

March 9, 2025 (Lesson 2)

## THE PAIN OF BROKEN COVENANTS

1. **God Requires Faithfulness** (Hosea 1:2-3; 3:1-5; 6:1-3)
2. **God's Case Against His People** (Micah 6:1-8)
3. **God Relents; God Judges** (Jonah 3:4-10; Nahum 3:1-7)

**Central Truth:** Keeping covenant with God is supremely important.

**Focus:** Comprehend the gravity of keeping vows made to God, and keep our vows.

**Evangelism Emphasis:** God invites unsaved people into covenant with Him.

**Golden Text:** “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed” (Ecclesiastes 5:4).

The most famous verse in the Bible says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The cross of Christ saves us from everlasting death and grants to us unending life. If we read the entire Gospel of John, however, we learn *everlasting life* means more than timeless existence. It refers to length of life and quality of life. According to John, eternal life includes abiding in Christ (15:4), walking in the light (8:12), knowing God (17:3), keeping His commandments (14:21), and having fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3). In total, eternal life is the quality of life that belongs to the “children of God” (John 1:12 NKJV).

These elements of eternal life are relational terms. We “know” Him, which means He is not a stranger to us. We “walk with” Him, which means He is our constant companion. Another important relational term is *covenant*, which means we share a mutual commitment to each other.

A covenant is an agreement, entered into willingly, by which two unrelated people make a commitment to be loyal to each other. The concept of *covenant* is a major theme in the Bible, being mentioned 316 times. Through covenant, God offers to restore the broken relationship between Himself and humanity. As Christians, we are partners with God in the new covenant, which is sealed by the blood of Christ (Mark 14:24; Heb. 7:22; 13:20).

The new covenant accomplishes two important things. First, it guarantees God will be faithful to

save us and to keep us by His grace. Second, it requires that we respond to God’s grace with faithful service, worship, and love. Thus, the covenant calls for mutual loyalty and accountability.

## **1. GOD REQUIRES FAITHFULNESS**

### **A. Unrelenting Faithfulness** (Hosea 1:2-3; 3:1-5)

1:2 The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord. <sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.

3:1 Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. <sup>2</sup> So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: <sup>3</sup> And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee. <sup>4</sup> For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: <sup>5</sup> Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.

The ministry of Hosea, like all of the Old Testament prophets, was based on Israel’s covenant with God, which they made with Him at Mount Sinai (Ex. 20—24). The Israelites belonged to God, and they promised to be faithful to Him. However, they repeatedly strayed and worshiped other gods. Therefore, God raised up the prophets to call Israel back to their covenant obligation to love Him and to love their neighbor.

The “word of the Lord” (Hos. 1:1), which means a prophetic revelation, came to Hosea not long after the ministry of Amos. Like Amos, Hosea directed his prophecies to the northern kingdom of Israel, which was ruled by King Jeroboam, the son of Joash. God gave unique instructions to Hosea, revealing Hosea’s marriage would serve as a prophetic symbol of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. Therefore, Hosea was commanded to marry “a wife of harlotry” because Israel had “committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord” (v. 2 NKJV). Hosea obeyed the Lord and

married a woman named Gomer.

Gomer was not a prostitute when Hosea married her. The Lord did not say, “Marry a prostitute”; rather, He said, “Take for yourself a wife inclined to infidelity” (NASB), or “a woman characterized by harlotry.” Hosea was told to marry a woman who had the inclination to be unfaithful. God knew Gomer’s disposition would eventually lead her into marital infidelity, but she had not yet acted on those carnal impulses. Just as Israel was initially devoted to God but became unfaithful and followed after other gods, Gomer was initially devoted to Hosea but strayed from him and gave herself to other men.

Hosea’s family was a living sermon, and Gomer’s adultery was a constant reminder of Israel’s spiritual adultery. Her actions brought great pain to Hosea, just as Israel’s unfaithfulness brought great pain to God.

Surprisingly, however, Gomer’s sin was not the end of the story, for God commanded Hosea to restore his relationship with her. Although she had committed adultery, Hosea must love her again. His renewed love for her would represent “the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel” (3:1), who had forsaken the Lord and worshiped idols. Gomer had fallen so far that she had sold herself into slavery, and it was necessary for Hosea to redeem her from servitude. Hosea’s purchase of Gomer represented the Lord’s commitment to redeem His people at any cost (John 3:16).

