

Why Such Strange Names for These Children?

Hosea, Day 3

Hosea 1:3-9

So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, “Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”

When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” – Hosea 1:3-9, ESV

Naming your children is one of the most important things new parents do. It's exciting, and sometimes a bit overwhelming. When we named our first-born son, it was easy: Andrew is my middle name and is also the name of the first evangelist named in the Gospel of John, my favorite Gospel. Andrew brings his brother, Simon Peter, to the Lord. This expressed our hope for our son, that he would be an early and enthusiastic disciple of the Lord Jesus. Our second son is named Jeremiah, and we struggled more over his name, going back and forth between Jeremiah and Luke before settling on Jeremiah, a name that fits him well.

Hosea didn't get to choose what to name his children. God told him what to name them, and God gave Hosea's kids some very strange names. Yet what's even more poignant is the fact that two of Hosea's three children likely weren't even his, as their names and the account of their births seem to make clear.

The account of the birth of Jezreel is pretty straightforward. Hosea took Gomer as his wife. She conceived and bore him a son. God told Hosea to name him Jezreel, as a word of warning and judgment against northern Israel. Jezreel is perhaps not the name Hosea would have chosen, but it all seems clear and sensible enough, for a prophet. Then things get strange.

Gomer next conceives and bears a daughter, but the text leaves out a key word - "him." She did not bear **him** a daughter, as was said regarding Jezreel, "*she conceived and bore **him** a son.*" The idea that this girl is not Hosea's biological daughter is also captured by her name, No Mercy. This name means no compassion, no sympathy, no tender affection or love. What dad names his daughter that? One who was commanded to do so by God, yes, but also one who knows the girl is not really his daughter.

This trend continues and is intensified with the third child born in chapter one, a son named Not My People. It doesn't get much clearer than that. These two, No Mercy and Not My People, are the "children of whoredom" God told Hosea he would have by "a wife of whoredom." An unfaithful wife has illegitimate children. Ouch!

If you feel badly for these children, just wait. The story gets better. Hosea is a redemption story after all. But for now, we're meant to see something clear: Our unfaithfulness to God has real and lasting consequences. Our sin brings disastrous consequences into our lives. Also, we're to not only identify ourselves with Gomer but also with No Mercy and Not My People. We have no natural, legitimate claim to be called children of God. Our sins separate us from God, cutting us off from His mercy and from being His people. This stunning, sobering truth should cause us to repent and seek the Lord for redemption.