

# THE BOOK OF HOSEA

WITH STUDY NOTES

A Preacher's Guide to the Book of Hosea



# **HANDS to the PLOW**

## **MINISTRIES**

**HandsToThePlow.org**

Copyright© 2019 by Hands to the Plow, Inc.

Published by Hands to the Plow, Inc.

P.O. Box 567 • Webster, WI 54893

First printing, 2019

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, or stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher.

From the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# Contributors

**Tom Kelby** - Study Notes

*President, Hands to the Plow Ministries, Webster, WI USA*

**Mark Yaeger** - Design and Printing

*Creative Director, DKY, Inc., Mpls, MN USA*

**Lori Sjoquist** - Production

*Production Manager, DKY, Inc., Mpls, MN USA*

---

Dear Reader,

This Preacher's Guide is intended to help you understand and to use the book of Hosea. While this Preacher's Guide focuses on the book of Hosea, it is intended to help the preacher or teacher read and understand other books in the Bible as well. It certainly will help the reader understand the rest of the "minor prophets" (Hosea-Malachi). This book will also help the reader better understand the "major prophets" (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). Hopefully, by meeting this one prophet, you will better understand all of the prophets, especially Jesus.

But this book will help you understand more than just these particular "prophetic" books. Hosea frequently quotes from the book of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Therefore, the reader of Hosea will better understand Moses's writings after studying this book. The issues described in Hosea accurately portray what people in Israel and Judah believed about God and how they worshiped him and other gods during the time period described in 1 and 2 Kings. Therefore, the reader of Hosea will better understand 1 and

2 Kings after studying this book. Finally, Hosea is quoted in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles. Therefore, understanding this book will help the preacher understand New Testament books and the theology of Jesus and the apostles.

However, the goal of this book isn't, ultimately, just a better understanding of God's word. While understanding God's word is important, understanding, by itself, isn't the end goal of studying a book like Hosea. The end goal is worship. May the study of this book lead you to worship the triune God. Additionally, may the study of this book lead you to love the church more. May it strengthen you so that you might bring strength to many others.

These notes are far from perfect. And there is much more that could have been said about the book of Hosea. My limitations may be seen, I am quite sure, on every page. However, the perfection of God's good word is worthy of our imperfect efforts. This is true in writing, and it is true in study, in preaching, and in teaching. We must seek to understand and to proclaim God's good word and trust that he will give us strong help from heaven. May you find and rejoice in his strong help as you study, worship, obey, and proclaim the truths found in Hosea.

Tom Kelby

December 4, 2018

# How to use this guide

1.

This book contains the text of Hosea. We have divided the book into different sections. Before each section in this study, the reader will find a brief overview of that section.

2.

After the overview, the reader will find the text from Hosea itself. The text of Hosea appears in the **upper portion** of the page.

3.

This book also contains study notes that refer to certain words or verses or sections in the chapter of Hosea being studied. These study notes are located beneath the text of Hosea in the **lower portion** of the page. The study notes are not sermons. They are intended to help the preacher discover the meaning of Hosea.

## Hosea 3

Hosea 3

Hosea 3 brings the reader back to the story of Hosea and his marriage. Something terrible seems to have happened in Hosea's marriage. Hosea's wife no longer lives with him. In fact, she is not even called Hosea's wife in this passage. She is called "a woman who is loved by another man". Thus, Hosea's relationship with Gomer is like Yahweh's relationship with Israel. Hosea's marriage, remember, is a small picture of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. In these verses Yahweh tells Hosea how he is to take his former wife back to himself. He does this because Hosea taking Gomer back is a picture of how Yahweh will take Israel back to himself. It is important that the preacher or teacher does not become too interested in the circumstances of Hosea's relationship with Gomer. The text does not allow the reader to focus too greatly on this, because very few details are given. It is important to keep Hosea and his marriage in the background, because the relationship between Hosea and Gomer is not the main point of this passage. God's relationship with Israel is the main point of this passage. The fact that Yahweh's relationship with Israel is the main point is clear based on verses 4-5.

4.

The study notes in the **lower portion** of the page are numbered. These numbers are red. The red numbers next to each study note are connected to a red number appearing within the text of Hosea in the **upper portion** of the page. The numbers go together.

5.

The study notes sometimes list other passages of scripture. These passages are sometimes from the Old Testament and sometimes from the New Testament. These passages should be carefully examined because they are connected to the passage in Hosea that is being studied.

## Hosea 3

Hosea 3

3:1 And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman<sup>59</sup> who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even though the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."<sup>60</sup> 2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.<sup>61</sup> 3 And he said to her, "You must dwell with me as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."<sup>62</sup> 4 For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar,

<sup>59</sup> The name "Gomer" is not used in this chapter. Gomer's name is not used because this emphasizes her distance from Hosea. That is why she is referred to as "a woman" and not Hosea's "wife" in verse one. Israel is similar to Gomer. She is very distant from Yahweh. Because of her repeated adulteries, Yahweh no longer considers Israel to be his wife. She is "a woman". But Yahweh will, like Hosea, buy her back and give her a name.

<sup>60</sup> In spite of the warnings about idolatry, Israel refused to abandon the worship of other gods. Israel loved the worship of other gods and things involved in the worship of other gods (like, perhaps, cakes of raisins). The reference to rain cakes demonstrates one of the main reasons people commit spiritual adultery: they love the pleasures of the world more than God himself. People will find gods that allow them to satisfy their pleasures. This wasn't just true in Israel in Hosea's day. Ever since Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was "good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6), people have been delighting in the pleasures of the world more than the pleasures of God. One of these co-workers, a man named Demas, deserted Paul and the work of the Lord because he was "more love with this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). The examples of the people of Israel in Hosea's day and Demas in Paul's day serve as reminders of what will happen to every person who loves the world more than God for earthly pleasures.

<sup>61</sup> Hosea is commanded to "love" Gomer again. In order to do this, he is forced to buy her "for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley" (Hosea 3:2). The reader is not told why Hosea needed to buy her. Perhaps, because she had abandoned Hosea, she was now a slave and Hosea needed to buy her from her master. Based on the price Hosea needed to pay for her, it is clear that Gomer was not worth much. No one really wanted her. Hosea himself may not have wanted her, either. He is commanded to "love" Gomer because Yahweh is using Hosea's relationship with Gomer to demonstrate many truths about his relationship with Israel.

<sup>62</sup> When Hosea bought Gomer back, he told her that she could no longer "play the whore". She would live with him, but, for at least some time, even he would have no sexual relations with her (this appears to be the meaning of the phrase "so will I also be to you"). She would be left without any of the things which had brought her satisfaction in the past.

## 20 things to keep in mind when reading Hosea.

**1. Hosea is a prophet.** The main “job” of the prophet is to speak for God as his spokesperson and to act for God as his “hands and feet”. Thus, what the prophet says and what the prophet does are actually what God is saying and what God is doing among the people (see Hosea 6:5). Hosea prophesied around 750 BC. He was a real man who lived in ancient Israel. Therefore, it would be accurate to say, “Hosea **was** a prophet”. However, it would also be accurate to say that Hosea **is** a prophet. Through his writings, Hosea is still speaking to God’s people (see 1 Peter 1:10-12). His words still need to be considered and obeyed.

Jesus expected the people during his time on earth to have read the words in Hosea and to be applying those words to their lives (see his quotations from Hosea in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7). Based on Jesus’ use of Hosea with the people living during the first century, it is clear that Hosea’s words to Israel apply to people living in time periods after the time of Hosea. We must read Hosea’s words as if they have been spoken to us and we must obey what we find written in them. The preacher or teacher will need to carefully take the message of Hosea, explain its meaning in an understandable way, and apply it to the people of God today.

As God’s spokesperson, the prophet reminds the people of God’s covenant with them, declares heaven’s verdict regarding whether the people have kept or broken the covenant, calls people to continued faithfulness (if they have been obedient) or to repentance (if they have been disobedient), and provides a picture of blessings to come for the obedient or curses to come for the disobedient.

While “predicting” the future was a part of the prophet’s job, it was not their only job or their most important job. The main job of the prophet was to call Israel to obey the covenant and to worship God.

It is important to know that the prophets are a reflection of Christ. He is the greatest prophet (see, for example, Luke 4:24 and 7:16). He is God’s preeminent spokesperson. Therefore, Jesus is like all of the prophets who are associated with **written prophecy** (Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, etc.). He is also like all of the prophets associated with **miracles and mighty deeds** (Moses, Elijah, Elisha, etc.). The fact that the Christ would be a prophet was prophesied in the Old Testament. Before Israel crossed into the Promised Land,

Moses declared that a prophet was coming who would be *like him*. “I will raise up a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (see Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Moses was speaking about the coming of Christ! Again, all of the prophets before Christ reflect his work. They remind us, in some way, of Christ.

**2. The message of the prophets was generally not received by the people of Israel.** It was not safe or easy being a prophet. Jesus himself said that the Israelites persecuted all of the prophets (see also Matthew 23:34, 37, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 11:47-49, and 13:34). See also Acts 7:52. Killing a prophet was a great sin, for it was an attempt to silence God. The prophet, remember, was God’s spokesperson. Therefore, to kill a prophet was an attempt to “kill” the voice of God. Most of the people rejected the words of the prophets. This was true in the time of the Old Testament, and it was true when Jesus, the greatest prophet, was ministering on earth. However, a small remnant of people believed the prophets and responded to their words. This was true in the Old Testament. It was true when Jesus was ministering on earth. And it is also true today. God’s people listen to the words of the prophets and respond to those words. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets (see Ephesians 2:20). (The reason the word “apostles” appears first in Ephesians 2:20 is because the apostles serve a very important role in interpreting the words of the prophets for believers.)

**3. During the time period when Hosea was prophesying, the people of God were divided into two nations: Israel and Judah.** The two nations were connected. Israel was located in the north. Judah was located in the south. Hosea was a prophet sent by God to Israel. However, even though Hosea was speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel, he knew that his words would also be heard in Judah. It is clear he expected the people in Judah (the nation to the south) to listen to his words and to act in accordance with what they heard. Sometimes, Hosea even speaks to Judah directly (see Hosea 4:15). Like Hosea, other prophets focused on either Israel or Judah. Interestingly, the prophet Isaiah spoke concerning Judah (see Isaiah 1:1). However, he sometimes uses the name “Israel” in his writings (see Isaiah 1:3). This is an indication that God never had “two” different people groups with two different plans. His plan was always for one people joyfully living under one King.

Today, the people of God are no longer divided into separate nations or peoples. The people of God are united into one “nation” following after one King—Jesus Christ. The unity of the people of God was prophesied in Hosea and throughout the Old Testament (see Hosea 1:11 and Ezekiel 36:22-28). Because of the work of Christ, the people of God are one (see Ephesians 2:11-22). Even though Christians today live in a different age from Hosea, we must listen to the words spoken to Israel and the words spoken to Judah. They all apply to the people of God today.

**4. Hosea draws a great deal of his material from the book of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy).** The book of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) was written more than 600 years before the time of Hosea. It was widely known in Israel, for the book of Moses is regularly referred to by the prophets who lived after the time of Moses. Like the other prophets, it is clear Hosea had read the law (another name for the book of Moses), understood it, believed it, and expected God’s people to obey what was written in it.

Hosea creatively incorporates the law into the book of Hosea. He frequently uses language taken directly from the law. He refers to stories and people from the book of Moses. He constantly reminds the people of the covenant made between God and Israel at Mt. Sinai. And he uses events recorded in the book of Moses as a template for events that were to take place in the future. For instance, Hosea frequently speaks about a **second exodus event**. He takes words and details from the first exodus, and uses them in his description of a second exodus event that would take place. Based on Hosea’s use of the law, it is clear he expects his readers to be familiar with the book of Moses. It is also clear he considers the book to be authoritative. Because of the many connections between the book of Moses and Hosea, it will be a great help for the preacher or teacher to study the book of Moses along with the book of Hosea.

**5. Hosea is a book that is found in the Old Testament.** While Old Testament books were written before the coming of Christ, they still apply to the people of God even today. However, as a book written before the coming of Christ, Hosea cannot be approached and used in the same way as a New Testament book. The New Testament books were written after the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The Old Testament books were all looking forward to these events. The place to begin the study of any Old Testament book (and thus any Old Testament book of prophecy) is in the New Testament. As



Christians, we do not approach the Old Testament as if the New Testament had never been written. It has been written, and in it we find extensive quotations from the Old Testament and, even in passages that don't provide exact quotations, we find an abundance of allusions to its words and themes. We are frequently told how a certain prophecy was fulfilled. We are told what certain events in the Old Testament were meant to foreshadow. In short, we are told, by none other than Jesus and the apostles, how to read and to understand the Old Testament.

Jesus and the apostles clearly state that Old Testament prophecy finds its fulfillment in Jesus (see Luke 24:25-27 and 44-49). Of course, this does not mean that every page includes an overt reference to the coming Christ. Most do not. However, it does mean that the entire Old Testament—somehow and in someway—is about Jesus and his story.

Some of the ways the Old Testament tells the story of the Christ are easy to recognize. Consider, for instance, the following prophecy from Micah:

*But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2*

This prophecy details the exact town where God's anointed ruler (referred to as the "Christ" in the New Testament) would be born. There are many passages like this. They describe the coming of the Christ in explicit detail.

Other parts of the Old Testament, however, are more difficult. How, for instance, does the book of Judges speak of the coming of the Christ (it does, but not in the same way as Micah 5:2)? A hint may be seen in the the final words of the book, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (see Judges 21:25). The book of Judges is a book calling for the establishment of a king in Israel. The book is meant to leave the reader knowing that Israel's problems can only be solved when God's anointed king is on the throne governing over God's people. That king is Jesus.

All Old Testament books, then, speak of Christ and the gospel. All of these books, however, do not speak of Christ and the gospel in the

same way. Part of our job as preachers and teachers is to discover how the Old Testament books are telling the story of Christ and to carefully explain this to others.

Fortunately, we do not have to guess at the meaning of passages. We have been given the apostles and the Holy Spirit. As we read the New Testament, we can see what the apostles do as they interpret the Old Testament. We can see how they quote passages and discover how they understand stories and poems to apply to Christ and the church. And we must trust that the Holy Spirit will help us in this task. He wants us to see and to proclaim Christ in all Scripture.

**6. The Old Testament is traditionally divided into three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.** (The section called the Writings is sometimes called the Psalms. This is appropriate because Psalms is the largest book in that section.) Jesus refers to all three sections of the Old Testament in Luke 24:44: “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’”. Jesus’ words demonstrate that he recognized these three divisions in the Bible. Jesus’ words also are a clue that he, like the apostle Paul after him, undoubtedly used the three section division itself as a divine “help” in his teaching.<sup>1</sup>

There is a great deal of evidence that the three sections of the Old Testament as a whole and the individual books within each of the three sections have been carefully arranged. Thus, the Law is purposely placed first, the Prophets are purposely placed second, and the Writings are purposely placed third. It is helpful to view the three-part division of the books in the Old Testament as a gift from God. It is the joy of the preacher or teacher to consider how the books have been arranged so that they might lead the reader to faith in Christ and to joy in him.

It is important to note that the books in modern Bibles (like the ESV which is used in this Preacher’s Guide) are not arranged by these three sections. Rather, modern Bibles are arranged in mostly chronological order. This means that books within the Prophets and the Writings are mixed together in modern Bibles. The actual words within the books are the same. The difference is in how the books are arranged.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jesus’ words also include his very important declaration that all three sections are about the Christ.

Outlined below are the books found in each of the three sections. Again, note that the order of books presented here is different than the order found in most modern Bibles.

**Law:** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Number, Deuteronomy

**Prophets:** Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

**Writings:**<sup>2</sup> Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (sometimes referred to as the Song of Solomon), Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1-2 Chronicles

Each of the three sections are equally part of God's word. All three sections are useful for "teaching, rebuking, correcting, and leading to righteousness". All three sections are intended to lead people to Christ and to maturity in him (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

**7. Hosea is found in the section of the Old Testament called the Prophets.** The Prophets can be divided into two parts. The first part is made up of books that are telling the history of Israel. This type of literature is sometimes called "narrative". The second part is made up of books that are collections of sermons.

This **first part of the Prophets** includes Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings. These books tell the story of Israel as it entered the Promised Land, lived in the land, and, finally, was driven from the land. These "historical" books tell the reader the events that took place in Israel. The **second part of the Prophets** is made up of books that feature more sermons (these are sometimes referred to as books of commentary). This includes Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These "commentary" books tell the reader the reasons that caused the events to take place.

**8. The "narrative" books within the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings) are arranged in chronological order.** This means that the books appear in the order in which they occurred within history. For instance, Joshua speaks of events that occurred before the events recorded in Judges, this is why Joshua appears before Judges in the Prophets. Likewise, Judges appears before 1-2 Samuel because Judges speaks of events that occurred before the events recorded in

---

<sup>2</sup> The books within the section called the Writings were arranged in different ways in different ancient lists of Old Testament books.

1-2 Samuel. And 1-2 Samuel appears before 1-2 Kings because 1-2 Samuel speaks of events that occurred before the events recorded in 1-2 Kings.

**9. The events recorded within the “narrative” books within the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings) are also arranged in chronological order.** For instance, the events in Joshua 4 happened after the events recorded in Joshua 3. The events in 1 Samuel 1 happened before the events of 1 Samuel 2, etc..

**10. The “sermon” (or commentary) books within the Prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) are not arranged in chronological order.** This means that the editor or editors who put the individual writings of the Bible together chose a different way to arrange these particular books than by the order in which they were written. It is the joy of the preacher to discover how these books are connected.

**11. The words written within the “sermon” books (or commentary books) within the Prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) are often not arranged in chronological order.** The writings in these books are, again, like sermons. In the same way that a pastor changes the sermon each week based on the needs of the people, the “sermons” of the prophets are arranged so as to make the greatest impact to the readers. In this sense, the words seem to be arranged topically. This explains why it is sometimes hard for readers to understand books in this part of the prophets. The reader is expecting them to be arranged chronologically. But these are not stories. They are more like sermons or commentaries.

**12. Hosea is the first book in the “book of the twelve”.** The book of the twelve is a collection of books written by the “Minor Prophets”. They are called Minor Prophets simply because their books are shorter than the “Major Prophets” (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah). The editors of the Hebrew Bible packaged the 12 Minor Prophets together, calling this collection of books “the book of the twelve” or “the twelve”.

It appears that the books in the book of the twelve have been arranged based on content. For instance, The end of Joel (3:16) declares “The LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem”. The next book, Amos, begins in the exact same way: “The LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem” (1:2). This connects the

two books. An editor saw this connection (and others) and put the books together for this reason. Amos ends with a reference to the people of God possessing Edom (9:12). Obadiah is a book about the judgment of Edom (Obadiah 1:1). Jonah, Micah, and Nahum all relate to Assyria. Jonah is about mercy shown to Nineveh—a city within Assyria. Micah is about judgment of Assyria. And Nahum is about the fall of Nineveh. Again, this is evidence that an editor carefully arranged these books.

**13. Hosea is a warning against idolatry.** The people of Israel in Hosea's day worshiped many gods. Hosea's words were warnings that the people must repent of their sin of idolatry. Therefore, Hosea's words applied to the people living in his time period. However, Hosea's words are also a warning that applies today. God is a jealous god. He will not tolerate any rivals. It is important to know that the Israelites often worshiped Yahweh and idols at the same time. This mixing of religions is sometimes called **syncretism**. It combines a little faith in the true God with a little faith in false gods. This creates, in essence, a brand new religion. This type of "worship" was not acceptable in Hosea's time, and it is not acceptable today. Hosea is a warning against syncretism. Again, God is a jealous God. He will not share his glory with any other "gods".

During the time of Hosea, the people of Israel worshiped a god named Baal. Worship of Baal involved, at least to some extent, the people committing acts of fornication with cultic prostitutes. These illicit sexual encounters were done because it was thought that Baal would respond to these acts by doing the same thing with Anat (the goddess to whom he was married). Thus, human intercourse on earth stimulated the gods to have intercourse in the heavens, which resulted in favorable weather and agricultural prosperity. A large number of ancient stories concerning Baal have been found. Some stories describe Baal's battle with the sea-god Yamm. Other stories describe his battle with Mot, the god who brought about droughts in the summer. According to these stories, Baal's main helper was Anat, a goddess with whom he had sexual relations. Anat was Baal's sister and his wife.

Yahweh did not receive Israel's "mixed" worship. It was impossible to trust in Baal and, at the same time, to trust in Yahweh. Yahweh, as Israel's husband, had promised to provide and care for his wife. It was part of his covenant with her (i.e., Israel). She, however, as Yahweh's "wife", did not trust in his care. She thought that Baal was the one who provided her food and drink and comfort. Israel

demonstrated, by her allegiance to Baal, that she did not consider Yahweh to be a good husband.

**14. Hosea is calling people to faith.** Throughout the book of Hosea, Hosea calls the people to respond to Yahweh in faith. True biblical faith involves much more than just belief that what God has said is true. True biblical faith involves actions. Hosea was calling people to listen to God's words, to believe what God said was true, to repent from their idolatry, and to walk in obedience to all of God's words (see, for example, Hosea 6:1-3 and 14:1-3). The last words in Hosea demonstrate that the purpose of the book is to call the "wise" to knowledge and obedience: "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them" (see Hosea 14:9). These words calling people to be wise and obedient weren't just for Hosea's first audience. They are for all those who hear Hosea's words. This means that we, like Hosea's original audience, need to hear Hosea's words and respond to Hosea's words in faith.

**15. Prophecy in the Bible is often presented to the reader in the form of poetry.** This is true in Hosea. Except for a few narrative portions in the book (see Hosea 1 and 3), Hosea is completely written in a form of poetry. This is a great gift to the reader and to the preacher or teacher.

Next to narrative (the term for the type of writing used in storytelling), poetry is the most common form of writing in the Old Testament. Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Zechariah all include a good deal of poetry. Poetry is also scattered throughout the other Old Testament books (see Exodus 15:1-18). Beyond this, many of the poems in the Old Testament are quoted in the New Testament (see Acts 28:26-27). Thus, it is important for the preacher to be able to recognize, understand, and apply biblical poetry.

The reader can learn to easily recognize the poetry in the Bible because biblical poetry uses unique words and patterns of words. The poetry found in the Old Testament is different from the type of poetry that is common in the English language. It doesn't, for the most part, rhyme. The poetry in the Bible is written in a verse form called **parallelism**. Parallelism is a structure in which one line says

something, and the line immediately following it repeats the idea from the first line, and, by using different words, strengthens the idea in some way. This is similar to two railroad tracks that are laid parallel to one another (sometimes three statements are parallel with each other). Imagine that the second rail in the railroad track is noticeably stronger than the first rail. That is how parallelism works.

Another way to think of parallelism is as an echo. The second line is, in ways, an echo of the first line. However, in a normal echo, when a person yells something, the responding echo is exactly the same. In biblical poetry, however, the echo changes! It is **almost** the same. The first line is echoed by the second line, but with noticeable differences.

Here is an example of biblical poetry from one of the psalms. Notice how the second line repeats the ideas found in the first line, but uses stronger words to do it:

*O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,  
nor discipline me in your wrath!* **Psalms 38:1**

Again, like two train tracks lying parallel to one another, the second line is parallel to the first line. This can be seen in the words that are used. They are like each other. The word “rebuke” in the first line is **like** the word “discipline” in the second line. But notice the word “discipline” is stronger than the word “rebuke”. Again, the two lines of poetry are like a railroad track, they are parallel to each other, but the “second rail” is noticeable stronger than the first rail. In the same way that the word “discipline” in line two of Psalm 38:1 is parallel to “rebuke” in line one, the word “wrath” in line two is parallel to the word “anger” in line one. However, as is expected in parallelism, the word “wrath”, while parallel to the word “anger”, is also stronger than “anger”.

Consider another example of parallelism from Hosea 6:2:

*After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.*

Notice how the number referred to in the second line (“three”) is one greater than the number in the first line (“two”). This way of using numbers is typical in parallelism. The second number is greater than the first. This explains why a Proverb might say something like, “There are **six things** the LORD hates, **seven** that are an abomination to him” (Proverbs 6:16). Yahweh is not confused about

whether it is six or seven things that he hates. Rather, this is classic biblical poetry. The second line is parallel to the first line, but it has intensified the first line in some way. (Notice, also, the progression between something Yahweh “hates” and something that is an “abomination” to him. The second statement is stronger.)

Why did God inspire the prophets to rely so heavily on poetry?

