***“MY NAME IS GOMER”***

**Part One**

“Greetings,” the beautiful young lady said. “Have you come to worship?” It was a beautiful clear and warm day in this hilly place overlooking the valley of Jezreel. A gentle breeze was running up the hills from the valley.

The strong young man approached her with a purpose set into his face, “Peace be to you’” he said. “I worship the One True God with my whole heart, my whole soul, my whole being, and with all my strength. And I would never worship him *here*!” he ended with emphasis on *here*.

Fear crossed her face, but with defiance she said, “Your own men come here, *often*.” She threw that last word at him as a mock, taunting him.

Visibly calming himself, he said, “I know, and *not* to worship,” he mocked her back.

His calmness seemed to relax her a little. “Maybe they only want a good crop this season?” she offered.

“We both know that their visits have nothing to do with how fertile our crops or our women are, since they know who makes them so,” he said.

“So, you have come for an asherah to put into your field?” she continued to tease, but still confused about his real purpose.

“Those useless fertility charms only get in the way of our plows!” he said in disgust.

“Men open up mother earth with their big plows to sow their seed,” she threw back at him. “The least they could do to appease her would be to leave a token gift.”

“Yes,” he said, realizing the reason he came to see her. “I have not come to discuss the religion of Baal.”

“Then why did you come?” she asked a little upset.

Before getting sidetracked again, he came right to the point, “I have come for a wife!”

“What!” she answered stunned. She never expected that secret dream to come true, that she would fall in love and he would take away from here to be his bride. After all the years she had spent as a sacred prostitute of Baal, she had been trained and told again and again never to fall in love with those who came to worship at his temple. After all, they were married and had come to perform the ‘act’ for the fertility of their fields and their wives. The dream had started to fade over the years. Once, her dream had a chance to come true. A handsome young man about her age had returned. She had sent him a message that she was pregnant with his child. But he had come to collect the child born to them. Her dream died.

Awaiting her answer, he introduced himself as ‘Yehoshua,’ or Hosea. He was a farmer and a member of the tribe of Levi. “What is your name?” he finally asked.

“My name is Gomer,” she replied.

*The name, “****Hosea****”, is a simple form of the verb,* to help*. The name is the same as the last king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but spelled different to distinguish between the two. Moses’ successor, until Moses changed it to* “Yehoshua”, *is very likely derived from the same Hebrew verb and thus means “*Yahweh saves*.” This is the Hebrew name for Joshua in Exodus. Another form of the name is “Yeshua”, also the name of the Messiah,* Jesus*.*

*We are nowhere told precisely where Hosea lived, but all place names in his book are in the* ***north****. The author’s diction betrays traces of a dialect not found in Judah but suggestive of northern Israel, which is near the Aramaic-speaking territory of* Syria*. His family evidently had some social status, for his father’s name is mentioned in the introduction of the book. Most especially, Hosea must have had an* agricultural background*, because he uses many agrarian terms and phrases.*

*Hosea may have been a member of the* ***Levitical priestly groups*** *that we know were living in scattered settlements in the north at this time. To appreciate the significance of this fascinating possibility it will be necessary to review briefly the checkered fate of this important Israelite subculture.*

*At one point in Israelite history these Levites were the leading priestly group in Israel. In fact, according to Exodus 32:25-29 Israel’s founding prophet* ***Moses*** *himself had appointed them to this role as reward for their loyalty during an especially grave crisis. Furthermore, early during the Israelite settlement in Canaan it was one of their number, the famous* ***Eli****, who presided as priest over all Israel at the central tribal shrine at* ***Shiloh****.*

*But it was right then in their history that tragedy struck. In the wars between Israel and the Philistines this important shrine was destroyed and its most sacred object, the* ***Ark of the Covenant****, fell into Philistine hands. When this happened, Israel was for a period without any central shrine at all. When, however, David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and housed it there in a new tent shrine, one of their number,* ***Abiathar****, was again installed as one of two priests in charge of the worship there.*

*But then, tragedy struck a second time. Soon after David’s death Abiathar and is family were expelled from Jerusalem by* ***Solomon*** *for having opposed him in the struggle for the secession, and when the northern shrines were established under* ***Jeroboam****, the Levites were bypassed in favor of ‘*ordinary families’*. So it came about that the Levitical families of the north, despite their venerable heritage, were without any official role as priests at any of the state shrines of either kingdom—and so it had been at the time of Hosea for almost two centuries!*