

Art Katz:

God’s endtime strategy for the restoration of Israel back to Himself

God gives us the prophet Hosea and his relationship with his adulterous wife as being a perfect parallel of His relationship with an adulterous Israel. The prophet has to experience God’s grief for His nation. If Hosea is going to be the mouthpiece of God, he is going to proclaim some hard things, and therefore needs to share God’s grief for the people he is addressing.

Gomer did not begin as a hardened prostitute. She began as a woman of Israel, and by a process of moral deterioration relative to the rejection of the knowledge of God, there was a corresponding moral decay in her own life. Jewish commentators frequently treat the prophets as champion of social justice, as if their only message was the issue of social concern; but they do not understand that when the prophets addressed the social concerns, it was the symptom of a much deeper malady, namely, a turning from God Himself. The sinfulness of man in His rejection of God will find its expression in a lack of compassion, in a tendency toward violence, injustice and unrighteousness. In other words, the external behavior of mankind is the visible expression of an otherwise unseen condition of heart toward God. Gomer, as with Israel, mirrors and reflects all of that. Her condition finally became so bad that she not only has become a prostitute, but also a slave. She has completely lost all moral sense.

Hosea then speaks about God’s judgment. The word “Baal” actually means “Lord” or “Master.” Someone speaking of the God of Israel as “Lord” would at the same time take the word “Baal” into their mouths, and someone using the word “Baal” to refer to the pagan deity would mindlessly think that he is referring to the God of Israel. That is why Elijah, when confronting the false prophets of Baal in Israel, said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? How long are you going to be a mixed-bag thing? If God be God, follow Him and serve Him. Disassociate the pagan entity from the God of Israel.”

When God finally restores Gomer, He takes the Baal language out of her mouth. She will never again refer to God as Baal. The Lord is not going to take the risk of allowing a use of language that could be deceptive. In other words, when we are saying “Lord,” we need to be referring to the God who is Lord. God does not want our hearts going after a deity of our own choosing or our own making. God takes the name “Baal” out of her life and out of her mouth, “And now you will call Me Ishi, which means “my Husband.” She is being required to recognize God as husband – not just as some impersonal deity who provides her flax and wool and wine – but the lover of her soul and the One to whom she is called to intimate relationship. God wants to save us from going whoring after other gods, and so long as we do, we will have a false and counterfeit intimacy where love becomes lust.

God’s judgments are very severe:

For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal (Hosea 2: 8).

It is an excruciating pain to lavish something on your wife as the expression of your love, and then for her to use that very thing to cater to the god who is your enemy, to the false deity and demonic alternative. She uses her gift from you to pander to the false god. It is like rubbing salt on the wound, a humiliation that God has had to bear with His unfaithful Israel.

Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time and My new wine in its season. I will also take away My wool and My flax given to cover her nakedness. And then I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one will rescue her out of My hand (Hosea 2:9-10).

We have seen this same scenario in modern times in the dealings of God with His people Israel: One of the conundrums of WWII was that the “St. Louis”, the passenger ship that left Hamburg harbor with one thousand German Jews, could not find a place to disembark; no one would take them in, not even Canada or the USA. That ship had to go back to Hamburg and disembark, and many of those Jews, if not all, ended up in the gas ovens. Jews are faulting these nations, and in a sense, those nations are yet responsible even while they were fulfilling a judgment of God. When His judgments come, they are severe.

“I will also put an end to all her gaiety, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her festal assemblies. And I will destroy her vines and fig trees, of which she said, “These are my wages which my lovers have given me.” And I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field will devour them. And I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifices to them and adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry, and follow her lovers, so that she forgot Me,” declares the Lord (Hosea 2:11-13).

These verses deserve our closest attention. This is no arbitrary judgment. It is severe, and touches the very things she enjoyed, the things she thought she was receiving from Baal. Not only is He going to take away the things that brought her comfort and enjoyment, He is also going to destroy and lay waste her vines. God is not just removing the harvest of the vine, He’s removing the vine itself. He is going to pluck it out.