There are probably several answers to this question. One answer is that the nature of the prophet’s message demanded poetry. The people were not listening to the words of the prophets. This means they were not listening to God! The constant repetition that is part of parallelism is particularly well-suited to emphasizing a point. The main points are said and re-said with stronger and stronger words. Another reason is that poetry uses words that tend to be more shocking than regular speech. The shocking nature of the words makes poetry hard to ignore. A final reason is that the words of biblical poetry are memorable. At a time when most people could not read, the message of the prophets came in a form that the people could repeat and remember.

**16. The prophets use language in a way that is intended to shock the readers.** The very strong words regularly used by the prophets is understandable because the people would not listen any longer to “normal” words. Because the people would not listen to “normal” words, the prophets were forced to use stronger and stronger words to convey their message. For instance, the people of Israel were worshiping idols. They had been warned about this sin again and again. Hosea was sent to warn them about their idolatry and to plead for their repentance. He was, in a sense, Israel’s last hope. Israel had, for many, many years, refused to listen to God’s word as it came to them in the book of Moses. And Israel had refused to listen to God’s word as it came to them through earlier prophets. That is why Hosea was forced to speak using words that could not be ignored. He could have said, “turn from your idolatry”. These words would have been grace from God. But Hosea doesn’t normally use these “normal” words when he speaks to Israel about its idolatry. Israel would not have listened to Hosea’s words. Instead, Hosea uses a word to describe the actions of the nation that is far more shocking than idolatry. He declares that the nation has been **whoring**. This word and the many words like it that Hosea used surely captured the nation’s attention!



Notice the following lines of poetry describing Israel's idolatry. Imagine hearing these words if you were an Israelite living during Hosea's time:

*"Plead with your mother, plead—  
for she is not my wife,  
and I am not her husband—  
that she put away her whoring from her face,  
and her adultery from between her breasts ..."*

## **Hosea 2:2**

Hosea is describing Israel as a prostitute! To feel the weight of this line of poetry, imagine if someone described your mother in this way! It is no wonder the people wanted to kill the prophets. The strong words of the prophets are intended to cut the people deeply so they can hear God's words. God himself declares this is what he was doing when he sent the prophets. Consider these lines of poetry (this is an example of three lines of poetry which are parallel to one another):

*Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;  
I have slain them by the words of my mouth,  
and my judgment goes forth as the light. Hosea 6:5*

People living in Hosea's day needed to hear these strong words and people living today need to hear these strong words. It is important to remember that this strong language wasn't just for the benefit of people living in Hosea's day. People today need to hear these same words. We often need to be shocked out of our callousness! The words of the prophets are God ordained. They have been carefully chosen to capture the people's attention so these people might hear God's good words, repent, and walk in obedience to him (see Hebrews 4:12).

**17. The prophet's main ministry was not to those who lived during his lifetime. Rather, it is to those who live after the time of the prophet.** One of the jobs of a prophet was to warn people living in their own generation of the judgment that was coming upon them because of their sin. Thus, Hosea was called by God to speak to people who lived during his own lifetime. But consider the fact that only a few thousand people, at most, ever heard Hosea during his lifetime. Countless millions of people, however, have heard Hosea's words in the thousands of years after the time of Hosea's public ministry in Israel. Based on this

fact alone, it is clear that the greatest impact of Hosea's ministry wasn't to the people living in his day. It is to the people living after him (including you and me)! Readers of Hosea today are very different from the people who heard Hosea in the days of his public ministry in Israel. Those who heard Hosea during the time of his public ministry were living before his predictions ever came to pass. The northern kingdom of Israel had not yet been destroyed. The people had not yet been scattered. And, most importantly, the Christ had not yet come. Readers today are not in that situation. The things Hosea spoke about have already come to pass. Readers today are looking back on Hosea knowing the things which he predicted have already come to pass! This should build faith in God's people. If Hosea's words regarding the Israelites came to pass, this should give the people of God great faith that all of God's words will surely come to pass today! It should also build great fear of God. We are able to see that God kept his promises and did not spare his people when they worshiped other gods. This should cause us to know that he will not spare us if we worship other gods.

Again, the prophets weren't just speaking to help those living in their own generation. They knew their prophecy would benefit a people living long after their words had come to pass. Hosea knew his main audience would be living in the future. Carefully consider the following verses from 1 Peter. The apostle Peter declares that the prophets—and this would include Hosea—knew they were serving us! The prophets knew they were prophesying about God's grace that would come in Christ, and they knew that their words would help a future people.

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. **It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you,** in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. **1 Peter 1:10-12***

As readers of Hosea's words today, we need to be careful that we hear these words as words that were written for us. They were not just for the ancient Israelites.

**18. It will be a great help to read 2 Kings in conjunction with Hosea.** 2 Kings recounts the history of Israel and Judah during the time period when Hosea lived and prophesied. By combining the narrative in 2 Kings with the poetry in Hosea, the reader is able to determine the **background** of the words found in Hosea. The book was written to the people living in Israel. There was a king on the throne in Israel at this time. His name was Jeroboam. He was a powerful king, yet he didn't use his power for good purposes. He led the people into evil. The people of Israel gladly followed their king into evil. The God of Israel—Yahweh—would not tolerate Israel's disobedience. He called Hosea to bring a message to Israel. The message was that Yahweh would no longer tolerate Israel's unfaithfulness. They would be destroyed. Yet, Hosea also has a message of hope. Yahweh would, even though he promised to destroy Israel, also restore Israel.

**19. It will be a great help to read Deuteronomy 4:1-31, 12:1-32, 28:1-68, and 30:1-20 in conjunction with Hosea.** In a sense, Hosea was not telling the Israelites anything new. They had been warned about idolatry in the book of Moses. They had been told what would happen if they walked in disobedience. And they had heard God's promises to restore Israel in the last days. The same should be true with people hearing Hosea today. Hosea is, in a sense, telling today's hearers nothing new. If people understand the book of Deuteronomy, they will understand Hosea. Reading Hosea with these chapters from Deuteronomy in mind will be a great help to the preacher.

**20. A feature of Hebrew prophecy is that it frequently flips between negative and positive statements.** A certain group of verses is negative. These negative verses are immediately followed by a group of verses that are positive. This cycle between negative and positive statements is common in the books of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. Such is the case in Hosea. Hosea 1:1-9 is negative. It is a promise of Israel's destruction. Hosea 1:10-2:1 is positive. It speaks of Israel's resurrection to life. It also speaks of Israel's deliverance and great multiplication under a chosen leader sometime in the future. This is a promise of the gospel! Hosea 2:2-13 is negative. Hosea 2:14-23 is positive. Why are the prophetic books like this? Why aren't all of the negative sections placed together and all of the positive sections placed together? Perhaps this frequent changing between positive and negative allows the messages within

the book—both positive and negative—to be repeated over and over again in new words. Repeating the messages in the book is important because God's people need to hear these messages over and over again.

It is easy for the preacher or teacher to emphasize the glorious things being emphasized within the text. At the same time, it is easy to skip the difficult things being emphasized in the text. This is not wise.

The wise preacher or teacher will emphasize all of the things being portrayed in the book of Hosea.

## Hosea 1:1-1:9

Hosea's ministry to Israel began around 755 BC. At the time when Hosea lived, the 12 tribes of Israel were not considered to be one nation. About 180 years before Hosea began his ministry, the nation of Israel was broken into two kingdoms (this is described in 1 Kings 12:16-24). The northern kingdom was made up of ten tribes and was called Israel (or, sometimes, Ephraim). The southern kingdom, comprised of Judah and Benjamin, was called Judah. Hosea was the last prophet to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel before it was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. Since he was the last prophet to preach in Israel, he was God's last messenger calling for repentance before the judgment came. Unfortunately, the people did not listen to Hosea.

Important background to Hosea's words to the Israelites are Moses's words to the Israelites just before they crossed over the Jordan river and entered the Promised Land. Notice, particularly, the warning about what would happen if Israel followed other gods.

*"But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day. Furthermore, the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. For I must die in this land; I must not go over the Jordan. But you shall go over and take possession of that good land. Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

*"When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But from there*

*you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.”*

### **Deuteronomy 4:20-31**

The Israelites had done all the things Yahweh warned against in these verses. In spite of being warned by the prophets over and over again, Israel was still actively engaging in idolatry! They were, to use a Hosea-like term, “whoring” after other gods. True to his promise, Yahweh was about to “scatter [them] among the peoples”. This was Hosea’s unhappy message: the scattering was about to take place. But Hosea also had a message concerning the future: Yahweh would one day—as promised in Deuteronomy—bring the people back to himself. This promise would, as the New Testament makes clear, be magnificently fulfilled in Jesus. His death, burial, and resurrection has resulted in the scattered people of God being brought back to him.

It will be a great help to read 2 Kings in conjunction with Hosea. 2 Kings recounts the history of Israel and Judah during this time period. By combining the words in 2 Kings with the words in Hosea, the reader is able to better understand the words found within the book of Hosea.

The book was written to the people living in Israel. There was a king on the throne in Israel at this time. His name was Jeroboam. He was a powerful king, yet he didn’t use his power for good purposes. He led the people into evil. The people of Israel gladly followed their king into evil. However, the God of Israel—Yahweh—will not tolerate disobedience. He called Hosea to bring a message to Israel. Hosea’s message was that Yahweh would no longer tolerate Israel’s unfaithfulness. They would be destroyed.

The book of Hosea also includes a message of hope (see, for instance, Hosea 1:10-2:1). However, no hope is seen in Hosea 1:1-9. In both the Hebrew (sometimes called the MT) and the Greek (sometimes called the Septuagint or LXX) Hosea 1 concludes at verse nine. This makes sense because the message dramatically changes after verse nine. That is why this section also is concluded at verse nine.

As you finish these first nine verses, you should be feeling Israel’s desperate situation. They have abandoned God and God is abandoning them. If you can’t feel Israel’s pain, read the passage again. Do you see how seriously God takes idolatry? If you can’t, read the passage again.

God demands obedience from his people. That is very clear in these verses. However, we must not think that obedience is only demanded during the Old Testament time period. Notice how Jesus speaks in John 14. Notice, specifically, how often he says that those who love him keep his commandments.

*"If you love me, you will **keep my commandments**. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

*"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever **has my commandments and keeps them**, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not **keep my words**. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." **John 14:15-24***

We must obey our Lord and we must call our people to obey him. We are foolish to think that his attitude regarding idolatry and obedience has changed. At one level, then, this chapter concerns Israel at the time of Hosea. However, it also concerns God's people today. As preachers and teachers, we must warn the people about the dangers of idolatry.

HOSEA 1:1-1:9<sup>3</sup>

**1:1** The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri,<sup>4</sup> in the days of Uzziah,<sup>5</sup> Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam<sup>6</sup> the son of Joash, king of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

**2** When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea,

---

<sup>3</sup> Hosea is the first book in what is now sometimes called the **minor prophets**. In ancient times, this collection of shorter books was also called “the Book of the 12” because there are 12 books in the minor prophets. The Jews regarded this collection as one book.

<sup>4</sup> Hosea’s ministry to Israel (Israel is sometimes referred to as **Ephraim** in Hosea) began around 755 BC. Hosea was the last prophet to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel before it was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. This first verse doesn’t say Hosea is a prophet to Israel. This fact becomes clear in verses 4-7.

<sup>5</sup> Hosea begins with a list of the kings who were in power during the time of his ministry. This is common in the section of the Bible called the Prophets. Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah also begin their books listing the kings in power during the time of their ministry. Hosea, like Amos, lists kings from Judah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah) and from Israel (Jeroboam). He does this even though his ministry was primarily to Israel. The lists of kings in books of prophecy are a great help to the preacher. By comparing the list of the kings in the beginning of the book to the description of those kings in 2 Kings, the preacher is able to understand the conditions in the land during the time in which the prophet spoke.

<sup>6</sup> During at least the initial stages of Hosea’s ministry, Israel seemed to be prospering. Except to the prophets and those who believed their words, it did not appear that the end of Israel was near. In fact, Jeroboam increased Israel’s size (see 2 Kings 14:23-29). However, he did not increase her obedience to Yahweh. According to the writer of Kings, “he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD”. As the representative of the people, he should have led the people in keeping Yahweh’s covenant. Instead, “He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat”. “Jeroboam the son of Nebat” was the first king of Israel. The first Jeroboam led the Israelites into idolatry. Jeroboam II, the king referred to in Hosea 1, continued the evil practices of the first Jeroboam. Jeroboam II ruled Israel between 793/92—753 BC.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that Hosea refers to the kings of Judah and to the king of Israel demonstrates that his book is related to both nations. While Hosea was primarily speaking to Israel, many of his words are directed toward Judah. It is clear he expected the people in Judah to hear the words he spoke and to respond to them.



“Go, take to yourself a wife<sup>8</sup> of whoredom<sup>9</sup> and have children of whoredom,<sup>10</sup> for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”<sup>11</sup> **3** So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

**4** And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little

---

<sup>8</sup> While most of Hosea is poetry, the first chapter is narrative (i.e., a story). The story in this chapter is of Hosea’s marriage to a woman named Gomer and of the birth and naming of the children born to Hosea and Gomer. This story of Hosea and his “wife of whoredom” is a picture of faithful Yahweh’s marriage to unfaithful Israel.

<sup>9</sup> There are not many details given about Gomer either before or after her marriage. Therefore, as it pertains to Gomer, it is difficult to know exactly what “a wife of whoredom” means. This is an instance where the preacher needs to pay attention to the main point of a passage (the spiritual unfaithfulness of Israel) and not be distracted by details that do not ultimately impact the meaning of the passage. The preacher can remain ignorant of many details about Gomer and still clearly and correctly teach the main point from the book of Hosea. If the preacher or teacher needed more information about Gomer in order to make the point, it would have been given!

<sup>10</sup> Hosea had three children with Gomer. All three children were given symbolic names. For as much as the reader might like to know more about the children and the things they did, we are told nothing. The significance of the children lies in the **names** they were given. The names of the children were intended to send powerful messages to the nation.

<sup>11</sup> While the reader is not told about the exact nature of Gomer’s whoredom, readers of the Old Testament are told many, many things about the nature of Israel’s whoredom. That is what matters, because the marriage between Hosea and Gomer is intended to be a small picture of the “marriage” between Yahweh and Israel. In the same way that Hosea and Gomer were married, Yahweh and Israel were joined together by a covenant. In this sense, they were “married” to each other. The covenant given at Mt. Sinai (outlined in Exodus-Deuteronomy) was their “marriage contract”. Yahweh kept his part of the covenant. He provided Israel with love, food, shelter, and care. From the very beginning, however, Israel broke the marriage covenant. Many, many passages detail how Israel was unfaithful to Yahweh (see, for instance, 1 Samuel 7:3-6). To borrow Hosea’s strong language, Israel was a spiritual whore. The nation loved other gods instead of her true husband Yahweh. It is significant to note that the word translated “whoredom” in verse two is plural. Thus, Gomer’s “whoredom” isn’t presented as a one-time event. It is presented as a way of life. While the reader is not told any details about how this was true in Gomer’s life, the reader is told a great deal about the pattern of “whoredom” in Israel. Israel’s “whoredom” was not a one-time event. Israel was consistently unfaithful in its relationship with Yahweh.

Israel’s spiritual whoredom resulted in the people of Israel committing great sexual sin. Fornication was a major aspect of the religious festivals to the Baals, because the Israelites believed that sexual relations between humans would cause the gods to also have sexual relations with one another which would cause the land to be fertile. These actions, aside from being forbidden, were a denial of Yahweh’s husbandly role as Israel’s provider. The wife— Israel—did not trust her husband—Yahweh—to provide for her. By her actions she was demonstrating she did not love him and she did not trust him.

while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel,<sup>12</sup> and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. **5** And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

**6** She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, “Call her name No Mercy,<sup>13</sup> for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. **7** But I will have mercy on

---

<sup>12</sup> Jezreel was the name of a famous town and valley in Israel. It is clear that many significant evil things happened there (see, for instance, 1 Kings 21). Beyond this, a particularly dark period in Judah's history began with events that took place in Jezreel (see 2 Kings 9:14-10:11). By commanding Hosea to name his son Jezreel, Yahweh was giving a sign to the Israelites that he had seen the evil and bloodshed that had taken place in that area and that he would “break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel”. Thus, Hosea's son Jezreel was meant to remind the people of the place Jezreel. He was a sign that God had seen the evil in that place and he was bringing destruction upon that place. But carefully read the words. The destruction wasn't just coming to Jezreel. The prophecy says, “I will put an end to the kingdom of **Israel**” and “I will break **the bow of Israel** in the Valley of Jezreel”! Thus, the destruction that was to come to this one place (Jezreel) symbolized the destruction that was to come upon the entire land. Many scholars have noted that the name Jezreel sounds like the name Israel. This is probably intentional. God wanted people to think of all of Israel when they heard the boy's name. Thus, by naming the boy **Jezreel**, Hosea was giving a sign to all **Israel** that it would be utterly destroyed. This one town symbolized all of Israel's towns.

The name Jezreel is also used in 1:11 and 2:22. In those verses, however, the name is used in a positive sense. Remember, books of prophecy frequently change between negative and positive messages. The repeated use of names is one of the ways the book of Hosea is tied together and themes are carried from one chapter to another. The repeated use of names demands that the reader pays close attention to Hosea's words. By using what was an evil name in a beautiful and positive way, God demonstrates that he is able to take what is evil and turn it into something good.

<sup>13</sup> The name of Gomer's second child may seem to be surprising, for Yahweh makes himself known as the merciful God. He is not known as the God of “No Mercy”. **But Yahweh is not obligated to show mercy.** Mercy, by definition, is not a payment of a debt. Yahweh can show mercy when he chooses, where he chooses, and to whom he chooses. He can also withhold mercy. As Yahweh said to Moses, “I ... will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (see Exodus 33:19). Exodus 34:6-7a presents Yahweh as a merciful God: “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin ...’”. However, the second half of Exodus 34:7 says something very different—something the Israelites had forgotten: “... but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation”. Israel acted as if Yahweh owed mercy to them. This was not the case. Hosea's daughter “No Mercy” was a sign to Israel that Yahweh would not, at least to the Israelites living during the time of Hosea, be a merciful God any longer. Their days of mercy had come to an end. But what about Yahweh's promises to Israel? Wasn't Yahweh obligated to be merciful because of the covenant he had with Israel? Wasn't he obligated to show mercy to his own wife to whom he was bound? Not if he she was no longer his wife. Israel had broken the covenant. And here, Yahweh was giving her a certificate of divorce. No longer would she enjoy her “marital privileges” of mercy and forgiveness and intimacy with God.

the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God.<sup>14</sup> I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”<sup>15</sup>

**8** When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son.

**9** And the LORD said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not

---

<sup>14</sup> A distinction is made between Israel and Judah in verse 7. Judah, unlike Israel, would still find mercy from Yahweh. It is important to remember, even though Hosea was speaking primarily to the people of Israel, people in Judah were listening to his words as well. Hosea was calling people in both nations to turn to Yahweh. Beyond this, it was important for people in Israel to hear about God’s plans for Judah. Specific references to Judah within Hosea may be found in 1:1, 1:7, 1:11, 4:15, 5:5, 5:10-14, 6:4, 6:11, 8:14, 10:11, 11:12, and 12:2.

This particular reference to Judah being saved should not be taken as a promise that Judah would never be punished for its sins. Even though Judah was not conquered at the time Israel was conquered (the time described in Hosea 1:4-5), it was eventually conquered by the Babylonians and was taken into exile in Babylon.

<sup>15</sup> The words “I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen” mean that Judah would not be saved because of its own military strength. Instead, salvation from the Assyrians would come “by the LORD their God”. Hosea’s prophecy in Hosea 1:7 was fulfilled in the days of Hezekiah (he is one of the kings of Judah referred to in Hosea 1:1). See 2 Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-38 for a detailed description of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Hosea 1:7. It is important to note, Judah was not saved at this time because of its righteousness. Rather, Yahweh told Judah that he was saving them, “for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David” (see 2 Kings 19:34). At the time these words in 2 Kings 19 were spoken, David was dead. This is a reference to the promise made to David regarding a king who would come from David’s body. This is, ultimately, a reference to Christ and his kingdom. God’s promise to David is spoken of in many passages. It is first detailed in 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

my people,<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Hosea's third child was named "Not My People". He was named this because God wanted Israel to know that it could no longer say that it was God's chosen people. Because of their repeated spiritual adultery, God was officially severing his relationship with the Israelites. They were, in this sense, like the rest of the nations. They had been cut off. It is vital that the preacher or teacher helps people today feel what this means! Imagine hearing these words from God!

Notice how the language changes in the second half of verse nine. For the first time in this chapter, Yahweh addresses the people of Israel directly. Up to this point, he speaks through Hosea about the people. He hasn't spoken to the people directly. Here, however, he speaks directly to the people: "You are not my people, and I am not your God". The terrible curses prophesied in Deuteronomy had come to pass: "Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods" (see Deuteronomy 31:17-18).

God's promises to Israel, which were conditioned on keeping the covenant, have been rescinded! "Not My People" indicates that Israel was no longer Yahweh's special nation. They could not call themselves God's people any longer. What a tragedy! Consider how God spoke to the Israelites earlier in their history. His intention was that they—of all people on the planet—would be his people (see Exodus 6:7, 19:4-6, Leviticus 26:12, and Deuteronomy 27:9). This was no longer true. The name "Not My People" logically follows "No Mercy", for without mercy, Israel could not be Yahweh's people. Without his mercy, they could not stand in his presence for even a moment.

It is highly significant to note what God the Father says to Jesus when he is baptized: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Based on the Father's words, it is clear that Jesus is God's people. God is not ashamed to be associated with him. It is important for the preacher or teacher to keep this thought about **Jesus being God's people** in mind, for this explains how Christians, even though they, like the people in Hosea's day, are sinners, can have mercy and fellowship with God. They can have these things because they are "in Christ", the obedient Son of God.

and I am not your God.”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Hosea's three children are not the only ones receiving names in this chapter. Yahweh also gives himself a name in this chapter. Immediately after Yahweh tells Hosea to name his third child “Not My People”, Yahweh declares “and I am **not your God**”. “Not your God” is a name! It is the counterpart to “Not My People”. However, the words used in the ESV (see also NIV 2011, NLT, CSB) do not capture the full sense of the Hebrew (MT) or the Greek (LXX). The Hebrew (MT), when translated into English, reads, “Call his name **Not My People (Lo-ammi)** because you are not my people and I am **Not I Am (Lo-ehyeh)** to you”. The name “I Am” (eyheh) is Yahweh's covenant name. It was the name Yahweh called himself when he spoke to Moses at the burning bush (see Exodus 3:14). When Moses asked Yahweh what his name was, Yahweh said his name was “I Am who I Am” (ehyeh asher ehyeh). In the book of Exodus, Yahweh progressively unfolds the meaning of this name for the Israelites. For instance, in Exodus 6:2-8 Yahweh describes what his covenant name means in far more detail. Yahweh makes himself known in the following ways: he loves his people, redeems his people, rescues his people, and provides for his people. He is, as **ehyeh**, everything his people need. In this verse in Hosea, however, he takes his name back. He is **Lo-ehyeh** (Not I Am). No longer is Yahweh Israel's “I Am”. No longer will he be “with them”. They would now be, like the rest of the nations, without God and without hope in this world (see Ephesians 2:12). They are not his people and he is not their I Am. The Greek (LXX) mirrors the Hebrew. It reads, when translated into English, “Call his name ‘Not my people’ because you are not my people, and I am not your ‘I Am’” (NETS).

## Hosea 1:10-2:1

Hosea 1:1-9 ended with Israel's "divorce" from Yahweh and an expectation of destruction to come upon the entire nation of Israel. The reader is not to feel sympathy for Israel here. Israel had been committing spiritual adultery and deserved everything promised in verses 1-9. Yahweh's chosen people, the people he brought out of Egypt, had broken and were still breaking the covenant vows they made with him. They had been intimate with other gods, demonstrating their inner lusts by their external actions.

The perceptive reader shouldn't be surprised that the "marriage" between God and his people was ending in this way, for Israel's "marriage" to Yahweh was never particularly healthy. From the moment when Israel came into the Promised Land, Israel was not a faithful covenant partner with God.

Hosea 1:1-9, then, marked the end of what had always been a deeply troubled marriage. Yahweh had been faithful, but the people never devoted themselves to Yahweh. They loved many gods. They did not trust in his goodness, protection, or care. They were not satisfied with his tender love. Because of this, they were finally being cut off. They were no longer his people. And he was no longer their "I AM". That is the message of Hosea 1:1-9.

