

## The Bible: A love story

### Pt 2 : Adultery and Divorce

In the last message, we saw how Yahweh entered into a spiritual 'marriage' with His chosen bride, the nation of Israel. Like Boaz with Ruth, He had first redeemed her (from Egypt) and then entered into a sacred covenant (*berith / diatheke*) with her at Sinai (see previous message: '*A Marriage made in heaven?*').

Unfortunately, the course of the marriage did not (nor could not) run as smoothly as the wedding itself!

Remember that the covenant of marriage entered into by Yahweh and His bride was a *contract* (like any other contract) and, as such, was conditional upon both sides upholding their *end of the bargain* - so to speak! For Israel's part, her responsibility was to adhere to the requirements of the *ketubah* (marriage

contract - otherwise known as the 'Book of the Law' : **Ex.24:7**). This is what the Scriptures simply refer to as 'the Law' (**John 1:17**) - and Israel, as the bride, were contractually bound to keep it!

Yahweh's proposal (**Ex. 19:5**):

**Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then .....**

And the 'bride's' response (**Exodus 24:3**):

**When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do."**

**They had declared fidelity to one another!**

**Now the 'husband' was certainly going to be faithful:**

**Deuteronomy 7:9**

**Know therefore that the Lord (Yahweh) your God is God (Elohim); he is the faithful God, *keeping his covenant of***

*love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.*

Israel, in its turn, was to remain faithful and devoted to her husband as per (in particular) the first two stipulations of the marriage contract (the Ten Commandments):

*“You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself an image..... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God....” (Exodus 20:3-5 )*

Idol worship would be a betrayal of these vows of fidelity - a 'cheating' on the husband, if you will - and such marital infidelity would evoke justifiable anger and jealousy on the His part! Ardentlly desiring Israel's love and devotion (analogous to marital fidelity), Yahweh says to His loved one:

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 10:12).

Idolatry - the following after other 'gods' (even though these were false gods) would, in this context, constitute marital betrayal - even a form of spiritual *prostitution*! Bowing down to foreign gods would be equivalent to falling in love with other men . Even entering into alliances with other nations controlled by these foreign gods (see message '*Israel under attack*') would be tantamount to turning to men other than one's husband for love and protection!

And such became the case! The fatal flaw in this first marriage (the Old Covenant) didn't take very long to emerge.

Even before Moses had brought down from Mt Sinai the two stone tablets which constituted the '*Book of the Covenant*', that they had sworn to uphold, the people were violating their oath of loyalty to Yahweh by breaking the first two stipulations. They were dancing in frenzy around the statue of a golden calf - which may well have represented Apis, the bull-god of Egypt([Ex.32:1-6](#)).

This appalling act highlighted the extent of Israel's infidelity! The wedding was barely over (a mere 47 days old) and they were already cheating on their husband!

We today find these actions almost inexplicable! The nation had been delivered from Egypt ([Exodus 12](#)), led by a cloud and pillar of fire ([Exodus 13](#)), miraculously brought through the parted waters of the Red Sea ([Exodus 14](#)), fed with manna and quails from heaven ([Exodus 16](#)), supernaturally given water

to drink ([Exodus 17](#)) and accorded a resounding victory over the Amalekites ([Exodus 17](#)). In the face of such evident Divine deliverance and preservation, how could they have so easily reverted to worshipping the gods of Egypt?

To understand this, we need to understand the culture and mentality of that time. If we go to [Ezekiel 23](#), we find the nation of Israel is represented by two sisters:

The older was named Oholah, and her sister was Oholibah.....Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem ([Ezekiel 23:4](#)).

So Oholah (Samaria - Northern kingdom of Israel) and Oholibah (Jerusalem - Southern kingdom of Judah) represented the nation of Israel in its entirety. And what we then discover is that both sisters had been engaged in idol worship in Egypt for perhaps the whole four

hundred years of the engagement period (*Erusin*) leading up to the wedding! And notice here that their infidelity is couched in sexual terminology which must be understood in terms of the impending marriage and (lack of) spiritual faithfulness to her 'fiancé'.

