

OT LESSON 34
“I WILL BETROTH THEE UNTO ME IN
RIGHTEOUSNESS”

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Elder Ronald E. Poelman of the Seventy spoke of the message of Hosea.

My message today might best be illustrated through the experiences of a young couple whom I will call John and Gayle.

John was a thoughtful, kind young man, affectionate, with a frank and open manner. He sincerely tried to obey the Lord's commandments and found honest contentment in the joys of family life. Gayle, his wife, was young, attractive, high-spirited, but inclined toward more worldly interests and activities. The society in which they lived was, in general, one of affluence and materialism. People seemed preoccupied with temporal gain, social status, entertainment, and self-gratification. Religious leaders were concerned about the apparent breakdown in family life and moral standards.

In the early years of their marriage, John and Gayle were blessed with children, first a boy and then a girl; but Gayle seemed uninterested in her domestic responsibilities. She longed for glamour and excitement in her life and was frequently away from home at parties and entertainments, not always with her husband. In her vanity, Gayle encouraged and responded to the attentions of other men until eventually she was unfaithful to her marriage vows.

Throughout, John encouraged Gayle to appreciate the joys of family life and experience the rewards of observing the laws of God. He was patient and kind, but to no avail. Shortly after the birth of a third child, a son, Gayle deserted her husband and children and joined her worldly friends in a life of self-indulgence and immorality. John, thus rejected, was humiliated and brokenhearted.

Soon, however, the glamour and excitement that had attracted Gayle turned to ashes. Her so-called friends tired of her and abandoned her. Then each successive step was downward, her life becoming more and more degraded. Eventually she recognized her mistakes and realized what she had lost, but could see no way back. Certainly John could not possibly love her still. She felt completely unworthy of his love and undeserving of her home and family.

Then one day, passing through the streets, John recognized Gayle. Surely he would have been justified in turning away, but he didn't. As he observed the effect of her recent life, all too evident, a feeling of compassion came over him—a desire to reach out to her. Learning that Gayle had incurred substantial debts, John repaid them and then took her home.

Soon John realized, at first with amazement, that he still loved Gayle. Out of his love for her and her willingness to change and begin anew, there grew in John's heart a feeling of merciful forgiveness, a desire to help Gayle overcome her past and to accept her again fully as his wife.

Through his personal experience there arose in John another profound awareness, a realization of the nature of God's love for us, his children. Though we disregard his counsel, break his commandments, and reject him, when we recognize our mistakes and desire to repent, he wants us to seek him out and he will accept us (Ronald E. Poelman, "God's Love for Us Transcends Our Transgressions," *Ensign*, May 1982, 27, 28).

In order to emphasize the message of this book of scripture, let me point out that in the book of Hosea, some form of the word *mercy* appears 12 times. The word *justice* does not appear at all.

1. USING THE SIMILITUDE OF A FAITHFUL HUSBAND AND AN ADULTEROUS WIFE, HOSEA DESCRIBES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LORD AND ISRAEL.

Around the framework of the great metaphor (similitude) mentioned in the

heading above, Hosea uses many other comparisons. A few of these are mentioned in the Gospel Doctrine manual. The list below contains 22 of my favorites: If you look for these comparisons, watch for the words *like* and *as* to help you identify them.

1. Hosea 1:10
2. Hosea 2:3
3. Hosea 4:16
4. Hosea 5:10
5. Hosea 5:12
6. Hosea 5:14
7. Hosea 6:3-5
8. Hosea 6:4
9. Hosea 7:4-11
10. Hosea 7:16
11. Hosea 8:1
12. Hosea 8:8
13. Hosea 9:10
14. Hosea 9:11
15. Hosea 10:1
16. Hosea 10:4
17. Hosea 10:7
18. Hosea 11:10,11
19. Hosea 12:11
20. Hosea 13:3
21. Hosea 13:7,8
22. Hosea 14:5-8

The story related by Elder Poelman in the introduction is very much like the opening accounts in the book of Hosea.

Hosea was commanded to take a wife “of whoredoms and of the children of whoredoms” (Hosea 1:2). He did and three children were born. Note the meaning of their names: *Jezreel* means *God scatters*. *Loruhama* means *Not having obtained mercy*. *Loammi* means *not my people*. What do those names suggest about the message the Lord is trying to send to Israel with Hosea and his family?

The Lord used this family to accuse Israel of infidelity.

For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink (Hosea 2:5).

But he also them to show Israel his love.

Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine (Hosea 3:1).

What do we learn about Israel when the Lord calls her an unfaithful wife? The Lord has used this analogy in other places (see Jer. 3:14; Is. 54:5; Ezek. 16:1-59)

Notice the description in this verse:

And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD (Hosea 2:13).

How would a husband feel in such a situation? What if this sort of infidelity happened many times. What would you expect a husband to do? How often would a husband allow his wife to abandon him before he discontinued all his efforts to reclaim her?

In Hosea 2:6-12, the Lord details the punishments that will come.

Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover

my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.

With most men, the story would end here. A man who had been treated by his bride in the way that Israel has treated the Lord would say, "I am out of here" and he would be. Why doesn't the Lord respond in that way? What does he announce in addition to and immediately after the punishments and judgements above?

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali. I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God (Hosea 2:14-23).

What is it that the Lord wants Israel to learn from this?

And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now (Hosea 2:7).

2. BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE, THE LORD CONTINUES TO INVITE ISRAEL TO REPENT AND RETURN TO HIM.

It may be that Israel will return to the Lord as a response to the judgements that will come. But one day that will change and she will follow and obey him for another reason.

And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi [husband]; and shalt call me no more Baali [master] (Hosea 2:16).

What difference does it make if a relationship is based on love (husband) rather than fear (master)?

In Hosea 11, the Lord uses another comparison to illustrate his relationship with Israel. It begins in Hosea 11:1. In this verse, the Lord and Israel are compared to a father and a son. What did the Lord do for his son?

I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them (Hosea 11:3,4).

How did the child respond to this kindness?

And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him (Hosea 11:7).

How might parents respond to a rebellious child? Should parents be more patient than spouses?

How does the Savior feel about his rebellious child?

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned toward thee, and my mercies are extended to gather thee I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city (Hosea 11:8,9, JST).

Read these two pleas from the Lord to his children:

1. O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? (Hosea 13:9,10).
2. O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips (Hosea 14:1,2).

What promise does the Lord make if they will return?

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him (Hosea 14:4).

Conclusion: Elder Poelman ended his talk (the one cited in the introduction) with this testimony:

God is our father; he loves us; his love is infinite and unconditional. His sorrow is great when we disobey his commandments and break his laws. He cannot condone our transgressions, but he loves us and wants us to return to him.

I know of no greater inducement to repentance and reconciliation with our Father in Heaven than an awareness of his love for us personally and individually. That such awareness may increase within each of us is my prayer . . . (Ronald E.

Poelman, "God's Love for Us Transcends Our Transgressions,"
Ensign, May 1982, 29).