

# Lesson 15

## Hosea 3:3

3 And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

In our last lesson, we had started looking at verse 3, and we had broken Hosea's statement to Gomer into three parts. And in that lesson we looked at the first two of those three parts.

### **Part 1: "You must dwell as mine for many days."**

As a review, in our earlier lesson we said that this "many days" is not the time period in which Gomer is to be Hosea's wife, but rather this "many days" is the time period in which Gomer is to refrain from all sexual activity.

Why did we reach that conclusion?

One reason is because of the phrase "many days." If this time period was the time period of their entire marriage, then we would expect to see – not just "many days" – but rather 'til death do they part.

And a second reason is because of what Hosea will say next.

But another reason is because of what we will see in verse 4 – "for the children of Israel shall abide **many days** without a king." What we are

seeing here between Hosea and Gomer is intended to mirror a punishment against Israel. And so it would make sense for the “many days” in verse 3 to also be a punishment of some sort, but against Gomer rather than against Israel.

**Part 2: “You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man.”**

I think a better translation of that phrase is, “you shall neither prostitute yourself nor be with any man.” Not “**another** man” as we read in the ESV, but “**any** man,” which would include Hosea himself.

I think the best way to view verse 3 is that, as part of her restoration to Hosea, Gomer is required to abstain from all sexual activity for “many days.”

And now let’s look at the third phrase, which is where we ended in our last lesson.

**Part 3: “So will I also be to you.”**

Again, I think we should look for a better translation of this phrase. What is Hosea saying here? What is Hosea promising to do? What make sense for Hosea to say here? What does not make sense?

If Hosea commanded Gomer not to play the whore or be with **other** men (excluding Hosea), then that is hardly an obligation that Hosea would ever need to take on himself. No one would ever have thought that Hosea would ever be with other

women. Hosea's own faithfulness has never been in question.

If instead (as we have just suggested) Hosea commanded Gomer not to play the whore or be with **any** men (including Hosea), then again that is hardly an obligation that Hosea would ever need to state for himself. If Gomer is married to Hosea, and Gomer is abstinent, then clearly Hosea will be abstinent as well. Again, Hosea's own faithfulness to Gomer has never been in question.

And, again, we are trying to find a parallel in verse 3 with something that we will see in verse 4, and so perhaps we should read ahead a bit to help us in our interpretation of verse 3.

If we do that, I think we will see that a better translation of this final phrase is "**then I shall be yours**" rather than "so will I also be to you."

With those three translations, the entire statement by Hosea to Gomer in verse 3 would be this:

"Many days you shall remain with me, and you shall neither prostitute yourself nor be with any man, and then I shall be yours."

Perhaps a good paraphrase of what Hosea is telling Gomer is this:

Gomer, I have paid the price for your freedom, but you have defiled yourself by playing the whore. Because of that, I am going to require you to be completely chaste for many days during which you are not to play the whore, and for those many days you are not to be with any man at all, including not even me. After that period

of many days, I will be yours again, and we can resume our normal marital relations.

Before we make a final decision on verse 3, let's look at verses 4-5.

Again, the significance of the command in verse 1, the obedience in verse 2, and the statement in verse 3 is explained by verses 4-5. The events in verses 1-3 happened for a reason – and that reason was to teach Israel the lesson in verses 4-5.

And so if our view of verses 1-3 is consistent with the message in verses 4-5, then that suggests we are on the right track with verses 1-3. But if our view here is not consistent with verses 4-5, then we will need to circle back and look at verses 1-3 again.

## Hosea 3:4

4 For the children of Israel shall dwell **many days** without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.

Having now read verse 4, I think we can say we were on the right track with our view of verse 3.

In verse 3, we see that Gomer would not have **any man** for many days. Here in verse 4, we see that Israel would not have **any king** for many days.

The last *earthly* king of Israel would be Hoshea, and he would reign only until the Assyrian invasion in 723/722 BC. (See the handout for Lesson 2.)

In addition to not having a king or a prince, there are four other things that Israel would not have for many days – sacrifice, pillar, ephod, and household gods.

Of those four items, only one is *always* evil – “household gods.” The other three items can be good or bad, depending on how they are used.

- A “sacrifice” can be good or bad depending on the object of the sacrifice and the attitude with which the sacrifice is made.
- The “pillar” was most often set up for false gods, but not always. Jacob raised up a pillar for God in Genesis 28:18. We also see a pillar to God in Isaiah 19:19.
- Finally, an “ephod” refers to sacred garments worn by a priest, which again can be good or bad depending on the priest.

So how are the words “sacrifice” and “pillar” and “ephod” being used here in verse 4? In a good sense or a bad sense?

Considering the sad state of Israel at this time, I think we must conclude that these words are all being used here in a bad sense – these are false sacrifices made to false gods by false priests standing before false pillars.

And God was going to put an end to all of that. And that is something that God has already told us in this book.

**Hosea 2:11** – And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.

Israel had been without the temple since 930 BC, when the kingdom was divided and the temple remained in Judah, the southern kingdom. But that did not keep the people of Israel from offering false sacrifices.

