



## Headline News

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

### Hosea 6:1-3

*Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his going forth is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.*

Christine Keeler, Jimmy Swaggart, Paula Jones, Marv Albert, Michael Jackson, Jim Bakker, Jennifer Flowers, Bill Clinton, Monica Lowenski, Lorena Bobbitt - what do these people have in common?

They were headline news for all the wrong reasons. You read the published stories of their escapades. You saw their faces on television. You sat breathlessly waiting to hear all the details. You know what they have in common. They were all mixed up in scandals. Their private affairs became public business. Their scandals were of a particular, titillating type. When the news of their scandals broke, you wanted to know more.

Your inquiring mind wanted to know more. So, you read all the stories in the paper. You listened to the special reports on television. You read. You listened. You watched. You shook your head in disgust. You wagged your finger at them. You couldn't believe what they did. But, you were always ready to hear just a little bit more.

They were headline news. Most people have a fascination for learning all there is to know about the private lives of public people. That's why the headlines in the super market tabloids and the teasers for the nightly news-magazines promise to provide the complete low down.

You know how it goes. Photographers and reporters stalk the rich and famous, hoping to catch them in some embarrassing situation. Enemies and opponents spread rumors or tip off the media, seeking to damage and destroy. Facts blend with fiction, half-truths and innuendoes are woven together to feed the public's insatiable appetite for scandal.

What a world we live in. You try to rise above it. You don't want to be drawn into the fray. But, you can't escape the headlines. "What a scandal," you pant, and it's a guilty pleasure you feel as you wait for the details to unfold.

A good scandal has a way of grabbing your attention and refusing to let go until every rock has been turned over and all the sordid details have slithered out into the light of day. What a world we live in!

You might say this is just one symptom of today's sick society. You might assume that back in the good old days, people didn't gossip or talk about other people; they didn't spread rumors. You might conclude that back in the good old days people didn't read scandal sheet headline news. If that's how you figure it, your diagnosis is wrong. The love of a good scandal goes way back.

Take, for instance, the Bible. Read some of the headlines the Bible stories provide:

"Jealous Brother Kills Brother,"

"King Watches Neighbor Woman Bathe,"

"Younger Son Tricks Dying Dad,"

"Son of God Life of the Party, Brings Best Wine,"

"90 Year Old Woman Pregnant -

- Can't Be True, Says 100 Year Old Dad."

I just gave you some of the scandalous headlines, but you know every one of those stories in detail. There are many more.

It doesn't matter what time in history it happens; outrageous behavior always makes the headlines.

There's one scandalous Biblical headline I want to follow through to the very end today: It all began with a dateline in Jerusalem about 750 BC. when all the lurid minutiae of one man's personal life were laid bare.

"Prophet Picks Prostitute For Partner" the headlines screamed, and everybody in Jerusalem wanted to know more.

The prophet in question was a man named Hosea. Maybe you've heard of him. There's a book in the back of the Old Testament that talks all about him. What you may not know is that his life was one, long, public sex scandal.

Had they been around back then, ABC and Fox, NBC and CBS, HBO and Showtime would have stumbled over each other in the rush to produce their own versions of made-for-TV docu-dramas exposing the full story of Hosea and the prostitute he chose for his wife.

Can you imagine it? He was a respectable prophet. She was a woman with a bad reputation. What were they doing together? What a juicy scandal it was. I imagine some of you are thinking, "Jerry, tell me more."

It might surprise you to learn that there was no hard-hitting investigative reporter who broke the news; there was no jilted lover who spilled the juicy details; there was no rival prophet who was seeking to ruin Hosea's reputation; there was no under-paid maid who took secret photos of the boudoir. There was none of that. Hosea, himself, broke the story.

He stood up in front of every synagogue and temple he could get into and said, "Listen to my sorry tale..." He called a meeting of the ministerial association and told his fellow priests, "Have I got a story for you..." He worked the major intersections of downtown Jerusalem, yelling to the passers-by through a bull-horn, "Let me tell you what happened to me..."

Day Two's headline read, "Prophet Hoped Wife Would Change Her Ways." That's what Hosea said. He thought he could take a prostitute and make her pure. He thought his love was all she needed. He thought his love would make her change her ways. He thought a band of gold could convince her to give up her old life and embrace the life of a loving, faithful, wife and mother.

He was wrong!

Hosea's wife's name was Gomer. That's an unfortunate name for us. Don't think of her as Gomer Pyle, the ugly, slow-witted mechanic from the Andy Griffith show. Think of her as the beautiful, provocative woman she was.

That marriage seemed doomed from the start. They came from different worlds. Hosea was a prophet of the Jews. Gomer was a temple prostitute for the pagan god Baal. Hosea worshipped his God through prayer and following the Ten Commandments. Gomer worshipped her god through practicing her trade right there in the temple. To show their devotion to Baal, men would go

to the temple and buy a prostitute. In their religion, they thought that was a good thing.

But, Hosea thought it was a bad thing. To the people who followed Baal, Gomer was a servant of their god; but to Hosea, Gomer's job was a bad thing.

As unlikely as it may seem, somehow Hosea and Gomer met, fell in love, and got married. When Hosea slipped that gold band upon her finger, Gomer thought she was making a new beginning. Hosea thought his wife was making a clean break from her past life.

