



Bamidbar: 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. God's commands to Hosea as well as Hosea's imagery in this Haftarah and beyond were intended to be explicit and degrading- and they remain so today.

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, Yizrael¹; a daughter, Lo Ruchamah ("unloved"); and a son, Lo Ami ("not My people").² 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 Haftarah 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 and become a greatly populous nation 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 יִחְדָּו וְשָׁמְרוּ לָהֶם רֵאשׁ אֶחָד וְעָלוּ מִדֶּֽאֱרֶץ כְּנָעַן יוֹם יִרְעָאֵל:

Verses 4-7: In the meantime, Israelites loyal to God should fight to get their "mother" (the Israelite Kingdom as a whole) to abandon her idols and the bounty they promise, thereby avoiding God's degrading punishments.

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 from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts.	רִיבוּ בְּאִמְכֶם רִיבוּ כִּי־הִיא לֹא אִשְׁתִּי וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אִישָׁהּ וְתָסֵר וְנִגְלִיהָ מִפְּנֵיהָ וְנִאֲפֹסְפֶיהָ מִבֵּין שְׁדֵיהָ:

¹ The name of the Jezreel Valley means "God shall plant"; in 2:25 (after the Haftarah's conclusion), God plants His repentant, redeemed people there.

² Some understand these events literally. Maimonides (Guide of the Perplexed, 3:46) asserts that they happened in a prophetic dream.

Verses 8-10: God will create obstacles to stop Israel from idol worship. Israel will then abandon their non-productive idols for God, but they still won'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 הדגן והתירוש והיצהר וקספ הרביתי לה וזהב עשו לבעל:

Verses 11-15: God will therefore remove His blessings and their joys and holidays from them, leaving her degraded and without His protection. God will destroy them as well as the bountiful produce they attribute to their gods.

Hosea 2:14	הושע ב:יד
I [God] will lay waste to 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.	והשמתי גפנה ותאנתה אשר אמרה אתנה המה לי אשר נתנו לי מאהבי ושמתים ליער ואכלתם תית השדה:

Verses 16-20: One day, God will lead Israel into a wilderness to restore their "marital" relationship to one of mutual affection, as in their "newlywed" days in the Wilderness after the Exodus. No longer attached to idols, God will return them to the Land, ensuring that neither beasts or enemies disturb their peaceful, secure dwelling there.

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].'"	והיה ביום ההוא נאם ה' תקראי אישי ולא תקראי לי עוד בעלי:

Verses 21-22: Israel and God will "remarry" for eternity, with Israel demonstrating its knowledge of God through its faithful devotion to righteous justice, kindness, and mercy.³

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.	וארשתיך לי לעולם וארשתיך לי בצדק ובמשפט ובחסד וברחמים:

Connection

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: "Which verse proves that the Holy One, Blessed be He, changed His Mind and agreed to Moses's [view that 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]."	"וישמנו לשורון ויבעט". אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: מנין שחזר הקדוש ברוך הוא והודה לו למשה, שנאמר: "ונכסף הרביתי להם וזהב עשו לבעל".

With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

³ Men customarily recite verses 21-22 while wrapping the strap of their arm tefillin around their fingers- like placing a wedding ring on it.