We need to remember that God’s judgments are always redemptive. The vine and the fig tree are destroyed and rooted up. If she is ever going to be restored again in the future – “God always has a future” – she will

receive the benefit again of those things; for if God were to leave the vines, and the produce was to come again, she may construe to think again that it has come from a false lover. There must be, therefore, a way by which this restoration comes that can be seen as coming from the Creator-Redeemer Himself.

Many people are chafed with me because I say flatly, “I believe that the future of the state of Israel is bleak, and that it won’t survive a coming time of distress.” And people say, “How can you say that? Hasn’t God said that the nation will never be removed as long as the sun gives its light.” My answer is, “Yes, the nation will never be abolished, but the state is only a political, Zionist entity.” In other words, God can remove it in the same sense as He destroys the vines. So that if ever there shall be again an Israel in that part of the world, it will not be the continuation of some Zionist thing that temporarily lapsed, but something totally recreated and new and given by God.

The judgment will be severe for Israel because the state has become an idolatry in itself. Worship of the state is greater than the worship of God. There is more trust in the state than trust in God. That is clear from any examination of present-day Israel. So, the parallel between what is spoken here of Gomer as a pattern and model, and the last days’ issue of Israel is acute. God will not just destroy the harvest from the vine, but also the vine itself. Gomer misconstrued the source of life and pleasure. God will not allow Israel to survive if they misconstrue the source of their national success, and think that it has come from “Baal,” or even themselves, which is to say, false gods. It has got to be clear that God is their source, and that He will bring everything down in order to raise it up.

If there is any people in the earth who should better understand the way of God, it is Israel; and yet, they still do not understand their own judgments or recognize them as coming from God’s hand. We are going to see that God’s redemption of Israel, as well as Gomer, is not through these judgments per se, but really the opposite—through a love and a mercy that is completely unmerited. It is this alone that instructs Gomer; and it will instruct a nation who has not historically been instructed by their judgments. That’s why this text is a powerhouse. There is an enormous punch line, which I got out of Matthew Henry’s commentary on Hosea. In this act of redemption, God’s final, ultimate, and supreme revelation of Himself is not His judgments, but His love and mercy. His judgment is: “And I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifices—so that she forgot Me.” Forgetting is a willful activity in most instances. We choose not to remember because to remember brings inconvenience, or something displeasing to our own flesh. We hide behind a lot of this forgetting, and so when God says, “And you forgot Me,” He means, “You have willfully chosen not to retain Me in your memory. You have chosen not to keep me alive in your consciousness and before your face that you might walk in My ways. You have willfully put Me out of your consideration so that you would have the liberty to engage yourself in adulterous activity.”

The next verse takes us absolutely by surprise! Instead of the penalty for willful forgetting, it is exactly the reverse. It is a blessing! How do you understand a God like this? When He has every right to bring judgment, He chooses in that very moment to display something completely unanticipated—blessing! Something comes to Gomer of a totally undeserved kind—not because of Gomer but because of who God is and what He is in Himself. When He says, “You did not know Me,” it means, “You did not know Me as the God who is utterly gracious, utterly forgiving, utterly kind, and utterly merciful. Your condition stinks. Unless I alter that, give you a new covenant that I Myself will keep, you will continue in that same sinful condition. You are unfaithful by nature, but here is what I am by nature.” This is the knowledge of God that He has called Israel to communicate to the nations as His witness nation.

Present-day Israel is going to know God in this way. She will be saved out of her whoredoms, her idolatries, her infidelities, and her willful forgetting. At the point where she knows she deserves judgment, God will enter her into a new realm or dimension of blessing. It is this that will overwhelm Israel, and make her to repent on her face. It will be the revelation of God as He is. How does anyone come to that knowledge? There is no textbook way that you can know God in this way, except as being the recipient of the mercy that comes instead of the judgment. Only then do you know.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak kindly to her (Hosea 2:14).

