



# Gomer

HER NAME MEANS

*“Completion”*

**HER CHARACTER:** Though a married woman, she carried on numerous love affairs, crediting her lovers for the gifts her husband had given her.

**HER SORROW:** To have become the symbol of spiritual adultery—a picture of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God.

**HER JOY:** That her husband continued to love her despite her unfaithfulness.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** Hosea 1–3

## *Monday*

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HER STORY

*T*he man stood at the door, craning his neck and peering through the half-light. His limbs felt stiff and cold, despite the desert heat that still warmed the narrow street. Other than a stray dog curled in a knot against the wall of a neighboring house, he saw nothing. It was too late for a woman to be walking the streets alone. But, then, she wouldn’t be alone, would she?

He didn’t want to go inside yet, to listen to the absence of her chatter, to lie down on the empty bed. By noon tomorrow, the news of her betrayal would fill every gossip-hungry soul in town like swill in a pig’s belly. Hosea, the man who would steer the nation with his prophecies, couldn’t even control his own wife.

He felt grief and fury like a storm breaking inside him. He had meant to guard his heart; he had never intended to give himself so completely. His pain was the worse for loving her so well. For Gomer had squandered his gifts, mocked his tenderness, and allowed herself to be seduced by other lovers.

Hadn't God warned him and instructed him to "go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord"? He had named his children "Jezreel" (God Scatters), "Lo-Ruhamah" (Not Loved), and "Lo-Ammi" (Not My People). Each successive child measured the growing rift between husband and wife. Hosea wondered whether he had even fathered the last two.

The word of the Lord that had filled Hosea's mouth now troubled his soul, rushing back with appalling force. So this was how God felt about his own people—bitterly betrayed, cut to the heart, disgusted, outraged. His tender love, his every gift meant nothing to a people enamored with Canaanite gods. Israel's leading men were the worst whores of all—virtuosos when it came to playing the harlot, cheating the poor and imploring idols to bless them with peace and riches.

But peace was elusive. Six kings had ruled the northern kingdom during a period of just twenty-five years. Four were murdered by their successors and one was captured in battle. All the while, Assyria perched like a vulture at its borders.

If only Israel would learn its lesson and turn back to the Lord before it was too late—if only Gomer would turn back. Hosea wanted to shout in her face, shake her awake to her sin. Enough of patience. Enough of tenderness. She had ignored his threats, shrugging them off as so many flies on a donkey. What choice had he now? He would strip and shame her, punishing her unfaithfulness.

In the midst of his bitter grief, he heard the voice of God, strong and clear: "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods."

So Hosea took back the wife he couldn't stop loving. And the word of the Lord transformed Lo-Ruhamah into Ruhamah (Loved) and Lo-Ammi into Ammi (My People).

The story of Gomer and Hosea portrays God's jealousy for his people. For the first time, a prophet dared to speak of God as husband and Israel as his bride. But this is a tangled love story, one in which God's heart is repeatedly broken. Despite his pleas, regardless of his threats, Israel would not turn back to him until after the northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyria a few years later.

Still, the knit-together lives of Hosea and Gomer were a living reminder to the Israelites of both God's judgment and his love. Hosea's beautiful words still move us as we think about the church today, about our own unfaithfulness and God's forgiveness: "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

No longer Lo-Ruhamah, we are Ruhamah (Loved), and no longer Lo-Ammi but Ammi (My People). For our Maker has become our Husband, the one who hates our sin but loves us still.

## PROPHETS

*G*omer's husband, Hosea, appeared on the scene as the last of the prophets who spoke the "word of the LORD" (Hosea 1:1) to the doomed northern kingdom of Israel. Before long, the Assyrians would conquer the capital of Samaria and take thousands of Israelites captive. When the book of Hosea begins with "the word of the LORD," it asserts Hosea's authority as a prophet, that God has spoken to him, and that he must relay the message to the people.

