

HEARTBREAK IN HEAVEN
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There are few definitive words to describe God, other than those we cannot apply to ourselves. We are not eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, or holy, but God can be all of these. Many words we use to describe ourselves can also apply to the God who made us. One word we use to characterize Him is judgment. The Old Testament in many places paints a frightening picture of the eternal judge who will decide our fate at the end of time. Insofar as it goes, that description is correct. Scriptures describe Jehovah as jealous, wrathful, and terrifying at times. That is also an accurate portrayal, insofar as it goes. When we catch a glimpse though, of our Heavenly Father when His heart is breaking, we have trouble reconciling that with our views on what God should be.

The **eleventh chapter of Hosea** speaks of God's need to uphold righteousness using correction, coupled with grief over the necessity to do so. Imagine having to punish our children, but hating the hurting of them, and we might be close to God's feelings when we disobey and sin. The people of Israel had been called out of Egypt, but they had forgotten why. They are referred to elsewhere in scriptures as God's "bride in the wilderness." If this was their role and destiny, they had a great deal to learn about fidelity. The entire book of **Hosea** is a tale of the patient love of a husband toward an unfaithful wife. In **verses 2-4 of chapter 1**, the prophet is commanded to marry a whore to illustrate God's commitment to Israel. Here we also find the birth of Hosea's first son.

This child's name and the names of the next two are interesting studies on the relationship between Israel and God being slowly destroyed by mistrust. Jezreel's name meant, "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." They were warned God was preparing to punish Israel. When Gomer conceived again and had a daughter, God commanded her name would be Loruhamah," saying He would no longer have mercy upon the house of Israel; but would utterly take them away. "Loruhamah," meant "not my loved one." By this point in Hosea's marriage, the prophet suspected the child might not be his. When she had weaned her daughter, another son was born. Then said God, "Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." "Loammi" meant, "Not my people." There was no longer any doubt that she had other lovers. Most people would have long since washed their hands of such a treacherous spouse.

Hosea 2:5-13 tells of grief and anger prophet as the husband discovers proof of his wife's betrayal of his love. **Hosea 2:23** is a chilling prophecy wherein God promises He will bury the bride that is unfaithful to Him and put another, who once were not His people, in the place Israel had disdained. He foretells the replacement of His originally chosen wilderness bride with the bride described as the New Testament Church. Imagine a prostitute becoming a preacher's wife. It is as difficult as imagining a sinful mankind becoming the eternal companion of a holy God.

Imagine how we would feel if our spouse were unfaithful to us. Now imagine how God hurts when we worship other gods. The **fourth chapter of Hosea** warns of judgment coming to Israel because of infidelity and worship of false gods and idols. The **eleventh chapter** has God lamenting over the necessity of punishment for the one He loves. Still, **Revelation 3:19** tells us it is love that makes punishment necessary. The purpose of correction should be restoration of a relationship damaged by misbehavior. If that is not the motivation, punishment degenerates quickly to just abuse or revenge. We punish our children to correct them, to hopefully result in a better life for them in their future. God does the same thing. He has no interest in watching us fail or need further punishment. **Ezekiel 18:31-32** assures us of this.

Instead, this God who grieves over us desires to protect us from the storm, from the coming consequences of our mistakes. He compares Himself in **Matthew 23:37** to a hen using her own body and wings as shelters to protect her chicks from the storm. Those He wanted to protect were the people of Jerusalem who were killing the prophets He had sent to warn them. If we would let Him, He would shelter us from our foolishness and cover us with His very blood. We choose instead to return to the same lifestyle from which God's grace first rescued us.

Gomer also chose to return to her former lifestyle of prostitution. Hosea had the right, under the Law, to have her stoned to death and wash out his shame with her blood. Instead, out of love for her, he

chose to redeem her. On the auction block to be sold as a slave to pay for her debts, her buyer was her husband. Hosea took her back again and restored her as his wife. God has the right to exact the penalty of death for our sins, but instead chooses to wash out our shame with His blood. He chooses to redeem us out of love for us.

If we were God, we would have abandoned us long ago. He made a decision though, before time began, that the only way we would go to Hell would be over His dead body. Having allowed us to crucify Him, He is not willing to make His sacrifice meaningless. So long as there remains any possibility of restoration, He keeps trying to redeem us. We read in **1 Peter 3:9** that His longsuffering, or patience toward us, means we do not have to pay for our sins ourselves. We have a promise of mercy, if we will act upon it. **Micah 7:18-19** says if we repent and turn away from sin, God also repents and turns away from the necessity of punishment. He delights in showing us mercy. When we repent, or turn to avoid pain, **Luke 15:10** tells us we change the atmosphere of heaven. Instead of the grief of a Father who must correct His children out of love, we find angels rejoicing. With our eternal relationship restored, that celebration will culminate at the marriage supper, where the word heartbroken will no longer describe the bridegroom.

Why would God show us mercy? So He can welcome His eternal bride home, to live with Him forever.