But that is what makes Hosea 1:10-2:1 so surprising. Immediately after nine verses proclaiming God's judgment, there is a declaration of hope!

*Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Say to your brothers, "You are my people," and to your sisters, "You have received mercy."*

These words, in light of Hosea 1:1-9, are absolutely stunning. Here, Yahweh promises to multiply Israel—the people whom he has just promised to destroy—to such an extent that they will not be able to be counted. He promises that the people he has called "Not My People" will be called "Children of the living God". He promises that Judah and Israel will no longer be separated. These two nations with two kings will be joined together with just one leader.

## Hosea 1:10-2:1

Could there be a more dramatic turnaround? This is nothing less than resurrection from the dead. But how could this resurrection from the dead take place? And when would these things come to pass? What would their fulfillment look like?

Fortunately for the preacher or teacher, we don't have to wonder how the promises of restoration and growth in Hosea 1:10-2:1 would be fulfilled. Two of the apostles in the New Testament quote these verses. The words of the apostles provide great help in understanding how these promises from God have been fulfilled and are still being fulfilled.

Consider how the apostle Paul uses these verses from Hosea in Romans 9:

*What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea,*

*“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”*

*“And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”*

### **Romans 9:22-26**

Clearly, Paul considered that this promise from Hosea had been fulfilled in his day. Beyond this, notice Paul includes Gentiles in this promise. This is stunning, because the original words of the promise in Hosea 1:11 were spoken to “the children of Judah” and “the children of Israel”. Obviously, the meaning of the phrase “children of Israel” has been massively expanded by Paul. It includes Jews and Gentiles! It must be said that Hosea's original audience, the people living in Israel during Hosea's day, would have never expected this.

Before we consider how Paul arrived at this conclusion, let's consider the rest of Hosea 1:10.

*And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”*

### **Hosea 1:10b**

What a wonderful promise! This massive number of “children of Israel”, unlike the children of Israel referred to in Hosea 1:1-9, wouldn’t be given a terrible name. Instead, in a reversal of the name of Hosea’s third son (“Not My People”), the people referred to in Hosea 1:10 will be called “Children of the living God”.

Notice how this passage is used by Peter in his first epistle. He addresses these words to “those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). In this letter, Peter is primarily addressing his words to Gentile Christians. He writes,

*Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

### **1 Peter 2:10**

These words are taken from Hosea 1:6, 1:9, and 2:1 (see also Hosea 2:23). Peter, like Paul, applies the promises in Hosea to the church! He, like Paul, considers the promise made in Hosea 1:10-2:1 to have already been fulfilled. Beyond this, he declares that this fulfillment includes Gentiles!

Paul’s and Peter’s interpretations would not be expected if we were just looking at the book of Hosea. Hosea, after all, doesn’t use the word Gentiles in Hosea 1:10-2:1. It refers to “the number of the children of Israel”. But the fact that the interpretations of these two apostles don’t appear in the wording in Hosea shouldn’t make us think that the apostles misinterpreted these words and “forced” them to say something brand new. Rather, we should see that God always intended to answer the promises in this way. The saving of the Gentiles together with the Jews was always his plan.

Over and over in the New Testament, we see that prophecies are fulfilled in surprising ways. Quite often, a prophecy “progresses” from the time of its original pronouncement to its fulfillment. That is, the fulfillment is far greater than could have been imagined when the prophecy was given. This is precisely what happens in Hosea 1:10-2:1. Promises are spoken in Hosea in a way the Israelites living in Hosea’s day could understand. But their fulfillment is far different—and far greater—than anything Hosea’s original audience could have ever imagined. If you are a Christian, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, these verses are about you!

Before we consider the next verses in Hosea, let’s take a moment and consider the method by which Paul and Peter arrive at the conclusion that these verses in Hosea find their fulfillment in the church.



The simple answer is Jesus. Paul and Peter both saw God's promises to Israel being fulfilled in Jesus. Paul goes so far as to say that every promise of God (and he's talking about the promises in the Old Testament) finds its fulfillment in Christ.

*For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*

**2 Corinthians 1:20**

In the eyes of the apostles, the gospel event—namely Jesus' life, death, and resurrection—brought about the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises (like the promises we've been considering in Hosea 1). This is stated over and over in the New Testament.

*“And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”* **Acts 13:32-33**

Could it be any clearer? God fulfilled what he promised to the fathers by raising Jesus from the dead. The gospel event is the event by which these promises are transformed into realities.

But what about the Gentiles? How can these verses speak of them as if they were “children of Israel”? We must not think that the church is, somehow, replacing Israel. The church has not displaced Israel and taken her promises for itself. The promises still find their fulfillment only in Israel. To become a recipient of the promises, one must be a citizen of Israel. And that is exactly what, according to the following verses, those Gentiles who are in Christ have become. In Christ, the Gentiles have become true “sons of Abraham”.

*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

**Galatians 3:7-9**

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.* **Galatians 3:13-14**

*But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. **Galatians 3:22***

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. **Galatians 3:28-29***

To put it another way, in his letter to the church in Rome, Paul notes that “Jewishness” is an internal rather than an external matter.

*For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. **Romans 2:28-29***

This surprising designation of Gentiles as members of Abraham's offspring shows up in other ways that are not as immediately obvious. For instance, notice the introduction to Peter's first epistle. By calling his readers “elect exiles of the dispersion”, Peter is taking language that normally applied only to Jews and is applying it to Christians throughout the Roman empire (most of whom were Gentiles)!

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ... **1 Peter 1:1***

James, in similar fashion, addresses his epistle to “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (James 1:1). Yet the reader should note that this is a letter to the church! James, like Paul and like Peter, speaks of Gentile Christians as if they are a part of the people of Israel.

Clearly, the apostles considered believing Gentiles to be “sons of Abraham”, but how is this so? How can they be called Jews? The answer is Jesus. Over and over in the New Testament, believing Gentiles (and Jews) are referred to as “in Christ”. Only “in him” is anyone (Jew or Gentile) counted as a son of Abraham, a recipient of the promises made to Israel. Jesus is Abraham's true offspring.

*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. **Galatians 3:16***

To put it another way, **Jesus is Israel**. This one man is, in this sense, the people of God. He is the one in whom all the promises in the

Old Testament find their fulfillment. The Messiah (Jesus) is explicitly referred to as Israel in one of the “Servant Songs” in the book of Isaiah:

*And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”* **Isaiah 49:3**

This verse has massive implications. It not only states that the Messiah is Israel, it also states that he, as Israel, is the one in whom God will be glorified. He is the one in whom God’s goals for Israel will be fulfilled.

It is crucial to consider the parallels between the nation of Israel (in the Old Testament) and Jesus. These are not coincidental. Jesus’ life purposely echoes Israel’s history. For instance, Israel was called God’s son—a name which was rescinded in Hosea 1:9. Jesus was called God’s Son (see Mark 1:11)—a name which will never be rescinded. Israel’s male babies were targeted for slaughter by Pharaoh and were delivered because of the faithfulness of the Hebrew midwives (see Exodus 1:15-22). Jesus was targeted for slaughter by Herod and was delivered (see Matthew 2:1-18). Isaiah prophesied that nations would come to Israel and bring her gifts of gold and frankincense (see Isaiah 60:1-6). The wise men fulfilled this prophecy, recognizing the glory of Jesus and bringing gold and frankincense to him (see Matthew 2:1-12). God called Israel out of Egypt (see Exodus 1-15). God called Jesus out of Egypt (see Matthew 2:13-15 and Hosea 11:1). Immediately after passing through the Red Sea (used in the New Testament as a picture of baptism), Israel was led into the wilderness where it is tempted for 40 years. Immediately after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, Jesus was led into the wilderness where he was tempted for 40 days. Jesus, it should be noted, responded to all of Satan’s temptations with quotations from Deuteronomy, thus accenting the comparison between his wilderness experience and that of the nation of Israel under Moses. Israel was comprised of 12 tribes. Jesus—the new “Israel”—designated 12 apostles. Israel was referred to by Yahweh—in a negative sense—as a vine that bears poor fruit. Jesus referred to himself as the true vine (John 15). He alone bears good fruit.

Jesus is clearly presented by the New Testament authors as Israel. We might even say that the first Israel was a picture of the true Israel who was to come. The nation of Israel’s actions were divinely intended to prepare people to recognize the true Israel. But Jesus, unlike the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, perfectly kept God’s

commands and walked in his covenant. He always did and always does what pleases his Father. All the covenant promises to Israel justly come to pass in Jesus because he perfectly keeps the covenant. Since all the promises find their fulfillment in him alone, only those who are counted as “in him” may be recipients of God’s promises. Those in him are counted as his co-heirs. His obedience to the covenant is counted as their obedience to the covenant.

This promise of the children of Israel becoming a multitude like “the sand of the sea” began to be fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead and the church was established. The book of Acts goes to great lengths to describe the rapid growth of the church. We should not read these accounts of the church’s growth as just interesting but relatively unimportant facts. They should be seen as demonstrations of how God was fulfilling the promise he originally spoke to Abraham! Consider the following passages in Acts:

*In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) ...* **Acts 1:15**

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.* **Acts 2:41**

*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.* **Acts 2:47b**

*But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.* **Acts 4:4**

*And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women ...* **Acts 5:14**

*And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.* **Acts 6:7**

*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.*

**Acts 9:31**

Luke, the author of Acts, is clearly interested in demonstrating that the church was growing. Why did God inspire him to include this information? It appears God inspired him to include these verses to clearly demonstrate that the promises which he had made about

the children of Israel being “like the sand of the sea” were coming to pass! This dramatic growth, it is important to note, coincides with the resurrection of Christ.

It’s interesting to compare the beginning of Exodus with the beginning of Acts. Exodus, like Acts, emphasizes the growth of the “children of Israel”.

*But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. Exodus 1:7*

*But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. Exodus 1:12a*

*And the people multiplied and grew very strong. Exodus 1:20b*

The author of Exodus (Moses), like the author of Acts, was clearly interested in demonstrating that the children of Israel were growing. Why did God inspire him to include this information? It would seem God inspired him to include these verses to clearly demonstrate that the promises which he had made about the children of Israel being “like the sand of the sea” were coming to pass!

The connection between Exodus and Acts should not be missed. The church is being presented as the new “children of Israel”. And you are, if you are a Christian, a part of that promise being answered. The “children of Israel” have grown to a massive number indeed—like the sand on the seashore. Again, this is not because the church has replaced Israel. It is because Jews and Gentiles have entered into the true Israel—Jesus, the one in whom all of God’s promises find their fulfillment.

The stunning growth of the “children of Israel” is not all that is promised in Hosea 1:10-2:1. This chapter also says that the “children of Israel” will have one head (i.e., one leader).

*And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Hosea 1:11*

Readers of the New Testament should anticipate that this prophecy, somehow, finds its fulfillment in Christ. Indeed it does. Jesus is the head referred to in this verse. He is the one whom the “children of Judah and the children of Israel” appoint to lead them.

No longer would there be, as there was in Hosea's day, two people groups calling themselves "God's children". Instead, one day the "children of Judah and the children of Israel" would be "gathered together" into one people. The implication is that Yahweh is the one who gathers them. He goes and gets the lost sheep of Israel and brings them together under "one head". This verse doesn't say much about this one head. But there is enough here to whet the appetite of Hosea's original audience. These words should have left them longing for the godly king who would lead God's growing people. But these words weren't just for Hosea's original audience. They are also for us as we celebrate the reign of King Jesus. They remind us that his coming was promised long ago.

Jesus is not an after-thought in God's plan. He has always been the intended "head" of God's people. King after king failed to shepherd God's people. The kings consistently led the people into sin. This was especially true in the northern kingdom of Israel. The godly people in the land must have wondered if it would always be that way. The book of Hosea tells the readers about a coming leader whom all of the people of God would embrace. This is not the last time Hosea refers to the coming King.

Before we conclude this rather lengthy introduction to Hosea 1:10-2:1, let us consider the final prophecy in Hosea 1:11:

*And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Hosea 1:11b*

Based on the rest of the verse, it is clear that this is a great promise, but what does it mean? Before we consider this promise, it is helpful to remember that the name **Jezreel** was used in a negative sense in Hosea 1:4-5. It pointed to the judgment that was coming on the king and the people of Israel. Here, however, we find the name being used in a positive sense. How can this name be used in two very different ways? That is one of the features of poetry! The Hebrew prophets use words in surprising ways to capture the sleepy reader's attention. Based on 1:4-5, the reader is expecting Jezreel to be a negative name. The reader is now surprised because it is being used in a positive way.

The name Jezreel means "God sows". It is significant that the meaning of the name was not focused upon in Hosea 1:4-5. "God sows" means something like "God plants". Thus, the "day of Jezreel" is a reference to a **time period** when God is planting something or someone in some place. **What is he planting?** Based on the

context, it is clear that he is planting people—his people! **Where is he planting them?** The answer is found when we consider the entire phrase “And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel”. It is significant that the words “go up from the land” were normally connected with the Israelites coming out of Egypt. This passage is speaking of a time when God would rescue his people once again. He would bring them out of a new “Egypt” and plant them in his good place. This is an amazing promise of a future exodus! Even though the Israelites would be driven from the land because of their spiritual adultery (Hosea 1:1-9), God would, once again, rescue his people and bring them back to the land.

While this may seem to be, at first glance, a reference to ethnic Jews being returned to what is now the modern day country of Israel, the apostles do not interpret prophecies like this in this way. They do not define God’s people by outward physical characteristics. Rather, they define God’s people by what is inward (see, for instance, Romans 2:28-29). This is a promise God is making to bring his people of faith (whether they are Jews or Gentiles) to “the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (see Hebrews 11:10). It is a promise to bring his people to a “homeland” in a “better country, that is, a heavenly one” (see Hebrews 11:16). Thus, this is a promise to bring God’s people to God’s place and to plant them there forever (see Revelation 21 and 22).

Like healthy trees, God’s people will be planted by “streams of water” (see Psalm 1:3) and they will grow up from the new soil that God has prepared and will become fruitful (see Psalm 1:3, Ezekiel 47:1-12, Revelation 22:1-2). This should remind people of Adam and Eve being “planted” in the garden in Eden!

If I was an Israelite in Hosea’s day or in the dark days following his ministry (and I was, by God’s grace, receptive to his words), these words would have made me hunger for the day (i.e., time period) of their fulfillment. These words would have birthed in me a great desire to see “the consolation of Israel” (see Luke 2:25) come to pass in my day. I would have been longing for the day when Yahweh himself would rescue his people and plant his sons and daughters in the soil of his good place.

As one who is looking back on these prophecies, these words bring joy to my heart and increase my love for my Father and my King. They increase my faith in God. He has done (and he is doing) all that he has promised! And he has done it in a way that goes far beyond

all expectations. I am overwhelmed by the mercy I see here. Mercy to the Israelites (who deserved nothing but death), and mercy to me (who deserves nothing but death). By faith, I have been included in these promises. The apostle Peter's words, which are echoes from these verses in Hosea 1 (and many other Old Testament passages), have come true in my life:

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. **1 Peter 2:9-10***



**Hosea 1:10-2:1<sup>18</sup>**

**1:10** Yet<sup>19</sup> the number of the children of Israel<sup>20</sup> shall be like the

<sup>18</sup> Both the Hebrew text (sometimes referred to as the MT) and the Greek text of the Old Testament (sometimes referred to as the LXX) conclude chapter one with verse 9. In the MT and LXX, Hosea 1:10-2:1 are found in Hosea 2. This is a more logical way to divide the chapters.

<sup>19</sup> Verse ten is very different from the verses before it. That is why the ESV translated the first word as “Yet”. This word marks a distinct transition between the events of 1:9 and 1:10. The difference between 1:1-9 and 1:10-2:1 may be seen in two ways: (1.) **in regard to the tone** of the prophecies in each section and (2.) **in regard to the timing** of the fulfillment of the prophecies in each section.

**In regard to the tone of the prophecies**, 1:1-9 was negative, but 1:10-2:1 is positive. Nothing in the text prepares the reader for this quick change from negative to positive. A common feature of Hebrew prophecy is that it frequently flips between negative and positive statements regarding the future of Israel. This cycle of rapid flipping between negative and positive statements repeats itself over and over in Hosea. Hosea 1:1-9 was negative. It foretold the destruction and end of the kingdom of Israel. It spoke of the fact that Yahweh and Israel were no longer in any special relationship with one another. Hosea 1:10-2:1 is positive. It speaks of Israel’s deliverance from slavery and the great multiplication of the people of God under a chosen leader sometime in the future. The prophecy turns negative again in Hosea 2:2-13. The prophecy turns positive again in Hosea 2:14. Again, this pattern is repeated throughout Hosea (and in other books in the Prophets).

**In regard to the timing of fulfillment**, 1:1-9 was predicting events that were actually fulfilled shortly after the words were spoken. The judgments spoken of in verses 1-9 concerned the Israelites living around the time of Hosea. However, Hosea 1:10-2:1 does not concern the Israelites living during the time period when Hosea prophesied. Rather, it relates to a much later period. Hosea’s original audience would not have known when this time period would come. They were forced to wait for this time of restoration in faith. People reading Hosea today should know that the time period spoken of in Hosea 1:10-2:1 has already come. It began to be fulfilled when Jesus died and rose again. It is still being fulfilled today. And it will be completed in the future when Jesus returns. The promises in Hosea 1:10-2:1 are described in many other places in the Old Testament. See, for instance, Deuteronomy 4:30-31, Isaiah 2:2-5, Hosea 3:5, and Micah 4:1-5.

<sup>20</sup> “Children of Israel” does not, according to the apostles, refer to merely ethnic Jews. It refers to those who, by faith, are counted as “sons of Abraham” (see Galatians 3:7, 14, and 28-29). According to the apostle Paul, “no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical”. Rather, this person is defined by what he or she is inwardly. All those who are “circumcised” by the Holy Spirit are true “children of Israel” (see Romans 2:28-29). This is not merely a “New Testament” truth. Evidence of this appears throughout the Old Testament. For instance, Rahab the prostitute (a Gentile woman) was added to the people of Israel (see Joshua 2 and 6:22-25) and lived in the land of Israel. She was even granted the honor of being an ancestor of the Lord Jesus (see Matthew 1:5). Achan (a Jewish man) was cut off from the people because of his disobedience (see Joshua 7:10-26). Even in these pre-New Testament times, the reader is being led to see a “true Jew” as one who has faith and walks in obedience. Also carefully consider John’s words in John 11:51-52.

sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered.<sup>21</sup> And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”<sup>22</sup> **11** And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together,<sup>23</sup> and

---

<sup>21</sup> The reference to “the children of Israel” being “like the sand of the sea” is a clear reference back to God’s covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Genesis 13:16, 22:17-18, 26:3-5, 28:14, and 32:12). Hosea 1:10 indicates that this promise—in spite of the destruction and divorce spoken of in Hosea 1:1-9—will surely come to pass. True to his covenant promises, God will multiply Abraham’s offspring—“the children of Israel”—“like the sand of the sea”. Luke’s descriptions of the rapid growth of the church should be seen as part of the fulfillment of this prophecy (see, for instance, Acts 2:41, 5:14, and 6:1).

<sup>22</sup> In the “day” when this prophecy would be fulfilled, no longer would the people in Israel be described as “Not my people”. Instead, they would be described as “**children of the living God**”. These words are a translation from the Hebrew (MT). The Greek (LXX) translates this phrase as “**sons of the living God**”. It is noteworthy that the exact same phrase (except in the singular) is used in Matthew 16:16, the passage where Peter calls Jesus “**the Son of the living God**”. Thus, the gospel of Matthew seems to be making a connection between this prophecy in Hosea 1 and Jesus. But Jesus is not alone. Because of Christ’s elevation as “head” of God’s people, he is “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). He is the “firstborn among many brothers” (see Romans 8:29). This prophecy has been fulfilled because of the coming of Christ. He is the reason we can be called “children of the living God” (see Ezekiel 37:27, Romans 9:26, 2 Corinthians 6:16, and 1 Timothy 3:15)!

The words “living God” demand careful attention. The people living in Hosea’s age worshiped gods of silver, gold, and stone. These gods were not living. In actuality, the people made these gods with “their own fingers” (see Isaiah 2:8). Obviously, worship of a man-made god is foolish. Such a god has no power to save anyone. It cannot even save itself. It depends on man for its very existence! The God of Israel, however, constantly declares that he is the “living God”. There are no other gods like him. He does not depend on man for anything (see Acts 1:25). The words “living God” are used in many passages (see, for instance, Deuteronomy 5:26, Joshua 3:10, 1 Samuel 17:26, 17:36, 2 Kings 19:4, 19:16, Psalm 42:2, 84:2, Isaiah 37:4, 37:17, Jeremiah 10:10, 23:36, Daniel 6:20, and 6:26). As these verses make clear, the name “living God” is tied to the fact that God is truly alive. He is active in the world and in the lives of all people. He hears the words of those who hate him and he responds to evil. He also hears the cries of those who love him and he acts on behalf of his people. No one can escape from the living God. This is a great blessing to those who love him. It is great sorrow to those who refuse to worship him.

<sup>23</sup> See John 11:51-52 and Ephesians 2:11-22.

they shall appoint for themselves one head.<sup>24</sup> And they shall go up

---

<sup>24</sup> The “one head” is a reference to one specific coming leader who would be leading the people of God **up from the land** of their slavery in a second exodus. It is evident that the coming of this “head” is vitally connected to all the events described in Hosea 1:10-2:1. In other words, if there is no “head”, the rest of the events described here do not happen. They go together. The word “head” (rather than “king”) is appropriate here because it is the same language as was used of leaders during the time of the Exodus. In the same way that Moses (and later Joshua) was the head of God’s people and was commanded to lead them up out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and to the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 10:11), so this future leader would lead the people of God up out of the land of their slavery, through the “wilderness”, and help them possess the land promised to them by God. Christ is, indeed, like Moses. He is the Prophet who, like Moses, sees God face-to-face (see Deuteronomy 18:15-19, 34:10-12, and John 1:18). This uniquely qualifies him to lead God’s people. Christ is also like Joshua. He successfully brings the people into the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 31:3). In the book of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy), the word “**head**” is a designation of a leader of God’s people. However, it is not a designation of a king of God’s people. There were no kings in Israel at this time. However, after the time of Moses, the word “head” also came to be used for the kings of Israel (see 1 Samuel 15:17, 2 Samuel 22:44). Thus, the word head is very fitting in this verse in Hosea. It reminds readers of the exodus, and, at the same time, it reminds the readers of a king. Jesus is the king who will safely lead his people up out of the land of their slavery, through the wilderness, to the land promised by God.

This prophecy about “one head” in Hosea is a remarkable promise, for at the time Hosea was writing, there were two “heads” over the people of God—the king of Judah and the king of Israel. Here, we read that a time would be coming when God’s people would choose one King to rule over them and to lead them (see also Ezekiel 37:15-28). This has happened with Christ Jesus! The word Christ is a Greek word and it means anointed. Jesus is the anointed King. He is the one King over all of God’s people. And he is already ruling! Based on his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has been declared to be “the Son of God in power” (Romans 1:4). “All authority in heaven and on earth” has already been given to him (see Matthew 28:18). God’s people want him to be their King (see John 20:28) and are joyfully submitting to his rule. This is not the only reference in Hosea to the coming King of God’s people (see, for instance, Hosea 3:5).

