

Hosea 3:4-5

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Gomer's probationary period illustrates Israel's experience in captivity, where the nation will live with no political or religious entity. After this period, Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and will experience complete restoration.

In the previous section, Hosea obeyed God's command to continue to love his wandering wife Gomer, despite her infidelity. Hosea purchased Gomer back, redeeming her as a picture of God's redemption, and asked her to have a probationary period, in which she would abstain from sexual relations before the two of them could resume their normal life as husband and wife (vv. 2-3). In this section, the LORD made clear that Hosea's relationship with Gomer was an object lesson to portray His strategy to reclaim Israel as His covenant people, and restore intimacy with them.

The LORD declared that just as Gomer was to remain with Hosea *for many days* in total abstinence, *Israel would live in abstinence for many days*. During this disciplinary period, *the sons of Israel would remain without king or prince*. The reference to Israel living *without king or prince* speaks of a time when Israel would be in captivity. The LORD would discipline His covenant people by sending them into exile. As a result, the entire political system of Israel would be temporarily destroyed. This would be in keeping with the terms of the covenant/treaty Israel had agreed to enter into with God. Because Israel broke the treaty, they would be exiled from the land (Exodus 19:8; Deuteronomy 28:36; 1 Chronicles 9:1).

Not only would God temporarily destroy Israel's political system, He would also destroy her religious system because He stated that they would be *without sacrifice or sacred pillar for many days*. The word used for sacrifice here is "zevah" in Hebrew, and it refers to offerings of thanksgiving which served to bring fellowship between God and the worshiper (Leviticus 7:16; 22:18-23). Here it is probably used as a general term for the entire sacrificial system. This would imply that Israel would be exiled from the land, away from the place of worship in Israel.

The term *sacred pillar* refers to stones, either cut or uncut (2 Kings 3:2). Sacred pillars or sacred stones once served as a legitimate part of the LORD's worship, especially during the patriarchal period. For instance, "Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top" (Genesis 28:18, 22; 31:13). However, because those stones were later associated with pagan worship (2 Kings 3:2), the LORD forbade their use and instead asked Israel to smash them (Deuteronomy 7:5).

Israel would also live *for many days without ephod or household idols*. An *ephod* was a garment or object normally worn by priests (Exodus 28:6-14). But it sometimes became an object of worship (see also Judges 8:27). Since it is here paired with *household idols*, that would seem to be the inference in this context. The term translated *household idols* were used for divination to consult occult powers (Genesis 31:19; 1 Samuel 19:13, 16).

These two items (*ephod* and *household idols*) were used together in the book of Judges, where the people of Israel treated them much like the pagans treated their gods, as a good luck charm and source of power to manipulate to their own end (Judges 17:5; 18:5). Here in Hosea, the LORD explained that the Israelites would lose their religious system, including aspects that might have included syncretization with pagan practice. This indicates a prediction of exile, where the Israelites would be dispersed among the nations.

Nevertheless, after the disciplinary period of exile, Israel will be redeemed, and then experience a new life and enjoy a new relationship with their husband, Yahweh: *The sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God*. In Hosea's days the Israelites were seeking pagan gods like the Baals. However, God's discipline by which He would temporarily destroy Israel's political and religious entities would allow them to come to their senses. They would return/repent and *seek the LORD* with all their hearts. They would also *seek David their king*.

The reference to *David as king* here refers to a descendant of David who will rule as Messiah in the last days (Jeremiah 23:5-6). At that time, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah will be united and submit to the Messiah's leadership (Amos 9:11; Isaiah 11:1-12).

As a result of their repentance, *the sons of Israel will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days*. This descendant of David will be Jesus. And this prediction of return again to earth in the *last days* is yet in our future, as of this writing in 2022. Jesus will return to earth a second time, landing on the Mount of Olives, the place from which He ascended to heaven after being resurrected from the dead (Zechariah 14:4). He will defeat Israel's enemies and establish His kingdom on earth (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:4-6).

The *goodness* of God to which the people will return refers to His provision, including grain, oil, and vineyards (Jeremiah 31:12). That means the people of God will joyfully return to their Suzerain (ruler) God and will humbly acknowledge His power. They will once again live in fellowship with the LORD. Israel will experience full restoration and will be blessed beyond measure. In the present, they have broken their covenant, so will experience the provisions that pertain to their choice to rebel. But in the future they will also experience the restoration promised in God's treaty/covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

Biblical Text

⁴ For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. ⁵ Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.