

Gomer

1. “**Keil** believes the children were the result of adulterous acts of the wife, born before her marriage to Hosea; for Keil holds that Gomer was a prostitute before she married Hosea, a view already seen as unlikely. **Harper** believes that the first child was Hosea’s but that the second and third were those of another man, since their names are of a different type from the first. This is possible. Yet we should realize that all three names were designated by God for their symbolic significance respecting his own relation to Israel. They may then have all been Hosea’s own children.” – Leon J. Wood in volume #7 of “The expositor’s Bible commentary”
2. **J. Andrew Dearman** in New International Commentary on the Old Testament series “The book of Hosea” –
 - a. “A reading of Hosea 1-3 raises a number of questions for interpretation that can be grouped in three categories:
 - i. The Promiscuously Adulterous Female:
 1. Is the Gomer of chapter 1 the mother of chapter 2 and also the unnamed adulteress of chapter 3?
 2. How many women are depicted in chapters 1-3?
 - ii. Narrative Sequence:
 1. Do chapters 1-3 provide a basic sequence of events – marriage, marriage breakdown, reconciliation?
 2. Or, is the first-person account of chapter 3 the earliest presentation of the marriage, with chapter 1 a later, originally parallel, rendering?
 3. Regarding sequence, is the command to marry a “woman of harlotry” presented retrospectively (i.e., Hosea married normally, his wife’s promiscuity developed subsequently)?
 4. Or, did the command come initially to him as his sense of prophetic call, so that the woman he chose had already been involved in some form of sexual misconduct?
 - iii. Symbol and Reality:
 1. Should these chapters be read only as a symbolic rendering of Israel’s history (allegory, parable, vision, dream account)?
 2. Or, in their symbolic import do they also reflect actual events in the life of Hosea, son of Beeri, and his family?
 - b. “Perhaps it is best to see Hosea’s marriage, the naming of the three children, and the acquiring of an adulteress as public acts to illustrate a prophetic message, with the offensiveness, indeed the impurity and scandalousness of the report, as integral to the prophetic sign....Mother and children are metaphorical symbols for Israel and the land...The goal, therefore, is to render Israel and the land in breach of covenant with YHWH through sign-act and literary symbol, not to provide a simple digest of family history.”
3. Isaiah’s symbolic children:
 - a. Isaiah 7:1-9 – “
 - b. Isaiah 8:1-4 –“
 - c. The children are signs (‘ot in the Hebrew Is. 8:1, 3)
 - d. Isaiah was apparently married to a prophetess (Isaiah 8:3) who also served in a symbolic role.

