

# Minor Prophets: Hosea

## Introduction

The book of Hosea was written to equate idolatry with spiritual infidelity. Hosea lives out this message in his own family as he proclaims God's heart of love for a wayward people. Although they were unfaithful to God in His covenant, God remained faithful to them, and even still loved them after they committed spiritual infidelity with other gods. Hosea wrote to remind the people of God's great love and their relationship with Him, that even after its termination, it could be restored.

## About Hosea the Prophet

Hosea's ministry spanned up to about 40 years. He was one of the last prophets to speak to Northern Israel before its downfall in 722-721 BC. He is unusually from the Northern Kingdom and is probably a citizen there. We gather this from his intimate understanding of Northern Israel's history and geography. His father is mentioned in the first verse as being Beeri. But no other biographical information is found about Hosea in any other book of the Bible. He is quoted in the New Testament, but those references do not tell us anything about his life.

Hosea ministers starting in a stable kingdom and then observes the nation go from stability to instability and is definitely alive to witness the fall of his beloved nation. He considers himself a prophet from the school of prophets. He is commanded by God to marry a woman who is either a prostitute or will prove to be unfaithful as an image of how God has married the unfaithful nation of Israel. He names his children according to the words God gives him to speak as well. His family life is the image of God's current relationship with the nation in his time.

Hosea's name simply means "Salvation" and is probably a shortening of Joshua or Isaiah. His prophecies and life revolve around the deep wounds of infidelity and God's restoration of such a relationship. His message is impassioned and intimately personal. He does not categorize life as we tend to do in Western culture. It is a deeply honest book and image that this man presents to us, urging us to know God personally rather than facts about God and to remain faithful to Him in every season of life. Hosea is a contemporary of Amos, Micah and Isaiah.

## Hosea in History

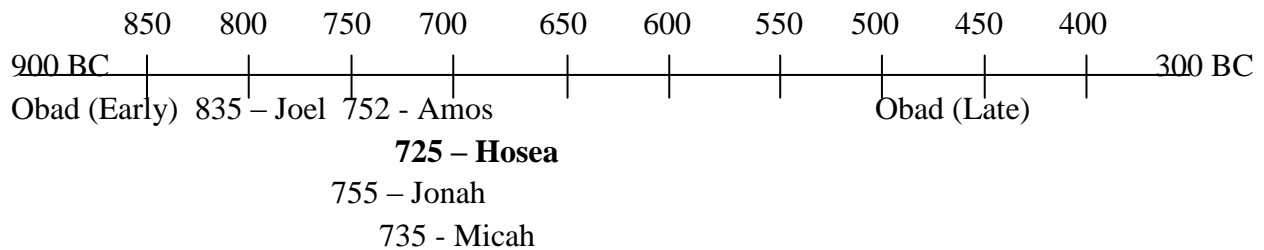
Hosea, like many of the prophets, mentions the kings in whose reigns he prophesied. He starts with the southern kingdom of Judah, even though he prophesies to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He mentions three kings from Judah, beginning with Uzziah (792-740) and ending with Hezekiah (716-687). In Northern Israel, he only mentions Jeroboam II (793-753). He does not mention any other kings from Israel because there are six in 20 years. This is the time of great instability.

Hoshea (732-722) was the last king of Israel before its fall to Tiglath-Pileazar III in 721 BC. Four of the six kings that rule within the short period of time assassinate one another to take the throne. The blessing of Jeroboam's reign is abused by the kings that follow and the people while the gap between the wealthy and the poor expands. Many scholars suggest that these kings are not worthy of mention.

Throughout the book, we never see Hosea mention or describe the fall of Samaria, and so it is believed that his writing was complete by 722 BC. I have placed his writing at 725, very close to the final destruction of the Northern Kingdom. No one knows if he fled to the south or if the prophet went into exile with Israel. I would suggest that he went to the south because he mentions Hezekiah and not the last king of Northern Israel. If this writing would be written after such a monumental and historical event as the fall of Samaria, it would be included in the book, as Jeremiah, it is believed, wrote in Lamentations about the fall of Jerusalem. Hosea addressed the spiritual infidelity of the people of Israel and warned them of the end of their nation.

## Dates and Timelines

\* I am using James Smith's Survey of the Minor Prophets as a guide.



## Outline of Hosea

- I. Hosea lives out the unfaithfulness of Israel from God's perspective (1-3)
  - A. Hosea introduces his ministry and family (1:1-10).
  - B. God will punish Israel for spiritual infidelity (2:1-10).
  - C. God's mercy and redemption are still possible (2:11-3:5).
- II. God introduces a lawsuit against Northern Israel (4-5).
  - A. The charges are leveled against Israel (4:1-19).
  - B. The punishment will be severe (5:1-15).
- III. Israel rejects God's warnings with a hard heart (6-10).
  - A. Both Israel and Judah refuse to listen or repent (6:1-7:16).
  - B. God will punish the nation for its indifference to His demands (8:1-10:15).
- IV. God's total love is met with Israel's total judgment (11-14).
  - A. God still loves Israel despite its unfaithfulness (11:1-12:1).
  - B. God will indict Israel formally and carry out the judgment (12:2-13:16).
  - C. Hosea pleads with Israel to repent and turn to the Living God (14:1-9).

## The Prophetic Message of Hosea

### Chapter 1

**1:1 The word of the Lord, which came to Hosea, son of Beer, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel.**

The prophet's book opens by giving the historical background for his ministry. Although he is a prophet born and raised in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and his message is to the Northern Kingdom, he also gives the kings in Judah. What's interesting is that he gives the southern kings first, maybe by way of focusing in on the northern kingdom for the rest of the book.

The Judean kings listed span a range of about 38-40 years of ministry. Since the book was written mere years before the fall of Samaria, we can assume that such a catastrophic event has yet to occur, otherwise Hosea would have at the very least mentioned it. We only learn, as with several other prophets, the name of his father for family background. There is no mention elsewhere of his father or him for that matter.

As is common with most prophets, he starts by immediately proclaiming that the following is the word of the Lord spoken through him to the people. While only four kings are enthroned during his ministry in Judah, six kings sit on Israel's throne in 20 years or less! Many of them are wicked and assume the throne by assassination of the last king. David's throne is being abused as far as a king from his line sitting there.

The worst of the Judean kings is Ahaz by far. The others are fairly good kings, especially the bookends of Uzziah and Hezekiah. Hosea would have started ministry late in Uzziah's reign. He is a contemporary with Isaiah, who is called in the year King Uzziah dies. And it is during the reign of Hezekiah that Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel fall to the Assyrians. While Tiglath-Pileasar III tries to take Jerusalem as well, he ultimately fails, as we will see even in the words of Hosea.

Some mark the fact that Hosea points to the falsity of the other five kings' reigns in the Northern Kingdom because he only mentions Jeroboam II. Surely, there were five other kings up to the fall of Samaria and he knows of them, but most likely does not respect their rule or see them as genuine kings. So in a time of great upheaval in which he has seen the stability of Jeroboam and the instability of all who followed, Hosea points to the last legitimate king he can remember, Jeroboam. The sad political state is only a sign of the even worse spiritual and social state of Northern Israel as it comes to its demise in this prophet's ministry.

**1:2 The Lord first spoke to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and have children out of prostitution because the land has surely prostituted itself against the Lord."**

While most Bibles make a break between verses one and two as a change in subject matter, there is a samek to note the break of the section from introduction to story at the end of verse two. It matters very little where the break is and has no affect on interpretation here. But the Hebrew Bible would see the first two verses as introductory background for the prophet and then 3-9, in their estimation, as the narrative setting up the point of the book. Verses 10-11 in the Hebrew Bible start chapter two instead of finish chapter one as in the Christian Bible.

So as part of the introduction of the prophet, first we learn of his name and father, then of the kings under which his prophetic ministry took place. Then in verse two, we learn what God said to him and spoke to him. This is the setup for the entirety of this book and Hosea's ministry. His message will include his family life. Unlike in America and the West, family life and ministry for Hosea will be intimately woven together to illustrate the message the Lord has for Northern Israel in its last days.

When the Lord called on Hosea, his call is unique in that oftentimes a prophet will suffer some shame in speaking for the Lord. Isaiah was a man of unclean lips who felt the sting of God's burning holiness in the coals to his lips. Micah walked around barefoot and naked, singing songs of lament and funeral dirges. Here, Hosea will have no less a unique and shameful expression of the message of God.

Some scholars find it hard to believe that God would issue a command to the prophet to take for himself a wife who was a prostitute. Many say that she was not a prostitute until after he married her, and say that the text is hinting that she will become a wayward spouse after marriage. The text does not warrant such a view in my opinion. If this marriage is truly to be an image of God and Israel, then we must understand that even Abraham worshipped other gods, whatever they were in Ur, before God called him to become separate.

Israel at its very institution on Mount Sinai was whoring with idols (the golden calf incident) before Moses even came down from the mountain. It is not hard to see that God would make this image as poignant, then, as the real relationship He has with Israel. From the beginning Israel was wayward. And I believe so is Gomer, a prostitute in her own right before Hosea took her as his wife.

So God calls Hosea by demanding that he take on the shame of marrying a prostitute and living with her as his wife, although she is by far his wife only. This would bring shame upon him from the community. I must say something about the pastor in ministry here. It is often the assumption that the pastor is perfect, has everything, including his house, in order. Pastors used to be generally well respected among their communities. But what would it be like if this were modernized today? What if a pastor married a prostitute? Would you sit under his ministry? How hard it must have been for Hosea to speak words that people would heed when his home life was not exactly "in order"!

After marrying this prostitute who would surely be unfaithful to him before and during the marriage, he is then told by the Lord to treat her as a wife, to have children with her, but children that would grow up in a home where they knew their mother was a prostitute. Anyone whose ever seen celebrities and others argue for the baby whose mother does not know who

could be the father can understand this story. The family from the start would be broken and the wounds would be deep and intimate. But the opportunity for redemption would be just as deep and just as intimate, and even more powerful!

**1:3 So he went and took Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and gave birth to a son.**

Verse three begins the narrative that tells of the prophet's obedience. He does what the Lord says. We don't know how much time has elapsed between verses two and three. It's possible that it is immediate, or that it takes some time. After all, Hosea most likely would not have known a prostitute to marry. Relationships take a while to happen in any case. But in verse three, he finds his bride, named Gomer. All that is given of her is her father's name, Diblaim. We only know this couple's two fathers.

Immediately in their marriage, they were blessed with a son. But he may have no idea of his wife's prostitution or of her wayward heart. They have a son together. We will find that Hosea's home life mimics the story of Israel and God on a spiritual level. God went and found Israel, chose that nation, and became its God. His children's names will in themselves be sermons preached to Northern Israel.

**1:4 Then the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, because in just a little while I will visit the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and I will bring to an end the kingdom of the house of Israel.**

It is the Lord who gives special names to the children but tells their father what to name them. As he calls on the children, the message of their name will daily remind him of the Lord's messages for Israel. And all of the children's friends and acquaintances will also here the message in the children's names. The first is named Jezreel after the Valley of Jezreel. It is to tell Israel that God will punish them for what happened in that valley under Jehu, one of their kings.

Many Hebrew children were named by their parents for special life goals or other reasons. Often, a child's name denotes the kind of person he or she may be or become. Jacob's (deceiver) name is changed to Israel (He struggles with God). Esau's name means red or angry because he came out of his mother's womb redder than most babies. Zechariah is told to name his son John (the Baptist) and Joseph is given the name Jesus for Mary's unusual pregnancy of the Messiah. I can go on and on, but names are very important to the Hebrews.

The name Jezreel has two significant meanings, one focused on here first, and then another focused on toward the end of chapter two. First, we will focus on the name's meaning here. Jezreel sounds very much like Israel and means "God sows." Later this will be used in a positive way, but here it is used to show that God sows vengeance.

One of the five kings of Israel, a wicked king, was named Jehu. He killed the former king of Northern Israel and the king of Judah at the time in the city of Jezreel in the Valley or Plain of

Jezebel. He basically permitted for a bloodbath to take place and was the murderer of many people, all to take the throne of Northern Israel. But even though he killed Jezebel and Ahaz, incredibly evil rulers, and Jezebel's son, he murdered them in cold blood and was just as evil a king as they were when they ruled. He allowed for worship of the golden calf in Israel.

Because he murdered in cold blood so many, God will revisit upon, or return upon Israel the bloodshed that was spilled on that day. This will be a punishing visitation. The verb here is visit and can be a positive or negative meaning, but here it is definitely a negative meaning. The boy's name points to a time in which the sins of Jehu will be punished in a particular place, the same place in which he committed the atrocities.

The way in which God will punish all of Israel will be the exile. That Valley will be an important part of the nation's fall by the Assyrians. God's punishment for such wickedness will be brought in that valley to the nation of Israel, and it is no coincidence. It is planned by the Lord. So the boy's name reminds Israel that it will be judged by God with punitive payment.

**1:5 “Then it will happen on that day that I will shatter the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”**

When the day of God's vengeance and punishment comes upon Israel, it will be in that valley. He will break, or shatter, their bows and their weapons. There will be no way to win against the invaders. If God decides to fight against you, there is no hope. When God fights for you, there is victory. That is the short message that God delivers by His own words here in this verse. There will be no victory in Jezreel for God is punishing the Israelites for their ungodly and wicked leadership.

**1:6 Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter, and He said to him, “Call her name ‘No Mercy’ because no more will I still have mercy on the house of Israel. Indeed, I will surely not forgive them.**

The abruptness of yet another conception seems sudden, and there may be a purpose to that. We are not even told, as in verse 8, that the first child is weaned while a second child is already on the way. This means that just after birth, Gomer is once again pregnant. While this would not raise any issues, because Hosea and Gomer are married, it does point to Gomer's desire for intimate relations. It cannot be proven from the text, but there is no break between the birth of the last child and this one in the literary structure. We are not talking about years but months. Another suggestion I point out is that it is most likely she did not prostitute herself between these two births.

The next child is a daughter who is named by the Lord through Hosea Lo-Ruhamah. This is the Hebrew of her name that is sometimes left in the text untranslated. Other texts give you the name of the child instead of the Hebrew. The name means “no mercy.” God's grace period for Northern Israel is officially over. Just after this book is written in 721 BC, Samaria and Northern

Israel fall to the Assyrians. God will no longer keep them from being captive. His mercy has run out.

Not only is God's mercy gone for Israel, at least in the north, but he no longer will continue to forgive their sins. The wording for "no longer" gives us a definite time window that is now coming to an end. This nation only survives on the blessing of God for so long, but its wickedness after that blessing has dried up the time of mercy. Now, they will drink the dregs of God's wrath. God's forgiveness has run out and now He turns to exact vengeance for sins He covered over or passed by before. Now is the time of judgment, and it will be swift and painful and complete.

**1:7 But to the house of Judah I will show mercy and I will save them by the Lord their God! Yet I will not save them by bows, or by the sword, or by war, by horses, or by horsemen."**

God's stance toward Northern Israel is not the same as toward Judah. Judah will last for a while. This prophetic prediction comes true within five years after the prophet pens these words! Even though God's mercy is no longer in place for Israel, Judah will see God's favor for a bit longer. There will be mercy in Judah where mercy is absent in Israel.

Now the next part is a prediction that we can find the historical conclusion to in the book of Isaiah in chapters 37-39. God promises to show mercy to Judah, and it happens during Hezekiah's reign. But the salvation will be reminiscent of what used to happen in Gideon's time, where God would do the work of rescuing Judah personally rather than through the nation's armies.

They will be saved and God will be the agent of their salvation, not military or political might. God even lists all of the things that won't save them. He goes from bows and weapons like swords to horses and horsemen used in battle with chariots. This will be a victory for the Lord. Sure enough, when Senacherib goes down to Judah and begins to take out cities to Jerusalem's south, when he gets to Jerusalem and lays siege, the Lord wins the battle by turning his armies to dust.

He leaves without capturing Jerusalem, the capital city, which is seen as a failure to capture Judah. And Hezekiah rebuilds. We have the prism of Senacherib, and he refuses to admit he could not siege Jerusalem. He goes on and on listing cities he takes and then when he gets to Jerusalem, he simply says, "And I left Hezekiah trapped in his own city like a bird in a cage." This prophecy is fulfilled! It is just another example of God predicting the future when He wishes to show His sovereignty and divinity.

**1:8 When she weaned No Mercy, she conceived and gave birth to a son.**

Now there is a bit of time here as Gomer does wean the second child before she is once again pregnant! This all seems to happen quickly, but we cannot be certain how long it takes. In

the next chapter, Hosea will help us understand a bit more, but for now, we are left with the overall impression that these children come fairly quickly in the marriage. The third child is a son. Sons were seen as a blessing from the Lord because they could be heirs to inherit their father's wealth. Daughters cost a father money because when they were wed, their fathers paid a dowry to the groom or his family.

**1:9 And He said, "Call his name 'Not My People' because you are not My people and I am not for you."**

Although the Lord is not specifically named as the one commanding Hosea to name the children, we saw earlier that He is indeed named. So the Lord once again chooses the name of the child. This time, it is Lo-Ammi, a name meaning, "Not My People." This is the harshest of names for the people of Israel to accept. Since their being brought out of the slavery of Egypt, God has always said, "They will be My people and I will be their God."

Now with this name and the prophetic understanding that comes with it, God is no longer their God, and they are no longer His people. We must understand that it is not God who has rejected Israel, but Israel that has rejected God. Most translations have, "and I am not your God," but the text does not have the word God in it. That is contextually understood from a general understanding of Scripture.

Their relationship has been severed, not by God Himself, but the reality is that the people have rejected Him. We too must be careful not to reject Jesus, for it is indeed possible to fall away from Him. But it is something that we have to initiate and complete, not something God does. We see in the painful stinging words of God that the covenantal relationship has finally been irreparably damaged and severed by His chosen people.

**1:10 (H 2:1) Yet it will happen that the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or counted. And it will happen in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," it will be said, "Children of the Living God."**

Verses 10-11 show the revitalization and the hope at the end of judgment. Throughout the Old Testament, when we see prophecy of God's wrath and judgment, it is always followed by hope and restoration. That is what is so wonderful about our God. It is not His intention to simply tear down and destroy. He hates having to judge, but He must do it. He much rather would enjoy loving and living in love with His people.

Even though God will put them through the exile and they have disowned Him, they will still grow strong in number, like the sands of the sea shore. That promise is still in tact despite their severing of the covenantal relationship. The image of sand as the innumerable people of the nation of Israel was used with Abraham. It is showing that they cannot be numbered. God's blessing and promise are still available, but the covenant has been torn to pieces by the people,



so they will lose the land for a time until they return to the Lord. But the blessing and promise of God is not rescinded.

The restoration will occur in the same way the destruction has occurred. At the proper time, God will once again call Israel His children and they will readily be His children. There will come a time and place in which what was said through the birth of this child and the naming of this child, “Not My People,” that they will once again be God’s people and His children. The covenant relationship will be restored!

**1:11 (H 2) And both the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be assembled together, and they will appoint for themselves one head and they will ascend from the land because great will be the day of Jezreel.**

Not only will the people continue to see God’s blessing in the number of the people of the nation, but they will also have a reconciliation of the two kingdoms. No longer will it be divided. God will gather and assemble both houses once again and they will be united as brothers before Him. There is also a hint of Messianic prophecy in this verse, but it is indeed referring to the time after the exile.

They will appoint one head over them. This is the idea that there will no longer be two nations with two different political systems, but one nation under one king. This will be ultimately fulfilled in the time in which Jesus reigns in the Millennium. Even the place of Jezreel will no longer be a stain on their history. God will do great things there and they will rise up or ascend to a prominent place once again.

## Chapter 2

**2:1 (H 2:3) Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have been shown compassion.”**

The prophet’s message is one of the most personal and intimate and family-oriented of all the prophets. By family-oriented I do not mean that his material is friendly to all ages in the family, for he speaks openly about his wife’s waywardness and lewdness. But I mean that his family is the center of his message, its problems and its solutions, become an image to drive God’s message home to the nation of Israel that is in a marriage relationship in the covenant to God spiritually.

So we should not be surprised that chapter two opens with the prophet calling his children to reason with their mother and his children to bind together their own relationships with one another. Everything said here, by the way, has a double meaning. As Hosea talks to his sons and daughters, so the Lord is speaking to the nation of Judah. So when he tells the children to love one another and show one another compassion, God is also speaking to the nation to not be divided but to be united as a people and to remember all of the compassion He has shown them in the past.

**2:2 (H 2:4) Contend with your mother! Contend, because she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. But she must turn aside her prostitutions from her face and her adulteries from between her breasts—**

The prophet begs his children next after uniting together, as a family dealing with the possibility of divorce or any relational brokenness would do, to plead with their mother. He does this in hopes that she will listen to her children, because she has not listened to her husband. The word for plead here is not good enough. The basic meaning of this verb is much better contained in the idea of contention and even bringing to court. That is the range of meaning. Plead is more of a kind way of approach, where as this would be a harder and tougher approach of addressing the wayward mother.

Hosea even tells his children that she won’t listen to him anymore and that she doesn’t even consider his position in the family as her husband worth hearing. Couples can get to this stance very quickly in an escalation. Gomer has decided that she wants to do her own thing no matter how much it hurts Hosea, her first husband. His sentence about her not being his wife and him not being her husband is more a description of their current relationship than a rebuke of their marriage. They are still married, but they are not acting like it.

So often in our relationships, we love to first place labels and positions on people, and then we love to change those labels and statuses and positions. We become flippant about who’s our best friend or who is no longer even an acquaintance. We easily shift from inner-circle friend

to outcast to be berated. This malady of our society has found its way into our marriages and family relationships.

Why is our divorce rate so high? Well, there's probably not just one answer for this, but let me suggest that when we get used to simply changing the status of a friend from moment to moment and from feeling to feeling might be a factor. When we so easily get rid of friends when they don't make us happy and when we live from emotion to emotion rather than according to our commitments and convictions, then divorce is just the final process of what we do every day.

And it's no different for children! Some parents readily throw their children out of the house at 18. Now this is a good thing as far as learning to live on one's own, but the parent tends to mention that they're not "responsible" for the teenager anymore. While that is legally accurate, it is not accurate of their relationship status.

Hosea, like any scorned lover who is married to an adulterer or adulteress, has just one demand if she returns. She must not cheat on him anymore. That's all he asks. That is not unreasonable at all, considering Gomer is in the wrong. But she won't see it that way, because she wants what she wants. She is addicted to the sin of prostitution. It must be mentioned that this woman does not just do this once. It is not a one-time deal. What some translations don't allow us to see is that the words for prostitution and adultery here are both plural! She cheats on him in a regular fashion. It has become a habit, a lifestyle. Lifestyles can grieve the heart of God just as much as one or two sins, and maybe more!

Let us not forget that this is also God speaking to Israel about its many spiritual prostitutions with many gods. The Baals will be specifically mentioned, but God is saying to Israel, "If I am to be your God, then you must no longer seek to be a prostitute and to do these things, to go after other gods. I am your God. I'm all you need!" But Israel will not listen to Him.

**2:3 (H 2:5) lest I strip her naked and place her, like the day she was born, and arrange her like a wilderness, and like a parched land, and kill her with thirst.**

The prophet's next words are very harsh, but we must understand that he is intending to maintain his marital relationship with Gomer. If he is to continue to be her husband, and she does not change her ways, he would do these things. This is something we are not used to in our culture, intimate and personal emotionally-charged speech will be Hosea's form of communication and it will make us uncomfortable, as we will see. But it is also God's intimate communication with us when we choose to willingly cut His heart and join with our sins.

If the prophet remains in this relationship and she does not quit her adultery and fornication, he promises to strip her naked like when she was born. He describes her as a wilderness, as a barren land that is parched, without water and dry. He will make her desolate and let her exposed to the elements. And then he would kill her because she would not receive from him as her providing husband what she needs to survive.

This sounds harsh, but let us understand not with our minds but with our hearts the prophet's (and God's) position. He is stuck in a relationship with a woman who readily at every

turn profanes their personal and intimate relationship with every other man in the village. Nothing is left sacred and with every lover other than him, she cuts Hosea's heart and ruins him.

He goes through multiple destructions with each of her multiple adulteries. He can't take it anymore. He might as well profane her as she has inwardly profaned her. So he speaks in this manner about what he would do in his anger. What will God do? The word for strip here can also be used of the word exile. The parallels are meant for this purpose. God also has come to the conclusion that he must let her die in her sin.

**2:4 (H 2:6) Even to her children I will not show compassion because they are children of prostitutions.**

As we often learn from sin, we do not just hurt God and the ones closest and most intimate in our lives. We also hurt everyone else in relationship with us. Pastors that commit heinous acts of immorality that cause them to leave their churches easily split congregations and destroy the ministry the Lord was doing through them. They break trust and destroy God's ability to speak to the people who followed their lead. And it is no different for the children of a divorce in a marriage.

Not only will the prophet in his anger and in his brokenness lay waste his wife, or make her desolate and naked, but he will also not show compassion to their children because they are children that she has had with him while being unfaithful. We have so many programs on our televisions that exploit the electricity of such a problem. Who's the father? How does Hosea even know for sure that he is these children's father? He may not know! But the children are also affected by the mother's sinful inhibitions. Her broken relationship with her husband is breaking his relationship with their children. Notice that he doesn't even know whether or not to take the children as his own, referring to them as "her" children!

**2:5 (H 2:7) For their mother has played the whore. She who conceived them is put to shame. For she said, "I will chase after my lovers, who give my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink."**

The reason for all of this is expounded in verse 5. Their mother has played the harlot. She has committed multiple and continual acts of prostitution. Her heart is not for her family or for her children. It is for the next best thing, the next guy that comes along and promises her special items for her body. We will see later that these multiple lovers don't truly love her as a person. They just want her body. They won't defend her or take her back later in the narrative.

But she is doing the thing they do to her later to Hosea, her husband now! She is leaving him over and over again, continually breaking their marriage covenant to go and be a harlot. She continues to profane what was intimate and holy with her only husband with every man who "loves" her. Their mother is put to shame every time she leaves her husband for another man.

Where do we get the idea, the rationalization, that no one is hurt when people cheat on their spouses? Every family member is adversely and most effectively affected.

This woman is looking for the next best thing. She ignores the provision and care of her husband for another man's company. Even in her speech to herself we can see her false understanding and rationalization. They've got something better than what she has with her husband. The grass is greener on the other side. The better situation is always the one I'm not in. She thinks that every man that comes along will treat her better than her own husband! But all they will do is use and abuse her.

She thinks that her food and water, her clothing and her cooking products come from these random men. That is another false understanding, that one's lover will provide every need they have. This simply does not take place. Often an adulterer or adulteress will see the fulfilling of one need as the fulfilling of all their needs. For instance, the person they commit adultery with may fulfill a need to be wanted and to be praised, but that does not fulfill every need that they have.

They are looking somewhere else for the needs to be fulfilled while the spouse is at home working to fulfill more of their needs than not. And all the damage that comes with this train wreck is not worth the fulfillment of one need over many. It would be better to talk out the unfulfilled need with the person fulfilling most of your needs instead! Let us not forget that this is just as much about our relationship with God as it is with this couple on display for us. God fulfills all our needs. We need not go anywhere else!

**2:6 (H 2:8) Therefore, behold, I will fence in her way with thorns, and I will build a stone wall against her. Then she will not find her paths.**

This verse presents Hosea's response to his wife's wayward ways. He plans to cut her off, to essentially give her a curfew like a parent would give an escaping teenager. His plan is to make it hard for her to find her lovers and to get around. The word "way" or "path" shows up here twice, talking about a physical road and also her method of prostitution. For all we know, Hosea made every man aware that if they messed with his wife, he would mess with them.

But the prophet makes the prostitute's fleeting lifestyle hard to perform, and therefore hard to enjoy. We will see in the next verse that this will bring her back to him at least for a time. She seems to be more of an opportunist prostitute than a desiring prostitute. If the opportunities are limited, she may prostitute herself less. He fences her in and builds a stone wall against her. He lays traps in her way so that she no longer desires to go out and find these lovers. He makes it easier for her to come home rather than go out on the street.

**2:7 (H 2:9) She will pursue her lovers but not catch up with them, and she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now."**

Because Hosea has a hand in stopping his wife from getting to her lovers, she will still long for them, still want to commit her acts of adultery, but will find it less and less convenient to follow through with her desires. She will chase after these lovers, looking for them in all the familiar places, but she will not catch up to them. Some translations use the word “overtake” as in to overtake a traveler. But overtake also brings the common understanding of overpower. So I have preferred “catch up to.”

Her efforts to find these men that were so easy to spot before will frustrate her because they are no longer where she looks for them. They have either not come out to meet her or have been told a different place for their rendezvous. We don't know exactly how Hosea hinders his wife from seeing her lovers.

But look at this also in the sense of God's relationship with Israel. When Israel would commit idolatry, God would do the same thing Hosea does. He would hinder them from having success with their other gods. He would destroy their crops when they worshipped the god of fertility. He would cause different weather patterns when they worshipped the weather god Baal.

We see the reaction of the wife who wants life easy. She decides that she might as well go back to her husband because at the very least, life wasn't as hard then as it is looking for all these new interests in her life. Remember, she thinks these men have provided everything for her from the clothes that she wears to the food and water she partakes. But as we will see, it was Hosea providing all of these for her.

**2:8 (H 2:10) Yet she did not know that I gave her the grain and the sweet wine and the oil, and silver I lavished upon her and gold, which they used for Baal.**

This woman leaves her husband and seeks other men because she believes that he is not a good provider. For men, to have a woman refuse their provision is one of the worst things they will ever go through. Men feel part of their job is to provide for their families. It must have tremendously hurt Hosea's heart to hear that his wife is leaving him and seeking the provision of others. She is denying his ability to provide. There are fewer low blows that hurt worse than a woman thinking her man cannot provide for her.

What she does not realize is that everything that she has that is good was provided not by her random lovers, but by Hosea. He provided for her despite all of her thinking to the contrary. God is the same way. He is our main source for provision. In turning to idols and other gods in our lives, we effectively rob Him of that duty to provide for us. We give others the credit for provision that belongs to God alone.

In her running to other loves, she had no idea that Hosea was their provider. They will not provide everything that she needs. They are flings, not life-long loves. They are here today and gone tomorrow. All of the things that she thought they provided her husband, her long-lasting relationship, provided. More than this, it's a wonder that Hosea, or God for that matter, did not decide to cut her off when she would leave him for those lovers that did not do anything for her at all. Both God and Hosea are also upset that the wife (and Israel) did not just use their

provisions while giving credit for those provisions to someone else, but they actually used them for evil purposes, like serving Baals, which can be translated “lords” or the gods of the nations.

**2:9 (H 2:11) Therefore I will return and take back my grain in its time and my wine in its season. I will take away my wool and my linen, which were to cover her nakedness.**

Verses 6-8 talk about what the prophet does to get his wife to stop running around. Verses 9 and following talk about the restrictions he places on her to keep her once she turns back to him. He will begin by taking away all the things he provided for her that she wasted and said were given to her by her lovers.

This is also prophetic of what God will do to Israel for its denial that He was blessing the nation and attributing those blessings to the idols they worshipped. They will find this time with God a time of being disciplined by the Lord. If they don't wish to endure His loving discipline, they will meet his hot anger and judgment. Although the prophet is speaking of removing the blessings he has bestowed upon his wife, this can also be seen as God telling Northern Israel that he will take away its food and water and its clothing, essentials and needs for the nation's survival.

For the prophet, removing Gomer's grain and wine is to reduce her enjoyments of the high life. He does not want her to be rewarded for turning against him. He promises to remove her wool and linen, which she earlier said was given as gifts from her lovers. But the actuality of her situation is that Hosea provided these things as a covering for her nakedness. He was covering over her nakedness much like God's covering made for Adam and Eve after the Fall in Genesis.

**2:10 (H 2:12) But now I will expose her lewd nakedness before the eyes of her lovers and not one will rescue her from my hand.**

Another point that must be made by the prophet to his wife is not only discipline, but also the fact of the lies of her lovers. They were using her to fulfill their own sinful pleasures. They do not love her and wouldn't save her or offer their lives in exchange for hers. They have been leading her on to do what they want with her, and they are more than willing to throw her away as she was willing to let them go and return to her husband.

