



Watchman Prayer Alert

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. – Isaiah 62:6

Passionate God Pursues His People

They had worked hard to establish their own identity, and they had built a name for themselves. This people was incredibly religious and believed they understood the world around them and the works of God. At the same time they refused to acknowledge the working of God in their history and in their lives, and they paid the price.

Hosea the prophet was sent to Israel, and his marriage was a poignant story of love, betrayal and redemption which offers great promise for us today.

Hosea married a prostitute (Gomer) at God's command. After bearing him three children, she left him to pursue other lovers. Eventually, she found herself uncovered on the slave block offered to the highest bidder. At God's request Hosea chose to love her, and he bought her back for the equivalent of 30 pieces of silver. This story becomes a picture of God's relationship and love for His people Israel and His love for each one of us.

Nothing in me want to identify with Gomer in the story. As we dissect the book, though, it appears we have much in common with both Gomer and Israel. We may not be leaving our spouses or committing adultery, but I suspect we will all find ourselves in this story. And, we can all rejoice in the unfailing love of our the Redeemer who purchased us from the slave block while we stood in our own shame.

Though our sin may not be as overt, I wonder if we can still learn a lesson from the ancient prophet. In the book, Hosea warns that God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (Hosea 4:6) Reading through Hosea, I am captured by the number of things the people don't "know." They didn't know:

- God was their provider. (Hosea 2:8)
- Their own condition as they were aging and losing strength. (Hosea 7:9)
- God reared them and healed them. (Hosea 11:3)

In fact, Hosea goes so far as to say that there was no knowledge of God in the land. (Hosea 4:1)

At the time, the people still worshipped God, but they also made idols, worshipped Baal and offered their children up as temple prostitutes. It sounds dreadful,

but they were able to justify their practices in the name of religious devotion. They thought they were following God in their own way. They thought they understood God. In fact, they cried out, "My God, we of Israel know YOU!" (Hosea 8:2)



Is it any wonder that Hosea preached, "The people without understanding are ruined"? (Hosea 4:14) I have to wonder how the Israelites could be so deceived, believing they knew God, yet living a life so foreign to the one He chose for them. They worshipped God, yet ignored His directives

Meaning of Know/Knowledge

The word for "know" used in these verses conveys the idea of intimate understanding, as a husband like Hosea knows and loves his wife Gomer. It is not talking about knowledge of the facts or logic. It is a deep comprehension. In some cases, it is translated as acknowledge. For example, Hosea wrote, "They did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love, ... I bent down and fed them." (Hosea 11:3) In this instance, he meant that the people refused to acknowledge that God cared for them so tenderly. Even if they knew the facts intellectually, they failed to recognize God or show gratitude for God's blessings.

Looking at Israel's marvelous history, with all the miracles, I wonder how this could ever happen. Understanding the blessings of God that we have experienced, could

this be repeated today? Hosea sheds light on Israel's downward spiral. He wrote that a spirit of harlotry resides within the nation, so they chose not to acknowledge (know) God. (Hosea 5:4) Specifically, Hosea calls out the desires for carnal passion and wine which take away understanding. (Hosea 4:11) Harlotry sounds so pagan and outdated. It might sound much more acceptable if we call this a desire for pleasure or self-fulfillment or even comfort. What could be wrong with that? We could probably identify with that.

Watch Out for Dangers

I don't believe the Hebrew people set out to deny God. They just started down a slippery slope chasing what they believed would satisfy them and make them happy. In the end, they did some crazy things. Fortunately for us, Hosea documents the progression and offers some warning signs, which we need to be aware of so that we can preserve our own intimacy with Jesus.

Failure to recognize God's provision

Israel (and Gomer) did not acknowledge that it was God (or Hosea) who provided for her. (Hosea 2:8) She attributed her luxuries to her lovers, instead of her husband. In chasing after her pleasure, she forgot God. Likewise if we fail to acknowledge the blessings we receive as being from God, we can also seek our own satisfaction and simply forget our Creator.

Seeking self-gratification

Hosea warns that harlotry and wine (personal pleasure) take away the understanding. (Hosea 4:11) This understanding is not the cerebral, logical understanding. Rather, it is the knowing in the heart. The pursuit of pleasure actually steals the center of your being, your heart, your identity. In the end the "*people without understanding [heart] are ruined.*" (Hosea 4:14) This search for self-satisfaction comes at a high price.

Rejecting moral absolutes

Israel looked at the directives from God as a strange and foreign concept. (Hosea 8:12) As a result they forgot their Maker and built their own empire. (Hosea 8:14) There is something so familiar about this. When we choose to ignore the moral code designed by our Creator, then we forget the Creator and turn to our own ways. We construct our own palaces to live in. We build our own memorials. We each define our own codes of conduct and act based on what our own logic tells us is proper.

Living life my own way

Israel "*trusted in his own way.*" (Hosea 10:13) This may seem logical. It may sound right. However, if it is not

God's way, we face consequences. When you "*plow with wickedness, you reap injustice.*" Hosea calls it the fruit of lies, and it's not very tasty. That's a sad result of living life on your own terms.