- e. Isaiah went naked and barefoot for three years as a sign (or 'ot) against Egypt and Cush in Isaiah 20:1-6
- 4. **John Calvin**: "It seems not consistent with reason, that the Lord should thus gratuitously render his Prophet contemptible; for how could he expect to be received on coming abroad before the public, after having brought on himself such a disgrace? If he had married a wife such as is here described, he ought to have concealed himself for life rather than to undertake the Prophetic office. Their opinion, therefore, in not probable, who think that the Prophet had taken such a wife as is here described."
- 5. **J. Andrew Dearman** in New International Commentary on the Old Testament series "The book of Hosea" –
 - a. "The thought that God would ask a prophet to do something immoral has caused consternation, so that a number of interpreters have concluded that 1:2 is a retrospective presentation, produced by the prophet and his editors after the fact, when the prophet had come to realize the spiritual relevance of his family turmoil over his wife's adultery. This would mean that Hosea married in acceptable fashion, only later to discover his wife's infidelities. After discovery, he came to see that his anger and disappointment mirrored that of God toward wayward Israel. According to this view, he presents his personal circumstances in literary form as originating with God, including a proleptic description of his wife's promiscuity. Such a retrospective view is plausible. (**Andersen** and **Freedman** commentary is a sustained presentation from this point of view.). Since Gomer is charged with adultery (Hosea 2:2), so the interpretation goes, her promiscuity began after her marriage. Some find the retrospective view difficult to square with 3:1 and the statement that 'the Lord spoke to me again', issuing a command to go and love an adulteress. In this case, it is clear that the command to re-acquire or to reconcile with an adulteress presupposes that Hosea enters the relationship already knowing of her infidelities...Nevertheless, one can neither find a beginning to her sexual history nor reconstruct much of her marital history from the command in 3:1. It is simply a claim that she had committed adultery prior to her (re)acquisition by Hosea. The difficulty comes in distinguishing a legal meaning for 'adultery', as it might apply to Gomer in Israelite society, from its metaphorical meaning of faithlessness, with her representing Israel in reach of covenant fidelity.
 - i. Gomer may, for example, have been married to someone else and subsequently divorced before her marriage to Hosea.
 - ii. She may have engaged in sexual relations with someone other than her husband.
 - iii. Her 'adultery' could be related to one or more fertility practices
 - iv. Or, even commercial prostitution to support herself during her estrangement from Hosea.
 - b. "Interpreters who see chapter 3 as a parallel account of 1:2-9 could be correct, but it is a conclusion based on taking the two passages from their current contexts and drawing a historical judgment from a hypothetical reconstruction of their prehistory."
 - c. "The issue turns on the question of reading Hosea 1-3 as a unit and whether an editor has contrived a false sequence of events through the reordering of 1:2 and 3:1 and the adding of the third-person report in 1:2-9. Otherwise, is not the more natural reading of the unit one in which details from chapters 1-2 are presupposed in chapter 3, so that the latter serves as a sequel?"

- d. "With respect to a sequence of events, **Rowley** makes a persuasive case that while Hosea 1-3 provides only a few details, it is a basic summary of Hosea's marriage and family life used as a comparison to the Israel/YHWH relationship.
- i. He married a prostitute, however the term is defined
 - ii. She bore three children
 - iii. She and Hosea separated over her adultery
 - iv. Subsequently the two of them reconciled
- e. "Such a conclusion answers affirmatively one of the questions: Are Gomer (ch. 1), the immoral mother (ch. 2) and the unnamed adulteress (ch. 3) the same woman? One reads across the grain of Hosea 1-3 rather than with it, to conclude that Hosea married a second woman in chapter 3. That option seems open, since oddly Gomer is not explicitly named in 3:1, but neither are the children. Silence is not a persuasive argument to find in the unnamed woman a second wife of Hosea, any more than the silence with respect to children in 3:1 means that there were no children. The symbolic representation of Israel is better maintained if one spouse represents the corporate identity of people from adultery to reconciliation."
- f. "What, therefore, might it mean when Gomer is described in 1:2 as a 'woman of harlotry'?"
- i. "One starts with the recognition that Gomer is a symbol for the people of God, just as her children are. In metaphorical terms she is a vehicle representing the tenor, which is faithless Israel.
 - ii. "As a female she may more particularly represent the people as defined by land or capital city (Samaria), since both of these entities in Hebrew are feminine in gender.
 - iii. "Her marriage to Hosea is a symbol of the covenant that God established with Israel.
 - iv. "And the charges of prostitution and adultery (2:2) against her represent God's charge that Israel had forsaken him, served other deities and otherwise failed to maintain the standards of covenant obedience in the realm of political relations.
- g. "Does Gomer's symbolic role as harlot include actual prostitution or adultery on her part, or does the charge simply reflect that she was an Israelite engaged in the cultic and social misdeeds symbolized in the metaphor? Any answer is speculative, since the textual evidence under consideration is not sufficient for drawing a firm conclusion.
- h. "It seems probable that Hosea and Gomer were actually married, even though their relationship is configured literally as a prophetic symbolic act. Stated differently, certain details of their marriage and family were adopted to illustrate a prophetic message. If this is true, then symmetry between person and portrayal would suggest that Gomer was involved in misconduct both before and during her marriage to Hosea, some of which was sexual in nature. The form of her promiscuity remains elusive because it is Israel, not Gomer who is the primary agent being rendered as harlotrous. As readers and hearers, we must attend to the target being rendered, namely Israel."
- i. Her harlotry, however, is primarily not about her but about Israel. This is the important matter for understanding the claims of the book. Once this issue is acknowledged, it is better also to acknowledge the difficulty of moving behind the metaphorical use of sexual terms and to remain reticent, rather than to define more specifically Gomer's

sexual practices. To concentrate on the person of Gomer rather than the people of Israel is to miss the forest because of attention to a symbolic tree.”