**Hosea 4:19** – ...they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

And Israel also had false priests.

**Hosea 6:9** – And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness.

And, of course, Israel had many false gods.

**Hosea 4:17** – Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone.

But all of that was about to change. Very soon, the people of Israel would not be worshipping at all – not true worship of the one true God or false worship of their false gods. And very soon, Israel would have no earthly king at all, not even one of their weak cut-throat kings.

What verse 4 is describing is a defeated and exiled people who would lack control over their own affairs. They would lose their political institutions, and they would lose their religious institutions. They would no longer be a state; they would no longer be a people.

Would this situation last forever? No, it would not. We will see that in the next verse, but I think we can also see that from verse 4 because

verse 4 does not say this situation will last forever, but only for “many days.”

Does that mean that, after the many days were over, the people could return to their false worship and their false gods? No, it does not mean that any more than verse 3 means that Gomer could return to being a prostitute after her own “many day” probationary period was over. Instead, Gomer would be expected to be pure and faithful to Hosea after the “many days” – just as Israel would be expected to be pure and faithful to God after Israel’s own “many days.” That was why each had gone through this period of many days!

How long was the “many days” in verse 4? We learn the answer to that question in the next verse.

## **Hosea 3:5**

5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Verse 5 tells us when the “many days” would come to an end by telling us what would happen afterward.

- The people will return and seek God.
- The people will return and seek David their king.
- The people will come in fear to God and to his goodness.

And these things are said to happen “in the latter days.”

Let’s start with that last phrase first – the latter days.

That phrase always refers to the end of the world – right? Wrong!

All that phrase “latter days” means is exactly what it says – it refers to some later time period. That could be the end of the world, but it is not necessarily the end of the world.

If we want to know the time period to which the latter days in verse 5 refers, we need to look at the context in which the phrase is used.

Here, the context suggests that the “latter days” just refers to some time period after the “many days.”

It is a mistake to assume that the phrase “latter days” or even “last days” always refers to the end of the world.

Let’s look at an example from the book of Joel.

**Joel 2:28** – And it shall come to pass **afterward**, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

When Peter quotes that prophecy in Acts 2, here is what he says:

**Acts 2:17** – And **in the last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters



shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

What does that tell us? It tells us two things.

First, Peter's quotation of Joel 2 in Acts 2 confirms what we just said – the “last days” or the “latter days” just means “afterward.”

And second, it confirms that the “last days” or the “latter days” does not always mean the end of the world. Why? Because the first century events in Acts 2 are said by Peter to have occurred in the “last days.”

So, now let's go back to Hosea 3:5. To what time period does the “latter days” refer in that verse?

To answer that question, let's look at what is said to occur in those days, and then we can figure out **when** they happened. That will give us the time period we are looking for.

And, again, we are looking for three events:

- The people will return and seek God.
- The people will return and seek David their king.
- The people will come in fear to God and to his goodness.

That second event is a very big clue! Does it mean that the people will seek King David himself? No, and Peter confirmed that for us in Acts 2.

**Acts 2:29–31** – Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he

both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

It is not David whom the people would seek, but the descendant of David whom God would set on the throne of David – and, of course, that is Jesus.

**Luke 1:32–33** – He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

When did Israel return and seek God and Christ? When did Israel seek David their king? When did Israel come in fear to God and to his goodness? Those things all happened in the first century when Jesus came to this world.

**Jeremiah 23:5–6** – Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

And we see that prophecy being fulfilled by the Samaritans, who were descendants of the same people who first heard Hosea’s prophecy.

**John 4:39–42** – Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him

to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

**Acts 1:8** – But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Verse 5 is describing what happened in the first century when Jesus came to die for the world and to proclaim his wonderful gospel.

No longer were the Samaritans without a king! No longer were the Samaritans without a sacrifice! No longer were the Samaritans without a priest!

Instead, those who obeyed the gospel were added to the church, and they were once again in a happy marriage with God after their "many days" without a king – just as Gomer was once again in a happy marriage with Hosea after her own "many day" probationary period came to an end.

What happened between Hosea and Gomer in verses 1-3 was a mirror of what happened between God and Israel. And the happy ending for Gomer at the end of verse 3 was a mirror of the happy ending for Israel in verse 5. And we see that happy ending in the New Testament when the King of kings and the Lord of lords met a Samaritan woman at a well.

## Hosea 4:1

1 Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land;

There are very few things about which all Hosea commentaries agree, but one of those things is that there is a major break between chapter 3 and chapter 4.

Verse 1 itself suggests that there is a major break here and that the people are about to hear a message that is very important.

- Verse 1 begins with a call to listen – Hear!
- Verse 1 announces that what the people are about to hear is the word of the Lord.
- Verse 1 is addressed to all the children of Israel.
- Verse 1 gives the reason why the people should all listen – God has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.
- Verse 1 describes in summary form the complaint that God has with them – no faithfulness, no love, and no knowledge.

