FOUR VIEWS ON HOSEA’S MARRIAGE

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INTRODUCTION

“When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.” Weather Gomer was a prostitute when Hosea initially married her, or if she was in fact a real person or fairy tale, has been a topic of much debate among evangelical scholars. What is not debated is the correlation between God and Hosea, and Israel and Gomer the harlot. The big picture being painted is of a man who faithfully loves his wife even after she has been unfaithful to him. The four popular views that are commonly debated among bible commentators are divided in two groups: literal and allegorical. The later group is as follows: “The hypothetical marriage view, and the spiritual infidelity view; these are the allegorical views. The former, which are the literal, are the literal marriage with Gomer unchaste view, and the literal marriage with Gomer chaste view.” These views will be observed and discussed in more detail later. Suffice it to say for know, that ones conclusion will either lead to speculate that God condones the unevenly yoked marriage between a man of God and a harlot; or that God condones divorce to bring about His sovereign will; or that God, by His omniscience and sovereignty, can anticipate a women’s unfaithfulness to her husband to illustrate the unfaithfulness of Israel.

HYPOTHETICAL MARRIAGE VIEW

The hypothetical marriage view portrays the marriage of Hosea and Gomer as a fairy tale story, not a historical account. This view relieves the immoral problem of God condoning an

1 All Scripture is taken from the NASB translation, unless otherwise stated.

unevenly yoked marriage between Hosea and Gomer, but at the expense of allegorizing the book of Hosea. In addition to that, to support this theory one must be willing to erase the life and ministry of Hosea from all historical records. This crime should not be committed unless sufficient biblical evidence allows the interpreter to do so. Aside from that, “there is no indication in the text that this was a visionary experience or an allegorical tale, and there are many details that point to it being a real experience. For example, Hosea recorded the name of his wife and her father's name (1:3). He also named the exact amount that he paid for her (3:2).”

This theory attempts to clear God from commanding a righteous man to marry a harlot, but at the expense of a hermeneutical crime. There is insufficient textual evidence to support the theory that this account was in fact a fairy tale, and should be regarded as an erroneous view.

**SPIRITUAL INFIDELITY VIEW**

While this view supports the literalness of the historical account of Hosea, it allegorizes Gomer’s sexual unfaithfulness for spiritual unfaithfulness. Proponents of this view see an idolatrous Gomer rather than an adulterous one. Unlike the hypothetical view, this view attempts to retain the historicity of Hosea and Gomer, but it does not adhere to a plan, normal, literal method of interpretation. The problem with this view is that Gomer’s harlotry is interpreted as spiritual rather than physical. A plan reading of Hosea will argue for an unfaithful sexual Gomer. For example, in Hosea 3:1 God commands Hosea, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress… After hearing God’s commands, Hosea says, “So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley” (Hosea. 3:2). Hosea goes on to tell Gomer, “You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the

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harlot, nor shall you have a man…” (3:3). “Again the details of the story as it unfolds argue for literal sexual unfaithfulness.” This view also fails to answer the question of whether or not Gomer was a prostitute when Hosea initially married her.

LITERAL MARRIAGE WITH GOMER UNCHASED VIEW

Unlike the Hypothetical and spiritual infidelity marriage view, this view holds to an extreme literal interpretation; too literal! Supporters of this view interpret Hosea 1:2 as God commanding Hosea to marry a prostitute; however, the text does not give sufficient proof that Gomer was unchaste before marrying Hosea. “If the Lord meant that Hosea was to marry a harlot, it would have been more natural for Him to say ‘take to yourself a harlot’ (Heb. zonah) or ‘prostitute,’ rather than saying, ‘Take for yourself a wife of harlotry’ … It seems very unlikely that God would command His prophet to marry a woman who was already a harlot.”

Some interpreters support the view that Gomer was a temple prostitute, which sharpens the comparison with Israel’s apostasy, but does not really remove the difficulty, since Hosea was undoubtedly opposed to the practice of ritual prostitution.”

LITERAL MARRIAGE WITH GOMER CHASTE VIEW

Unlike the three views that went before, the literal marriage with Gomer chaste view interprets Gomer as becoming sexually unfaithful after her marriage to Hosea; this relieves God from any immoral issue and at the same time answers the question was Gomer a prostitute when Hosea initially married her. “At the time of the wedding, Gomer was a virgin but later proved

4 Ibid.,
5 Ibid.,
unfaithful. This accords with the impression of Israel’s pristine purity derived from Hosea 9:10; 11:1; 13:1.”7 When God rescued Israel from Egypt, she was a chaste bride (Jer. 2:2-3). At Sinai God took Israel as His bride, and only later would Israel become unfaithful. “Thus the Lord’s command should be understood as follows, ‘Go take to yourself a wife who will prove to be unfaithful.’”8 The words “take yourself a wife of harlotry” are to be understood holistically, i.e., looking to the future.”9 Interpreting the passage in this way would lead to the interpretation that Hosea knew his bride would later become sexually unfaithful, but his love for Gomer would not detach from his sacrificial and unconditional love for her.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a quick summary of the four views of Hosea and Gomer’s marriage that were discussed were, first the allegorical hypothetical marriage view. There was insufficient textual evidence to support the theory that this account was in fact a fairy tale, and should be regarded as an erroneous view, and also failed to answer the question of whether or not Gomer was a prostitute when Hosea initially married Gomer, and whether or not God commanded an immoral act. Second, the spiritual infidelity marriage view was also erroneous after a deeper study of the literal rendition of Hosea 1:2: “Go take to yourself a wife who will prove to be unfaithful.”10 Third, the literal marriage with Gomer unchaste view attributed false moral action to God, and like the spiritual infidelity marriage view, did not account for the literal rendition of Hosea 1:2: “Go take to yourself a wife who will prove to be unfaithful.”11 Finally, the literal

7 F.F. Bruce, New International Bible Commentary, 873.
10 John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1379.
11 Ibid.,
marriage with Gomer chaste view, though it does not answer every debatable question in Hosea, does answer “no” to the question weather Gomer was a prostitute when Hosea initially married her, and resolves the moral issue with God. So what does this say about the loyal, faithful, and unconditional love of God to Israel, or the believer’s union with the Son of God, Jesus Christ? Even though believers at times may fall and disgrace themselves and their Master, and become unfaithful to their Lord, it is the love God that maintains that precious union between Jesus and the believer, and the blood of Christ that cleanses them from all their sins and unrighteousness.
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