Taking credit for what God has done

Ephraim [Israel] said, "*Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself; In all my labors they will find in me no iniquity, which would be sin.*" (Hosea 12:8) Here Israel took credit for what God did. Israel believed they were responsible for their own success. Rather than acknowledging the blessings of God, they puffed out their chest and patted themselves on the back.

We would call it an American success story. We would tell how we pulled ourselves up by the bootstraps. Unfortunately, the price of this pride includes self-deception. Israel truly believed they were without sin.

Results of Spiral Thinking

I don't believe Israel meant to leave God. They still worshipped in the temple. However, they also worshipped idols of their own making. They had God plus something. That's the way they wanted God. Sadly, I believe that inclination is a typical human tendency.

- "I want to worship God. I really do. I just need to work 90 hours a week, too."
- "I love God, but I can't give up the movies I want to see."
- "I believe God, but some of His commandments really don't make sense today."
- "I love God, and I know He understands my moral choices."
- "God is good, but I really need a bigger house."

We want God too, but we also want our comfort and our pleasure and our recreation. We want what we want, too. We want God plus something. Is that really any different from the ancients?

God withdraws

When Israel chose their own way, they fell into a thought spiral with dire consequences. Hosea said, that God withdrew from them. (Hosea 5:15) God offers a clear choice. We worship God alone or we worship other things like pleasure. We can't have it both ways. If we chose other things alongside of God, then God will return to His own place until His people acknowledge their sin and truly seek Him alone.

Reap a harvest

Hosea said, "*They sow the wind, and they reap the hurricane.*" (Hosea 8:7) The little seeds of pleasure Israel planted grew out of control and completely

enveloped the nation in destruction of its own making. Once they started down the well trod path, they found no easy return. That's the danger we face, too. We think we control the outcomes by the choices we make, but it rarely turns out as we expect when we honor anything the way we should honor God alone.

Lost identity and forgotten God

Although it is an unintended consequence, we will experience the results that Israel did. If we place the importance of our pleasures next to the position God should occupy in our thoughts, then we will forget God altogether (Hosea 2:8, 8:12, 14) and lose our own identity in the process (Hosea 4:11). We will believe the deception. (Hosea 10:13)

The abominations of Israel are beyond comprehension, but the scary part is the signposts that led up to Israel's slippery slide. The same warning signs of Hosea are plastered across billboards around our nation and news sites on every computer and touted by many forms of modern entertainment. Are we sliding down the same slippery incline toward and impending moral, economic, political and faith crisis?

Taking a Personal Inventory

I believe it is time to take stock. Take a close look in the mirror and talk with God. Given that we live in a sex-saturated culture that is more and more tolerant of perversions, I wonder how much of my own judgment has already become clouded. How far have I personally advanced toward the tipping point of the spiral thinking slide?

Have I allowed the culture I was raised in to cloud my view of God? Am I really as serious as I need to be in my devotions? Has my intimacy with God suffered? How much has my comfort become my goal? How much have I trusted in myself for provision, for health, for safety, for joy? Will I insist on doing life on my own terms? Am I really that different from ancient Israel or even the wandering Gomer?

Take a few moments to ponder each of these dangers with me and let us together ask God if we need to be making adjustments in our own lives.

1. Do I recognize all that I have as God's provision for me? Will I acknowledge the people in my life to be treasures from Heaven?
2. Am I trying to please myself, constantly seeking my own pleasures? Am I always looking for something new to make me happy? Do I feel like I'm missing something in the center of my being? What is the heart of my identity?

3. How do I view the 10 commandments? Do I still revere them as God's plan for humanity or do some of them look a little dated? Do I want to sort through them to choose which I will follow?
4. Will I say with pride, "I did it my way," or will I acknowledge God? Will I trade information about God for intimacy with God? Will my wealth continue to support my own pleasure and comfort, or will I get serious about honoring the command of God?
5. Have I ever taken credit for something God did? I work hard, but is it my hard work that pays the bills or the blessing of God that provided the job and the strength to go?

Hosea's Call

Hosea documented Israel's progression:

"As they had their pasture, they became satisfied. And being satisfied, their heart became proud. Therefore, they forgot Me." (Hosea 13:6)

The blessing of God brought prosperity. Self satisfaction with their wealth led to misplaced pride. The natural result was to forget God. What a sad state.

Fortunately, Hosea also gives us some concrete steps to take.

First, we must acknowledge God. (Hosea 6:1-3) *"Let us know. Let us press on to know the Lord."* This takes action and time and effort. We must invest something in our relationship with God.

Then, we must *"break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you."* (Hosea 10:12) Fallow ground is hard and full of weeds and often not very fertile. To break it up requires a lot of work. It may be time for us to pull a few weeds and turn over the soil of our heart until we see Jesus blooming in us.

Finally, we must return to the Lord. (Hosea 14:1) That means ONLY the Lord. We must rejoice in the pleasures that come from Him and set aside our vain attempts at self-fulfillment. The righteous will walk in the ways of the Lord. (Hosea 14:9) Like Hosea, God wants desperately to redeem His bride and bring her home. He loves us with an everlasting love and Hosea's relationship with Gomer is a perfect image of our passionate God. His desire is for us to be His people (and ONLY His).

As we enter our prayer closets, let's renew our commitment to God alone, acknowledge His provision, and bury our own attempts to complete ourselves.

