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## MARRIAGES OF HOSEA.

BY THE REV. T. C. LAWSON, M.A.

### THESIS.

That Hosea records two marriages, and that each is to a woman of pure, devout and honourable character and therefore consistent with the righteous laws of God.

### THE SCHEME.

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### I. TO STATE THE VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS.

The first message which came to the prophet Hosea from God was a command to "take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms," so he "went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim." There were three children of the marriage to whom Hosea, instructed by God, gave strange-sounding names significant of future disaster to "the kingdom of the house of Israel" in relation to God. The firstborn was a son whom Hosea named "Jezreel," signifying that God would cause the kingdom to cease. The second child was a daughter who was given the name "Lo-ruhamah," meaning "not having obtained mercy" and signifying that God would no more have mercy upon the people to deliver than from the enemies that might come against them. This was to be a great contrast with God's purpose to save the Kingdom of Judah. The third child was a boy and received the name "Lo-ammi," meaning "not My people." For God would no longer recognise them as His own people nor be their God. In the third chapter Hosea records that God commanded him to "love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress." Accordingly he purchased a woman whom he took and treated as for ceremonial cleansing, significant of the future of the Kingdom of Israel in being without a King and their ceremonial religion.

These acts of Hosea have received a variety of interpretation by commentators. It is impossible to say that "the critics are agreed" or that they have arrived at "assured results." The

real problem does not lie in the literal fact of the marriage, but in the meaning and application of the words "whoredoms" and "adulteress"; for taking them, as most writers do, in their literal and physical sense of harlotry, and as a description of the natural and personal character of Gomer, and the woman whom he purchased, it seems to imply that God commanded His servant to do what, in ordinary circumstances, appears sinful and unwise, and bound to lead to a great tragedy of domestic unhappiness and shame in his life. It is asserted that God thereby purposed to teach Hosea through his own bitter personal experience how He Himself felt towards the people in spite of their want of trust in Him and their corrupt worship. For as Hosea was commanded to love an "adulteress," and thereby learned to love his unfaithful and erring wife and so reclaimed her from the depths of iniquity into which she had sunk (which act "developed in him the most wonderful capacity of unselfish affection"), so God loved His people and would reclaim them. Hosea "had to learn . . . that the essence of Divine nature was not justice but love." He therefore proclaims God's love: "I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord" (ii. 19-20). And again such yearning as expressed in these words: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? Mine heart is touched within Me. My repentings are kindled together" (xi. 8). This view is well expressed by Dr. Campbell Morgan in his book on Hosea, *The Heart and Holiness of God*.

Those who interpret the words "whoredoms" and "adulteress" literally of the personal character of Gomer, vary as to the precise application and meaning. The most extreme view is that she was a grossly licentious woman with children born before her marriage to Hosea. Some think that the statement in the third chapter is a prelude to what is stated in the first chapter, and that it is a description of the character of Gomer and the methods by which Hosea proceeded to obey God's command. "According to this Hosea knowingly married a woman of unchaste character who was not only living with a paramour, but that he did this only after a period of probation." Dr. Pusey says: "Hosea, then, at God's command united to himself in marriage one who . . . had fallen manifoldly into fleshly sin" (*Minor Prophets*, p. 4), so that by "wife of whoredoms is meant one who up to that time had again and again been guilty of that sin" (*ibid.*, p. 7). And by "children of whoredoms is meant children born to her after marriage and begotten by another than the prophet" (Harper, *International Com.*, p. 206). Another writer says: "They were the offspring after marriage so designated because their mother's profligacy would make their legitimacy appear doubtful" (*Speakers' Com.*, p. 462). For this reason Hosea gives the children their names to indicate his repudiation of them as his own.

Few hold this view. It is objected that it is not parallel with

Israel who was pure at first when God took them to be His own special people, when He said of them: "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (Exod. xix. 5-6). And of whom Balaam is made to proclaim: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. xxiii. 21). It is therefore suggested that "whoredoms," according to Hebrew idiom, need only "mean a woman of unchaste disposition, one who, although chaste at the time of marriage had in her a tendency to impurity which later manifested itself" (Harper, p. 206). Another writer says that Gomer was called a wife of whoredoms proleptically, but, after bearing three children, became unfaithful, and they share their mother's disgrace, and so are called children of whoredoms. The writer of the article on Hosea in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* says "there is no reason to suppose that Hosea knowingly married a woman of profligate character. The point in the allegory is plainly infidelity after marriage as parallel to Israel's departure from the covenant God; a profligate wife is not the same thing as an open prostitute."