So the prophet graphically introduces her to this fact by uncovering her body in front of them, exposing her “lewd nakedness.” The Hebrew word here directly refers to her private parts and genitals. He exposes her to the eyes of her “lovers.” But not one of them will take her back. Not one of them is willing to rescue her from her home life and husband. She is unwanted by all of them except for her husband, who despite his heartbreak, still loves her.

All of the other men treat her with contempt. They weren't really her providers and they aren't really her lovers. They are people who used her to get what they wanted, but she gave them the same loyalty and intimacy that she should have reserved only for her husband. The

lovers have had their desires met and she has opened herself up for pain and heartache, believing that they would care for her and take her away.

This is much like when a man or woman expects a cheating spouse to leave his or her family for them. It is often not how things will work out and that person is abandoned at the moment of truth. This woman has been rejected by the very lovers she willfully accepted and opened herself up to. Where the rubber meets the road, she will be ashamed and abandoned, not her husband.

**2:11 (H 2:13) And I will stop all her joy, her festivals, her new moon celebrations, and her Sabbaths and her assembly places.**

The prophet continues to elaborate, and the same goes for God's response to Israel at this point, that he will stop his wife from all of her relationships and contacts that brought her all of these lovers. He will stop all her joy. This is the idea of having an inner joy, a happiness. He will keep her from that happiness. Oftentimes, when people get into a dangerous situation, their flippant way of life is shored up in their grief and alertness. When nothing is bothering us, we tend to be joyful and lose with our fears.

The prophet is hardening up her surroundings so that she does not become flippant and seek more lovers. He is letting her know that she cannot just get away with adultery and prostitution behind his back, that he knows about every case. He has also made her aware that she emotionally gives herself to these men, not just physically. But they do not return her affections.

She will no longer have free reign of the house and be able to go out and socialize to find more lovers. She will have to stay close to her husband to even attempt to earn back his trust. She will no longer be able to attend the festivals and celebrations, the feasts and the giant get-togethers. The partying days are behind her and it is time to deal with her sin and shame. Not even the weekly Sabbaths and assemblies will be attended by this woman. Her social network is cut off because it is the source of her infidelity.

It is a sad note to mention this woman was finding her clients and lovers at sacred and religious get-togethers. We must never suspect that people are not willing to sin even in the community of faith. What cannot be missed from the side of God's chastening of Israel is that He is saying the same thing about Israel. It is precisely in these rituals and religious celebrations that Israel was whoring itself spiritually to these idols that God hates. The nation was giving herself away to idols that did not provide for her nor care about her, while at the same time neglecting God, the nation's true love and protector, provider and caregiver.

**2:12 (H 2:14) And I will make desolate her vines and her fig trees of which she said, "These are my wages which my lovers gave to me!" But I will make them a thicket and the beasts of the field will consume them.**



Beyond her shame will be the destruction of the gifts she received from her lovers, like her vineyards and fig trees. The prophet will destroy them as part of her chastisement. Her refusal to be disciplined and to be committed will result in their desolation. They will have to grow wildly instead of controlled by human hands. They will become much like the forests and the bushes that are not attended.

They will become a thicket and a thorn bush, no longer producing the food they once did. Most likely they are not gifts from her lovers but the prophet's gifts. We must notice that these are simultaneously the prophet's words and the Lord's words. The Lord is not afraid to take back His gifts from His children in times of discipline and the teaching of lessons.

He does not enjoy doing so, but if that is what is necessary to bring us back to Him, He will do so. We must understand that this is not judgment against us but discipline to strengthen our relationship with Him. And it is not as if He is in the wrong. It is us who have been unfaithful. Hosea's wife has no right to fight these changes in her life and this discipline from her husband. Most of us would say that this is the least that she owes him.

**2:13 (H 2:15) And I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and her jewelry and chased after her lovers and forgot Me, declares the Lord.**

This verse is more the Lord speaking to Israel than the prophet speaking about his wife, but it is most likely that at this late period in Northern Israel's history that Gomer was involved in immensely popular Baal worship. Pagan worship included offerings as well that were indeed burnt offerings, but the difference was that it was very possible for children to be sacrificed as well as animals. That never happens with the burnt offerings to YHWH.

The next thing that she had done in her days of running around with lovers is wearing her ring and jewelry. This refers to the wealth of the nation at the time that was living off of the blessing of yesterday from the Lord and giving credit to that to their idols, such as the Baals, or multiple lords and gods. The nation chased after these gods in the same way Hosea's wife chased after her lovers. God says that in their idolatry, the nation of Israel forgot their true God. This section is completed with a "declares the Lord" statement that puts God's authority behind the message of Hosea to his wife, and also to the nation of Israel.

**2:14 (H 2:16) "Therefore, behold, I will persuade her and bring her into the wilderness and speak to her heart"**

A short section in Hebrew is introduced here, just these two verses. It seems to be a transition from the discipline of the wife to the restoration of the relationship between husband and wife, between Israel and God. It starts with "therefore, behold." The combining of two attention-getting markers should show us the change in direction. Anytime you see "therefore" in

Scripture, what follows is based on what has just been said. God's restoration of His relationship with Israel only follows after Israel is disciplined for its idolatry.

The word "behold" has been seen often in our studies of the Minor Prophets. It is a special favorite Hebraism that shocks the readers into attention for what follows. This is the emphasis of the message about Israel's idolatrous spiritual adulteries with the Baals: God will restore after discipline! The relationship is not over. Both the prophet and the Lord say they will persuade the wife and the nation. This word for persuade is a word that means to allure, to draw back into a relationship. The people and Gomer will be drawn back to their first love.

The Lord says that He will bring Israel back into the wilderness. This might seem strange to us but it is a rebooting of the relationship, a starting over right where they started before. How many remember their first date with their spouse, have a song that they both remember, a story to tell? Well, Israel and God met in the wilderness at Sinai. And the Lord says that in the restoration of the relationship, He will take the nation back to the initiation of the "marriage" of God and Israel. The wilderness is a place where people learn to lean on God rather than their own resources for their very sustenance, let alone their safety.

It is in this wilderness setting that the Lord once again woos the nation back to Himself, speaking to their heart, tender words of affirmation. It is in the midst of the discipline that the passion of the relationship is rekindled, in the midst of the wilderness where they met before. God is resetting the relationship with His chosen bride.

For many of us, we get stuck in the moment of our own beginnings with God, our own salvation. We like the songs that were sung when we first knew Him. We like the church that we met Him in. We like the Scriptures with which He won us over. These are dear moments with God, but we must advance in our relationship with Him as well, look for Him in new places, new songs, and new avenues. But we will know it is Him because He does not change.

**2:15 (H 2:17) and I will give to her her vineyards there and the Valley of Achor a door of hope. Then she will answer there as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of the land of Egypt."**

There is a samek at the end of this verse in Hebrew, denoting that this brief transition is over and there is a start to a new section, a new promise. God and the prophet speak of not just the restoration of relationship, but the restoration of the sustenance and blessing that relationship once brought. God and Hosea promise to Israel and Gomer that they will give back the vineyards that they had blessed their spouses with. This will happen in the wilderness, the time of testing and discipline.

The Valley of Achor is in the northern area near Jericho. It is the place where Achan and his family was stoned for stealing items under the ban when Jericho was taken during Joshua's battles. For this reason, and the fact that the name of the Valley means "Valley of Trouble," it is of great interest that God mentions it here as a place of hope. Other prophets promise the Valley to be a place of fertile farmland. Part of the change is in the understanding that God restores even

the negative things in our lives. He will take that which was evil and make it good. That is part of His restoration. The Valley once a place of trouble will now be a place of hope for Israel.

When God makes that place a place of hope, Israel will once again rely upon Him, call out to Him and answer Him. It will be like it was in the infancy of the nation when the people relied upon the Lord for all things. For the prophet, it will be like when he knew Gomer in the beginning of their relationship when love was in the air and the passions ran deep.

The place of the wilderness is where Israel came to know God, the place of the wilderness. Marriages that seem to be on their last leg can be restored to this time if both spouses want that passion back. Passion comes directly out of emotions, which can always be rekindled if the thinking patterns are there as well. Sometimes the commitment to make a marriage not just work but be vibrant start with a starting over, a new path starting from the same old starting point. But the commitment must be there before you initiate the relationship in the same way.

**2:16 (H 2:18) “Then it will happen in that day,” declares the Lord, “that you will call Me, ‘My Husband’ but you will not still call Me, ‘My Master.’”**

This new section is all about the complete and final restoration of God and Israel. God takes Israel back after discipline and restores the relationship. Now here are the results of that change. In that day refers to a future, not a present state. Most of this next section speaks of the Day of the Lord and the eschatological implications of Israel’s restored relationship with God.

God longs for Israel to know Him intimately as lovers know one another. He longs for them to completely know all of Him. He longs for the day when Israel will once again consider Him the Provider and Protector, much like the role of husbands today and back then. God wants that relationship more than anything. He does not want Israel to consider Him a tyrant or some master, but the Husband, the great Lover of the nation.

What is also interesting here is the word for master. It is the word Baal. Perhaps the nation of Israel was worshipping God but putting Him in the categories of the Baals. Perhaps they no longer called Him YHWH in worship but Baal instead. It seems from this verse that they had lumped God in with the other gods, the Baals, that they were worshipping at this prophet’s time. So God wants them to call Him by a lover’s name, a personal name, not the name they call everyone else they equate Him with.

**2:17 (H 2:19) “because I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth and they will not be remembered by their names anymore.”**

The reason the people will no longer call God by the names of the false gods they worshipped is because God will remove their names from the mouths of the people. For the prophet, this was his wife’s former lovers, the men she would call lord or sir. The word Baal means sir or lord, kind of like “mister” today.

A name was not just a word to the people of Hosea's time. It was a reputation. Your name was wrapped up in your character, the kind of person you were. So God is saying that He will destroy and annihilate the Baals and their reputations. He will make the people forget their reliance upon false gods that don't even exist. The people would once again only see Him, not false gods around Him.

**2:18 (H 2:20) “Then I will cut with them a covenant in that day, with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creeping things of the ground. I will also shatter the bow, the sword and war and I will make you lie down in safety.**

Here in Hosea, as in several other prophets of the time, especially Jeremiah, we see a new covenant, a separate covenant being made with Israel in this time of restoration. Once the foreign and false gods are finally out of their mind, which happens in the Exile, then God would cut a new covenant with them. A covenant, as we observe with Abraham, requires the life of animals as sacrifices. The literal word here is not make a covenant but cut a covenant because of this process.

For the second time in Israel's history, God holds Himself to the covenant, initiating it knowing full well that Israel will be the unfaithful one, not Him. So He is the one to initiate the second covenant, the new covenant. But it is not just a covenant with Israel, with human beings. It is a covenant with all of creation, ranging from God's creatures to God's people. Nothing is left out of this covenant. It is an all-inclusive covenant. God has plans not just to restore human relationship, but the whole earth.

God also eliminates in the new covenant the need for war and weapons. He shatters the bow and the sword and the idea and practice of war. These are not necessary in the eschatological age because God has restored all things from relationship with Him to the way the earth, animals, and humans interact. It is an environment of wholeness and harmony. Safety will be the new norm for humanity and creation.

**2:19 (H 2:21) “Then I will betroth you to Me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, and in justice, and in lovingkindness and in mercy.**

Now the Lord promises that the relationship will be restored. He uses the imagery of betrothal or engagement. In Hebrew culture, engagement was pretty much like already being married. It was viewed as a done deal until the actual wedding. God says that in the same close relationship, He will betroth the nation to Himself. This is very much the idea behind the saying found throughout Scripture, “I will be their God and they will be My people.”

This is also not just an intimate relationship, the restoration of the previous relationship, but also it will last forever. There will be no end to this relationship. It will last for all eternity. This is definitely referring to the end of time. He promises betrothal for a second time and that is

to provide emphasis on His restoration of the people. At the moment, they are in the midst of their sin, but this is a promise that will occur after their judgment and discipline.

These are the five characteristics of this new betrothal that will be different from the former relationship. As God restarts His relationship with Israel, it will be founded first on righteousness. Righteousness is the right action of a person. It comes out of a holy lifestyle. The things that holy people do are righteous, stand as the correct and godly acts of holy people.

The second of these characteristics of betrothal is justice. Justice is bringing the correct decisions to a person's case. Justice is making sure that both parties are treating one another in a righteous way. The third is a very special term in Hebrew, covenantal love. This is the loyal love, steadfast and establishing unconditional love of God for His people. It is the word *hesed*. This is the foundational love of God that does not take Israel's sins into account. God's selfless and faithful love is demonstrated to His people through that covenant, and this new covenant as well.

The fourth of these characteristics is a betrothal of mercy. The word for mercy in Hebrew mentioned here has a long history of imagery. It presents the imagery of the comfort and compassion that a mother has for her young. It suggests the safety that a baby finds in the womb of its mother. Compassion or mercy is God's gift that he will cradle the nation in His hands and let nothing happen to them. He will nurture them in this relationship. They will find complete safety in Him.

**2:20 (H 2:22) “And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the Lord!”**

For the third time we see God declaring that He will betroth the people to Himself. Then we find the fifth and final characteristic of this new covenant and relationship. God will be faithful. He will be their rock, their solid fortress. They will be established with Him as their foundation. He will shield them from all things that would harm them. He is the Protector of their lives.

It is only after this restoration of relationship that the people will once again intimately know the Lord for His reputation and His works. Knowing the Lord implies an experiential knowledge, not a factual one in this case. The whole section is on relational knowledge. So when God speaks of knowing the Lord, they will know these characteristics of the new covenant and their renewed relationship with God. They are part of who He is.

**2:21 (H 2:23) “Then it will happen in that day that I will answer,” declares the Lord, “I will answer the heavens and they will answer the earth,”**

More than just the relationship restoration is the restoration of the whole earth and all of creation. We will see this in this verse and the next. The prophet uses the idea of answering or responding to point out that response of God to the earth and the earth to God. We have seen this before in the prophets. The whole of creation reacts to God's presence and mood in directly corresponding ways. Here, it is God's great joy that brings the heavens and the earth into the

production and harmony of joy. The message comes directly from God and emanates through the heavens to the earth.

**2:22 (H 2:24) “and the earth will answer the grain and the sweet wine and the oil and they will answer Jezreel.**

This is clearly the communication to send God’s blessings to the earth once again. They are in the wilderness, but that wilderness is going to become a paradise. God will send from the skies rain upon the ground and will make the earth produce its fruits. The verb for answer is used once again, showing that God is sovereign over the situation. He decides the blessing and commands it, and everyone and everything obeys that command.

The crops mentioned are only a sampling of all that is produced. The grain and sweet wine and oil were mentioned earlier as the things that God and Hosea took away from an adulterous nation and woman. Now, God promises to bring them back in full swing. They respond to the answer of the Lord. And those same plants will then produce for Jezreel.

The mention of Jezreel has two implications. First, it is the name of the firstborn of Hosea and Gomer. Jezreel was earlier referred to in negative connotations from the valley of bloodshed. Jezreel is the first of the three children whose name is mentioned, as a precursor to God’s changing of the other two children’s names.

Jezreel’s name need not be changed because it contains both the positive and negative references. But the other two children have names with a negative conjunction built into them. But here it is used in its native understanding of goodness and blessing. The name means “God sows” or “plants.” God will now turn and sow goodness to a land and people that had once been negative and lost.

**2:23 (H 2:25) “and I will sow her for Myself in the land. Then I will have mercy on No Mercy and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are My people,’ and he will say, ‘My God.’”**

The prophet now does a word play on the meaning of Jezreel’s name to bring out the point that not only will the land produce what is planted or sown in it, but God will also plant or sow His people in the land. The land of Israel has always been part of the covenant, and God promises here to restore them to that land. But they are not placed in the land merely for their own benefit. They are placed there for God’s sake and for His glory.

Now we come to the changing of the children’s names. Unlike Jezreel, their names are negative without any possibility of positive change unless the names are changed to positives themselves. That is exactly what God does. He takes the negative situation and either turns it into a positive or gives it a new positive meaning. The child called “No Mercy” will now be called “Mercy.” God will no longer look on His people with disdain but will sooth them and have compassion on them as a mother has on her children.

Also there is the son of Hosea named “Not My People.” His name is changed as well to be “My People.” God has now turned from the separation that prostitution to the gods has caused and is restoring His relationship to Israel, His bride. In the same way, Hosea will turn again and forgive Gomer. Along with God’s declaration that Israel is once again His people, they will respond by calling Him their God. This is a complete change from the times of their spiritual adultery with the Baals.

Only God can restore a marriage and a relationship. That is why Jesus, the great Mediator of relationships, has come. He started with our relationship with God and is daily working in our lives to bring that same reconciliation to our marriages, our family relationships, our friend relationships and every other relationship that has turned toxic because of sin.

## Chapter 3

**3:1 Then the Lord said to me again, “Go! Love a woman who is loved by a favorite lover and who commits adultery, as the Lord loves the sons of Israel though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”**

Now after the Lord has laid out His plan of redemption through the personal experience of the prophet, He once again calls the prophet after her indiscretion and adultery to once again join with her in sacred marriage. He commands the prophet to take back his wife who had profaned their intimate marriage with every man in sight.

She had irreparably damaged him from the inside out, killed his love for her by violating his privacy as her husband and sharing herself with other men. She was for him alone. After such a hearty violation of their marriage, it will not just cost the prophet his emotional ties to her, as we will see. But God comes again with the same command He had given to the prophet in the beginning of the book.

Go and take yourself a woman who is loved by others. Before this had said a woman who loves prostitution. Now it says a woman who is loved by many other men. The word here for those who love her is the word of a lover or a friend or a favorite person. These men loved her not because of her attributes, which is the reason for a husband to love her, but because she would so willingly and readily share her sacred body and person with them in their beds. They loved her because she was easy, because she was free.

The woman Gomer, Hosea’s wife, is characterized first as a woman who is now loved by those who have enjoyed her whoredom and second as a woman who commits adultery. She is known by her actions. She is loved because she commits adultery, not because she’s a good woman.

Once again we see that the prophet’s life is an image of God’s life with Israel. He is the one who seeks them out even though they are whoring themselves with the idols of the nations. God chases the Israelites in spite of the fact that they are chasing after the gods He hates that don’t love them back or even exist. But why does He talk about their love for raisin cakes? I believe there are several reasons for the mention of these raisin cakes.

First, my own observation is that they are something sweet, a food that develops in its eaters a craving. These are people that crave new things. That is one of their greatest problems and it also is part of the idea of adultery. They crave things they do not usually have access to, like an adulterer craves an adulterous relationship not just because of sex, but because it is dangerous and euphoric. We have the disease of wandering to merely please our own emotional desires and gratification.

Second, many scholars suggest that these cakes were used in religious ceremonies. King David gave these kinds of compressed cakes to all the people as part of a celebration that the Ark of the Covenant had been returned to Israel (2 Samuel 6:19). And there is much suggestion that they were used in the ritual worship of foreign gods. That is why the Lord has anger against



Israel for loving them and enjoying them. They are part of the evidence that Israel loves the idols they blindly worship.

### **3:2 So I bought her for fifteen silver coins and a homer of barley and a lethec of barley.**

In this verse we are surprised to learn that Hosea has to buy Gomer, apparently from one of her lovers. We cannot be certain why he had to buy her back. But when some scholars have added up the barley that he paid out with the coins, they come to roughly the same amount of money that must be paid for the loss of a slave in Exodus.

If this is so, one commentary suggests that she owed a debt she could not pay and ended up a debtor's slave until it could be paid. This would seem to be the case, although the text never tells us why Hosea is paying for his own wife. It is most likely that he is not paying off one of her lovers just to get her out of his arms. It is most likely that she owes that lover something and he must pay to release her from slavery.

A homer and a lethec are Hebrew measurements for the amount of barley. Two separate amounts of barley are listed, showing the amount of payment is a big deal to Hosea. If the slave situation described above is accurate, we see just how much the lovers cared about Gomer. They cared enough to make her a slave when she owed them.

### **3:3 Then I said to her, "Many days you will dwell with me. You must not play the whore nor belong to a man. So I will also be to you."**

Because Hosea bought back his wife, showed her that he cared for her more than her lovers, she would probably feel some sense of owing him. So he makes her commit to him once again their marriage vows. He asks her to move back in the house with him and live with him as she used to. Then he prohibits her from doing the things of prostitution and adultery that she used to do.

These all seem reasonable. But there are many marriages where a hurt spouse decides to get even rather than be redemptive. They hold their spouse under strict regulations and the spouse capitulates because they feel bad about their own indiscretions against the spouse. But then that person holding them from doing what they used to do decides to get even and violate their side of the marriage covenant.

Hosea here promises that he also will be under the same restrictions his wife has come under. This is the kind of attitude that can redeem and restore the marriage. It takes commitment on both sides before, during, and after any breach of the marriage covenant. Belonging to a man seems to indicate that she may have been owned as a slave when he bought her back, but we cannot be absolutely certain of that.

### **3:4 Thus for many days the sons of Israel will dwell without a king, and without a ruler, and without a sacrifice or pillar, and without an ephod, and without idols.**

The prophet directly corresponds his own relationship and understanding with Gomer to the Lord's situation with Israel. Israel also must be recommitted to God for many days, meaning dwelling with Him for the rest of their days as in a marriage. But this is also a promise that they will suffer the many days as Gomer would.

No longer will there be ready idolatry in Israel. There will not be a king or a ruler. Israel will suffer and not be able to bring a sacrifice or to have pillars of remembrance or for idolatry. Some of the gods, especially Asherah, had pillars or poles that were like totem poles. They would not be able to bring sacrifice to any of the gods or to God. They will not have an ephod. An ephod is the linen clothing that the priest would wear in doing his duties. And there would be no idols.

This sounds very much like the time of the exile. This is the time in which the nation has nothing and turns back to the Lord in the desert. The suggestions here because of these specific images is that the people of Israel will not have any leadership whatsoever, whether civil or political leadership or spiritual leadership. They will have no means to resume normal national activities. No priests and no sacrifices for Israel in this time. No kings or leaders to lead them to freedom. They would be alone and would not enjoy the things they enjoy right now.

**3:5 Afterward, the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and they will come near in trembling to the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.**

But after this time in the desert, the people would be restored. They would once again return to the land and live in it again. More importantly, they would return to the Lord in relationship. They would begin to do the Law and treat one another as brothers again. They would begin to seek God and God alone after this time in the wilderness of Exile.

Seeking the Lord is something they were not doing in the time of the prophet Hosea, right near their end as a nation in Northern Israel. Things had decayed so badly that they had no hope except what Hosea is offering them in these chapters, that God would redeem them and still love them even after their idolatry. They will seek David their king. I believe this is either saying that they will have their political section of society restored and once again have competent leadership, or that it is a reference to Christ as the seed of David ruling over them.

This is the time of the latter days, which points to Jesus coming as the Messiah and being their king out of the line of David. In this time, the people of Israel will once again come to the Lord and not see Him as some friendly and kind God, but as the transcendent King over all the universe. Their familiarity with God will be changed into an understanding of His power and might.

They would no longer be flippant with God and would no longer simply expect His goodness in their lives, but it would be seen as a blessing and privilege rather than an entitlement. We need to hold a healthy balance between God's familiarity with us and His friendship and His transcendence. We must never treat His goodness with contempt.

## Chapter 4

### **4:1 Hear the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land that there is no faithfulness, there is no lovingkindness, there is no knowledge of God in the land.**

As the introduction to Hosea's life and ministry is complete, and chapter three served its purpose to encapsulate the whole of his message, we now turn to a dispute that the Lord has with Israel. We are redirected by the prophet to a more poetic section after the narrative. God's argument or dispute with Israel starts with a command to hear the terms of the dispute, much like in the book of Micah.

The prophet calls all the people to come and hear the word of the Lord. Much like the Greeks would sit in their town squares and rehash philosophy, the people of Israel enjoyed hearing from the prophets, at least when it was a favorable word. After the command comes the address to the audience, the sons of Israel, meaning the people living in Hosea's home country of Northern Israel.

Then the prophet gives the reason for the Lord's word and the context of that message. The message follows the genre of a dispute, a legal matter. But this one is different from Micah in that it does not focus on the civil and political landscape, but almost solely goes to the heart of the religious and spiritual landscape. Hosea is all about the spiritual problem in Israel. Deal with the spiritual problem, and the other problems will fall into place.

He once again mentions the people of Israel in listing the audience of the inhabitants of the land. The whole of Israel is the problem and has the spiritual issue. The two references are one and the same people group. The Lord's dispute deals with the lack of faithfulness, lovingkindness, and knowledge in the land.

The word for faithfulness here bears the image of the stronghold, the established foundation. The people of Israel have no foundation of trust. They cannot be trusted nor do they look to God for help. They are on their own and without a foundation, they cannot stand. Second, there is no lovingkindness. This is the word *hesed*, one of the most important theological terms in the Old Testament.

*Hesed* contains the idea of God's covenantal loyal love for Israel. It is the unconditional acceptance and blessing of the people through the covenant. *Hesed* contains the idea that God is faithful and the people are not. Even when they are not faithful, God keeps His covenant. That is why His love and covenant are unconditional. He always holds up his end of it! The final word used here is the word for knowledge or wisdom, the skill or ability of insight. This word is also important. It is not the main word for wisdom, but has the idea of know-how. It is an understanding of how things work, a sort of combination of information and experience. The Lord is referring to knowledge of Himself, as we will see.

#### **4:2 Swearing oaths together with deceiving, also murdering and stealing and committing adultery; they make a breach, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.**

As is common to a legitimate lawsuit of the time, or a legal dispute, there is a list of wrongs the people have done against God. They go together in sections. The first two have to do with character and reputation. There are people in the land who break the commandment about bearing false witness in a dispute. This is coupled with deception. Both refer to shady character.

The second group of wrongs in this list also refer to three of the commandments directly in the Ten Commandments. So far we see three broken here. They are murdering, stealing and adultery, the big three. These are common everyday occurrences in Israel at the end of the nation's hay day. Part of the reason for their collapse is their moral decay. But these are not meant to be moral indictments but a list of what people do when they are not in proper relationship with God.

The last group have to do with war and fighting. They make a breach in a wall. In other words they attack the defenses of other cities. They are murderers who love to murder. They allow much bloodshed and even revel in the shedding of blood, the source of life and a sacred fluid. Their propensity for violence is uncanny.

We live in this country right now as Americans! We have people who don't mind ruining their reputation, lying to get their way. Our whole economic system, as we are seeing, is built on greed and deception. How many of us have bought a product only to realize we were deceived? And there is murder and theft and adultery all over the place.

One of the most favorite games of our youth, Grand Theft Auto, contains elements of all three of these and is a very violent game. Sex doesn't sell in movies at the moment, but we love that violence! We need to pray for this country. We are headed the way of Northern Israel and of Rome. Our days are short when we routinely break the fundamental laws upon which our country was built.

#### **4:3 For these reasons, the land mourns and all its inhabitants wither, even the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are removed.**

Once again in the Minor Prophets, we see the overarching theme that the fall of humanity did not only affect humans, but all of creation. We live in a fallen world. Everything is fallen, from people to societies to cultures to the earth itself. Sin's staining and decaying effect is universal in creation.

So after pointing out some of the most grievous of sins against God's Law, Hosea shows the results of such sin. The first problem of the sin is that the land itself mourns. The land here can refer to the physical land or the country. Either way, there is natural suffering because of sin. Sin encompasses much more than simply human affairs. The people who live in the land also are adversely affected by sin. They wither or decay.

But the problem of sin does not stop with the land or the humans. Also all of the animals in the typical Old Testament classification are affected from humankind to beasts of the field to birds to fish. You will see this same listing in this order throughout both Old and New Testaments. I believe in Genesis it is given this order once or twice, and I know that in Romans it is given in this order. This must be the way that Hebrews categorized their natural world.

**4:4 “Indeed, let no man dispute and let no man argue, for your people are like those who dispute with a priest!”**

I believe that in verse four the Lord begins speaking and laying his argument down for the people. But it does not matter how you frame who is speaking. The material would flow from God either way to the prophet. At the very least, verse six must be God speaking for He speaks in the first person singular and calls the people His people.

The opening word to verse four can be used in both positive and negative ways. It is a term of agreement, of egging on the argument. It’s like producing a stronger second point to an already strong first point. The prophet already mentioned the effects of their sins upon themselves and creation. Now God will enter the argument and call them to quiet down as He brings the dispute.

He demands that the people not dispute his dispute. The idea here seems to be that He does not want them to issue a countersuit before He is done bringing His whole argument. The text of this verse is not easy to understand or track. But that seems to be the idea. Of a great certainty is that God points out the priest especially. The priest is the representative of the spiritual or religious part of Hebrew society.

Remember, Hosea spends most of his time on Israel’s spiritual sickness, not on matters of legality. Pointing out the priest and his arguments is a way of pointing to the problem of religious rebellion. We have just read of the sins of the people. Apparently, the priests aren’t doing their job well at all, so God is inciting them as well for the problems in Israel. The people’s great sins are their litmus test. They have been found not doing the work of the priest.

**4:5 Even you will stumble by day; also the prophet with you will stumble by night, and I will destroy your mother.**

The Lord continues raging against the priests. They are at fault for using their spiritual leadership, or the lack thereof, to bring the whole society to naught. It is because the priests themselves have turned to other gods and not done their duty that the people are running around and committing such gross injustices and breaking the Law in broad daylight. There is no fear of the Lord because the priests have dropped the ball.

The word stumble here literally refers to the ability to walk. But God is speaking of their walk, their life. They will sin as well. Even the priests will not be able to live by the Law. How can they teach others if they themselves cannot obtain lawful living? The indictment is against

the priests, the religious leaders of Israel for Israel's spiritual state. They were the shepherds of the people and they have done much more harm than good.

This has direct correlation to those of us who minister as pastors in the Gospel. But that is not the only group this applies to. The Bible tells us in 1 Peter that we are all priests for God. Every Christian is a priest! How is your flock doing? How are the people at work doing? At school? In your own family? Just living by God's Word is a testament, but are we being priests to our world? How we represent Christ in this world is of the utmost importance. How many of us have met with opposition to the gospel and Christianity because of other Christians who have dropped the ball? We cannot change them. But we can present Christ in a faithful way ourselves.

Not just the priest in Israel stumbles in his walk with God, but the prophet with him as well. The whole of Israel's spiritual leadership, even the checks and balances of the prophetic ministry, are corroded and failing. No one in Israel from the leadership down stands unsaturated with sin and complicity.

It seems unnatural that God will destroy the mothers of the priests. One commentator suggests that the mother is the religious institution in Israel. This seems to fit well because in the next verse God decries the lack of knowledge of the children of Israel, the common persons. If that is so, then as in a human relationship where the mother trains up the child, the priests will be overthrown and destroyed because they have brought up bad children who do evil. So God is speaking to all of Israel, saying He will destroy the root of the problem, their religious leadership.

**4:6 My people are destroyed from the lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, so I reject you from being a priest for Me. Since you have forgotten the Law of your God, also I will forget your children.”**

As we finish out this first round of God's crying out against His people, we can really see the relational affects more than the legal ones. Micah was a master at pointing out all of the legal implications of these things. But Hosea is really after the relational collateral damage of sin in our lives and spiritual apathy and even idolatry in our lives. When we serve anyone or anything else, we effectively commit spiritual adultery against God. We join ourselves to idols.

The result is the loss of the relationship between the mother, Israel's religious system, and the children, those who learn to love the Lord and honor Him only. Another relationship destroyed in this book. The people themselves are destroyed or perish because they lack this all-important knowledge. Knowledge here is the same word used earlier, having the skill to understand and practice spirituality.

We have the same issue in the church today. We have pastors who do not teach their people how to read and study the Bible. They do not teach their people how to pray or how to do the spiritual disciplines. They do not teach on fasting or on knowing and hearing the voice of God. They do not teach on the spiritual gifts. Worse than all of this, many pastors do not believe

in God's Word! How can we teach something we don't believe for ourselves? It will never be that way at this church.