The years passed. Children were born. To all outward appearances, the marriage seemed to be working, but behind locked doors, Hosea and Gomer's domestic union was in trouble. Day Three's headlines broke the news: "Paternity Problems Pester Prophet."

It seems, right from the start, there were serious questions about the true paternity of Gomer's children. Hosea hoped he was the father, but apparently Gomer had been slipping back into her old habits.

Day Four's headlines confirmed the doubts. "Gomer Calls It Quits." The domestic life just wasn't for her. She left her husband. She walked out on her children. She left them all behind and went back to the temple of Baal, back to her life as a prostitute.

The scandal hit a new low in Day Five's headlines: "Prophet's Children Plead: Come Home, Mommy." Hosea lost all of his pride. He sent his little children over to the temple to beg their mother to come back home. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. Gomer wouldn't listen. She refused to go home. She wanted to stay right where she was.

Years passed. Gomer kept working her trade in the temple until her beauty faded. When her usefulness had been all used up, when she was a sunken, shapeless shadow of her former self, when no man wanted to worship Baal through her any more; her boss at the temple sent her over to the slave market and put her up for sale.

Day Six's headlines broke the news: "Prophet Sinks To All Time Low - Buys Back Hooker Ex-Wife."

All those many years later, when Hosea saw Gomer standing on the auction block at the corner slave market, Hosea knew that his love had never died. He outbid all the rest. He bought Gomer's freedom. He took her back home. He made her his wife again.

[And some people say the Bible is boring.]

What a scandal it was. The gossips had a field day. They called Hosea a fool.

What do you think? Was Hosea a fool?

- a fool for taking her back?
- a fool for loving her?
- a fool for forgiving her?
- a fool for making his private hurt public business?

Why did he do it? Hosea told it all. He didn't leave out a single embarrassing detail. He exposed the depth of his pain and the fullness of his domestic tragedy. He did it, because he wanted to write the headline for his own life story. He called it "A Love That Redeems."

Hosea made his story headline news in order to teach a lesson. It was an important lesson for his friends to learn 2,750 years ago, and it is still a fresh and important lesson for you and me to learn today.

"My life with Gomer," he said, "is like your life with God."  
Just as Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea, so are you unfaithful to God.  
Just as Gomer betrayed Hosea, so do you betray God.  
Just as Gomer turned her back on everything that was good and pure and true, so do you turn your back on what is best.  
Just as Gomer broke her vows to Hosea, so do you break your promises to God.  
Just as Gomer abandoned her husband and children, so do you abandon your faith.

Hosea exposed his personal tragedy so you could learn a lesson. He wanted to alert you to the tragedy which might be brewing in your life right now. "Don't be a faithless harlot," he warned you. "Don't turn your back on God's love." Hosea knew the truth. He had learned it through years of experience: he knew betrayal was right around the corner; he knew the enticements of the Baals are so very strong; and he knew the slave market is so very near.

750 years before Christ, Hosea revealed his painful marital woes so he could show his people back then, and show you today, "A Love That Redeems."

That's what you can learn today. Gomer represents mankind's unfaithfulness. Hosea stands for the constant, abiding, forgiving, love of God. Hosea said his love for Gomer illustrates God's wonderful love -

a love that can't be shortened by disobedience,  
a love that endures abandonment,  
a love that redeems from the lowest degradation,  
a love that restores what was thrown away,  
a love that renews what was ruined.

That's the kind of love God has for you.

And what Hosea started 2,750 years ago, Jesus Christ came to complete. Jesus came, and he told us that we're a whole lot more like Gomer than we are like Hosea. Jesus came, and he knew all about our unfaithfulness. Jesus came, and he saw us for who we are.

But he came to give us a gift - it's the same gift Hosea talked about so many years before. Jesus came to give us a gift called: "A Love That Redeems"

it comes with undeserved forgiveness,  
it comes with another chance to live life differently,  
it comes with purity, and promise, and potential.

It is, indeed, "A Love That Redeems" you, a love that reaches out to you, a love that brings you home.

Hosea was willing to be headline news. He was willing to risk a public scandal. He was willing to be ridiculed, and embarrassed, and held up for public scrutiny. He was willing to do it all for you.

Jesus Christ was willing to take the hatred of the Pharisees and the criticisms of the crowd. He was willing to be beaten and abused, misunderstood and misquoted, accused and accosted. He was willing to give up his life for you.

Hosea and Jesus alike watched their lives be exposed in the headline news, but it was worth it as long as their pain showed you "A Love That Redeems."

They want you to know that God loves you with "A Love That Redeems" even when you despise and reject God.

They want you to know that God loves you with "A Love That Redeems" even when you play the harlot to the enticements of this world.

They want you to know that God loves you with "A Love That Redeems" even when you're not worth it.

Just as Hosea stood at the door watching as Gomer walked away; just as his heart broke, and his tears fell, and his babies wailed; just as he called out to her, pleaded with her, to come home...

So Jesus stands at the door of heaven watching as you walk away, and he calls to you... "Come home..."

Come back home, from whatever distant land has captured you.

Come back home, from the sin that has enslaved you.

Come back home, from the despair that has imprisoned you.

Come home to your God,

for although you are torn, He will mend you...

and where you are broken, He will bind you...

and if you have fallen, He will pick you up.

Come home to your God, who loves you with "**A Love That Redeems.**"