

Gomer: What do we know?

Jasmine Anderson-Sprague

Gethsemane Lutheran Church

The Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.” Hosea 1:2

These are the very first words we are told are spoken by God through the prophet Hosea. We are told Hosea is instructed to seek out a woman with a specific reputation – or maybe God is just foretelling the type of woman Hosea’s wife would be, regardless of the woman he married. We see that Gomer was the daughter of “Diblain” which depending on how you Google or which Bible dictionary you pick up can mean ‘a promiscuous woman’, ‘a harlot’, or ‘a cluster of figs’. Diblain could have easily been the family name if they were fig farmers – and years of Biblical telephone got the definition twisted. Either way these first words in the book of Hosea are riveting: wife of whoredom, children of whoredom, land commits whoredom.

It’s important to know that Hosea lived between rival nations Judah and Israel. Israel had fallen away from God by worshipping false gods and trusting kings and priests who were greedy and more concerned with prosperity and the wealth of themselves than the prosperity and wellbeing of the nation. The book of Hosea is a testament to God’s unconditional love. Hosea’s message is this: God loves us even when we don’t love Him back as we should. This parallel is highlighted in his own marital struggle with Gomer.

So; Gomer...what do we know? The truth is that we don’t know much, and what we do know is only one sided. We never get to hear anything from Gomer or from her children. There is nothing stated in her defense, there is no word from any of her stated or accused lovers, there are no townspeople validating claims of prostitution or adultery, and we know this series of events was instigated by God’s very first words to Hosea.

We do not read very many words from Hosea during our church year so forgetting this book and the words inside are easy to do. Chapter 2 looks like this:

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,
³ or I will strip her naked
and expose her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and turn her into a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.
⁴ Upon her children also I will have no pity,
because they are children of whoredom.
⁵ For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.
For she said, “I will go after my lovers;
they give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”
⁶ Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns;
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.
⁷ 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 with me than now."

⁸She did not know
that it was I who gave her
the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and who lavished upon her silver
and gold that they used for Baal.

⁹Therefore 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.

¹⁰Now I will uncover her shame
in the sight of her lovers,
and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

¹¹I will put an end to all her mirth,
her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths,
and all her appointed festivals.

¹²I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,
of which she said,
"These are my pay,
which my lovers have given me."

I will make them a forest,
and the wild animals shall devour them.

¹³I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals,
when she offered incense to them
and decked herself with her ring and jewelry,
and went after her lovers,
and forgot me, says the LORD.

¹⁴Therefore, I will now allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

¹⁵From there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁶On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." ¹⁷For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. ¹⁸I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, 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. ¹⁹And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. ²⁰I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

²¹ On that day I will answer, says the LORD,
I will answer the heavens
and they shall answer the earth;
²² and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel;
²³ and I will sow him for myself in the land.
And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah,
and I will say to Lo-ammi, "You are my people";
and he shall say, "You are my God."

Gomer bore Hosea three children; a son Jezreel (which means 'God sows'), a daughter Lo-ruhamah (which means 'no mercy'), and a second son Lo-ammi (which means 'not my people'). Chapter 2 begins as an obvious plea to Hosea's own children – "Plead with your mother..." – and describes what seems to be the very intimate relationship of his own with Gomer. Hosea explains the consequences that will befall Gomer if she does not turn from her harlotry and put her whoring away from her face. Hosea extends these consequences to her children born of adultery and explains they will also receive no mercy. They will be left exposed, naked, barren unless Gomer repents. Remember: these are Hosea's words, not Gomer's. We really do not actually know what Gomer is up to, what she's thinking or feeling, whether she loves her family or God, or if she even knows that her husband was told to marry a 'wife of whoredom'.

This is Hosea's version of events.

Despite the repeated acts of adultery and multiple lovers Hosea is committed to Gomer and remains faithful. *"The Lord said to me again, "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.""* Hosea 3:1

At God's command Hosea purchases Gomer for 15 shekels, a homer of barley, and a measure of wine (Hosea 3:2) (less than an enslaved human being's going rate-so she was basically viewed as worthless to this person selling her) even though she had turned to other people and raisin cakes. How she needs being purchased out of enslavement is never made clear to us. Was she kidnapped? Did she lose a bet? Bad poker game? We never get to hear from Gomer or from the person Hosea purchases her from to know the details, we only know the cost of her freedom – which is not much.

³ And I said to her, "You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you." ⁴ For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. ⁵ Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hosea 3:3-5)

Upon purchasing her freedom Hosea states that Gomer will be without her lovers, including him, just as the Israelites will be without kings and false gods and idols until they return to God. We know that God celebrates the return of all of His people who have been lost, for one day or one lifetime.

Gomer did not get much of a role in the Bible. Most of us probably don't even remember her name, and not even one spoken line belongs to her. This was Hosea's story, starring Gomer as the extraordinary sinner who needed unconditional love and forgiveness. Hosea sought after an unfaithful, but named, wife and we hear of the anguish and suffering endured in doing so. This relationship was not one of happenstance but of God's command, and an example for us to see the similarities in God's own jealousy, anguish and suffering when His people turn away from Him. *"You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me," Exodus 20:5*

Gomer is all of us, and all of us have been Gomer. We have all turned away from our commitments, our loved ones in times of need, and God. We have all needed extended grace and unconditional love from friends, colleagues, and family. We have all had one side of the story told about us without an opportunity to defend ourselves (and sometimes the other side does not tell the whole story or fluffs it up). If this last year has taught us anything it is that extending a little grace and forgiveness goes a long way in creating lasting relationships. God calls us to love Him and to trust Him to take care of us. It is a funny thing to think about being in relationship with God like He is your spouse across the kitchen table – but if you were to imagine He was in the room with you like that: would you be able to let go and "let God" more?