

HOSEA

How many of us love to pay taxes; the higher the better?

Seems the Israelites of old didn't like paying taxes any more than we do. In 921B.C., the nation of Israel was split in two over the issue of taxes. This tax revolt not only split the nation, it also ushered in the age of the prophets like Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah and others.

Here's what happened....

The reigns of King David and King Solomon were the golden era of the nation of Israel. King Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem which became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In addition, he built numerous palaces for himself and his 300 wives and 700 concubines. Throughout Israel Solomon built fortresses to protect the country. He built ships and strengthened the Israeli army. All these projects and more cost money. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam inherited a kingdom that was in debt. Contrary to wise counsel, King Rehoboam decided to increase the already high tax rate. This sparked a tax revolt. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel seceded from the union. Those ten tribes formed the northern kingdom called Israel with its capital in Samaria. The two remaining tribes formed the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital in Jerusalem.

King Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel had a problem. The Law of Moses required his people to return to Judah, to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer their animal sacrifices and to celebrate the seven annual Feasts of the Lord. **1 Kings 12:26-33** tells us:

26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. 27 If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." 28 So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." 29 And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. 31 He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. 32 And Jeroboam

appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah¹, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. 33 He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings.

The tragic part of this story is that the citizens of the northern kingdom of Israel rebelled and were willing to lose their lives in a bloody civil war over taxes but abandoned Yahweh and betrayed their covenant with Him without a whimper.

But they paid for it spiritually and culturally. Not only did they worship the golden calves, they worshipped local Canaanite fertility gods named *baals*. Worship of the *baals* was vile involving sexual rituals and, in extreme cases, infant sacrifice. The Israelites insulted Yahweh by praising and thanking the *baals* for the rains, for the harvest, for food, for children and livestock. They sacrificed animals and bowed down to figurines they themselves carved out of wood and stone! Their culture degenerated. The rich grew richer. The poor were abused. Justice was corrupted. Violence reigned. The name and reputation of Yahweh, the God of Israel, was trashed.

Israel's wickedness increased to the point God intervened by sending to Israel a young prophet named Hosea. Prophets spoke for God. They were national figures like Billy Graham was a national figure here in the US whether you were a Christian or not. But before Hosea even preached his first sermon, God spoke to Israel through Hosea in a most unexpected way.

HOSEA 1:2-3 (ESV)

2 When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."

God told Hosea to marry a whore!

Can you imagine Hosea's response? "Uh, Lord, did you just tell me to marry a whore? Have you thought through the optics of this? Of course you have, sorry. But Lord, you know generally speaking prostitutes don't make

¹ A counterfeit Day of Atonement – Yom Kippor

great wives. Ok, ok, I got it. You want me to marry a whore (but I don't remember reading that in my contract)....”

3 So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim....

God told Hosea to marry a whore so Hosea married a whore named Gomer.

What if Billy Graham married a hooker and claimed God told him to do it? How do you think that would be received? Would you believe him?

Is that the kind of thing God would do? How does it make sense that God would tell His spokesman to confront among other things, Israel's sexual immorality and yet direct His prophet to marry a woman actively involved in sexual immorality?

Some Bible teachers insist God would never do this.

But here it is.

God told Hosea to marry a whore!

Why would He do something so radical?

To demonstrate His radical love for His people. No matter how unfaithful and wicked the Israelites, they are God's chosen people. With them He has cut three unconditional covenants; the Abrahamic, Land and Davidic covenants.² No matter how unfaithful and wicked the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may become, God will not reject them as His people. His *chesed*, His steadfast covenant love will not let them go. God will fulfill His covenant promises to His chosen people.

Though Israel be unfaithful, God will be faithful.

Hosea and Gomer's marriage was a living illustration of Yahweh and Israel's relationship. After bearing three children, Gomer blew up their family. She cheated on Hosea, broke his heart and went back to her whoring. She abandoned her children and left Hosea to pick up the broken pieces of their lives. Gomer sunk so low she was eventually sold into slavery as a sex slave.

Gomer was a living picture of the people of Israel.

How quickly they left Yahweh and gave themselves to the baals and golden calves. They blew up their relationship with God and trashed their culture. Gomer and Israel got what they deserved. Hosea and God should just

² A fourth will be revealed through Jeremiah (31:31-40).

forget about them. After all, they were the ones who left, they were the ones who rejected Hosea and God, not the other way around. Hosea and God should look for new wives who will be faithful. That's the mind of the creature, not the Creator.

God's *chesed* will never ultimately be taken from His covenant people no matter how undeserving. To illustrate His steadfast love for Israel, God directed Hosea to go and redeem His unfaithful bride.

HOSEA 3:1-5 (ESV)

1 And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." 2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. 3 And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

God will not ultimately reject Israel. Though she has suffered divine discipline for her disobedience, Yahweh will yet restore His relationship with Israel.

HOSEA 2:14-20 (ESV)

14 "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. 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 from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. 18 And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

God's *chesed*, His steadfast love, will never let Israel go. God will be faithful to fulfill the unconditional covenant promises He has made to Israel.

God has not rejected Israel as many in the Christian Church teach. God will restore Israel to Himself when the Tribulation generation of Jews, led by their spiritual leaders, repent and accept Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah and Savior. As a nation, they will then enter the New Covenant and receive the fulfillment of all the covenant promises.

Because of His *chesed* God longs to restore His covenant people even when they have walked away and been unfaithful.

This is the point Jesus made through the parable of the prodigal son. Contrary to popular teaching, the prodigal is not an unbeliever who gets saved. The prodigal is an Israelite who, for a time, turns his or her back on God. The point of the parable is that any wayward Israelite who wants to come home to God can be assured God is watching and waiting to welcome them home.

In this Dispensation of Grace, when you trust in the blood sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and you trust in His resurrection for new life, you are included in the New Covenant. You are in a covenant relationship with God. You are safe in the *chesed* of God. Even if you abandon God, He will never abandon you. He longs to welcome you home.

Robert Robinson was a poet. He was also a Christian, but after a time he drifted away from Jesus into an openly carnal life.

Then one day Robert Robinson was in a carriage traveling from one city to another.

There was one stop along the way. On the stop a young woman got on the carriage, and, as they were traveling together, this young woman was reading a book of poems and hymns. She came to a particular poem that she did not understand. As she was reading it, she handed the book of poems over to the man and said, "Excuse me, sir. Could you explain this poem, this hymn to me?"

Robinson looked at the poem, and it began by reading, "Come Thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace." He couldn't talk for a long time. Then he began to weep, tears streaming down his face. Finally, he said, "I wrote this poem. I wrote this hymn. I once believed these words, but no more."

And this woman, being guided by the Holy Spirit, took back the book and after a moment gently replied, "But then, remember what else you wrote? 'Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.' That's what you've done. You've wandered, you've drifted. But

remember how you ended your poem. 'Here's my heart, Oh take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.'"

On that day Robert Robinson came back to the faith. Robert Robinson was prone to wander. He was prone to drift like many of us, perhaps like all of us.

Brothers and sisters, have you wandered away from the Lord Jesus? Are you in the grip of covetousness, alcohol, porn, materialism? Do you find yourself trapped in the carnal life? Like a loving husband, a loving father, God is waiting and watching, longing for you to turn home. 1 John 1:9 instructs us to confess our sin knowing God will be faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God will never let you go. He's waiting for you to come home.