It is important to note that Hosea cared deeply about these prophecies. He longed to see them fulfilled. He was not just prophesying about a future King of God’s people. He believed this prophecy would be for his own benefit! He was prophesying about his own King! Hosea, like all the prophets, knew about the Christ, loved the Christ, and was looking forward to the coming of the Christ (see Acts 3:18, 21, 24, and 1 Peter 1:10-12). Specific prophecies about a coming King are found throughout the Old Testament. However, all of the Old Testament wasn’t completed or gathered together when Hosea prophesied. He couldn’t have read all of it. Nevertheless, Hosea had access to large portions of it. He would have read about the coming of the Christ in the book of Moses (see, for instance, Genesis 49:8-12 and Numbers 24:1-9 and 14-19). And he almost certainly had meditated on many, if not all, of the psalms of David. These psalms contain many, many references to the Christ (see, for instance, Psalms 2, 22, and 110).

from the land,<sup>25</sup> for great shall be the day of Jezreel.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> The people, being led by their “head” (i.e., their royal leader), will “**go up from the land**”. This language was originally used when Israel went **up from the land** of Egypt (see Exodus 32:1, 4, 33:1, Numbers 32:11, Joshua 24:17, 24:32, Judges 2:1, 11:13, 19:30, 2 Kings 17:7, Isaiah 11:16, Jeremiah 2:6, Amos 9:7, Micah 6:4). But the idea behind “go up from the land” includes far more than just leaving the land of Egypt. **To “go up from the land” includes at least three ideas.** **First**, it includes the idea of a people coming out of a land of slavery because they have been rescued by Yahweh. **Second**, it includes the idea of people safely traveling from the land of their slavery to a new place because they are being kept and protected by Yahweh. And **third**, it includes the idea of entrance into a new land, because Yahweh has prepared a land for them and is helping them to possess the land. In Hosea 1:10-2:1, Hosea is speaking about an exodus event! He is not, however, speaking of the first exodus in these verses. That event had already happened. Rather, he is speaking of a “second exodus”. This exodus will be led by the one “head” who has united the people of God. This “second exodus” is the exodus in which Christ leads his people from slavery through the “wilderness” and to God’s good place. All those who are “in Christ” are part of this second exodus. “Second exodus” language is frequently found in the Prophets (see, for instance, Isaiah 55:12-13 and Jeremiah 16:14-15).

<sup>26</sup> The word “Jezreel” was also used in Hosea 1:4-5. However, in this verse, the name is used in a very different way from how it was used in Hosea 1:4-5. In Hosea 1:4-5, the name “Jezreel” was used in a negative way. It was a reminder of the evil that had taken place in Jezreel and of the defeat that all Israel would experience in Jezreel. Also, the name Jezreel sounds like Israel. Therefore, it was a reminder that the entire kingdom of Israel would be destroyed. In Hosea 1:11, however, the name Jezreel is used in a positive way. The use of the name in 1:11 is tied to the meaning of the name. The name Jezreel means “God will sow”. In the day when this prophecy of the “second exodus” is fulfilled, “God will sow” sons and daughters in his good place. This is similar to Adam being placed in the garden in Eden. He was created outside of the garden in Eden, but God brought him into his good place and “planted him there”. This prophecy is being fulfilled today! The “head” (Jesus) is leading his people up from the land of their slavery and he is bringing them to God’s good place. We are living in the days of Jezreel!

**2:1** Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Yahweh has just given glorious promises of restoration and life to the people of Israel and the people of Judah (see 1:10-11). Hosea 2:1 is about the proper response to these promises. Based on the glorious promises they have just heard, the people hearing the message are called to respond in faith. In Hosea’s day, obedience to 2:1 would have meant Israelites, hearing these words, going to their “brothers” and “sisters” in Israel, and speaking these words of faith to them. Beyond this, they were to cross the border into Judah and proclaim these words to their “brothers” and “sisters” living in Judah. They were to proclaim the promise of the one coming “head” and the future rescue from slavery, restoration, and reconciliation of the people of God. In other words, faithful Israelites were being called to preach the gospel (even though Christ had not yet come)! How did the people of Israel respond to this command? It is likely that only a very small remnant of people living during Hosea’s day listened to Hosea’s words and began speaking to fellow Israelites and to people living in Judah about the promises spoken here. But while obedience to this command was certainly not common in the days of Hosea, it became common after the death and resurrection of Christ. His death brought great change to the people of God! After the death and resurrection of Jesus, many people began proclaiming that the days of restoration and life had come! See, for instance, how the apostles Paul and Peter speak about these promises in Romans 11:30-32 and 1 Peter 2:10. Of course, the people living during Hosea’s day would have been speaking in faith as they looked forward to the gospel event. People living after the death and resurrection of Christ are speaking of something that they have already experienced! They are no longer waiting for this to be fulfilled. It has been fulfilled—and is still being fulfilled—in Christ! Preachers and teachers need to emphasize this command in 2:1 still stands! We need to declare these things to our “brothers” and to our “sisters”.

## Hosea 2:2-13

As was stated earlier, a feature of Hebrew prophecy is that it frequently switches between negative and positive statements regarding the fate of Israel (or, sometimes in Hosea, the fate of Israel and Judah together). This portion of Hosea is negative.

As background to Hosea 2:2-13, it is worth taking a little time to consider Baal, the “rival” god worshipped by the Israelites during this time period. Sometimes Baal is used singularly, as in Hosea 2:8:

*“And she did not know  
that it was I who gave her  
the grain, the wine, and the oil,  
and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for  
Baal.” Hosea 2:8*

Sometimes, the word is used in the plural, as in Hosea 2:13:

*“And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she  
burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and  
jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the  
LORD.” Hosea 2:13*

The word Baal means **husband** or **lord**. Thus, the Israelites, who were supposed to be “married” to Yahweh, were having an affair with another god who was, ironically, called “husband”. The Israelites did not see Baal as an evil god who was bringing destruction to them. Rather, they believed that they needed Baal. He helped them and provided help in areas where Yahweh was perceived to be weak. Baal’s actions were seen as critical to the success or failure of their harvests. In their warped understanding, Baal was responsible for the rain. This is why statues of Baal portray him holding a lightning-bolt in his hand.

While Israel was worshiping Baal, it was, at the same time, attempting to worship Yahweh. They kept feast days and brought sacrifices to him. They were trying, in their own way, to please him. However, this “worship” was done in the way Israel wanted, not in the way Yahweh had commanded. Israel was worshiping Baal and, at the same time, falsely worshiping Yahweh.

Worship of Baal involved, at least to some extent, the people having sexual relations with cultic prostitutes. These illicit sexual encounters were done because it was thought that Baal would respond to these acts by doing the same thing with a goddess named Anat (Anat was

Baal's wife). Thus, the Israelites believed that human sexual relations on earth caused the gods to have sexual relations in the heavens, which resulted in favorable weather and agricultural prosperity. Beyond this, the people of Israel took great pleasure in these sins. They wanted to worship in these evil ways, and they found gods that allowed them to worship in these evil ways.

Israel's trust in Baal demonstrated that it did not trust Yahweh. Yahweh, as Israel's husband, had promised to provide and care for his wife. It was part of his covenant with her. She, however, did not trust in his care. She thought that Baal was the one who provided her food and drink and comfort. By her actions in worshiping Baal, Israel demonstrated that she did not consider Yahweh to be a good husband. This chapter is Yahweh's response to Israel because of its trust in Baal.

While Hosea 2:2-13 was originally written concerning Israelites living before the coming of Christ, the preacher or teacher needs to consider how these verses apply to Christians today. Outlined below are six benefits of preaching these verses to Christians today.

**1. These verses provide Christians with an explanation of why Yahweh acted as he did toward Israel at the time of Hosea.**

These verses explain why God allowed Israel to be conquered by the Assyrians. It explains why they were scattered over the whole world. They were being punished. The reader is not to feel pity for Israel as he or she reads these words in Hosea. Israel was not the victim. Yahweh was the victim. His "wife" was committing adultery! This poem paints Israel in the worst possible light. She was acting like a prostitute and deserved everything she received in punishment. The readers are to be on Yahweh's side.

**2. This poem outlines, clearly, the nature of the relationship between Yahweh and his people. It is a marriage.** This is why Paul, when talking about earthly marriage, cannot help but talk about the far greater marriage between Christ and the church.

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her*

*by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. **Ephesians 5:22-33***

Earthly marriage is a small picture of the relationship between God and his people. This is why marriage between a man and a woman must be honored and treasured.

**3. This poem demonstrates that Yahweh will not, in his marriage to his people, tolerate any other lovers.** Yahweh wouldn't tolerate spiritual adultery in Hosea's day. We must know he will not tolerate adultery among his people now. It is absolutely imperative that we see the nature of our relationship with Yahweh as a marriage and act in accordance with that reality. God's word is our covenant document. If we, as Christians, run after other lovers and neglect our covenant vows, we will, like Israel, be punished. This poem in Hosea, then, should put a healthy amount of fear in our lives.

While these specific verses in Hosea are not quoted in the New Testament, as may be seen below, the New Testament writers frequently draw from the ideas found within them.

*For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

**2 Corinthians 11:2-3**

*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **James 4:4***

The church is Christ's bride. We cannot be married to him and lustfully running after the world at the same time. That is adultery! These chapters demonstrate that God takes his marriage to his people seriously. He will not share his love with any rivals. And he



will not let us define what true worship looks like. We must not, in imitation of Israel, decide how we will worship Yahweh. We must follow what has been written in his good word.

**4. This poem reminds us that we, as believers today, are to live in full assurance of our husband's care. To look elsewhere, as the Israelites did, is an offense against him.** When we do this we are saying that he is a bad husband. To grumble about the way Jesus is providing for us is an offense against him (see Ephesians 5:29). Again, when we do this, we are saying that he is a bad husband.

**5. This poem should remind us of God's grace in our lives.** Many times, I have been spiritually unfaithful and am deserving of the same punishment Israel received. I have run after other gods (with different names than Baal). I have, like Israel, invented novel ways of worshiping God. I have grumbled about God's provision in my life. Why has God had mercy on me? Why has he been so kind to me? Why has his grace come to me? God's many kindnesses are not because I have earned his kindness.

**6. Finally, and most importantly, this poem showcases the glory of God.** He will not tolerate anyone or anything taking the place that is rightfully his because it would be wrong for anything to supplant him.

*"... you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God ..."* **Exodus 34:14**

Yahweh is jealous for his name. We should be very glad of this! He will ensure that he is seen as great. That greatness may be seen in how he punishes a wayward people. It may also be seen, as we will see in Hosea 2:14-23, in how he forgives a wayward people.

## Hosea 2:2-13

2:2

“Plead with your mother, plead—<sup>28</sup>

for she is not my wife,

and I am not her husband—<sup>29</sup>

that she put away her whoring from her face,

and her adultery from between her breasts;<sup>30</sup>

3

lest I strip her naked

and make her as in the day she was born,

---

<sup>28</sup> Yahweh doesn't refer to Israel as his wife in these verses. He doesn't even speak to her directly. By his words, he keeps her at a distance from himself. Instead, he tells the “children” to call their “mother” to repentance. If the “mother” is the nation of Israel as a whole, then the “children” are individuals within Israel. Since the mother (again, the nation as a whole) won't listen to Yahweh, Yahweh is calling godly individuals within Israel to speak to the nation for him. Since she won't listen to her former husband (Yahweh), perhaps she will listen to her children. These godly individuals are to respond in faith to Yahweh's words and are to join Hosea in pleading with the nation to repent. Did this actually happen during Hosea's day? Did any individuals, in response to Hosea's words, plead with the nation to repent? Since there was always a remnant of believers in the land, it is likely that a few people responded to Hosea's words here and joined him in calling Israel to repent. This would have required great boldness on the part of the Israelites obeying this command. They would have been rejected in the same way the prophets were rejected.

<sup>29</sup> Notice the way the poetry works in this verse. Yahweh says that **Israel is not his wife**. The next line is parallel to it. This means that the next line should be like it, but we should expect this line to expand the thought from the first line ever further. That is exactly what happens here. In this parallel line, Yahweh declares that **he is not Israel's husband**. Israel had wandered from Yahweh for hundreds of years, but, through all that time, the prophets were calling wayward Israel back to her true husband. Yahweh had always been her faithful husband. Here, however, it is clear that the marriage relationship between Yahweh and Israel has changed. Yahweh says that he is not her husband any longer. Under the law of Moses, the husband was obligated to care for his wife (see Exodus 21:10). Here, however, Yahweh declares that Israel is no longer his wife. Therefore, he is under no obligation to care for this adulterous woman.

<sup>30</sup> Israel is described like a prostitute. Her eyes are painted like a prostitute's eyes. This is a poetic way of saying that she is always looking for different lovers. There is no shame in her eyes. But she does more than just look like a prostitute. The parallel line indicates that she uses her body—“her breasts”—to satisfy those lovers. This is a poetic way of saying that the nation of Israel was actively having relations (i.e., worshiping) with other gods.

and make her like a wilderness,<sup>31</sup>

and make her like a parched land,

and kill her with thirst.<sup>32</sup>

4

Upon her children also I will have no mercy,<sup>33</sup>

because they are children of whoredom.<sup>34</sup>

5

For their mother has played the whore;

she who conceived them has acted shamefully.

---

<sup>31</sup> Israel must repent of its spiritual adultery or she would face further punishment from Yahweh. Israel will be like an abandoned baby. This means totally helpless. Israel will be “like a wilderness”. This isn’t the kind of wilderness someone might want to visit and admire for its beauty. This wilderness is a “parched land”. The earth is hard as a rock. Nothing grows. The heat is oppressive. Water is desperately needed, but it never rains. Heaven has no mercy on this place. The rain is purposely withheld, for Yahweh promises to “kill her with thirst”.

While the word “wilderness” is used in a negative manner in 2:3, “wilderness” is used in a positive manner in 2:14. Thus, in the same way the word Jezreel is used in two different ways in Hosea, the word “wilderness” is used in two different ways. Repeating words serves to connect the book together. Creatively changing the way words are used draws attention to the amazing work of God. He is able to turn all things into good.

<sup>32</sup> Consider the strong parallel between this passage and Ezekiel 16:1-7 (words that were spoken regarding Judah).

<sup>33</sup> See Hosea 1:6.

<sup>34</sup> Again, the “children” are the individuals within the land of Israel. Israel as a whole is the “mother”. Yahweh sees no difference between the individuals in the land and the country as a whole. While there was a godly remnant at this time, almost all of the “children” were following after their “mother” in spiritual adultery. Because of their relationship with their mother, they, too, would be punished.

For she said, 'I will go after my lovers,<sup>35</sup>  
 who give me my bread and my water,  
 my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'<sup>36</sup>

6

Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,  
 and I will build a wall against her,  
 so that she cannot find her paths.

7

She shall pursue her lovers  
 but not overtake them,  
 and she shall seek them

---

<sup>35</sup> The word “lovers” is a reference to the foreign gods Israel worshipped. Baal was one of the rival gods worshipped by the Israelites during Hosea’s time. The word Baal means husband or lord. Thus, the Israelites, who were married to Yahweh, were having an affair with another god, whom they called “husband”. The Israelites believed Baal provided them with the things they needed to live: bread, water, wool, flax, oil, and drink.

Worship of Baal involved, at least to some extent, the people committing acts of fornication with cultic prostitutes. These illicit sexual encounters were done because it was thought that Baal would respond to these acts by doing the same thing with Anat (the goddess to whom he was married). Thus, human intercourse on earth stimulated the gods to have intercourse in the heavens, which resulted in favorable weather and agricultural prosperity. A large number of ancient stories concerning Baal have been found by archeologists. These stories describe Baal’s battle with the sea-god Yamm and his battle with Mot, the god who brought about droughts in the summer. Baal’s main helper was Anat, a goddess with whom he had sexual relations. Anat was Baal’s sister and his wife.

Israel’s worship of Baal and trust in Baal was proof that Israel did not trust Yahweh. Yahweh, as Israel’s husband, had promised to provide and care for his wife. It was part of his covenant with her. She, however, did not trust in his care. She thought that Baal was the one who provided her food and drink and comfort. Israel demonstrated, by her allegiance to Baal, that she did not consider Yahweh to be a good husband.

<sup>36</sup> Israel’s whoredom is defined here. She shamefully runs after her “lovers” (the Baals) because they are the ones, so she thinks, who provide her sustenance. Yahweh is not, in her eyes, her provider. Her lovers, she is convinced, provide her with all her physical needs. The wise preacher or teacher will apply these verses to God’s people today, warning them to stay away from spiritual adultery.

but shall not find them.<sup>37</sup>

Then she shall say,

‘I will go and return to my first husband,  
for it was better for me then than now.’<sup>38</sup>

8

And she did not know

that it was I who gave her  
the grain, the wine, and the oil,

and who lavished on her silver and gold,<sup>39</sup>  
which they used for Baal.<sup>40</sup>

9

Therefore I will take back

my grain in its time,  
and my wine in its season,

and I will take away my wool and my flax,  
which were to cover her nakedness.

---

<sup>37</sup> Even though Israel tries to worship the Baals, Yahweh acts so that Israel is no longer able to find these “lovers”. Here, Israel is compared to a prostitute who cannot find anyone to have relations with. Normal prostitutes have clients who come to them. They stand on street corners and wait. Israel, however, chases after her lovers. These verses indicate that Yahweh will no longer let her find these foreign gods. She will chase and chase after them, but she will never catch them. She will hunt for her lovers, but she will not find them. The implication is that no one wants her. What a pathetic picture—an unfaithful wife desperately running through the streets looking for someone ... anyone ... with whom she may commit adultery. But her former lovers don’t want her. They have used her and find her repulsive. She is all alone.

<sup>38</sup> And then, in her aloneness, she has a thought: “I will go and return to my first husband!”. This is not repentance. Hosea describes her as if she is still sweating and out of breath from her futile race after her former lovers. She comes to the realization that Yahweh will take her back. He always, after all, has taken her back in the past (for example, think of the many, many times Israel repented in the book of Judges and “returned” to Yahweh—for a short time period). The adulterous wife believes she can leave when she wants and she can return when she wants. When she wants Yahweh, she can have him. And when she wants other lovers she can have them. It is all her decision (so she thinks). And she has decided that maybe life with Yahweh wasn’t so bad after all. She still doesn’t, as the following verses make clear, believe that Yahweh was a good provider. She still doesn’t know that Yahweh, not Baal, is the one who cared for her.

<sup>39</sup> God is the one who provides people with good things (see, for instance, James 1:17).

<sup>40</sup> Yahweh was a good husband. He met his wife’s needs. He provided her with grain, wine, and oil. More than that, he “lavished on her silver and gold”. Israel was well cared for. What did she do? She gave his gifts to her lover Baal!

10

Now I will uncover her lewdness  
 in the sight of her lovers,  
 and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.<sup>41</sup>

11

And I will put an end to all her mirth,  
 her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,  
 and all her appointed feasts.<sup>42</sup>

12

And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,  
 of which she said,  
 ‘These are my wages,  
 which my lovers have given me.’  
 I will make them a forest,  
 and the beasts of the field shall devour them.<sup>43</sup>

13

And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals  
 when she burned offerings to them  
 and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry,  
 and went after her lovers

---

<sup>41</sup> How does Yahweh respond to Israel's newfound desire to return? Yahweh isn't persuaded by his ex-wife's sudden turn toward him. Instead of moving toward her, he moves further from her. No longer will he let his ex-wife use his gifts for her lovers. Her food and drink and clothing will all be taken away. Her clothes will be stripped off and she will be seen by her former lovers for what she is—a lewd whore. No one, upon seeing her, will want her. Her lovers will not fight to win her back. And even if they did fight for her, her lovers would not be able to recover her, for Yahweh will prevent them from finding her.

<sup>42</sup> But food and clothing weren't the only things that Yahweh would strip from his ex-wife. He would also strip her of her religious practices—even the ones that were done (supposedly) in the name of Yahweh. She would no longer celebrate feasts and keep the Sabbath. These special days to Yahweh were jokes to her anyway. She would no longer be able to make a mockery of Yahweh's designated feasts and Sabbaths. Everything that has given Israel identity, whether from Yahweh or from Baal, will be stripped from her.

<sup>43</sup> Israel thought that she had earned, by her love of Baal, her present prosperity. Vineyards and fig trees were proof that Baal was rewarding her service to him. These things were, in her mind, the payment she had earned for sleeping with Baal. What would she think once the vines and fig trees were gone? What would she think when brambles and briars filled the land? Israel was, at this time, religiously confused, but no one, save Yahweh and his prophets (and probably a few faithful others), seemed to care. The inhabitants were keeping Yahweh's special days (Sabbaths, feasts, etc.) while they were also keeping the special days of the Baals. Yahweh didn't consider himself lucky to have half of Israel's attention. Israel wouldn't be rewarded for her “partial” allegiance. She would be punished.

and forgot me,<sup>44</sup> declares the LORD.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Israel's punishment is terrible. She has been cut off from Yahweh and she will be cut off from her lovers (the Baals). She will be left naked and alone. The last lines in this poem ("and went after her lovers and forgot me") are worthy of deep reflection. The act of Israel going after her lovers is equated with Israel forgetting Yahweh. To run after one is to forget the other. They are connected. Maintaining a vital relationship with both Yahweh and the Baals is impossible. This is true today. Christians need to be warned about the danger of attempting to serve God and another god at the same time.

<sup>45</sup> The words "declares the LORD" are intended to emphasize that the words in this oracle are an official declaration of Yahweh. Unfortunately, the English translation "declares the LORD" is not as precise as it could be. "Declares the LORD" draws attention to Yahweh's act of speaking. But while the ESV uses a verb here ("declares"), there is no verb in the Hebrew. Rather, this is a "construct chain" of two nouns, "declaration" and "Yahweh". (A "construct chain" is a technical term describing how two nouns in Hebrew are sometimes combined.) Based on rules of Hebrew grammar, since "Yahweh" is a proper noun, the word "declaration" must also be definite. A translation more closely aligned with the Hebrew would be something like, "the declaration of Yahweh". In other words, the emphasis in the Hebrew text is not on an **action** which was done by Yahweh but on **the declaration** which was produced by Yahweh. The words "the declaration of Yahweh" draw extra attention to the declaration. In a sense, even though these words are in the text, these words are not the text itself. They are an affirmation of the text.

The words "the declaration of Yahweh" don't make Yahweh's words in this particular section more truthful or more binding, for his words are always true and are always binding even without this declaration. These words, in some ways, would not seem to be necessary. After all, the reader has already been told that Yahweh is speaking. The reader should know that Yahweh's words are true and binding and a proper response to his words is always required. However, even though these words may seem to be unnecessary, they appear frequently in the prophets. Over and over again, the reader is reminded that a certain set of words are "the declaration of Yahweh". Based on the number of times these words appear, it is clear that the words "the declaration of Yahweh" are absolutely necessary for the reader's benefit. That is why the Holy Spirit caused them to be included.

The reason why "the declaration of Yahweh" is used in a text is probably similar to the reason Yahweh, on certain occasions, took an oath (see Hebrews 6:13-20). Obviously, Yahweh doesn't need to take an oath to confirm his words. Yahweh is truthful with or without an oath. He takes an oath, on occasion, "to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose". Yahweh takes oaths to help his people stand fast in faith! Something similar is probably happening whenever "the declaration of Yahweh" is combined with Yahweh's words. This is for the benefit of God's people! It confirms that they must think deeply about what has been said because it is "the declaration of Yahweh". Beyond this, it means they can trust this particular set of Yahweh's words. But "the declaration of Yahweh" isn't just for believers. It is mercy for those who doubt. It provides skeptical readers with one more chance to respond to Yahweh's words in faith.

"The declaration of Yahweh" is used throughout the Prophets. It is clear the people in Israel and Judah recognized the weightiness of these words, for these words were even used by the false prophets to add validity to their lying words (see Jeremiah 23:31 and Ezekiel 13:7)! The words "the declaration of Yahweh" first appear in the book of Moses, where they are used just two times (Genesis 22:16 and Numbers 14:28). Both of these uses in the book of Moses occur in passages where Yahweh is making a strong promise. These words serve as further proof that Yahweh's words will come to pass. "The declaration of Yahweh" occurs four times in Hosea (2:13, 2:16, 2:21, and 11:11).

## Hosea 2:14-23

Hosea 2:2-13 was entirely negative. Hosea's oracle described Yahweh's punishment upon Israel because of her spiritual adultery. Those negative verses make the verses immediately following them all the more surprising. Just when you expect Yahweh to announce another horrible punishment that would come upon Israel, he does the opposite (remember, this is common in prophecy)!

*"Therefore, behold, I will allure her,  
and bring her into the wilderness,  
and speak tenderly to her."* **Hosea 2:14**

The word "Therefore" is surprising. It connects Yahweh's actions to Israel's adulteries. Her spiritual whoredom has caused him to do something completely unexpected. Since she won't abide by the covenant, and since she has found the Baals to be attractive alternatives to him, and since she has run after them, and since she has refused to listen to the prophets and to the Scriptures, he has decided to "bring her into the wilderness" and persuade her. He will, in other words, win her love with romance ("I will allure her" and "speak tenderly to her").



## Hosea 2:14-23

## 2:14

“Therefore, behold,<sup>46</sup> I will allure her,  
and bring her into the wilderness,<sup>47</sup>  
and speak tenderly to her.<sup>48</sup>

## 15

And there I will give her her vineyards<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> The word “behold” is often used for emphasis, to introduce something unexpected, to draw the reader’s attention to something new, or to prepare the reader for an explanation of something. Here, the word draws attention to something unexpected. See also Hosea 9:6.