The writer of the article in *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible* does not go so far as to think that Gomer was "a woman with a propensity to unchastity, a sense which the words could not bear. A 'wife of whoredoms' is explained by 'children of whoredoms.' The children did not yet exist, they were born in the prophet's house, for Hosea did not marry a woman with a family; and in like manner the woman when taken was not yet that which she afterwards became. If the events be real, the words were written from a much later period in the prophet's history."

If, then, Gomer was pure when Hosea married her, and she be regarded as the same woman of chapter iii, the question arises, when did she begin the downward career? Dr. Peake, in *The People and the Book*, says that Hosea "after the birth of the second or third child discovered the infidelity of his wife. The names of the second and third child may declare Hosea's knowledge of Gomer's guilt. Whether she left him or whether he sent her away is not clear."

Dr. Brown, however, thinks that she became unfaithful after the birth of the third child. It is thought that then she either left her husband or was driven away by him, and so sank into the depth of iniquity of a slave concubine ("from which Hosea with tender affection and encouraged by Divine command bought her back and restored her to his home"). "The prophet was compelled by his love of Gomer, faithless as she was, to purchase her out of the depths of infamy into which she had fallen, at the price of a slave" (Harper, p. 215).

The advantage of this view is, so it is said, that "it accepts the narrative as the recital of historical facts and does away with the moral difficulties." "It furnishes a reasonable basis for Hosea's evident love for his wife." This view is arrived at by assigning to

the terms "whoredoms" and "adulteress" their natural physical meaning as applicable to the personal character of Gomer, and assuming that she is the same woman of chapter iii.

The difficulty is not so easily escaped. If it removes the moral difficulty of the first command by regarding Gomer as pure and the words spoken of her and the children as only "proleptical," there yet remains the moral difficulty of the second command which seems, to say the least, to involve God in commanding a man to do what certainly, in ordinary circumstances, would be considered morally wrong. As Calvin says, "that this was done by the prophet seems very improbable." Some regard it as "an extraordinary command of God." In which case Calvin suggests that the prophet ought to hide himself. The excuse is made that God may command what in ordinary cases could not be lawful, and "what no man would dare to do except at God's bidding." But as Dr. Gill remarks, "this would look like God countenancing whoredoms."

In order to avoid this moral difficulty it is suggested that "whoredoms" and "adulteress" refer not to the natural but to the spiritual, to the idolatry which was so rampant in the land, and that whilst Gomer personally was morally pure, yet she was a worshipper of idols which also involved her children. But this again would imply that God, to some extent, favoured union with an idolatrous woman which is scarcely conceivable, since the whole purpose of the prophet was to denounce the sin of idolatry and the evils which arose out of it, and because of which he foretold the punishment upon the nation which would be shown no further mercy and which would be disowned.

To escape these dilemmas the events are interpreted as being not real actual facts, but parabolical, that "the course enjoined upon Hosea is related solely with reference to a symbolical meaning." It "is in all probability purely parabolical" (*Students' Com.*, p. 329), and is therefore "not a relation of actual occurrence, but imaginary, rendered in a high degree probable by the moral incongruity." But, says Canon Box, "Gomer was a real person and not an allegorical figment." "The old interpretation as pure allegory may rightly be dismissed."

Others, however, regard it as a mere vision. "Almost all Hebrews agree in this opinion that he did not actually marry a wife, but that he was bidden to do so in a vision." Bishop Horsely says, "this is in truth a question of little importance to the interpretation of the prophecy, for the act was equally emblematical whether it was real or visionary only; and the signification of the emblem whether the act were done in reality or in vision, will be the same." This view certainly excludes the idea of any actual moral wrong on the part of Hosea, or incongruous idolatrous marriage. But there are objections to this view in that "what is morally objectionable in practice become no more defensible by being prescribed in vision." And besides there is no indication given by the prophet that it is either related as a parable or only

seen in a vision. There are many details lacking. We are not told "how Gomer committed adultery and became a slave." We are not told that Gomer is the same woman mentioned in chapter iii. In all the above interpretations too many details have to be invented in order to make the story hang together as a whole.

## II. THE INCONSISTENCIES OF THESE VIEWS WITH

- α. The Holiness of God.
- β. The Divine Laws of Marriage.
- γ. The Honour of the Prophetic Office.