They became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms caressed ([Ezekiel 23:3](#) see also [v.7](#)).

In fact, it was this idol worship during the engagement period (and not an expanding population [[Ex.1:9-10](#)] that constituted the underlying reason for Israel's subsequent enslavement in Egypt under a new Pharaoh:

[Ezekiel 20:8](#)

'But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes

on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt'.

Clearly it was simply not in the future bride's nature to be faithful! And we know the reason for this: Israel was then, and later (even now) living in the energy of the flesh - the natural man! The problem is that the *flesh* (working through human nature) *cannot* love God ([Rom.8:5-8](#); [Heb.11:6](#) ) and this stark reality was proving to be so in Israel's experience - as it is in the unsaved today!

The Israelites' previous involvement with Egyptian idols may well have also predisposed them to a naive acceptance of the ancient world's polytheistic belief that Yahweh was merely one God among many - a powerful God, to be sure (as the Philistines fearfully acknowledged ([1 Sam.5:7](#) ff) - but still one God among

many. This seems likely as we find that, time after time, Yahweh had to remind the Israelites that He was the one and only true God - the *real deal* ([Deut.7:9](#); [1 Kings 18:21](#))!

And so a consistent violation of the Old Covenant - the Israelites consistently betraying their husband to whom they had sworn faithfulness under the terms of the *Berith* - became a recurring feature of Israel's history.

On one occasion Yahweh said: "...**they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,**" ([Jer. 31:32](#))

Yahweh continued to be the faithful husband, continually demonstrating His love and fidelity - but, time and again, He was forced to berate Israel for going after strange gods - a spiritual wife committing spiritual adultery and thereby effectively prostituting herself.

## Jeremiah 3:20

But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you, Israel, have been unfaithful to me," declares Yahweh.

And in [Ezekiel 16:32](#) the indignant 'husband' levels this accusation against his erring spouse:

'You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!'

Yahweh's description of His wife's unfaithfulness becomes even more graphic in [Ezekiel 16:15](#),

'But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his.'

Remember the three specific things to be provided by the husband as stipulated in the Ketubah: food, clothing and oil (marital love)? Yahweh had certainly

provided these for His spouse ([Ezek.16:10-13](#)) but now we find that Yahweh's wife, Israel, is accused of going outside the covenant of marriage to procure these gifts from other so-called *gods*:

### [Hosea 2:5](#)

She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my *food* and my water, my *wool* and my *linen*, my *olive oil* and my drink.'

All the benefits promised to Israel by her Divine husband (security, protection, guidance, wealth, love etc) were being sought from other nations (and, by extension, the *gods* of the other nations). Israel was adopting their customs, their values, their very lifestyles - as could be seen (for example) in their adoption of the abominable practices of the Canaanite 'god', Molek ([2 Kings 23:10](#)).

And it wasn't a 'one-way street'! Israel's involvement and interaction with these other powers (lovers) went even further: she didn't just obtain these 'marital benefits' from other so-called gods, but even took them *from* her husband and lavished them on other lovers!

Ezekiel, at the time of the Babylonian captivity, records:

**Ezekiel 16:15,18-19:**

And you took your embroidered *clothes* to put on *them*, and you offered my *oil* and incense before them. Also the *food* I provided for you---the flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat---you offered as fragrant incense before them. That is what happened, declares the Sovereign Lord (*italics mine*).

By the time of Hosea's ministry (just prior to the Assyrian invasion of 722 BC), no effective relationship existed between Yahweh and Israel. In fact , Hosea was

commanded to marry a prostitute who would subsequently desert him - Yahweh's way of graphically symbolizing Israel's infidelity to her husband.

God at that time said this:

**Hosea 2:2**

“Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts”.

