

After Lovers

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Hos 2:7 (BHS)

כִּי זָנְתָה אִמָּם
הַבִּישָׁה הַזֹּרְתָם
כִּי אָמְרָה אֵלֶיךָ אַחֲרַי מְאַהֲבֵי
נֹתְנֵי לֶחֶמִי וּמֵימֵי
צֹמְרֵי וּפְשֵׁתֵי שֶׁמֶן וְשִׁקּוּנֵי:

Hos 2:5 (NIV)

Their mother has been **unfaithful**
and has conceived them in disgrace.
She said, 'I will go **after my lovers**,
who give **me my** food and **my** water,
my wool and **my** linen, **my** olive oil and **my** drink.'

Notice the versification is off by 2 between Hebrew and English.

“Unfaithful” is a rather mild gloss of the sexually loaded *zanah*; compare with NLT, “Their mother is a shameless prostitute.” Note the first common singular pronominal suffix “my” (י) eight times. In line 3, the verb “to love” is *'ahab*, as in Ahab. The *m* prefix makes it a participle, “lover.” It is plural, “my lovers.” She desires to go “after” (*'ahar*) her lovers. Whew!

This is part of a larger narrative in which Israel is accused by God in diverse ways of cheating on him. She (Israel) chases other lovers, and in doing so metaphorically “plays the harlot” with them. In our verse, Israel is actually shown to credit them with providing the staples of life: food and drink and wool and so on. It is as if a nymphomaniac wife cheated repeatedly on her husband while he provides everything for her, and she convinces herself that her paramours are the ones buying her fine clothes and nice houses. What would such a husband do? In the metaphor, God is depicted as quite emotional, and responds like any cuckolded spouse would. Yahweh is presented as being emotionally invested in what his people do, and is not cool, calm, and collected. He intensely feels. (For more, see my Hosea commentary [here](#).)

The most interesting part of the verse to me is in line 3, where she says, “I will go after my lovers.” The lovers are both gods and nations like Egypt. These, she thinks, are the sources of her prosperity. In 2:13, this charge is repeated again, but with an extra comment. Using the same language, she “went after her lovers”—but then is added, “‘But she forgot me!’ says the LORD.” He wants Israel to pursue him. He wants to be their lover. He wants what they are giving to others.

This is seen other places in Hosea as well. Continuing NIV, Hos 4:12 reads, “they are unfaithful to their God.” The wooden idiom is, “They whored from under their God.” This language is echoed in the very next verse, where they sacrifice “under oak, poplar and terebinth.” The wooden idiom of 9:1 is, “you whored from upon your God”—and the second half of the verse is, “You loved a harlot’s reward upon every threshing floor.” In other words, Yahweh desires the love and devotion from them that they are spending on gods and nations. God is passionate, God is desirous, God is jealous.

And God is angry. He is presented as if he were experiencing the spectrum of emotions that a human husband would under these circumstances. He wants to punish her, but he also wants to take her back. “How can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? ... My heart is torn within me” (11:8, NLT).

The great conflict in the book of Hosea is how this God will unleash his just wrath against the very people that he loves. There are many ways to frame this issue. But perhaps the best way is to take the conflict all the way to the cross. There, God’s justice and God’s love meet. Instead of destroying the

unfaithful people who have mocked him in their idolatries, he takes their one perfect king, Jesus, who willingly dies on their behalf. Thus the voiced inner conflict in the heart of God that Hosea writes about is resolved by Jesus dying on the cross.

Stop for a moment and consider the great passion and desire that drove God to this extremity. He loves you. He really does. And this should make a difference in your life. Knowing that he is there, wanting your love and showing you his, may help when times are difficult. Remember he is not passive. Remember what he has done for you.

And it isn't over. Jesus will return for you because he still loves you. He will call you to himself. Not even the grave will be able to hold you then. And you will bask in the love of God forever. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!