Spiritual knowledge is not just information, but experience of God. It tells you how and then shows you how. The priests were not doing this for the people. So they were not just putting the people's physical lives in danger, which we see in the fall of the nation, but they were more importantly putting the people's spiritual lives in jeopardy. The people did not know how to do the rudimentary basics of their spiritual walk. They had no discernment and were easily led astray to the slaughter of idolatry.

But it is the priests, the religious leadership that has rejected God's wooing into spiritual relationship and knowledge. Because they refuse to take part in God's knowledge, God will reject them. This gets back to Hosea and Gomer. Gomer rejected Hosea so he let her go out of the house. She was most likely living with another man, or men, when he had to go buy her back. The priests without realizing it, or maybe they had realized it, were selling Israel to idols and to another nation. Because they rejected relationship with God, God rejected them and their followers, their children.

Because the priests were not being God's priests and shepherding the people, God took their priesthood away from them. They are left desolate with no status in Israel. Let us not forget that priests did not own property but lived on the offerings of the people. If they were no longer priests, that provision was no longer theirs. They would have to find land and live in a way they were not accustomed to. More than that, as a minister myself, I have no recourse, no other job for which I am fully qualified or even desire to do. If I were no longer a pastor, I would be utterly devastated.

The priests were not only refusing to practice and teach God's Law. They had forgotten the Law altogether! You can't teach or practice what you don't know. Because they had literally forgotten God's Law, God forgot Israel. Israel's, and our, lifeline is in obeying God's Law. Without God's Law, there can be no relationship. The point of the Law was to get rid of sin in the community so God could dwell with His people.

Take away the Law, and you take away God's presence. Take away God's presence, and there is no existence worthwhile. Moses knew that and these priests forgot that. So God left them to their own destruction. God forgot them after they forgot Him. But He will remember them individually as they turn back to Him even in exile. It is interesting to note that after the Exile when people come back into Jerusalem, they all gather to hear the whole Law being read to them by Ezra. They truly had forgotten the Law!

**4:7 “The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me. I will exchange their glory for shame.**

Hosea is still talking about the priests here. There is no separation in the Hebrew text, such as a samek. But there is a separation in most Bibles, the beginning of a new section of raving against the priests. God will do just that for a few verses and then make a statement about

the way they are leading the people astray and will segment off into the most grievous sin of the priests and people, that of physical prostitution that is happening among them and how it parallels their idolatry. And this is all on the priest's heads because they weren't doing what they were called to do.

The more priests that Israel had, the more they sinned against God. The idea was that the more priests the people had the more likely that the percentage of them would be godly and would lead the people back to God. But the opposite happened in Israel. More and more priests were added in the temples, but Israel was not being led back to God. Instead, they were being led deeper into cults and false gods.

For this reason, because the priests failed to uphold God's Laws and standards and to win the hearts of the people back to God, God will exchange or change their glory, the glory of the priesthood, the special place in Israel, for the shame of the prostitute. He will take their glory, the weight of their office and function in His land and will utterly shame them. He will leave them as Hosea left his wife exposed to her lovers. God will bring upon them the shame of their failure and of their loss of devotion.

Shame was the most powerful deterrent in Israel's time. Today we shun shame. But in the time of the prophet, it was a very effective mode of punishment. We must never forget to be devoted to God alone. The same is true of the Kingdom of God today. The more Christians, the better the world should be getting. If we're not doing our part, maybe God should shame us. The glory of the gospel must be our thrust into this world. It is what makes us different. We need to be more effective for God so that we never hear that He wishes to shame us. It reminds me of the words I want to hear so badly from Jesus, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!"

#### **4:8 "They feed on the sin of My people and for their iniquity they lift up their lives."**

In still talking about the priests, God says that they feed off of the sins of the people. The more the people sin, the more they encourage sin. There are three different terms for sin throughout this passage, which leads me to believe that God meant sin in every possible form in which it could reveal itself.

It is the priesthood who is administering and managing the people to continue deeper on the path to greater and more depraved sin. The very light God had placed to lead people to Him was leading people farther and farther away from Him! Like scavengers, the priests looked for sin and encouraged it. They fed off of the violence and sexually explicit culture they had created. The machine was getting worse. The decay was in everything. Even the priests who were consecrated, set apart, were not only complicit but were teaching sin to the people.

The last phrase I have translated literally here. Most translations give you the substance of the literal, that the priests became greedy from the sins of the people. The word iniquity is used to show that it is a different word in the original language. The first meant a missing of the mark, a morally wrong deed. The second word for sin here is iniquity, which has a slightly different shade of meaning the guilt caused by sin.



So the priests are feeding off of the moral wrongness of the people's actions and greedy for the people to feel more and more guilt. The literal wording here is that they lift up or raise up their lives. This is the idea of making a better living off of greed. They are raised up as priests in the community because they led people to sin. The people like sinning, and so they admire the priests for bringing them to that depraved place in their own lives. And the priests benefit by a better standard of living because of the people's gratitude.

**4:9 “So it will be: ‘Like people, like priest.’ Thus I will visit upon them their ways, and their deeds will return to them.**

Now the Lord begins to pronounce judgment on the priesthood. The prophet comes up with a saying to show what will happen to the priests. They will become like the people they taught how to sin so effectively. We have the phrase in our culture, “Like father like son” and others like it. Here, Hosea says “Like people like priest.” The idea is actually reversed from our own saying because the father is the example and leader to the son. But the priest who is supposed to be the leader will be led into sin by the people he led.

The people of this time were poor economically and even more bankrupt spiritually. The priests had a one-way ticket to the same place in every way. They would become as poor and destitute as the people without bread and wine. We learned from Micah, a contemporary of Hosea, that the priests and prophets made money on the side being paid to do what they were supposed to do for free. One would imagine they ate and lived better than most in Israel at this time. But not anymore!

The word often used by God in negative ways, although in positive ways at times, visit, means to punish in this case. It will be used again at the end of this section. The word visit implies that God will personally involve Himself in the punishment or reward. It is said later of Jesus that the Messiah visited humanity. God Himself came as the Messiah. He visited us. But here, the sins of the priests will catch up with them and overtake them. God will visit their sins on their own heads. It is a form of retributive punishment. If that is what they want, they will have it until they are sick and dead.

Their ways will lead them to destruction and death as individuals and as a nation. And the things that they do, their deeds, will return upon them. When they cheat someone else, they will find themselves being cheated. Live by the sword and die by the sword. No mercy. Everyone's on their own. When we let sin run rampant in our culture, the sins that we do will be done to us because there is no mutual respect or honor of God that keeps us from hurting one another. Without a healthy view of God's image in even fallen human beings, we will not treat anyone better than ourselves. The spiral sinks into depravity and oblivion. The whole society dies. The whole nation dies. Where are we in our nation today? Are we headed for life or death?

**4:10 “So they will eat but not be satisfied. They will promote prostitution, but not multiply because they have forgotten to devote themselves to the Lord.**

The priests will begin to experience a dramatic change in their standard of living. The food they eat will not fill or satisfy their bodies. They will grow weak and tired because their food is not doing what it used to do. They have and will continue to promote promiscuity and prostitution, most likely especially temple or cult prostitution, but the typical result of sexual intercourse will not be observed, that is the conception of infants. Without this, a nation dies with its current generation.

All of these decreases in their standard of living occur for one main reason: they are no longer devoted to the Lord. To be devoted means that you have one Master, not many. It means that you turn not to other things, but you keep the things close to you. The word here is actually the word for keeping the Law or watching over a city or a person in protection. It is the word for guarding your heart. Here, it refers to remaining devoted to the Lord.

They have turned to idols instead, so the blessing of the Lord is no longer their delight. It was always a privilege, not a right in the first place. And we would do well to remember this too. Jesus said in the book of John that we must stay or remain connected to the vine as His branches. It is only in our connection with God that we receive His favor, His presence, His blessings, and His attention.

#### **4:11 “Prostitution, old wine and new wine take away the heart.”**

This verse is in a sense the conclusion and transition to the separate point God wants to make about idolatry and prostitution, which the priests have been promoting. These are activities that lead a nation, a society, to extinction. When prostitution does not make babies, a nation dies. When we take the God-ordained institutions, such as marriage, and pervert them, God’s blessing is no longer in them. It is through prostitution, because it is a sin, that diseases which hinder production of babies occur. That is because God’s blessing is not in prostitution but in marriage!

Wine has many warnings in Scripture. Proverbs 23 tells us to be careful when looking into the wine glass because it can overtake our senses and lead us to destruction. It lures us in until it’s too late. We must be careful of these things. Wine and debauchery also lead to danger and death because being drunk means that we are no longer in control of our faculties and placing that control in a substance that slows down our reaction times and fries our brains.

The last phrase is literal in this translation. These things take away the heart. They take away understanding as many translations say. You don’t think straight when you’re involved in sex and drugs/alcohol. We saw it earlier in the book. Gomer was a prostitute and she either was led into deception or deceived herself into thinking that those men actually loved her and cared for her.

She wasn’t thinking straight. Sex has an allurements that draws us away from logical thought processes. And drugs and alcohol specifically are no different. They are designed to dull our senses and keep us from thinking straight or in a controlled fashion. These are wise words from this prophet. We should be careful to heed them.

**4:12 “My people consult a piece of wood, and their walking staff informs them. Thus in a spirit of prostitution they play the whore away from beneath their God.**

In any other context, this would be seen as mocking the people and their idols, and it may very well be doing so, because it sounds so funny and stupid for them to do this, as I will explain in a moment. But there is a bitter truth to what is said in this verse and the following verses. We have moved now in the transition of verse eleven to the whole of God’s people, the whole of Israel.

The people look to or consult their own idols, made by their own hands from wood or from rock. Isaiah does intend to be funny and ironic when he talks about the people cutting down a tree, taking part of it to make an idol and the other to make the fire, and then consulting the idol made from the same material that is burning. They thought that the idol was providing heat for them! Here, Hosea does the same type of analogy or irony.

The people are gaining understanding from their walking sticks! Can you imagine a man walking around in the woods on his afternoon stroll and then sitting down to take a break and bowing down before the stick he leaned on in his walk? This is what the people were doing. Absolutely foolish things! No wonder the Lord called them lost without understanding! The word for informs her means to announce or pronounce, much like the oracle of a prophet. And the word for consult is the word used for entreaty or inquiring and asking things.

The next section is a bit rough to translate in this verse, and many go for a more informal or thought-for-thought approach but I have tried to stay literal and I will explain here its reference. That is the beauty of commentary with translation. The Lord concludes his rage over the priests and people’s deeds that separate Him from them by talking about the physical temple prostitution and its spiritual parallels and consequences. We have already mentioned the infertility that will come of prostitution in Israel that He has promised.

The Lord concludes that a spirit of prostitution has come over His people. This is the idea that an idol or most likely a demon or demonic force has seized the minds and hearts of the people in their reveling and made them slaves to prostitution. They would much rather have sex than worship God. In fact, there is evidence here and in other places throughout all the prophets that the people were involved in idolatry in the Lord’s temple and had cultic or temple prostitutes. So they went to the temple to have sex in public as part of worship to whatever idol they were serving.

This is why the Lord calls it a spirit of prostitution. And He speaks of the thing that hurts His heart more than any other thing: the people have turned away from worshipping Him to worship their own bodies and their idols. They play the whore like his wife Gomer had done to Hosea.

Then we have this interesting literal translation that says, “away from underneath their God.” Most translators see that this is hard to make out the understanding for, so they once again go for the concept, which is fine except that they make their readers miss a double imagery here.

First the spiritual reference here is to the protection and the worship of God as Provider and Protector.

They are underneath His protection and underneath Him as His people. He is their umbrella. When they worship Him, they are gathered under Him and are united under His Law. That is the first reference. They have left the umbrella of His protection and presence to go to other idols. But also, there is a second meaning here, a physical meaning that is also an image of what they are literally doing in temple prostitution. In sex, one is underneath another. So the idea here, without stretching this image too far, is that they have left the companionship of God, their divine Lover, to play the whore with other gods. It is a slight reference to sex with the implications of spiritual position under God's care.

**4:13 On the pinnacles of mountains they sacrifice and on the hills they burn offerings, under oak and poplar and terebinth, because the shade is good. For this reason, your daughters play the whore and your brides commit adultery.**

Verse 13 points to the people's propensities for sin and idol worship in the highest places and in broad daylight. They do not commit their sins in the darkness or in secret anymore, but publicly parade them. They have lost all sense of conscience and propriety. They have lost a sensitivity to God completely. They are bold and abrasive in their sins. They readily commit them against God, knowing that they are hurting His heart. But they don't care.

So in the highest places, the tops of mountains and on every hill, they offer sacrifices to their gods, both burnt offerings and slaughtering of animals. There's a giant difference between the sacrifices to God Almighty and the gods. A sacrifice to God was an understanding that sin causes death and something must substitutionally die that death to make that person right with God's Laws and right in relationship with Him. But a sacrifice to the gods was to appease them and guilt them into providing whatever you needed from fertility to a nice sun tan, impending on the god.

The people do not just do this in plain sight on mountain tops and hills but they also do it in forests with trees that provide great shade for them. They do it in their comfort and they have no guilt about it. They have become callous to hurting God with their sins and allegiances to false idols. The terebinth tree was a mighty or very tall tree that provided great shade for them.

Just as the shade was good for the people committing sins and sacrificing offerings to their gods under the trees out of comfort, it also became comfortable for their unmarried women to become promiscuous. The culture no longer shunned such things and the daughters could do whatever they want. One of the greatest ways to avoid lusting after someone is to think of them in a relational way instead of objectifying them.

For instance, a man can think of all the women other than his wife as a sister or a mother. That generally stops him from having feelings for her right there. And a woman can think of a man as her brother or father. Incestual relationships generally do not afford the same objectifying

of the opposite sex. The person now has a relational context that is dirty and shameful and gross to violate.

It is no different here. Hosea does not talk about the young women being promiscuous. He talks about the father's daughters being whores. And he doesn't discuss how married women look for another hook up. He talks about the bride of a husband's youth turning to another man. These are emotionally charged relationships. Fathers guard their daughters from evil men who only want one thing. And husbands are jealous for their brides.

**4:14 “I will not punish your daughters although they play the whore, nor your brides although they commit adultery because *the men* lay spread out with prostitutes and sacrifice with temple prostitutes. Thus a people without discernment will be ruined.”**

But God says he won't visit their sins upon them, or punish them. This is the same word used earlier against the priests. Instead, He will let them revel in their sins and continue to become more and more depraved. Why? Because the men are just as bad as their women. No one has any censor or conscience. They sin without guilt because they are that depraved. Punishment does no good.

Instead, their punishment will be in the futility of their society and nation. The nation will come to ruin. That will be punishment enough for them. The men are doing the same things the women are doing except they are doing them in religious contexts. One of the worst things to deal with is a person who brings accusation against another person in a church while they themselves are steeped in sin. No one is godly in this country.

There is another vivid image here as God speaks of the horrid things men are doing in the temple. The temple is a sacred place, a place where God's presence dwells. But yet in that same place, the grossest of sins is being committed. Temple prostitution was an item reserved for most gods of fertility and some others as well. The Israelites in their worship of idols are committing public prostitution in the temple of the Lord, an abomination to say the least!

The word here is often translated other ways but does not capture the vividness of the prophet's speech. The verb for laying spread out is another explicit reference to sexual intercourse here, which is why I have left it in the literal. We need to see all the references to the lewdness of sin in these verses, for that is the whole point of Hosea's message.

Sin is the ugliest and most public way to destroy our relationship with God and it kills God for us to sin against Him. This image is supported by the author of Hebrews when he talks about crucifying the Son of God all over again with our sins. The final sentence of this section reiterates an earlier idea in the passage that a culture that revels in such depravity and does not care whether or not God blesses them will find themselves in ruin and destruction. This is what happens to Northern Israel very shortly after this book is written. God's point is that without Him, no culture or people will survive. They will come to ruin because that is exactly what sin does over the long haul. It separates and diseases and decays and brings death.

**4:15 Though you play the whore, O Israel, do not let Judah become guilty. Do not go into Gilgal and do not ascend to Beth-Aven, and do not take an oath, “The Lord lives!”**

Now the prophet speaks and demands certain things of Northern Israel. It's as if he's thrown out the baby with the bathwater and decided that Israel is too far gone, but the danger now is if Northern Israel corrupts Judah. So he calls out four negative commands to Israel while it's steeped in its sin.

The first of those four is for the nation to not incriminate Judah, to not spread its sin to the neighboring country. One of the reasons that the people had to wipe out the land and people when they inherited it from the Canaanites was because sin and idolatry are so pervasive and like a cancer that grows. They do not stay in one place, but work themselves through, as Paul says, “The whole batch of dough.”

So the prophet demands that Israel in its folly and destruction does not take Judah prisoner to go down with it. The second negative command is for Israel to not go into Gilgal. Gilgal is a town up by Jericho and is the site of Joshua's first base camp. Several other historical things happened there as well, so it is a spiritual place that is sacred. The prophet does not want Israel to taint the sacred city.

A third command is to not go up to Beth-Aven. Now there is no city named Beth-Aven. But there is a city named Bethel that is linked in Amos to Gilgal and there Amos warns against these places being corrupted as well. Beth-Aven means “house of nothing.” Perhaps the prophet is making a play on words and asking that the House of God (Bethel) not become the House of Nothing (Beth-Aven). But we cannot be certain he is referring to Bethel for sure.

Finally, he demands that the Israelites do not swear by the name of the Lord. An oath was always taken as a guarantee that a person would do what they said. It was actually a way of calling another person's reputation as collateral for the loss of one's own character and reputation. The prophet demands that they do not use God's name since they have worshipped the idols. God is no longer sacred to them. To take an oath with His reputation backing it and not worshipping Him would be to profane His name.

**4:16 Thus like a heifer is stubborn, stubborn is Israel. Now can the Lord feed them like a lamb in an open pasture?**

This verse is a bit harder to completely translate, but it is easier in the form of a question. First, the prophet concludes that Israel is as stubborn as a heifer, a female cow. He uses an a, b, b, a structure to do this. It is a literary device, much like the “Like the people like the priest” phrase. The word stubborn denotes rebellion and deciding to not obey or do anything one is told.

Then there is a question about if the Lord can even regain them, can even once again shepherd the people of Israel. It is almost as if the prophet turns Calvinist on us and says they are a lost cause and there's no hope for them. He is right about that if they are to continue their stubbornness. He is essentially asking, “Can God break the stubborn creatures?” A lamb in open

pasture is easy to corral. There is no danger or possibility of it getting away. Israel is the opposite of that.

#### **4:17 Ephraim is joined to idols. Desert him!**

Verse 17 is a very short, pithy little statement with grave implications. The prophet has indeed given up on seeing Israel return from its trip to the dark side. He has allowed for his hope to wane fully now as he simply says in four short words in Hebrew, Ephraim has made it's path and must now lie in it, but don't go be like Ephraim.

The fact that the prophet uses "Ephraim" instead of "Israel" is important because the word for Ephraim points to Israel as a stubborn and evil nation that does not seek God. The word joined here is very important as well. From what I could find, there is no reference to sexual intercourse here. It is merely used of alliances and being partners. But I will say this: it is hard to not see in my own culture where I pronounce in a marriage, "What God has joined, let no one lay asunder" and then not see a connection once again to relationship in this prophet's writings.

Ephraim is in league with or allied to idols and false gods. Then there is one short command to Judah here. "Leave him alone." or as I have translated "Desert him." Israel has made its final decision and Judah should not go try to save it. It's almost like a man who has problems with drinking alcohol going into bars to "minister to people." This is one of those moments where you cut off your ties to the nation so that you don't go down with them. It's like a lifeguard who leaves someone to drown if he is not strong enough to keep from drowning while rescuing them.

#### **4:18 When their liquor is abandoned, they surely give themselves to prostitution. Their rulers dearly love shame.**

The people are moving from one form of entertainment to another, from one form of sin to another. They have no care in the world and they don't even begin to seek help. They don't think they need it. The hopelessness of this situation hits home as they move from drugs to sex and they are a shamed people without hope.

There is an emphasis on giving themselves to prostitution. This was not just a religious image of what they did to God when they served and worshipped idols but they were literally physically prostituting themselves every chance they got. They were extremely sensual and lewd at this point in their nation's history. And no ruler or priest would say anything about it.

When we see sin in our world, it's easier to turn a blind eye or keep our mouths shut. But it's what God wants when we raise our voices to the issues around this world. Some of the greatest advancements and greatest laws that come in America and abroad come from Christians. We need to stand up when we see sin and tragedy. Let's not become insensitive to it! Let's expose it and work in a redemptive way against it. Let's lead the world in stopping things like drug trafficking and human trafficking and war and all the things that violate God's intentions!

**4:19 A wind has enveloped them in its wings and they will not be ashamed by their sacrifices.**

The last image of chapter four is the image of a whirlwind, a wind that has grasped the people's hearts. They are no longer in control. They have been lured in and become slaves to their indulgences. There is nothing left for them but destruction. God's going to have to start over. This wind has encompassed and surrounded them, enveloped them in its desires.

They will not be ashamed of their open lewdness and sensuality. They will not be ashamed to walk in a drunken stupor. They will not be ashamed to publicly prostitute themselves in God's holy temple. And they won't be ashamed of their idols and false gods. They will not stop doing their sin. They are running headlong into destruction. Their sacrifices will continue to go not to God, but to these idols. Ephraim is joined to idols. Desert him! Flee from sin and death and decay! Let us also heed such a warning. While sin looks good, it promises death.



## Chapter 5

**5:1 “Hear this, priests, and listen attentively, house of Israel and house of the king. Give ear because the judgment is upon you, indeed, you were a snare at Mizpah and a net stretched upon Tabor.**

Just after the prophet has expressed little hope in Israel’s ability to turn back to God, the Lord Himself speaks into their situation the same lost hope and then speaks of their judgment for having chosen the hardcore path of defiance and rebellion over God’s mercy and a return to the Lord. God opens with a command to hear and heed His words. There are three different synonymic verbs here for hearing and heeding, for listening intently or attentively, and finally for giving ear or listening with the intention of obeying.

Another interesting interchange here is the mention of three houses. First God calls the priests, the religious leaders, to hear His words. Then He calls the whole of Israel’s house, the common people. Finally He calls the king, the political leader, to hear His words. Then God gives them reason to listen to Him.

The judgment is coming upon them. This judgment will be punishment and torment for their rebellion. The judgment does not just come because God feels like it. Instead, it comes as a direct result of the priests’ treachery in Mizpah and on Mount Tabor. These references are considered by some scholars to be random or slight, but the best evidence points to Mizpah’s affluence religiously and Mount Tabor’s position in the nation.

Mount Tabor was a mountain that was mostly used as a land marker to separate tribal territories. There is not much that would signal the significance of its use here by Hosea. We don’t really know why it is listed. The idea of a net stretched upon the mountain suggests that the nation had committed some abominable sin there or it may be used as a landmark familiar to all of the nation itself. We do this in our day too. Everyone thinks of the Eiffel Tower and then thinks France because no other nation has this landmark. We could think of many examples of this.

The prophet says that the priests have been a snare at Mizpah. Once again we do not have an exact understanding of the specifics of how they were a snare in this city, but we do know that Mizpah is an important city. It is a city on the edge of the nation’s territory, and therefore, a city open to travelers. One scholar has suggested that the city had temples in it that would allow a traveler to pray before a nation’s gods before entering that nation. If this is true, then it is possible there was much idolatry by the priests in that city.

The terms used here for Israel are hunting terms. A snare is a trap that a hunter would set to catch an unsuspecting prey and also a net is very useful in the same way, especially in fishing. These terms connote that the priests lay in wait to take unsuspecting religious observers and teach them to be idolaters. But we do not know for sure what is happening in these places. Whatever spiritual adultery is going on, the common people and king are at fault for not addressing the priesthood’s heinous acts.

## **5:2 “Now the revolvers went deep into slaughter but I will chastise all of them.**

You can take verse two in two different ways. The first is to take it as the reasons for God’s anger and judgment in verse one on these two places in Israel, Mizpah and Tabor. Because revolvers or wanderers were killing and slaughtering people, possibly children by one or more commentators’ suggestions, God would strike them down in chastisement and punishment.

The other way to take this passage is a continuing indictment that is still somewhat vague upon all of Israel. This might be the more likely way to view the verse in its context. The word for revolvers is rare in the Old Testament. It is a word that means to swerve in one’s deeds, to revolt, or to wander. The word might be reminiscent of the command to go straight, to not wander to the left or the right when obeying God’s commands.

The verb here for going deep means to delve into, to plumb the depths, to be mysterious. Here it has the idea of going deep into slaughter. In other words, the rebels or revolvers have killed without caring of the consequences or the anger of the Lord. They have learned the craft of slaughter so well that they are to be punished for their efficient sinfulness. The word for slaughter is often used of sacrifices, hence at least one commentator suggesting that the Israelites were offering child sacrifices. That would be linking the second verse to the first against priests in those two cities. Either way, murder and slaughter were against the Torah’s commands.

The word used for chastise or discipline here has a dual meaning not just as punishment but also as discipline, or training. It is mainly a punishment, a result or consequence of the nation’s hard heart. But it is also God’s working in the nation of training and discipline. God did not merely wish to punish the nation, but to show the consequences of idolatry. His end goal was not to make them pay but to draw them back to Himself.

In our lives as believers, there are many times when we don’t obey God and we sin. When we sin, Jesus has covered that sin. But at the same time, we may endure the consequences of our sin because that is what you get when you sin, the consequences. Those consequences are not given to judge us. God has already found us to be like Jesus. Those consequences are meant to discipline us and teach us that we don’t want to sin if we don’t want its consequences. He is doing the same thing with the nation of Israel.

## **5:3 “I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me. Because you have played the whore now, Ephraim, Israel is defiled.**

As God continues to speak to the punishment and discipline that the nation will receive, He speaks about Himself not as a bystander who glimpses into the nation or is unaware of the nation’s actions and thoughts and heart. He speaks as the God of Israel, who intimately knows the nation, its people and its laws, its priests and its prophets, and its history.

The word in Hebrew “know” implies an intimate understanding, a familiarity, with the nation and its sins. The title Ephraim is used often in the prophets to refer to Northern Israel. It is

one of the ways Northern Israel is distinguished after the dividing of Israel into Northern Israel and Judah in the south. God is not like the idols. The people cannot get away with sins in front of Him. He actually lives! He sees all things. He responds to every action. He is real.

This word for know also has sexual connotations, meaning that it is an intimate knowledge as that of marriage. We see it in one of its first debuts in the Old Testament when it speaks of Adam “knowing” his wife Eve. The next thing that happens is their first son is conceived. God tells the nation that their sinning and idolatry is not something He does not know about. It is not as if the nation is sneaking out of the house at night to lie with other lovers. God is well aware of the nation’s spiritual adulteries with false gods.

He makes another reference to their spiritual adultery with other gods in the verb “play the whore with.” For God, using explicit terms such as these highlights the nation’s wounding of His own heart. In their romping with other gods, their committing of flagrant idolatry, they have wounded the depths of God’s being.

He is all too familiar with their affairs with every idol. And just as a man or woman who commits adultery with a prostitute against their spouse, the Northern Kingdom of Israel has been defiled or left ceremonially unclean. This reference goes the whole way back to the Law. Throughout the Old Testament, holy days were observed by, among other things, abstaining from sexual activity.

God knows us intimately. He knows when our affections are drawn to other things. Even the amount of time we spend, the joy we receive from an event or a person or a thing, our allegiance to a country, and many other affections, can be viewed as modern day idolatry. Some may say that we don’t bow down before statues or that kind of thing today, but we readily sit before TVs, drool over sports cars, listen to Oprah and Dr. Phil, spend our lives gaining money, shopping for things we don’t need, and the list of spiritual adulteries goes on for our culture. We are the most distracted culture the world has known in quite a long time. What distractions are you flirting with? The Lord is a jealous God. He seeks you because He wants you and loves you!

#### **5:4 “Their practices do not allow them to return to their God because a spirit of prostitution is in their midst, and they do not know the Lord.**

The word for practices is usually translated deeds, but I found it necessary to show that it is a system of deeds, a behavior that God speaks of here. So many times we think that just one sin will cut us out of God’s plan, take away His Spirit, and leave us for Hell. But that is not necessarily true. God has made us His children. Even when your children do something utterly horrible, they are still your children. But the way we react to our sins must never become an apathetic and lethargic response. Sin still separates us from our loving God.

The things the people are doing continually will deter them, literally keep them from returning to the Lord. Repentance is only confirmed by a change in lifestyle and behavior! Sure we are liable to stumble and fall, but we do not continue in our sins. That would mean that we

never did repent. The word repent is a one-on-one correlation to going the other direction. It means we stop the consistent and continual action for good.

But the people of Israel have separated from God forever as far as they are concerned. They have hardened their hearts and decided on idols instead of the Living God. They have chosen the path God has been wooing them away from. They have decided not to follow God's ways or to worship Him alone. It is even worse than before, because they used to incorporate other idols into their worship of Almighty God. Now, they have cut Him out of the worship and just worship other gods.

Next Hosea gives the reason for the people's calloused and refusing hearts. There is a spirit of prostitution among them. In the last verse of chapter four, a wind was mentioned that is sweeping them away from God. In Hebrew, the words for spirit and wind are the same word. It is the euphoric sense of worshipping other idols. They are getting a high off of not following God's laws. We experience this also in our sin. The euphoria from sin is heightened when it is more blatant and there is a greater possibility of danger or being discovered. The people are caught up in this spirit of prostitution. They no longer care that they publicly turn to idols. They have lost a sense of propriety. The spirit of prostitution is upon them, guiding them to their immediate desires rather than their God.

As God shows, you cannot have both. You cannot follow a spirit of prostitution, or of any other sin for that matter, and still intimately be connected with and know God Almighty. Jesus says that you can't serve two masters. Paul concurs. The teaching that a person can be devoted to more than one god is self-defeating. We must choose one and stick with that god. While we may boast of our multitasking skills, the same is not true in religious arenas. Because Israel has chosen idols, they no longer have the privilege of an intimate and knowing connection with the Living God. They have cut themselves out of His covenant.

Some people teach that there are multiple spirits out there in our world. They teach that there is a spirit of drunkenness, and here we see a spirit of prostitution. This teaching seems to have merit, but we should not push it as far as many do. There is not a spirit for every possible sin or desire under the sun. There are indeed demons that seek to oppress and possess human beings. They long to control humanity. But there is not a spirit of something or a demon under every nook and cranny, under every rock.

When you come against a spirit that is not the Spirit of God, remember that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. That's all you need. When you're connected to the Vine Jesus, you have His authority and another spirit cannot influence or dwell in you if God's Holy Spirit dwells in you. Don't give them ground and let's not waste our time and brains dwelling on their meager existence. Let's not give spirits and demons more credit than they are due. They are a small footnote in God's economy, a blip on the radar screen.

**5:5 “Even the pride of Israel testifies against his face! Yes, Israel and Ephraim will stumble over their guilt. Judah also will stumble with them.**

Next the Lord highlights Israel's pride. The word for pride speaks of lofty and high desire, the selfish aggrandizement of the nation, its arrogance and exaltation of itself and its gods. The fact that the nation is full of pride instead of humility speaks against it. The verb here is the word for respond, answer or reply. But the context calls for a legal term like testifying. Right to the face of Israel is the evidence against them in their pride and arrogance. That alone will bring their condemnation.

Israel and Ephraim here are synonyms. It's almost like when you become angry with someone and use their full name. God is making sure they know where His anger comes from. He says that they will stumble or stagger. This is the word used for drunkenness and also used by Paul in speaking of the Gospel. It is what happens when you trip over a rock and almost fall, losing your sense of balance and your center of gravity.

Israel also has stumbled over their guilt like one stumbles over a pebble or rock or a crack in the sidewalk. As they are walking along, or to take the metaphor of walking as living, as they are living and their behavior in sin heaps up mounds of guilt in them, they falter because of that guilt. Guilt is the one thing that even the sacrifices could not take away. But now, those sacrifices are not even to YHWH! If it weren't bad enough for Israel to be struggling through their idolatry and spiritual adultery, but they have led Judah into the same problems and Judah also stumbles as they do. Their guilt is not only against themselves, but also encompasses their guilt for bringing Judah down into sin as well.