But it was all in vain! The first stage of the great divorce took place in 722 BC with the destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. The marriage, in Oholah's case, was thus terminated and the unfaithful wife finally dismissed from the family home of Israel:

**Jeremiah 3:8** I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce *and sent her away*

**because of all her adulteries. (*italics mine*)**

And in the subsequent century, the younger sister, Oholibah (the southern kingdom of Judah), continued with *her* idolatry, refusing to learn the lesson of what had happened to her older sister, Oholah. Jeremiah describes the situation in these words:

**'Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood' (Jer.3:8-9)**

In fact, under Manasseh and his son Amon, things got so bad in Jerusalem that Jehovah concludes in **Jer.3:11,**

**“Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah”.**

So Judah, too, was sent away from the family home - carried off by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar - beginning in 606 BC.

It's true that seventy years later, Oholibah (Judah) *did* return to the land under Ezra and Nehemiah but, after the great diaspora (dispersion) of the first century AD, the nation of Israel *as a whole* is only now just starting to come back after an effective exile of over two thousand years

Yet in spite of such unfaithfulness - in spite of such a shocking betrayal - Israel's former husband has refused to abandon her. Even at the time of the Babylonian captivity, Yahweh persisted in His pleas for a reconciliation:

(As you read these words, it's most important to keep in mind that in the O.T., the expression: 'The Lord' (capitalised in the A.V), serves as a

substitution for the actual name: *Yahweh*. This appears to have come about because the Jews will not say the name of God aloud and so substitute the word: *Adonai* (Lord). In deference to this, the English translators of the Masoretic text have made a similar substitution).

“Return, faithless people,” declares the Lord (Yahweh) “for I am your husband. I will choose you---one from a town and two from a clan---and bring you to Zion (Jer. 3:14)

In fact Yahweh is explicit in His determination to reunite with His former wife:

“In that day,” declares the Lord, “you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' ” (Hosea 2:16)

Again - in [Ezekiel 16:60](#)

Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you (see also [Jeremiah 31:31-33](#)).

So, to realize this aim, Yahweh has ensured that, during this time of separation, Israel never succeeds in finding another 'lover'. This is in order that she might come to her senses and realize how blessed she originally was in her relationship with Him.

He explains this strategy - again through the prophet Hosea:

..I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. [7] She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.'  
([Hosea 2:6](#))

And as a result, ever since the Babylonian captivity ended in 531 BC, we have witnessed a situation unique among the nations. Although Israel has been scattered, she has, for two-and-a-half millennia, retained her distinct identity. Jews all over the world have at no time adopted any other religion or been assimilated into any other country - never 'found another lover' - so to speak! A Jew is still a Jew and their identity as a race is still effectively synonymous with their religion of Judaism! Israel has truly been surrounded by 'thornbushes' and has had her path blocked.

It certainly is a remarkable fulfilment of prophecy! The marriage may be dead but even though national Israel is not presently in a spiritual relationship with Yahweh (for she still rejects Christ - [Hebrews 1:1-2](#)), she still fiercely maintains the outward trappings of Judaism! She goes through the outward

form of a marriage with no actual relationship!

And all this has been ordained by Yahweh so that Israel will, one day, reconcile with her former husband. Even Yahweh's turning to the Gentiles is described in terms of creating jealousy in the erring wife to bring about a change of heart:

They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding. (Deut. 32:21)

Hosea describes Israel's period of exile and its ultimate result in the following words:

For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. [5] Afterward the

Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days ([Hosea 3:4-5](#)).

This reconciliation will take place on the *Day of Atonement* when Christ returns. The Lord Himself assures Israel that she will be lovingly restored at this future time:

For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. “Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband---the Lord Almighty is his name---the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if

you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit---a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God (Isaiah 54:3-6).

And note the words of Jeremiah 31:22  
How long will you wander, unfaithful Daughter Israel? The Lord will create a new thing on earth---the woman will return to the man.”

This time - the relationship will be successful because it will be enacted under the terms of the New Covenant - an *unconditional* marriage covenant based on the work of Christ and the renewal by the Holy Spirit.