<sup>47</sup> The word “wilderness” was used in a negative sense in Hosea 2:3. It will also be used in a negative sense in Hosea 13:15. Here, however, it is positive. Yahweh will bring Israel to the wilderness and win her to himself. It is significant that John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness (see Isaiah 40:3 and Matthew 3:1-3). John’s preaching was an announcement that God’s kingdom had come and that forgiveness was open to all!

<sup>48</sup> This last phrase (“and speak tenderly to her”) is similar in the Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX). Both read something like, “And I will speak to her heart”. See Ezekiel 36:24-27.

<sup>49</sup> “Vineyards” is used metaphorically in Hosea. They are a reference to the kind of fruit being produced by the people. Perhaps another way of describing “fruit” would be “lasting, ever-expanding **results** connected to the life-giving Spirit of God”. In the wilderness, Israel would, finally, become truly fruitful. From the beginning of the Bible, God’s people had been called to be “fruitful and multiply” (see Genesis 1:28, 8:17, 9:1, 7, 28:3, 35:11, 48:4, and Leviticus 26:9). Unfortunately, because of sin, Israel was never truly fruitful as God intended. Sin always kept lasting fruit from being produced. In fact, in Hosea, we read of Israel being fruitful in entirely evil ways! But this verse in Hosea is a glorious promise that the fruitful potential of God’s people would finally, in the day when this prophecy was to be fulfilled, become reality. The prophets speak about the future fruitfulness of God’s people in many ways (see, for instance, Jeremiah 23:3). This fruitfulness is no longer future. It has come to the people of God because of the gospel event. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ has resulted in the people of God bearing great fruit. This happens because his Spirit now lives within them. The “fruit of the Spirit” (see Galatians 5:22-23) is just one aspect of the fruitfulness of God’s people that has come because of the gospel event (see also Jesus’ words regarding the fruitfulness of all those who are “in him” in John 15).

and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.<sup>50</sup>

And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,

---

<sup>50</sup> This is poetry at its best, forcing the reader (or, in the case of Hosea's original audience, the hearer) to reflect deeply on the meaning of the metaphors. The phrase "**door of hope**" is easier to understand than "**Valley of Achor**". The "**door of hope**" points to the place where hope is found. Whether it means the door through which hope comes or the door through which one passes to find hope, the meaning is essentially the same. Hope will be found at this place. The "**Valley of Achor**", however, is a little more difficult to understand, especially to readers today. The Valley of Achor was a name from the days of Joshua, when Israel was first conquering the land of Canaan (see Joshua 7:22-26). This was the valley where the Israelites stoned a man named Achan because he had disobeyed Yahweh and had taken a cloak and some silver and gold that he found when Israel conquered Jericho.

The Valley of Achor was, as its name indicates, a valley of trouble. A heap of stones stood in this valley reminding Israel of her sin and the trouble that sin had brought upon the nation. The heap of stones also reminded Israel of Yahweh's judgment. Now, however, the place of Israel's sin and Yahweh's judgment would be transformed into a door of hope. Israel's hope, in other words, is connected to her sin and Yahweh's wrath. How can this be?

Looking at this passage through a gospel lens, we are reminded that our "door of hope"—the place where hope came to us—was located in the very place where our sin and God's wrath were most visibly made known—the cross. The cross is where my sin was exposed. The cross is where God poured out his wrath on that sin. And the cross is where hope, for me, was found.

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* **2 Corinthians 5:21**

We are seeing the gospel in poetry! No one in Hosea's day could have foreseen exactly how Yahweh would fulfill this prophecy. How could they have foreseen it? Looking back at Hosea's prophecy, however, we are able to see that this happened when God put our sins upon Jesus and judged them in him. He poured out his wrath on Jesus as he hung on the cross, and there, at the very place where the sins of God's people were publicly displayed, God opened to them a door of hope.

as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.<sup>51</sup>

**16** “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’<sup>52</sup> **17** For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered

---

<sup>51</sup> Even though Yahweh’s people had resisted him in the past, because of the events that were to take place in the “wilderness”, Yahweh’s people would no longer resist him. Rather, they would follow him as they followed him when they came out of Egypt.

Yahweh reminds Israel of her earliest days—the days of her captivity in Egypt. He brought her from her captivity and into freedom. Yahweh’s words here hint that he would do this with her once again. He would lead her from slavery and she would follow. Many passages in the prophets speak of God leading his people in what has been called a **second exodus** (see, for instance, Isaiah 11:10-16 and Jeremiah 16:14-15). By the words of the prophets, it is clear that this second exodus will be far greater than the first exodus. It will involve more people (a multitude that no one can count) and it will be more effective. The people being led out of their slavery will truly love God and live as the people of God. This second exodus is related to the gospel event. This is why Revelation 15:2-4 pictures Christians singing the “song of Moses” after their deliverance by God (see also Isaiah 12). This is the same song the Israelites sang when they crossed the Red Sea (see Exodus 15)! However, in Revelation it is described as “the song of Moses, the servant of God, **and the song of the Lamb**”. Moses is connected with the first exodus. The Lamb of God—Jesus—is connected with the second exodus.

<sup>52</sup> After this “second exodus”, the people of God will not follow him reluctantly. Instead, they will regard him as their beloved husband. This is not what happened after the “first exodus”. Israel had, from her very earliest days, mixed her “love” of Yahweh with love of other gods. In this day to come, however, Hosea declares that the people of God will love Yahweh alone. The next verse explains why the people of God have this great affection for Yahweh.

by name no more.<sup>53</sup> **18** And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.<sup>54</sup> And I will abolish the bow, the sword,

---

**53** Yahweh himself will prompt this radical devotion to himself! He “will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth”. She won’t speak of (or speak to) the Baals anymore because she won’t think of them again. She will be consumed by her love of Yahweh. Yahweh will cause her to forget her former lovers. He will, by his love, win her to himself and himself alone. He will remove idolatry from her so that her attention is focused on him alone. What a change!

We must know that this is exactly what God does through the gospel. He draws us to himself and he causes us to love him. He cleanses us from our love of idols. This doesn’t happen because of our own will power or holiness. It happens because of his mercy and kindness. He alone is the cause of our single-minded devotion to him. Notice how this same truth is proclaimed in the book of Ezekiel:

*“I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”* **Ezekiel 36:24-27**

The promise to “remove the heart of stone from your flesh” is a promise to remove a wayward and wicked heart. The promise to “give you a heart of flesh” is a promise to replace the hard heart that refuses to follow Yahweh with a heart that is soft and responsive to his call. This all happens because of the work that Jesus accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection. While Hosea is using different words in these verses, he is describing the exact same thing!

**54** But Yahweh’s promises aren’t just about the love he will bring about between him and his people. Hosea 2:18a indicates that the changes he will bring about are far more sweeping than that. He will change all things because of the change that has come about in his people. By using language that is drawn from the original creation account in **Genesis 1**, Yahweh says that he is bringing Israel into a new creation! This new work not only impacts the people, it spills over to impact all created things. This “new creation” language is used throughout the Bible to describe the results of the gospel event. Notice how Paul talks about the blessings that God will bring to nature itself when “the sons of God” are revealed:

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* **Romans 8:18-22**

and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.<sup>55</sup>

**19** And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. **20** I will

---

<sup>55</sup> Yahweh promises to “break” or “shatter” (that’s the way both the Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX) read) the bow and the sword and even war itself. The word “break” or “shatter” is far stronger than “abolish” (which is used in the ESV). Breaking the bow means war will no longer be possible because the implements of war themselves will be destroyed by Yahweh. Even war itself will be destroyed by Yahweh. Beyond this, using the word “break” here shows the connection between this verse and Hosea 1:5. The same words are used in both passages. Hosea is not the only prophet to use this language to refer to the victory of Yahweh (see, for instance, Psalm 46:9). It is likely Hosea is thinking of at least some of the “break the bow” passages as he writes these words. **Intertextual connections** like these are important to study. They demonstrate that the victory of Christ is referred to throughout the Bible, even when Christ is not explicitly named. The reader knows, based on other passages that provide more details, that the things spoken of are, in some way, connected to him.

Compare this verse to Hosea 1:5. In that verse, Yahweh breaking the bow of Israel was negative. It meant that he would remove all of Israel’s strength. In this verse, it is positive. It means he will bring complete peace to God’s people. Because of his work in “that day”, they will no longer need bow or sword and they won’t fear the sword or bow in the hands of anyone else! Once again, Hosea uses the same word in different ways. The preacher or teacher should use Hosea’s repetition of words to his or her advantage! Hosea’s repetition of “break the bow” in Hosea 2:18 provides the preacher or teacher with a good opportunity to, once again, remind the people of the words in Hosea 1:5 and to compare those words with the change experienced by the people of God in Hosea 2:18. This should result in praise of Christ and his work.

Regarding the words “lie down in safety”, see Psalm 4:8. This is something which can only be granted by God.

betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.<sup>56</sup>

**21**

“And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,

I will answer the heavens,  
and they shall answer the earth,

**22**

and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,

**56**

But what is to prevent backsliding? This, surely, is a question that must be answered. What is to keep Yahweh's newly devoted wife from straying again? And what is to prevent Yahweh from divorcing his wife? After all, Israel had, in the past, made many attempts at reform (see, for instance, the book of Judges). These reforms, unfortunately, never lasted. What would be different this time?

*“And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.”* **Hosea 2:19-20**

What will ensure a lasting relationship? The answer, we must know, is Yahweh. His actions ensure the success of this marriage. These verses point to the beginning of the relationship. We see Yahweh committing himself to his bride forever. We see him giving his bride gifts that will allow this relationship to thrive. He gives her righteousness, justice, steadfast love, and mercy. He gives her a faithful heart. His actions will cause his bride to know him.

Yahweh's betrothal to his bride guarantees a long and happy marriage. She will, he promises, know him. This verb—“to know”—has many implications. It means, of course, that she will understand Yahweh. She will be intimately acquainted with him. She will know his thoughts and dreams. This word also alludes to sexual intimacy. Yahweh's wife will not be like Leah, Jacob's unloved wife. Yahweh wants this bride! And this bride will not be wondering where her desire for pleasure might be met. All her desires will be met by her husband.

and they shall answer Jezreel,<sup>57</sup>

23

and I will sow her for myself in the land.

And I will have mercy on No Mercy,

and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’;

---

57

The final lines in this oracle speak of the glory of this future marriage between Yahweh and his people. No longer will Yahweh be distant. No longer will he turn a deaf ear to the cries of his people. When this betrothal takes place, the land will burst forth. Wine, oil, and grain will abound. Similar promises of prosperity may be found throughout the minor prophets (see, for instance, Joel 2:24, 3:18, and Amos 9:13).

We must know that these promises of abundance (what could be a picture of greater abundance than mountains dripping with wine?) find their fulfillment in Jesus. His first miracle—the turning of the water into wine at the wedding in Cana—pointed to the fact that he was the one in whom these prophecies would be fulfilled (see John 2:1-11). That is why the apostle John says Jesus “manifested his glory” when he performed this miracle (John 2:11). Jesus showed, through this miracle, exactly who he is. He is the fulfiller of these great promises. He is the one who brings Israel the prosperity and fruitfulness which she had been promised. Without him, there was no wine. This was symbolic of Israel’s fruitlessness. With him, however, the best wine flowed freely. This is symbolic of the great fruitfulness brought about by Christ.

Notice, Hosea 2:22 brings us, once again, to Hosea 1. We’re brought back to Hosea 1 by the “answer” given by “the grain, the wine, and the oil”. Obviously, grain, wine, and oil can’t speak. But this is poetry. Poetry has a different set of rules than narrative. It is meant to cause people to think deeply. Why do the grain, wine, and oil answer in this way? It is because God has planted life-giving seeds! Jezreel means, as we’ve noted before, “God sows”. This word was used negatively in Hosea 1:4-5. It was used positively in Hosea 1:11: “And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel”. What does it mean here? It seems that the grain, wine, and oil are giving a shout of victory. They are saying something like, “It’s here! The great day of Jezreel has arrived! We’re proof that Yahweh keeps all of his promises! Look what is springing up from the ground!” May we, the people of God, be as excited about the victory of God in Christ as the grain, wine, and oil! May it never be said that earth was better at praising God than his own people.

and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"<sup>58</sup>

58

Compare Hosea 2:23 with Hosea 1:1-9. In the earlier verses, Yahweh had promised, remember, to uproot Israel from the land. In these verses, however, he promises to plant her in the land. She will be his. He will show her mercy and will joyfully proclaim that she belongs to him alone. She has been chosen by him. God's people will no longer run after other gods. Instead, they will gladly agree with Yahweh, shouting, for all the world to hear, "You are my God".

This is a wonderful gospel passage. Consider how Peter applies these verses to the church:

*Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* **1 Peter 2:10**

Peter insists that these things have already been fulfilled. But how can he say that these things have come to pass when, clearly, there seems to be a great deal that has not come to pass? After all, God's people haven't been "planted" in their physical land yet, right? This is another instance where we need to look to the interpretation of the New Testament. The New Testament writers proclaim that these promises have been fulfilled and they are being fulfilled. It is significant to note that the writer to the Hebrews declares that believers "have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering" (Hebrews 12:22). In other words, God's people have already been planted in their land—the heavenly Jerusalem. We may not be able to see our true homeland with our physical eyes (yet), but we can see it with eyes of faith.

The same is true of the other promises in these verses. For the believer, the "mountains" are already dripping with "wine". This is a picture of great fruitfulness and prosperity. Fruitfulness and prosperity is something Jesus has brought to us now. At Cana, he dramatically demonstrated that he was the one in whom these promises were being fulfilled. In him, God's abundance flows freely. In him are "unsearchable riches" (Ephesians 3:8). In him, the harvest is so plentiful that the sower and the reaper are bumping into each other (see Amos 9:13 and how Jesus interprets this in John 4:34-38). These are, for the saints, days of great abundance. Nothing has been withheld from them! God has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3).

The gospel event, we must know, has brought about the fulfillment of all of God's promises (see Acts 13:32-33 and 2 Corinthians 1:20), including the ones spoken of here. In Christ, all has already come to pass. However, at the present time we see the fulfillment of these promises by faith. One day, we will see the fulfillment with our eyes. To put it another way, the second coming will bring nothing "new" to the believer that he or she has not already seen and tasted in Christ. It will merely bring these things from faith to sight.

We are already living in the days of the glorious marriage of Christ and the church. He has given her his wedding gifts, ensuring that she will be able to fulfill her marriage vows. She will not stray after other lovers, for all her delight will be in Christ.



## Hosea 3

Hosea 3 brings the reader back to the story of Hosea and his marriage. Something terrible seems to have happened in Hosea's marriage. Hosea's wife no longer lives with him. In fact, she is not even called Hosea's wife in this passage. She is called "a woman who is loved by another man". Thus, Hosea's relationship with Gomer is like Yahweh's relationship with Israel. Hosea's marriage, remember, is a small picture of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. In these verses Yahweh tells Hosea how he is to take his former wife back to himself. He does this because Hosea taking Gomer back is a picture of how Yahweh will take Israel back to himself. It is important that the preacher or teacher does not become too interested in the circumstances of Hosea's relationship with Gomer. The text does not allow the reader to focus too greatly on this, because very few details are given. It is important to keep Hosea and his marriage in the background, because the relationship between Hosea and Gomer is not the main point of this passage. God's relationship with Israel is the main point of this passage. The fact that Yahweh's relationship with Israel is the main point is clear based on verses 4-5.

## Hosea 3

**3:1** And the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman<sup>59</sup> who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.”<sup>60</sup> **2** So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.<sup>61</sup> **3** And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”<sup>62</sup> **4** For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar,

---

<sup>59</sup> The name “Gomer” is not used in this chapter. Gomer’s name is not used because this emphasizes her distance from Hosea. That is why she is referred to as “a woman” and not Hosea’s “wife” in verse one. Israel is similar to Gomer. She is very distant from Yahweh. Because of her repeated adulteries, Yahweh no longer considers Israel to be his wife. She is “a woman”. But Yahweh will, like Hosea, buy her back and give her a name.

<sup>60</sup> In spite of the warnings about idolatry, Israel refused to abandon the worship of other gods. Israel loved the worship of other gods and things involved in the worship of other gods (like, perhaps, cakes of raisins). The reference to raisin cakes demonstrates one of the main reasons people commit spiritual adultery: they love the pleasures of the world more than God himself. People will find gods that allow them to satisfy their pleasures. This wasn’t just true in Israel in Hosea’s day. Ever since Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was “good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6), people have been delighting in the pleasures of the world more than the pleasures of God. One of Paul’s co-workers, a man named Demas, deserted Paul and the work of the Lord because he was “in love with this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). The examples of the people of Israel in Hosea’s day and Demas in Paul’s day serve as reminders of what will happen to every person who abandons God for earthly pleasures.

<sup>61</sup> Hosea is commanded to “love” Gomer again. In order to do this, he is forced to buy her “for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley” (Hosea 3:2). The reader is not told why Hosea needed to buy Gomer. Perhaps, because she had abandoned Hosea, she was now a slave and Hosea needed to buy her from her master. Based on the price Hosea needed to pay for her, it is clear that Gomer was not worth much. No one really wanted her. Hosea himself may not have wanted her, either. He is commanded to “love” Gomer because Yahweh is using Hosea’s relationship with Gomer to demonstrate many truths about his relationship with Israel.

<sup>62</sup> When Hosea bought Gomer back, he told her that she could no longer “play the whore”. She would live with him, but, for at least some time, even he would have no sexual relations with her (this appears to be the meaning of the phrase “so will I also be to you”). She would be left without any of the things which had brought her satisfaction in the past.

without ephod or household gods.<sup>63</sup> **5** Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king,<sup>64</sup> and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter

---

<sup>63</sup> Gomer's forced period with no relations with Hosea parallels what would happen in the relationship between Israel and Yahweh. In the same way that Hosea took Gomer back, Yahweh would take Israel back. And in the same way that Hosea, for a brief time period, had no relations with Gomer, Yahweh would, for a time period, have no intimacy with Israel. During this time period, she would be left without any of the things which had brought her satisfaction in the past. Everything—kings, sacrifices, household gods (and, undoubtedly, raisin cakes)—would be withheld from her. During Israel's forced separation from all that had comforted her in the past, she would be longing for her promised consolation—waiting for the promises of Yahweh to come to pass. Certain people in the New Testament (like Simeon) are described as “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). These people were waiting for Israel's period of non-intimacy with Yahweh to come to an end. They were waiting for the intimacy with Yahweh that had been promised in verses like Hosea 3:5.

<sup>64</sup> Notice how returning to God is connected to the leadership of “David their king”. This means Yahweh's promise to bring Israel back to himself would involve a specific king who was connected to David. This does not mean that the same David who killed Goliath would again rise to rule Israel. Rather, this is a reference to the “son of David” who was first described in 2 Samuel 7:1-17 finally coming to power. One implication of this verse is that following God demands following his anointed King—Jesus, the true son of David. People cannot follow God and, at the same time, deny Jesus Christ. He is the heir of David's throne (see Matthew 1:1 and Luke 1:26-33). This is now the second time Hosea has referred to the future king of God's people. Hosea 1:11 reads, “they shall appoint for themselves one head”. This verse is a confirmation that the “one head” is the same person who is described as “David their king” in Hosea 3:5.

<sup>65</sup> This promise was to be fulfilled in the latter days. It is important to understand that a time period described as the latter days from Hosea's perspective does not mean that this time period is still in the future for people reading these words today. Even though these "latter days" were future to Hosea, they are no longer future. The "latter days", and the events that were to take place in the latter days, have already come!

Other passages use these same words to describe the time period when Israel would be delivered from sin and a new period of obedience to Yahweh would begin (see, for instance, Deuteronomy 4:30, Isaiah 2:2, and Micah 4:1). The words in Hosea 3:5 about the glorious events that would take place in the "latter days" should have created great longing among the true Israelites for **the latter days** to come. This seems to be the case. In the New Testament, faithful people are sometimes described as "waiting" for the day when God's promises would be fulfilled. For instance, consider the way Luke describes the two older people who saw Jesus in the temple shortly after his birth. Luke describes Simeon as a man who was "**waiting** for the consolation of Israel" (see Luke 2:25). Luke describes Anna speaking about Jesus "to all who were **waiting** for the redemption of Jerusalem" (see Luke 2:38). Thus, Simeon and Anna were two members of what could be described as a small remnant of faithful people who were waiting for the day when God would fulfill his promises. Joseph of Arimathea was also part of this remnant of people who were waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled (see Mark 15:43). Significantly, when these people encountered Jesus, they recognized that he was the key to the fulfillment of these promises! In other words, **the latter days** began when Jesus was born. This means that **the latter days** are no longer future. These promises are being fulfilled today! Believers now are living in the latter days (see, for instance, Acts 2:17 and Hebrews 1:2).

The initial fulfillment of this promise of **children of Israel** coming to **David their king** and the goodness of Yahweh began when Jesus was baptized. People, by ones and twos, began coming to the new "son of David" (see Matthew 1:1, 9:27, and 20:30). The numbers increased after Jesus' resurrection. 3,000 people, for instance, came to "David their king" on the day of Pentecost. Even though Jesus had ascended into heaven, the people considered him to be their king who was ruling in power (see Romans 1:4). Therefore, if you had asked a first century Christian when this prophecy in Hosea would be fulfilled and when the people of God would return to David their king and to the goodness of Yahweh, this person would have said something like, "We've already come to David! He's reigning now and we're following him now. We're tasting his goodness today." Paul, for instance, wrote that God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3). Paul was not waiting to come to God's goodness sometime in the future. He said that he had already been blessed with it.

While the prophecy in Hosea initially seemed to refer to just Jewish people, the New Testament does not allow us to interpret this passage in this way. Jews and Gentiles are part of the people of God who are living under David their king. Gentiles, as is stressed throughout the New Testament, have been, by faith, "grafted" into the children of Israel. Gentiles have not, in any sense, replaced Israel. They have, by a miracle of God's grace, been joined to her via the person of Jesus—the true Israel. They have become, by God's grace, recipients of the promises made to Israel. These promises are, as we've noted so many times before, fulfilled in Jesus (see Acts 13:32-33 and Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29).

## HOSEA 4-5

Hosea 4 is a scene from a court room. Yahweh is bringing a lawsuit against the people of Israel. He is more than the victim. He is the prosecuting attorney. He is also the judge. While this was a lawsuit brought by Yahweh against the people of Israel in Hosea's day, all people should pay careful attention to God's words here, for God does not change. If Israel was punished because there was "no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land", the same will be true with people today. We, like the people of Israel in Hosea's day, need to "hear the word of the Lord". The careful preacher or teacher will make sure people understand what happened in Hosea's day and apply that to how people today must relate to Yahweh.

In Hosea 5, Yahweh continues bringing his charges against Israel. Israel and Judah will be punished. Beyond this, Yahweh declares "I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue". These are, as we have seen elsewhere in Hosea, terrible words. However, chapter five ends in a hopeful way. Yahweh declares, "I will return again to my place, **until** they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me." The word **until** indicates that all is not lost forever. Yahweh will be waiting for the people to repent. The hopeful words at the end of Hosea 5 prepare the reader for the glorious words found at the beginning of Hosea 6.

As with other chapters in Hosea, the preacher or teacher needs to remind the people that what was a prophecy concerning the future to Hosea and his generation is not necessarily a prophecy concerning the future to readers today. The preacher or teacher always needs to consider whether a promise may have already been fulfilled or, if it has not been fulfilled, be in the process of being fulfilled. The best way to determine this is to study how the apostles interpreted passages like these in the New Testament.

HOSEA 4-5<sup>66</sup>

## 4:1

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel,

for the LORD has a controversy<sup>67</sup> with the inhabitants of the land.<sup>68</sup>

There is no faithfulness or steadfast love,

and no knowledge of God in the land;<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Hosea 3 included a beautiful promise of restoration for God's people in the future. (It is important to note that the promise in Hosea 3 was future to the people in Hosea's day. That does not mean that it is future to people today. The promises in Hosea 3 have been fulfilled and are currently being fulfilled in Christ.) However, Hosea 4 does not continue the beautiful prophecy from chapter 3. Hosea 4 is a terrible promise of destruction for God's people. Remember, this sort of switching between positive and negative prophecies is common in prophetic literature. The writers do not tell the reader when they are switching between positive and negative prophecies. The reader needs to determine this based on the words that are used.