**5:6 “With their flocks and with their herds they will walk to seek the Lord, but they will not find Him. He has withdrawn from them.**

God continues to tell of their precarious situation. They have no out, no way to relieve or return. They are now locked in to the result of their idolatry. Why would Hosea talk about their flocks and herds? The picture here is of lostness, of them looking for God as though He were a lost sheep. They are wandering and looking for him. But this is not the imagery of this verse. They are searching for God through their sacrifices.

The Israelites would sacrifice from their lambs and flocks. They would also sacrifice bulls and cattle from their herds. The idea here is not walking around with animals they own but habitually sacrificing to God and hoping that He will respond to them again. The word walk is often understood in the prophets as a lifestyle or way of life. They are continually sacrificing but God is long gone. They seek Him but will not find Him because the time of grace is over. The word for Him in find Him is not given. But Seek and Find is an oft used phrase in the Old Testament that needs no object because it is understood in the subject.

The Lord will not be found by any means He was formerly found because sacrificing is not a method to get God to show up. He does not care about sacrifices. The point is that nothing Israel will do now will bring Him near. They are finally alone, but it is just what they wanted. Finally the husband does not allow His bride to return to Him. The nation has made its decision and nothing it can do will bring it back. It does not really want to come back to Him anyway.

The verb for withdrawn contains the idea of leaving with the intent of staying away. His presence is going up from them. He will not return until they are broken from their pride. This word is a military related term.

**5:7 “They have dealt treacherously with the Lord for they have begotten illegitimate sons. Now the new moon will devour them with their possessions.”**

God continues to berate the Israelites for their open spiritual adultery by saying that they have dealt treacherously with Him. The emphasis in this verse is upon the Lord being victimized by the idolatry of Israel. He is the wounded Lover, the violated victim of their sin and idolatry. The word for deal treacherously contains the idea of being faithless, even of infidelity, and speaks of their leaving God for other gods.

Hosea is no stranger to the idea expressed by the Lord. We have shows on TV today that constantly go back to the shock and drama factor associated with figuring out a child’s parents when one of the parents, usually the mother, is unfaithful to the man who thinks he is the kid’s father. But here the idea is probably a true picture of the breakdown of the family structure that God ordained and instituted. Beyond this, God speaks to the next generation as spiritually illegitimate as well as physically.

This is a nation who has sold its youth into idolatry, taught them from a young age that God is not the one true God. Joshua long ago, as well as Moses, commanded them to teach to their children that God is one and that Israel worships the Almighty Lord God. But through their current practices, they are teaching the opposite. They have become spiritually illegitimate because they are not God’s children but the children of whatever idols they are taught to serve.

The new moon was a celebration every month when the moon would disappear and become visible in the skies again at night. It was a celebration that God brings newness and life to the earth. These celebrations are singled out, but every religious celebration of Israel would testify against them and their spiritual adultery. Each celebration was designed specifically for God and not any idol. Each time they did a celebration they would realize their idolatry. Even the land was tied to loving YHWH and no one else. Everything stood in stark contrast to their ardent idolatry.

**5:8 Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah! Raise the war cry at Beth-aven; we are behind you, Benjamin!**

This verse would almost resemble Joel chapter two except here it is being used in sarcasm and mockery by Hosea. He has just said that the Lord would not be there to assist Israel, that the Lord is going into hiding and won’t answer their calls for Him because of their injustices and sins. Now when the attack happens, they cannot save themselves, whether by military or any other means. Both nations will fall to the enemies that come against them.

Blowing the trumpet had several uses in Israel, the most common of which was for battle. This lines up with issuing the war-cry in the second sentence. There are two different instruments used to sound the war-cry, besides the voices of the people yelling. The first is the horn or shofar, a ram's horn that makes a very loud and long-distance noise. The second in this verse is of a metal horn that has a long end, like the ones used to announce a king's presence in the movies.

Next, there are four references to Benjamin, one of the twelve tribes that lay between Israel and Judah. The first is to the south city right above Jerusalem of Gibeah to the northernmost city of Bethel. Beth-aven has been used before to refer to Bethel. The town of Beth-aven is used as a name three times in Hosea, twice in Joshua, and twice in 1 Samuel. It is most likely another name for Bethel, the northernmost city in Benjamite territory, with Ramah in the middle. Ramah and Bethel are well-known to the reader of the Old Testament, but these three cities go north from Jerusalem in a line and are all in Benjamin's territory.

The final reference might have been a war-cry that was often used in battle. It is of historical fact that Benjamin's tribe led many battles and was skilled in warfare. This could be a general cry for Benjamin to lead in battle, just like we push a person in front of us and say, "I'm right behind you." The prophet is mocking the military might of Israel as a whole, both Northern Israel and Judah with these words.

### **5:9 Ephraim will be a desolation in the day of rebuke among the tribes of Israel. I will make known what is true.**

Ephraim has always been a metonymy, a way of pointing out the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the prophets. Both Israel and Judah are included in this prophecy extending to the end of the chapter. Many scholars attempt to link this section to historical battles or wars, especially the attack of the Assyrians that takes northern Israel and also sacks everything but Jerusalem in Judah, but that does not fit the situation here. Others will attach it to little battles here and there throughout history. I believe it is merely a point of showing the torn relationship between these two nations, once a single kingdom.

The word for desolation is unusual here and we are not quite sure of its meaning. The clearness of the image is not in question but rather the word and its origins. It seems to carry the idea of horror and terror, but it is not a noun. It is an adjective. Perhaps the idea of a wasteland would be most accurate. Another point to make is that Ephraim is emphasized here, unusually showing up before the verb, changing the word order of the sentence. In Hebrew, the verb usually comes first, then the subject. When the subject is first, it is for emphasis.

The day of punishment is also called a day of rebuke in the original. I would say this is not the eschatological day of the Lord, but it is the day about to happen shortly after this prophetic writing is completed in 721 BC when Assyria attacks and takes the whole Northern Israel territory. The Lord declares that he will make known or bring into reality what is already as good as happened, what is already true and reliable. The word for truth here is the word amen

in Hebrew. We use this word to end prayers. It means to become reality. As sure as everything is real, Northern Israel will come to desolation through the hands of the Assyrians.

**5:10 The rulers of Judah have become like those who move a boundary; upon them I will pour out like water my rage.**

Verse 10 focuses on the rulers or princes of Judah. This is not to refer to the king but more likely those under the king, the next in line, his counsel. They seem to be a thorn in Israel's side. We cannot point out any times where Judah is the aggressor in the time of the fall of Israel, so it is most likely that this is to mean that they will not befriend the northern kingdom.

The phrase that Judah has become like a boundary mover is where most try to point out Judah's aggression, but there are no historical insights of such an aggression. It is better to understand this as a metaphorical calling out of Judah's leadership. In Deuteronomy 27:17, there is a curse put on anyone who moves a border stone. It's quite possible that Hosea is pointing out that Judah's leaders are just as bad as Israel's and that Judah also is under the curse of God and will experience the same type of fall. That is indeed accurate to history.

Then there is the prophecy of retribution for Judah's complicity in leadership and the Lord declares a promise that He will avenge their wickedness as well as Israel's. We know that God does indeed allow the Babylonians to come into Jerusalem and sack the city in 586 BC. This is the time in which He pours out His wrath like water. God is a gracious God who does not seek to bring judgment. We bring the judgment on ourselves through our sins.

**5:11 Oppressed will be Ephraim, broken in judgment because he was keen to walk after filth.**

After making a note about the morally deteriorating leadership of Judah, Hosea returns to Ephraim, the more immediate disaster apparent. He uses two words for oppression, speaking of being under the control of an enemy nation. First he uses the word for oppression normally used for that idea, and then the next word brings the idea of being broken or crushed, of being bent and snapped and abused.

The judgment comes for a reason. God gives that reason as the nation desiring after, longing for filth. The word here expresses a keenness, a great seeking of the wrong thing. Now this word for filth is one of the most interesting and debatable words in the Old Testament. It is used in Isaiah 28 when Isaiah is mocking the natural laws of humanity against the godly commands. This is that section in Isaiah that says "Line upon line, precept upon precept." This word is the word for line or precept. But here, it speaks of the idolatry of Ephraim and is most likely a taunting sound rather than a word. The idea is of vanity and pride.

**5:12 But I am like pus to Ephraim and like dry rot to the house of Judah.**



The Lord now speaks of Himself as a disease to the nations of Ephraim and Judah. He calls Himself a pus, that substance that pours out of a boil or any type of wound. Many translations have moth here, but it does not fit and is not even listed as an accurate idea of this Hebrew word. The idea is wound or the pus from the wound. then the Lord also will be like dry rot to the house of Judah. This dry rot has the idea of the bones becoming dry from the inside out, rotting from the core outward. It is apparently a disease that the people would have understood. It's possible that it more speaks of a situation in which bones decay and dry out. But the Lord is becoming a disease and problem to these nations that want to seek after filth and idolatry. He's hanging on to them and causing them issues.

**5:13 When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to the great king, but he is not able to heal you or cure you from your wound.**

Now we have a mockery of all three nations, Ephraim, Judah and Assyria. Ephraim sought an alliance with the northern coalition as we read in Isaiah 7 which struck fear into the people's hearts in Judah. So they were about to turn to Egypt for help and Isaiah was furious with Ahaz for even thinking about returning to the house of slavery for help.

So Ephraim turned to the northern coalition and for a time even paid tribute to Assyria to avoid destruction. The point of this verse is the same as the section in Isaiah 7, that the nations were turning to other nations for help rather than calling upon God. When they found their wound and destruction near, they did not reach out for their God. They reached out to other nations. That is what is so stifling about this ordeal. So through the prophet God simply says, "they cannot heal you."

They look to the great king in stature to the north, the king of Assyria and make their deals but he cannot fix their idolatry or stave off God's judgment. Ironically, he is God's judgment! They think he is great as a king, but God calls him impotent. Then two words are used for curing and healing. One of them is the word rapheka, as in YHWH rapheka, "the Lord your Healer." They are looking to a human king to do what only God has promised He will do. That king can't heal or cure them. Their disease is terminal and only God can touch them for healing.

I have nothing against doctors. God gives them the wisdom and knowledge to heal people and to work on certain ailments. But what I do want to say about this passage is ask you to whom do you turn first? Do you turn to the Lord for healing before going to doctors? Or do you look for doctors and medicine first? Ahaz never had it in his mind to ask God for help! Do you look to God first? Why would He heal us if we don't even look to Him first?

**5:14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, yes I, will tear into pieces and walk away. I will carry off and no one will deliver.**

We have seen the image of the lion and the lion cub before in other prophets. Here, God is speaking of the lion coming and dragging away in parts a carcass. Both nations are doomed to

see the judgment of the Lord. Judah may last longer, but it will fall all the same. The Lord will come among them and take them little by little. This is an interesting prophecy because we know that there were several waves of deportation from Israel and Judah elsewhere. God did indeed take them little by little in waves, leaving a few there and not taking them out of the land.

The Lord takes all the full credit for this judgment. He speaks of tearing into pieces the nations and carting them off to feast on them. Lions would take and hide parts of a carcass if they were full and eat it later. But the whole of the carcass was eaten. But there is no deliverance, no one to stop them because no one can stand up to the Lord. This word for deliver is a military term that has the connotations of saving and rescuing as well.

**5:15 I will return again to my place until they plead guilty by atonement, and seek My face in distress for them, earnestly seek Me.**

God has already warned them that His presence is leaving them and He will not return. Here He says He will stay in His own place, on the throne in Heaven, until they are repentant and give the guilt offering. This verb is an interesting one. It means to make the offering for the atoning of guilt, the guilt offering. There were several offerings in the Law. There was a grain offering, a drink offering, a burnt offering, and a guilt offering to name a few.

So to plead guilty here is not a legal term but a religious and ritual term, meaning to first repent and in their hearts return to the Lord, and then admit their guilt in the sacrifice specified for a guilt offering. They must also seek God's face because of their distress. They will find Him if they truly seek Him only, not other gods. They have been turning elsewhere long enough and in the moment of their greatest distress, God's not even on their radar. They must be on the lookout for God. That's what this word for earnestly seek entails. A lookout would sit atop a tower and look for dangers to a city, an enemy army, a storm, or anything that would endanger the population. Now their job must be to look for God to return to His people.

When you're in the midst of a danger or distress, who do you look to? Do you call on God and look to Him, or do you blame Him and look to your own resources? God will only be found when we search for Him earnestly. And we don't seek Him because He can get us out of a jam, but because He loves and cares for us. We must have the right attitude and heart when we approach and we must seek Him alone in faith. Then God will gladly come to our aid.

## Chapter 6

**6:1 Let us walk and return to the Lord, for He has torn us that He may heal us. He has struck us and He will bind us up.**

The first three verses of chapter six are a call by the prophet Hosea to return to the Lord and to go back to their first Love. What is interesting in this verse is that the prophet readily admits that God is the one who has torn them apart, as we saw in the verse about the lions. God is the one who has caused their wound. We have seen this idea in other prophetic books as well. God said in one book that He hurt them so they would turn back to Him.

Here, God is both the wounder and the wound healer. Sometimes in our lives, God will allow things to take place in our life that may even be traumatic so that we will turn back to Him instead of trying to fix things on our own. Sometimes we are so obstinate that God has to up the stakes in our lives. Israel had become so blind and dead to God that God had to mortally wound the whole nation so that He could revive them.

But one point must stand out in this discussion on God's effort to both wound and heal: God will never hurt us more than He can heal us. He always takes us only as far as He can bring us back. He does not intend our wound to last forever. It is only meant for us to return to Him. He can heal it, no matter what it is or how deep it goes. Hosea says the same thing again as he talks about God striking the nation as a whole and then binding them up. God tears down to build up. The enemy tears down to destroy.

**6:2 He will revive us after two days, on the third He will raise us up and we will live in His presence.**

The word for live is here twice, but the idea is of living again or being revived from death or near death experience in the first verb. We don't really know what the two days indicates or even the third. Could they be set amounts in history? Maybe. There are a couple of points I want to make, though. First, sometimes when a specific time is mentioned in the prophets and other books of the Bible, they are literally true. A number of years or weeks goes by and then what was prophesied happens.

Other times the point is not the actual time but the fact that whatever is being timed has a beginning and an end; it does not go on forever. This happens every so often in the prophets and especially when they are talking about the time of exile, as here in this passage. So I would much rather speak of the finite moment of discipline and exile rather than how many days and years are discussed here.

The second point I will bring up because it is too much to let pass is that there is a prophecy about being raised in three days here. And we are talking about salvation, so I as a believer in Jesus in reading this can see God talking about healing us on the third day when Jesus rose again. There are just too many references here to resurrection and Jesus' timing of His own

resurrection, plus the matter of being in the Lord's presence after that raising up. I just see this as a prophecy about Jesus saving us and bringing us into God's presence.

**6:3 Let us know, let us pursue to know the Lord. As the dawn is established, so is His departure, and as the showers will come to us as the latter rains to water the earth.**

With some calls to knowing God, Hosea wants to pull the people back to the Lord, as is the passion of any prophet. The word for "know" speaks not of having the facts about God but of experiencing God in a personal way. This call is not about doing the Law to the letter or offering sacrifices exactly as told but more about knowing the God who loves Israel.

The second call is to pursue this knowledge of God, to work toward knowing Him personally. Right now in their history, the nation is far from God, counting on other nations and on idols. They have no relationship at all with God nationally. They are already quite dead to Him. So the prophet calls them to begin to walk with Him again, like when Adam walked with God in the cool of the day. He knows that to experientially know God, the nation must rekindle their lost love.

But the nation is not the only one who has given up on the relationship. God also is leaving and there is a select amount of time between His being there and being gone. The nation is indignant and ignorant of His presence as He stands there. He is about to leave. His departure is as certain as the coming of the next day, as certain as the latter rains and spring rains that water the crops and the land one last time. In Israel, there were two giant rains: one at the planting to water the seeds for growth and then one close to the harvesting. Other rains may come, but these two were of an absolute guarantee to any farmer in Israel. It was like clockwork. As sure as a farmer could be of a rain that has not yet come, the nation was sure to lose the presence of God.

**6:4 "What will I do with you, Ephraim? What will I do with you Judah? For your steadfast love is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew that melts away."**

Beginning in verse four, God speaks and not the prophet. His introduction to His speech is almost like a person who is fed up with the results of a dead relationship. He says to Israel and Judah, "What am I gonna do with you?" It is a question of finality. There is nothing God can do because the people have rejected Him. The foundational love is gone not from the Lord but from the people. Because they have a free will, He will not force them to love Him.

These are two questions of frustration. God is truly at a loss. Everything that a lover could do to sway and woo a love God has already done. They are at an impasse and He is about to leave because He is not welcome, and hasn't been welcome for such a long time. In case we can't see the relational struggle here as believers, let me apply this to you by going to a familiar passage we quote to sinners from the letters in Revelation: "Behold I (Jesus) stand at the door and knock."

This letter was not written to sinners but to the Church! If you think we never have moments with Jesus where the passion is not there and we don't even acknowledge His presence daily in our lives, then you are either not truthful to yourself or are not very knowledgeable about the human condition. The sad thing is that God is never at fault. He is always there. It is us who go MIA from time to time.

God points out that Israel's faithfulness in love to Him is fluent if there at all. Israel's hessed, loyal love, is like the morning clouds of fog that burn off in the morning sun. It doesn't last but a moment in time. God's hessed has never been questioned. But Israel would not return hessed to Him for His hessed for them. The covenant is in danger here. Another image of Israel's fleeting hessed toward God is that of the morning dew that melts away as the sun warms the earth and grass. That night dew is gone in sometimes less than an hour.

The point is that God's faithfulness to Israel is eternal and Israel refuses to return that same steadfast and loyal love. God is the one losing in this relationship and Israel is so cold they don't even care at all how much they are ripping His heart apart. Israel is like the divorcee more concerned with splitting up the treasures of a once happy marriage and the alimony for the kids, the collateral damage. The light of passion has not been lit for so long. Only the cold business of ending the marriage is left. The decision was made long ago.

**6:5 “Therefore, I have hewn them by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of My mouth, and My judgments of you come as daylight.”**

The “therefore” in this verse references the fact that Israel is not faithful in their covenantal love toward God, that they wane between faithfulness and unfaithfulness. When the people, and when we, fail God and are unfaithful, when our passion changes and He is not the center, God sends the prophets to hew us like stone. The verb “hew” means to cut with intent to shape. That's exactly what the prophets did. They cut the people like one would cut a temple stone. They spoke out when the people were not lining up in practice and teaching with what the Torah said.

Next God says that He killed the people by the words of His mouth. The prophets were God's mouthpiece. They spoke God's message to God's people for that time. The words of God's mouth refers to all of Scripture and to the prophets especially. But the words of God's mouth are spoken today in preaching and in prophetic functions in the Church as well. They agree with Scripture if they are from Him.

God's judgments are the third way that He attempts to win back the people to the passion of the Torah. He wants them to come back to Him as a wayward lover would return. That is the message of Hosea in a nutshell. The judgments of God are those things that He speaks true as He diagnoses and observes the people's loss of love for Him. The judgments are also the prescriptions and cures for their ailments. God's judgments are not only what He decides, but what He carries out. The judgments are daylight to the people because they provide the light of

revelation so that everything, even hidden sins, can be observed in the revelation of the light. Light exposes the people's sins, and God's judgments do that very thing.

God's judgments in our own lives are hard to hear as well, and they are quite revelatory of our person. Sometimes we begin to think that we can hide our true nature from God or we even deceive ourselves about our true nature before Him. We refuse to deal with things in our lives that don't please Him. His judgments come as light. When you are in darkness and someone shines a light in your eyes, it hurts before it helps. Many don't like to endure the judgments of God in their lives and shrink farther into the darkness rather than let the light uncover the darkness. We need to be a people who endure the light because it will keep us from living in the darkness until we adjust. Then we need to be obedient to what God shows us in His revelation.

### **6:6 “Thus I delight in steadfast love and not sacrifice, rather knowledge of God than burnt offerings.**

God is much more concerned that we practice steadfast covenantal loyal love. He doesn't want sacrifices any more than we want to give them. He is not interested in our ability to follow every little letter of the Law and that we properly prepare the sacrifice. He is more interested in the ways that keep us from having to rely on the sacrificial system.

God is more interested in faithfulness to obey than He is in ability to make up for disobedience. The sacrifices are acceptable only when done properly. Why does that matter? Because we've already violated His character by not following the command. This inability to be faithful could follow through to offering the sacrifice, so that we do the sacrifice to make up for disobedience in a shoddy way because we don't care. The sacrifice must be done properly. But before we get to the sacrifice, the Law should have been followed in the first place.

Knowledge of God here is the same word we've been seeing for knowing. It's from the Hebrew word yadah which is more concerned with knowing intimately and through experience, not knowing a cold, hard fact. God is much more interested in us learning to know Him intimately than getting every little thing in the sacrifice right. While the sacrifice remains important and its preparation and carrying out important, it is only because we have already failed Him. Not carrying out the sacrifice properly shows that we not only have no concern for His Laws but also for redemption when we break them. But He wants to know us, not take our sacrifices as tokens that we sort of care sometimes. He's out for us, not our sacrifices.

### **6:7 “But they like Adam transgressed the covenant. There they dealt faithlessly with Me.**

The Lord says that the people of Israel are much more like Adam, the first human being, than they are like God in His faithfulness to them. Adam was the first to transgress God's command. But Adam did not have a covenant with God when he transgressed. The people have

transgressed the covenant like Adam transgressed the one command to not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The people are transgressors like their father Adam.

God has experienced countless failures by humans from the day that He made us. He has been let down more times than not. He, like a scorned lover, is getting used to unfaithfulness rather than faithfulness. He doesn't know what more He can do to rectify His relationship with His people. He can't force them to want Him back. And they don't want Him back. The verb for "dealt treacherously" means to be unfaithful, to not be truthful or trustworthy.

It means to walk out like a dead beat. It means to let someone down in the moment of their trust. It means to depart without a care, to leave them hanging. The people have breached their relationship with God and He is angry, but He is also deeply sad, just as a person left by their spouse, the person that covenanted to be with them through every part of life. God is that spouse who is victimized by their spouse's infidelity.

### **6:8 Gilead is a city of evildoers, trampled with bloody footprints.**

God mentions Gilead again, a Benjamite city. It is one of many examples, almost as if it were chosen as an example of all other cities in Israel. It is saying that all the cities are the same as Gilead. It is a city of people who work evil, who serve evil and love evil rather than God. It is a city of people who practice what is evil and wicked, what causes disasters and harm to others.

The next phrase is a bit hard to bring into English. The footprints are an understanding of the verb that speaks of being trampled or being a rocky terrain that is marched over. So the people are walking in blood and trampling the lifeblood of others murderously. You can take this literally, that people are simply killing one another and committing murder at an alarming rate. The other way that you can take this is spiritually, that the people are walking in blood and destroying the life God created in other human beings. They are trampling underfoot the most precious gift of life from God. Remember that "walk" in the Bible usually speaks of our lifestyle and behavior rather than actually walking somewhere.

### **6:9 Even as bands of robbers wait for a man, the priests band together and murder on the road to Shechem. Yes, they put into effect divisive plans.**

Now the priests, the religious leaders are once again singled out. The connecting idea here is the band or grouping of robbers and priests. In other words, through the word "bands" the priests are called robbers. The "like...like" construction is not used, but is implied. Hosea has used that construction before in his book to say the people were just like the priests.

The robbers wait to steal from a person, but the priests aim to kill people, to murder them in cold blood on a certain road to Shechem, one of the Israelite cities. We don't know if this was a literal killing by the priests or if it is speaking of their abuse of the people or character defamation. Either way, the priests are not acting as God's priests. They are failing in every aspect of their function in Israel. The reason we cannot be sure if it is literal or not is because the

next sentence only affirms that they put into practice divisive or deceitful plans. This could speak of plans to do evil or plans to kill people. They are involved in evil rather than godly behavior and thinking.

**6:10 In the house of Israel I see something horrible. Ephraim's prostitution is there and Israel is defiled.**

The Lord proclaims His observations of something horrible in the house of Israel. There is some sin in the camp, some horrid and grotesque. It is the sin of adultery, physical and spiritual. The people have allowed sin to so entangle and work its way throughout their whole nation and society that there is nothing but horrifying evil in their midst. The Lord sees that sin and that idolatry. He refers to Israel as both Israel and Ephraim here. The emphasis throughout this verse would have keyed in on Israel's chief sin: idolatry or spiritual adultery against the Lord. Because of turning to other Gods, they are ritually defiled, and their sin of prostitution is not just spiritual but physical, physically carrying out in the temple of the Lord cultic and ritual prostitution with priestesses of foreign gods that physically defiled them, their nation, and the temple of the Lord.

We learn from the New Testament that we are now the temple of God, where His Holy Spirit dwells. When we sin in every way, we defile the temple of the Lord, our own bodies where He dwells. We are appalled at the understanding and the image of the Israelites committing prostitution in the temple of the Lord, but if we were to commit adultery or fornication today, we're doing the same exact thing! And when we sin in any way at all we do just as badly as the Israelites in the temple with cultic prostitutes, both male and female.

**6:11 Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, when I return the captivity of My people.**

At the end of the prophecy, almost like it was tacked on as a sticky note, is a quick mention of Judah as well. This is not out of place, for Hosea has mentioned Judah in verse four. Both are in view in this entire section. Judah was falling fast behind the heels of the more evil northern Israel kingdom. They were very little better morally than Israel and were on the same path toward destruction and demise. It's much like America following into the same pathways as Europe. Judah was following its brother into sin and exile.

The prophet makes this painfully clear in this verse. He uses the idea of a harvest, like God is going to cut them out of the land that they were planted and grown up in. The word for appointed can be seen throughout the prophets to point out that God is in control of all things and that He will set in motion what He decrees. He is the sovereign King of the nation and of human history and all Creation.

He can do as He wills. God says He will return or bring back the judgment of captivity for Judah. He will first deal with the evil northern kingdom, and then He's coming back for



Judah. Judah will not escape the captivity either. Both are doomed to face this time of exile and destruction. The word for “My people” is important in the prophets and the Old Testament, a term of endearment and special relationship with God, as His chosen people. Even though they are His special and chosen people, their sin does not make them exempt from God’s judgment when they willfully choose other gods.

## Chapter 7

**7:1 When I would heal Israel and the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, and the depravity of Samaria, for they practice deception and a thief breaks in; bandits mug *people* in the open streets.**

Some scholars connect the last verse of chapter six with the beginning of seven, so that the new thought is not in 7:1 but in 6:11. The last verse of chapter six seems to be transitional and could fit in either place. God returns to the image of healing causing Israel pain. This is much the story of repentance. Repentance hurts and causes godly sorrow in us. It hurts to say that we are in sin, but it is a part of the healing and restoration process. When you mend an open wound, the pain comes with the healing.

In the healing of the nation is also the suffering of the nation, for its sins are great and so attached to the nation now. When God heals the nation by pulling those sins away, out into the open and exposing them, it will hurt the nation as the healing begins. All of the nation will be laid bare before the Lord in that time of healing. Samaria, its capital city is signaled out to refer to the nation as a whole. The word for depravity throughout this text is the standard word for evil or calamity or wickedness.

The people of the land, not just the capital city of Samaria, practice deception. They seek to be false and they enjoy lying. The thought of falsity is the breach of faith. They lie about the truth and cause faith to be on shaky foundations. Thieves run rampant in the streets literally and false idols have stolen the hearts of the people figuratively. People are being mugged by bandits and raiders in the open streets where they would usually have waited in the shadows and in hiding places along roads out of the city. There is no safe place in Israel because sin has so completely corrupted the nation.

**7:2 Yet they hardly say in their heart, “I remember all their depravity.” Now their works surround them. Their deeds are before My face.**

It is obvious that with their false gods and on their own the people of Israel desperately need the Lord God, but that is not their aim or goal. Instead, they have convinced themselves deep down in their hearts that God will not remember their sins, that they need not ask for forgiveness and that He won't punish them. We saw this with the false prophets prophesying peace to Israel and saying that God loves them and would not exile them in Amos' book.

To say in their heart is to be convinced. They are convinced that God will not deal with them in their sins, that He will forget that they are rebelling against Him. They think He will forget their wickedness. But where our minds would immediately say, “You know better than that. He will not forget,” their hearts were confirming their wrongheadedness. For the Hebrews, the emotions and reason are both combined in the word heart.

Contrary to Israelite belief in the north, those very deeds and wicked works are before God and He can see every single one of them. He must judge the sin that is before Him. They would know that if they were not so compromised in their hearts to think He would forget the sin. Their deeds surround them in the sense that sin is having its deteriorating effects on their culture. They wonder why they are not safe in the streets and why everyone robs them on open streets and in broad daylight. They should know the answer, Sin has not only crept in but taken over their society. It has pervaded every aspect of their lives.

### **7:3 By their depravity they make the king glad, even their princes by their deceit.**

While God must judge their sins and send them into exile for their freedom in sin and wickedness, the king of the nation revels in their sin. He is glad and proud of what the people have come to and made for themselves. He does not look to the Lord for guidance and the leadership of Israel will now be taken into consideration. During this time, there were six kings in quick succession of one another, one of them not lasting more than half a year! They would often succeed the throne not through the lineage of David but through the assassination of the sitting king. For 20 years, northern Israel suffered at the hands of six kings and six changes in leadership and every policy of the nation.

The princes are the king's officials and the people in his court. They would be much like the President's cabinet today, except they did not only advise the king but ruled over certain areas. The word for deceit or treachery at the end of this verse actually carries the connotation of a sickness or malady, an infirmity. Their sin was so bad it turned into a sickness, but it made the nation's leadership glad instead of sick. The putrid sin smelled like roses to the noses of the kings.

### **7:4 All of them commit adultery like a heated oven when the baker ceases to stir from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.**

In verse four, the phrase "all of them" speaks of the people of Israel. They are busy committing adultery both physically and spiritually. Now Hosea turns to the image of a half-baked cake in an oven. The ovens of the time were cylinders with dome tops that had a door at the top. First, the baker would put in the fuel to make the fire and heat up the coals. The coals, once made smoldering hot, would then be all that was left. The fire would escape out of the door. Now all that was left was hot coals that heated the oven for hours on end.

The baker would then put in cakes on the walls or among the coals. But it took a baker who would be paying attention because they would need to be turned over and attended. They would need to be kneaded and watched until the process was complete. If they were not attended, they would be burnt on one side and doughy on the other. The people are too busy committing adultery to see the follies of the half-baked leadership of their kingdom. They were not observing

their politicians and the politicians would have such wide swings in policy so quickly that the people did not know what was going on.

The political turmoil is not so far removed from our own nation today. Just as the newest king would decide to run after either Assyria or Egypt, as the nation of Israel is caught in the middle between these two superpowers, our own government cannot decide how it feels about nations that we used to have a fixed understanding about. The people had fallen asleep and now the political climate is dangerous and the nation's future hangs in the balance. Israel died as a nation because of this and their sins. They were too busy pleasing themselves that they did not see the road ending ahead for their nation.

**7:5 On the day of our king, the princes fell sick with the poison of wine. He drew his hand with mockers.**

The abuses of the kings and rulers are clearly seen in this section. With such an overturn in the kingdom so many times, the common people probably had a very hard time knowing who was in charge and how they would react to events. Israel's political climate was such that their leadership, which was supposed to be clear-headed and helpful to the nation, spent their time drinking wine and mocking one another. The king apparently joined in some of this revelry. The word sick here may not only describe the physical event of a hangover but may also point back to the wound, or sickness or malady of the nation during this tumultuous political upheaval.

**7:6 Thus they approach with hearts like an oven their ambush, all night their anger smolders, in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.**

Verse six is still speaking of the kings and their officials as they near the ends of their reigns. As mentioned, most of the kings in this 20 year period were succeeded to the throne by their assassins. Of particular interest to most historians is the Pekulah reign which immediately reversed all of its nations standing policies.

The kings and officials are too drunk to realize that they are being set up in an ambush and will die by the hands of the next administration. This violent ambush method was used for all 20 of these years and for four of the six kings. They kings would gladly and distractedly walk right in to the ambush, or would be angry with their successors for some reason or another and find themselves dead in ambush. But they would angrily go to their ambush.

