

## HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS:

# Haftarah Bamidbar

by Mark Huey posted 23 May, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Hosea 2:1-23

### “Wilderness People”

The opening reading of the fourth book of the Torah, Numbers, details the Israelites' wilderness journey from Mount Sinai, to the plains of Moab prior to their entry into the Promised Land. It is appropriately entitled, *Bamidbar* (בְּמִדְבָּר) or “in the wilderness,” but has become known to us in English as Numbers via the Septuagint designation of *Arithmoi* (ΑΡΙΘΜΟΙ), because it begins by numbering the tribes of Israel. Within Numbers, the trials and tribulations of Israel—for nearly forty years at multiple encampments—are recorded.

If there is one consistent theme down through the centuries of Israel's history, it is the fact that the people are not always faithful to the Almighty. Their faithfulness seems to always be ebbing and flowing, as they move from times of intimacy, to times of seeming abandonment. Perhaps for these, and other reasons, the Sages concluded that Hosea 2 should be considered during the same week when the Torah portions begin to examine Numbers.

Hosea was a prophet raised up by God to speak specifically to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, after Israel and Judah had already been split into two separate states. As one reads through the Book of Hosea, you find that his life, marriage, and offspring were in many respects, analogous to the sordid history of Israel itself. Hosea marries a woman who had become a prostitute (Hosea 1:2), who bore him children of prostitution (Hosea 1:3-6). These children were named Jezreel (God sows), Lo-ruhamah (no compassion), and Lo-ammi (not My people). The Prophet Hosea, in his personal life, very much lived out the kind of relationship that God had to the Northern Kingdom (cf. Hosea 1:6b-7), as they forsook Him, committing harlotry and idolatry, worshipping and loving other gods than He.

Hosea 2 is our Haftarah reading for this week, and we find the Lord telling Hosea to speak to his fellow Northern Kingdom Israelites that they will be *Ammi* (עַמִּי), “My people,” and *Ruchamah* (רַחֲמָה), “compassion.” In spite of their rebellion and disobedience to Him, the Holy One in His mercy indicates a great love and compassion for them. Yet, a rebuke of them for going after false gods is still required. A lengthy soliloquy describes the House of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, contrasted with God's faithfulness to the wayward people. In the opening verses of our selected reading, notice the statement that God will actually make Israel “like a wilderness” or “desert” (NIV), *k'midbar* (כְּמִדְבָּר), connecting us to the opening portion in Numbers:

“Say to your brothers, ‘Ammi,’ and to your sisters, ‘Ruchamah.’ Contend with your mother, contend, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; and let her put away her harlotry from her face and her adultery from between her breasts, or I will strip her naked and expose her as on the day when she was born. **I will also make her like a wilderness**, make her like desert land and slay her with thirst” (Hosea 2:1-3).

However, despite the wilderness path that the House of Israel chooses to take, the Lord will provide for her like a faithful husband:

“Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me than now!’ For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold, *which* they used for Baal” (Hosea 2:6-8).

There will be a number of methods that the Lord will use to bring back His beloved House of Israel, depicted as being brought into the wilderness where He might speak to her:

“I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifices to them and adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry, and follow her lovers, so that she forgot Me,” declares

the LORD. “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness [*ha'midbar*, הַמִּדְבָּר] and speak kindly to her” (Hosea 2:13-14).

This wooing of God eventually results in the House of Israel returning to her first love of the Lord. The intimacy will transcend from just being a Master, to them having a relationship like a loving husband and wife:

“And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. It will come about in that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘That you will call Me Ishi and will no longer call Me Baali. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, so that they will be mentioned by their names no more” (Hosea 2:16-17).

The challenge in seeing this occur is that it will take place *b'yom-ha'hu* (בְּיוֹם-הַהוּא), or “in that day.” This would be a particular time reference to the End of the Age, at the inauguration of the Messianic era. Notice the changes that are to come about when “that day” finally arrives:

“In that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land, and will make them lie down in safety. I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. then you will know the LORD. It will come about in that day that I will respond,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to the earth, and the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine and to the oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they will say, ‘*You are my God!*’” (Hosea 2:18-23).

In this prophecy, we see that there is an absence of war in the Earth, as well as compliance by the animal kingdom. The House of Israel will be restored to a full relationship with its King, and will exist in a permanent kind of betrothal. There will be eternal righteousness and justice prevailing. All of the Created order, including grains, wine, and oil producing plants, will be in compliance with the will of God. **Most significant, though, is that the House of Israel will acknowledge the Lord as its God, and they will be once again recognized as His people—fully loyal and fully obedient to Him.**

The overall story we have witnessed down through Biblical history is that God’s people tend to wander from one wilderness experience to the next. At times along the journey—due to circumstances that require a response, resulting in some return to intimacy—they come back to their God. Yet, the pattern seems to repeat itself from almost generation to generation. We see it with the House of Israel in the Prophet Hosea’s era, and have certainly seen it since.

How important is the prophecy that we are reviewing this week? In describing God’s saving activities in his day, the Apostle Paul quoted from the Prophet Hosea—actually applying God’s promise of restoring the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the salvation of the nations. He did this in an effort to explain to his fellow Jewish Believers what was happening in His day, and why many of their own Jewish brethren had rejected Yeshua—and even more so why many others of the nations accepted Him:

“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. As He says also in Hosea, ‘I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, “MY PEOPLE,” AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, ‘BELOVED.’” AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, “YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,” THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD” (Romans 9:18-26; cf. Hosea 1:10).

As you read and contemplate the Torah and Haftarah readings from this week, and how God will extend mercy upon His chosen vessels—you should rejoice and give thanks to Him for your personal deliverance from the wilderness of unbelief. Can you remember when you did not believe in Yeshua? Or can you remember seasons when you took your salvation for granted? Have you ever noticed a tendency in your own personal walk with the Lord to wax and wane in your zeal and enthusiasm for Him?

We know that ultimately, the Lord is going to dwell with all of us “in that day.” But what are you doing today that would have you call Him your “husband,” and loyal provider? Are you seeking Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength *all of the time*? Or are you more attracted to some of the idols and distractions of this world that compete for your time and allegiance?

We are each going to be held accountable for what we do with our time, talents, and resources. Clearly, where our heart’s focus is, is the place where we will invest our energies and treasure. The wilderness Israelites of Moses’ era, the Northern Kingdom Israelites of Hosea’s day, and the saints of Paul’s time—each had the same questions that Believers today must ask. Is He my God? Am I one of His people?

Maybe we should occasionally turn the tables and quit telling people “I am one of His.” Instead, we should ask “Am I one of His?” If this is indeed true, what are we doing to demonstrate that we have been delivered from the wilderness? Perhaps these occasional queries will help us from getting lost between the cracks of worldly distractions?

Until the restoration of all things...

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