It will be a New Covenant (as seen in the N.T. writings) in which (a remnant of) national Israel will be reconciled to her husband in the future *Kingdom of Heaven* and in which the Church will be ultimately wed to the Lamb in the present *Kingdom of God*.

Orthodox Jews are actually looking forward to the day of Israel's reconciliation to her husband! At Passover , they place a fifth cup on the table for Elijah and fervently repeat the national longing: "Perhaps next year - in Jerusalem!"

Even more explicitly, each morning orthodox Jewish men each morning put on the *tefillin* (phylacteries) - a traditional wrapping of leather straps (usually wound around the weaker arm 7 times) - reflective of the seven blessings of the wedding ceremony. The tefillin straps are also wrapped around the fingers - representing the ring a husband gives his wife under the *chuppah* (symbolic of the betrothal of God and Israel). At the same time, some will recite the following passage:

**"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,**

in love and compassion. [20] I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. [23] I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one. ' I will say to those called 'Not my people, ' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" (Hosea 2:19-20,23)

(For an account of Israel's return to her Messiah and an explanation of how the Church (and Rapture) fit into this context, please read the series entitled '*The Two Kingdoms*').

In conclusion, there is an important lesson (among many) that we can learn from the history of Israel as seen figuratively in the two sisters: Oholah and Oholibah ([Ezekiel 23](#)):

Spiritual unfaithfulness on the part of Israel didn't merely consist of overtly worshipping the idols of other nations.

**Ezekiel 23** describes (in graphic sexual terminology) how Oholah lusted after the Assyrians and Oholibah, in her turn, after the Babylonians!

How was this so? Not in directly worshipping the idols of those countries so much as in making Godless alliances with them for protection and support. This constituted spiritual adultery because, in the metaphor of the marriage, it would be tantamount to the wife looking to men other than her husband for her protection and support!

Based on God's own Word that the things that happened to Israel were to serve as examples for us (**1 Cor.10:6; 15:46**) what can we, as members of a spiritual nation (**1Pet.2:9**) learn from Israel's experience?

Just this: because we, as the Church, are betrothed to Christ, we can (and often do) commit spiritual adultery in similar ways.

Not only are we exhorted as those 'not of the world' ([John 17:16 ff](#)) to keep ourselves from idols ([1 John 5:21](#)) - undue importance given to possessions, career, sport etc - but we are also enjoined to abstain from too close an association with this world in terms of its goals, values, direction etc ([2 Cor.6:14-18](#)) Any dependence on this world for our security or support would, in view of our relationship with our *betrothed*, constitute a form of marital betrayal - *adultery*, if you will!

#### [James 4:4](#)

[4] You *adulterous* people, don't you know that *friendship with the world means enmity against God?* (*italics mine*)

Oholah turned to Assyria for support - rather than depending on Yahweh alone. The result? She was ultimately effectively destroyed by those same foreign lovers - the Assyrians! Oholibah,

in her turn, depended on Babylon and was subsequently attacked and carried off into captivity *by* Babylon!

The lesson to be learnt here? If we rely upon any other resource but God alone, our testimony will ultimately be destroyed (and God dishonoured) by the very thing we rely upon! ([Matt.10:33](#))

Everyday and always, we should be watching and waiting for our beloved Bridegroom to appear from heaven to take us back with him to our heavenly home (see message entitled: *The Rapture - fact or fiction?*).

The Scripture says of this world:  
Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ([Phil.3:19](#))

And the message for us?

**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil.3:20-21).**

**This hope should give us a real incentive to prepare ourselves for that momentous meeting in the air by living holy lives - devoted to working out God's will for us in this foreign land (Rom.12:2; 1John 3:3; Eph.4:1; Rev.19:7-8).**

**In the next message in this series "The Bible - a love story" we'll discuss God's intention to reconcile with Israel and just how this reconciliation is to be achieved.**

**May God bless His Word to each one of us!**