Like the ovens described earlier, the kings and officials would lie in wait to ambush someone else and become the victims of their own ambush. Their anger against their enemy would smolder like the coals in the oven described earlier all night long, but in the morning it would blaze and increase as they were ambushed.

**7:7 All of them are hot as an oven and they devour their judges. All their kings have fallen. None of them call upon Me.**

Verse seven has the same opening phrase as verse four. It speaks again of the people and their own hot anger and sin. They would devour their judges who would seek to fulfill the law. The people wanted nothing to do with righteousness. They were hot in their sins and would not be changed any time soon. As long as the hot coals of their sin and anger burned, the people would not hear reason or turn to the Lord.

Even in the political climate where their kings were murdered or assassinated, they neither cared nor sought the Lord for help. They left themselves to their own resources and thought that was good enough. But destruction was coming upon them soon. The worst part of this verse is the last sentence in which God determines that not one of the people cried out to Him. They had completely turned away as a people and as individuals.

### **7:8 Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples. Ephraim is a cake not turned.**

This verse starts a new section in the continuing description of the nation's political destruction. Along with the change in section comes a change in metaphor. Hosea has been using the metaphor of an oven and now speaks about the cake itself. The charge to Ephraim is that the nation has mixed itself among the other nations. that it looks to other nations rather than to the Lord for help.

It vacillates between alliances with arch enemies and seeks even to play nations off of other nations. But this political strategy has not been working out well for Israel. The nation is in so much internal turmoil that it will not see everything gradually creeping in on it. Because it mixes itself with the nations and the peoples of those nations, it is confused and doesn't know its own place or function as a nation. The people are too busy to care about their political suicide. The rulers are left to do whatever they wish without accountability to the people and the nation is almost history.

Now the imagery changes to the half-baked cake to express the ideas and plans of the politicians are not thought through nor do they yield proper results. The kings have been making the situation worse, not better. They have no ability to lead or to accomplish their duties. There is no way out for the nation except through God but they have long given that possibility up. When you don't turn the cake, two things happen that you must avoid as a baker. First, the one side is burnt and destroyed, and then the other side does not cook and is also not edible. The nation is either on fire or not even cooking. Confusion reigns rather than a king.

### **7:9 Strangers devour his strength, but he does not know it. Even gray hairs sneak in on him, but he does not know it.**

The strangers referred to here are foreigners from other lands and they are taking land away from Israel. The word for strength connotes land and property. It can also refer to the military might of the people, but we know that in the time of Pekulah as king, the Assyrians took

land through conquest because they sent tribute to Assyria but then turned and asked for help from Egypt.

This may have been the time being referred to or there may have been a more gradual stealing of their land, because it says that the people don't realize or know about the stealing of their land. Now in this time where the common person was not informed of all the things happening in their nation, it could simply be the people are too distracted with their own desires to worry about land.

This might remind one of the larger-scale Roman fall to the nations around it because of its preoccupation with the Coliseum rather than the empire. The moral is true of any era or nation that entertainment through wine and sex and any other distracting engagement render the senses and the mind helpless against even the most obvious of attacks.

The next image is not only of the nation losing its strength but of the nation growing old without realizing it is becoming extinct. Those gray hairs are the hairs in between the natural and youthful color of hair to the whiteness of old age as the pigment slowly is drained from the strand of hair. The people don't see the grays of hair, the gradual passing of their nation. They look in the mirror but don't see their age bringing them to national death.

**7:10 Now the pride of Israel testifies to his face, but they do not return to the Lord their God, nor do they seek Him in all of this.**

Israel's haughty and lofty idea of itself, its pride, has now been its accuser. It stands in front of the nation and keeps the people from turning to the Lord and getting the help that they need. Without the Lord's help, their pride dooms them to an end of their nation. And that is exactly what happens to them. The word for testify means to answer or respond. It seems to be a term used in legal matters. The people know that they are too prideful to be saved.

They refuse to turn to the Lord, knowing full well that He can redeem and heal them. It has become more a matter of pride than even being too late to turn back to Him. They have made their decision against the Lord and refuse to turn back to Him because that would require repentance and sorrow and the hard time of healing in which the nation must swallow its pride and return to Him. The people don't want to consider that option. They would rather go to their nation's death, and they will.

Not only do they refuse to return to their Lord and God, but they refuse to even seek Him throughout these political and military happenings. The people don't turn to the Lord first or at all in the midst of trial and national danger. When 9/11 happened in our nation back in 2001, people flocked to their churches and prayed for the survivors and the families of that terrorism. But Israel will not even turn to God in crisis. Their pride has hardened their hearts to the Lord.

**7:11 Then it will happen that Ephraim will be like a dove, gullible, without heart, calling to Egypt, running to Assyria.**

Once more the metaphor changes from a hot oven to the cake in the oven and now to a dove because of its gullibility, its simplicity and the nation's running from one superpower to another for help and guidance. The kings of Israel think that these superpowers would help them against the other, but both superpowers want both Israel and Judah as a way to get to the other superpower and destroy them. The nation of Israel is only important to either superpower as a means to world domination.

Really Israel does not have the might to deal with either of these superpowers they flirt with. They could simply be wiped out if either superpower decided to turn its full force and attention to the nation. That is why Hosea speaks of doves, which flutter around between places and choices. The nation being without heart in this context may refer to the mental ability of the nation's leaders to see the trap they set for themselves or it may refer to the fight and strength of the nation being drained.

The nation calls out to Assyria and pays them tribute, then decides that tribute is too high a price and turns to Egypt to help them get out of the tribute. Neither decision looks good for Israel because both nations want the land to drive their forces to the other nation. Israel's only playing chip is that they could make that happen for either nation without having to fight for the land bridge. The image of Hosea's wife running to different lovers for different gifts is not expressly mentioned, but serves as a wonderful background image for this idea of the dove. Israel thinks that it's important but it is not as important as its leaders calculate.

**7:12 Then as they run I will stretch out My net over them. Like the birds of the heavens I will bring them down. I will discipline them according to the report to their congregation.**

While they are running between these superpowers, their downfall will come not from one of the empires but from the Lord Himself. He will be the one to hunt them down like birds and capture them in His net. And it will be part of their punishment for not coming to Him instead of others. Essentially, in not seeking the Lord in the midst of their political tumult, the Lord will become the x factor, the unexpected enemy and demise of the nation. Not seeking the Lord not only kept them from His help, but caused His wrath!

Historically, the Lord used Assyria to bring about the nation's downfall. The Lord has a history of using nations however He chooses. He uses one nation against another and then that other nation against another and so on. He controls it all. He is no national God. He is the God who controls not one nation, but all of them. The Lord has set his sights on Israel to take them into exile and captivity, spreading His net over them to entrap them in His willful judgment of the reckless nation.

The word used for discipline has the idea of teaching or instructing but with a harsher tone than a simple school lesson. They are going to get schooled by God's judgment. He will instruct them or discipline them according to the report that the leaders give the assembly or congregation. In other words, if they say something false or lead the people astray in a report, the nation will suffer the result of that lying and falsity.

**7:13 Woe to them because they fled from Me! Devastation to them because they broke away from Me. Yet I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me.**

There is much emphasis in this verse. The Lord calls a woe upon the people. They are to be pitied because they turned away from the Lord. The words “from Me” are emphasized. It’s almost as if God is saying, “When you turn away from Me, I’m not like those false and dead gods. I respond and it won’t be nice.” It also gives the impression and image of a scorned lover once again.

God actually declares through a statement of command that devastation comes upon the nation for their insolence. The Lord acts exactly like a lover getting even with her violator. The next emphasis is once again on the pronoun for the Lord. He is telling them that they broke away from Him, not He away from them. This is their doing, not His. This is what they wanted wholeheartedly. It was not His choice, but it is what is demanded in their situation. The word for “break away” contains the idea of leaving or forsaking, of rebelling and turning away. The people left God at the altar and moved on. But God’s not over them yet.

Even in this moment, in His anger and the raw betrayal, God would have still healed them had they reached out to them. The next emphasis comes in the Lord actually referring to Himself twice in the original language. He is saying, “This is what they did to Me. But I would never do that! I still wanted to heal them!” He is juxtaposing His attitude and desire with the attitude of the people.

Despite the people’s harlotry and idolatry, God would still take them back. Just as the word for redeem was used by Hosea when he bought back his wife out of prostitution, willing to put money no her despite her infidelity, so God says here that He would have chosen to redeem, to buy His people back out of their sin and situation. Instead they still press His hand by speaking lies against Him and about Him. The people are now throwing God under the bus. They have decided that He is their enemy despite His continuing message of kindness and love to them.

Sometimes in our anger or rage in the midst of a spat or fight, we don’t even realize that the other person is trying to make amends or peace. We get locked in and we’re out for blood. And even if they spill it, it would never be enough. We get so riled up and it’s almost like someone or something else takes over. We won’t listen to reason or to love. We want to end someone. We come after them with full destructive force in the argument. That is what Israel has done to God. They have become so against Him and so caught up in rage and vengeance and pride that they can’t even see Him surrendering and wanting to heal. And so they force His hand upon them.

**7:14 And they do not cry out to me from the heart. Thus they wail on their beds, for grain and wine they gash themselves. They turn aside away from Me.**



The Lord knows that false cries to Him are also lies. The people still offered sacrifices, but the whole of their being wasn't in the worship. They did it out of tradition or human need, but not out of their passion and love for God. He was aware of that. He knows every time that we offer Him a token instead of ourselves. He knows every time that we come to Him looking good on the outside but inwardly rotting.

They refused to cry out to Him genuinely. They would rather play a religious and ritualistic game with Him. Because they didn't have relationship with Him, they endured the sleepless nights and the worries and cares of this world, their crops, their nation, their situation, their very lives. They endured wailing and weeping upon their beds at night. They slashed themselves and cut themselves in front of false gods to try to get more grain and wine. We know that the prophets of Baal would cut themselves as a way of showing their devotion and resolve. But because they had turned aside from the Lord, they would not receive an answer from Him or the dead idols.

**7:15 Although I trained them to be strengthened in their arms, yet they devise evil against Me.**

They diminished in every capacity, including their ability to be strong men who can fight for themselves. They had given even that up, although it was a gift from their God. He was the one who instructed them and taught them to be a strong nation among nations and they had lost all of that when they gave up on Him and forsook Him.

In our nation today, we wonder why all the turmoil, the school shootings, the greed, the world around us seems so violent and wicked. It is because our nation has turned its back on God long ago. We asked for it. That's what our nation wanted. But ironically, it is the loss of the foundational principles we were built on that has us busting at the seams of our foundations. We are in grave danger of becoming history instead of the nation of the present. Despite God's personal involvement in the nation of Israel, Israel would rather turn its back on Him and instead turn to planning evil and calamity against Him.

**7:16 They return, but not upward. They are like a slack bow, and their princes will fall by the sword because of their cursing tongue. This will be their derision in the land of Egypt.**

Finally in this chapter of images for the nation of Israel we receive the image from the prophet of a slack bow or a faulty bow. The bows of that time were made with a combination of wood and the horns probably of a ram, using sinews and tendons as the rope mechanism. They had to be kept in good weathering conditions or they would wear out, dry out, or break and would not be accurate.

The Lord claims that Israel has become like one of these bows. They are wrong in their direction and lie to the shooter. They don't go where they are supposed to. They are faulty. Like an arrow fired by a faulty bow, the nation of Israel returns but not on target. Some scholars

suggest that the word for upward here is the word for the Most High. It is not. The idea is not of them returning to the Lord most high, but of an off-target arrow.

A slack bow has no power to get an arrow to its target. The nation has no strength as God has already pointed out. Because they are not cut out to be a nation anymore, their princes and officials of the king, the rulers under the king or in his court, will all be killed by the sword. This happened historically over and over for those 20 years of upheaval and then finally when the Assyrians took Samaria in 722/721 BC.

The reason for their demise came because the whole nation cursed against its God. The whole nation had a lying tongue, a fowl tongue. This is not in the sense of using a four-letter word but in the sense of cursing out God and telling Him to get lost. So He left them and found a nation to destroy them. That is the reason for their destruction, because they pushed God away.

Even the land of Egypt will mistrust them and will spread rumors of derision because of their neglecting of their God. Egypt may be pointed out specifically to refer to all nations around Israel, to say that all of them will deride the people of Israel for their forsaking God. Derision is something done with the tongue just as much as the cursing of the nation, so God is using a hint of irony that the nation shall endure the scorn of another nation in the same way they rejected God.

## Chapter 8

### **8:1 Put the trumpet to your lips! Like a vulture over the House of the Lord, they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My Law.**

Trumpets were used for several occasions in the Old Testament. Sometimes they signaled worship like church bells signal services today in our culture. Sometimes they sounded the war-cry for battle. Sometimes they spoke of victory and sometimes were used as alarms. I believe the trumpet is used here as a last resort alarm to the people of Israel. The Lord is sending out alarm because they are defiling the Temple, the House of the Lord. The word for trumpet here is the shofar, a trumpet made from the hollowed-out bone of the rams horn. It made a very loud sound and carried far.

Here God compares the nation of Israel to vultures. Vultures are not hunters. They are scavengers. They don't do the killing; they steal the prize of the hunt. You see vultures hovering and circling over dead things. The people of northern Israel have made the Lord's House, the Temple, a dead thing by misusing it. Because they crossed over or transgressed the precious covenant, trampling it on their way to run to their false idols, and they have rebelled against God's moral Law. They have left everything sacred for the profane. The word for rebel here is to break away from. This becomes important when God talks about cutting them off in verse four.

### **8:2 To Me they call for help, "My God, we—Israel—know You!"**

Like most in our own nation, when Israel is in trouble with its enemies, it still calls out to God for help ceremonially. That is what they are used to doing. They don't believe in Him or worship Him, but they'll take His help. The problem is not that they call on God. Everyone who wants to believe in Him calls upon Him. The problem is their intent and reality of calling on God. they lie as they call on Him. They say that they know Him.

The word "know" in Hebrew is an experiential knowledge. It is a knowledge gained through intimate relationship and getting to know a person. It is not a factual knowledge. They are claiming that they have an intimate relationship when they call on God. That is a lie. Even unbelievers call on God knowing that they don't know Him and most don't even expect Him to do something that they ask because they understand what Israel took for granted, that they don't know God in intimate relationship.

The words "My God" are also indicative of an intimate and personal relationship, as well as a personal God that responds to prayer. To call God, "My God" is to express one's own personal identity and relationship with Him. When we call on God as "My God," it expresses the intimate relationship we have with Him. But Israel had no such relationship of their own free will. They did not want God. Instead they turned to idols and treated him commonly and profanely with these other idols. He is holy and separate, unlike any idol they can imagine or design or produce!

### **8:3 Israel rejects the good; the enemy will pursue him.**

This is a habit of Israel, to reject the good. It has become part of their natural character and reputation to reject anything that is good. The word good here is a descriptor of anything that is good. It is used in a way that suggests “the good things” or “anything that has goodness as its quality.” Instead Israel seeks the evil things.

What one seeks, one finds. Israel will turn away from all the good that God sends and they will experience instead the evils of life as a nation without their God. They will be pursued on all sides by enemies. Their enemies are many. They have enemies on every border, on their south Egypt, on their north, Assyria, on their east Philistia, and on their west Moab and Edom. They are landlocked between enemies. When they call out to God, He doesn't answer, just like Jesus will say to those who did not truly know Him, “Away from Me! I never knew you!”

### **8:4 They made kings, but not through Me. They acted like rulers, but I did not know it. With their silver and their gold they made for themselves idols for the sake of being cut off.**

The emphasis starts out in this verse with “they” as if God is declaring, “THEY made kings, not ME!” There is a long tradition in Israel that first, God was king, and then they desired a human king, hurting God's heart in their demand. But God gave them what they wanted, warning them they would not like the kings. But God anointed through a prophet each of the kings.

He is saying they will not even let Him pick and anoint the kings anymore. And they suffer for it all the more. In our culture, the people pick their leader. I'm not saying this is not biblical, but we see God raising up the leadership throughout the Bible. Even in the Church, God used the casting lots method in Acts 1 for His control and His Spirit spoke after the Day of Pentecost. God chose leadership in Israel.

The next sentence suggests that they carried on like rulers but had not the authority to do so. They were puppets instead of true authorities. They were frauds and fakes, falsely assuming a place of power that was not theirs. They were lawless in their pursuit of the throne. They did not ask God. And they suffered their unwise choices and leaders. Not only are their political fortunes bankrupt, but they have used their fortunes to make idols instead of to glorify and sacrifice to God.

The silver and gold speak of their monetary and economic uses of what God has blessed them with. They used their money to make gods and idols for themselves. Because they turned to man-made objects of worship instead of the invisible God, they suffered the cutting off from God. They suffered the complete rebelling of God against them. This word for cut off is used for making a covenant. You cut a covenant because you cut animals as part of the ceremony of confirmation. But God will cut them off from the people of God and the land and the covenant

they have trampled upon with their sin. It is solely because of the idols that God will cut them off from His blessing.

**8:5 I reject your calf, Samaria. My anger is red hot against them. Until when will they be incapable of innocence?**

The same word used for rejecting is the same word used above to describe Israel as rejecting the good in verse three. Because they refuse to do good, God refuses their idol, the calf. We remember that in the dessert the people made a golden calf right after the speaking of the Ten Commandments from God's own mouth! The calf is a symbol of strength and they are trying to point out the strength of God, but they were limiting Him to strength where He has many other attributes. When we take only one of God's attributes or even a few, but do not consider all of them, we make an idol because God is more than we can pin down.

Samaria is the capital city, probably where they did worship a calf. But you could also understand these as one example of many: the calf is an example of the many idols being made, and the city of Samaria represents all the cities of Ephraim or Northern Israel. The reason I would say it is both is because it is clear that the whole nation was making actual idols and worshipping them. But it is also clear that God refers to the whole nation in the next sentence. He says his anger is not only red hot against Samaria, but against them, plural, meaning all the cities or all the people of the nation.

God's anger is often spoken of in the Old Testament prophets. It is literally talking about flaring nostrils. The word for anger is the word for red and for nostril. So the idea is that God's nostrils flare in His anger. This is why I have translated it as "red hot anger." We are way past the offending the Lord stage. We are in the scum of the earth and I'll wipe you from the map kind of angry.

Then God asks a rhetorical question in His anger with this nation of idolaters that used to be His intimately chosen people. He asks how long or to what time would he have to wait until they were not a guilt-ridden people anymore. The word for innocence here is the word for being white or pure or guiltless. This produces the same idea of God washing our sins white as snow. The word "innocence" speaks of a purity that is not muddled by sin, guilt, impurity, or transgression. And God comments that they are incapable of innocence. As we saw earlier, they are calling on God suggesting that they intimately know Him but they worship idols in the same breath. They are beyond any line of returning to innocence. And neither do they care. The stiff-necked people have become hard-hearted as well.

**8:6 For it is from Israel and a craftsman made it. It is not even a god, for Samaria's calf will be wood shavings.**

Now God describes their false gods and idols. They are not from some unknown place or some mysterious celestial place. They are made in Israel. It's like when you pick up an object in

your home and see the sticker on the bottom, “Made in China.” For them, it was not as if these idols were forced upon them. They are the ones who made the idols! They are not being forced or coerced and they are not innocent. They are using God’s gifts that were given to them to make idols.

What are you using your gifts for? All gifts come from God. We know that from James 1:17. God gives you gifts that are special and unique, meant to be used for His glory. Here the gift of craftsmanship and creativity is used not in worship to God but against Him in worship to a dead and nonexistent idol. They made these things from different materials in Israel. The idol is from Israel. It was made there and originated there. And a craftsman made it, not God. We cannot produce something greater than ourselves. We have full control over what we build and make. Nothing we make can be greater than us!

I love the next line because it reminds me of the story of when the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the same place as the Philistine god Dagon. The historical account is that the first night they kept the Ark in the same place, in the morning the idol was bowing to it face down on the ground. They put it back up and the second night the same thing had happened. And then the third morning, it was shattered to pieces before the Ark. I love how God says to them that their idols that they spend time and craftsmanship and creativity on will be like wood chips. God will obliterate their images and idols!

**8:7 Thus they sow the wind and they will reap the whirlwind. On the standing grain stalks there are no shoots. It shall not yield flour. Perhaps it would produce, but strangers would swallow it.**

The Israelites through their rejection of God’s law and covenant, through their idolatry and spiritual adultery with idols, had thus brought upon themselves worthlessness and the shiftings of the wind and air. This image has come up several times through Hosea. The image of wind or whirlwinds has been mentioned in 4:19 as well. In that passage, the context is referring to Israel’s desire for its idols and God’s despair and loss of hope that Israel will return to Him and neglect its idols. Here, the image is of nothingness or emptiness.

The wind and whirlwind are images of emptiness and nothingness because they are not firm foundations. They move one, seemingly invisibly by a power not their own. They have great power when channeled, but they can’t be seen. It is this invisibility that makes them empty or nothing. We say a jar is empty when it actually contains air, but it has nothing else in it. Their idolatry and chasing after idols is empty and vain. The idols don’t exist except in their minds.

By fashioning and making idols out of the nation’s goods, its wood and metals and stones, the people are sowing the wind. They are making something that they believe has power but it has none and is no greater than the mere mortals that produce it. But they are reaping the whirlwind of desires for gods that don’t exist, running from one god to another in search of something more powerful than the Living God. They will find nothing, but they will search for idols because that is what they have chosen in their sowing. Any farmer knows that you reap

what you sow. You don't plant corn and get pumpkins. You plant corn and get corn. If you plant worthless idolatry, you'll get a bunch of worthless idols that multiply and yet hold no power at all.

Their idolatry is working itself out in what they are praying and sacrificing to these gods for. They are worshipping fertility gods because they increase the crops. They are worshipping Baal because he is the god of weather and can make favorable seasonal patterns for their crops. Just one problem though. The crops are dead and produce nothing that brings food to their stomachs. Not only do these idols fail to have any power, but the nation also brings God's vengeance through the empty grains of wheat. God is punishing them for turning to these gods. He is showing them their impotence and also punishing them at the same time. Even if the plants would bear anything worth using, it is stolen by Israel's enemies. They are left desolate and their gods fail them. Their God punishes them.

### **8:8 Israel is swallowed up now! They are among the nations as a worthless vessel.**

The verb "swallowed" from the last sentence chains the idea from strangers eating the produce of Israel to Israel being devoured into oblivion among the nations. The same idea of the wind comes back in more exacting terms as Israel is called worthless among the nations, a vessel that is empty and worth nothing. Because Israel has rejected the priceless Living God, they have become worthless. Even among the nations, they have nothing to offer. They used to be a nation of commerce and everyone would come to them, but now they have nothing unique to offer. They serve the same gods everyone else does and experience the same failures every other nation experiences. Without God, Israel truly is worthless, vain and empty.

### **8:9 Thus they have ascended to Assyria, a wild donkey isolating itself. Ephraim has paid a prostitute's fee for lovers.**

Israel is making alliances, but the only way to make those alliances is through prostituting itself. This verse probably refers to some kind of forced tribute Israel paid to stay out of Assyria's crosshairs. Their money was the only thing keeping them alive among the nations. If they had no money for tribute, they would simply fade away.

They went up north, or ascended, to the Assyrians. Assyria is northwest of Israel on the map. Assyria is described as a wild donkey because no one knows quite what Assyria's got up its sleeve. It is not joining in with the other nations. It is building its own empire. Donkeys are obtuse and obstinate. So also the Assyrians did their own thing and got their way however they could manage it. Another possible way to take this, because the pronoun is vague, is that the wild donkey refers to Israel going off alone without any other allies and going to Assyria on a wild whim.

Israel had to pay Assyria just to keep them away from her and to keep their help from the other nations circling her for the kill. But Assyria, as history points out, did not actually keep

good on its pledge of allegiance and friendliness to Israel. Assyria is the empire that takes the northern Israeli country almost without protest in about three years after this is written. Israel pays the Assyrians for the service of allegiance but because Assyria was not a true lover like the prophet Hosea and like God, Assyria turns its back on the nation when it does not continue to pay for Assyria's services, just like a prostitute only loves as far as the money demands.

**8:10 Even though they pay a prostitute's fee among the nations for allies, I will gather them and the king and princes will be rendered invalid because of the burden.**

No matter how much they pay to get out of God's judgment, it's not going to work out for them in the end. The burden I believe this verse refers to is the tribute on the princes and kings of northern Israel. The tribute was usually a crippling demand by a more powerful and larger force like the Assyrians.

The idea of paying a prostitute's fee or "hiring friends" does not prevent God from carrying out His plan to gather all of the Israelites together and then scatter them across the nations as punitive judgment. If they want to be like the nations so much, worshipping false idols and intermixing, then they will indeed do just that in the Exile. The princes and kings meant nothing because they could not lead their people away from destruction.

**8:11 Because Ephraim has increased altars for sinning, they have become to Him altars of sin.**

The people had become an abomination to God with their ardent and intensive idol worship and sacrificing to idols. They had become a whole nation of sin to God, a cancer that must be excised, a black pit in the midst of the world's nations. Israel was worse than everyone around it, and they were supposed to be the light, the difference, the unique and holy people of God. But since they had turned to idols and sinning with excellence, they became a place of sin and defilement, and such a sickness must be removed, as a former image in the book comes to mind.

**8:12 Were I to write for him by the myriads My laws, they would be regarded as foreign.**

God goes so far as to say that because of their sinfulness and idolatry, following every open wind of spiritual adultery, they have become unfamiliar with their foundational laws which God gave them. Even if He wrote them myriads of times they would not recognize them! The idea of this verse is a lack of familiarity with what made them a nation different from others. They are so unfamiliar with their God now that they have been with other gods.

The word for myriads here can also be the word for a thousand or 10,000. It is an incalculable number, and the amount of times it is written speaks of a familiarity like second nature that the Israelites lacked with God's laws. This verse does not speak to the greatness of



God's laws, but to the familiarity of them. Some translations have incorrectly interpreted the original text, like the KJV and NKJV.

**8:13 As for My sacrificial offerings, they slaughter meat and eat. The Lord does not take pleasure in them. Now the Lord will remember their iniquities and punish their sins. They will return to Egypt.**

Not only had Israel turned to other gods and become like the nations they were supposed to be different and unique among, but they also ignored God in the sacrificial offerings, ignoring the reason for the sacrifices, they simply did the slaughtering and ate the meat rather than looked to God in the action of sacrificing offerings. They were running through the motions. It's like taking communion because you're hungry for lunch in church rather than focusing on the reason we take communion. And let's face it, communion in church is no feast. If you're really that hungry, a wafer and a swig of grape juice isn't going to improve your status.

God did not delight in the offerings because He knew the people did not do them for Him. They did them out of tradition and ritual. The significance of the sacrifice was lost to them and they routinely did what they always did, like machines, like a person who goes through the motions of a marriage "for the kids' sakes" rather than trying to reignite a flame that has gone out. It's hard work, but it's better than living without feeling and without caring. It's better to work on the marriage than become a zombie.

But God saw that the people did not care anymore. The only thing left to do was to give them over to the sins they so loved as they used to love Him. The reference to returning to Egypt is not to be taken literally. It is figurative of their past. Egypt was the place of slavery and they are about to head into that same slavery when they are exiled. They will be strangers in a foreign land once again. And their sins have led them up to this point. Their hard hearts and heads will leave them homeless in foreign places.

**8:14 Now Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces, and Judah has increased impregnable cities, so I will send a fire upon his cities and it will consume her citadels.**

The word for Maker and build are related in this image and Judah's increase is in its fortifications and armies rather than in the Lord. Both are building places that show where their allegiances lie. The palaces are for kings and princes that don't help the nation in any way, scared boys instead of leading men. The impregnable cities and citadels are a last-ditch effort to provide a strong front and defensible city, but they also will fail. When God has decided to judge, there is no stopping His judgment. The nations of Israel and Judah would know this if they had not turned away and become familiar with other gods.

They would know about the Lord if they had not turned to these idols. They would know they could not get away from the coming wrath. The fire being sent is from the siege of enemies at the gates of their cities. No matter what Israel and Judah do to stave off God's wrath, it isn't

going to work. God will bring destruction because that is what the people wanted and asked for. As surely as sin leads to death, their idolatry led to their Exile.

## Chapter 9

**9:1 Do not rejoice, Israel! Do not shout like the peoples because you have played the whore, away from before your God. You love a prostitute's fee over all the threshing floors of grain.**

I don't know what the background to this part of the prophecy concerns. Perhaps it was pleasure over having Assyria as an ally. That would agree with the larger context of the last chapter and section that chided the Israelites for going to pay the prostitute's wages for allies among the nations, specifically Assyria.

If that is the case, then this verse fits into their reaction to the news of an alliance and the prophet is disgusted that the nation would be glad about giving up its grain and going a different way than toward God, trusting in an alliance. The words for rejoice and shout are words of happiness and bliss. The people should not feel that way because they have paid too high a tribute for this alliance.

Once again the charge comes that the nation has played the whore with the nations and with idols. They have gone away from their God to accomplish these goals they had set. Because they made this alliance and paid for it by tribute, apparently a grain tribute, the prophet says that they hold a prostitute's fee in better standing than being able to feed themselves. Loving a prostitute's fee is linking this chapter and statement to the last chapter, for this is the third time this fee is mentioned. They were willing to give themselves and their grain up to be ravaged just to avoid being taken by another nation. That's what makes it a prostitute's fee, giving something of great value for an empty promise.

**9:2 Threshing floor and winepress will not feed them and sweet wine will fail in them.**

All of the resources of the nation are dried up because of their sins against God and their idolatry. They have turned to other sources of provision and protection, to Assyria for protection against the other nations and to idols for their provisions. But the protection is only as good as the amount of tribute they pay, and the provisions are drying up because the idols are dead and empty.

The threshing floor is the place of separating the wheat from the rest, the stocks and the chaff. The winepress is the place where the grape harvest is churned into wine, usually by treading over the grapes in the press, but also through mechanized crushing. These objects of production will be silent. There will be no more flour and bread, no more new wine because all of it goes to Assyria to keep Israel out of harm's way. The first step toward annihilation is not an outward attack but an inward languishing from having no gross national product to feed the people.

**9:3 They will not dwell in the land of the Lord, but Ephraim will return to Egypt and in Assyria they will eat unclean food.**

More painful than not eating for the nation of Israel is to not dwell in the land, but this was inevitable the moment they looked outside the land and the God who provided the land for their security and provision. If they look to other places besides the land they live in, then they should just move to those places, which is exactly what God will do.

The verbs for dwelling and returning are very similar, so there is a connection, almost a play on words, between the idea of not living in the land and returning to Egypt. We have seen this “return to Egypt” motif before in the last chapter, found in 8:13. It has the same meaning here that it did there. It is not a literal statement, but a metaphor for the house of slavery to which they will be going as they live in the foreign land of Assyria.

There, they will be forced to eat unclean food and live like the Gentiles of that land. In the prophecies of Daniel, we are told that the people of Persia attempted to Persianize the nobility of Israel’s youth so that they would be puppets in Judah and Israel for them. It is no surprise if they would literally eat unclean food in Assyria then.

The word “unclean” is a ritual cleanliness. It is not that the food will have dirt on it, but that the food will be on the list of unclean foods in the ritual law of Israel. They want to be so much like the gentiles that God will let them live as the Gentiles do in Gentile land with Gentile food and Gentile idols. He gives them what they want.

**9:4 They will not pour out to the Lord wine nor will they please Him. Their sacrifices will be like mourners’ bread to them, all who eat it will be defiled, for their bread is for their throat; it will not come to the House of the Lord.**

The ritual and sacrificial system may still be observed, but it has no power. It is vain, worthless and empty. It has lost all of its appeal for God because the people do not live out the law or their love for Him. So to Him, they don’t have any love for Him. God reacts emotionally to our worship just as we react emotionally to His care.

He seeks a people who truly love Him not just in word but in deed. The time is long past for Israel, but it is not long past for each of us. Everything that we do is worship to someone or something. Pouring out the wine referred to the drink offering and the sacrifices did not work. The people might as well just eat what they sacrifice to survive because God is not at all pleased or delighted with it in any way. He has been rejecting their sacrifices for as long as they have not followed after Him and walked in His ways. God does not humor us or wait on us to start offering true worship again. He only goes where the worship is genuine!

