

Haftarat Bamidbar במדבר

Torah: Numbers 1:1–4:20

Haftarah: Hosea 2:1–22 (Hebrew) 1:10–2:20 (English)

For the Love of the Bride

General Overview

Hosea chapter two is, perhaps, one of the most famous sections in the entire prophecy of Hosea. It contains the well-known allegory of the wayward wife and her longing husband. The wife becomes a harlot and leaves her loving husband. She comes into difficult times while she was out from her husband's care in the home. She finds that what she sought in the world turned out to be bitter disappointments. All the while, her faithful husband provides for her, but without her knowing that it was he who was doing so. In the end, the husband woos her back to himself. The two are united and find complete happiness in being with each other, never to be separated again.

The husband represents God and the wayward wife pictures His bride, the people of Israel. This chapter tells the sad story of the unfaithfulness of the children of Israel to the God who loves them and provided for them. We learn that the very provisions from God were, in fact, being used to seek after other "lovers" — other gods and ungodly attractions.

The story continues to describe how God had to temporarily separate Himself from His wayward wife. But, in the end we are told how God lures His bride back to Himself. The two are reunited forever in happiness.

Connection to the Parasha

According to Rabbi J. H. Hertz,

The opening words of the Haftarah compare the future numbers of the nation to the sand of the sea, and thus connect with the Sidra which gives the numbers of the Israelites in the wilderness.¹

These comments might sound strange to those of us who use an evangelical English translation of the Scripture. However, it is merely an indication that the Hebrew division of the verses differs. Thus, in the Hebrew Bible, and subsequently Jewish translations, the haftarah corresponds to the evangelical Bible verses 1:10–2:20 of Hosea.

Exposition

The relationship between God and Israel is described in the Scriptures in terms of a marriage. This touching story in the haftarah is about some of the marriage problems that existed in this Divine family.

Our passage opens by describing the destiny of the family, a short description of God's intention for this family. Then we read about the infidelity of the people of

Israel, the Bride, to their God. Because infidelity always has consequences, the passage continues by relating some of the disasters this family has had to endure. Finally, we are given a picture of the time when God will reunite the family and some of the resultant blessings of that mended relationship. Here, then, is the outline we have chosen to use, reflecting those different sections of this haftarah:

- I. The Destiny of the Family
- II. The Dysfunction of the Family
- III. The Disaster of the Family
- IV. The Delight of the Family

This haftarah excerpt will focus on part IV, The Delight of the Family.

IV. The Delight of the Family

There is a transition beginning in verse 2:14 introduced by the word “therefore,” לְכֵן. Usually “therefore” introduces a section drawing a conclusion from the previous section. What possible conclusion can be drawn from the hopeless disasters brought upon Israel in Hosea 2:1–13? It seems that there is only one conclusion: the blessings described in the remainder of the haftarah can only come about because of Israel's hopeless and helpless condition. Her unfaithfulness has proved that she can only be the needy recipient of the grace and mercy of God. There is no possibility that she could earn any of God's goodness. Therefore, we should not view what follows in 2:14–20 as a reward for any of Israel's goodness in any way.

What Hosea 2:14–20 describes for us is the future of Israel. It pictures the utter delight she will have with her Husband, her God, and how God will bring her to that point.

A. The Wooing of the Husband

First, we see how the loving and gracious husband woos his bride. Notice that it is He that takes the initiative in bringing the wayward wife back to Him. Remember that we are still making the stated analogy: Gomer is to Hosea as Israel is to God. Thus, whatever we say concerning one couple also applies to the other.

Accordingly, Hosea tells Gomer that he will “allure her.” The Hebrew verb translated “allure” is an unusual word. It is from the root *patach*, פָּתַח. Normally, this root is associated with the idea of being simple or open-minded. Here it is being used in the sense of a husband persuading his wife.² Leon Wood suggests that the word here can be understood to mean “persuasion by means of attractive benefits.”³ Rabbi Hertz would agree, although he states it differently by saying it means to “entice her to return by the gentle discipline of love.”⁴

The verse tells us specifically how Hosea intended to allure her. It says that he would take her to an isolated place and “speak kindly to her.” Indeed, a kind word puts away wrath.

One note here for people who may find themselves in a similar case. We have commented that the husband took the initiative here and allured his wayward wife by speaking kind words to her. This is how it must happen. Whenever there is difficulty in the family, it is the husband's role to begin to try to put an end to it by how he speaks to his wife. Moreover, it must be a consistent practice, not a one-time action.

However, we should also say that this verse is speaking about God and His relationship to Israel. On a human level, things do not always work out according to the best intentions of people. Sometimes there could be the most loving and gracious husband who simply will not be able to lure his wife back to him. If that applies to any of you, please do not let yourself feel unjustified guilt just because it did not work out that same way.

