

# A Husbandly Covenant

by G.W. North

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*God's covenant with Israel was a sacred writing that revealed His character and nature, and it was a reminder of their relationship with Him as a husband and wife.*

**Scripture:** Hosea 2:19

**Topics:** "God's Faithfulness", "Covenant Relationship"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes the profound covenant relationship between God and Israel, likening it to a husband and wife. Despite Israel's persistent unfaithfulness and the misuse of altars for sin, God remains committed to His people, promising corrective love rather than destruction. He highlights the significance of the covenant established at Sinai, where God sought a faithful relationship with His people, urging them to understand their role as His chosen ones. North points out that the essence of the covenant is not merely about sacrifices but about the people themselves being the living sacrifices to God. Ultimately, God's jealousy and love for His people drive His desire for their repentance and restoration.

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## Transcript

HOSEA, another mighty prophet of similar insight and understanding, says of his people that since altars had been to Israel to sin, then altars should be to them to sin. What a dreadful state of affairs this was. That which had been revealed to them as a means of blessing had irretrievably become a means of causing the absolute opposite of God's original intention. Instead of the altar being the place where sin was forgiven by atonements, it was the place where their sin increased. They were using all kinds of self-made illegitimate altars to offer many sorts of self-chosen abominable sacrifices to a variety of different self-devised idol-gods in increasing numbers of self-built temples. All of these were expressions of self-willed sin and studied insults to God. The opening chapters of the book make it very plain that Israel were living in spiritual harlotry.

Yet God loved the people and regarded Himself as married to them. He had entered into spiritual covenant and union with them by a great oath that He would be their God and they His people, so He felt that the onus lay upon Him to act toward them as a faithful husband. Although Israel's behaviour toward Him merited punishment and He would have to administer it, He would do so in love and mercy. At the worst it would only be corrective, He could not bring Himself to be altogether destructive toward them. He would limit His anger, directing it to the elimination of the divisive abominations which had become such a barrier between them and their God.

He loved them dearly and felt jealous and hurt over their conduct as would a faithful husband over the behaviour of an unfaithful wife; He would therefore punish them, but He would not divorce them. His covenant and oath to them had been sealed with blood; He had meant every word of it. When He made His vows He did so without any desire or intention in His heart to break or deviate from them, nor would He. But on their part Israel did not see or know, nor did they seem to understand in any degree that their relationship to Jehovah was to be as a wife to a husband. Isaiah had cried it out to them in his day, but whether they had ever read or still read his prophecy is very doubtful.

Their history is one long story of almost unrelieved backsliding. It is almost certain that their forefathers had never understood the full meaning of the events recorded in Exodus 24. Events proved that they never grasped the full implication of God's covenant. Why, even before the tables of the covenant were in their hands, they were making a golden calf and wishing they were back in Egypt. At that time, by a series of unparalleled miracles, the fathers of the nation had but lately come out of Egypt across the Red Sea and were gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. Having earlier briefly referred to this, we will consider it now more fully, for here it finds its natural place in the exposition.

At the call of God, Moses, their saviour, leader and mediator had been up and had returned from the mountain with instructions to inform the people of the covenant God wished to make with them. At this juncture the ten commandments which were to form the basis of the covenant had not been written. As recorded in chapter 20, Moses had already received them from God whilst in His presence under the power of His Spirit, but as yet God had not inscribed them. So, descending the mountain under commission from God, Moses gathered the people together and reported to them what God had said to him. The object of this was to acquaint them with God's terms so that they could voluntarily enter the covenant of love with understanding. When the people heard God's terms they unanimously promised, 'all the words which the Lord hath said we will do and be obedient'. Well pleased with them, Moses accepted their vow and in God's behalf took them at their word. Not until then did Moses commit the commandments and ordinances he had so far received to writing.

This sacred writing was the first 'Bible' ever given by God to man. We now know it was really only the first instalment of the inspired Word. Viewed in the light of all the foregoing, it is surely a most remarkable fact of great importance to us that the first thing ever to be put into writing by God should be this covenant. It is perhaps as remarkable also that around it the other great revelations should be later assembled. Just how and when the rest of the Pentateuch was received and written and ordered in its entirety we cannot be sure. Whether Genesis came last and was placed first we do not know; we can only thank and praise God that we have it.

We do know practically to the point of certainty however that the Book was commenced under the shadow of Sinai and that the first words written down by Moses were not 'In the beginning God created...' but these which now comprise chapters 20-23 of the book of Exodus. 'I am the Lord thy God .... thou shalt have no other gods before me'; what a beginning -- God, just God, all God, only God. From this ultimately flowed the words of Genesis 1 -- 'In the beginning God'. But let us see how Moses continues with his first great revelation from the Spirit: 'I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ... thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. God is come to prove you ... an altar ... if they will make me an altar'. Thus the writing continues, but what a surprising course to take. 'I am the Lord thy God ... if thou wilt make me an altar'; who would have expected that?

By this we can see most clearly into God's naked Spirit; by saying such things He has revealed Himself. Right from the beginning the Lord's primary insistence to Israel was that they were to be the people of God and the altar. The commandments were given to keep them from sin, and the altar was devised to reveal both the principle of life and the way they could offer themselves to God. The wording is significant, 'thou shalt not come up by steps to my altar'; note that the Lord does not go on to say 'to offer thy sacrifice'. The whole implication is that the sacrifice is the person, not something the person offers.

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