Mourners’ bread refers to the emptiness in the people. They are physically fed but empty in their souls. They long for a filling beyond physical bread, but they will not receive it because they have given it up long ago. The bread they do eat that is either sacrificed or not sacrificed is a

defilement to them because they either don't offer the best and first as sacrifice or their sacrifice has no affect because God is displeased.

Either way, it defiles them and even testifies against their knowledge of God. There used to be showbread in the Temple, but we don't know how much of the temple was continuing the sacrificial and Levitical laws. Either way, the people are not worshipping God and feel an emptiness that only God can fill.

### **9:5 What will you do on the day of meeting and on the day of the Lord's festival?**

Because their sacrifices don't please God and they don't even seek Him anymore, there will be nothing to do on their high festival days. There were three main festivals in Israel throughout the year, although there were minor ones as well. But the three main ones are Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Passover, and the Festival of Booths. All three of these have a meaning only because of YHWH.

Since they don't serve or worship Him anymore, why would they observe such festivals? These festivals are foundational to their identity as a nation, but they are also foundational to YHWH being their God. It would be like the United States being conquered by some other nation or empire and celebrating July 4<sup>th</sup> just because that's what we've always done. There is no point to the pomp and circumstance of these festivals if God is not the nation's God.

### **9:6 Therefore, behold! They are walking away from destruction. Egypt will gather them. Memphis will bury them. Their precious silver will be possessed with weeds. *There will be thorns in their tents.***

Directly connected to the idea of the futility of sacrifices to YHWH while committing spiritual adultery with the idols is their political situation. The people think they are getting away from annihilation and destruction by seeking alliances with the more powerful empires surrounding them. Israel is right in the middle of the thicket of empires. Assyria is to their north and Egypt to their south. The Mediterranean is to their west and the up-and-coming empire of Media-Persia is to their west.

In making an alliance, the nation thought it was walking away from destruction, that it would live another day. But so many nations wanted to destroy Israel. The story has not changed much to this day. The city of Memphis is the place where most of the Pharaohs and kings would set up their capital. So speaking to the capital is speaking to the ruler of the nation, the Pharaoh. This speaks of the reverse plummeting the Egyptians would do to the Israelites like when the Israelites left their kingdom in the Exodus.

Egypt would love to get retribution, but remember this is a reference to the house of slavery more than anything. It means that they will lose all of their inheritance, the land, the precious things and silver things they cherish, their freedom. All of these things will be lost and God will not let up on them either. Their tents, which speaks to their temporary and fleeting days

in the wilderness where they did not build permanent houses, will be full of thistles and briars. This would make their sleep uncomfortable, let alone their daily lives. Their fine possessions would turn to weeds and would no longer be priceless.

**9:7 The days of visitation have come; the days of retribution have come. Let Israel know the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is a lunatic because of your great iniquity and great animosity.**

The first two lines of this verse have a poetic cadence to them and repetition. They focus on the day of God's visitation or punishment. God visits judgment on the people. The word there is visit and can be a positive word, but is seldom used as such in the prophets. These are days, a period of time, in which God gets retribution. He pays them for their sin by bringing vengeance.

The prophets of this time, as we know from other contemporary prophets, were telling the people that the true prophets of God were lying about the nation's future. They were telling the people that everything would be alright. But here Hosea speaks against them and says that they are all fools. The connotation of the fool here is not the one who lacks knowledge or wisdom but the one who willfully does evil despite the wiser choice of doing righteousness.

The prophet and the man of the Spirit are the same person or office. The people had taunted the prophets because of their ecstatic experiences and their passionate pleas to the people to heed the word of the Lord. They called them madmen or lunatics and foolish. The word foolish has a connotation of evil in its contexts in the Bible. They were also calling these men mad. A madman was ignored in his speech throughout the Old Testament. It was a way of discrediting their message as prophets because they would not be heard if they were categorized as madmen.

But these men of the Spirit, these prophets, could find no other way to better communicate God's heart to His people. They did some crazy things and made some crazy accusations. But they were meant to shock the people into turning from their destructive course of idolatry. Hosea is telling the people that the prophets are indeed madmen. But it is the sin of the people, the persecution and animosity of the people that has driven them to these methods and metaphors.

**9:8 The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God. The bird catcher's trapping net is on all his ways, animosity in the House of his God.**

These same prophets are gone mad because they are the last resort, the watchmen of Israel. The watchman stands in a tower on the city wall or in a fortified city and looks for danger. He signals any kind of danger from any direction. He has the foresight to see things coming against the city. The prophets watched for danger against not just a city but the entire nation of Israel. And they were going mad to sound the warning cry. God assisted them as the watchmen to see what was coming for a sinful nation.

Another image surfaces for the prophet as he seems to be full of them. This one is of a bird catcher's net that keeps the bird from being free to fly. It is a net to trap the bird. The prophet cannot do what needs to be done to help the people turn before it's too late. He is being hindered by the religious leaders and those who want to shut him up. He cannot speak to the issues because they refuse to listen. He is trapped as a bird in a net. And beyond this, when the prophet goes into the House of the Lord, the Temple, he is persecuted with rage and anger and the people attack him. These are only some reasons for the prophets going mad.

**9:9 They have become deeply corrupt as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins.**

The people of the land have been so sinful and become so corrupt that the prophets were getting nowhere with typical images and allusions. The words here for deeply corrupt refer to a ruin that is deep or mysterious. Here the word is deep, not mysterious. The corruption has gotten as bad as Gibeah. Gibeah here is mentioned probably by way of allusion to the events of the end of the book of Judges. There, a maiden was brutally raped and murdered, and then all of Israel attacked the city to stop the violence.

God will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. The word iniquities here refers to the guilt caused by sin, the crooked or wrong deed done. The word sin refers to the kind of sin that a sin offering is made for in the sacrificial sin, a more general term for wickedness. Once again we see the word for visiting upon someone, which is almost always viewed as negative or punishment in the prophets.

**9:10 Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel. Like the early fig on the fig tree in its first season I saw your fathers. They came to Baal-Peor and consecrated themselves to shame and they became detestable like what they loved.**

Our next image is that of a young Israel when it was first in the land. To God, the young nation was like grapes in the wilderness. You don't find a whole lot of grapes just growing in the wilderness. Israel was special, a unique thing to find. They were also young and full of potential and promise. They were like an early fig on the fig tree. Early figs showed what the crop was going to be like, if it would be qualitatively and quantitatively good or bad.

The reference to Israel's forefathers as in their first season speaks to a time of innocence when the nation was not steeped in its sin and ignorant of its relationship with God, a time when the people were like infants. But even then in their earliest times, the fathers and the nation had a bent toward idolatry.

The prophet refers to a time when Israel flirted with the Baal idol who is associated with Moab in Numbers 25. The men of Israel were committing adultery with the women of Moab and it was only stopped when Phinehas drove a spear through a couple in their bed chambers. It is understood that their sensual act initiated the Israelite man into ritual rites with Baal of Peor or

the Moabites, ruining the covenant with YHWH. They became as detestable and nasty to God and He did not delight in them because they delighted in the ritual rites of the Baal of Peor idol. They were doing the same things, if not worse, in the days of Hosea.

When we look to other things in our own lives as more important than God, the same thing happens to our relationship with Him. When we hunger for anything else, even if it is a good thing, we become to God detestable because we have left the place of giving a sweet aroma of worship to God and God alone. With every thought, every action, we are either drawing near to God or pushing Him away.

**9:11 Ephraim like a bird will fly away, their glory away from birth, away from pregnancy, away from conception!**

Once again the image of the bird comes back, but this time in the freedom of the bird to fly away. The bird is the glory of Ephraim, the ability of the nation of Israel to have children and to be prosperous. That is what will fly away. Israel's place in the world, its strength and its power, will be gone, will vanish into the air. The ability to give birth, to carry an infant to full term through a pregnancy, and even the ability to conceive a child will be lost to the Israelites while they stay in their sin and idolatry.

**9:12 Even if they raise children, yet I will deprive them from adulthood. Yes, indeed, woe to them when I depart from them!**

God makes their punishment even more harsh as He moves from stopping their child bearing to saying that even if by some small miracle the people can give birth to a child, the child will not come close to living out its years. God will cut the life of the child short. He will deprive the nation of children that grow to adulthood.

We do not know through what methods this occurs. One would suggest everything from miscarriages (mentioned in verse 14) to battles to sickness and disease to natural disasters that would take the life of children not yet adults. Because God's presence is no longer with the people, their ability to live life will be extremely hampered. His presence is the key to life. Paul quotes a Greek philosopher with this idea when he says, "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

God would take with Him as He leaves their ability to birth children and see them live full lives as adults. He would deprive them of their future. There is a construction that is interesting here, a construction of certainty that I have translated, "Yes, indeed." It is constructed with several indicators of a positive affirmation. There is no doubt that with God's presence goes the life force that He brings with Him. The Israelites will suffer without a future and wither away.



**9:13 Ephraim, just as I saw Tyre, planted in a meadow, but Ephraim will lead out his children to the slayer.**

Israel in that imagery of the forefathers was like Tyre in that God planted the nation in a nice place, a pleasant meadow and gave it the perfect conditions to build a civilization. But Ephraim decided instead to lead its children and people to slaughter. Israel has thrown away every good thing that God has done for the nation. They have decided in their passion and haste to completely turn on the Lord. They are leading their children to a futureless death.

**9:14 Give them, Lord—what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and withered breasts.**

AS the prophet prays for the nation, instead of asking God for a blessing, he asks God to make it harder for them because of their sin. Instead of life and fertility, he asks God to give them wombs that miscarry the infants inside of them, causing heartache and barrenness. It is not that the women will be unable to conceive, but that they will be unable to give birth. This plays to the emotions of those of us who understand that life begins at conception.

God is allowing their conceived infants to die in the womb before they see the light of day. It is almost as if the prophet stops himself from asking the Lord to give them a different gift. Along with miscarriages comes the withered breasts that have no milk to give a sucking infant. Even if the babies were to survive the birth, the mothers would have no nutrition to offer them to make them strong and healthy. Taking away birthing options is a quick route to destroying a nation.

**9:15 Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal. Thus there I hated them because of the evil of their deeds. From My house I will drive them out. I will love them no more. All their princes are rebels.**

The term for evil here refers to general wickedness and depravity, the basic word for evil or bad. Gilgal is mentioned for the second time out of three in this book. We don't know exactly why Gilgal is mentioned. It is one of the Benjamite cities and was a place of worship. What specific evils were performed there we cannot be sure. It could be anything from sacrifices to idols on high mountain peaks to a number of other sins.

In the time of Saul, Gilgal is the place where Saul goes ahead and sacrifices animals instead of obeying the Lord, when Samuel is late before battle and Saul is chastised in that famous word from the prophet, "The Lord desires obedience instead of sacrifice." But we do not know what the specific reference is here to the evils done in Gilgal. The whole of the nation was wicked. They did something that made God hate them for their wickedness and depravity. It could be cult prostitution. They did commit that in the high places and the temple.

The temple is mentioned in this verse where God says that He will drive them out from His House. God's House is the temple. That is where the Israelites understood Him to dwell. So they will be kicked out of the temple because they had defiled it through such practices. Perhaps the evils spoken of in Gilgal have to do with ritual or cultic idolatry of some sort. God vows to love the nation no more. He hates the princes because they rebel against Him. There really is no redeeming quality about the nation anymore. Its destruction draws nearer.

**9:16 Ephraim is afflicted with disease; their root is dried up. They bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put to death their beloved children.**

The word most translate as stricken speaks of being given a death blow, a smiting through disease. God has given them the worst of disease that will cause death painfully. Once again we see the idea of dryness or withering, first with the breasts of mothers in verse 14 and now in this verse of their roots or foundations as a nation. The nation is already sick. We have seen that image before in Hosea, especially throughout chapter 7.

Next the prophet describes the nation as bearing no fruit. This specifically speaks not of the fruit that grows on a tree but of the fruit of the womb. They cannot have children, being fruitful and multiplying. So there are the agricultural images of roots and fruit. That is the reason why you see a reference to giving birth. The fruit is that of children, not of food. God has already said that the children that do survive the brutal birthing process will be taken from life before adulthood. The word for children is different here than usual. It is a word that means precious ones or beloved children. It is combined for what is literally two words that say, "what is precious in the belly or womb." These children that are desirable don't come to life because they die in the womb or shortly after being born. The harshest death blow is dealt by God to these people who offer sacrifices to foreign idols of fertility, and yet with every sacrifice, the people become more and more infertile.

**9:17 My God will reject them because they did not listen, and they will become wanderers among the nations.**

Hosea refers to God personally and intimately as "my God." He has walked with God and spoken His message, asking the people, begging the people, to listen, to hear the message. But they have refused and laughed at him and scorned him instead. It is because they reject God's messenger and message that God will reject them. The word for listen is the same word for "hear!" used as a command throughout this prophetic book.

Their punishment is to become a nation of wanderers. It seems the Israelites are always wandering. First through the wilderness before the promised land, and now after giving it up for the delights of their sin, they will wander among the nations again, this time as captives and foreigners. They will be treated as they treated the foreigners who passed through their own land. They will be scattered among the nations rather than be a light to the nations.

## Chapter 10

**10:1 Israel is a luxurious vine, yielding its fruit. As much as he increased, the greater his alters *became*. As his country improved its pillars improved.**

Chapter ten may start a new chapter in the English Bible, but the content still pertains to the judgment of Israel and Judah. It is very much connected with and continues the thought of the last chapter. The break in chapter ten does not come until the end of verse 8, and even then it is not a break in thought but a literary break. So we will continue with the idea of God's judgment in this chapter as well.

We will see many agricultural images throughout chapter ten. We start off with a luxurious vine, a vine that yields fruit with little work. The vine is luxurious in that it is prolific to the point of wasting. It produces much, much more than enough. The problem is not the production of the vine Israel. The problem is the product, the fruit that Israel is producing.

Israel is very careful as it is successful and blessed to make its altars and pillars better, but these altars and pillars are not for the Lord. They are altars and pillars to idols. No matter how much Israel increases, the nation does not turn back to the Lord. Instead the wealth is used to make its idolatrous places nicer and better.

What do you produce in your life? I like to play games like SimCity or Civilization, because you get to build a culture and nurture it and cultivate it. As Israel improved and increased the only thing that got better was not the place of the poor in society or even the nation's spirituality. The only thing they did better was idolatry. What are you becoming prolific in? What do you churn out in productive work? Does it glorify God? May the things we produce give glory to God more than anyone or anything else!

**10:2 Their heart is slippery; now they must incur guilt. He will smash their altars; He will destroy their pillars.**

Hosea describes the nation in strange ways here. He uses the plural pronouns with singular nouns. This is unusual in Hebrew. Usually the pronouns and nouns match. For instance, it would either be "His heart is slippery" or "Their hearts are slippery" but it is "Their heart." This is probably the use of a group or collective. Another interesting literary point to make is the word slippery. It means smooth or slippery, like something you can't quite get your hands on, something that slips out of your grasp. This is an image for deception, because you never know where something slippery will go when it leaves your hands.

The Lord calls for the time to endure the guilt that Israel has stocked up and sown. It is time to reap, as we will see in a couple of verses. Israel's history is becoming ripe and will be complete in just a few short years. God has had enough of their slippery hearts. He will let them slide into destruction. The word for incurring guilt here is one word. It means to carry out their guilt or feed them their result from the guilt they have had.

The way God is going to do this is to show them how empty their idolatry is, how worthless and impractical. These idols they serve will not help them flee God's wrath. And they will know it. The Lord will smash their altars and destroy their pillars. This is probably both literal and figurative, literal in that their cities will be destroyed when He sends Assyria to them, and also figuratively in that before this actually happens, the people already know their idols can't help them.

The words for smash and destroy are intensive. God does not give us an inch when it comes to idolatry. He is a jealous God! He seeks you more than anything and He will utterly lay waste to the things you see as more important than Him. He will chase you. He wants you. The other gods don't want you. They want your worship because it detracts from your true mission to worship the true and living God. What does God need to smash and destroy in your life?

**10:3 For now they will say, "There is no king for us. We do not fear the Lord. So what will a king do for us?"**

The people realize in their judgment that nothing they trusted in before will help them. No human king can go up against the King of Kings! There is nothing that will keep them from God. If they didn't fear God, holding Him in awe and reverence, then there is no hope for them. That is all they were required to do, to fear the Lord. But they had no reverence for God.

Even though there is a king on the throne of northern Israel, it does not truly matter. We experience this in our own politics often. During presidential elections, so many people talk about the president like he or she can change everything in the world, but all the power in our government is not given to a single person. It is distributed among branches.

So one person cannot have the power we suggest that person has. So also, though there were kings for Israel, they were so petty and weak that they would not be able to help the people at all. In fact, those giving tribute were mere puppets anyway. We must not trust in politics or presidents. The only one who can change anything in the world is no politician. He is our Father. He is King over everything, not just one country. Because the people had not feared the Lord, they had no hope of changing what He was going to do to them.

**10:4 They utter words, empty oaths. They cut a covenant, so judgment sprouts like a poisonous plant in the furrows of the field.**

Israel was probably using oaths as they are used in paganism and in idolatry. That's why their words were empty. Oaths are a way of coopting someone else's reputation when it is believed that you are lying about something. That's why people swear upon something else. They know that people don't believe their integrity will speak for itself.

So the Israelites were probably using oaths based on whatever idols they believed in. So these oaths were empty because the other gods had no power. The Israelites would cut a covenant or make a covenant, but it did not matter because they were not people of integrity.

They would not be faithful to their covenants that they made. The word “cut” speaks of making a covenant in the Bible because that is what you literally did, you cut up an animal as part of the covenant making process.

The result of all of their empty words of platitude, their oaths based on false and nonexistent gods, and their covenant cutting got them nowhere except into God’s judgment seat. And that judgment would sprout like a weed, like a poisonous plant. This is one of our agricultural images. Judgment would affect them like a poisonous plant. It would duel out justice to them for their empty oaths and unfaithful covenants.

The Bible teaches extensively on the practice of oath taking. First, one of the Ten Commandments tells us to not swear an oath falsely. The Old Testament law talked about honoring a person’s oath but was pretty strict about oath taking. In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to not swear by certain things, to not coopt the reputation of heaven or God in our oaths. And James tells us to avoid oaths and back up our integral speech with integral actions. It’s better to speak truthfully and be known as a person of truth and integrity than to use oaths. Let your reputation stand on its own.

**10:5 For the calf of Beth-Aven the inhabitants of Samaria tremble, yes, they mourn over it, its people and its priests, who rejoiced in its glory because it has departed from them.**

The calf of Beth-Aven (“house of destruction”) has not been mentioned, but the calf of Samaria was mentioned in chapter nine. As discussed before, Beth-Aven is most likely Hosea’s renaming of Bethel (“house of bread”). Bethel and Samaria, along with a couple of other cities were religious centers for the worshipping of these idols through rituals. There may or may not have been a calf in these cities. If there was, it would have been an idol that was worshipped. If there was not an actual calf, it is the prophet’s allusion to the calf at Mount Sinai, the general idea of breaking the first Commandment through worshipping idols. The calf becomes a metonymy for idolatry.

Apparently these different cities were friends in their idolatry, for the Samaritans are mourning over the calf or idols in Bethel. Apparently, as we will see from this verse flowing to the next, the king was forced to give the material of the idol, or the idol itself, as a tribute to the Assyrian king. The people and priests are mourning for the idol because it is departing from them. It is going away. They worshipped and rejoiced in the idol, but now it is a mere object to be given as a gift in tribute to keep them from all being taken in war.

**10:6 Even the idol itself will be brought to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim will be seized with shame and Israel will be ashamed of his counsel.**

Verse six confirms that the king of northern Israel gives the idol of Bethel to the king of Assyria as tribute. This probably is part of the regular tribute that an empire like Assyria would exact from a nation to keep the peace. Otherwise, the empire would conquer that nation through

war and destroy everything, especially that nation's way of life. It was much more efficient for a culture in distress to pay a tribute. If the idol was made of a precious metal or even wood, which is precious in the Middle East, then it would suffice for tribute.

But because the weak northern Israel king must give up his nation's idol to the Assyrians, this would also be viewed as the spoils of taking over another nation, even if not through battle. That is why Israel is ashamed. The nation sold out its god to keep from being pillaged through war, although that will eventually happen anyway.

To lose one's god was a shameful thing. Remember the story of Dagon and the Ark of the Covenant? When Israel lost the Ark in battle, it was seen as the plunder of the Israelites. Here, it is no different. The king of Assyria didn't have to even get an army to go down there. Israel had no way to defend itself against him so he took what he wanted from them like a playground bully. And the whole world was watching.

The reference "great king" refers to the emperor of Assyria at this time. Once again as in many references, we see Ephraim and Israel standing as synonyms in the poetic pen of Hosea. They mean the same nation, northern Israel. The nation is seized with shame, grasped by shame's hand, if you will, and the shame is that the nation could not even keep its idol.

The word counsel here most like refers to keeping counsel with an idol, asking it about wisdom. Israel has been made fun of by Hosea for doing this already, but now with the idol gone, they have no one to give them counsel. That is plain sad for a nation who could turn to the God of the universe and receive not only counsel but power and freedom from any enemy.

Do we seek the counsel of others or other things before we seek God's counsel? In a world of voices and sources of counsel, whose counsel is most important to you? God's counsel is good because He cannot be taken like an inanimate object, an idol. He is much bigger and greater than that! His counsel is always with us. We need not look to any other source.

But they are out there in many forms, some evil, and some just full of counsel. There are experts and professionals who study a subject or issue deeply and can give counsel, but they're not always there. There are also other forms we would deem as evil counsel, such as eight balls, horoscopes, and even the Chinese fortune cookie is not something you want to count on for good counsel. Where do you go for counsel?

### **10:7 Samaria's king will be destroyed like a twig on the face of the waters.**

This verse has some vagueness to it that we must first sort through. No one is sure of the word for twig in this passage. It is a word that most lexicons do not have a meaning for. The context is not very helpful because a twig is not the only thing that floats on water's surface. The people earlier had postulated that their king was not really a king because he held no power to change events in their favor. Here, that idea must be carried on in a metaphor.

The metaphor of a twig on the face of the waters is interesting in that a twig has no power of its own, it floats and moves with the currents and ripples of the surface of water. This must be what Hosea was saying about the king of Samaria, that he would have little effect on the nations

around Israel because he was the puppet of Assyria. He had no authority to be powerful. Others suggest that there are two ideas here, first that the city of Samaria itself is destroyed and then the king is like a twig on the surface of the waters. Either way you wish to see this statement, there is no hope for Samaria, Israel's capital city, or the king of Israel. The head city and the head leader are pointed out as an example of the whole nation.

**10:8 Then the high places of Aven will be destroyed, the sin of Israel. Thorn and thistle shall climb up on their altars and they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"**

Aven means disaster, trouble, sorrow, harm, wickedness. The high places are those places that the people were sacrificing upon. They were places where the people worshipped their gods in idolatry. There is a word play on Aven (the name Hosea gives to Bethel) and the word for destroyed because they refer to a disaster. Hosea refers to the spiritual adultery of the nation in Bethel as the sin of Israel. God will destroy them for their sin, and He will destroy the place of their sin. This is much like taking away a dangerous object from someone who is about to use it. God removes the place where the people worshipped as one defuses a dangerous situation.

The thorns and thistles mentioned here are covering the altars and high places because they are not being kept up. As the people are worshipping these idols, they are taking care of the grounds and keeping them beautiful, but God will destroy the high places and the people will no longer gather there and they will become untamed wilderness again. The destruction God brings will be unbearable for the people.

This reference to asking the high places like mountains and hills to fall upon them and cover them reminds me of when Jesus speaks of the end times and talks about how people will long to die and have things fall on them to kill them. The people will not escape God's judgment through death. They will suffer it fully. The same at the end of this verse in the original language shows at least a pause or changing of direction.

**10:9 From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel; there you stand. Will the war in Gibeah overtake the sons of disobedience?**

Gibeah is referenced immediately after the samek to start a new section. Different city, but same idea of sins that violate God's holiness and call for their destruction. Gibeah means "hill" and we have just seen a reference to the hills falling on the people. That is the link between the last section and this new section. The days of Gibeah refers to a past sinning that has been perpetuated. Most scholars point to the ending of Judges 19-21 as the sin that is referred to, the brutal sins committed were at Gibeah.

The sinning is blamed on all of Israel. Gibeah is an example of the gross immorality of the people of the nation. And they stand in their gross sins. They stand upon them without running. They are happy with their sin. They stand convicted of their sins, but they are satisfied.

They do not seek to make offerings for them. Then there is a rhetorical question asked about a war in Gibeah.

In the Syro-Ephramite war, the city of Gibeah apparently helped the northern coalition. This would have been the second time in the history of the tribe of Benjamin that they found themselves starting rebellion and civil war among the tribes. That is the question at hand. When will the nation stop tearing itself apart in civil war? When will the unity of worship and life come back to the nation as a whole? That is the meaning of the phrase “sons of disobedience.” Gibeah is just one example of a people who have been rebellious to the core since God made them a nation.

**10:10 When I desire, I will discipline them. Then peoples will be gathered against them, when I bind them for their double guilt.**

Of these three phrases, two start with “when.” These are referring to the same time and same discipline or judgment. God will wait until the proper time to discipline them, as in scatter them among the nations away from their home through the Exile. There is a timetable of grace here that cannot be overlooked. The Psalmist at least once, and the martyrs under the altar in Revelation, asked “How long, O Lord?” We tend to want God to move quicker than He wills. His timing is perfect!

God tells the people through the prophet that when that time does come, and the time of sin has reached its full weight, God will bring His discipline. That discipline will be in the form of the nations around Israel rising up against her. Just as Israel was used against the Canaanite nations during the times of Joshua, now the Lord will use other nations to deal with Israel. God will bind the people for their sins. The word bind here could be taken literally, for the people will be bound as slaves to go to their new places.

The words for “double guilt” here are a bit more enigmatic. We don’t know what two sins or two guilt sins these people have committed. If it is referring to Gibeah, there can be the sins of idolatry and dissent. This may also be a general reference to the nation’s sins of idolatry and injustice. We are not completely sure how to apply this wording, but God will judge the nation for its sins of guilt.

**10:11 Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, but I pulled over her fair neck to be yoked, Ephraim. Judah will plow! Jacob will harrow!**

Once again Hosea returns to agricultural images. He talks of Ephraim like a trained calf, one that from its youth is taught and trained how to thresh grain. But Ephraim’s freedom is taken away as it is yoked by God because of its sin. God yokes both Ephraim and Judah to one another, for they have already been united in their sins. Now they will be forced to suffer the same harvest of judgment.



The Lord loved Ephraim but still had to put the yoke over its neck. Judah is included in this image as the other nation that is yoked to Ephraim. They both will share the work of plowing and of judgment, the hard and arduous judgment ahead. Jacob here is mentioned as the whole of Israel united once again. But the difference is that they are united in judgment rather than a great harvest of blessing.

**10:12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap for your mouths steadfast love! Till your fallow ground! So it is time to seek the Lord, that He may rain righteousness upon you.**

The agricultural images continue in this verse as well as Hosea takes a moment to plead once more with the nation to sow righteousness. The image of sowing and reaping is not unfamiliar to those who know their Bibles. And for it to be applied to righteousness instead of grain or other produce is not ground breaking work by Hosea.

But this popular image is used here as a plea by Hosea to help the people turn back to the Lord. If they would use this moment of grace to begin to please the Lord, it would go a long way in staving off His wrath and discipline. If the people would act rightly, they would receive God's hessed, His steadfast love once again. The prophet commands them to till the fallow ground, that ground that has been ignored by the people. This is a call to do what has not been done in a long time, to act rightly to one another.

Then the prophet refers to the time to seek the Lord. This is another sort of agricultural metaphor in the sense of a season of time, a special season in which whatever is done changes the course of the resulting seasons. Israel has just one last season to change God's wrath. All they must do is plant righteousness. The word for rain can also be translated as teach or instruct. God will instruct the people in righteousness. He will let it flow like rain in their lives again. It's like riding a bike. You never forget how to be righteous, but you don't always have to be righteous.

**10:13 You plowed wickedness, injustice you reaped. You consumed the fruit of deception, because you trusted in your way, in the abundance of your warriors.**

Just as they could have sowed righteousness and reaped God's steadfast love, His covenantal and loyal love, they instead sowed or plowed wickedness. They reaped injustice instead of God's loyal love. These seem to be principles in the Bible that do not fail. If one is to sow righteousness, they reap God's powerful loyal love, but those who seek to do wickedness, who sow evil, they reap the intended results of that evil, which are injustice and more evil.

The people then ate or consumed that resulting injustice and they enjoyed the deceptions and the lies of idols and wickedness. Sin has a hook, a way of getting you to think that it would be pleasurable long-term. But sin is only pleasurable for a short time, just long enough to get you enslaved to it so that you are addicted. That is what has happened with the people here. They

have trusted in their own way rather than the Lord's way. They have trusted in warriors and military strength instead of the Lord's power.

They have thus deceived themselves and will be found without an offense in the coming war. The nation will quickly fold its lands and possessions to the enemies of the north, to the Assyrians. It will all fall like a deck of cards because human warriors are not what is needed. They needed the divine warrior! We tend to do the same thing, though. We trust in ourselves and rely only on ourselves when our best option is to cry out to God and to ask Him to win the battles of our lives for us. How long will we wait to call on the name of the Lord? We have to know that our own resources are not enough to win! Be careful of the deception that you alone can handle the battle. Rugged individualism is a great way to die on the battlefield alone.

**10:14 Thus the uproar will rise among your people and all your fortresses will be devastated, as Shalman devastated Beth-Arbel on the day of battle, mothers shattered with their children.**

The last two verses sum up the results of Israel's choices through this time of grace. Instead of choosing the Lord and returning to Him, they have chosen their own path, and it will lead to destruction. The destruction will be tragic and epic all at the same time. The people will react in a noise like nothing else, an uproar that will accelerate beyond an ability to comprehend with one's ears. The fortified cities and fortresses, the warriors, and all the military assets the people looked to as their resources and security will come crumbling down to the ground. They will be left only with the pain of defeat and devastation.

Hosea likens this experience they are going to have soon to another devastation in the past. We don't know exactly who this Shalman is. Some have suggested that it is Shalmaneser V, a king of Assyria, but this is unlikely because there is little historical precedent for such a battle in which the treachery extended to mothers in pieces beside their children. It might be a king that paid tribute to Assyria, and as an Assyrian ally saw fit to ruin this city, Beth Arbela, which many would say is the city Arbela, because Israel vacillated between its masters. Either way, the day of this battle is still fresh in the minds of the people listening.

**10:15 Thus it will be done to you, Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel will be utterly destroyed.**

That same fate awaits those who have trusted in all other resources except the Lord. They will fall by the wayside and they will reap the destruction of their wickedness and choices to serve idols. Their idols and their warriors cannot save them. The power is given to their enemies. Bethel is only one of the cities, it's name meaning "House of God." It may speak to the whole nation as God's people. Even their king will not make it past the dawn of that day. It will be destruction like never before in their history, total annihilation of their nation as they know it.

## Chapter 11

### **11:1 When Israel was a boy, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.**

In chapter 11, we get a very different image from the agricultural images God used in chapter 10. Here, we see the image of a boy growing up with God as his parent. We will see in the verbs used and the images used that God is the parent seeking the very best for the wayward child, the strong-willed child.

Chapter 11 begins with the image itself of a young boy just starting out on life. This is not an infant, but a child who is quickly learning, yet still relying upon his parents. God speaks of the nation in its childlike and infantile state while in Egypt. Even when Israel was on its own and suffering in Egypt, God says that He loved Israel.

A parent should do anything a parent does out of a love for a child. Sometimes, there is discipline which shows that love, helping the child to avoid a life full of mistakes and hurts. Other times, love is in giving the child the desire of his heart. God loved the nation of Israel enough to provide for it, to free it, and to continually guide the nation despite the temper tantrums in the wilderness. God says that He called Israel out of Egypt.