### α. *The Holiness of God.*

Various objections have been raised against particular views in the foregoing statements. But none is really fatal to the idea that Gomer became a wicked woman and brought tragedy into the life and experience of the prophet, and that in some measure God countenanced a marriage alliance with an evil woman.

The facts of the marriage of Gomer at God's command, the birth and names of the children, the taking and buying a wife and isolating her as for purification, cannot be disputed. But when the words "whoredoms" and "adulteress" are taken literally as the personal character of Gomer at some period of her married life: and that God commanded Hosea, as in chapter iii, to love and take such a woman for a wife, then the story becomes somewhat revolting to the moral sense, which is not altogether set at ease by taking the story as allegorical or a vision. For "a transaction which is repugnant to the moral sense is just as repugnant when chosen as the subject of a vision or allegory, the moral difficulty is not removed" (Dr. Brown, p. 33).

If we broaden our outlook and lift up our eyes to the wider horizon of God's previous dealings with the people of Israel we shall find definite principles for rejecting the interpretation that maligns the personal character of Gomer and involves Hosea in a marriage to a woman of evil repute. Such a transaction would be inconsistent with the Holiness of God. The whole of the ceremonial laws were designed to teach the awfulness of sin of all kinds, and to avoid all appearance of evil in the light of the Holiness of God, by the constant need of cleansing from defilement caused by certain foods, flesh, disease and proximity to dead bodies, and most particularly sex relation. The cleansing and the injunction of abstinence were enjoined by this command reiterated on several occasions. "Be ye holy for I am holy." It was enforced by various ceremonies performed in the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the office of the priesthood. Upon his garments were emblazoned the words "Holiness to the Lord." These requirements were never relaxed in the service of God. By this Holiness God swore to punish sin (Amos iv. 2). Such a marriage would have profaned the Holiness of the Lord. "For Juda hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Mal. ii. 11). So that if Gomer were really of

such a character, then to marry her was contrary to God's Holiness, a Holiness we conceive to be required in the prophet who was sent to preach righteousness.

There is a second objection. Such action on the part of Hosea would be contrary to the marriage laws. It was unlawful for the high priest to marry "a widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot; these he shall not take" (Lev. xxi. 14). The ordinary priest was under the same restriction (Lev. xxi. 7). "Profane" means to pollute one's self, to make common, and in verse 9 is explained as "playing the whore."

Since a prophet is a teacher of righteousness and his purpose is to call the people to obey God's laws (as was also the duty of the priest, Cap. iv. 6, 9) may we not assume that God would require a like regard in the conduct of His prophet in respect of marriage? It was forbidden to the ordinary man to take a wife back whom he had sent away (Deut. xxiv. 4). If Hosea found his wife to be unfaithful, as is assumed, then there lay before him but one course of action, which was to have both her and her paramour stoned to death (Deut. xxii. 22). Even if Gomer were merely an idolatrous worshipper of Baal we might justly infer, from the fact of God forbidding marriage alliances with the heathen on this very ground, that the marriage with her would be equally distasteful (Deut. vii. 3-4). The reason given for this is that the people were holy unto the Lord (Deut. vii. 6-7). Some may seek to justify Hosea by reference to the action of Samson; but here it is not said that God commanded him to do what he did. And in the case of Rahab it is now known that the word is used in the sense of an "Inn Keeper" or one that took in guests.

The third objection is an inference rather than a direct negative. Such action would be against the Honour of the prophetic office. His actions would be just as well known as his preaching, and any wrong conduct on the part of his wife, any neglect on his part to enforce the law, would be sure to have a repercussion upon the people, and, to a large extent, nullify the purpose of his message. The priests were to be living witnesses to, and teachers of, God's Holiness, and no less so the prophets who were His messengers and preachers of His word. The very requirements laid down by St. Paul for the qualification of the ministerial office also show how a bishop must be such that nothing can be laid to his charge even after a public examination; neither must he be open to attack at any point in his character. Also he must not be a bigamist, and must be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." It is not sufficient to be popular with the congregation, but he must needs "have a good report of them which are without." We need only to use our imagination a little to conceive what the effect would be in a village or town were the wife of the pastor to act wrongly. It would destroy almost all the good he had tried to do, and his influence for good would be gone. Whilst there might possibly be some sympathy on the

part of devout Christians, yet the world would point the finger of scorn, and the message of a call to righteousness would go unheeded. In raising these objections we have followed the principle that "it is not lawful to so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another."

