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## "The Rest of the Story"

by Gary Simpson

**Hosea 1:2-10** (KJV) The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.

3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.

5 And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel, in the valley of Jezreel. And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. 7 But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

8 Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

**Genesis 18:20-32** (KJV) And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.

23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous:

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wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.

29 And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

31 And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

## Reflection:

As a kid, I recall listening to Paul Harvey. He would tell facts about a person or an event that were not widely known and he would conclude with, "And now you know the rest of the story." That thought crossed my mind about both Chapter 1 of Hosea and the story of Sodom. So the title of this sermon is "The Rest of the Story."

I am of the understanding that rabbis encourage people to "turn it ant turn it".<sup>1</sup> In an attempt to understand the Bible, we are going to keep turning the Bible, looking at the texts to see what we see from other angles to see how that changes our perspective on the passages.

## Sex Trade Related Words in the Bible:

As a background to the book of Hosea, I will let you in on some ongoing research that I am doing into Bible texts that have words related to the sex trade or that relate to sexual sins, such as adultery and fornication. There is a reason for my doing the research. You may remember Robert Pickton, the convicted British Columbia serial killer. In 2007, "Pickton was convicted of second-degree murder in the deaths of six women".<sup>2</sup> There was some reason to believe Pickton may have been involved in the murder of many more women. A *Wikipedia* article states, "Pickton also stood accused of first-degree murder in the deaths of 20 other women until these charges were stayed" in 2010.<sup>3</sup> When the news of many missing sex trade workers was hitting the headlines, I wondered if there was a possible connection between Bible verses that sounded quite critical of prostitution and violence targeting sex trade workers. I asked myself, "Are hate crimes taking place against sex-trade workers, because we are not understanding the Bible?"

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<sup>1</sup> Gwynn Kessler. "Looking Back to Look Forward: Parashat Vayera (Genesis 18:1-22:24)." *Torah Queries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*. (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>2</sup> "Robert Picton." *Wikipedia*. June 2019, 23 July 2019. <[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Pickton](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Pickton)>.

<sup>3</sup> Pickton also stood accused of first-degree murder in the deaths of 20 other women until these charges were stayed on August 4, 2010.

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I started to research words related to the sex trade to see how the words were being used and what the words meant in the context of the Bible passages where the words were located. So far, I have researched the words whore, whoremonger and whoredom. I am not comfortable using the words, because they seem insulting and judgmental. I am concerned that using the terms does not treat sex trade workers with the inherent worth and dignity that people of faith believe each person has. But the words are in the Bible, so we need to deal with them.

I used the King James Version, because it is copyright free and because a lot of Biblical research tools and commentaries are based on the King James Version. I am not through my work, but I managed to finish my work reviewing the words prostitute, whore, whoredom and whoring. This is a highlight of what I found.

- **Prostitute** appears once and is used in the context of the worship of other gods.
- **Whore** is used fifteen times. "Two of the fifteen passages appear to be related to sexual acts, one of the texts could be either about sexual sins or about the worship of idols and twelve of the Bible verses appear to be about the worship of other gods."
- **Whoredom** appears forty-six times. "In every passage, the chapter appears to have themes that make a case the the word whoredom is used in reference to the sin of worshipping other gods. In one passage, a case could be made that the text may be in reference to a more sexual and personal form of prostitution."
- **Whoring** appears eighteen times. "In all 18 passages where the word whoring is used . . . the word whoring appears to be used in reference to the worship of other gods."<sup>4</sup>

I am not wanting to make a sweeping generalization, which might not apply to other words related to the sex trade and to sexual infidelity, but we need to be **cautious** about how we read the Bible. The prophets sound angry when they mention words related to the sex trade. These frustrated prophets may have been more angry with those who are worshipping other gods than they were with those who are engaging in premarital or extramarital sexual activities.

First, we will look a little at how prostitution is seen in the Bible and then we will look at prostitution in the context of Hosea. In both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures, prostitution seems to be a recognized industry.<sup>5</sup> In ancient near Eastern religions, there was an association between sex trade workers and the worship of gods other than the God of Israel. In the city of Corinth, there was a temple to the goddess Aphrodite. There were one thousand temple prostitutes associated with the temple.<sup>6</sup> One commentator described Corinth saying, "Sex was a religion there."<sup>7</sup> In the Pauline

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Simpson. "Key Sexuality-Related Biblical Words." *Created Gay*. n.d., 18 July 2019. <<https://www.createdgay.com/keywords.html>>

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Knust. "Prostitution in the Bible." *Bible Odssey*. n.d., 10 July 2019. <<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/video-gallery/p/prostitution-in-the-bible>>.