Hosea tells the story of the Exodus with poetic terms and images. He talks about the small and young nation as a child growing up. God is the loving parent that brings them out of Egypt by His power, not theirs. He is the parent who protects and provides for them in the wilderness. But that is not all that is important in this verse. Hosea 11:1 is quoted by Matthew 2:15 in which Jesus is taken by His parents to Egypt for safety so Herod cannot kill him and then Joseph is told in a dream to return home. The Messianic reference here is quoted by Matthew to liken Jesus' growing up to Israel's with one exception: Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds.

The other image that is important here is to remind ourselves what Egypt was. Egypt was the place of slavery for the young nation. It was in Egypt that the people suffered the treachery of the Egyptians and their Pharaoh through unpaid and forced labor. Egypt is many times used as the image of slavery in the Bible.

One thinks of some of Paul's correlations to the heir or son and slavery. The slave cannot be an heir, but the son is by nature an heir. Israel went from slavery to inheritance. What are you enslaved to today? You need an Exodus experience in which God by His own power brings you into His freedom so you can know your worth is not measured as a slave, but as a child of God.

### **11:2 The more I called to them, the more they ran away from my face. To the Baals they sacrificed, and to idols they burned offerings.**

Not only do we see a child that is caught up in slavery and a loving God who rescues the child, but we then see Israel as a child in the wilderness, a strong-willed child that seeks his own path apart from God, a child that wants more than anything independence and to try new things. God says like a parent whose children refuse their wishes that the more He called out to Israel

and tried to parent them into positive situations, the more the nation sought out the dangerous and deadly things of the world around them.

They would not hear the words of their parent. They did their own thing. The literal here says the more they ran away from My face. The word face can also refer to God's presence. God is chasing them, seeking them out, an image that resounds in this book usually with God being a lover that seeks out the prostituted wife. The people turned away from God, ran away from the one who had brought them out of slavery and given them an identity as a nation.

Instead, they turned to the Baals. Baals is a plural form here to show us that there were more than one Baal. Baal is often thought of as one idol, but there were several Baals. The word Baal in Hebrew means "master, sir, lord." One Baal controlled the weather. He was the god of the skies in the weather sense. Idols then are listed as well as another group that the nation ran after away from God. Idols here can refer to nonspecific gods and even the notion of making or building an idol. The nation sacrificed and burnt offerings to these false deities. They treated them like they would treat God Almighty.

**11:3 Yet I Myself taught Ephraim to walk. I took him up by his arms. Even then they did not know that I healed them.**

Despite Israel's whoring after or chasing after other gods that weren't really gods, the Lord comments that despite their desire to appease these idols, He was the parent, the caregiver, the one who cared for them. These idols did not hear the people in Egypt or bring them out in a glorious exodus. In fact, all of the plagues were designed to show the Egyptians and their false gods that Israel's God is the only God.

God is the one who was their source for learning and for life. He was their foundation and it is only by His hand that they got out of Egypt or were blessed in any way. He was the one who showed them how to be a nation, who helped in their development. He was the one to bend down and take them up in His arms when they were injured. This is the image of a parent picking up a child that needs them.

Not only was God their caregiver, but He is the one who healed them. These idols could do nothing, but God healed them of diseases and provided for them in the desert and in the promised land. The word here is the same word used when God takes the proper name YHWH Rapha, God your Healer. He was able to keep them from death by healing their wounds. But now they turn to someone else as if these new gods can replace the true God.

**11:4 With leather cords I pulled them. With bands of love, and I came to them as one who raises the yoke from their jaws, and I bent down to feed them.**

The translation of this verse you might find fairly different in other English versions. The word I translate is leather, not anything else. I don't know why they would choose to so dynamically translate an obvious one-on-one correlation. I think, to their credit, they are

attempting to show God's great care in leading his people up out of Egypt. But the word does not say kindness.

The verb here can be translated lead. It is the word for pulling or dragging or carrying off. This is what God did in the wilderness experience, he led by pulling the people along. In the wilderness, the people followed God around. He would come as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The Tabernacle was a temporary tent that could be packed up and moved so that the people might follow God.

The next word, bands, has the same semantic meaning as cords but is a different word, which can be translated as branches or bands or ropes or cords. The two words fit into the same semantic idea and are synonyms. This second time the cords of leather are now explained more as bands of love. This is where most translators get the idea for kindness from the first word that was leather.

God further describes Himself as a loving and caring God as one who released the yoke of oppression from their necks. The yoke would probably have fit around the neck snug against the jawbone. That is why the word for jaw or chin is used here. If a head was down, the jaw would most likely butt up against the wooden yoke. The raising of the yoke signifies the release from slavery, the setting free of captives of Egypt.

The people had to learn how to be a free people in the desert. All that generation, and roughly 400 years of generations before them, knew was how to act as a slave, not a free nation. God taught them all of these things. And now they are using His blessed gifts against Him in search of another way. Finally God reminds the people that He was the one who bent down out of heaven and came to their aid and fed them in the wilderness. He provided manna. And when they complained, He provided quail! He has always been the loving parent of this nation as it has matured.

### **11:5 He will not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria will be his king because he refuses to repent.**

Hosea prophesies here that Israel will not go to Egypt. Earlier in the book, Hosea pressed the issue that Israel would go to the house of Egypt. There he was not referring to the physical nation of Egypt but to what Egypt stood for in Israel's history, a place of absolute slavery. So he was not saying that Israel would go to Egypt literally, that Egypt would be the nation to take Israel but that Israel would be in another state of slavery just as they had come out of slavery in Egypt.

Israel, however, is not off the hook. It's great sins and many sins against the Lord will not go unpunished. Israel may not end up in Egypt, but they will end up in Assyria. God will still send the Assyrians down on their heads. The Assyrians were historically more brutal in their battle tactics and more barbaric to their spoils. The prophet declares that Israel will have a new king, the king of Assyria, not the Pharaoh of Egypt. The reason for going to the Assyrians is

Israel's continued rebellion. Even when we would ask God for forgiveness for sin, there are some consequences that He may not take away. And this nation refuses to repent at all.

**11:6 The sword will rage against his cities, and put an end to his diviners, and it will consume their advisers.**

Some of the words in this verse are hard to translate and interpret. There is quite a wide range of interpretation and even translation on this verse. The word for rage is dance or twirl, to spin around. But most versions put rage because it is a dance of violence when the sword is doing the dancing. The cities of Israel will fall to the raging swords of the Assyrians.

The next part is translated differently by many versions as well. They translate it as consuming the gates of the cities, but the Hebrew literally says, "Put an end to his diviners." The word for diviners is not a word used for gates or any part of a city. It is the word for the person who tries to figure out or speak for or get the gods to do something. It is a diviner, not a gate. My guess is that since the first part of this verse talks about destroying the cities, most translators take this word to be wrong and change it, but the next phrase goes with it.

Along with putting an end to the diviners, in which the verb is a verb of finishing or completing and not consuming, the next phrase also is taken to speak of the counselors of Israel, the idols. That is why I have kept the original meaning in my translation for the middle phrase. The cities will fall. Then their diviners and the people who have the profession of divining or figuring out the idols will be stopped. And then the advisers and counselors, those idols that give counsel to the nation of Israel, will be consumed. This is better than taking the middle section as another point about the cities when there is no support for the word diviners meaning gates.

**11:7 So My people are hung up on falling away from Me. Although to the Most High they call together, I will not raise them up.**

God comes to the conclusion that His people no longer want to make this relationship work. This is not about the covenant, but about God's intimate relationship with Israel. The intimacy of their relationship is seen in the kind way He refers to them as "My people." This is a common way for God to refer to the people He has loved and chosen as a nation in the Old Testament.

But God says about them that they no longer feel about Him as He does them. This is very much like the relationship of Hosea and Gomer. Gomer was bent on finding other lovers instead of staying with her husband. He could not change her feelings or her actions no matter how much he still loved her deeply. So God sees that His beloved people have decided against Him and He cannot change their hearts toward Him. The word for "hung up" is by many versions translated "bent on" and it has the idea of being stuck on an idea, being stubborn and not going back on a decision. The people have been stuck on the idea of apostasy against the Lord their God.

The word “falling away” is the word for apostasy. It has a direct correlation in the New Testament as well and stands against the idea that you cannot fall away from God once you intimately know Him in relationship. There are some theologies that say you cannot fall away from God or you would never have truly been saved or been in relationship with Him. They profess that God’s grace is too great to walk away from. But this theology does not take at least two points into consideration that show up here.

First, the human heart is deceptive even to its owner and humans are incredibly depraved and stubborn. Humans want what they want and they will leave an absolutely astounding lover with all of the goods, so to speak, for a fling. That is what Israel has done here as Gomer, Hosea’s wife, continually did through their marriage. The second point is that this is only one example of the very word for apostasy being used of the people of God. Israel was in a covenant with God and still fell away. In Hebrews 6:4, the writer of Hebrews brings a similar situation of believers who fall away. Apostasy can biblically happen among believers. It is proven in several examples of Scripture. Even though God is gracious and perfectly lovely, humans have the free will and do turn away from Him after an intimate relationship and the benefits of that relationship have been enjoyed by the one who falls away.

Also seen in this passage is God’s response to the hard-core apostasy of Israel. He says even if they would call to the Most High, which is one of God’s names in the Old Testament and is representative of the Most Holy Place in the temple, God would not answer them because they have chosen to leave the benefits of His intimate presence.

Remember, this is not dealing with the covenant God made with their forefathers, but the relationship that God has with them as a people in the nation of northern Israel. That is what God is rejecting. The covenant is still in effect. One might also notice that the people call out to the Most High and God will not raise them up. Raise up and Most High speak of a place God dwells where His people are now forbidden to journey to. His presence is gone from the people, but that is exactly what they wanted when they fell away!

**11:8 How can I surrender you, Ephraim? How can I deliver you up, Israel? How can I surrender you like Admah? How can I lay you down like Zeboiim? My heart overturns within Me. All my compassions grow warm.**

Although the people of Israel have rejected God and fallen away, He is not done loving them completely. He cries out in anguish because the people have so easily and swiftly cut Him off in relationship. He does not want to surrender Israel to Assyria, to give up His great love to their enemies. But hard and tough love and discipline seem to be His only choice left, much like when Hosea locked up his wife so she would not go whoring herself on street corners.

The names Ephraim and Israel refer to the same nation in Northern Israel. They are synonymous with Israel. To surrender and deliver up Israel on a silver platter to the Assyrians would be the worst kind of discipline that they could endure, and that is exactly what will

happen. God will give them up to Assyria. They are His people. God does not have any of His possessions stolen from Him. He can, however, give them up, at least for a time.

The cities of Admah and Zeboiim may be unfamiliar to us at first, but they are part of a coalition of other cities we would recognize from the Pentateuch. Admah and Zeboiim are traditionally associated with the same destruction that flowed to Sodom and Gomorrah. They were part of a coalition of five wicked cities that lost a battle to four other cities in Genesis 14. The story is recorded there and these two cities are mentioned, and then attested to in Deuteronomy 29:23.

In that historical event, God overthrew and destroyed the cities because of their grave wickedness. Hosea's reference to Israel being as wicked as Sodom and Gomorrah is not the first nor the last biblical reference equating Israel with Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus does the same thing in His woes section in the Gospels. God is conflicted between His love for His people and the discipline they must bear. Yet their sin warrants such a statement by God. He is torn between His compassion for His beloved people and the judgments that must be weighed out to them.

God literally describes this tearing of His affections by saying that He's got heartache over the situation, that His heart overturns like a stomach overturns with bad food. He is having much indigestion over the matter at hand. His compassions, unusually a plural form of the noun here, grow warm or is a term that speaks of emotional upheaval on several fronts, from anger burning hot to the agitation that comes in making hard choices, the tenderness of a heart versus the anger of the heart. These are not terms of justice and law, but terms of love and relationship, the key difference between Hosea's message and the other messages throughout the prophets. It is as if we are getting the emotional thoughts of two people in a courtroom.

**11:9 I will not execute My burning anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.**

Verses 9-11 seem to speak of God's promises and the results after the Exile and return, that He will no longer do what He has to do here to discipline them so harshly. The callous heart of Israel leaves Him no other course of action. The word return in the second sentence of this verse speaks of turning again or turning the same discipline again. The Exile or scattering of the Israelites even today can be seen. The largest concentration of Jews is in New York, not in Israel.

God says that He will not fully carry out His burning wrath against them in complete and final judgment. The book of Hosea looks upon the Exile as a disciplinary measure, not a final judgment, of the nation. Their dispersal from the land and loss of their territory through war with a greater enemy will shame them enough to drive the point God is making about sin and idolatry home for the Israelites. The literal image here is of God's anger being so red hot and great that His nostrils are flaring.

Because of God's past relationship with Israel as their holy God, He will not bring again His full vengeance upon them and completely annihilate the nation of Israel. He will take them out of the land, which will be discipline enough. The land will still be there to return to after the



Exile. God could have made it impossible to return in His anger, but He relented from that scorching final judgment. A normal human response would indeed destroy Israel in flaming anger, but God can control Himself much better than a man could.

**11:10 They will walk after the Lord. Like a lion He will roar. When He roars, His children will come trembling from the west.**

Here the Lord focuses on the return to the land, a time when once again He is their God and they are His people. This is a time where the people will live out the Lord's desires and laws once again. The word "walk" here speaks to that very image, of living and walking the road of life with God. He compares Himself to a lion that roars over the land and the people are now intimately referred to as God's children once again, not because He does not see them as His children in the Exile, but because they once again want to be His children.

The children will come trembling from the West back to their homeland. They will follow God and will live in the fear of the Lord once again, like the fear of the Lord they exhibited at Mt. Sinai and throughout their early history in the land. The people will be restored after the time of discipline.

**11:11 They will come trembling like a bird from Egypt and like a dove from the land of Assyria. Then I will dwell with them in their homes, declares the Lord.**

The word trembling links the images from verse 10 to 11. As the people come back from the places to which they are scattered, they are seen as a bird returning from Egypt, like a dove from Assyria. The imagery here is both literal and figurative. The references to the birds are figurative, speaking of the authority of God as He is the Lion who roars, and the birds cannot ignore His roaring. They return to Him in their own land.

Another figurative image we see for the second or third time in this passage is the image of a dove going up from Egypt, the image of a second Exodus from the Exile back to the land. Just like when God rescued the people from the slavery of Egypt and brought them into the promised land, so they will return to the land by similar God-ordained and miraculous circumstances. But it is also literal in that people will return from the land of Assyria. We know also that Judah will return from the Persian Empire after being taken by the Babylonians and then transferred through their downfall to the Medes and Persians. The bird might also be a symbol of freedom here as well because a bird can fly in the sky wherever it wills.

Finally in these promises is a promise that God's presence will be with His people once again and His presence will return to the place in the land where they make their homes. He will once again dwell with them and be among them. The word for house has not just been used to speak of the homes of the people individually, but of the houses of Israel and Judah as well. God will once again be their God and they will be His people. This is guaranteed with the authority

that comes in the prophetic formula “declares the Lord.” This formula puts God’s authority behind the promises being made to His people through the prophet.

A samek ends this section in Hebrew, showing the next of several times the English version does not line up with the sections in this book. What comes next may be seen as a conclusion to the English reader while it is actually the start of the next section of the prophet’s message. We should take it as such. The chapter break in this case is in the wrong place in English.

**11:12 (H 12:1) Ephraim has surrounded Me with deception, and the house of Israel with fraud. But Judah is still roaming freely with God, and being faithful to the Holy One.**

The next section starts here after the samek. This statement is a return from the promise of God’s returned presence and blessing among the people to how the nation has so let God go and it is too late to relent from their discipline. The words for deception and fraud are synonyms, as well as the names Israel and Ephraim, as we see often in the prophets. The people of Israel do not deal with the Lord in kindness or even as an acquaintance. They treat Him like dirt and deceive Him, saying they love Him and turning to other gods.

However, Judah still has time. Judah is not as far along in their sin as their northern brothers. Judah will see more years before it is destroyed as a nation. Judah is described as roaming free with God, as being in His good graces for a time yet. They have remained faithful, although they are being influenced by the idolatry of Israel and may be beginning to flirt with idolatry. Yet the Lord sees they are still close to Him. I hope that the Lord never has to evaluate the intentions and affections of my own heart, and I hope that you are in the same boat with me. Let us not give Him reason to think that we may not love Him more than we did yesterday!

## Chapter 12

### **12:1 (H 12:2) Ephraim feeds on wind and pursues the east all day. Deceptions and violence they multiply. A covenant with Assyria they cut, and oil to Egypt he carries.**

A comparison of Ephraim and Judah seem to be at hand here in the twelfth chapter of Hosea. The prophet seems to be comparing the two brothers in their dealings with the Lord. Verse one of this chapter is actually the final verse of the English chapter 11. The comparison starts in that verse and is continued through this section.

The nation of Israel will eat up anything that is worthless and empty. That's what it means to feed on the wind. This image of wind is used throughout the judgment sections on Ephraim in Hosea. Wind speaks of the vanity and emptiness of idolatry, because idols don't exist. They are like puffs of air. Only God is real. Israel is located in the west of a map of the Near East. When Hosea comments that Ephraim pursues the west, it means that Israel wants to become like the empires and nations around it that are not godly. They follow their neighbors not only into idolatry but into all sorts of wickedness.

The word for deceptions could also be translated "lies." They are liars and violent people. They make in greater numbers their lies because one lie must be compounded upon other lies to be maintained. America is not far from resembling Israel in its last days as a nation. We also are a nation of lies and violence. We love violence and worship it. It is in every bestselling novel and movie. These entertain and intrigue us as a nation, both lies and violence, when we should be fleeing from evils of all sorts instead of being entertained by them. What you watch and are entertained by is a glimpse into your heart and soul, what you're like or willing to put up with on the inside.

The nation of Israel is making deals with the empires it fears. Israel is squeezed in the middle geographically between Assyria in the north and Egypt in the south, and it is the quickest route between these warring factions. So Israel is making deals to save its skin. In the north, it makes covenants and deals with the nation of Assyria and it sends gifts or tribute of oil to the southern Egypt empire. All of this is intended to keep Israel from being overrun by either of these strong empires. Instead of relying on God, the nation has turned to its own fleeting resources of products and diplomacy.

### **12:2 (H 3) And the Lord has a dispute with Judah and He will visit upon Jacob according to his ways, according to his deeds He will return to him.**

Verses 2-7 seem to turn attention on Judah as a last-ditch effort to win the nation back over to God before they slip into the same self-defeating sins as their northern brother Ephraim. Here the references to Judah and Jacob speak to the southern kingdom. Just as in earlier times when prophets like Micah would raise a dispute with Israel, a court hearing, a legal proceeding, so now God raises with Judah.

This word for dispute means to have a legal case against someone. The verb for visit is usually translated punish because it usually contains negative connotations in the prophets especially. There are positive connotations, like when Jesus visited the world of sin to bring salvation and reconciliation. God visits the sins of Jacob upon him, returning to him in punishment what the nation of Judah now enjoys in its sin. Sin is fun for a time, but that promise of gratification does not last long. Then the punishment is much worse than the enjoyment.

God punishes here in a retributive way. He brings the sins of the nation back on the sinners. He gives them what they want to the full so that what in small amounts seemed desirable becomes extremely undesirable when taken to its full measure. It becomes overbearing. That is how God judges in retribution. He gives people all of what they wanted in smaller quantities. God lets them walk themselves into disaster and futility. That is His judgment. We see this not only in the prophets but all throughout the Bible. Moses makes the people eat the stone commandments that he breaks in his anger. When the eschaton starts, God's first few judgments are natural consequences of the waste and sin of the world in the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

#### **12:3 (H 4) In the womb he grabbed his brother's heel, and in his vigor he strove against God.**

As is often the case, Hosea like many other prophets, reminds Judah of its inner nature by recounting its history. He calls the nation of Judah Jacob after the man whose name means "deceiver." Now he points out that in the beginning of the father of the nation of Judah, Jacob, was the one to grab his brother Esau in the womb and keep him from completely emerging from the womb first. Jacob pulled Esau back into the womb. Most of Jacob's life was a life of deception against others for his own safety and advancement. All of this is true of the man Jacob until he met the God of the universe, and then his very name and nature were challenged and questioned by God.

#### **12:4 (H 5) Yes, he struggled with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought His favor at Bethel. He found it, and there God spoke with him.**

The prophet recounts how Jacob, representative of the current nation of Judah in its deceptions with other nations, was a deceiver until he strove with God and struggled with the angel. This story can be found in Genesis 32:22-32. The angel reminds Jacob of who he is, his character which is wrapped up in his name Jacob, meaning "heel grabber" or "deceiver."

Jacob, however, challenged the angel in the wrestling match and kept the angel all night through the battle and demanded a blessing before the angel could leave. This is what it means for Jacob to prevail. The angel blesses him after changing his name from "deceiver" to "he struggles with God" the name Israel.

Even in the prophet Hosea's day, Israel struggles with God. Jacob sought God's favor in this place of struggling and called the place Bethel, meaning "House of God." He gained a hearing with God in that place because He struggled to be blessed for who he could be rather than the deceiver who stole the blessing from Esau. He was given it without stealing it in Bethel.

**12:5 (H 6) And the Lord, the God of Hosts, the Lord is His memorial name.**

Verse five concludes the story of Jacob and his past and warns Judah, the nation that still has the opportunity to return to the Lord before their demise. For Israel, it is too late. God is coming for them. But Judah still has time to change. Hosea finishes the story of Jacob by showing that Jacob gained much in Bethel, even knowing God's character and name, that He is the covenantal God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac, and that He is the Lord of Hosts, that He controls the armies of the earth, and that this name of the Lord will always be known and memorialized. God does not change.

**12:6 (H 7) Now you, by your God, keep steadfast love and justice, and wait for your God continually.**

This verse is still a direct point to Judah. If they acted now, their best actions are given as commands by Hosea to the nation of Judah before it's too late for them as well. It's as if the captain of a sinking ship is warning the ships following it. He swears them into action by invoking God's authority and demands that Judah begin once again to keep or enforce the steadfast love of God, the loyal covenantal love. This is the word *hesed*, which is a very important kind of love that God reserved for the nation of Israel, out of which came the promises in the covenant He made with them.

The prophet also calls Judah to justice because they are waning in their judgments and in their ability to please the Lord as a nation. Justice is different in the Bible than what it's currently being defined to mean. Today the word justice, often specified as "social justice" by most of its users means that each human being should be equal in salary and possessions to the others, so that the rich are not rich and the poor are not poor. But that is not what God means by justice. He means making the right judgment no matter whom it may affect.

Finally, the prophet calls the nation to expectantly wait upon the Lord, to seek Him continually. The word "wait" here refers to an expectant waiting, an active expectation for God to show up and do great things. These three things Hosea calls the nation of Judah to do so that they can restore what they also have lost with the Lord.

**12:7 (H 8) A merchant in whose hands are false scales He loves to exploit.**

Merchant literally means Canannite here, and some commentators point to a shifty or sly Canaanite merchant. Hosea is still speaking to Judah here and might be clarifying in a business

sense what it means to be just. The saddest part about this is that the prophet must define justice for them. They have fallen so far that they don't even remember what it is to have just scales.

False scales or balances speak to a very practical issue. Even today merchants use scales when measuring a product by weight, like when you buy fruit in a grocery store. In biblical times, the merchants would take a stone and weigh it to an official weight used by all merchants. But then they would either mislabel a rock that looked to be that weight or even cut parts of the measuring rocks so that they were lighter, and in so doing shift the actual weight to get more money for less product.

The message of this verse is that God returns on the merchant the false scales and the shifty business practices that he uses. Many English versions are kind here with how God is described. It says that God loves to oppress the shifty merchant who is unjust. But the literal word here carries the connotation of exploiting the shifty merchants! God loves to return upon their heads the same injustices.

He loves to violate the violators and extort the extortionists. That is the connotation of this, that God becomes unjust in the same way an unjust person is to others. When a person takes the moral or ethical gloves off of their own industry, God takes off His own ethical gloves and judges them in the way they violate others. He returns the perfect judgment, putting them in the shoes of their victims. If you've ever seen the TV series "The Pretender," where Jarod, a genius who can do any job he learns about, seeks justice by putting the perpetrator in the victim's shoes so they know the same feelings and hopelessness, that is much like what God is pictured doing here.

**12:8 (H 9) Now Ephraim says, "Ah, but I am rich! I have found wealth for myself. In all my labors, He will not find in me iniquity or sin."**

The argument returns from the short point to Judah back onto the nation at hand, the Israelites. They are indignant toward the Lord, proclaiming the works of their own hands rather than admiring the works of His. They call out in a taunt. The word ah presents a manner of pride or arrogance. Israel does not see its own spiritual bankruptcy. It only sees the blessing, and does not even give the credit for that blessing to God.

The idea Israel gives is that the nation has made its own wealth by its own intellect and strength. But that simply is not true. The Lord made Israel wealthy because of their faithfulness, and now the Lord will take that wealth away from them to shame and discipline them. This reminds me of earlier in chapters one through three where Gomer believed that it was because these false lovers actually loved her as her husband did and received gifts of land and clothing. The nation does not realize who its Provider is, and has placed itself in God's position. That is only the beginning of the fault, the sin and iniquity that God will find in her.

**12:9 (H 10) I have been the Lord your God since Egypt! I will again make you dwell in tents as in the days of the place of meeting.**

God responds to Israel's claim that it is self-sufficient by way of exclamation, pointing out that He has been their God since the birth of the nation. In fact it is because of His goodness that they even became a nation. He brought them out of slavery in Egypt. He made something of them when they were common slaves. He rescued them from the house of their slavery. Every time they groaned in the wilderness, He answered their cries.

God decides that a good dose of nostalgia might remind His people of their place in His plan. Going back to tents and the nomadic lifestyle of the wilderness may dredge up some memories. At least in the wilderness, the people only lived on every whim of God. They relied upon Him even for their morning food in manna. Now they think their own hands have worked these blessings. The reference of tents and the place of meeting might refer to the Tent of Meeting in which Moses talked face to face with God. That was in the wilderness, the most obvious reference here by the prophet.

**12:10 (H 11) Then I spoke to the prophets; yes, I multiplied visions, and through the hand of the prophets I spoke in parables.**

After the image of God being their God in the wilderness, He begins to mention how they treated Him when they were given the promised land of Canaan. The prophetic office came before the kingly office. Indeed, it was under Samuel's watch that the people begged for a king. The prophets seemed to always be around in Israel, although that cannot be completely certain. The office was so well established that there were schools of the prophets, much like we would have guilds for like-minded and skilled workers.

God gave these prophets visions of Himself and words to speak to the people. The prophetic office was always one of bringing the people to the issues of sin in their lives that kept them from God's presence in their land. They always spoke to their nation and society, to cultural issues that did not please God. Sometimes God used the prophets as foreseers of what might come, but even without predictions of the future, the prophets were a stopgap measure so that the people would return to the Lord. But the people as much as they ignored God's care in the wilderness also did not listen to the prophets He sent.

The word that I have translated "hand" here is usually changed by most versions to "mouth." The Hebrew word here is hand, not mouth, but it does make sense to say mouth in English because God does not speak through hands. At least, that is the argument, but let me explain why I have hand as the original. While it may not make sense in English, the point is made. A parable can be a spoken story or it can be an acted out story, or a concrete image depicting an abstract concept. Such examples require not words but actions. The prophets are notorious for unusual life circumstances that serve as a depiction of God and Israel. Indeed, Hosea has the theme of spiritual prostitution and he married a prostitute! The word for hand can also metaphorically speak of one's power. So the prophets had the power to demonstrate through

several mediums the prophecy of God. And whether it is through words or an image, it still speaks to our hearts.

**12:11 (H 12) If in Gilead there is iniquity, indeed, they will come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls, also their altars are like stone heaps on the furrows of the fields.**

The two cities named here are both Benjamite cities. The prophet might be using them as examples of how the people defy the prophets God sends to them, not listening to their warnings or heeding them at all. Then sin or iniquity is in the camp, the people don't survive. That is the point of this first reference. It is almost the same idea that Gamaliel gave of the early church that if they were of God, then even the religious leaders of Israel could not stop them, but if they were not of God, they would come to nothing. It is the same idea here. Sin only brings emptiness. It cannot deliver on its grandiose claims.

The other city mentioned is Gilgal. It has been mentioned before in this book. But here, the image is of its enthusiastic approach to spirituality that does not produce any relationship with the true God. It is not so hard to become religious and lose our relationship with God. We get caught up in religious rites and duties that we forget why we even do them. All the while Jesus is calling to us to come and sit with Him, to be with Him. The multiplying altars actually served to condemn Gilgal more than help them find God. Altars are made of stones, and to have heaps of stones in the middle of a field meant that you could not plow the field. The altars are hindrances to true spiritual growth, but they were probably built to help in spirituality, just not unto YHWH.

**12:12 (H 13) Then Jacob fled to the pastures of Aram, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he guarded.**

Hosea now returns to the story of Jacob to bring some other points to light. Jacob in his usual deceptive form fled after he stole Esau's birthright and went into Aram to serve Laban in order to get Rachel as his wife. Anyone who knows the story knows that Laban tricked him into 14 years of service instead of 7 and that he had to work for two wives instead of one. Laban made Jacob tend his flocks. That is the word used here for guard, to keep or protect or guard flocks.

So in the pastures of Aram with Laban working for his wives, Jacob will be compared to the nation of Israel now that works but is not satisfied. The key of this verse, and the wordplay that Hosea will flow into his main point in the next verse is that as Jacob kept flocks, the Lord keeps the nation of Israel and has served the nation so that He may call them His bride, His chosen people, but they have refused Him.

**12:13 (H 14) So by a prophet the Lord brought up Israel from Egypt, and by a prophet He guards.**



The idea of the prophet is mentioned in verse 10 and is brought back in this verse. The prophet Hosea refers to in the first line is Moses who guided the people through the Lord's hand up out of Egypt in the great Exodus. He kept the people and shepherded them and took care of their needs with food and shelter, their civic needs by judging the people's quarrels and their spiritual needs by being their mediator with God. He was a prophet in his own right.

In the second line, I believe that Hosea is referring to himself and all of the prophets who have come since Moses that the Lord has sent and the people have rejected. They too have the job of keeping the people and shepherding them and guarding them. But the people have rejected the prophets as they have rejected the Lord. But the Lord just as He used Moses to shepherd the people is still the one shepherding the people through prophets like Hosea.

**12:14 (H 15) Ephraim has provoked with bitterness, so the Lord will abandon his blood upon him, and scorn his Lord will return to him.**

The nation of northern Israel has provoked the Lord and has bitterly rejected His shepherding and His leading. They want to go their own way and find their own path. Because of their rejection of the Lord, He will reject them and will abandon the nation to its own desires. The word for blood signifies the bloodguilt or the guilt that comes from sin. Instead of taking their guilt away, He will let them deal with that guilt.

He will let His scorn rest on the nation and they will suffer without His guidance now and will wish they had not chosen against Him. The Lord is not the one who is neglecting the relationship, but is only making official what the people of the nation already wanted. They abandoned Him for their gods and now He is abandoning them to their own devices because they don't want Him anymore.

May we never come to a place where we ignore God and push Him out of our lives and seek our own way. We need His ever present guidance in our lives. Anything that is good in us is His work. The nation of Israel has become apostate to the Lord and He does not force them to be in a relationship where they have no love for Him. He lets them go and lets them suffer the consequences of life without Him. May it never come to that for us! May we stay close to our Lord and not fall away.

## Chapter 13

### **13:1 When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling. He was raised up in Israel but he became guilty on account of Baal, and he died.**

The Lord now remembers when Israel was strong and when it had a voice among the nations. When Israel spoke, everyone listened with respect and terror, trembling at Israel's words. Israel used to be a world leading nation when it walked with God. But now is not the same, because the nation has turned to lesser gods that do not truly exist. Israel is left without a heritage or a legacy.

Instead, the nation chose a different present and future. It chose rather to be guilty of great sins and suffer the consequences. It no longer is even looked to by other nations. No one seeks Israel's counsel, while at one time Israel was sought far and wide. Although the nation was once raised up among the nations, no one cares about Israel now. Instead, Israel turned away from YHWH to serve the god Baal and its fame has dwindled since. The nation as a reputable nation died.