<sup>67</sup> The word translated "controversy" in verse one is sometimes used of people fighting against each other. It can also be used to describe a legal case (like a lawsuit). Here, it is used to describe a legal case Yahweh is bringing against Israel. The word is also used in verse 4 (in a different form). Yahweh is charging the "children of Israel" with many crimes. The crimes are listed in verses 1-2. All people need to carefully consider Yahweh's lawsuit here, for all people have committed these same crimes (see Romans 3:9-18, 23).

<sup>68</sup> Notice, Yahweh does not describe the people as "his children" here. He merely calls them "the inhabitants of the land". The distant way in which God refers to his people demonstrate the broken state of the relationship between Yahweh and the people. This distant way of referring to the people is similar to the nation of Israel being called "your mother" in Hosea 2:2 and Gomer being called "a woman" in Hosea 3:1.

<sup>69</sup> Yahweh's "charge" against the people is that there is no **faithfulness** or **steadfast love** or **knowledge of God** in the entire land. This does not mean that there weren't a few faithful people in the land (after all, Hosea lived in the land!). There was always a **remnant** of faithful people. For instance, in Elijah's day, Elijah felt all alone. He complained that there were no others who were following Yahweh. Yahweh corrected him, telling him "I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (see 1 Kings 19:18). However, the vast majority of the people did not worship Yahweh. There was, in this sense, "no faithfulness" to Yahweh anywhere. The people of Israel should have been walking with Yahweh in joyful obedience to his commands. The people should have been reflecting God's image (see Genesis 1:26-28). Instead, based on verse 2, they were reflecting the image of the gods they were worshipping. By saying that there was no knowledge of God, this does not mean that people in Israel did not know something about God. They did know something about him. However, they did not know him truly. As the apostle John wrote, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (see 1 John 1:6). This is still a danger for people today. People claim to know God, but by their works they deny him (see Titus 1:16).

2

there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery;<sup>70</sup>  
they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

3

Therefore the land mourns,  
and all who dwell in it languish,  
and also the beasts of the field  
and the birds of the heavens,  
and even the fish of the sea are taken away.<sup>71</sup>

4

Yet let no one contend,  
and let none accuse,  
for with you is my contention, O priest.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> All of these “crimes” are referred to in the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1-17). Hosea frequently refers to Moses’s writings because Moses recorded the laws by which Israel was to live.

<sup>71</sup> Compare this to the creation account in Genesis 1. It is as if creation is being described in reverse order. Instead of everything prospering, everything is “languishing”. The animals, like the people, are being “taken away”. If creation is God preparing a place where he is to be worshiped, this is de-creation. Everything is being removed! In Deuteronomy, Moses described many curses that would come upon the people of Israel if they disobeyed God and worshipped other gods (see Deuteronomy 32:15-33). All of the things described in Deuteronomy were now coming to pass. As strange as it sounds, the fact that the land in Israel was languishing was grace from God. It was a warning that the people needed to repent. Unfortunately, they did not heed this gracious warning from God.

Theologically, it is important to know that the spiritual state of the people and the physical state of the rest of creation are connected. Because of the cursed nature of the people, the rest of creation is languishing. The actions of the first Adam led to decay and destruction coming upon all creation. The last Adam (Jesus) is making all things right and will make all things right—including the rest of creation. Compare this verse in Hosea to Psalm 8:6-8. In this verse in Hosea, all creation is disordered. In Psalm 8, however, everything is ordered. It is well ordered because the Psalm is a prophecy of Christ and the wholeness that comes through him to all things. He is the “last Adam” who rightly reflects God’s image. Thus, through Christ (and those who are “in him”), all creation will be released from its bondage to decay (see the apostle Paul’s careful consideration of this in Romans 8). Other passages beyond this passage in Hosea reflect the connection between the evil of people and the languishing of the rest of creation. See, for instance, Genesis 6:11-17, Deuteronomy 28-32, Isaiah 24:4-6, and Jeremiah 14.

<sup>72</sup> In this verse, it seems that the priest, the one who was to go between God and the people, is about to make a defense. Yahweh tells the priests that they have no right to speak because Yahweh has something against them.

5

You shall stumble by day;  
 the prophet<sup>73</sup> also shall stumble with you by night;  
 and I will destroy your mother.<sup>74</sup>

6

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;<sup>75</sup>  
 because you have rejected knowledge,  
 I reject you from being a priest to me.  
 And since you have forgotten the law of your God,  
 I also will forget your children.

7

The more they increased,<sup>76</sup>  
 the more they sinned against me;  
 I will change their glory into shame.

8

They feed on the sin of my people;  
 they are greedy for their iniquity.

9

And it shall be like people, like priest;  
 I will punish them for their ways  
 and repay them for their deeds.

10

They shall eat, but not be satisfied;  
 they shall play the whore, but not multiply,  
 because they have forsaken the LORD

---

<sup>73</sup> This is a reference to false prophets that were loved by the Israelites. Thus, the two “holy” groups of people in Israel (priests and prophets) are condemned together. Neither of these two “holy” groups is faithful to Yahweh. Both of them are disobedient. Both of them are on trial along with the rest of the people.

<sup>74</sup> “Your mother” is a reference to the nation as a whole (see also Hosea 2:2).

<sup>75</sup> This is not a reference to knowledge in general (i.e., knowledge of science, art, literature, world events, etc.). It is a reference to knowledge of God (see verse 1). See 1 Samuel 2:12.

<sup>76</sup> God’s people were, from the very beginning, called to “be fruitful and multiply”. God’s people were to bring God’s image into all the earth (see Genesis 1:26-28). The people of Israel were being fruitful in wickedness and were multiplying their evil.



## Hosea 4-5

to cherish **11** whoredom, wine, and new wine,  
which take away the understanding.

**12**

My people inquire of a piece of wood,  
and their walking staff gives them oracles.  
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,  
and they have left their God to play the whore.

**13**

They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains  
and burn offerings on the hills,  
under oak, poplar, and terebinth,  
because their shade is good.  
Therefore your daughters play the whore,  
and your brides commit adultery.

**14**

I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore,  
nor your brides when they commit adultery;  
for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes  
and sacrifice with cult prostitutes,  
and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

**15**

Though you play the whore, O Israel,  
let not Judah become guilty.<sup>77</sup>  
Enter not into Gilgal,

---

<sup>77</sup>

From the time of Moses through the time of Solomon (David's son), the people of God had been united as one nation. During the time of David's grandson Rehoboam, however, the one nation of Israel was divided into two nations: Israel and Judah. Judah was located in the south. Israel was located in the north. The warning in this verse is spoken to Judah. They must not go up into Israel and worship the golden calves there. It is common for Hosea to speak to Judah. Even though he was primarily addressing his words to Israel in the north, Hosea expected the people in Judah to be listening and responding to his words. He also expected future people (see 1 Peter 1:10-12) to be listening and responding to his words.

nor go up to Beth-aven,<sup>78</sup>  
and swear not, “As the LORD lives.”<sup>79</sup>

16

Like a stubborn heifer,  
Israel is stubborn;<sup>80</sup>  
can the LORD now feed them  
like a lamb in a broad pasture?

17

Ephraim<sup>81</sup> is joined to idols;

---

<sup>78</sup> There was a town named Beth-aven in Israel (see Joshua 7:2, 18:12, 1 Samuel 13:5, and 14:23). **However, this verse isn't referring to the actual town of Beth-aven. Rather, this is a mocking reference to the town of Bethel.** Bethel means “house of God” (in Hebrew, “Beth” = “house” and “el” = “God”). Bethel had been, at one time, a place where the people of God went to worship and to inquire of him. People truly worshiped in this location. This was the place where Jacob dreamed and saw a stairway between heaven and earth. Because of this, Jacob named this location Bethel—the house of God (see Genesis 28:10-22). But Jeroboam, the first king of Israel after the nation of Israel had been divided into Judah and Israel, didn't follow in Jacob's footsteps. He didn't worship God in Bethel. Instead, he put a golden calf there. He established his own priesthood and created his own laws (see 1 Kings 12:29-32). Israel grew to love their golden calves (there was also one in Dan to the north).

Bethel was of great importance to Israel. They considered it to be the “temple of the kingdom” (see Amos 7:13). Yahweh repeatedly warned Israel about this idolatry through his prophets, but Israel would not repent. The idolatry taking place at Bethel is the reason Yahweh calls Bethel by the name Beth-aven in this verse (“Beth” = “house” and “aven” = “idolatry”). Bethel was no longer the house of God. It was now the house of idolatry. This name is also used of Bethel in Hosea 5:8 and 10:5.

<sup>79</sup> Judah is warned not to imitate Israel. By saying things like, “As Yahweh lives ...,” Israel was acting as if they worshiped Yahweh. Their hearts, however, were far from him. They were using his name in vain (see Exodus 20:7). Hosea tells the people of Judah to separate themselves from Israel.

<sup>80</sup> This is a simile. In this poetic way of speaking Israel is being compared to something else. Here, Israel is compared to a stubborn cow that cannot be moved to a better pasture. Even though Yahweh has good pasture for the Israelites, they refuse to move.

The prophets frequently use similes in the prophetic books. Given the hard-hearted nature of the people, the heavy use of similes is not surprising. When people will no longer listen to “normal” words in “normal” speech patterns, perhaps they will listen when “heightened speech” (like similes and poetry) is employed. Similes have a way of cutting to the heart and exposing sin. They provoke a response.

<sup>81</sup> Ephraim is a name of one of the tribes of Israel. Ephraim was the largest tribe in the northern kingdom of Israel, therefore the name Ephraim was sometimes used in poetry to describe the whole nation of Israel (see, for instance, Isaiah 7:2, 7:17, 11:13, and Jeremiah 31:18). The name Ephraim is used 37 times in Hosea. This frequent use of Ephraim is, among other things, a demonstration that Hosea was particularly focused on the northern kingdom of Israel.

## Hosea 4-5

leave him alone.<sup>82</sup>

**18**

When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring;  
their rulers<sup>83</sup> dearly love shame.

**19**

A wind has wrapped them in its wings,  
and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

**5:1**

Hear this, O priests!

Pay attention, O house of Israel!

Give ear, O house of the king!

For the judgment is for you;

for you have been a snare at Mizpah  
and a net spread upon Tabor.

**2**

And the revoltors have gone deep into slaughter,

---

<sup>82</sup> This is a call for individuals to flee Israel and for Judah to not join themselves to Israel. Again, Hosea is calling people to listen to his words and to respond in faith.

<sup>83</sup> Priests, prophets, and rulers are all condemned in Hosea 4.

but I will discipline all of them.<sup>84</sup>

### 3

I know Ephraim,  
and Israel is not hidden from me;  
for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore;  
Israel is defiled.

---

<sup>84</sup> Verses 1-2 are connected and are carefully arranged in a pattern. It is important to note that this pattern cannot be seen in the ESV. The pattern cannot be seen in the ESV (and other popular translations including the CSB, NET, and NIV) because of the way the ESV has translated the first half of verse 2. The explanation below does not follow the ESV (or CSB, NET, and NIV).

The pattern in these verses is built using groups of threes (a pattern of three is also seen in verse 8). In these verses, three things are referred to and then a pronouncement by God is given. This happens two different times. First, three different **audiences** are spoken to: (1) priests, (2) the house of Israel, (3) the house of the king. After these three audiences are spoken to, a proclamation is made by God: “the judgment is for you”. Second, three different **places** are referred to: (1) Mizpah, (2) Tabor, (3) Shittim. After this, a verdict by God is pronounced: “but I will discipline all of them”.

*The Message* captures the **three people** plus commentary and **three places** plus verdict rendering well:

*“Listen to this, priests!  
Attention, people of Israel!  
Royal family—all ears!*

*You’re in charge of justice around here.  
But what have you done? Exploited people at Mizpah,  
ripped them off on Tabor,  
Victimized them at Shittim.  
I’m going to punish the lot of you.”*

The overall meaning of these verses is that all of Israel’s people from the leaders to the general public have sinned greatly and this may be easily demonstrated by looking at the conditions in different places in and around Israel. Because of this, God will punish Israel. The ESV’s translation of verse 2a may be correct (“the revolters have gone deep into slaughter”). However, it is possible this line should be translated “they dug a deep pit in Shittim” (Lexham English Bible) or “and a pit dug deep in Shittim” (NRSV). Poetically, the reference to Shittim makes sense because it would be the third place referred to in the list of places where Israel committed its idolatry. This would keep with the pattern established in the first half of verse 1. Three groups of people were referred to in verse 1. Then three places were mentioned in 1b and 2a. The charge against Israel is that *Shittim* is a place where the Israelites dug the pit of idolatry even deeper. The fact that a group of three is also referred to in verse 8 increases the likelihood that verses 1 and 2 also are built on patterns of three. This would seem to make the translation in the ESV (and CSB, NET, and NIV) less likely.

4

Their deeds do not permit them  
to return to their God.  
For the spirit of whoredom is within them,  
and they know not the LORD.

5

The pride of Israel testifies to his face;  
Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt;  
Judah also shall stumble with them.<sup>85</sup>

6

With their flocks and herds they shall go  
to seek the LORD,<sup>86</sup>  
but they will not find him;  
he has withdrawn from them.

7

They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD;  
for they have borne alien children.  
Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields.

8

Blow the horn in Gibeah,<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Judah is guilty also and should listen to the proclamations made by Yahweh to Israel. This is evidence, once again, that Hosea expects the people of Judah to be listening to his words and to be responding to them in faith.

<sup>86</sup> This is a reference to false worship.

<sup>87</sup> The reference to blowing the horn (or trumpet) and sounding the alarm is a reference for all of the Israelites to gather together. In ancient times, this happened during times of great significance. For instance, during a time of war, a trumpet would be used to call the people to battle. By referring to the horn being blown in **Gibeah** and **Ramah**, Yahweh seems to be reminding the Israelites of an event that had taken place during the time of the Judges (see Judges 19-21). During the time of the Judges, the people of Benjamin committed a great sin at Gibeah. All Israel gathered together because of this sin. The people of Benjamin would not turn from this sin (see Judges 20:13). At that time, the people of Israel went up to **Bethel** (see Judges 20:18) to inquire of God about how they should respond to this sin committed by the tribe of Benjamin. In this verse in Hosea, however, the people of Israel gather together at Beth-aven (a mocking nickname of Bethel) and declare “we follow you, O Benjamin”. The people of Israel aren’t gathering together to fight sin. Rather, they accept their sin and are fighting for their sin. This seems to be why the verse reads, “we follow you, O Benjamin”.

the trumpet in Ramah.<sup>88</sup>

Sound the alarm at Beth-aven;<sup>89</sup>

we follow you, O Benjamin!

9

Ephraim shall become a desolation

in the day of punishment;

among the tribes of Israel

I make known what is sure.

10

The princes of Judah have become

like those who move the landmark;<sup>90</sup>

upon them I will pour out

my wrath like water.<sup>91</sup>

11

Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment,

because he was determined to go after filth.

<sup>88</sup> See Judges 19:13.

<sup>89</sup> This reference to three places seems to confirm that this chapter is built on patterns of three and that the explanation of verses 1-2 above is more likely.

As was mentioned earlier, there was a town named Beth-aven in Israel. **However, this verse probably isn't referring to the actual town of Beth-aven. Rather, this is a reference to the town of Bethel.** For more information about the name Beth-aven and why it is a fitting nickname for Bethel, see the note at Hosea 4:15. The name Beth-aven is also used in Hosea 10:5.

<sup>90</sup> As has been demonstrated many times, even though Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, he was also speaking to the southern kingdom of Judah. Here, Judah is compared to a person who would move an ancient landmark (see Deuteronomy 19:14, 27:17, and Proverbs 22:28). Proverbs 22:28 reads, "Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set". This is exactly what the people of Judah were doing in regard to their worship. Their forefathers had set a "landmark" in place regarding true worship of Yahweh. The people in Judah during Hosea's time, however, had "moved" this ancient landmark regarding worship to a new location. Now, they worshiped in ways their forefathers would not have recognized or permitted.

<sup>91</sup> Judah, like Israel, will be punished by God. This may seem to differ from the prophecy in Hosea 1:7 where God declares, "But I will have mercy on the house of Judah". It is important to note that the deliverance promised to Judah in Hosea 1:7 was experienced by Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. However, even though they were delivered at that time, they were later conquered by the Babylonians. Judah, like Israel, loved sin and false worship. 2 Kings 23 provides the reader with a good example of the types of wickedness that were happening in Judah during this time period.

**12**

But I am like a moth to Ephraim,  
and like dry rot to the house of Judah.<sup>92</sup>

**13**

When Ephraim saw his sickness,  
and Judah his wound,  
then Ephraim went to Assyria,<sup>93</sup>  
and sent to the great king.<sup>94</sup>

But he is not able to cure you  
or heal your wound.<sup>95</sup>

**14**

For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,  
and like a young lion to the house of Judah.<sup>96</sup>  
I, even I, will tear and go away;<sup>97</sup>  
I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

---

<sup>92</sup> In the same way that moths and rot destroy materials, God is saying that he is the one who is destroying Israel and Judah. These are surprising similes for God to use in regard to himself!

<sup>93</sup> Israel was constantly turning to earthly kingdoms for help rather than to the kingdom of heaven. Assyria and Egypt (see, for instance, 7:11) are especially mentioned as earthly kingdoms in which Israel put its trust. Assyria is mentioned here in 5:13 (see also Hosea 7:11, 8:9, 9:3, 10:6, 11:5, 11:11, 12:1, and 14:3).

<sup>94</sup> Israel recognized that it needed help. However, instead of turning to its real great King (Yahweh) and seeking his favor, it sent to the “great king” of Assyria and sought his favor. The kings of Israel hoped that an alliance with Assyria would bring the strength and peace it craved and needed. They did not know that the Assyrians would destroy them.

<sup>95</sup> Israel’s wound was caused by idolatry. The Assyrians could not solve Israel’s spiritually diseased condition. Only God can heal spiritual adultery. God’s healing for spiritual adultery is seen in Hosea 6:1. These verses are a reference to the healing that comes to God’s people through the gospel event. See also Ezekiel 36:24-27.

<sup>96</sup> Both Israel and Judah have a spiritual disease. They both need to be “cured” by Yahweh. Here, we read, once again, that Judah is no different from Israel. Hosea is speaking to both nations.

<sup>97</sup> Yahweh is saying that he will punish his people and will “go away”. This is the worst tragedy that could happen! God is distancing himself from his people. Israel’s defeat at the hands of the Assyrians and Judah’s later defeat at the hands of the Babylonians needs to be seen based on this verse. God used these two nations (Assyria and Babylon) to “tear” his people.

## 15

I will return again to my place,  
 until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face,  
 and in their distress earnestly seek me.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> This is the first hopeful thing that has been said since Hosea 3. By saying, “I will return again to my place, **until** they acknowledge their guilt” Yahweh is declaring that he will, based upon his people’s **repentance**, again have an intimate relationship with them. The gracious promise by Yahweh to return to the people wouldn’t have been a surprise to Hosea. Israel’s repentance and Yahweh’s return to his people was promised in Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and 30:1-10. Other prophets also speak of Yahweh’s promise to return based on the repentance of his people (see, for instance, Isaiah 1:16-31). The ministry of John the Baptist should be seen in this light. Israel’s repentance during John the Baptist’s days prepared the people for renewed relationship with the Lord.



## HOSEA 6:1-3

The first three verses of Hosea 6 are a glorious presentation of the gospel! Hosea calls those who hear his prophecy to respond in faith and to return to Yahweh. Hosea, again, is a man of faith. He himself was listening to the words he was preaching and he was responding to them in faith. He wanted Israel and Judah to respond as well. He knew if Israel and Judah repented, God would deliver them and would raise them up very quickly. It is important to notice **when** Hosea says God would raise his people up: “on the third day”. This is a clear reference to the gospel event! Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day and, because he was raised on the third day, it may truly be said that all those who are in him were also raised with him. Christ tasted death for all the people of God, so that all God’s people might be raised with him. Thus, the third day was more than just the resurrection day of the Christ. It was the resurrection day of all those who are in him (see Colossians 3:1-4).

## HOSEA 6:1-3

6:1

“Come, let us return to the LORD;<sup>99</sup>  
 for he has torn us, that he may heal us;<sup>100</sup>  
 he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.<sup>101</sup>

2

After two days he will revive us;<sup>102</sup>  
 on the third day he will raise us up,<sup>103</sup>  
 that we may live before him.<sup>104</sup>

3

Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;  
 his going out is sure as the dawn;  
 he will come to us as the showers,  
 as the spring rains that water the earth.”

---

<sup>99</sup> These are no longer Yahweh's words. They are Hosea's words (notice the phrase “let us”). He has heard Yahweh's promise in Hosea 5:15 and he calls the people to do the things Yahweh called for in that that verse. Hosea calls the people to “acknowledge their guilt” and “seek [Yahweh's] face”. Hosea knows that if they “earnestly seek” Yahweh they will find him.

<sup>100</sup> Hosea knows that the reason Yahweh would be “tearing” Israel, and Judah is “**that** he may heal us”. This means that Israel's punishment and Judah's punishment was God's grace. He was punishing them because this was the means by which he would ultimately heal Israel. This healing happens through Jesus Christ. See, again, Ezekiel 36:24-27.

<sup>101</sup> Israel's punishment was by the hand of God. In the same way, Israel's salvation will be by the hand of God. Israel cannot heal itself.

<sup>102</sup> In Hebrew poetry, numbers typically increase from one line to the next line. In this poem, it is natural for the number to increase from “two days” in the first line to “the third day” in the second line.

<sup>103</sup> The reference to God's people being raised up on **the third day** is clearly fulfilled in the gospel event. Christ was resurrected on the third day. However, his resurrection didn't impact Jesus alone. Rather, all those who are “in him” were raised with him on the third day (see Colossians 3:1). 1 Corinthians 15:4 declares that Jesus was “raised **on the third day** in accordance with the Scriptures”. Surely Hosea 6:2 is one of the Scriptures that Paul was referring to in this verse. It is clear Paul read this verse in Hosea and immediately connected it to the gospel event.

<sup>104</sup> The reason Christ was raised is so we might be raised. God did this so “we may live before him”. We cannot live before Yahweh if we have not been raised with Christ.

## **HOSEA 6:4-11a**

The first three verses of Hosea 6 were Hosea's words. They were his faith-filled response to Yahweh's words in Hosea 5:15. Hosea was calling God's people to repent because he knew, based on Yahweh's words in 5:15, that Yahweh would respond to their repentance and would heal them, revive them, and raise them up. All of these things refer to the work Christ did through his life, death, and resurrection.

In Hosea 6:4, however, Hosea is no longer speaking. Once again, Yahweh is speaking. In these verses, Yahweh speaks about the nature of Israel's and Judah's love toward him. He declares he sent the prophets so these nations might see their sin, repent, and worship in a pleasing manner. They have not done this.

Again, the constant changing between messages of hope (Hosea 6:1-3) and condemnation (Hosea 6:4-11a) is common in the Prophets. The preacher or teacher cannot rely on the chapter numbers to demonstrate where changes take place within the book. This demands close reading of the text.

## Hosea 6:4-11a

6:4

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?

What shall I do with you, O Judah?<sup>105</sup>

Your love is like a morning cloud,

like the dew that goes early away.<sup>106</sup>

5

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;

I have slain them by the words of my mouth,

and my judgment goes forth as the light.<sup>107</sup>

6

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,

---

<sup>105</sup> The warm “heart” of Yahweh can be felt here. Like a frustrated parent who has tried everything to correct a son or daughter, Yahweh is expressing his loving frustration with his people. This poem is evidence, again, that Hosea’s words are for Judah as well as Israel. Both of these wayward nations need to repent from their sins. A loving Father is calling them to himself.

<sup>106</sup> What was true of Israel and Judah is often true of those who call themselves Christians. Their love for God is like a cloud. It appears to be real and substantial, but disappears with the slightest puff of wind.

<sup>107</sup> These three lines of poetry are very helpful in regard to understanding **who the prophets are** and **what the prophets do**. Based on this verse (and others), the prophets should be seen as the authorized spokespersons of God. When a prophet speaks, God is the one speaking to the people. When the prophet speaks seemingly harsh words to the people, it is God speaking these seemingly harsh words to the people. When the prophet speaks words of comfort, it is God speaking words of comfort. The prophet’s words of judgment are a way that God shines his light on a people. Thus, prophets are instruments of God’s grace. They bring God’s light to dark places. Hosea’s words to Israel (and Judah) are God’s words to Israel. Isaiah’s words to Judah are God’s words to Judah, etc., etc., etc.. Since the prophets speak God’s words, they are always correct in what they declare (see Deuteronomy 18:19-22). Furthermore, since the prophets speak God’s words, they must be obeyed. To disobey the prophet is to disobey God. The fact that the prophets are God’s spokespersons demonstrates that killing a prophet is an attempt to silence God himself. It is saying to God, “we will not listen to you”. To put it more strongly, to kill a prophet is an attempt to kill God himself.

