

I'd like to share some examples of times when God asks his people to do some ... well, strange things.

- 1) God directed Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt where they had plenty of food and water and good soil for growing crops. And take them into the desert which had no food or water or good soil. Where are you going to find food and water for 2 million people?
- 2) God directed General Joshua to have the Israelites march around Jericho once a day for 6 days, and then 7 times on the 7th day while blowing trumpets and shouting at the top of their lungs. How will that military strategy defeat an army safely inside the city walls?
- 3) When the Israelites arrived to the Promised Land of Canaan, they found homes ready to move into they hadn't built and crops ready to harvest they hadn't planted. So God directed them to give him the first and the best of their crops and herds. How are farmers and ranchers supposed to have enough if they give away the first / best?
- 4) As the Israelites prepared to fight the Midianites under Judge Gideon, God gave these military orders. Of the 32,000 troops, send home 31,700. What possible military strategy has an enemy of 125,000 defeated by 300 armed only with a torch, trumpet and jar?

Some things in the Bible seem strange, at least from our obstructed view. From God's seat, it's so clear, when we let him explain. Each of these OT Bible stories teach us a valuable lesson.

- God sent the Israelites into the desert because he wanted them ... and us ... to depend on him for daily existence.
- God asked for the Israelites first and best of their crops and herds because he wanted them ... and us ... to trust him down the road.
- God sent Joshua and Gideon into battle the way he did because he wanted them ... and us ... to know he fights our battles.

And yet, we're still puzzled, even after reading them, like today's story about God's arranged marriage between the preacher and the prostitute. Turn to p.5, or follow Hosea on the screens as I read.

v.2 ... When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go. Take for yourself an immoral wife (a polite way of saying prostitute) and children produced by sexual immorality, because the land has been committing flagrant immorality, turning away from the LORD."

See what I mean? God asks Hosea, his prophet slash preacher, to do the unthinkable. Turn his marriage and family into a living visual aid for God's people. *"Come on, Lord, a prostitute? Can't you give me some words to say as I stand on the street corner? You want me to marry a prostitute?"* Did the people whisper: *"There's that preacher who married the prostitute!"* whenever Hosea went to the temple?

This had to sound so strange to Hosea, and he trusted God. **v.3-5 ... So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim. She conceived and gave birth to a son for him. The LORD said to him, "Name him Jezre'el, because in a little while I will inflict punishment on the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezre'el. I will destroy the ruling power of the house of Israel. In that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezre'el."**

Gomer, Hosea's bride, soon becomes pregnant. The proud papa has a son. The Lord even picks out a name for the couple's child: **Jezre'el**, which means: *"Punishment or Payback."* Every time God's people looked at the preacher's kid, or Hosea said his son's name, there was that painful reminder of how angry God was with them for disobeying him. If that's the extent of it, maybe Hosea could work through it!

v.6-7 ... She conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. The LORD said to him, "Name her Lo Ruhamah, because I will no longer have

compassion on the house of Israel. Indeed, I will certainly not forgive them. But I will have compassion on the house of Judah. I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen."

It's a girl! Hosea and Gomer's family is growing. God names her: **Lo Ruhamah - "Not Loved"**! Daddy's little girl isn't really daddy's little girl. This wasn't Hosea's child. *"Not Loved or No One Loves You"* again expresses God's anger because his people cheated on him. He refuses to show love to them. The people of Israel are no longer God's chosen people, that honor now belongs to the people of Judah.

Hosea had taken Gomer off the streets, married her, given her his name and a respectable life. After all of this, his wife slept with other man. Hosea must have been heartbroken. But there's more. **v.8-9 ... Gomer weaned Lo Ruhamah. Then she conceived and gave birth to a son. The LORD said, "Name him Lo Ammi, because you are not my people, and I will not be the LORD for you."**

Hosea has a second son. But this one wasn't his either. You can tell by his name, **Lo-Ammi - "Not My People or "You Don't Belong in Our Family."** Because Israel worshiped false gods, he can no longer considered himself their God! He's unwilling to share them with.

What message did God's strange but true story of the preacher and the prostitute and those three children send to the people? The Lord pictured himself as Hosea, the faithful husband ... and his people as Gomer, the unfaithful wife. His message? Unmistakable: *"I refuse to be two-timed! I demand your love and your absolute faithfulness. I forbid you to love anything or anyone more than you love me."*

It seemed that while Hosea got Gomer out of the red-light district, he couldn't get the red-light district out of Gomer. And just when you thought the sad story of repeated unfaithfulness would end in failure, we hear another story about grace, which is code for faithfulness and

forgiveness, for undeserved and unconditional love.

Chapter 3 ... The LORD said to me, "Go again. Show love to a woman who is loved by another man, a woman who keeps committing adultery. Show love just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, even though they keep turning to other gods and loving the raisin cakes." So I bought her for myself for 15 pieces of silver and 9 bushels of barley. I said to her, "You will stay with me for many days. You must not be promiscuous. You must not be with any other man, and I will also be for you."

Once again, the Lord's message thru this family of 5, unmistakable: *"I am the Lord who loves the unlovable. I am the Lord who is faithful to the unfaithful. I am the Lord who forgives the unforgivable."*

The true story of Hosea and Gomer is also the true story of God's love for you and me. None of us wants to think of ourselves as a Gomer. But when God looks at us, what does he see? He sees us on the dark streets of sin, forgetting our first love and willing to sell ourselves.

What do we look like to Jesus? Unlovable! There's no reason for Jesus to love us. And yet, he does. *"Why?"* When you search the Bible this answer keeps popping up again and again: ***he loves us because he loves us.*** When we sell ourselves to sin ... repeatedly ... Jesus buys us back at the price of his holy precious blood.

You'd think we'd learn and know better, and never want to leave our loving Savior, wouldn't you? But for some sick reason we think that we'll find something better, something more fulfilling out there.

Jesus has every reason to be angry with our two-timing ways. But he forgives us ... every time, and welcomes us back ... every time.

What's Hosea's message? **Jesus, Friend of Sinners, loves the unlovable, is faithful to the unfaithful, and forgives the unforgivable**