### III. THE MEANING AND APPLICATION OF THE WORDS "WHOREDOMS" AND "ADULTERESS."

α. The Literal.

β. The Allegorical: (1) Religious, (2) Political.

γ. The Application to Gomer and the Purchased Woman.

In the literal sense the words describe the personal character indicated by such unlawful intercourse outside the marriage vows. The Hebrew word for "whoredom" is used primarily with reference to the woman, whilst the Hebrew word for "adulteress" in chapter iii. 1, has reference to the case where one or both persons are married and is used of either the man or the woman according to its masculine or feminine form. In this sense they express the personal character of the guilty, and for which severe penalties were enacted to make amends, and in certain cases the death penalty (Lev. xx. 10; xix. 29; Deut. xxii. 20). The reason advanced precludes so far our reckoning Gomer or the woman to be of this character personally.

The sin of idolatry was so heinous an offence against God that these terms are used to express His abhorrence of it. The people were specially chosen; to them God showed His tender mercies and loving kindness. Of them He said: "For thou art an Holy People unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God has chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people; but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn to our fathers" (Deut. vii. 6-8). Again: "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God . . . And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people" (Deut. xxvi. 17). They were bound by the closest ties made by solemn oaths. They were given and accepted laws superior to those of all other nations, laws embracing their social conduct, religious worship, and moral rectitude. They were strictly forbidden to imitate or associate in the worship of the gods of the nations. Thus: "Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee. But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, cut down their groves: For the Lord, Whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they go a *whoring* after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; and thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a *whoring* after their gods, and thy sons go a *whoring* after their gods" (Exod. xxxiv. 12-16, cf. Deut. xxxi. 16;



Judges, ii. 17). "Worship of him (Baal) is, therefore, adultery against Javeh, their true God, who led them out of Egypt and loved them in the wilderness. They have committed adultery against Him ever since they left the desert and first set foot on Canaanitish soil (ix. 10). Adultery, unfaithfulness, and desertion of their true husband—these are the pictures which Hosea uses to describe the popular worship of his day, and they are nowhere painted so beautifully as in that early poem, which seems to have been composed with the cult only in the mind and without reference to the political events described in the later chapters (ii. 2-13). (Dr. Brown, Preface, p. xxiii; see also Hosea iv. 12-13; v. 3; vi. 10.) Not only are these terms applied to the nation in regard to their idolatry but also in respect to their political alliances with other nations for their own protection and security. God had promised absolute safety upon their obedience and forbade alliances. But they disobeyed His Laws and then, when other nations came against them, they sought help from one or other of the world powers—Egypt, Syria and Assyria, whichever suited their purpose (see chapters v. 13; vii. 11; xii. 1). These are called lovers in viii. 9. This, too, was abhorrent to God and is characterised by the same terms in Ezekiel xvi. 25 ff. The words therefore apply to, and are descriptive of, the national character as a whole, both religiously and politically as conducted by their rulers and politicians. They had forsaken God their true Husband and joined in worshipping false gods, and were putting their trust in the help of foreign nations, whose help was vain and to no purpose.

This sense and application of the words is confirmed by the latter part of verse i. 2, which explains the meaning of "whoredoms." "For the land hath committed great whoredoms, departing from the Lord." It therefore denotes, not the personal character of Gomer, but the character of the Northern tribes, to which she belonged, and therefore her origin. The children are also designated by the same term since they also by birth belong to the same kingdom. There is no reason, therefore, to suppose that Gomer was in any way other than a godly matron and of honourable conduct. For however much a nation through its rulers may have departed from God, as in the case of the Northern Kingdom commencing with Jeroboam (who set up the calves the one in Dan and the other at Bethel, and said: "Behold thy gods O Israel which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" . . . and this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one, even to Dan (1 Kings xii. 28-30). Yet there are always those in a nation "who have not bowed the knee to Baal nor kissed him." Italy is a Roman Catholic country, but to marry an Italian does not mean that one necessarily marries a Roman Catholic; or that one who marries an Hindu marries an idolater. So there were some whom God had reserved to Himself of whom Hosea was certainly one and no doubt Gomer was another. Why not? since there is no definite charge against her.

It might be urged that the word "adulteress" in iii. 1. is definite

and cannot be so easily disposed of. In the absence of details and definite statements that Gomer is the same woman, we are at liberty to put another construction upon the verse than the one generally accepted and which we have stated in the first part of this article.

