

## ***For Better or For Worse - Lessons From Old Testament Couples***

### ***Yahweh and Israel: Fulfillment Beyond Failure***

Lesson #13 for September 29, 2007

Scriptures: Exodus 3:6-14; 6:6-8; Joshua 24:1-18; Jeremiah 5:19,22; Ezekiel 16:26-29,34; Hosea 9:1; John 20:21; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 1 John 2:12.

1. Read 2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Chronicles 36:15,16. The story of the relationship between ancient Israel and their God is a tragic one. Ten to twenty years before their ultimate demise, Hosea spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel. One hundred years later, Jeremiah, the last prophet to speak to Judah before the Babylonian captivity, pled with the people of Jerusalem, but he could not prevent them from continuing in open rebellion.
2. Look at Jeremiah 2:2,3. When did God's people fit that description? "I remember your youthful loyalty, our love as newlyweds. You stayed with me through the wilderness years, stuck with me through all the hard places." (Jeremiah 2:2,3; *The Message*) Is that the way you interpret the years of wilderness wandering?
3. After their incredible deliverance from Egypt and all the miracles that led up to that, how long was it before the children of Israel turned away from God?
4. At the end of his life, Joshua called the children of Israel together and asked them to make a covenant promise with God. Read the story in Joshua 24. Joshua gave his personal testimony and ended with these words:

If you decide that it's a bad thing to worship God, then choose a god you'd rather serve—and do it today. Choose one of the gods your ancestors worshiped from the country beyond The River, or one of the gods of the Amorites, on whose land you're now living. As for me and my family, we'll worship God." The people answered, "We'd never forsake God! Never! We'd never leave God to worship other gods." (Joshua 24:15,16; *The Message*)

5. Do you think they were honest in that promise? Compare Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7. Do you think those promises were sincere?
6. As we have noted, God repeatedly used the symbolism of marriage to illustrate His relationship with the children of Israel. God instructed Jeremiah never to marry. (Jeremiah 16:2) He told Ezekiel not to weep when his wife died suddenly. (Ezekiel 24:15-19) He instructed Hosea to marry an adulterous woman and later to take her and her children back. (Hosea 1:2; 3:1) At what point in Israel's relationship with God did those "lived out" parables fit?
7. Do you think marriage is a good symbol for God's relationship with His people?
8. In many cultures, wives take the name of their husband when they marry. When we choose to become Christians, are we taking God's name? Do we ever take His name in vain?
9. What was God's plan for the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt? Did they ever even come close to fulfilling that plan?
10. God placed them on the trade routes from north to south and east to west so they could be a "light" to the entire world. What kind of witness did they become? As we have noted repeatedly in the past, ancient peoples tended to think of a nation's "god" as good and powerful if the people of that god were successful in military conquests. What do you think

the nations thought about Israel's God when they were captives in Egypt? What do you think the nations thought about Israel's God when the northern kingdom was scattered and completely lost in the days of Hosea? (2 Kings 17) When the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity? (Daniel 9:15-19)

11. During the reign of David and the early reign of Solomon, the children of Israel were generally faithful to Yahweh. But following the rebellion of Solomon and the splitting up of the two kingdoms under his son Rehoboam, the northern kingdom began an uninterrupted slide into sin, rebellion, and apostasy. Several different prophets were sent to describe that deterioration as adultery and to try to persuade God's people to become faithful. (Jeremiah 5:7; Ezekiel 16:26-29,34; Hosea 9:1)
12. Why do you think Israel was so rebellious? What did they find so attractive about those idols and those false religions? (Hosea 4:7; Jeremiah 2:11)
13. Divorce is becoming all too common, particularly in Western societies. The reasons people give for divorce are sometimes unbelievable. In the United States, one couple divorced because the wife was fed up that her husband always left the toilet seat up! In Japan, one man divorced his wife because she was left-handed.
14. Can you remember a time in your life when your relationship with God was like a honeymoon?
15. The Bible describes God as doing three things to try to reach out to His people:
  - 1) God pursues His bride. (1 Kings 6:13; Psalms 132:13; John 15:13; Revelation 3:20)
  - 2) God does everything possible—without violating our freedom—to protect us and help us to remain faithful to Him. (Zephaniah 3:17)
  - 3) God seeks to make our relationship with Him permanent. He repeatedly shows us how to come back to Him. He prepares heaven as a reward. He gave His life to answer the questions that we have raised—questions that we have raised at the bidding of Satan. Read Jeremiah 5:19; Hosea 4:17; 11:7-9.
16. Why is it that God cannot bless His people when they are unfaithful to Him? Is it because He becomes upset with them? Does He ever stop loving them? Or are there situations in which—without violating His people's freedom—God can no longer do anything for them?
17. When we sin, does Satan have any legitimate claim on us? Can he rightfully say to God, "Step back, these people have chosen to follow me"?
18. In our day what specific things can we do to show or demonstrate to the world our ongoing relationship with God? Should we support the church with our time and our money? When given the opportunity, should we witness correctly for God? Should we be willing to invite others to share our experiences? Like Moses and Job, should we defend God when His reputation is under attack?
19. Read Jeremiah 3:6-10; 7:34; 16:9; 25:10. But it seems that if we ever consider coming back to God, He will take us back at any time. (Jeremiah 33:11)
20. In virtually every prophetic message in the Old Testament, God ended with a promise of restoration if they would come back to Him. What does that tell us about God?
21. When God apparently "turned His back" on people because of their sins, was that punishment and/or God's "wrath"? What happened if they changed and turned back to Him? Is God angry—in human terms? Or is that discipline?
22. As we have noted, God has repeatedly talked of His relationship with us as being like the

relationship between a groom and his bride. Elsewhere, God called us His friends, (John 15:15) His children, (1 John 2:1) and other endearing terms. Paul even called himself a slave of God. (Romans 1:1) But what is specifically different about the relationship between a bride and groom that might best represent our relationship with God? Brides and grooms are very intimate! Could we ever have that kind of relationship with God? (Genesis 4:1; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6) Do you believe that your relationship with God is one of intimacy? The honeymoon is recognized by almost everyone as a time of special joy. Could your church promote that kind of relationship with God? How? Do you know Christians who have that kind of relationship with God?

23. Read again Hosea 3:1-3. Does God ever treat us like that? If we are willing to come back to Him, what is His goal and His desire for us? (Jeremiah 31:31-37; Galatians 3:29; Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:16,17) It is true that we have rebelled against God and that we have gone away from Him in every direction possible, but that He wants us to “come back.” He is willing to treat us as if we had never sinned! What more could we possibly ask for? What more could He do?
24. Does your current relationship with God represent a “divorce” situation or a “honeymoon” situation? What could you do to improve that relationship?

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