The Old Testament prophets are no longer on the earth. However, because of God’s gracious gift of the Scriptures, the prophets are still speaking. Therefore, they are still to be obeyed. Their words, along with the words of the apostles, form the foundation upon which the church is built (see Ephesians 2:20). In regard to how much the prophets knew in regard to the plans of God, see 1 Peter 1:10-12.

the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.<sup>108</sup>

7

But like Adam they transgressed the covenant;<sup>109</sup>  
there they dealt faithlessly with me.

8

Gilead is a city of evildoers,  
tracked with blood.<sup>110</sup>

9

As robbers lie in wait for a man,  
so the priests band together;

---

<sup>108</sup> This verse explains why God sent the prophets. He sent them so that the people might truly love him and worship him. He sent the prophets so that the people might worship in spirit and truth. He sent the prophets to rescue the people from empty religion. Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. When Jesus quotes a passage, he wants those who are listening to him to think about more than just the particular verse he is quoting. He wants those who are listening to him to think about the entire passage in which the verse is found. When he told the Pharisees, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice’”, he was telling them to carefully study Hosea and to find out its true meaning. Jesus expected those who were living in his time to read the words of Hosea and to apply them to their lives. The same is true today. Jesus expects those reading Hosea today to apply Hosea’s words to their own actions. In regard to God not being pleased with mere sacrifices, see also Isaiah 1:10-17.

<sup>109</sup> This is the one place in Scripture where a **covenant** between Yahweh and Adam is explicitly mentioned. This provides even more clarity to the relationship between Yahweh and Adam and why Adam’s disobedience resulted in such tragic consequences. Adam broke the covenant! This information helps the preacher or teacher understand the serious nature of Adam’s sin in Genesis 3. Hosea’s words comparing Israel to Adam provide additional evidence that Israel is like Adam. They both lived in God’s place where God was to be worshiped. Both were intended to bear God’s image and to be fruitful and multiply. They both had a covenant with God. Israel was, like Adam, described as God’s son (see Exodus 4:22 and Luke 3:38). But Israel, like Adam, failed to honor God’s word. Both of God’s sons broke the covenant. In the same way that Adam was driven from the garden so that all people, one day, might return, Israel was being driven from the land so that they might come back. Jesus is unlike Adam and Israel. He keeps the covenant, demonstrating that he truly is God’s Son. Because he is perfectly obedient, God’s people do not need to fear him ever being driven from God’s presence and place.

<sup>110</sup> Hosea brings up Gilead because it is an example of a place where Israel has broken the covenant. He uses another example in verse 9. The references to these places is a help to the preacher or teacher. When we read about evil actions that take place in these locations, we need to remember that these places are inhabited by people who are in covenant with the living God! God sees the covenant break and he remembers it. Gilead is also referred to in Hosea 12:11.

they murder on the way to Shechem,<sup>111</sup>  
 they commit villainy.

**10**

In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing;  
 Ephraim's whoredom is there; Israel is defiled.

**11**

For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> This is another place where Israel broke the covenant. However, Gilead and Shechem are not the only places where Israel broke the covenant. They are representatives of the covenant breaking that was taking place throughout every place in the entire land. Yahweh could have given many, many other examples of places where the covenant was being regularly broken.

<sup>112</sup> Again, Hosea's main "audience" at the time of his ministry was Israel. But he was speaking to Judah as well and they needed to respond to his message. They, like Israel, were breaking the covenant. Hosea was calling Israel and Judah to respond to his preaching in faith. Today, Hosea's main "audience" is the church. In fact, according to 1 Peter 1:10-12, Hosea knew that he was speaking to an audience that went far beyond his own day. He knew he was speaking to people who would be living in the future. The church needs to respond to his words.

## **HOSEA 6:11b-7:16**

In these verses, Yahweh is speaking. He describes how he wants to heal Israel, but Israel does not want to be healed. Because of this, destruction is coming upon them.

It may seem odd to “break” a verse in half. However, it appears that Hosea 6:11 should be divided in half. Verse 11a naturally belongs with what goes before it. Verse 11b naturally belongs with what follows after it. Again, the chapter divisions in the Bible were not in the original text. Hosea did not write them. While they are helpful, they are not inspired. The preacher or teacher should focus on the text, not on the verse and chapter numbers.

**HOSEA 6:11b-7:16****6:11b**

When<sup>113</sup> I restore the fortunes of my people,

---

<sup>113</sup> Hosea 6:11 may appear to be positive, however it is likely negative. It will probably help the preacher to “break” verse 11 into two parts. The first half of verse 11 should likely be connected to the two lines of poetry in verse 10. They go together. Hosea 6:10 is an indictment against Israel and the first half of Hosea 6:11 is an indictment of Judah. Both nations are guilty and will be punished for spiritual adultery. That is the “harvest” (verse 11) that is appointed for both of these nations. It is a harvest of judgment.

In the same way that the first half of 6:11 naturally goes with 6:10, the second half of 6:11 naturally fits with the first half of 7:1. They go together. Yahweh speaks about his actions (“When I restore the fortunes of my people, when I would heal Israel”) and he speaks about the actions of his people (“the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria”). Yahweh declares that he has been working to restore the fortunes of his people but they, because of their sin, have constantly been thwarting his efforts.

Yahweh had been trying to bring healing to his people (in both Israel and Judah), but they would not respond. Other prophets also speak of Israel’s refusal to respond to God’s grace (see, for instance, Isaiah 65:2, which is quoted in Romans 10:21). This is how the NET translation renders this part of the poem: “Whenever I want to restore the fortunes of my people, whenever I want to heal Israel, the sin of Ephraim is revealed ...”. Again, Yahweh was pouring out grace, and the people were responding with ever-increasing sin.



**7:1**

when I would heal Israel,  
the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed,  
and the evil deeds of Samaria,<sup>114</sup>  
for they deal falsely;  
the thief breaks in,  
and the bandits raid outside.

**2**

But they do not consider  
that I remember all their evil.<sup>115</sup>  
Now their deeds surround them;  
they are before my face.

**3**

By their evil they make the king glad,  
and the princes by their treachery.<sup>116</sup>

**4**

They are all adulterers;  
they are like a heated oven  
whose baker ceases to stir the fire,  
from the kneading of the dough  
until it is leavened.

---

<sup>114</sup> Samaria was the capital city of Israel.

<sup>115</sup> The people of God had forgotten that God sees all sin and, because he is just, cannot ignore sin. He is a righteous judge. God's people must walk in holiness. Preachers today need to remind the people of this same truth (see, for instance, Galatians 6:7 and 1 Peter 1:15-16).

<sup>116</sup> Israel's rulers were pleased by the disobedience of the people. The Lord Jesus is the opposite of this. He loves obeying God (see John 14:31), and he loves it when the people also obey God. He is displeased when God's people disobey God. In fact, Jesus asked the Father to give the Holy Spirit to the people so that they might obey! He is "another Helper" (Jesus is also our helper!) who helps us walk in obedience (see John 14:15-17). God's people can gladly follow their King (Jesus), knowing he will never lead them into evil because he loves righteousness (see Hebrews 1:9). Obedience is a major theme in John 14-16. These verses should be carefully studied. See also all seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3. These also emphasize obedience.

**5**

On the day of our king, the princes  
became sick with the heat of wine;  
he stretched out his hand with mockers.

**6**

For with hearts like an oven they approach their intrigue;  
all night their anger smolders;  
in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.

**7**

All of them are hot as an oven,  
and they devour their rulers.  
All their kings have fallen,  
and none of them calls upon me.

8

Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;<sup>117</sup>

Ephraim is a cake not turned.

9

Strangers devour his strength,<sup>118</sup>

and he knows it not;

gray hairs are sprinkled upon him,

and he knows it not.<sup>119</sup>

10

The pride of Israel testifies to his face;

yet they do not return to the LORD their God,

nor seek him, for all this.

11

Ephraim is like a dove,

silly and without sense,

calling to Egypt, going to Assyria.<sup>120</sup>

12

As they go, I will spread over them my net;

I will bring them down like birds of the heavens;

I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation.

13

Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!

Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me!

---

<sup>117</sup> God's people have always been called to be separate from the world (see 2 Corinthians 6:17). Instead, the people of Israel acted like the people who did not know God. The same is often true today. That is why James describes worldly Christians as "adulterous" (see James 4:4). The Christians to whom James was writing were, like the Israelites in Hosea's day, committing spiritual adultery.

<sup>118</sup> Loss of spiritual strength was reality for the people of Israel during Hosea's day. This can be true of Christians today. Our strength from God is devoured because we relate more with "strangers" than we do with the living God. We restore our spiritual strength and vigor when we repent and begin to "wait for the LORD" (see Isaiah 40:29-31).

<sup>119</sup> Israel did not know its weakness. The same is often true of Christians today. We believe ourselves to be spiritually strong, yet we do not know that we are weak and lazy and half-hearted (see Jesus' gracious warning to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22).

<sup>120</sup> Israel was constantly turning to other kings for deliverance from its enemies.

I would redeem them,<sup>121</sup>  
but they speak lies against me.

**14**

They do not cry to me from the heart,<sup>122</sup>  
but they wail upon their beds;  
for grain and wine they gash themselves;  
they rebel against me.

**15**

Although I trained and strengthened their arms,<sup>123</sup>  
yet they devise evil against me.

**16**

They return, but not upward;  
they are like a treacherous bow,<sup>124</sup>  
their princes shall fall by the sword  
because of the insolence of their tongue.  
This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Again, see 6:11b-7:1. God's desire was to save his people. They did not want salvation from Yahweh. They wanted help from the Baals.

<sup>122</sup> God's desire was true repentance.

<sup>123</sup> Yahweh made his people strong so they might bear fruit. They were strengthened so they could bring his image into all the earth. This is not what they did.

<sup>124</sup> This is a powerful image. A treacherous bow does not shoot in the direction it is intended to shoot. Instead, it turns on the one who is shooting it. God intended Israel to be a "tool" in his hands for his purposes. Instead, they turned against God! They were devising evil against Yahweh (see verse 15).

<sup>125</sup> The people will return to "Egypt". This does not mean that most of the people in Israel returned to Egypt. They were actually conquered by Assyria. This is symbolic. The people will go back to the slavery from which Yahweh had delivered them. In this sense, "Egypt" could be anywhere in the world! It is not the nation in Africa which is the focus, it is the slavery that took place in Egypt. Because of idolatry, God's people will, once again, be enslaved. This explains why Hosea 1:10-2:1 spoke of a "second exodus". A second exodus is needed, because the people will, once again, need deliverance from oppression. Christ is the one who leads this second exodus.

## HOSEA 8-10

In these three chapters, the reader will not find a major “positive” section. There is nothing like Hosea 1:10-2:1, 2:14-23, 3:1-5, or 6:1-3 in these chapters. Indeed, with the exception of 10:12, there are no messages of comfort at all from Yahweh in these three chapters. Instead, in poem after poem, Yahweh demonstrates that Israel and Judah are guilty of sin and will be punished. In spite of the almost total lack of comfort found in these chapters, they should not be seen as “graceless”. They are evidence of God’s grace. He is telling the people the bad news so that they might, upon hearing the bad news, repent. The preacher or teacher needs to learn how to preach the gospel from portions of Scripture like this.

## HOSEA 8-10

## 8:1

Set the trumpet to your lips!<sup>126</sup>

One like a vulture is over the house of the LORD,<sup>127</sup>  
because they have transgressed my covenant<sup>128</sup>  
and rebelled against my law.

## 2

To me they cry,

“My God, we—Israel—know you.”<sup>129</sup>

## 3

Israel has spurned the good;  
the enemy shall pursue him.

## 4

They made kings, but not through me.<sup>130</sup>

They set up princes, but I knew it not.  
With their silver and gold they made idols  
for their own destruction.

## 5

I have spurned your calf, O Samaria.<sup>131</sup>

My anger burns against them.

How long will they be incapable of innocence?

## 6

For it is from Israel;  
a craftsman made it;  
it is not God.

---

<sup>126</sup> A trumpet was sometimes blown in times of war. This seems to be the case here. However, the enemy is not outside of God's land attempting to get in. Rather, the enemy is found within God's land!

<sup>127</sup> A vulture is a fitting picture of the destruction coming upon Israel. Vultures feed upon the dead. Israel was spiritually dead.

<sup>128</sup> See Hosea 6:7.

<sup>129</sup> Israel claimed to love God. This “love” was false.

<sup>130</sup> This explains the nature of the kings of Israel described in 1-2 Kings.

<sup>131</sup> This is a reference to the golden calf in Samaria (see 1 Kings 12:25-13:34).

## Hosea 8-10

### The calf of Samaria

shall be broken to pieces.<sup>132</sup>

#### 7

For they sow the wind,  
and they shall reap the whirlwind.

The standing grain has no heads;  
it shall yield no flour;  
if it were to yield,  
strangers would devour it.

#### 8

Israel is swallowed up;  
already they are among the nations  
as a useless vessel.<sup>133</sup>

#### 9

For they have gone up to Assyria,  
a wild donkey wandering alone;  
Ephraim has hired lovers.<sup>134</sup>

#### 10

Though they hire allies among the nations,  
I will soon gather them up.  
And the king and princes shall soon writhe  
because of the tribute.

#### 11

Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning,  
they have become to him altars for sinning.

#### 12

Were I to write for him my laws by the ten thousands,

---

<sup>132</sup> The Israelites claimed that their golden calves were God. They are not God.

<sup>133</sup> Israel was not fulfilling its purpose. Originally, Yahweh had said Israel would be a nation of priests (see Exodus 19:6). Because of their refusal to obey, they were useless.

<sup>134</sup> This is a reference to Israel paying nations to deliver them. While this was temporarily successful, it demonstrated the spiritual poverty of Israel. They did not trust in Yahweh to protect them.

they would be regarded as a strange thing.<sup>135</sup>

**13**

As for my sacrificial offerings,  
they sacrifice meat and eat it,  
but the LORD does not accept them.<sup>136</sup>

Now he will remember their iniquity  
and punish their sins;  
they shall return to Egypt.<sup>137</sup>

**14**

For Israel has forgotten his Maker  
and built palaces,  
and Judah has multiplied fortified cities,<sup>138</sup>  
so I will send a fire upon his cities,  
and it shall devour her strongholds.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> This demonstrates that laws do not change one's heart (see Galatians 3:10-11). More laws would not save disobedient Israel. The only thing that could save Israel would be a new heart with laws written upon it. That way, the laws would not be seen as a strange thing. Instead, because they were written upon the heart, they would be natural. This is exactly what Christians have been given in Christ (see Galatians 3:12-14)! His death, burial, and resurrection have brought about the establishment of a new covenant (see Ezekiel 36:24-27 and Hebrews 8:8-12). This new covenant allows people to walk in joyful obedience to him.

<sup>136</sup> Israel claimed to worship Yahweh. That is why they were bringing "sacrificial offerings" to God. Thus, in a perverse way, Israel always worshiped Yahweh. He was one among many gods to them. But Yahweh would not accept this false worship. God has not changed. He still won't accept false worship. Christians must put away their false gods and worship God alone.

<sup>137</sup> Yahweh had saved the people out of Egypt. Now, because of sin, they will go back to their "slavery". Because the people are returning to "Egypt", if they are to be saved in the future, there will need to be another exodus. It is significant that the salvation Christ brings is often spoken of as the "second exodus". He brings his people out of their slavery.

<sup>138</sup> Again, the previous words were spoken mainly to Israel. However, the entire prophecy clearly pertained to both Israel and Judah.

<sup>139</sup> Yahweh was going to remove everything Israel trusted in. This was a gracious act. It allowed them to see clearly and, hopefully, turn to the only one worthy of trust. The same thing happens today. Yahweh removes things we trust in so that we might repent and place all our trust in him.



**9:1**

Rejoice not, O Israel!

Exult not like the peoples;

for you have played the whore, forsaking your God.

You have loved a prostitute's wages

on all threshing floors.

**2**

Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them,

and the new wine shall fail them.<sup>140</sup>

**3**

They shall not remain in the land of the LORD,<sup>141</sup>

but Ephraim shall return to Egypt,

and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.<sup>142</sup>

**4**

They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD,

and their sacrifices shall not please him.<sup>143</sup>

It shall be like mourners' bread to them;

all who eat of it shall be defiled;

for their bread shall be for their hunger only;

it shall not come to the house of the LORD.<sup>144</sup>

**5**

What will you do on the day of the appointed festival,

---

<sup>140</sup> Because of Israel's idolatry, God declares that the land will not give its blessings to the Israelites. This should not have surprised the Israelites. This had been promised in Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Even earlier, it was also seen in Cain's life when he killed Abel (see Genesis 4:12). This removal of blessings is a gracious gift from God. The people should see the lack of blessings as another warning that they need to turn from their sin.

<sup>141</sup> Like Adam and Eve, Israel would not remain in God's good place.

<sup>142</sup> Egypt and Assyria are combined together in Hosea. Both are pictures of slavery away from God's good place. Again, the references to these places remind the reader that God's people will, if they are to be delivered, need a second exodus.

<sup>143</sup> Again, Israel did worship Yahweh—at least in a sense. They half-heartedly brought sacrifices to Yahweh even as they worshiped other gods. Yahweh will not accept this type of worship.

<sup>144</sup> Worship of Yahweh continued even while Israel worshiped Baal. Yahweh is a jealous God. He does not desire partial worship and he will not receive this type of worship. See Exodus 34:14.

and on the day of the feast of the LORD?

## 6

For behold, they are going away from destruction;  
but Egypt shall gather them;  
Memphis shall bury them.<sup>145</sup>

Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver;  
thorns shall be in their tents.

## 7

The days of punishment have come;  
the days of recompense have come;  
Israel shall know it.

The prophet is a fool;  
the man of the spirit is mad,  
because of your great iniquity  
and great hatred.

## 8

The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God;  
yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways,  
and hatred in the house of his God.

## 9

They have deeply corrupted themselves  
as in the days of Gibeah:<sup>146</sup>  
he will remember their iniquity;  
he will punish their sins.

## 10

Like grapes in the wilderness,  
I found Israel.  
Like the first fruit on the fig tree  
in its first season,  
I saw your fathers.

---

<sup>145</sup> Memphis was a city in ancient Egypt. Egypt has become a major theme in Hosea.

<sup>146</sup> The days of Gibeah seems to be a reference to the sin that is recorded at the end of the book of Judges. See Judges 19.

But they came to Baal-peor<sup>147</sup>

and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame,  
and became detestable like the thing they loved.

**11**

Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird—  
no birth, no pregnancy, no conception!

**12**

Even if they bring up children,  
I will bereave them till none is left.

Woe to them

when I depart from them!

**13**

Ephraim, as I have seen, was like a young palm planted in a meadow;

but Ephraim must lead his children out to slaughter.

**14**

Give them, O LORD—

what will you give?

Give them a miscarrying womb

and dry breasts.

**15**

Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal;

there I began to hate them.<sup>148</sup>

Because of the wickedness of their deeds

I will drive them out of my house.

I will love them no more;<sup>149</sup>

all their princes are rebels.

**16**

Ephraim is stricken;

their root is dried up;

---

<sup>147</sup> See Deuteronomy 3:9 and 4:3.

<sup>148</sup> Gilgal is the first place Israel camped after crossing the Jordan river.

<sup>149</sup> This is a reference to Israel during the time of Hosea. God is saying that he will not forgive that generation any more. They will be destroyed.

they shall bear no fruit.<sup>150</sup>

Even though they give birth,

I will put their beloved children to death.

17

My God will reject them

because they have not listened to him;

they shall be wanderers among the nations.<sup>151</sup>

10:1

Israel is a luxuriant vine<sup>152</sup>

that yields its fruit.<sup>153</sup>

The more his fruit increased,

the more altars he built;

as his country improved,

---

<sup>150</sup> Israel cannot bear good fruit because they refuse to worship God and follow him. Jesus, the true Israel, does what Israel in Hosea's day would not do. He is perfectly fruitful. Because he is perfectly fruitful, all those in him are also fruitful (see John 15).

<sup>151</sup> See Genesis 4:14. Like Cain, the people of Israel would be driven far from their home. Dispersion was prophesied in Deuteronomy (see Deuteronomy 4:27 and 29:28). However, Deuteronomy also includes the promise that God would regather his people in days to come (see Deuteronomy 4:28-31 and 30:1-10). Christians are a part of that regathering of God's people from the nations (see 1 Peter 1:1). Jesus is the "head" who leads God's people in this second exodus (see Hosea 1:10-2:1).

<sup>152</sup> Israel is often compared to a vine in the Old Testament. This comparison is always negative, for Israel never bore good fruit (see Psalm 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, 5:10, 12:10, Ezekiel 15:1-8 and 17:1-24). It is significant to note that Jesus compares himself to a vine in John 15. He is the **true vine**. As the true vine, he does what Israel never did. He bears good fruit. This demonstrates that Jesus is the new Israel. He is the son of God who perfectly fulfills God's will. All those in him bear good fruit. Apart from Jesus, there is no other vine. As the true vine, he fulfills the "fruit bearing" purpose Yahweh always had for Israel. As New Testament readers reading this poem in Hosea, we are to think of the true Israel—Jesus—bearing good fruit to the Father's glory. The only way any person is able to bear good fruit is because that person is connected to the true vine—Jesus.

<sup>153</sup> The reader is presented with a beautiful picture of a grape vine loaded with fruit. The vine is Israel. The land of Israel, like the grape vine, has "grapes" growing all over it. The "grapes" growing in Israel, however, are actually altars to the Baals! These altars are as abundant as grapes on a healthy grapevine—and more are being added all of the time! Idolatry, we learn, is the "fruit" of Israel. This is what the land produces and the thing for which it is known.

he improved his pillars.<sup>154</sup>

2

Their heart is false;  
now they must bear their guilt.

The LORD will break down their altars  
and destroy their pillars.<sup>155</sup>

3

For now they will say:  
“We have no king,  
for we do not fear the LORD;  
and a king—what could he do for us?”

4

They utter mere words;  
with empty oaths they make covenants;  
so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds  
in the furrows of the field.

5

The inhabitants of Samaria tremble  
for the calf of Beth-aven.<sup>156</sup>  
Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests—  
those who rejoiced over it and over its glory—  
for it has departed from them.

---

<sup>154</sup> We have now left the image of the vine and all attention is on the land. As the land improved (because of Yahweh's provision!), we see the people of the land working hard to improve their pillars. The “altars” and “pillars” are to false gods. This verse indicates that idolatry was always growing in Israel. Israel worshiped idols “on every high hill and under every green tree” (see Jeremiah 3:6).

<sup>155</sup> Israel's “fruit”—its altars and pillars—will be broken down by Yahweh. The “tool” he will use to break down the altars will be the Assyrians. He will destroy the tools of idolatry in Israel. While this poem doesn't say it, other passages in Hosea indicate that not only will Yahweh remove the tools of idolatry, he will remove the love of idolatry as well.

<sup>156</sup> This is Hosea's nickname for Bethel. Bethel means “house of God”. Beth-aven means “house of iniquity”. Because of the golden calf there, Bethel, the house of God, had become Beth-aven.

6

The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria  
as tribute to the great king.<sup>157</sup>

Ephraim shall be put to shame,  
and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

7

Samaria's king shall perish  
like a twig on the face of the waters.

8

The high places of Aven,<sup>158</sup> the sin of Israel,  
shall be destroyed.

Thorn and thistle shall grow up  
on their altars,  
and they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us,"  
and to the hills, "Fall on us."<sup>159</sup>

9

From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel,<sup>160</sup>  
there they have continued.

Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah?

10

When I please, I will discipline them,  
and nations shall be gathered against them  
when they are bound up for their double iniquity.

11

Ephraim was a trained calf

<sup>157</sup> Even the golden calf the people trusted in was going to be taken into exile! The golden calf couldn't save Israel from exile. This "god" couldn't even save itself! It was going into exile, too!

<sup>158</sup> Again, this is a mocking reference to Bethel.