- j. “It is possible that the metaphorical description of harlotry simply marks Gomer out as an Israelite woman, since all of Israel is under the charge of harlotry. The realism of a symbolic act, however which is the basis of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer, would suggest otherwise. It is more likely that she engaged in promiscuous sexual behavior, even if its precise form cannot be further identified with certainty.”
 - k. **Paul A. Kruger** says the vocabulary describing Gomer, while metaphorical in application is Israel, is that of a prostitute and adulteress.”
 - l. **Hornsby** says “the description of Gomer is largely that of a prostitute.”
6. **J. Glen Taylor**, Ph.D., Yale University writes in “Zondervan Illustrated bible Backgrounds Commentary”:
- a. “ ‘Take to yourself an adulterous wife’ (1:2) – The Hebrew word translated “adulterous” (*zenunim*) is not a technical term for a prostitute; it is rather a general term describing the promiscuous sexual behavior of a woman who is either betrothed or married Its range of meaning can nonetheless include the sexual behavior of a prostitute” (Nahum 3:4 – “And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms.”)
 - b. “Regarding the possibility of her involvement in prostitution, we must rule out for lack of historical evidence any notion that Hosea’s wife was likely involved in what is normally meant by sacred prostitution – that is, prostitution at a temple where the sex act was done imitatively to conjure up fertility among the gods. Moreover, contrary to **Andersen** and **Freedman**, the Hebrew syntax of the phrase in which ‘adulterous’ occurs can (and usually does) describe the present behavior of the wife, thereby favoring the notion that Gomer is promiscuous at the time Hosea marries her.
 - c. “In addition, the Hebrew syntax of ‘to yourself’ draws attention to the implications of the command for the person who receives the command, suggesting in this case that Yahweh knows that he is asking Hosea to do something ominous, at personal cost.”
 - d. “The use of such a general term ‘adulterous’ also suggest that the Hebrew text is less concerned than the modern reader to specify the context of the illicit sexual behavior (i.e., whether an adulteress or prostitute).”
 - e. “Finally, assuming that Hosea is asked to marry an unchaste person, one remaining moral issue is certain:
 - i. “Given the great moral offense that would otherwise apply to Gomer’s first husband, Hosea marries a woman whose husband is no longer on the scene.
 - ii. “Gomer is thus likely a prostitute, or else a promiscuous divorcee or widow.
 - iii. “And sicne the legitimacy of Gomer’s children pre-Hosea is questioned, she was most likely a prostitute.”
 - f. “For any who still might not be able to let go of this problem [of Gomer being a prostitute when Hosea married her], consider the following:
 - i. “First, an important rule of biblical interpretation is to dwell on only those problems that the text by its own wording invites us to entertain rather than on the problems that modern-day readers bring to the text.”
 - ii. “Second, this is not lesson on whom to marry. God often uses biblical characters to teach us things about himself without ever expecting us to imitate the actions or behaviors of those characters.”

- iii. “Finally, desperate situations sometimes call for unusual practices. This being so, God was not unfair to ask Hosea to marry a prostitute in order to help save God’s people from apostasy, in the same way that a fire chief is not unfair to ask a firefighter to break into a house in order to save a family trapped inside. In such circumstances Hosea can no more be aptly called unwise or immoral than can the firefighter be considered a burglar.”

