

# Haftarah Helper 5781: Bemidbar

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## Hosea 2:1-22

At the peak of the Northern Kingdom's power and prosperity, God sent prophets - including Isaiah, Amos, Micha, and Hosea - to warn, in harsh terms, about its failings and likely downfall. In Hosea's opening prophecy, God issues a shocking command: he must marry a prostitute, Gomer. She bears him three children, each given a name symbolizing God's rejection of the Israelite Kingdom, as well as its coming destruction: a son, Yizrael<sup>1</sup>; a daughter, Lo Ruchamah ("unloved"); and a son, Lo Ami ("not My people").<sup>2</sup> Hosea's enduring love and loyalty to wayward Gomer and their children represent God's irrevocable marriage to Israel despite their rejection of Him for their "lovers", or idols, and their promises of agricultural bounty.

The Haftarah opens with three verses describing a future time when these names will change to reflect redemption. At that time, the Israelites will be innumerable - contrasting with their countable population in the Parashah. The Haftarah's central section (v. 4-15) is a searing condemnation of Israel's idolatrous, harlotrous ways, and the divine punishments they deserve. The chapter<sup>3</sup> concludes with God taking Israel to the wilderness. There, they permanently "remarry", with Israel showing it truly knows God by its devotion to righteousness, justice, kindness, mercy, and faith. The setting evokes Israel's loyalty to God in the wilderness after the Exodus (v. 17) described in the Parashah, as well as their "marriage" at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness, commemorated on the forthcoming festival of Shavuot.

## Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 1-3: In the future, God will again love the Northern and Southern Kingdoms after they return from exile, unified under a (Davidic) king.

Hosea 2:2	הושע ב:ב
The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, appoint themselves one head, and ascend out of the land[s of their exile]- for great shall be the day of Yizrael [i.e., God's planting them in the Land]!	וְנִקְבְּצוּ בְנֵי־יְהוּדָה וּבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִחְזְרוּ וְשָׁמָּה לָהֶם רֹאשׁ אֶחָד וְעָלוּ מִן־הָאָרֶץ כִּי גָדוֹל יוֹם יִזְרְעֵאל:

Verses 4-7: In the meantime, God's loyal children should contend with their "mother" (the Israelite Kingdom as a whole) to avoid His degrading punishments by abandoning "her" idols and the bounty they promise.

Hosea 2:4	הושע ב:ד
Contend with your mother, contend! For she is not My wife, nor am I her husband. Let her put away her harlotries out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts.	רִיבוּ בְּאִמְכֶם רִיבוּ כִּי־הִיא לֹא אִשְׁתִּי וְאֲנִי לֹא אִישָׁהּ וְתָסֵר וְנוֹלֶהָ מִפְּנֶיהָ וְנִאֲפֹסְפֶיהָ מִבֵּין שְׂדֵיהָ:

<sup>1</sup> The name of the Israelite valley means "God shall plant"; in 2:25 (after the Haftarah's conclusion), God plants His repentant, redeemed people there. That valley was the site of much bloodshed. King Ahab's palace was there, and he had his neighbor, Navot, killed to seize his vineyard (1 Kings 21). Later, Jehu killed many there while ascending to the throne (2 Kings 9-10).

<sup>2</sup> Some understand these events literally. Maimonides (Guide 3:46) asserts that they happened in a prophetic dream.

<sup>3</sup> The Haftarah omits the final three verses (v. 23-25) of the prophecy; they echo its opening three verses, described above.

Verses 8-10: Even when Israel abandons their non-productive idols for God, they still don't perceive Him as their source of prosperity.

Hosea 2:10	הושע ב:י
For she [Israel] did not know that it was I [God] who gave her the grain, wine, and oil, and multiplied silver and gold for her- which they used [to serve] the [idol,] Ba'al.	והיא לא ידעה כי אנכי נתתי לה חֲדָגָן וְהַתִּירוֹשׁ וְהַיִּצְהָר וְכֶסֶף הַרְבֵּיתִי לָהּ וְזָהָב עָשׂוּ לְבַעַל:

Verses 11-15: God will therefore remove His blessings and their joys from them, and punish and destroy them.

Hosea 2:14	הושע ב:יד
I [God] will lay waste her vine[s] and her fig tree[s] about which she thinks, "They are a harlotrous payment my lovers [idols] gave me." I [God] will turn them into woods. Beasts of the field shall devour them.	וְהַשְׁמַתִּי גִפְנָהּ וְתַאֲנֹתֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר אָמְרָה אֶתְנֶנָּה הֶמָּה לִּי אֲשֶׁר נָתַנּוּ-לִי מֵאֲהָבָי וְשִׁמְתִּים לְעֵר וְאָכְלָתָם תֵּיַת הַשָּׂדֶה:

Verses 16-20: Eventually, God will lead Israel into a wilderness to restore their "marital" relationship to one of mutual affection. They shall later return to the Land where God will ensure that they dwell in peace and security.

Hosea 2:18	הושע ב:יח
"It shall be on that day," declares the Lord, "that you [Israel] shall say 'Ishi [my Husband]', and shall no longer call me 'Ba'ali [my Master].'"	וְהָיָה בְיוֹם-הַהוּא נֹאמֶר-ה' תִּקְרָא אִישִׁי וְלֹא-תִקְרָא-לִי עוֹד בַּעֲלִי:

Verses 21-22: Israel and God will "remarry", with Israel demonstrating its knowledge of God through its faithful devotion to righteous justice, kindness, and mercy.<sup>4</sup>

Hosea 2:21	הושע ב:כ"א
I [God] will betroth you [Israel] to Me forever. I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, judgment, loyal love, and mercy.	וְאַרְשִׁיתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאַרְשִׁיתִּיךָ לִי בְצֶדֶק וּבִמְשָׁפֶט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים:

## Connections

The Talmud generalizes Hosea's **reproach of Israel for using wealth God bestows to turn away from Him**.

Berakhot 32a	ברכות ל"ב א
"And Jeshurun grew fat and kicked" (Deut. 32:15): Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: "What is the source demonstrating that the Holy One, Blessed be He, changed His Mind and agreed to Moses's [view the reason for the sin of the Golden Calf was the riches God lavished upon Israel]? As (Hosea 2:10) states, "I gave them an abundance of silver and gold, which they used for the Ba'al [the Golden Calf]."	"וַיִּשְׁמֵן יִשְׁרוּן וַיִּכְעַס". אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן: מִזֵּן שְׁחֹזַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְהוֹדָה לוֹ לְמַעַן, שְׁנַאֲמַר: "וְכֶסֶף הַרְבֵּיתִי לָהֶם וְזָהָב עָשׂוּ לְבַעַל".

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<sup>4</sup> Verses 21-22 are customarily recited while wrapping one's Tefillin strap around the fingers- like placing a wedding ring on it.