The adulterous wife would be restored to her home, but she would be given a probationary period (Hos. 3:3-4). During this time, she would live in isolation. This temporary period of testing prophetically symbolized Israel’s season of discipline during their exile. When the Assyrians captured them, Israel would have no king, prince, or religious institutions. During their exile, the priests would not serve, and they would not offer sacrifices.

However, after this period of discipline, Israel would be fully restored to fellowship with God.

Three actions would characterize their restoration: (1) Israel would “return,” which means they would repent and turn back to the Lord; (2) Israel would “seek the Lord their God, and David their king”; and (3) Israel would “fear the Lord,” signifying reverence, awe, and honor. These three actions would take place “in the latter days” (v. 5).

### **Two-Sided Commitment**

I recently performed a wedding ceremony; and, as is usual in a wedding, the bride and groom, among other promises, vowed to “love, honor, and cherish” each other. It is important that both the bride and the groom repeated the vows, for marriage is not a one-sided commitment—it requires mutual loyalty. Similarly, our covenant with God demands our faithfulness to Him, just as He is faithful to us.—Lee Roy Martin

#### **B. Call to Return** (Hosea 6:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. <sup>2</sup> After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. <sup>3</sup> Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

The ministry of the Old Testament prophets was complex, but it can be summarized in two types of messages—sermons of correction and sermons of encouragement. The Lord called the prophets “to root out, and to pull down” but also “to build, and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). Walter Brueggemann calls these actions “prophetic criticizing” and “prophetic energizing” (*The Prophetic Imagination*). The prophets often began their preaching by pointing to the sins of the people and by threatening divine judgment. However, they would always offer hope and encouragement to anyone who would repent and call on the Lord.

For the most part, Hosea’s preaching consisted of correction and judgment; but here in chapter 6, he offered hope and salvation. He urged his people to “return unto the Lord” (v. 1); that is, to

repent of their unfaithfulness and to live in obedience to the covenant. If they would return, they would be healed spiritually. The same God who brings judgment also brings restoration.

The phrases “after two days” and “in the third day” (v. 2) are figures of speech meaning “in a short time.” These expressions showed confidence in the Lord’s mercy and grace. The references to the “morning” and to the “rain” (v. 3) are comparisons between the natural world and the spiritual world. They indicate God’s faithfulness is as sure as the rising of the sun each day, and His presence is as dependable as the coming of the rains in their seasons.

—*Why must teachers and preachers today present a correct balance between the mercy of God and His judgment?*

## **2. GOD’S CASE AGAINST HIS PEOPLE**

### **A. God’s Plea (Micah 6:1-5)**

<sup>1</sup> Hear ye now what the Lord saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. <sup>2</sup> Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord’s controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. <sup>3</sup> O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. <sup>4</sup> For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. <sup>5</sup> O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord.

In contrast to Hosea, who uses marriage as his primary symbol of the covenant, Micah uses a courtroom setting. In dramatic fashion, Micah declares God is bringing a legal case against Israel. The prophet begins by calling on Israel to “hear” the Lord’s message. God’s first word is to announce the court case and to call on the mountains, the hills, and “foundations of the earth” to serve as a symbolic jury (vv. 1-2). They must listen to “the Lord’s controversy” (complaint) with His people—Israel. The Hebrew word translated “controversy” is used by the prophets to introduce what may be called a “covenant lawsuit,” in which Israel is accused of violating the requirements of the covenant. The purpose of the spiritual trial is to create a setting in which the Lord can present

His accusation, “plead with Israel” (v. 2), hear their response, and then render a decision.

The Lord begins His case in verse 3 with two pointed questions, as if He is interrogating Israel on the witness stand. He asks, “O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you?” (NKJV). The phrase “O My people” highlights the relationship between God and Israel, suggesting a deep emotional bond between them. Then, He urges Israel to respond. In effect, God is saying, “If I have done wrong, testify against Me.”