7. **Duane A. Garrett**, The New American Commentary “Hosea” says:

- a. “That Gomer was guilty of idolatry but was not an adulteress is clever but unlikely. Again the problem is that such preaching would have only confused his audience. Even if Gomer has worshiped the Baals,’ they might have reasoned, ‘Why does Hosea regard this as unfaithfulness against himself?’ Has he begun to think of himself as God?’
 - i. A variant of this interpretation argues that Gomer and the children bore the taint of adultery by virtue of being members of a depraved society. But if such was sufficient reason for him to call her and the children a woman of promiscuity’ and ‘children of promiscuity,’ then could not the same be said of Hosea himself?
 - ii. In fact, there is no reason to suppose that the text means anything other than what the ordinary sense of the words ‘promiscuous woman’ indicates.
 - iii. It is of course possible that Gomer became promiscuous as a result of involvement in the Baal cult, but it is not credible that she was in the cult but was faithful to Hosea.”
- b. “We should also reject the interpretation that Gomer and the woman of chapter 3 are two different women. Even though the Hebrew of 3:1 only calls her ‘a woman’ and not ‘your wife,’ context implies that Gomer is meant.
 - i. “First of all, she is the only immoral woman we know anything about in the book. It seems odd that Hosea, after speaking of Gomer as the paradigm of faithlessness, would suddenly refer to some other immoral woman without even mentioning her name.”
 - ii. “Also the word ‘again’ implies continuity. A question here is whether ‘again’ in 3:1 goes with ‘the LORD said’ or with ‘go, love.’
 - 1. “If ‘the LORD said to me again, go, love...’ ’ is correct, it is possible (but not certain) that a second woman is meant.
 - 2. “If the correct interpretation is ‘the LORD said, Go again and love a woman ...’ ’ then it is much more likely that he was to love Gomer again.
 - 3. In my view the former is preferable. Even so, as we will try to show, chapter 3, unlike chapter 1, does not concern the taking of a new wife but the recovery and correction of a wayward wife.”
 - iii. “We are thus left with interpretations which differ only in that:
 - 1. “one asserts that Gomer was already a promiscuous woman when Hosea married her”
 - 2. “whereas the other states that she was not yet immoral at the time of their marriage.
 - a. “The later perhaps seems more attractive since it avoids having to explain why God would demand that his prophet marry an immoral woman – perhaps even a prostitute.”
 - b. “On further investigation, however the later interpretation cannot stand.”

- c. Concerning the option that Gomer “not yet immoral at the time of their marriage”:
- i. “First, the comfort that this interpretation gives is very cold. Would it really have been easier on Hosea to marry a woman that he knew was going to be promiscuous over against a woman who already was? If anything, the torment of this story seems worse.”
 - ii. “Furthermore, ’eset zenunim (“an adulterous wife,’ 1:2) cannot be credibly translated ‘a woman with immoral tendencies.’ It is difficult to imagine how Hosea would have gone about seeking a woman who was still chaste but who had tendencies toward promiscuity, and the whole idea is if anything more offensive than just saying that he married a prostitute.”
 - iii. Most significantly, the text clearly states that first Hosea received a command to marry an immoral woman and then did so (1:2-3).”
- d. Concerning the option that Gomer was an immoral woman already when Hosea took her to be his wife:
- i. “Hosea, having been commanded to marry an immoral woman, took Gomer as his wife.”
 - ii. “after some time and the birth of three children, she abandoned him for other lovers. Then apparently she fell into destitution.”
 - iii. “Again at God’s direction Hosea went after her and found her, redeemed her (perhaps from slavery), and took her home.”
 - iv. “Proponents of this view have often regarded it as another example of a prophetic speech-act in which the prophet does something strange or shocking to carry home his message. Isaiah walked about naked and barefoot for three years as a sign of the coming exile of Egypt and Cush (Isaiah 20:3-5). Ezekiel lay on his side for over a year near a small model of Jerusalem under siege (Ezekiel 4-5); he also was forbidden to mourn when his wife died (24:15-18). Jeremiah did not marry (Jer. 16:2)”
 - v. “While it is true that Hosea’s marriage was a speech-act – indeed, it is the most extreme example in the Bible – this alone is not sufficient to explain this astonishing history. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 forbids a man to remarry his wife after a divorce if she has married another man in the interim. Although probably not technically in violation of this law, because it does not seem that she had remarried in the interim, Hosea’s action of taking Gomer back pushes the envelope. If it was wrong for a man to take back a woman after she had been married to another man, what was Hosea doing taking Gomer back after she had been with countless men?”
 - vi. “Surprisingly, however the very offense of Hosea’s action strongly confirms that this is indeed the correct interpretation. God has divorced Israel just as Hosea has divorced Gomer, but in both cases grace triumphs over righteous jealousy and the demands of the law. Like the cross itself, Hosea’s action is a stumbling block. A man does not normally take back a woman who has behaved the way Gomer did. But we must acknowledge this as a revelation of grace through suffering.”
 - vii. “Hosea’s sad story is important in another equally paradoxical way. One would think that having married an immoral woman, and then having the marriage collapse because of the wife’s gross infidelity, would be enough to disqualify