To allure, or to entice, is the language of love. Paul speaks like this as an apostle. Very rarely do you ever hear Paul commanding his disciples. It is more frequently, “I entreat you—I beseech you.” True, godly leadership will always entreat, plead and speak kindly.

There are many reasons why God will bring them into a wilderness. A wilderness place strips away the amenities of civilization. There are cushions and layers of things in society that keep us from stark reality. Our lives are so hedged by things that keep the real issues from us. So, for God to bring people into the wilderness is to strip them of everything that would confuse or disguise the issues of truth and reality about God and man. How many of us have gone through our own wilderness experiences in order to face ultimate conditions where we see as we are seen. That is what God did for Gomer, and that is what He will also do for His nation Israel.

It is not just a physical wilderness either. It includes whatever is required to strip the Jew from their philosophies and their categories, in order to make them confront the grit issue of themselves versus God. God will be like a father who does not spare chastising his son. It is painful for them both, but he does not spare. It is an ultimate love. God does not spare Himself; He gave His Son. God will bring Israel into the

wilderness and speak tenderly to her. Speaking tenderly does not negate speaking truthfully. He will speak the truth and He will speak it tenderly rather than accusingly³⁴but it is still the truth.

Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope (Hosea 2:15a).

The word “Achor” means “trouble.” God will take Israel’s ultimate distress, and that will ironically be the door and key to blessing. She is brought to her final downfall, where everything is stripped in the wilderness. The very place of desperation and despair will be the point at which she will enter into abundance and blessedness. This is God in His intrinsic character and way! That is why He can say, “There’s yet a future for you, but your future comes out of what you think is the end. When there is no prospect for hope whatever, it is precisely there that the door of hope is found.

“And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. And it will come about in that day,” declares the Lord, “that you will call Me Ishi (husband) and will no longer call Me Baali. For I will remove the names of the baals from her mouth, so that they will be mentioned by their names no more” (Hosea 2:15b-17).

This is a complete eradication of the name of Baal from her lips. God eradicates and takes it out, but He does not just remove it by that process; He removes it by a replacement. He puts something better in its place, namely, “my husband.” Note that it is my husband. There is a real sense of possession. Not just a husband abstractly, but my husband. And a woman needs that or else she is going to be tempted and be drawn away. So, it is very important for our wives and Israel to know that God is “my husband” and that the husband that you have is “your husband.”

In that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and will make them lie down in safety (Hosea 2:18).

Note every phrase where God says, “I will.” It shows He is the source of everything. This is total dependency on the God who is God. Baal is a fake! He can only give some appearance of blessedness and fertility. But God will take Israel from her abject condition of death, and this is what will happen, “I will do this for you, I will do that for you. I will, I will, I will, I will.” It has nothing to do with deserving!

“and will make them lie down in safety (Hosea 2:18f).

This implies that Israel’s last experience prior to being catapulted into the wilderness is violence and war in the Land. But now, God’s promise is that He will see to it that Israel will never again fear. Her safety will never again be at issue. He will have abolished war from the Land. He will say to Israel: “You tried everything to obtain your own peace. You forsook one Prime Minister and elected another. You tried the Oslo negotiation. Then you had the Wye River agreement, and every other kind of peace resolve since, but they will all avail nothing in establishing peace. I will abolish war and your safety will be permanent and never again be disturbed. That is the kind of God I am, and I alone am able to perform it.”

And I will betroth you to Me forever [i.e. You will never again experience unfaithfulness]. Yes I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion. And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the Lord (Hosea 2:19-20).

Note how the statement ends: “Then you will know the Lord.” There is a connection between God taking His wife forever on the basis of righteousness, faithfulness, justice, mercy, and love and “then you will know the Lord.” In other words, “I am not taking you because you won the Miss World title, or you were the most distinct charismatic model on the market. You are the actual opposite, but I am taking you as My wife forever, not on the basis of your attractiveness or any inherent trait that you have, but what I am in Myself.”