The facts given in iii. 1 should be viewed as a second marriage. We may suppose Gomer to have died and later Hosea contemplates marrying again. Many years have passed by since he gave such ominous names to his children who were constant living witnesses of the warnings and threatenings to the nation expressed again and again by the prophet. His warnings, his threatenings, his exhortations fell on deaf ears. They failed to produce any sign of repentance or reform. The rulers despised his words, and mocked the messenger. Their sin became more and more pronounced, their idolatry deeper, their alliances broader, and when Hosea seeks a second marriage he is restricted again to a woman of the Northern tribes, whom God, to mark His greater displeasure at their determination to adhere to their own ways, now uses a stronger term, a word that applies to the more heinous sin where one party is married. This is confirmed by the phrase, "Who look to other gods and love flagons of wine." They expected prosperity from the worshipping of false gods and making alliances with other nations.

Who and what was this woman whom Hosea wishes to marry, for which marriage he receives God's permission? According to Hebrew law, a person who became poor might sell himself to a Hebrew, but he was not to be treated as a bond servant. He might sell himself to a rich stranger from whence he might be redeemed by relatives or by himself, the price being fixed according to the date between the commencement of service and the year of jubilee (Lev. xx. 25, 39 ff.). It was also permitted to a man to sell his daughter and she to become the wife of the purchaser (Exod. xxi. 7 ff.). We can imagine that in the Kingdom during the interregnum of at least twenty-two years after the death of Jeroboam, followed by several revolutions and by regicide (2 Kings xv. 8 ff.) many families would become poor and so needy and ready to sell a daughter at such price as Hosea states. There is no reason, therefore, to suppose but that this woman, too, was pure, honourable and devout, and not at all the mistress of any paramour.

In both the above explanations Hosea in his conduct, and the character of the women, are in the sphere of law and order, and moral rectitude as required by the laws and regulations given by God Himself for the guidance of His people. For the neglect of which the prophet severely and unreservedly condemns the nation. He who preaches and teaches the law must himself be a doer of the law, otherwise his message will lose all its power and influence. The expression, "Do as I say and not as I do," would be as disdainfully rejected then as now in these enlightened days.

## IV. THE LESSONS ARE NOT IN THE MARRIAGES BUT IN

a. The Names of the Children.

β. The Separation of the Second Wife.

Such phrases as these, "Prodigal wife," "Unfaithful and thankless," "Sold herself for money," "Tragedy of the prophet's life," "She proved unfaithful to his trust," "Fled to her paramour," are utterly beside the mark, and do not apply to Gomer, nor was there any tragedy in the marriage. There is no reason to suppose such to be the case: for the lesson does not lie in the marriage, but in the names given to the children. The marriage to Gomer is the necessary preliminary to the existence of the children. It is necessarily recorded to make it clear that the prophecy applies entirely to the Northern tribes. Hosea belonged by birth to them, Gomer must also be the same by birth, so that the children shall be reckoned wholly and entirely of the same. They thereby become fully representative, and leave no room to divert the lesson from its direct application which might have been the case if the woman had been a native of Judah.

The naming of the children would be of very great interest to relatives and friends, as is seen in naming of John the Baptist. They all remonstrated with his mother for calling him John, saying, "there is none of thy kindred that is called by this name," and appealed to the father, and when in answer he wrote, "His name is John, and they all marvelled" (Luke i. 63). Names, too, often carry with them something of special note and significance as Esau and Jacob (Gen. xxv. 24-26). So also the change of the names of Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel, whereby God, associating His name with theirs, assured each of His blessing, His presence, His purpose. The names given to Hosea's children under Divine guidance are to be significant of the future of the nation, living witnesses moving daily among the people, so that friends and neighbours would be astonished, report the strangeness of it and thus it would be made known far and wide along with the significant message. Nor could the message be forgotten, for not only the contemporaries of Hosea, but those of the children (for children are keen to note anything strange about each other's names), and even the succeeding generation so long as the children lived would those names be witnesses and call attention to the prophecy and purpose of God as did the children of Isaiah in Judah at a later age, assure Judah of a deliverance from the threatened danger from Syria (Isa. vii. 3 ff. ; viii. 7 ff.).