<sup>6</sup> J. Vernon McGee. *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*. (Pasadena, California: Thru the Bible Radio, 1983), 1 and William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Corinthians*. Revised Ed. (Burlington, Ontario: G.R. Welch, 1975), 3.

<sup>7</sup> McGee. (1983), 1.

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epistles, Paul is concerned more with church members utilizing the services of sex trade workers than he is with sex trade workers themselves.<sup>8</sup> At times sex trade workers are treated with respect in the Bible. In fact, a sex trade worker is a hero in one of the Biblical narratives. Rahab can be described as a "friendly prostitute", a friendly sex trade worker who lets Joshua's spies into Jericho.<sup>9</sup>

There is an element in the symbolism in the story of Hosea that our 21st century minds find challenging. We have the rather odd sounding situation in Hosea, where God asks the prophet to marry a sex trade worker. And it is through the relationship that God teaches the children of Israel about God's unchanging love and faithfulness. Hosea uses sexual and family examples to express how he sees the relationship between God and humanity.<sup>10</sup> Contributors to *The Jewish Study Bible* state that in the book of Hosea God is described as having the role of an angry husband, who publicly dishonors his unfaithful wife, as a way of explaining the disasters that hit Israel.<sup>11</sup>

To say Israel had some spiritual problems, might be putting it mildly. Bible commentator Henry Halley states that "'whoredom' was a fitting name for the nation" because of its spiritual adultery.<sup>12</sup> Hosea is one of the minor prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. I believe that Hosea's name, which means "salvation or deliverance",<sup>13</sup> may foreshadow a major theme of the book. The theme of mercy and love<sup>14</sup> shows an impressive aspect of God, especially when it appears with another theme of Hosea, judgment for apostasy.<sup>15</sup> Hosea and his wife Gomer, the sex-trade worker, had a few children. Their names had symbolical meaning. A son was named Jezreel, which mean God sows.<sup>16</sup> Through the life of Gomer, the sex trade worker, God planted seeds of grace in the hearts of the children of Israel.

There is some controversy regarding Gomer. The United States Catholic Bishops have an online commentary about the book of Hosea. In their commentary they state Gomer might not have been a sex trade worker when Hosea married her. They seem to think that she may have started worshipping another god and that, "Prostitution here may refer to Gomer's participation in the worship of other

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<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Knust. "Prostitution in the Bible." *Bible Odssey*. n.d., 10 July 2019. <<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/video-gallery/p/prostitution-in-the-bible>>.

<sup>9</sup> Knust. (n.d.), <<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/video-gallery/p/prostitution-in-the-bible>>.

<sup>10</sup> Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible*. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 1143.

<sup>11</sup> Berlin and Brettler. (2004), 1143.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Halley. *Pocket Bible Handbook: an Abbreviated Bible Commentary*. (Chicago: Henry Halley, 1953), 317.

<sup>13</sup> Unger. (1967), 399.

<sup>14</sup> Unger. (1967), 398.

<sup>15</sup> Unger. (1967), 398.

<sup>16</sup> Unger. (1967), 399.

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gods."<sup>17</sup> The commentary does not say Gomer was a temple prostitute, but I am left wondering, because it seems implied to me. If Gomer was a temple sex trade worker, the depth of God's love is even more impressive.

We are now going to shift our focus to the story of Sodom. Synagogues follow a lectionary schedule, known as the parashat. The Torah, the first five books of the Bible, are divided into weekly parashat. In the Jewish cycle of readings Genesis Chapters 18 to 22 form one reading. Genesis Chapter 19, which has the destruction of Sodom, is studied in the context of Genesis Chapter 18. The parashat "invites" placing the story of Sodom in context.<sup>18</sup>

The region around Sodom had a fairly affluent standard of living. According to the Bible it was in a plain that was "well-watered . . . like the garden of G-d."<sup>19</sup> The Sodomites did not want to share that wealth,<sup>20</sup> very much like many of our contemporaries living in affluent areas of the world do not want to share the wealth.

You may have heard the expression, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is yours." I gather that is the way Sodomites are described in the ancient Jewish commentary, the *Mishnah*.<sup>21</sup> Based on how the old Jewish commentaries, the *Talmud* and the *Mishnah*, describe Sodom, I think Sodom might have been better described as having this philosophy, "What is mine is mine and what is yours is mine." Sadly, this ugly little philosophy was carried to an extreme that offends more than just our 21st Century consciences. Sodom offended God.