anyone from claiming the role of God's spokesman. But the opposite is true. Hosea offers his private tragedies as his credentials for serving as God's spokesman."

1. "As we have seen in the introduction to this commentary, Hosea and God echo one another in this book."
 2. First one speaks, and then the other. The human serves as advocate for God, but as the two speak, they speak common words from a common experience."
 3. "Hosea has endured as husband the same treatment God has endured as covenant Lord of Israel.
 4. "More than any other, Hosea has the right to speak in God's name. He has shared in God's experiences and therefore can speak with God's heart."
- viii. "Scholars have long pondered whether the phrase 'adulterous wife' means that she was a prostitute or simply immoral.
1. The Hebrew phrase simply means 'promiscuous woman.'
 2. Some scholars have suggested that if Hosea had meant that she was a prostitute, he would have plainly said so and that 'promiscuous woman' implies only that she had immoral tendencies. **This suggestion fails for several reasons:**
 - a. "First, 'promiscuous woman' does not describe what she might do but what she actually does. Therefore, whether or not she was a prostitute, she was not simply a girl whom one might suspect would someday turn immoral."
 - b. "Second, the word found here, zenunim ('promiscuity'), is a favorite of Hosea's, and its use here implies that he was more interested in conveying her behavior and character than her profession. Hence he did not use the more common word zona, 'prostitute.'"
 - i. The Hebrew phrase 'promiscuous woman' is comparable to the Hebrew phrases for 'slanderer' and 'contentious woman and thus simply means a 'promiscuous woman'.
 - ii. The Hebrew phrase for 'contentious woman is not someone who might someday become contentious but someone who already is; the same is true of 'slanderer'."
 - c. "Third, the whole question of whether she was a prostitute or simply sexually loose reflects more of modern social realities than ancient Israelite social realities."
 - i. "In our society of female independence a woman might be sexually loose but not receive payment for it."
 - ii. "In ancient Israel this would have been the exception. (An example of an exception would be Potiphar's wife – the sexually free wife of a wealthy man.) An immoral woman would generally not have been married or have any other means of support, so she naturally would take payment from her sexual favors. Such women might not have worked in brothels, but if prostitution is defined as giving sex for payment, they certainly were prostitutes."

- iii. “Fourth, evidence elsewhere in the book suggests that she was a prostitute. Hosea 2:5 refers to the fee paid a prostitute and that 22 may allude to ornaments worn by prostitutes.”