Five things are mentioned: “I am taking you in righteousness, justice, mercy, love, faithfulness. And you will know Me because that is what I am. That is going to be the foundation of our marriage. That is why you will call Me “my husband.” You will know me in those things because that is what I am. I am mercy, I am love, I am faithfulness. And you will know Me as the God who is faithful. You will know Me, and you will be My wife forever on that basis.”

And I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who are not My people, “You are My people!” And they will say, “Thou art my God!” (Hosea 2:23).

That means that Israel will never again suffer violence or fear; for they will be sown and deposited in the land.

In a word, God is reversing every judgment. He is now replacing and replenishing everything He took away.

The punch line comes in the third chapter:

Then the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes” (Hosea 3:1).

Even though we have read the conclusion of God’s answer in mercy, chapter three is not a continuation but a going back and showing another facet of something already expressed. This can be confusing if you do not understand the way God often unfolds His prophetic things. You read about judgment and restoration, and then you read about judgment again. Maybe it is because we cannot take it all at one sitting. He has to give us a portion and then show us the recovery and the restoration that is coming so we can breathe again. And then, being able to breathe, He now goes back and deepens the description of His judgments. And then He will

bring again His restoration. Prophetic statements are like that as well as prophetic speaking and prophetic men. We are not to expect from them an ordered sequence of statements in chronological fashion as you would from a teacher. They are a mish-mash of many dimensions and many overlays coming together. God is giving us a flashback of what was required of Hosea towards his wife, because in doing that, God is depicting what He is going to do for the nation.

“Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress.” In other words, “Don’t wait for her to reform; don’t wait for her to show her best side” and then you can love her. As she presently is, in the midst of her stinking condition, go and love her now. It is like saying, “Go and show your love to a woman who already has a lover and is an adulteress. Don’t speak it¾show it.” That is what God means by replenishing the vine, by removing what He had destroyed in judgment, by changing the meaning of the names. A people who were not a people shall become a people. One who is not to receive mercy will receive mercy. That is the showing of the love of God while the person is still in the condition of adultery. So, if that person is going to be changed, it is not by the judgment of God, but rather by the love of God shown to her while yet in that condition. It is a “doing” of an uncanny kind that violates and rubs against the whole grain of our natural, human disposition. Who can show love to a wife who is in the midst of her unfaithfulness?

This has everything to do with what the Church will need to show Israel when they meet with the Jew, face to face, in the wilderness. We have to show the Jew this unconditional love of God while they are yet sinners! It is easy to love them while they are cute, fetching, and admirable. It is another thing to love them while they are in an abominable and angry condition. This is at the heart of a redemptive God. When God will have a people through whom that can be shown, then the age will have ended. Therefore, the issue is not Israel, per se, but the issue of a people who can show “God as God” under deep vexation where the natural thing to say is, “You deserve this judgment! Don’t expect any mercy from me. Shape up and I’ll think it over.” Jews expect and understand that kind of response. It is the way they would act. And so God is wanting to show them the very thing they least expect, namely, His unconditional love. But He needs a people who can show that forth. That is what God is waiting for, and that is why we have to move from our organized, programmed system of doctrinal beliefs into the actuality of the faith. Only in this place can we appropriate the very nature of God Himself. The whole conclusion of the age waits for it. Nothing is to be expected from Israel.

Only that one who can love her while she is in that condition will be the instrument through whom the age is concluded.

The love of God is antithetical to the human thing in every point and particular. God’s love is not sentimental or slobbery. He confronts Israel in the wilderness; He entreats her; He does not withhold the truth, but speaks it endearingly. He does not dismiss something that would be of a benefit for the person to hear in order that they might be brought to a place of redemption. It was so for us when we were in Israel’s condition.

“although they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” This means that they actually made sacrifices to these gods and that these cakes were actually put before their altars. It is not that they had some abstract affinity for another god. They were to the point where they were literally making something for that god. Even in that abominable condition the love of God must be demonstrated.

So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley. Then I said to her, “You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.” For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their King; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days (Hosea 3:2-5).