The Israelites in Palestine had the law God had given to Moses and the people at Sinai. This consisted of the Ten Commandments as well as the other rules for living included in the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). However, those laws didn't cover many of life's situations and decisions. God instituted the office of the prophet for the many times when a specific revelation of God was needed for the people to know what direction they should follow.

We don't always know how prophets received their messages from God. At times they had visions and dreams. Ezekiel and Daniel both record visions that contained a definite message from God. Other times, as in Hosea, the prophets simply declared that their words were from the Lord. The emphasis of God's prophets was never on the method of receiving his word—whether mysterious or obvious—but on the message itself and on the people's need to follow. God made it clear that if the people would only listen and obediently follow the words of the prophets, he would give them all they needed to face an unknown future.

Just as God provided for his people in the Promised Land, he has provided for us. He may not miraculously reveal the path or supernaturally tell us his will, as he did with the Israelites, but he has revealed himself and his plans for us through the Bible, and his messengers today underscore and explain what Scripture tells us. We can be assured that God will go with us, just as he went with the Israelites, holding our hands as we face whatever our futures hold.

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HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

**Read Hosea 1:2–2:7; 3:1–5.**

1. In what ways does Hosea 2:2–7 reflect Hosea's feelings about Gomer? In what ways do these verses reflect God's feelings about his people?
2. Why is adultery a fitting symbol for the way humans treat God?
3. Put God's promises for his people in Hosea 1:10–2:1 into your own words.
4. In Hosea 3:2, Hosea has to pay money and goods to buy Gomer back from whatever situation she's landed herself in. She has apparently run off and ended up selling herself into prostitution to survive. What would it take for a man to do what Hosea does in 3:1–3?
5. How are you like Gomer? How has God pursued you and bought you back?

*A* tempestuous marriage. A wife who will not remain faithful to the husband who loves her. A husband who not only remains faithful, but loving. Children whose paternity is in doubt. All these are the elements not of a soap opera but of a wonderful picture of God's love and faithfulness to his often unloving and unfaithful people. The promises portrayed in the life of Gomer apply not only to the people of Israel but to the people of today. God loves us and remains faithful to us. Even when we abandon him and turn away, he waits with arms open. He only asks our repentance and his blessings will again overflow.

### **Promises in Scripture**

*I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.*

—JEREMIAH 24:7

*Let us acknowledge the LORD;  
let us press on to acknowledge him.  
As surely as the sun rises,  
he will appear;  
he will come to us like the winter rains,  
like the spring rains that water the earth.*

—HOSEA 6:3

*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,  
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

—ACTS 3:19

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HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

*“In that day,” declares the LORD,  
“you will call me ‘my husband’;  
you will no longer call me ‘my master.’”*

—HOSEA 2:16

- REFLECT ON: Hosea 1–3.  
PRAISE GOD: For his mercy.  
OFFER THANKS: That God loved you before you ever thought of loving him.  
CONFESS: Any tendency to love money, pleasure, children, husband, or career more than you love him.  
ASK GOD: To increase your hunger to know him more intimately.

### Lift Your Heart

*S*ometimes couples grow apart not because either have been unfaithful, but because of sheer busyness. If your relationship with God is bogging down in life’s details, why not plan an intimate evening or weekend with him? Let it be a time of quieting your soul in his presence, of hushing life’s everyday demands. Spend the day walking a solitary beach, or hidden away at a retreat center or a friend’s cottage or cabin. Take your Bible and a book of poetry by Christina Rossetti, or Mark Buchanan’s *The Rest of God*, or C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, or Kathleen Norris’s *The Cloister Walk*.

If you’re artistic, bring paint and art paper and commune with God through the pictures you create. Let it be a time of praising him, of telling him how much you love him, of thanking him for all the ways he has loved you. Don’t try to have a great spiritual experience, just relax and let God know you want to be with him.

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*Lord, how can I begin to understand how faithfully you’ve loved me?  
Draw me into your presence and hold me close. Quiet my noisy heart  
and speak to me.*