorbitant, since Gomer has disgraced herself. Under Jewish Law, she is now both her husband's wife and his property. He can do anything he wishes to her—even have her put to death for her adultery (a capital offence under Jewish law). But he restores her as his wife. “*And I said to her, ‘you must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.’*” As the parable ends, Hosea speaks YHWH's word about the outcome of this enacted parable for Israel. “*For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.*” Gomer's restoration has been accomplished when Hosea buys her back. But Israel's redemption and restoration is eschatological, off in the distant future, when Jesus comes.

As we wrap up, it is important to look back at this passage and ask, “why have things worked out like this?” If, under the Sinai covenant, Israel could never earn righteousness and could only come under covenant curses, be cut-off, and rendered “Lo-Ammi,” why then did YHWH bring all this to pass? It is only after the coming of Jesus Christ, we can answer this question. In Romans 3:21–31, Paul explains that in Christ, “*the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*” In the prophecy of Hosea and in the enacted parable of Gomer-Israel, we see that God was bringing his plan of salvation to fruition. When Israel becomes Lo-Ammi, it is clear from both the covenant of works and the Sinai covenant that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” If restoration is to come, it must come through some other covenant than Sinai—a covenant with a better mediator (Jesus) and greater promises (forgiveness of sin, a justifying righteousness, and eternal life).

When God declares of those who by nature and because of sin are “not his people” that “*you are my people,*” there must be a redeemer, a perfect bridegroom who can do for his bride what Hosea could not—sanctify her, making her pure and holy, washing off her shame and guilt, covering her nakedness with a royal robe. Hosea can buy Gomer back, but he cannot sanctify her (make her holy). This is why those who participate in God's promised restoration must be “*justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*” Paul even tells us why the prophets (like Hosea) present this as they do. “*This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*” If you have faith in Jesus, then YHWH says of you, “*you are my people.*” “I have bought you with a price (the shed blood of Jesus) and I am sanctifying you (making you holy), so that the promise I made to Israel will be realized in you.” “*In that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband.’*” We are the bride of Jesus. We say to him, “you are our God,” and he says to us, “you are my people.”