"Sodom and Gomorrah have come to epitomize moral depravity and cruelty."<sup>22</sup> The city was not very friendly to visitors, probably because there was a fear that visitors might try to profit from Sodom's wealth. I will relate a few details from the Talmud and the Mishnah that help illustrate Sodom's reputation to ancient Jewish people. To cross the bridge to enter Sodom, there was a fee.<sup>23</sup> Those

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<sup>17</sup> "Hosea 1." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. n.d., 22 July 2019. <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/hosea/1/>>.

<sup>18</sup> Kessler. (2009), 29.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 13:10 cited in Mendy Kaminker. "Sodom and Gomorrah: Cities Destroyed by G-d - Jewish History." *Chabad.org*. n.d., 22 July 2019. <[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm)>.

<sup>20</sup> Kaminker. (n.d.), <[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm)>.

<sup>21</sup> Avot 5:10 cited in "Commentary on Parashat Vayera." *My Jewish Learning*. n.d., 22 July 2019. <<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-sin-of-sodom-and-its-impact-on-creation/>>.

<sup>22</sup> Kaminker. (n.d.), <[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm)>.

<sup>23</sup> Kaminker. (n.d.), <[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm)>.

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who tried to save money by swimming across the river had to pay twice the fee.<sup>24</sup> The hotels in Sodom might not have received 5 star ratings from visitors. The beds all came in one size. Those too short for the bed were stretched to fit the bed and those who were too tall for the bed had their feet cut off, so they fit the bed.<sup>25</sup> Jewish commentator Harvey Fields notes that some people explain that it was against the law in Sodom to welcome or to care for visitors. The punishment for welcoming and caring for visitors ranged from imprisonment to death.<sup>26</sup> Giving a stranger bread and water could result in a person being burned to death.<sup>27</sup> As a general rule, visitors were to be taken advantage of, their possessions stolen and chased out of town as quickly as possible.<sup>28</sup>

## The Rest of the Story:

### About Sodom

Perhaps, you now see why news of Sodom's evil actions reached God's ears and why God decided to take decisive action against Sodom. Because there were not ten righteous people in Sodom, God destroyed the city. The decision to destroy Sodom was made before the heavenly visitors faced the threat of being assaulted in Sodom.

The book of Ezekiel outlines the sins of Sodom. Those sins are found in **Ezekiel 16:46-50** and they include pride, excess food and ease, not helping the poor and needy being haughty and doing things that God considered disgusting. Ezekiel does not list all of the things that Sodom did which God found disgusting, but homosexuality is not listed in the passage as a sin of Sodom. Given Sodom's extreme cruelty, I do not believe that the destruction of Sodom had anything to do with homosexuality. The fate of the city was determined long before Lot took the visitors into his home.

And now, you know the rest of the story regarding Sodom.

### About Hosea:

To the children of Israel, God appeared to be blessing and prospering Israel's enemies. They probably felt forsaken. I suspect many children of Israel may have felt that God was unfaithful to God's chosen people. But it was the children of Israel who were the ones who were unfaithful, by worshipping other gods.

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<sup>24</sup> Kaminker. (n.d.), <[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm)>.

<sup>25</sup> Kaminker. (n.d.), <[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2017931/jewish/Sodom-and-Gomorrah-Cities-Destroyed-by-G-d.htm)>.

<sup>26</sup> Harvey J. Fields. *A Torah Commentary for Our Times. Vol. 1: Genesis.* (New York: UAHC Press, 1990), 47-48.

<sup>27</sup> Yalk, Gen. 83, cited in Joseph Jacobs and Schulim Ochser. n.d., 22 July 2019. "Sodom." Jewish Encyclopedia. <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13827-sodom>>.

<sup>28</sup> Nachmanides and Gesesis Rabbah cited in Fields. (1990), 48.

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Some disasters just happen - accident, coincidence, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Other terrible things are the result of poor decisions we made. Regardless of the reason for the disasters in our lives, God remains faithful, seeking us out, building a bridge across the caverns of disaster and pain. Our love for God might be shaken by events, but God's love for us is not shaken by events. God's love remains present when world events and personal events make us feel like we are terrible people and when those events make us question God. Even when life bites, God is faithful.

And now, you know the rest of the story regarding Hosea.

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