This is the pay-off, and this is where we need to brood over every choice word. This is so compact and full, and who can understand the wisdom of this? After buying this woman back, and therefore she is now legally his, why does he command her, “This is the end of your whoring; you are not going to continue that. But neither am I going to have any intimate relationship with you for many days.” What is the divine wisdom in that? Why could he not now possess this woman whom he had purchased and who is now his wife? It says “for many days,” so it is not going to be a permanent condition. The day will come when they will enjoy conjugal relations, but now, having bought her back, he is dispensing with that relationship. Although he has every legal right to possess the wife that is rightfully his, he does not have relationship with her as his wife. This is a God who has been denied a relationship with Israel for millennia. She has been whoring and has forgotten God for ages. It is an anguish of denial for her sake. If we would burrow into this and diagram what love is as against the human love, we will have a revelation of God in dimensions that are priceless. This is love. This is the revelation of God’s love¾self-denial for her sake.

But how does it benefit her to now be distanced from her husband? Remember, she is an ex-prostitute and a Baal-worshipping whore, and has had a relationship with many men. Her mindset would be: “Hey, now he has bought me back, I am sure that he expects this relationship. This is how men always are.” How would she differentiate her husband from all her past lovers if she just goes from the one to the other without a lapse

and without an interim? However, this is another kind of husband who will not gratify himself at her expense. He knows she is the weaker vessel and that her integrity has been lost. She thinks that all she is good for is to be a piece of merchandise used by men. She fully expects that this man will now use her as other men have used her.

But, this husband is not going to use her. He is going to wait many days for the restoration of her mind, heart, and soul, until she herself will desire and love in response to his love. This is love as she has never known it, and moreover, it will evoke in her a response. Their coming together will cause the angels to sing and heaven to rejoice. It will be more than the issue of rights, it will be transcendent and glorious, and God is willing to wait for that in present-day Israel. He will return her to the Land, but it will be many days before she is restored and can come into a right mindset. After her long history of apostasy, it will take time to understand what it means to be rightly related in love to the God who has redeemed her despite her condition. This is the greatest demonstration of God as God, and Israel has got to experience this if she is to make Him known in this way.

This is the final turning point for Israel. This demonstration of unmerited goodness, even His willingness to wait many days, is the final revelation of God as God. It will even occasion reverence and awe for God. Where Israel have failed to learn from God’s judgments upon her, they are going to learn from His goodness. They are going to fear His goodness more than they ever feared His judgments, and that will be the final and conclusive thing that makes Israel the Israel of God.

It is not only the Lord and His greatness that we ought to fear, but also the Lord and His goodness. Not only His majesty, but also His mercy. I have never heard of fearing the goodness of God. I can respect it, I can admire it, I can appreciate it, and I can love it. But to fear or to have a reverence, that is to say, an ultimate recognition of God, not through His judgment but through His goodness, has never occurred to me. That is why Hosea is to Gomer what God will be to Israel: “Go again and show love to this woman while she’s in the act of adultery with her false lovers and bring her back. And then wait many days until she’s restored in her mind and soul and can appreciate that she’s not a piece of merchandise now being employed by someone who now owns her.”

This loving compassion will strike the soul of Israel. Present-day Jews do not understand this at all. On the contrary, they understand buying and selling, “you get what you pay for,” obligation and requirement. It is the name of the game, and they are good at playing that game, but this demonstration is of another wisdom. This is another way. This is their God whom they did not know, and you don’t know God until you know Him in His goodness. But to know Him in His goodness to the point where it’s something to be feared is awesome. And when you know God that way, you know God. It is this knowledge of God, through a restored Israel, that alone can bless all the families of the earth. And this knowledge can never be learned as textbook. It can only be learned out of being brought down and restored by the goodness of God and the mercy of God.

Paul reminds the church that by the mercy given us, Israel might obtain mercy. For to obtain mercy is to obtain God as He finally, ultimately, truly, and fully is. This is especially true when it comes at the very time when it is least deserved – while they are yet in their whoredoms. That is the genius of the book of Hosea.