

**HOSEA**  
**By Kyle Wiseley**  
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You all look so strange! There are only a few here whose garb looks even vaguely familiar, and even they have neglected to cover their heads.

And how strange to find women speaking in the synagogue! I don't think my people would like that. Maybe in a thousand years or so... But I am told that the practice serves you well and that even your great high priest who sometimes serves at your great temple in the city of Washington is a woman. Ah, well, times change and we learn to worship in new ways,

I have come a long, long distance to be here, and the time!  
Oh the time! It seems like it took thousands of years to get here.  
They tell me that many of you wonder about the God of my people – you think that he is a God of wrath and vengeance. That he sends floods to destroy the earth and rains down fire on wicked cities because he is angry. Many of my people believe that also but that's not the way I see it. You see,

I am a prophet – at least I think I am,  
that's what people say I am;

but sometimes I think I am just a crazy man.

When I was young I was virtually on fire.

I studied under our tribal priests

And learned all the stories, laws and traditions of our people.

Yahweh (that's what we call our God, when we speak of him at all) became real to me.

And then they started –

The visions, the voices inside my head.

I became consumed with the idea of righteousness.

I abhorred the abominations I saw my people committing against Yahweh.

I burned with the fire of indignation  
And my words railed against my people  
Calling down God's wrath upon them for their wickedness.

But then, I met Gomer.

Later I realized that Yaweh had played an enormous trick on me,  
Almost cruel in its irony,  
To teach me mercy and forgiveness –  
Qualities that I had almost abolished from my life  
In my zeal to frighten my people into serving Yaweh.

Gomer was beautiful.

No, she was more than just beautiful – she was ravishing!  
She had the features, form and sensual movements  
That could turn the most resolute of men  
Into a quivering mass of desire.  
She lured me with her eyes  
And tempted me with her body.  
I would have sold my immortal soul  
For just the fragrance of her.

She said she loved me,

Then would fly off with some other man,  
Only to return begging forgiveness.  
And I couldn't refuse – I loved her too much.  
We married and she bore me sons and daughters, (at least she  
said they were mine)  
On whom I bestowed names that meant things like  
“Not pitied” and “Unloved”  
For I wanted to drive home my point  
That Israel was no longer pitied or loved by Yaweh.

But all the while, I was beginning to learn

Something about love.  
The longer she was my wife

The more intense my love for Gomer grew.  
After our third child was born, she left me again.  
I followed her, and finally found her  
In the most shameful of conditions.  
She had been beaten by her most recent customer  
And she was drunk with too much wine  
And half-dazed with pain.  
I bought her back – even in her degradation,  
For it was then I knew the real pain of love;  
And it was then that I realized how Yaweh must feel about  
Israel,  
In spite of all her idolatrous abominations.  
It was then I heard the voice of Yahweh inside my head saying:

\* \* \*

“When Israel was a child I loved him  
And called my son out of Egypt.”  
“I myself taught Ephriam to walk,  
I took them in my arms,  
Yet they have not understood  
That I was the one looking after them.  
I led them with reins of kindness  
With leading strings of love.  
I was like someone who lifts an infant close to his cheek,  
Stooping down to him I gave him his food.”

\* \* \*

“Ephriam, how could I part with you?  
Israel, how could I give you up?”

\* \* \*

“My heart recoils from it,  
My whole being recoils at the thought.  
I will not give rein to my fierce anger,  
I will not destroy Ephriam again.

For I am God, not man;  
I am the Holy One in your midst  
And I have no wish to destroy.”\*

And I understood – because I loved Gomer.

I should have hated her.

Our law would even have allowed me to have her stoned to death.

But when I looked at her, all I could do was weep  
In love, pity and despair.

Yes, Yahweh had played a cruel, but merciful, trick on me,  
For now I understand the true meaning of covenantal love.  
I understand how it can require one to give,  
Even when there seems nothing more to give,  
To give and give and keep on giving  
Even when all you receive in return  
Is faithlessness, indifference and pain.

But Yahweh gave me a promise to give to the people of Israel;  
Even if he never promised that I would receive from Gomer  
The love that I had so coveted.

To Israel he said:

“I will heal their disloyalty,  
I will love them with all my heart,  
For my anger has turned away from them.  
I will fall like the dew on Israel.  
He shall bloom like the lily,  
And thrust out roots like the poplar.  
His shoots shall spread far;  
He will have the beauty of the olive  
And the fragrance of Lebanon.  
They will come back to live in my shade;  
They will grow corn that flourishes,

They will cultivate vines as renowned as the wine of Helbon.  
What has Ephriam to do with idols anymore  
When it is I who hear his prayer and care for him?  
I am like the cypress – ever green,  
All your fruitfulness comes from me.”\*

So I learned from Gomer the pain of love  
But also, in the end,  
The healing wonder of love.  
Love that finally learns to be covenantal –  
To give selflessly, freely and wholly  
Until the very giving itself becomes pure joy.

And Yahweh says:

“Let the wise understand these words.  
Let the intelligent grasp their meaning.  
For the ways of Yaweh are straight,  
And the virtuous walk in them...”\*

Now I must go on my way. There are others that wish to hear my story.

But, it occurs to me that we are not so different – your people and mine. My people often fall in to the sin of worshipping the gods of our neighbors rather than Yaweh, and your people all too often worship gods of their own making. But Yaweh loves and forgives us all as a loving father would.

So, as I leave, bestow upon you an ancient blessing of our people:

May Yahweh bless you and keep you.  
May Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

May Yahweh make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you.

And may Yahweh watch between you and me, when we are absent one from another.

Shalom.

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\*Selected scripture quotations paraphrased from the eleventh and thirteenth chapters of the Book of Hosea, NRSV.