8. **Douglas Stuart**, Word Biblical Commentary “Hosea-Jonah”:

- a. 1:2 – “The [Hebrew] term cannot mean ‘a prostitute’ or ‘a prostitute for a wife.’ ‘Prostitute would appear in Hebrew as either [Hebrew term] or [Hebrew term] (as in Josh. 2:1 and Judges 11:1 and etc.) Instead this Hebrew term is a plural abstract refers more to a trait than a profession. The entire sequence of events in chapters 1-3 demonstrates nothing about Gomer’s marital faithfulness. There is no evidence that she was adulterous and none that she was a practicing prostitute.”
- b. “Hosea’s later use of the Hebrew term in 1:2 helps fix the definition, particularly as the word is used in the [Hebrew phrase] translated ‘spirit of prostitution’ or ‘prostituting spirit’ in 4:12 and 5:4. There, the clear referent is the inclinations of Israel, whose ‘cohabitations’ with all sorts of syncretistic and heterodox doctrines and practices are metaphorically depicted as analogous to the promiscuity of a common prostitute. Israel’s waywardness and infidelity constitute a national ‘prostitution’; Gomer, as a citizen of that thoroughly wayward nation is described, just as any Israelite woman could be, as an [Hebrew phrase] precisely because she is a typical Israelite, and this is an indictment in itself. God has commanded Hosea to marry a woman who by reason of being involved in the endemic Israelite national unfaithfulness is ‘prostituting.’ To marry any Israelite woman was to marry a ‘prostituting woman,’ so rife was the religious promiscuity of Hosea’s day.”
- c. “Hosea’s ‘prostituting children’ were so called because, like their mother, they would be part of the corrupt, faithless nation. No suggestion is made that the children were:
 - i. “born in adultery to Gomer before she married Hosea”
 - ii. “Automatically inclined to inherit their mother’s tendency to promiscuity”
 - iii. “not Hosea’s own natural offspring.”
- d. “Rather, precisely because the ‘whole land has gone thoroughly into prostitution away from Yahweh’ they are here linked with ‘prostitution.’ Indeed, according to the prevailing metaphor at this point in the periscope, it would have been conceivable for Yahweh to have described even Hosea as ‘a prostituting man’, or for Hosea to have replied, a la Isaiah 6:5, ‘Woe is me, for I am a prostituting man, living among prostituting people.’ ”
- e. “ ‘Gomer became pregnant and bore him a son’ – The prepositional ‘him/to him’ is not present in the parallel statements of the birth of the other two children, 1:6 and 1:8. But it is not possible to press the grammar to the point of concluding that Jezreel was legitimate (born to ‘him’) while *No Compassion* and *Not My People* were not. Hebrew has no such fixed syntactical patterns for discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children. The general movement toward brevity of expression as successive children are born, evidenced even in the lack of identification of Yahweh as the speaker in 1:6 and 1:9, means that nothing certain can be made of the presence or absence of the Hebrew word translated ‘him/to him’ in those verses. Indeed, several manuscripts omit the Hebrew word translated ‘him/to him/’ at all three points.

Commentator		GOMER				CHIL	DREN		
	Hosea's wife <u>became a prostitute</u>	Hosea <u>Married a prostitute</u>	Gomer is symbolic	Gomer (ch.1) and woman (ch.3) are the same	Ch. 1 was written retrospective (after events occurred knowing what Gomer did)	Adopted By Hosea; Children of other men	Hosea's own children	Jezebel, Hos. only Kid	S y m b o l i s
Keil		✓				✓			
Harper								✓	
J. Andrew Dearman		✓		✓					✓
John Calvin	✓		✓						
Andersen	✓				✓				
Freedman	✓				✓				
Rowley		✓							
Paul A. Kruger		✓							
Hornsby		✓							
J. Glen Taylor		✓							
Duane A. Garrett		✓		✓					
Douglas Stuart			✓						✓
TOTAL	3	7	2						

Biblical support that Israel was faithful, pure bride in the beginning for Yahweh:

1. Jeremiah 2:2-3 – “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt; disaster came upon them,’ declares the LORD.”
2. Ezekiel 16:8 – “Then I passed by you and saw you, and you were indeed old enough for love. So I spread My cloak over you and covered your nakedness. I pledged Myself to you, entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine, declares the Lord GOD.”
3.