The first child named Jezreel was significant of avenging wrong and causing the kingdom to cease. The final conflict would be in the valley of Jezreel. The name is associated historically with the committal of crime, injustice and its punishment. It recalls to mind how Saul perished in this valley (1 Sam. xxix-xxx.) for the sin of inquiring of a woman with a familiar spirit and not of God (1 Chron. x. 13-14). He had forsaken God and failed to trust Him, so God forsook him and he perished. It was here that Ahab put

to death Naboth at the instigation of his wife Jezebel, and possessed his vineyard inherited by Divine right and inalienable (1 Kings viii. 28-29). It was here that Jezebel perished (2 Kings ix). Here also the Baal worshippers were destroyed (2 Kings x). Hence the name wherever and whenever heard was singularly ominous of coming disaster for wrongdoing. It indicated the fall of Samaria and the captivity of the people recorded in 2 Kings xvii. 6, which came to pass some seventy-five years after the child was named and the prophecy uttered. Thus ended the dynasty of Jehu in the fourth generation (2 Kings xv. 10-12). And the Kingdom of the house of Israel ceased, its power was broken in the valley of Jezreel.

The name of the second child was Lo-ruhamah, "Not-having-obtained-mercy," or as some translate, "unpitied," which was to signify that God would not again have mercy upon the nation. He would not pity them when He saw their distress through oppression of foreign nations. He would leave them to their fate, to be taken captive by their enemies. This would stand in marked contrast with God's mercy upon the House of Judah which would be spared and saved by direct Divine intervention. The name therefore kept before the minds of the people for three generations this ignominious end. The fulfilment is clearly seen in the historical record of the events when Sennacherib's army overran the country, took Samaria and deported the people. Yet while that same army overran the cities of Judah and surrounded Jerusalem it perished by the unseen hand of God in a night. . . . And so Judah was saved not by her own power, but by God (2 Kings xviii-xix).

God had in the past spared the nation on several occasions and under the prophecy of Jonah, King Jeroboam II had prospered, recovered cities and strengthened his defences. But now the end must inevitably follow by God withdrawing His pitying mercy. The day of grace was past owing to their persistent sin of idolatry and alliances.

The third child was a son and received the name Lo-ammi, meaning, "Not My people." They were to be disowned and God would not be their God. The nation being deported would forfeit its special relationship to God as belonging to Him above all people. Thus the Kingdom of Israel would come to an end of which Our Lord's words are an echo over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stoned them which were sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." He disowned the Temple, no longer His but "yours" (Matt. xxiii. 37-38). Such is the significant meaning and application of the names of the children explained by Hosea himself. They helped to enforce his prophecies as constant reminders. The historical events confirm the prophecies.

We now turn to the second marriage. We have given reasons for considering this woman not to be the same with Gomer, and

an event much later in the prophet's life. If she had been impure it would have been no strange thing for the prophet to put her away in seclusion. There was no reason in law to do so except in the case of a captive taken from another nation (Deut. xxi. 13). It is this extraordinary act which was intended to cause a sensation among the neighbours as in the case of the names of the children. It is similar to Ezekiel when he refrained from mourning for his wife. It served to call attention of the people to his prophetic utterances (Ezek. xxiv. 15 ff.). As then this woman was excluded from all social ordinary intercourse and from her husband, so the people would be deprived of their kingdom and all religious ceremonies, and yet they would not be absorbed into any other nation. They would remain for God in the Gospel days.

#### V.

This interpretation enforces the message which the prophet has to convey to the people, and avoids all moral difficulties, and renders the whole story consonant with the honour and glory of God.

The marriage of Gomer, the names of the children, the purchase of the woman, her seclusion, are all literal facts as stated, but the names of the children, and the seclusion of the woman are symbolical acts of God's purposes and dealings with the nation. The terms "whoredoms" and "adulteress" are both explained in their own context as allegorical of the national character in having forsaken God, like a woman who had forsaken her husband.

In all this we do not detract the least from the message of God's love to the people. The nation as such had failed; but arising as it were out of the ashes, Phoenix-like, there is to be a new united kingdom under one head, even the Lord Jesus Christ, Who succeeds to the throne of His father David in the Gospel dispensation (Luke i. 32, 33). Then Jew and Gentile alike will be ruled over by Him, when Israel and Judah shall be as one. "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (Isa. xi. 13). This kingdom lies on a higher plane and stands on a wider basis. It rises to the height of the spiritual and embraces all nations. It points to the Gospel dispensation when the people shall be gathered under one appointed Head. Hosea looks into the dim future. He sees the glory of Christ and His Kingdom, chapters i. 10-ii. 1 and iii. 5. St. Paul and St. Peter confirm this by quoting these words and applying them to the gospel (Rom. ix. 25-27; Peter ii. 10).