

Syncretism's Sin

In Hosea chapter 2 the first 13 verses focus on the defection of Israel the bride from God in the story of Gomer desertion of Hosea. Israel had taken false gods. It began with worshipping the fertility gods with the common name of Baal. The Israelites acted towards God just as Gomer acted towards Hosea. **As the Hebrews entered Canaan after the 40 year Exodus they allowed the worship of foreign gods to become incorporated into their lives. This sin, syncretism, is the blending of the worship of Yahweh with other gods.** Syncretism has continued to be a problem to this very day. By the time of Hosea Israel saw Yahweh as the God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They remembered Yahweh as the God of the mighty acts, such as the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea and the defeat of greater enemies. They saw Yahweh as the God of mighty events of the past instead of the present God who oversaw all aspects of daily life. The Hebrews had been slaves for 400 years in Egypt and then wandered of Sinai for 40 years; they were warriors, shepherds of flocks and nomads. Now as they settled into towns and farms they needed to grow crops and plant vineyards, and they had not had a lot of agricultural training. The Canaanites did have this experience and worshipped many gods for the blessing of the rains, cultivation and harvest of crops. As the Hebrews adopted the Canaanite way of agrarian life they began to embrace the Canaanite gods as those who oversee and bless daily life. The gods of Baal were responsible for the rains, the harvest and for the herd's reproduction. Worshipping Baal along with Yahweh should ensure success on all levels of life, so they thought. At the same time as Hosea was calling the northern kingdom of Israel to repentance Isaiah was telling the people of the southern kingdom ¹⁰“**For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water**

the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater (*God is the source of all*), ¹¹ so shall (*speaking of God*) my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11) It is the One God of the universe that controls every aspect of this earth, everything of each life. The Israelites had forgotten it was Yahweh who gave them the Promised Land.

In the Exodus, Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments and “God spoke all these words, saying, ² **I am the Lord your God**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ **You shall have no other gods before me.** ⁴ You shall **not** make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for **I the Lord your God am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.’ ” (Exodus 20:1-6) The worship of anything but the One true God is syncretism.

Once syncretism is introduced, it grows and by its very nature takes the focus off of God and robs Him of his right to our worship. This move away from God by people and societies may come quickly or take decades or even centuries.

For the people of Israel it was the worship of Baal, which was the name used for a number of gods that lead them away from the only true God. What are the false gods of America? America has become like Gomer and commits spiritual adultery against God. America looks for pleasure and purpose everywhere, that is everywhere but God. This moving away from God by false worship has brought America to the point, over the last 200 years, to where there is no longer truth – in America truth is a moving target depending who is speaking. This worship of

materialism, self-promotion, self-gratification and the lack of moral standards has brought America to the same point Israel faced in 750 B.C. What about the Church? Yes, syncretism has crept into the Church. In whatever form that a church does not hold to the Scriptures as the eternal truth of God or places anything above living for the glory of God the Father by being the slave of Christ is wrong and will lead to the pollution of true worship. The Westminster Shorter Catechism was written in 1647 to help teach and train people to be true worshippers of God. The very first question is, **“What is the chief end of man?”** Answer, **“Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”** This is what Paul taught the Corinthians and Romans concerning glorifying God, **“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”** (1 Corinthians 10:31 and Romans 11:36) In Asaph’s (aw·sawf) psalm he wrote of enjoying God, ²⁵ **“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.”** (Psalm 73:25-28) Asaph enjoyed being near God and being his refuge, so much so, he cannot help but tell others of God. Do Paul and Asaph speak of you and your life lived for God’s glory? Do you enjoy God so much that he is the only one you worship? Or are there others gods that have crept into your life and you are living like Hosea’s Gomer the Israel with many gods?

Syncretism’s Judgment

Understanding the first commandment of the Ten Commandments and the problem with syncretism we are now better able to understand God’s judgment found in

verses 2 to 13 of Hosea chapter 2, let me read the main points, ²“Plead with your mother, plead ... that she put away her ... adultery ... ³ lest I strip her naked and ... make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst. ⁴ Upon her children also I will have no mercy ... ⁶ Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. ... ⁹ Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. ... ¹² And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees ... and the beasts of the field shall devour them. ¹³ And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them ...” We know from history God’s judgment was stern because Israel’s relationship with God was at stake. If one thinks God’s judgment is too much and too harsh, they only need to remember the depravity to which Israel had sunk. **God’s judgment is meant to create in mankind the desire to reconcile with Him. Just as God judged Israel, so will God judge America! Will America turn back to Him?** I pray for revival. If God’s judgment was stern with Israel, what should we expect his judgment to be with America? Reading from verse 7, “She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.’” Israel had become syncretistic with seeking after many gods for favor with daily life and engaged in spiritual prostitution as Gomer sought many lovers. They found only judgment in their worship of other gods. It seems to me that America is lying in the same bed of corruption as Gomer and Israel and God’s patience grows thin. America will not find blessing in its current path and at this point it does **not** say, “I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.” God’s patience grows thin and judgment is due.