While the first three chapters were focused somewhat on Hosea himself along with his wife and his children, there is nothing like that at all here in chapter 4. We see none of the intimate details about Hosea that we saw in the previous chapters. Instead, Hosea the person has completely receded into the background, along with his strange little family. (I do not think

they are missing completely as some commentaries suggest, but they are certainly in the background.)

As for the message that begins here in chapter 4, we are not told when it was given, we are not told where it was given, and we are not told the circumstances in which Hosea relayed this message to the people.

But one thing that is very clear from verse 1 is the tone of verse 1. It is the tone of a very serious rebuke, and whoever receives that serious rebuke should expect a serious punishment.

Adding to the seriousness is the fact that verses 1 and 2 read somewhat like a charge in court – the defendant is identified at the start of verse 1, the charges are read at the end of verse 1, and the evidence will be presented in verse 2. Let's look at each of these three things.

And, yes, I am a lawyer, and yes, I see a court scene here – so, yes, it could be that when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail! But, lawyer or not, I do think we see a court scene here.

The word translated “controversy” in verse 1 is the Hebrew word *rib*, which means contention, grievance, strife, or legal dispute. It is the Hebrew word for lawsuit.

**Exodus 23:2-3** – You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert

justice, 3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.

And I think that is what we see here as well – God is bringing forward a legal case against his people!

### **Verse 1a – The Defendant is Identified**

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.

If we are correct that verse 1 identifies the defendant, then who is the defendant? Is it the children of Israel? Or is it the inhabitants of the land? Or both? And are those two groups the same?

I think those two groups are both the same and not the same. They are the same in the sense that they both are composed of Israelites. God is not speaking here about anyone else or to anyone else.

But the groups are also different. How are they different? I think we can see the answer to that question in verse 1. The “children of Israel” are listening to the word of God from Hosea – they may or not may not heed that word, but at least they are listening.

As for the other group – the inhabitants of the land – they are the ones about whom God has a controversy. They are the defendant here. They are the ones without faithfulness, love, and knowledge.

I think we can see that distinction with the language that is used here. Think for a moment about the phrase “inhabitants of the land.” Doesn’t that phrase describe a people who have lost their identity? They have no nationality; they have no God; they belong to no one. All we can say about them is that they exist! They are located on the land!

Does that remind us of anything? Who had lost her own identity in chapter 3? Who was not mentioned by name anywhere in chapter 3? Who had lost her right to be identified as the wife of Hosea? Gomer.

I think the phrase “inhabitants of the land” here in verse 1 is another link between the wife who had rejected God and the wife who had rejected Hosea. Each of them had lost her identity as a result of her faithlessness.

So perhaps the best way to understand verse 1 is that the inhabitants of the land are the defendant in this complaint, and the children of Israel are the jury.

Another possibility is that what we see here in verse 1 is the same thing that we saw at the beginning of chapter 2 where God commanded the children to plead with their mother. But even with that view, verse 1 is still directed to two different groups – the ordinary people and the evil society in which they lived.

A third possibility is that we see only one group here – that the children of Israel and the inhabitants of the land are two names for the

same group, and that God is addressing only the defendant Israel in these verses. That is possible, but the use of two different descriptions in verse 1 makes me lean toward two different groups in verse 1.

As for the view that the children in verse 1 are the jury, we do see something similar elsewhere in the prophets.

**Micah 6:1-3** – Hear what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me!”

**Isaiah 1:2-3** – Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”

Those prophecies are similar to Hosea 4 in that there is a jury, but they are different because the jury in Micah and Isaiah is not the people but is instead the mountains, the hills, the heavens, and the earth.

But I think the similarity here outweighs the difference – in all three prophecies, God is speaking to a jury about the crimes committed by his people. In all three, God is making his case!

As for the jury here, we should keep in mind that there was a faithful remnant in Israel even at this time. How do we know that? Because Hosea



himself was from Israel. And there were people in Israel who were listening to Hosea.

A small faithful remnant serving God in the midst of a godless society that had turned its back on God and had become “foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless” (Romans 1:31)? Does that ring a bell for us today? Of course, it does. We are that faithful remnant today.

But are we really a jury? Maybe.

**Matthew 19:28** – Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

That’s a difficult verse, and we could discuss whether that verse applies to all Christians or to only the Apostles, the identity of the twelve tribes of Israel, what it means to judge the twelve tribes of Israel, and when that did or will occur, and why twelve (which certainly reminds us of a jury!) – but with those questions aside, Matthew 19:28 does at least seem to suggest that the remnant’s role as a jury may not have ended in Hosea.

One more point about the phrase “the inhabitants of the land” is that it reminds us of the phrase “those who dwell on earth,” which is used repeatedly in the book of Revelation to describe those who were opposed to God. And we are also reminded of Paul’s statement about our own current citizenship.

**Philippians 3:19–20** – Their end is destruction,

their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, in verse 1, I think we have a defendant and we have a jury. What's next? It is time to read the charges!