

Hosea 3:2-3

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Hosea obeys the LORD's command and buys his wife Gomer back. But to discipline Gomer, Hosea asks her to live in complete abstinence of sexual relations for many days, to stop playing the harlot, and to refrain from marrying another man, before the two of them can resume their normal married life.

In the previous verse, the LORD commanded Hosea to continue to show love to his wife Gomer, despite her unfaithfulness (v. 1). Here, Hosea gave an account of his complete obedience to the LORD and said, *So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley.*

Hosea's payment to redeem his wife was both in money and in kind. His monetary amount was *fifteen shekels of silver*. His payment in kind was *a homer and a half of barley*. A *homer* was a unit of measurement estimated to be roughly ten bushels or about 475 pounds. The phrase "half of barley" translates the Hebrew term "lethech," which is half of a *homer*.

The Mosaic law had a number of redemptions, such as the redemption of a firstborn (Exodus 13:13). This was to remind and teach subsequent generations that they were redeemed from Egypt by God (Exodus 14:14). Hosea's payment for redemption seems to represent the theme of God's redemption. It could also represent a redemption from the breakage of a vow, in this case Gomer's breakage of the marital vow.

Leviticus 27 sets forth an interesting schedule of valuations relating to vows that overlap this passage. It seems that these amounts are intended to redeem someone for or from a vow.

- Fifteen shekels of silver was the valuation of a male over sixty years of age. Likely this referred to the earning power of someone aged sixty or older (Leviticus 27:7).
- The value of a homer of barley seed was set at fifty shekels of silver (Leviticus 27:16).

The value of barley seed would not necessarily be the same as the value of barley.

The full list of monetary valuations from Leviticus 27:1-7 are:

- 50 shekels for a male aged 20-50
- 30 shekels for a female aged 20-50
- 20 shekels for a male aged 5-20
- 10 shekels for a female aged 5-20
- 5 shekels for a male aged 1 month to 5 years
- 3 shekels for a female aged 1 month to 5 years

According to some estimates, the payment in kind of a *homer and a half of barley* was roughly equivalent to fifteen shekels of silver. If this is correct, then Hosea paid approximately thirty

shekels to redeem his wife. This would correspond to the payment schedule of 30 shekels for a female aged 20-50.

According to the book of Exodus, thirty shekels was also the amount due as compensation for the loss of a slave (Exodus 21:32). Although the reason for Hosea's payment is not stated, perhaps Gomer was to be redeemed from a position as a slave. She might have found herself as a servant being leant out as a prostitute.

It is also possible that the payment represented a bride price, as if Hosea had no prior relationship with Gomer and was about to betroth her a second time. In this case Hosea's action would match God's promise to betroth Israel "in righteousness and in justice, and lovingkindness and in compassion" in the latter days (Hosea 2:14-23). Although we are not told directly, it seems most likely that Hosea's redemption payment would have represented all these things, all showing God's redemptive nature and power.

Having paid the price to redeem Gomer, Hosea spoke to her, providing her with some disciplinary guidelines. First, he *said to her*, *You shall stay with me for many days*. Although Hosea had already purchased his wife back, he required her to have a probationary period, in which she would remain at home but live in complete abstinence of intimate relations that would last for *many days*. This might indicate that Israel would endure a probationary period that lasted for an extended time prior to its fellowship with God being fully restored.

Second, Hosea said to his wife, *You shall not play the harlot*. That means Gomer was to stop her immoral life. She was to not act as a prostitute, an immoral woman receiving gifts from her lovers. Instead, she was called to live worthy of her status as the prophet's wife to provide him with true companionship (Amos 3:3), enjoyment (Hebrews 13:4), and completeness (Genesis 2:23). This would fulfill God's design for marriage to be lived in oneness: "A man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-7). It would also be symbolic of God desiring Israel, as His wife, not to play the harlot to other nations, their gods, and their exploitative ways (see Leviticus 20:4-5, where God calls the sacrifice of children to Molech "playing the harlot after Molech"). God desires to have oneness with Israel, an intimate and flourishing relationship.

Third, Hosea told Gomer that she was not to *have any man* (husband), meaning that she was to refrain from sexual relationships during this probationary period. Gomer was to show devotion to Hosea alone in order to successfully complete the probationary period. However, that devotion would be without physical intimacy. Hosea indicated that this relationship would be mutual during this period, stating *So I will also be toward you*. Hosea would be loyal to his wife, and not enter sexual relationships as well. The next section will explain what this was to illustrate to teach Israel.

Biblical Text

² So I bought her for myself for fifteen *shekels* of silver and a homer and a half of barley. ³ Then I said to her, "You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you."