Back to Hosea's story, let me fill in the blanks as I understand them. Gomer has now left Hosea for other lovers. Eventually she becomes completely immersed in her depravity and cult prostitution in worshiping the gods of Baal. Hosea is left to raise the 3 children alone. Under the Law Hosea had every right to seek a divorce and have Gomer put to death. But, it is Hosea's unconditional love and not the Law that will find a way to deal with Gomer without putting her to death. With the pain that has been plunged deep into Hosea's heart by Gomer and God's heart by Israel - Hosea delivers the Word of God to Israel in verses 2 to 13. We hear the wounded heart of God in these verses that are filled with a mixture of grief, frustration and anger, and with the love yearning to bring back the wayward wife of Gomer or Israel. I can hear these same emotions of grief, frustration and anger in my time spent with God, and I feel his desire for the unfaithful to return to him. I am at times torn between asking God for the quick beginning of the end times so Christ can return and the glory of eternity begin. On the other hand I feel a need to pray for his delay so that unbelievers will come to Christ. So, I pray for both revival and Christ's return. Look at God's desire and the result of Christ returning beginning in verse 16, "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals (*plural - because there are many gods that both 8th century B.C. Israel and present day America worship over the One true God*) from her mouth (*Gomer's mouth, Israel's mouth, American's mouth*), and they shall be remembered by name no more." As Hosea prayed, this I pray for this also – for people to return to God.

In verses 2 to 6 God speaks of the punishment that is coming to Israel but God's desire is for the bride to return to him in true worship. If she does not, the punishment will increase until Israel and I dare say America will as verse 7 says, "She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but

shall not find them.” When all avenues of seeking the gods and pleasures of the world have been exhausted and we come to ruin - “Then she shall say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.’ ” Israel will have to come to the end of themselves before they return to God. I believe American is coming to the end of itself and the hope is she will turn to God. This is much the same way I came to the Lord. I thought I had the world spinning around me and when I had made a mess, God was able to deal with me because I was broken and had no where to turn but God. I did not want God, but he wanted me. I tried desperately to find any other solution but could not. I was like Gomer who sought answers to life in pleasure, career and distractions only to find it all empty. God was always there but I chose not to see him as Gomer did not see Hosea and Israel did not see God. Broken I finally sought Him as he revealed himself to me.

Verse 8 is so true and is also interesting to consider as we come to understand running from God. Reading verse 8, “And she (*Hosea is referring to Gomer, which is Israel and today refers to the world and in my message specifically to America*) did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.” Let me put this into story form. Hosea and Gomer’s story is the story of God and Israel. I think it is also the story of God and America and it is my story and most likely your story before God saved us. As I begin this story think of your life before God saved you and think of America today.

God meet the needs and beyond the needs and he blessed Gomer, Israel, America and us. God has told Hosea he must live this life of painful relationship to teach Israel of God’s love and pain. Gomer has left Hosea for other lovers, as verse 5 says, “I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.” She seeks others to provide the necessities and

pleasures of life. For a while she received them but now her life has taken a downward course. As Gomer's lovers, the gods of this world used her up; she began to slide into less and less. The lover who gave her much now wants someone new. She goes to the next lover and the next ever on a downhill run. She ends up with a lover who cannot provide and she lacks not only the refinements but also clothing and even food. Hosea could sit back and say Gomer left me and now has her just reward, but he does not. God comes to Hosea and says, "Your wife Gomer is now living in the worst part of the city and she is living with a man who will not provide for her." Hosea says, "Yes Lord, I know." God says, "Hosea I want you to go to the market and buy food and clothes and even something nice for Gomer for this is the way I deal with my people whom I love when they run from me." This would have been hard for Hosea who was wounded by loving Gomer and her loving others. God instructs Hosea once you buy these things, "Go then to where she lives and find her lover and give him what you have bought for Gomer." So Hosea goes and searches for the lover of his wife and when he finds him he says, "Are you living with Gomer the daughter of Diblaim?" The man says, "Yes. What is it to you and who are you?" Hosea answers, "Gomer is my wife." The man most likely thought Hosea had come to demand the law be enforced and he arrested and Gomer put to death. Hosea looks him in the eye and says, "I am not here to cause trouble. I understand you are not able to care for Gomer and because I love her - I do not want her to do without." This man must have thought Hosea a fool for loving someone who did not love him in return. But because the man is not a man of honor he takes the food and clothes and gift from Hosea. As he returns to the small house he presents the clothes and food and gift of perfume to Gomer and says, "Look what I have bought for you. I sacrificed to show you my love." The lover, which is the gods of Baal that Israel has come to worship and the gods of America, takes credit for what are the provisions given by the only true God. **Gomer, a foolish and self-seeking woman is, in reality, Israel. She accepted**

