

Were Elisha's words, "Send them," a command, or merely the granting of permission? Verse 18 makes the answer very clear: "When they returned to Elisha ... he said to them, "Didn't I tell you not to go?" These parallels make it easy to understand God's words to Hosea. There must have been a background that has not been fully described in his book. Human beings are often drawn in more than one direction. The Old Testament prophets were not mere secretaries. Their books represent the very mind of God, but they often include the living experience of the individuals whom God used to give us part of His living Word. Some of the prophets give us details about their calls or about their early experiences. In other cases the prophet seems to appear suddenly, but we can be sure that God prepared each of them for his particular task.

I believe that I have seen some interesting parallels to Hosea's early experiences. There have been two or three occasions when I have met a young man who loved the Lord and ardently desired to serve Him, but was engaged to a woman who showed no slightest trace of interest in Christian service and did not hesitate to display a lack of interest in the matters that were so dear to the man's heart. In such a case a man usually has to choose between the woman and the Lord's call, and if he tries to cling to both it can lead to disaster. The case of Hosea may have been similar.

It is easy to imagine Hosea's early experiences. He dearly loved the Lord and wished to follow Him wholeheartedly, but he was greatly attracted by Gomer. We do not know whether she was already involved in immorality, or whether the immorality in her family background clearly showed the likelihood that she herself would eventually fall into grievous sin. He prayed that the Lord would change her (or that he would protect her from the evil influences so clear in her family background). It seemed that Hosea must choose between Gomer and the Lord, but he sincerely loved them both. He refused to take "no" for the Lord's answer, but kept on praying. Finally the Lord gave His consent, saying something like this: "Go and take a wife of whoredom. You will have to suffer a great deal of misery, but if you stand true to Me I will enable you to give a witness that will bring blessing to My people."