In defense of His treatment of Israel, the Lord reminds them He had delivered them from Egyptian bondage and had brought them into the Promised Land by the leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (v. 4). Furthermore, as the Israelites were passing through the wilderness, God had protected them from the evil intentions of Balak, king of Moab, who hired the sorcerer Balaam to pronounce a curse against Israel (see Num. 22—24). God would not allow Balaam to utter any curse; instead, He caused Balaam to prophesy blessings on Israel (24:2-24). The Lord concludes His defense by asserting His “righteousness” (Mic. 6:5). God declares if Israel will “remember” how He saved them from Egypt and how He protected them from other wicked forces, they will know He is righteous in His relationship with Israel. The Lord had always acted righteously, even when Israel had acted unrighteously.

### **Our Righteous God**

He hides our unrighteousness with His righteousness. He covers our disobedience with His obedience. He shadows our death with His death that the wrath of God cannot find us.—Unknown

#### **B. Micah’s Reply (Micah 6:6-8)**

<sup>6</sup> Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup> He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to

walk humbly with thy God?

Israel seems to respond humbly to the Lord's testimony, asking what they must do to be reconciled to God. Should they bring sacrifices of animals? Would thousands of rams and rivers of oil be sufficient to please God? Or, if they were to sacrifice their firstborn child, would that be enough?

The prophet Micah answers their questions in verse 8. His answer implies no amount of sacrifice can take the place of genuine holiness, because God's favor cannot be bought. Micah points out God had already shown them "what is good" and what He requires. They possessed the law of God, and they had previously heard the preaching of the prophets of God; so, they were not ignorant of the truth. They had no excuse.

Micah explains God requires three actions from His people: (1) they must "do justly," (2) they must "love mercy," and (3) they must "walk humbly" with God (v. 8). *Doing justice* means guaranteeing fairness, equality, and impartiality in all of their relationships, both in private and in society. *Loving mercy* signifies faithfulness, loyalty, integrity, and putting others ahead of oneself. Both justice and mercy are essential qualities of a godly community and society. They represent what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself. *Walking humbly* with God means to love God wholeheartedly, to honor Him above all things, and to obey Him at all times (see Matt. 22:36-40).

—*Why are "offerings" alone not enough to please the Lord?*

### **3. GOD RELENTS; GOD JUDGES**

#### **A. God Relents (Jonah 3:4-10)**

<sup>5</sup> So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

<sup>9</sup> Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? <sup>10</sup> And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto

them; and he did it not.

As we saw in last week's lesson, the people of Nineveh responded quickly to Jonah's preaching. First, they "believed"; second, they "proclaimed a fast"; third, they "put on sackcloth" as an outward sign of their heartfelt mourning (v. 5). As soon as the king of Nineveh received word of Jonah's preaching, he "took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes" (v. 6 CSB). Not only did the king demonstrate personal contrition; he issued a decree that the entire city should repent. The king commanded that both humans and animals should engage in a total fast, refraining from food and water. Also, he ordered that both humans and animals should put on sackcloth. Moreover, the king required the people to "cry mightily" to God and to "turn" from their "evil" and "violence" (v. 8). The actions specified in the decree combine to suggest sincere and authentic repentance by the Ninevites.

In His initial call to Jonah, the Lord had characterized Nineveh as an "evil" city (1:2); here we see Nineveh's evil consisted largely of "violence" (3:8). Historical records tell us Nineveh was a vicious, sadistic, and merciless enemy of Israel.

In verse 9, the king asked, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?"—a citation from Joel 2:14. In fact, the whole scenario in Nineveh recalls Joel's plan for repentance (vv. 12-14). Like Joel, the king again used the word *turn* as in Jonah 3:8, hoping Nineveh would turn away from her evil and God would turn away from His anger (see Zech. 1:3). The king's desire for mercy was strengthened further by his suggestion that God might "repent"; that is, change His mind (Jonah 3:9). The repentance of the Ninevites was aimed at moving God to pity so He would change His mind and not destroy the city.