provisions without question, assuming they were from her lover and failed to recognize that the true source was Hosea, who is, in reality, God. Today is America in accepting these provisions from God without question and crediting them to her false lover, the gods of America instead of recognizing who is the true source. Does God really act like this? Does He provide for us and love us even when we are running from him? This answer is “Yes.” This story and the complete story of the Bible teach us that this is exactly how God loves us. Think back to the times in your life before God saved you. Like me, you most likely were going down the wrong road and making the wrong decisions. Was not God there protecting you? You may have suffered the consequences of those bad choices but God did not let you be slayed, but in truth he was breaking you down like Gomer to the point you would call out to him.

Syncretism’s Thorns

This is what is means by verse 6, “Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths.” God pursues us and provides for us. However, there are consequences to our running from God. God puts a hedge of thorns to prevent Gomer from obtaining peace and satisfaction as she chases after her lovers – she cannot fully reach them. In verses 6 and 9 God tells us what happens when we continue to run from him. Verse 6, “Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns...” Verse 9, “Therefore I will take back ...” These 2 “therefore”s tell us to pay attention. There is both a temporal price for running from God and eternal price if one does not come to him.

When I read verse 6 - I cannot help but think of the difference of the **hedge** used to prevent Gomer from finding what she seeks from her lovers or the world and how the **hedge** was used for Job. Remember in the story of Job - Satan comes before the throne of God after spending time on earth. God says to Satan, “While you

were on the earth did you notice my faithful servant Job?” Satan replies to God, “Job is faithful only because you have greatly blessed him.” Satan continues, “Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.” (Job 1:10) We know this is not true for Job loved God and was faithful even when everything was taken away. The true part was that God had placed a “hedge” around Job and his family to protect him. God had been protecting the evil of Satan from getting to Job. But with Gomer God places a “hedge” around her to prevent her from reaching her goal of total depravity and evil. Even though the hedge was used to prevent her from all the pleasures of the world it too was for her protection. Because Job was faithful the hedge prevented evil from getting in. Because Gomer was unfaithful the hedge prevented her from reaching evil.

This is also true of the Christian life. If a man denies that the blessings come from God and selfishly misuses them, God will be gentle in correcting him, reminding him that they are to be passed on to bless others. Rebuke becomes harsher if no repentance follows. If one continues on the path of destruction God will throw up walls or hedges to prevent one from obtaining that which is sought for it would lead to their destruction. If one, like myself, thinks they will get rich and become influential, gaining power through their own efforts and it is all for their own glory without God, well then, God will allow you to get close but not reach your goal. As I climbed the corporate ladder and my career was everything - as I got close to the top I saw how empty it was and became disillusioned. For those who God loves he will not allow them to be destroyed by the world, yet they will surely suffer. Hosea or God put a hedge around Gomer or Israel to prevent them from reaching total destruction.

In verse 9 God changes his action because Gomer has not stopped, has not listened to the warnings and has not turned back to Hosea or God. Reading verse 9, “Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness.” Just like the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15 who squandered his father’s wealth and lost it all, and found himself living among the pigs. So too, all will be taken from Gomer. Some Christians suffer because through their suffering God will glorified and more will come to know who God is. This is not the reason the prodigal son and Gomer and Israel suffered. God removed his blessings so that they would come to the end of themselves and desire to return – the prodigal to his father, Gomer to Hosea and Israel to God.

Next week the story of Gomer, once all the trappings of the world have been removed continues. As is said, “there is more to the story.” Until then think of how history repeats itself. Verse 13 ends, Gomer “forgot me, declares the Lord.” Israel forgot the Lord God, the one true God and provider of even the air they breathed. This led to syncretism; the worship of false gods along with the true God. How is America worshipping false gods? Is the broad church in America worshipping false gods? Is there any difference between the gods worshipped by America and the board church? The gods of money, sex, power, desire for material wealth without working, for the government to provide for them in place of working, and peoples fascination with sports, movies or video games instead of time spend with God and his Word? Has America like Gomer forgotten who has blessed it so richly? American was once known for using its blessings to help and protect other countries and other peoples. Today it cannot balance a budget and borrows more and more and gives less and less, but the day is coming to “pay the piper.” Are you and am I, like Gomer, Israel and American, even in little ways, which in truth forsakes God and makes God a small god? **There is spiritual**

strength in numbers; the family is stronger than the individual and the church is stronger than the family. The question for us is, “Are we on the narrow path and staying true to God or traveling the broad road of our society?”

Let us now go to God in prayer and seek Him above all else. When prayer is over Leland will lead us in our closing song.

I will open our time of prayer and Garth will close, pray as you are lead by the Spirit of God; pray men, pray women, pray children for we are the family of God.