We must be careful to not harm our legacy with sin. Countless ministers making an inroads into their worlds have fallen prey to sin and their reputation, their platform for speaking God's wisdom and character into the world has diminished. They have become a byword, a joke among unbelievers, and a thorn in the flesh to everyone speaking the truth about God in witness. Let us be careful to not be in their place, no matter how famous we ever become. We must be faithful to God in all things small and great, and everywhere in between.

### **13:2 And now they multiply in sin and they make for themselves cast idols from their silver, idols through their skill, all of them made by craftsmen's work. It is said of them, "Those who offer human sacrifices kiss calves!"**

But their situation now is very different from their awesome past. Now they make idols and they are all tied up in the making of idols. Their industry has turned to using their silver to glorify a god that does not exist. It is all empty and vain. Their sins multiply with the amount of idols they make. Every single idol they make violates the Commandment of God to not make graven images. Their sins are heaped up like useless rocks and they weigh heavily on the Lord's heart.

The idols are being made with their silver and with their skill in forging metal. The people who once were empowered by the Spirit of the Lord to make the glorious tabernacle and temple implements have resulted to using their God-given talents and skills to break God's commandments and heap judgment upon their heads. They are so much more interested in the profit and work of a craftsman, making a fine idol worthy of worship because of its high craftsmanship, that they cannot see the Lord anymore. One might wonder if this is the work of

their hands that has made them rich. We know at least from previous sections that the king thought the idol of Samaria, the calf, worthy of selling off to the Assyrians as tribute. But now what will the people worship if the calf is in Assyria? Poor Samaritans.

The catch phrase that is used of the Samaritans who live in Israel's capital city suggests that there were human sacrifices being given up to these graven images. Some commentators chafe against such an understanding, but Hosea has mentioned sacrificing and human killing associated with idols before in 5:2 (less obvious) and especially 9:13. Many of the human sacrifices in ancient times were child sacrifices. We don't know for sure if this is happening in Israel or not. But one would see the phrase being spoken by others concerning northern Israel as referring to human sacrifices.

One possible other way to translate it to avoid human sacrifices is "Those humans who offer sacrifices kiss calves!" In this possibility, the humans are sacrificing to the idols, but they are in the category of those who also kiss the calves, which if in Samaria, is the chosen image of the idol mentioned before in Hosea's book. Kissing the calves was the image of the devotee of the idol, as one might bow before a king in honor or show adoration, but in this instance, to an object made by other human beings. In this sense, it is ironic that humans would kiss the idols made by other humans. We don't know who would say this about the Samaritans, but it must be other nations or at least those in Judah. Either with human sacrifices or with such deep devotion to an idol, it is sin.

**13:3 Therefore, they will be like the morning mist and like the dew that goes away early, like chaff scattering from the threshing floor and like smoke from a window.**

Because of such blatant sin, the prophet speaks of their demise in this verse. The people have earned their reward as a nation. They will fall like a deck of cards when the wind of an army comes from the east to take them away. The images presented by Hosea show the futility of their fighting back and the vague essence of the people that were once strong when the Lord was with them. They are now weak and are nothing to overtake. The image of a whirlwind was used before throughout Hosea and we will see the image again here.

The first image is of the fog in the morning, or the morning mist. The sun comes out and burns away that mist quickly and it is gone. So too the armies will come and take the nation quickly. The dew is in the same fashion, that it evaporates after condensing on the ground in the late night. But within an hour or less it is gone from the ground in the morning as well. Their demise will be quick and will take little effort on the part of their enemies. They are as deep and grounded as foam and cotton candy.

This first pair of images takes the sun to quickly get rid of the mist and the dew, but the second pair of images will require wind, all elements that the Lord commands, as He will also command the armies that take the people into exile. The first of these images is the chaff, the part separated from the wheat that is useless. It is sometimes burned and sometimes floats away in the

wind. The final of the couplet images is that of smoke coming out of a window that rides on the waves of the wind. The wind controls the direction of these images.

When we so quickly turn against the Lord, from His faithful foundation to the passing sin of our passions, we are becoming like these people. We will be carried off quickly by our sins and they will lead us instead of the Lord leading us. That is why the New Testament talks about being slaves to righteousness instead of to sin. We want to be led by God's Spirit, not by the sin master.

**13:4 I have been the Lord your God from the land of Egypt and no God except Me you have known, and there is no savior besides Me.**

Now God stakes his claim on the nation as their true God. He reminds them in these next couple of verses who He is and has been to them. He reminds them that He has been their Lord and God since the very beginning when they were still slaves in the land of Egypt. When they cried out, they did not cry out to Baal. They cried out to Him!

He takes it one step farther when He reminds them that they knew no other Gods but Him alone. Why now would they turn to foreign gods they do not know? No one else has ever rescued them or saved them from their calamities, but God walked with them at all times since even before His own reference to Egypt. He is the God of their own forefathers the whole way back to Abraham! He has been faithful to them, but they are throwing Him away for the newest and latest new idol. But only He can save them and redeem them!

**13:5 I have known you in the wilderness, the land of drought.**

Not only did God rescue them out of the clutches of Egypt and slavery, but He walked with them in the wilderness when there was nowhere to eat or drink. God supernaturally provided for all of their needs. He even gave them something different when they complained about the very basics of manna. He gave them quail when they craved meat! When they needed water, He provided it from a rock! That is a miracle in itself.

In fact, all of God's provisions for the people in the desert were miracles, but they took every single one of them for granted. The only time the people paid God's miraculous hand any attention is whenever it was perceived by them as dangerous. If He killed them for their insolence, they treated Him as their God, but when He provided their daily need of manna for 40 years in the desert, they expected the miracle to happen everyday.

**13:6 When they grazed, they were surely satisfied and their heart was high; therefore, they forgot Me.**

Their defiance and rebellion in the wilderness is mentioned here as God claims that anytime they had what they wanted they didn't even look to Him at all. When they had food to

eat and their animals grazed in the green pastures, the people lived it up in the height of provision. But instead of blessing God, their hearts became high and prideful and arrogant. When they were doing really well and had no immediate needs, God went to the background of their thoughts. He only came into focus when there was a crisis. They did not worship Him or think of Him until they needed Him. They forgot the Lord.

We must be careful in our daily lives to never forget our Lord! Is God unhappy with us when we only call on Him when we are in desperate need or dire straights? No. He still comes to our rescue! But do we praise Him as much in the good times as the bad? Or do we just roll on like we've made our own fortunes for the day? Everything that is good comes from God, and He deserves our praise no matter what our situation in life. He deserves our attention at every moment of our lives. When the going's good, praise Him. Thank Him. When the going's rough, call out to Him and praise Him for what He's about to do or doing amidst the storm.

### **13:7 So I am to them like a lion, like a leopard beside the road I will lurk.**

Because the people then and now have forgotten the Lord, He will come to them as a lion. Earlier in Hosea, we have seen the Lord as a lion who leads His people back into the promised land after the exile (11:10). But this is more like the image of 5:14 where the Lord is seeking blood. A new creature is mentioned here, a leopard. These two big cats are predators. They seek their meal with vengeance and without mercy. The Lord will wait along the road for the weak nation to approach. He will lurk in the shadows until it's time to pounce on his prey, the nation of Israel.

### **13:8 I will confront them like a bear deprived of her cubs and I will rip open their chest for their heart, and I will devour them there like a lion, as a beast of the field would split them apart.**

The images of danger continue for the nation that has sinned against the Lord. He will be like a bear without her cubs. When you upset a bear by taking its cubs, it will not stop coming after you until they are returned. And even then it might make quick work of you! This same savage response the Israelites will see from the Lord.

He further commits primeval images of death and being split open as food for their Predator in the image of ripping their chests open to eat their hearts. This is not a God who is merciful, but the God who has been provoked to wrath no matter how intimate the relationship once was. The image of the lion comes back, the lion that claws its prey and rips it up so that it may feast on its innards.

Harsh words are used throughout this section in the actions of the Lord. In His anger, you do not want to meet Him along the road. Not only the beasts are horrifically violent in their approach to finding dinner, but the verbs themselves connote a heightened sense of danger and finality. The word confront could be understood as split open or ravage a carcass. The other

verbs stand as intense as well in ripping open a chest and devouring the flesh like a beast and tearing them up or splitting them open. All of these are meant with their full imagined intensity. The Lord will finish them off as a beast of the field. He will not be gentle to this nation that has aroused His full wrath and vengeance. The Lord will bring it, all of it.

In our church culture today I feel we are reticent to speak of the Lord this way, but one of my favorite authors whom I often quote wrote the once-again-popular Chronicles of Narnia series in which the Jesus character, Aslan, is a lion and the beaver says about him that he isn't safe at all, but he is good. Today we have preached God's love so much that we forget that this love includes a jealousy against sin in which God would rather kill us in our sin than let us serve sin. He will vehemently and violently prosecute the sin out of us! He loves us too much to let us continue in our passionate and dangerous sins. Sin leads to death, and He is trying to stop us from killing ourselves by our sins.

### **13:9 He will annihilate you, Israel, because you are against Me, against your Helper!**

The pronoun "he" or "it" probably refers back to the lion or the beast of the field in the last verse, saying that the beast will annihilate Israel in its rage and vengeance. The reason for such red hot and close to the surface rage by the Lord is that they are against Him, that they have turned on their only Helper and Savior. They are the ones who have brought Him to this state, not Himself. God does not wish to be the Lion that destroys, but sin has put Him in that position.

Even when His own chosen people whom He loves dearly commit sins and walk in arrogance, God will respond in kind. Other Scriptures refer to God as our helper. One Psalm that I remember off the top of my head says, "I look to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord." Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and the one who comes along side of us and helps us.

### **13:10 Where is your king now, that he might save you in all your cities? And your rulers of whom you said, "Give me a king and rulers!"?**

The reference to the animal that the Lord will empower to wipe out the Israelites probably refers to the king of Assyria and his historical overtaking of Israel and much of Judah. The Lord now taunts the nation in defiance in the midst of their losing battle with the Assyrians. Not only does the Lord give Israel up to the Assyrians, but He allows the Assyrians to be as brutal as possible and then on top of all that taunts the nation! We do not want to be against the Lord!

The whole taunt asks about their human leadership, first their king and then their civic rulers and princes. The taunt focuses on leadership because they are supposed to be the ones to take care of the country, but they cannot stand up to the Lord's will, and they have helped in lessening the country's stance with the Lord as being positive. Many of the kings set the

religious tone in the land for idolatry rather than worship of the true God. So they are responsible.

The taunt harkens the whole way back to when Israel asked for a human king and the Lord told them they would not always want one. Earlier in Hosea we have seen the people themselves complain that they have no king, as in the king they have does not save them from danger. Now the Lord asks them where their king is. He cannot save them from the Assyrians.

The people's desire for a human king is backfiring on them when the enemy comes with God's authority from the north to lay waste their lands. Their kings have no effect on the situation and the people will go into exile. The Lord wants the point about a human king to stick in their minds and to be remembered. He is in essence saying, "This is where your desire for a human king has taken you, to utter destruction."

### **13:11 I gave you a king in my anger, and I took *him* away in my wrath.**

God did not want the Israelites to become reliant upon their own strength or upon a human king. The best part about the theocracy before the human king, the rule by God, was that there was no human as king, so everyone knew God is king. But now with a human king, the people looked to the human kings instead of to the Lord, and each king could decide for the nation rather than God's definite will being accomplished. The king could or may not represent God's rule in Israel.

So the Lord mentions after mocking their human king that He gave them what they asked for in His anger, a king that would do their bidding and make them look more like the nations around them. The two words for anger and wrath are different words in Hebrew. The first word has the connotation of God's flaring nostrils, a less severe wrath, although severe in its own right.

The second word contains the idea of an uproar, a whirlwind of fury and rage. It is much more intensive than the first type of anger. So God was angry when the Israelites cried out for a king. He was not happy to give them a human king. But when the human kings so utterly failed to glorify God in their God-given roles, God was very pleased in His raging wrath to get rid of them. The section ends here at the end of this verse with a samek in Hebrew which connotes the ending of a paragraph or single theme.

### **13:12 Ephraim is wrapped up in iniquity; his sin is stored up.**

Ephraim as is often recognized speaks of the northern kingdom at its demise. The Lord says about Israel that they are bound up or wrapped up in their iniquity. This word for iniquity speaks to the guilt and punishment of sin and the other word for sin speaks of the violation of God's holiness, the more common word for sin in the Old Testament. The next line speaks of Israel's sin being stored up.

Israel is wrapped up in, completely enveloped or encompassed in the guilt of the sins committed. And as a nation they have stored up their sins like one stores up food for the winter. They have managed in a time of God's grace before wrath not to turn the Lord's anger through righteousness, but instead to sin all the more and store up good reason for God's wrath against them. They have exacerbated the situation instead of relieving it.

**13:13 The pangs of childbirth come for him. He is an inexperienced son because at the appointed time he does not stand ready at the opening of the womb for children.**

Israel is next described by the prophet in a birthing image in which the nation is like a child that does not come out of the womb, a stillborn child. It speaks in graphic terms of when the mother has the pangs of childbirth, the contractions that designate the time of birth and prepares to have the child, the son, and yet the child does not come in the pregnancy. The child is unable to place itself near the exit of the womb.

The words here describe inexperience, literally speaking of a lack of skill or wisdom to "stand ready" at the cervical opening of the womb. The child is not cooperative in the birth process and does not do what is necessary to be born. Today, we have medical miracles that help with births of this sort so that a child is not lost, but in the days of the prophet, if a child had such a problem, it is most likely they would be stillborn babies. The image speaks of a nation that is inexperienced and does not realize what to do in the proper time that God has allotted.

**13:14 Shall I ransom them from the hand of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? Where are your plagues, O death? Where is your sting, O Sheol? Compassion is hidden from My eyes!**

With the image of a stillborn or dead on arrival infant, the Lord asks the rhetorical questions that are charged with His own emotion at the horrid price the Israelites will pay in exile, their own lives. He asks if He should ransom them or buy them out of their place in Sheol. Sheol is the Hebrew word for the afterlife, usually understood as a pit in which both the righteous and the wicked wait for judgment after death. That is the clearest sense of understanding we get from Hebrew culture. They are not fine-tuned on their understanding of the afterlife. But the Lord is asking if they should be released from the full punishment.

Then He asks basically of Himself, as if there is an internal struggle between His feelings of mercy and love for the Israelites and His wrath and anger against them, if He should redeem them from their own deaths. Should He let death have them as part of their judgment? The ideas of ransom and redeem are both economical terms. A ransom contains the idea that you pay in the place of another possibility. So you pay money for a captured person to be set free again. The idea of redeeming is to buy back in most cases a slave. So one is to replace with an equal or asked for treasure and the other is to buy back a treasure.



The next two questions are directed at the images of destruction and judgment, death and Sheol. It is as if the Lord now speaks to those end results as if they were people and asks if even they would be enough of a judgment. Usually we hear these questions in a positive light. Paul asks, quoting from the Old Testament, “Where, death, is your sting?” when he speaks of the victory Christ had in resurrection and the victory we share as believers in 1 Corinthians 15. But here the question is dealing with the severity of God’s disciplined judgment. The people will not be able to come back from death and Sheol.

This is why the Lord says that His compassion is kept from or even hidden from His eyes. He cannot react to such grave and deadly sin with compassion any longer. The time for discipline and judgment has come. He cannot turn to His compassion and allow sin to reign in the nation any longer. It is time for judgment, and a holy God will judge sin in His time. The results of sin are death and Sheol for the sinful nation. There is no recourse. There is no redemption when God pours out His wrath.

**13:15 Though he may be fruitful among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the Lord, will come rising from the wilderness, and his fountain will be ashamed, even his spring will dry up. It shall plunder his treasury of every precious implement.**

The brothers here probably speak of the smaller nations around Israel that are not still doing as well as Israel financially or politically. But the problem is not with Israel’s neighbor nations as much as it is with the empires rising up from the north and the east. What is interesting in this verse is that the east wind is specifically mentioned, from which Babylon comes later for Judah. The north is where Israel’s first exile will come from in Assyria.

That wind is called the wind of the Lord, for the Lord’s authority and power will be behind the enemies of the Israelites as they sweep through the nation like a wind and swiftly lay waste cities and take the Israelites captive. Their swiftness will be partially because the Lord’s wrath is against them. Once again, the wilderness is to the east of Israel, so this prophecy might be combining the exile of the north and the south, and speaking more generally of the nation of God as a whole.

The results will be devastating. Israel will no longer have anything to boast about. Everything that seemed to be an asset will be dried up and destroyed. The fountain of Israel’s wealth will be gone and will bring them much shame with its depletion and destruction. The spring of their life will be dried up and left as dead and useless. Any resource they thought they had will be worthless and dust.

The final sentence refers to that wind of the Lord that sweeps through the nation as an enemy destroyer. It says of that destroyer that it, meaning Assyria and possibly Babylon as general exiling empires, will plunder the Israelites, taking all that is worth anything at all to them or to the enemies. They will seek the treasury of Israel and no longer demand tribute, but simply take all that is worth anything in Israel, the precious metals, the implements of any sort that have value, and anything from the king’s palace, the temple of the Lord.

All of it will be taken as plunder and the nation will indeed be shamed. God will allow it, surrendering His chosen people who desire more than Him these foreign idols. While this verse does not end the chapter in an English Bible, it does end the chapter in Hebrew, although the separating mark of the section is after the first verse of chapter 14 in Hebrew, a rather unusual happening. Usually the English Bible cuts up the text ignoring paragraph and idea sections. So the next verse is the finishing thought to this section.

**13:16 (14:1 H) Samaria will bear guilt because she was obstinate against her God. By the sword they will fall, their infants will be smashed to pieces and their pregnant women will be ripped open.**

This thought indeed finishes the other thought. Is quite strange that the Hebrew Bible divides above this verse. However, it could be seen as the conclusion and transition from the prophecies into the final section of the book, so that it sums up the points against the Israelites, once again pointing out their capital city in metonymy, referring to the whole nation through its capital city. As goes Samaria, so also all of the nation of Israel.

If the verse is seen that way, then it completes the images against Israel and also transitions into the final section, which will speak of Israel's potential after the exile to return to the Lord once again and for the harmony of the world to begin. No matter how you structure it, this verse is indeed a transition and a summation.

Samaria, and in the larger understanding the whole nation of Israel, will be the guilt bearer, the one who is guilty and must offer the sacrifice for guilt, the guilt offering in the temple. The reason for this that Hosea gives is surprisingly not just a sin or trespass, but that Israel had been obstinate against God, a brazen desire to be away from Him.

The punishment for the nation is as it has been throughout the book. They will fall by the sword. They will be wiped out through battle with an enemy and will be taken without a defense. The enemy will take them by force. Not only must they be ashamed through losing in battle their cities and themselves, but their infants will be dashed to pieces. The infants represent at least two points of interest. First of all, the infants are the future of the nation and also they are precious. Their descendants will not even have a chance. Their lives will be cut out prematurely. That is injustice to the core.

But also, their infants were their most precious possession. The mothers would never forget and the fathers would love to return injustice upon their enemies for such a violation of basic humanity. If you thought it was bad enough for the enemy to violate the life of an infant, the prophet takes the next step, going back into the womb and not even allowing the child in the womb to be born. The mothers will be ripped open before the children will even see the world. The future of the nation, that precious future of descendants, will be abruptly aborted for their sin and obstinate nature. These images are some of the most provocative and intensive among the prophets.

## Chapter 14

### **14:1 (14:2 H) Return, O Israel, toward the Lord your God for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.**

If you take this as the continuation of the section starting in the last verse, as in the Hebrew Bible, it is an about-face and abrupt change in pace, in fact, directly opposite. With that image of death and abortion by the hands of their enemies fresh in the listener's imagination, Hosea hones them in on the ultimate gruesome results of their sin, and uses this fresh emotionally charged moment to reintroduce the desire of God that they would turn back to Him.

This word for return is used very often in the prophets, God's collective call for Israel and Judah to get away from their sin and come closer to Him. This is still God's priority message to every single human being in human history and on this planet. He wants us to long for Him and desire Him rather than the fleeting passions of sin. He wants us to come back. Some would see God as one who wants to punish you for your sins, but the God of the Bible asks you to leave them behind and return to Him. He does not take pleasure in crushing you because you sinned, but in embracing you when you stop sinning. He does not hold your past against you, much like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son.

The reason that Israel must return to the Lord is because they had turned away from Him to idols and sins. We have seen from other minor prophets we have already studied that the people on some level were arrogant enough to think that they had done no wrong toward God and need not return from sin. But that is exactly the diagnosis by all of the prophets. One very interesting point of discussion here is that Israel is stumbling because of iniquity. That word stumble will come up in the last verse of the book, speaking of those who transgress and violate God's law. This group is contrasted with those who are innocent and upright. Israel was not what they labeled themselves to be.

If you take this to begin a brand new section despite the Hebrew ordering, as every English Bible does, the final warning and summation of 13:16 simply prepares for the resulting call to returning to the Lord. Either way, verse 16 is seen as a transitional verse in a larger sense for the book rather than one or two sections.

### **14:2 (14:3 H) Take with you words, and return to the Lord and say to Him, "Pardon all iniquity but take the good and we will pay the praise of our lips with bulls."**

"Take with your words" is most likely a Hebrew idiom that means to make speeches that honor the Lord and are true to the reality of their actions. The image is coupled with the praise of their lips at the end of the verse, although the word praise is not there. Hosea gives them some of what would characterize their return to the Lord. They would ask the Lord to pardon them from

sin, to lift up or carry away the burden of the iniquity. The burden of transgressing the Law is death.

Instead, the people should ask that God not only carry away their sins, but also take the good things about them, the positive things. It's almost like burning away the dross and leaving only the good foundations. The people then would pay God with the sacrifices He desired with a heart that was pure toward God. The phrase "praise of our lips with bulls" is very hard to translate without context. The word praise is not in the original but supplied because of the idea of sacrificing bulls with the lips. The image is of lipservice that is genuine and truly pure.

**14:3 (14:4 H) Assyria will not help us. We will not ride on horses nor will we say anymore "Our god" to the work of our hands, so that in you an orphan is shown mercy.**

Assyria is the largest threat to the Israelites. The word help here has the connotation of saving from danger or to deliver by military force. Assyria would not aid Israel if another nation attacked. Indeed, the irony of this statement is that Assyria will be the nation that takes Israel by military force. The image of riding on horses could carry the meaning of having their own military might to resist the enemy or it could refer to the image of help or rescue by placing the people on horses to get them away from danger.

Along with the exile will come a resistance to idolatry like never before in Israel. If there's one thing that seems to change completely in the exile, it is the understanding that God is the only God of Israel. They have little issue with idolatry after the exile. So here, the prophet says that they will no longer call upon false gods and call their own designs and works of their creativity and skill gods. This refers to the idols that may be composed of wooden or metal.

The final statement of the verse speaks of the restoration of Israel when the nation executes its purpose that God had desired through the Law and from the beginning, that the nation would be a safe haven for those who are fatherless, the orphans. They would be given mercy in Israel where they would suffer elsewhere. The word for mercy here is surprisingly to English readers a verb, not a noun. The word is the same for the womb, because mercy speaks of the care of a mother for her child. But instead of it being a noun, it is a verb. It is not a thing, but an action to be done to the orphans.

Unusually in the Hebrew grammar here, the word *asher* is used, which usually describes an object or person. Here it is used to initiate a purpose clause. The meaning of this is that the people must stop their idolatry so that they can care for the orphans. Indeed, we have seen in this book and other prophetic writings how the sin of idolatry has affected the next generations of Israel.

**14:4 14:5 H) I will heal their falling away. I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them.**

Continuing with the revival of Israel and their return to God's favor, the Lord promises to heal the people from falling away. The word here, for the second time, shows up and speaks of apostasy. Let me say again as I did earlier that this word is the technical term for falling from grace, and is used of Israel and all the people of God, who have intimate relationship with Him, and then fall away after being His intimate and chosen people. There are several other examples that this can happen after salvation throughout God's Word as well. Some theologians teach that once a person is truly saved, they cannot turn their back on God.

In former chapters, the desire of Israel to chase the wind of idolatry was characterized as a mortal wound that must be healed. That image is revitalized in this verse, the word for healing being *rapha*, which the Lord also used in the wilderness when He said to Israel, "I am the Lord your Healer." Healing is not just physical, for here it is spiritual healing so that the cancer of idolatry will be wiped out of the nation's spiritual nature.

Next the Lord promises to love the nation freely. Freely is translated as an adverb, but it is a noun in Hebrew, speaking of the voluntary or free will offering. It will be an offering of love the Lord makes toward Israel. The reference to God's anger speaks of a time after the exile, for in about a year from this writing, God's anger will be kindled and Samaria, and then the rest of the northern kingdom, will fall to the Assyrians. But after the exile, God's love will return freely to them and His anger will subside.

We long for moments like these when God's anger subsides and His love flows over us freely. These are moments of healing when we understand God's great jealous love for us. When we don't fall into idolatry, He has no reason to be angry with us. When we love Him, He loves us the same with all of His being and resources. It is much better to enjoy the jealous love of God than to endure the burning anger of God.

**14:5 (14:6 H) I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like a lily and he will strike his roots like *the trees of Lebanon*.**

Earlier in the book, God described Israel's waning worship of Him as like the dew because it was like a mist. It didn't last very long. Now He describes Himself as the dew for Israel in a completely different aspect of dew. While dew only lasts a short time, this is not the image God is portraying. He is saying that He is like the dew to them in that He provides the dew that the plants drink in to blossom and be healthy. He is their sustenance and provision.

The result of God being like dew to Israel is that Israel grows beautiful like a lily and strong. The wording here is interesting in the Hebrew because it speaks of the roots that strike deep into the soul and have a wide base of foundation. God will provide and then be their foundation when they trust in Him again. The city of Lebanon is reknown for its giant and strong cedars in the Old Testament, so the image of that foundational giant cedar is used by referencing the city. The word tree is usually supplied to help the reader understand the well-known fact of the cedars in Lebanon. Once again we have agricultural images of God's care and provision.

**14:6 (14:7 H) His shoots will spread out, and he will be like the olive tree. His beauty and fragrance will be for him like Lebanon.**

Literally, this verse starts out, “His descendants will walk about” but the image can also be given to show continuation of the idea of growth of plants and fruits. So it is usually translated poetically that Israel’s shoots, the new growth, or the children of the people, will spread out or walk about the world. Israel will once again be a formidable place. The nation will be vast and thriving again, like the olive trees that are many in a field. Among the nations Israel will once again be many and will not be cut down as in the exile by the sword.

More than the simple image of Israel being strong and having the structure and foundation to be great is the aesthetic pleasure of the nation for the Lord again. Even the culture and the beauty of God’s people will be restored. It’s one thing to survive as a nation, but it is another to have the culture and society that was once unique to the Jewish people be revitalized and flourishing as well once again. It will be like a beautiful fragrance to the Lord, a sweet smell.

**14:7 (14:8 H) They will return, dwelling in My shadow. They will thrive with grain, and they will blossom like the vine, their remembrance like the wine of Lebanon.**

The people of the nation will return from the exile and once again be the nation of the Lord. They will dwell in His shadow. Now this does not mean what it means to us today. A lot of times when we talk about someone living in another’s shadow, we speak of the anger that person feels for not being able to make their own path, like when a sibling is compared to another when they do the same thing that sibling did. But that is not the meaning here. Dwelling in God’s shadow speaks of His protection and provision once again. He will protect and keep the people against all odds. They will be under His wings and find their rest and peace there. They will not be threatened by others.

The next line tells us that the grain will be restored and probably any crop they plant. The ability to thrive once again will be given to them. The Lord will prosper them in their fields. The nation will experience the providence and provision and prosperity of God once again. The word in Hebrew is live, but I have translated thrive because it fits the context of God’s abundant blessings after the exile. We know historically that it took the people time to once again work the land and get the cities fortified. But their return to the land began the healing of that land. The nation is promised that they will grow strong and will blossom like the vine. They will become a fruitful nation once again.

They will be remembered by the peoples of the earth. Many times throughout human history, when God does what He did with Israel, wiping out a nation, it is not remembered. Nineveh was like that and Sodom and Gomorrah and the other two cities. God tends to wipe out even the remembrance of a thriving civilization when they sin enough for His anger to blast them. But here, God promises that Israel will be a remembrance, a memorial, among the nations.

The people will remember Israel as they remember that famous wine in Lebanon. They will be unforgettable. Indeed, God has recorded in His Word the history of His chosen nation Israel.

A samek in Hebrew ends this prophecy so that the final tag of the whole book of prophecy may be given. The samek is almost like allowing for a postscript in a letter, sort of a finishing of the book that gives the prophet one more opportunity to crystallize his message to the people, something by which to remember all of his prophecies.

**14:8 (14:9 H) Ephraim, what are the idols compared to Me? I answer and watch out for you! I am like a leafy cypress; from Me your fruit is found!**

The first verse of conclusion is a word from the Lord to the people concerning their idolatry. The Lord in as much of an emotional and logical speech asks the nation to consider the benefits of idolatry versus the benefits of knowing Him. He asks the nation once again why they would consider the idols better than Him and His protection and provision. How can the people think anything is better than the Lord?

This question brings to remembrance Hosea's wife who had thought that everything she had for provision and enjoyment came from her lovers when Hosea, her husband, was the one to give all of these things to her. But she couldn't recognize his provision for her. She falsely attributed it to lovers who didn't love her at all but were using her for their own pleasure.

The Lord reminds them of His constant supervision and care for them. He is the one who answers them when they cry out for their needs, from the moment they cried out to Him in Egypt when the work was too great and their slavery was too great, to the moment that they cry out at any time. It is good to know that the Lord answers our cries for help! Think if He would not listen when you needed Him? He listens so intently that He even hears those who don't have a relationship with Him, and then He starts that relationship.

Next He reminds them of His protection, that He's always looking out for them, guarding them among the nations and keeping watch for danger. All of these things are being done for this nation by the Creator of the universe! He who has all knowledge and sees all things is their Watcher. You can't buy better security than that! Beyond this, God is a leafy cypress. This image speaks of the health and wealth and provision that flow from Him. He is a non-stop-shop for provision. And it is infinite provision. He never quits providing and He never runs out of provisions! The idols can't match that at all! He is their source and provision. The quantity and quality of their provision is never in question when God is the source.

**14:9 (14:10 H) Whoever is wise, also let him understand these *things*. Whoever is discerning, also let him perceive them, because straight are the ways of the Lord and the innocent walk in them but transgressors stagger in them.**

The final verse that closes out Hosea reads more like it comes out of Proverbs than a prophetic book. The prophet advises all who hear and read his book to be wise and understand

his words, his communication from the mouth of God. Those who are wise, or skilled in understanding the points of this communication, should seek to understand everything written in his book.

Those who are discerning or have a gift for the skill of understanding, a synonymous group with the first mentioned, should perceive, or know these writings. The word used for perceive is yada, the Hebrew word for intimate experiential knowledge. These would be hard to perceive in the prophet's time because the people are caught up in the whirlwind of idolatry. They are not thinking straight or working with God's principles and laws.

Therefore, the Lord's straight and upright ways would not be easily understood or discerned. So this is a call to anyone who is left and can perceive what the prophet is saying. He lives in the midst of such corruption that this should be viewed as an SOS or a last message to anyone who might still walk in a right and just manner. The people who would get this message would be very few and far between.

Earlier in the chapter, the word stagger or stumble was used to describe guilty Israel in 14:1. Now the words that directly oppose those words are used here, that of the innocent, rather than the guilty, and the transgressors who stagger or stumble in the way of life because they are not following God's ways. Israel is the transgressor, but if there be in Israel anyone who still walks in the way of God, who lives God's principles, let that person understand these prophecies. The prophet is looking for a very small audience in the end of his book.

The word "way" is the Hebrew word for a road or path. The word "walk" speaks of how one lives. So the Lord's road is not traveled by many in this stage of Israel's history, but the prophet still leaves room for anyone who is still upright and godly and innocent among the crooked slithering transgressors. The question is if God will find any not only in their society but also in ours.