The immediacy, genuineness, and comprehensiveness of Nineveh's conversion apparently made a deep impression on the Lord. In a surprising turn of events, He responded to their change of heart



with His own change of heart, choosing not to bring upon them the judgment He had threatened. The people of Nineveh “turned from their evil,” and the Lord “repented of the evil” He had planned to do to them (v. 10). The use of the word *evil* here is a play on words. God does not do anything that is morally evil. However, the Hebrew word translated “evil” (*raah*) can also mean “disaster” (NKJV) or “destruction” (NIV). The Ninevites were evil in the moral sense, but God’s judgment would be a “disaster” to the city. Therefore, the Lord’s planned judgment on Nineveh was not morally evil, but it is called an “evil” because it would be a “disaster” for the city.

In view of the fact that Jonah had promised the overturning of Nineveh in forty days, an event that apparently did not transpire, he might be vulnerable to the charge of false prophecy. However, God has the freedom to adapt His plans in response to human actions. In Jeremiah 18:7-8, the Lord said, “At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” The Lord, therefore, is free to express His anger toward human wickedness, and He is free to change His anger into mercy.

### **A Chance for Mercy**

Confession heals, confession justifies, confession grants pardon of sin. All hope consists in confession; in confession there is a chance for mercy.—Isidore of Seville

### **B. God Judges** (Nahum 3:1-7)

<sup>1</sup> Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not;

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. <sup>6</sup> And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock. <sup>7</sup> And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?

In response to Nineveh’s repentance, God withdrew His threat to destroy the city. Soon,

however, they were back to their old ways. They invaded Israel, employing ruthless and barbaric violence, eventually destroying the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BC. The Assyrians (of which Nineveh was a part) were the most violent and bloodthirsty of all Israel's enemies, and the prophet Nahum declared God would repay them in ways that were equal to their sins.

Reveling in Nineveh's coming demise, the prophet Nahum wrote, "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery" (Nah. 3.1). At the beginning of his prophecy, Nahum explained God's punishment of Nineveh would be retribution for Nineveh's evil treatment of Israel: "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth" (1:2). Because God was jealous for His people, He would pour out His wrath on His people's enemies. God is both merciful and just. The Ninevites had experienced God's mercy when they responded to Jonah's preaching, but Nahum declared they would come to know God's justice.

The destruction of Nineveh would come at the hands of the Babylonians, and Nahum describes the final battle with a series of military images. He starts with the noise of whips, then the sound of chariot wheels, then the galloping of horses (3:2). The battle progresses with cavalry, swords, spears, "a multitude of slain . . . countless corpses" (v. 3 NKJV).

The reason for Nineveh's destruction is her lust for power. Like a prostitute, Nineveh had lured many cities and nations (including Israel) into her grip; and then she brought them to ruin. Nineveh was also guilty of using sorcery and witchcraft (v. 4).

The shameless actions of Nineveh would lead to her own shame. Nahum stated bluntly that Nineveh would be disgraced (v. 6), covered with "abominable filth" (human excrement). She would be ridiculed by everyone and abandoned, with no one to give comfort (v. 7).

*—According to Nahum 3:4-5, how would Nineveh be shamed before nations, and why? Do you suppose God still judges nations (including the U.S.) which influence other nations by their evil deeds? If so, how?*

## **IN COVENANT WITH THE RIGHTEOUS ONE**

God is God; therefore, He has the right to judge us. Even more, God has the responsibility to judge us—He must judge all forms of sin and disobedience. Who else would have the authority to serve as judge? Thankfully, God’s judgment is always a “righteous judgment” (Rom. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:5); He does not judge by “outward appearance” (1 Sam. 16:7; 2 Cor. 10:6-7).

To be a Christian is to be in covenant relationship with God—a covenant based on the precious blood of Christ (Luke 22:20). The new covenant is based on grace and liberty, but that liberty does not give us permission to rebel against God or to sin against our neighbor (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16; Rom. 6:1-2). The grace of God saves us, and it enables us to be faithful to our covenant with Him.

### **Daily Devotions**

- M. Promise Kept to Faithful Caleb (Joshua 14:6-15)
- T. The Promised Land Given (Joshua 21:43-45)
- W. The Promised Land Can Be Lost (Deuteronomy 28:15, 36-42)
- T. Great and Precious Promises (2 Peter 1:1-4)
- F. Deceptive and Deadly Promises (2 Peter 2:17-21)
- S. The Promise of Christ’s Return (2 Peter 3:1-9)