

WHEN GOD "DIVORCED" HIS WIFE

By Allon Maxwell

In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in vivid word pictures, God is described as having divorced His "wife".

Because the prophets use both "adulteress" and "harlot" in these cases, referring to God's ground for divorcing His "wife", it has been claimed that they are using these two words interchangeably.

The claim is then transferred to the New Testament, to stretch the teaching of Jesus and grant licence for divorce and REMARRIAGE on the ground of adultery.

However, the prophets are not speaking about a real woman, or about real divorce, and they are certainly NOT speaking about REMARRIAGE.

They are using the words to convey a spiritual lesson about the consequences of the NATIONAL sin of IDOLATRY.

That spiritual lesson is not teaching us that the Hebrew words for harlotry, adultery and idolatry, mean the same thing, or are interchangeable in every place where they appear. (That is another subject in its own right).

The prophets are using those words to emphasise the magnitude of the sin. Israel's "adultery" is no ordinary adultery. It needs a bigger word than adultery to describe God's view of the spiritual condition of the nation.

God likens Israel to a woman who has deserted her husband to become a harlot. The woman used to describe Israel's condition, knows no shame. She is insatiable. She is a harlot who has given herself to many lovers, without payment. Rather than seeking payment, she has actually paid some of the many lovers she has taken.

The SPIRITUAL LESSON behind the graphic word pictures of harlotry, is that Israel is DEFILED AND SEPARATED FROM GOD by idolatry, in exactly the same way that a woman who wilfully plays the harlot, **without repentance**, is defiled and separated from an angry husband.

The prophets have described a "worst possible case". The situation between God and Israel is so bad that, in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, GOD HAS DIVORCED HIS HARLOT WIFE!

The NATION has been sent into exile for its persistent unrepentant IDOLATRY.

It is certainly true that, even for Christians, unrepented harlotry of this magnitude would lead to estrangement and separation. However, as we shall see below, even in this worst possible case, the prophets are not uniform about whether God has issued an actual bill of divorce.

And it would be HARDNESS OF HEART, in the extreme, to use this spiritual lesson to grant a LICENCE FOR REMARRIAGE on the grounds of either idolatry or adultery.

It is quite obvious from the context of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that God still regards Himself as bound by His "marriage covenant" with Israel. God is not using His "divorce" as an occasion to seek a new wife. Rather, He is inviting the harlot to repent and return to Him. The door is open for that and will never close while life extends opportunity.

In [Isaiah 50:1](#), it is not even certain that the bill of divorce exists. However it is not important that we resolve the question of whether or not there has been a formal "divorce". Either way the lesson is the same. The "wife" who has been sent away for her iniquities is neither forgotten nor forsaken. Zion will be restored to favour.

Hosea goes even further with the lesson of God's faithfulness. When faced with his own decision about what to do with a wife who has become a harlot, Hosea DOES NOT DIVORCE HER. Rather, at considerable personal cost, he actually buys her back from the brothel where she has become a slave. This, Hosea says, is how God also will deal with His faithless "wife".

With one united voice, the prophets are saying what the Apostle Paul also said, centuries later. GOD WILL REMAIN UNMARRIED OR ELSE BE RECONCILED!

How is it possible that men would dare to distort or misuse these beautiful lessons to encourage or condone a lesser standard for human marriage?

Let those whose hearts have been hard about this, turn towards God, listen and learn!

If there is any lesson at all to be learned from the prophets about divorce and remarriage, it is that, even for the worst sort of hurt, even in the worst possible case of ADULTERY, God expects US also to keep covenant with the same unchangeable and sacrificial love which He extends to His "wife".

That is the nature of the Covenant keeping which is one of the qualifications for life with God on the holy mountain. ([Psalm 15:4](#) *"he who swears to his own hurt and does not change".*)

When we say our marriage vows BEFORE GOD, we make a sacred promise, "for better, for worse, until death do us part".

Those words contain no exceptions and leave no room for change.