Yet, on the other hand, very few husbands are able to consistently speak kindly to their wives, especially to angry or hurt wives. The by-words in that case are patience, sincerity, and consistency!

Notice what God promised to Israel (as well as what Hosea promised to Gomer). In verse 2:15 we read that the blessings will return. Once again there will be productivity and fruitfulness in the Land. In addition, there will be military victories. The phrase, "and the valley of Achor as a door of hope" indicates this. The Valley of Achor was the place where there was trouble and disgrace at the time of Israel's entrance into Canaan under Joshua, (cf. Achan's sin, Joshua 7:24–26). God said that instead of trouble and disgrace, the Valley of Achor would be called a "Door of Hope."

Furthermore, along with fruitfulness and victory from her enemies, Israel will again sing and rejoice.

Even as we write, we see a partial fulfilment of these promises. All one needs to do is travel to the Negev, the desert, and see the sand produce food, and then go to the rich Galilee and behold the abundance of green farmland, in order to see how God would restore the blessings. Moreover, we can read about Israel's astonishing military victories and we will see a little of the hope He promised to her. Finally, even as we type, we are listening to a joyful tape of Hebrew songs from the Land of Israel.

Despite the imperfections, Israel today is but a tiny foretaste of all of the goodness God intends to pour out on these people in the days yet ahead.

Hosea 2:16, 17 describe what God will do in order to pour out his blessings on Israel. He says that He will cause a spiritual revival in her midst. He will make a renewed covenant with her. We can only assume that this is the same renewed covenant referred to in Jeremiah chapter 31. As a result of this spiritual revival, Israel will see God in a new and better light. They will see Him for who He really is — their loving Husband. For then Israel will call God "my Husband" instead of "my Master."

There is a play on words here in the Hebrew. The word for "master" is *baal* – בעל. This is also the same word for the false Canaanite gods they were worshipping,

their so-called “lovers.” Thus, instead of having Baal on their lips, they will have God on their minds and hearts. The reason this will be so is that God’s discipline will have worked its purpose.” “For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth” (2:17). Thus, this will be the work of God.

B. “The Right of Possession”

Finally, the capstone of this whole passage takes place: a total reconciliation of the marriage. In fact, here we see the marriage taken to a place in which it has never been. God tells His Bride,

And I will betroth you to me forever; yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in loving kindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. Then you will know the Lord (2: 19–20).

At first, the use of the word “betroth” confuses us. We usually use the word “betroth” to describe the establishing of a formal relationship between two unmarried people. Indeed, that is also how this word *aras* – ארש is usually used. However, the two people mentioned in this passage were already married. They were having serious marriage difficulties and even had a period of temporary separation (not divorce!). In what sense, therefore, can the word “betroth” be used in this context?

Upon further examination, we find that ארש has another connotation. It is sometimes used to speak of the, “price paid and so gaining the right of possession.”⁵ In a sense, Israel was already God’s possession. However, practically, He did not have their loyalty, their hearts, their love, and devotion. Here, God says that He will pay the price to gain what was rightfully His.

We suggest that we understand the word ארש in that light, instead of as a betrothal. When we do, a wonderful and important truth opens up for us. What price would God pay to gain Israel’s heart and loyalty? There is no other price paid in history for such a purpose except that ransom paid by the blood of Israel’s Messiah when he atoned for Israel’s sin. It is only through faith in Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel, that any Israelite (or anyone for that matter) can be totally one with God and have his sins forgiven. God said that when that price is paid, “then you will know the Lord” (2:20).

The word “know” implies intimate knowledge, the kind of knowledge that comes only through being one with a person (such as in a husband and wife relationship). Yeshua said that He came to bring us to God that we might be one with Him. In other words, it is through the death and resurrection of the Messiah — the “price” paid — that Israel will be able to come into a deep and intimate personal relationship with God.

When this happens, then that marriage which turned so sour will be one of total delight. This will take place on an individual level anytime an individual Israelite places his trust in Messiah. Someday, it will be a reality on a national level. All Israel will come to know Him. And, it is not just for Israelite believers only, this intimate marriage between God and His people is open for any and all who trust

in Israel's Messiah. They are grafted into Israel and through faith in Israel's Messiah can also have the delight of intimate union with the Eternal Bridegroom.

¹ J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, p. 581.

² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* ("BDB"), p. 834.

³ EBC, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ("EBC"), vol. 7: "Hosea" by Leon J. Wood, p. 179.

⁴ Hertz, op. cit., p. 584.

⁵ BDB, op. cit., p. 77.