<sup>159</sup> While Israel cried this in the days when they were conquered by Assyria, the apostle John declares that all people will one day cry out in this way because of their refusal to worship God (see Revelation 6:16). Thus, all people should learn from Israel's captivity in Hosea's time, because it is a warning to them of the punishment they will face for their idolatry.

<sup>160</sup> See the terrible sin described in Judges 19:22-30. Yahweh is saying that from the day of that sin to the day of Hosea's prophecies, Israel has not stopped sinning.

## Hosea 8-10

that loved to thresh,  
and I spared her fair neck;  
but I will put Ephraim to the yoke;  
Judah must plow;  
Jacob must harrow for himself.

### 12

Sow for yourselves righteousness;  
reap steadfast love;  
break up your fallow ground,  
for it is the time to seek the LORD,  
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.<sup>161</sup>

### 13

You have plowed iniquity;  
you have reaped injustice;  
you have eaten the fruit of lies.  
Because you have trusted in your own way  
and in the multitude of your warriors,<sup>162</sup>

### 14

therefore the tumult of war shall arise among your people,  
and all your fortresses shall be destroyed,  
as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle,<sup>163</sup>  
mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.

### 15

Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel,  
because of your great evil.  
At dawn the king of Israel  
shall be utterly cut off.

---

<sup>161</sup> This was a message to the people of Israel in Hosea's day. It was also a message to the people of Judah who "overheard" Hosea's words to Israel. And it is a word to people today. The Lord wants a harvest of righteousness. This demands breaking up the "hard soil" in our hearts that keeps us from bearing fruit.

<sup>162</sup> Israel should have trusted in Yahweh. Instead, it trusted in its own strength.

<sup>163</sup> Scholars are not certain about the battle referred to here. It doesn't matter. In any case, it was brutal. Yahweh says that the same thing will happen in Israel because of the sin committed at Bethel.

**HOSEA 11:1-11**

This chapter begins with an important declaration by Yahweh concerning Yahweh's "son". This declaration is important because it is cited by the apostle Matthew in Matthew 2:15. It is important for the preacher or teacher to carefully consider Hosea 11:1, because this verse demonstrates how the apostles used the teachings of the prophets. The chapter ends with one of the major "positive sections" in Hosea. This section includes some of the most beautiful poetry in Hosea.

It appears that Hosea 11:12 naturally belongs with the message found in Hosea 12, rather than with the message found in Hosea 11. For this reason, Hosea 11:12 has been included in the next section in this Preacher's Guide.



# HOSEA 11:1-11

## 11:1

When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.<sup>164</sup>

## 2

The more they were called,<sup>165</sup>  
the more they went away;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals  
and burning offerings to idols.

## 3

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;  
I took them up by their arms,  
but they did not know that I healed them.

## 4

I led them with cords of kindness,  
with the bands of love,<sup>166</sup>  
and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws,  
and I bent down to them and fed them.

---

<sup>164</sup> Yahweh called Israel his “son” when Israel was in Egypt (see Exodus 4:22). As God’s “son”, Israel was to bear God’s image to the rest of the world (see Genesis 1:26-28). In the same way that Adam, the first “son of God” (see Luke 3:38) failed in his task, Israel failed in this task. Matthew 2:15 indicates that the birth of Jesus was a fulfillment of this verse: “This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’”. (see Matthew 2:15). Of course, Matthew knew that this verse in Hosea originally referred to Israel. Matthew understood Hosea’s original meaning. But Matthew isn’t just thinking of this one particular verse. He is thinking of everything that has been said about God’s people coming out of Egypt. From Hosea 1:10-2:1, the idea of a return to Egypt and a journey out of Egypt has been proclaimed. Rather, Matthew is calling his readers to see that Jesus accomplishes what Israel never accomplished. He is the true “son of God” who was called out of Egypt. As the true “son of God”, Jesus accomplished and is still accomplishing all that Adam and Israel failed to accomplish (see also Balaam’s prophesy regarding the Christ in Numbers 24:8). This is additional proof that Matthew did not misunderstand Hosea’s words in Hosea 11:1.

<sup>165</sup> Yahweh’s relationship with Israel wasn’t just when he called them out of Egypt. He had been calling them from that day forward!

<sup>166</sup> Israel was a slave in Egypt. Yahweh never treated them as slaves. Instead, the “cords” he led them with were “kindness”.

5

They shall not return to the land of Egypt,<sup>167</sup>  
 but Assyria shall be their king,  
 because they have refused to return to me.<sup>168</sup>

6

The sword shall rage against their cities,  
 consume the bars of their gates,  
 and devour them because of their own counsels.

7

My people are bent on turning away from me,  
 and though they call out to the Most High,  
 he shall not raise them up at all.<sup>169</sup>

8

How can I give you up, O Ephraim?  
 How can I hand you over, O Israel?  
 How can I make you like Admah?  
 How can I treat you like Zeboiim?<sup>170</sup>

My heart recoils within me;  
 my compassion grows warm and tender.<sup>171</sup>

9

I will not execute my burning anger;  
 I will not again destroy Ephraim;  
 for I am God and not a man,  
 the Holy One in your midst,  
 and I will not come in wrath.

---

<sup>167</sup> See, again, Hosea 11:1. Hosea keeps using Egypt and Assyria in this book.

<sup>168</sup> The idea is that Israel is going back into captivity. In the same way God brought Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus, there will need to be a “second Exodus”. Jesus is the “new Moses” who leads his people out of slavery in this “second Exodus”.

<sup>169</sup> This is a reference to false repentance. Israel always sacrificed to Yahweh, but their words of allegiance to him were false.

<sup>170</sup> Admah and Zeboiim were small towns that were destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (see Genesis 10:19 and Deuteronomy 29:23).

<sup>171</sup> This is a surprising change in tone. In verses 8-11, Yahweh promises he will save his people. The prophets often switch between words of woe and words of comfort.

**10**

They shall go after the LORD;

he will roar like a lion;

when he roars,

his children shall come trembling from the west;<sup>172</sup>

**11**

they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,

and like doves from the land of Assyria,

and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> In Hosea 5, Yahweh also described himself as a lion. There, he promised to tear his people like a lion. Here, he promises to roar like a lion and bring the people up from their captivity and return them to their homes. Reusing imagery connects the various messages in the book and causes the reader to pay more careful attention to the message.

<sup>173</sup> Once again, we have a reference to God bringing his people out of Egypt (and other places). The second exodus is a major theme in Hosea.

**HOSEA 11:12-13:16**

Again, it appears that Hosea 11:12 naturally belongs with the message found in Hosea 12, rather than with the message found in Hosea 11. For this reason, Hosea 11:12 has been included in the next section in this Preacher's Guide.

After the beautiful poem of restoration in 11:8-11, the book of Hosea, once again, changes to messages of coming destruction. Again, changes from messages of hope to messages of destruction are common in all the prophets. In 11:12-13:16, Yahweh reminds the people of their history. He proves that he has been faithful and Israel has been faithless. The chapter ends with a devastating prophecy: "Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open". Shocking words like these should have caused the people to fear for their lives and to turn to Yahweh. They should have a similar impact on people today.

## HOSEA 11:12-13:16

### 11:12

Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,<sup>174</sup>  
and the house of Israel with deceit,  
but Judah still walks with God  
and is faithful to the Holy One.<sup>175</sup>

### 12:1

Ephraim feeds on the wind  
and pursues the east wind all day long;  
they multiply falsehood and violence;  
they make a covenant with Assyria,<sup>176</sup>  
and oil is carried to Egypt.

### 2

The LORD has an indictment against Judah  
and will punish Jacob according to his ways;  
he will repay him according to his deeds.

### 3

In the womb he took his brother by the heel,<sup>177</sup>  
and in his manhood he strove with God.

### 4

He strove with the angel and prevailed;<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>174</sup> It seems verse 12 more naturally fits with Hosea 12 than Hosea 11.

<sup>175</sup> At times, Judah did walk with God. For instance, during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, Judah “officially” repented of sin and committed itself again to Yahweh. See Hosea 12:2.

<sup>176</sup> Assyria and Egypt are paired together throughout the book of Hosea. Eventually, Assyria conquered Israel. During the time of Hosea’s preaching, however, Israel was trying to establish a covenant with Assyria.

<sup>177</sup> See Genesis 25:26. The ESV text note indicates that a possible meaning of the name Jacob is “He takes by the heel”.

<sup>178</sup> See Genesis 32:22-32.

he wept and sought his favor.<sup>179</sup>

He met God at Bethel,  
and there God spoke with us—<sup>180</sup>

5

the LORD, the God of hosts,<sup>181</sup>  
the LORD is his memorial name:<sup>182</sup>

6

“So you, by the help of your God, return,<sup>183</sup>  
hold fast to love and justice,  
and wait continually for your God.”<sup>184</sup>

7

A merchant, in whose hands are false balances,  
he loves to oppress.

8

Ephraim has said, “Ah, but I am rich;  
I have found wealth for myself,<sup>185</sup>  
in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin.”

---

<sup>179</sup> The account of this event in Genesis 32 doesn't speak of Jacob weeping. However, Hosea says this because that was Jacob's attitude. He wanted God and he wouldn't let go of him. Israel is very different from Jacob. They won't weep and they won't come to God. They do not seek his favor.

<sup>180</sup> See Genesis 35:1-15. Israel needed to follow the words which Jacob spoke to his family when they came to Bethel: “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments” (Genesis 35:2). Jacob was speaking to his family and servants at that time. However, Hosea says that “there God spoke with **us**”. This is very significant. According to Hosea, the people of Israel should have been listening to what was recorded in Genesis because God was speaking to them! The same is true today! God's words to Jacob are his words to Christians today because we, too, are Abraham's children (see Galatians 3:7-9, 14, and 29).

<sup>181</sup> The “God of hosts” is a name for God. It means God is the God of the armies of heaven.

<sup>182</sup> See Exodus 3:13-15. See also Yahweh's words in Exodus 6:2-8.

<sup>183</sup> Repentance happens because God helps his people. He gives us grace to walk with him in obedience.

<sup>184</sup> Hosea uses the story of Jacob in Bethel (see Genesis 28) to call the Israelites to call on God and return to him.

<sup>185</sup> See the letter to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22. See also Revelation 18:7.

9

I am the LORD your God<sup>186</sup>  
from the land of Egypt;  
I will again make you dwell in tents,  
as in the days of the appointed feast.<sup>187</sup>

10

I spoke to the prophets;  
it was I who multiplied visions,  
and through the prophets gave parables.<sup>188</sup>

11

If there is iniquity in Gilead,  
they shall surely come to nothing:  
in Gilgal they sacrifice bulls;  
their altars also are like stone heaps  
on the furrows of the field.

12

Jacob fled to the land of Aram;  
there Israel served for a wife,  
and for a wife he guarded sheep.<sup>189</sup>

13

By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt,  
and by a prophet he was guarded.<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> See Genesis 32:22-32. Hosea frequently quotes from the book of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). It is clear he has thought deeply about Moses's writings.

<sup>187</sup> Again, Yahweh is reminding the people of Egypt. He tells them he will be bringing them back to that place. He will be doing this so he might rescue them and so they might truly begin to worship him.

<sup>188</sup> See Deuteronomy 18.

<sup>189</sup> Hosea is reminding Israel of its past. He wants them to remember the story of Jacob when he lived outside of the Promised Land. It seems he does this because he wants to remind the people of God's care for them.

<sup>190</sup> Notice, the name Moses is not used here. Instead, this verse emphasizes that Yahweh used **a prophet** to bring Israel from Egypt and **a prophet** to guard them. These verses draw attention to the work of the prophets. The prophets have been a blessing to Israel in the past. Yahweh is still giving prophets to them. Hosea is a prophet. They should be listening to Hosea.

**14**

Ephraim has given bitter provocation;  
 so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him  
 and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.

**13:1**

When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling;  
 he was exalted in Israel,<sup>191</sup>  
 but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.<sup>192</sup>

**2**

And now they sin more and more,  
 and make for themselves metal images,  
 idols skillfully made of their silver,  
 all of them the work of craftsmen.

It is said of them,

“Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!”<sup>193</sup>

**3**

Therefore they shall be like the morning mist  
 or like the dew that goes early away,<sup>194</sup>  
 like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor  
 or like smoke from a window.

**4**

But I am the LORD your God

---

<sup>191</sup> This is a testimony to the “strength” of Israel before it fell into sin. Like the words of a wise person, at one time Israel’s words had been very weighty. Because of idolatry, this was no longer the case.

<sup>192</sup> Worship of Baal has “killed” Ephraim (Israel). There was no life of God seen in the land. See Romans 6:23.

<sup>193</sup> This seems to be a reference to the worship practices of the Israelites. They killed their children but they worshiped animals! False worship is always like this. It dehumanizes people and it wrongly exalts the rest of creation.

<sup>194</sup> “Dew” is used negatively in this verse. Because of idolatry, Israel will disappear as quickly as dew disappears in the morning heat. The word “dew” is used in a very different way in Hosea 14:5. There, Yahweh says he will be like “dew” to his people. This is a poetic way of saying he will be a constant source of refreshment to his people.



from the land of Egypt;<sup>195</sup>  
you know no God but me,  
and besides me there is no savior.<sup>196</sup>

5

It was I who knew you in the wilderness,  
in the land of drought;<sup>197</sup>

6

but when they had grazed, they became full,  
they were filled, and their heart was lifted up;<sup>198</sup>  
therefore they forgot me.<sup>199</sup>

7

So I am to them like a lion;<sup>200</sup>  
like a leopard I will lurk beside the way.

8

I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs;  
I will tear open their breast,  
and there I will devour them like a lion,  
as a wild beast would rip them open.

---

<sup>195</sup> Notice how many times Yahweh reminds the Israelites of the land of Egypt. He wants them to remember the past. From the days when they were slaves in Egypt, Yahweh has been their faithful God. The reader is being prepared for a return to “Egypt” and a second exodus.

<sup>196</sup> See Isaiah 43:11. This is still true. There is no savior apart from God.

<sup>197</sup> In verse 4, Yahweh reminded the Israelites he was their God in Egypt. In this verse, he reminds them he led them through the wilderness. He is bringing them back to their early days so they might remember what has gone wrong.

<sup>198</sup> These words are probably intended to remind the Israelites of Moses’s words in Deuteronomy 32:15. Just as Moses predicted, Israel has become proud and no longer truly worships Yahweh.

<sup>199</sup> See Nehemiah 9:25-26.

<sup>200</sup> Yahweh describes himself as a lion three times in Hosea. The first time is in Hosea 5:14. In that verse, he says he will, “like a lion”, “tear and go away”. In these verses, Yahweh promises to devour Israel “like a lion”. However, Yahweh uses the word lion in a positive way in Hosea 11:10. Poets frequently use words in different ways. It is one of the ways they more powerfully present their message and tie the book of prophecy together. See also how the word “dew” is used negatively in Hosea 13:3 and positively in Hosea 14:5.

9

He destroys you, O Israel,  
for you are against me, against your helper.

10

Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities?

Where are all your rulers—  
those of whom you said,  
“Give me a king and princes”?<sup>201</sup>

11

I gave you a king in my anger,  
and I took him away in my wrath.

12

The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up;  
his sin is kept in store.

13

The pangs of childbirth come for him,  
but he is an unwise son,  
for at the right time he does not present himself  
at the opening of the womb.<sup>202</sup>

14

I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol;

---

<sup>201</sup> In this verse Yahweh asks questions of the Israelites. He refers to things they have tried in the past which have failed.

<sup>202</sup> Disobedient Israel is compared to a foolish baby who, even though the nine months have been completed, refuses to be born! The life God intended for Israel was rejected by Israel. Like the foolish baby, they refused to be born into the life God had for them! This is often true of people today!

I shall redeem them from Death.<sup>203</sup>

O Death, where are your plagues?

O Sheol, where is your sting?

Compassion is hidden from my eyes.<sup>204</sup>

15

Though he may flourish among his brothers,

the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come,

rising from the wilderness,

and his fountain shall dry up;

his spring shall be parched;

it shall strip his treasury

of every precious thing.

---

<sup>203</sup> This is the wording from the 2016 text edition of the ESV: “*I shall ransom them* from the power of Sheol; *I shall redeem them* from Death.” While possible, the wording in the 2016 text edition seems unlikely (the NIV 2011 and CSB are worded similarly). Based on the negative context of Hosea 13 as a whole and on the end of Hosea 13:14 (“Compassion is hidden from my eyes”), it seems the wording in the 2011 text edition of the ESV is more likely (see also NASB, NET, NLT). The 2011 text edition of the ESV presents Yahweh as if he is asking himself a question: “*Shall I ransom them* from the power of Sheol; *shall I redeem them* from Death”. Notice the change between “I shall ...” (2016 text edition) and “Shall I ...” (2011 text edition). If the 2011 text edition of the ESV is correct, Yahweh is not making a **promise** to deliver Israel in these verses. Rather, he is asking himself a **question**. He asks himself if he should save Israel from Death and Sheol and his answer is “No”. Instead, he calls “Death” to bring its “plagues” upon Israel and “Sheol” to “sting” Israel. Yahweh calls upon “Death” and “Sheol” to destroy Israel because, in his own words, “Compassion is hidden from my eyes”. God’s patience with Israel has run out. Israel will be punished for its idolatry.

Paul refers to this verse in the New Testament in **1 Corinthians 15:54-55**. He uses this verse in combination with **Isaiah 25:8**. He combines these two Old Testament passages to speak about the day when Christians will receive new physical bodies: “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”. Notice how Paul quotes Hosea. In a stunning reversal of the way in which this verse is used in Hosea, Paul mocks death here! Paul calls out to “Death”, sarcastically asking death where its power has gone. Death, Paul knows, holds no power over the Christian! The “sting” of death (referred to as the “sting of Sheol” in Hosea) has been nullified because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul’s combination of Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 demonstrates that death has no victory over those who are in Christ. To summarize, in Hosea 13:14, Yahweh is asking if he will save Israel from Death and the answer is no. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is mocking Death because it has no more power over the Christian.

<sup>204</sup> In Hosea 1:6 Yahweh said, “I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel”. Here, he says he will not show compassion to them. Israel will, as a nation, receive “the wages of their sin” (see Romans 6:23). Israel was conquered by Assyria shortly after Hosea’s prophecies.

**16**

Samaria shall bear her guilt,  
because she has rebelled against her God;  
they shall fall by the sword;  
their little ones shall be dashed in pieces,  
and their pregnant women ripped open.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>205</sup> This is a very graphic way of describing what happened to the people in ancient times when cities were conquered. The graphic words here are intended to cause the people of Israel to repent. Prophets use shocking words because the people will no longer listen to “normal” speech.

## HOSEA 14

The last chapter of Hosea begins and ends with instructions for the people hearing the message of this book. In 14:1-3, the people are told how they ought to repent. They are even told the type of sacrifice they should bring to Yahweh when he restores them. In 14:9, a call is made for those who are “wise” and “discerning” to “understand” this book and to “know” it. The implication is that if one will not respond to this book with “understanding” and “knowledge”, that person is neither wise nor discerning. He or she is a fool. That was true in Hosea’s day. It is also true today. A person’s wisdom (or lack of wisdom) is proved by how one responds to this book.

In between the instructions to the people of God at the beginning and end of the chapter is a beautiful poem in which Yahweh, once more, pours out his heart to his people. He makes promises about how he will heal them and cause them to prosper. He speaks about the days of the King and the joyful existence of those who live under the King’s rule. These promises have been fulfilled (and are being fulfilled) in Christ. Whether one receives these promises, however, depends entirely on whether one is “wise” and “discerning”. Only the “wise” and “discerning” respond to the message of this book (and the entire Bible) and come to Christ in faith.

## HOSEA 14

## 14:1

Return,<sup>206</sup> O Israel, to the LORD your God,  
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

## 2

Take with you words<sup>207</sup>  
and return to the LORD;  
say to him,  
“Take away all iniquity;  
accept what is good,  
and we will pay with bulls

---

<sup>206</sup> The Hebrew word translated “return” in this verse is used throughout Hosea (see, for example, 3:5, 6:1, 11:5, 12:6, 12:9, 14:7). Notably, it is used seven times in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, a chapter describing the return of Israel in the second exodus. There are many connections between Hosea and Deuteronomy.

<sup>207</sup> Israel frequently brought bulls and goats to sacrifice to Yahweh (see Hosea 6:6). Here, Hosea tells the people that they need to bring true **words** to Yahweh.

the vows of our lips.<sup>208</sup>

### 3

Assyria shall not save us;

we will not ride on horses;

and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’

to the work of our hands.

In you the orphan finds mercy.”<sup>209</sup>

---

<sup>208</sup> At first glance, it appears Hosea is telling the people to make a promise to Yahweh that they will offer bulls in sacrifice after God has restored them: “we will pay with **bulls** the vows of our lips”. The ESV’s translation is loosely based on the Hebrew text (MT). However, most modern English translations do not reflect the Hebrew in this verse. Rather, they reflect the Greek (LXX), which reads “we will pay **fruit** of our lips”. For instance, the NIV reads “that we may offer the fruit of our lips”. Other translations take this a step further, understanding the fruit of lips to be praise. Thus, the CSB reads “so that we may repay you with praise from our lips”. The NLT reads, “so that we may offer you our praises”.

In the ESV’s translation of these words, people are responding to the grace shown to them in the second exodus by sacrificing bulls. In the translations based on the Greek (LXX), people are responding to the grace shown to them by offering praise to God. Which of these readings is more likely to be correct? For a number of reasons, the translations based on the Greek (LXX) seems preferable. First, the reading in the Greek fits with the words found at the beginning of verse two. The beginning of the verse speaks of bringing words to Yahweh. It seems likely that the end of the verse would not change and speak of bringing bulls to Yahweh. Second, the text of the Greek requires no additional words to make it coherent, but the Hebrew is textually confusing. It does require additional words. This is reflected in the ESV (and the NET). Third, the reading in the Greek aligns better with the arguments Hosea has been making throughout his book. Yahweh desires the people’s hearts, not sacrifices of bulls (see, for instance, Hosea 6:6). The reading in the Greek also fits with Old Testament passages outside of Hosea (see, for instance, Psalm 51:14-17). Finally, the reading in the Greek aligns with the nature of the Gospel. We are rescued by God because of the blood sacrifice he has made—Jesus. No additional sacrifices of this type are needed. Now, we offer praise to God in thanks for what he has done.

Another factor worth considering is how this verse is used in the New Testament. Hebrews 13:15 alludes to Hosea 14:2. Notably, the reading in Hebrews reflects the Greek (LXX) translation of this verse: “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the **fruit of lips** that acknowledge his name”. This is evidence that the author of Hebrews understood Hosea 14:2 to be speaking of offering praise to God based on the forgiveness he has granted in Christ.

<sup>209</sup> In verses 2 and 3, Hosea tells the people what they should say. Hosea tells the people that they need to turn from their trust in Assyria and from their love of the gods they made (“the work of our hands”). Words like these should be said by all people coming to God through Christ!

4

I will heal their apostasy;<sup>210</sup>

I will love them freely,  
for my anger has turned from them.

5

I will be like the dew to Israel;<sup>211</sup>

he shall blossom like the lily;  
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;

6

his shoots shall spread out;  
his beauty shall be like the olive,  
and his fragrance like Lebanon.

7

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;<sup>212</sup>  
they shall flourish like the grain;

---

<sup>210</sup> After the second exodus, Israel's "apostasy" (i.e., Israel's turning from Yahweh to false gods) will be completely healed by Yahweh. This means that God's people will no longer choose to worship other gods because God will heal them from this sin (see Ezekiel 36:25). This happens because of the work of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

<sup>211</sup> Yahweh's words in Hosea 14:5-7 demand close attention. This is close to the end of Hosea, thus, it makes sense that these final words would focus on the restoration God will bring to his people through Christ. In verse five, Yahweh declares that he will "be like the dew to Israel". This is poetry at its finest, speaking of nourishment, refreshment, life, vigor, help, and care. This line of poetry brings to mind the image of the fruitful tree in Psalm 1. But then Yahweh changes the subject from himself to someone else. He describes this person in five different ways: "**he** shall blossom like the lily", "**he** shall take root like the trees of Lebanon", "**his** shoots shall spread out", "**his** beauty shall be like the olive", and "**his** fragrance like Lebanon". Who is this person? Based on the way words like these are used elsewhere in the prophets and the writings, it is almost certain these are references to the fame, glory, and fruitfulness of the Christ! Notably, after Yahweh's five references to the Christ and his fame and fruitfulness, he speaks of a group of people: "**They** shall return and dwell beneath my shadow". Who is this group? It is the people of God! This verse is talking about the King (Christ Jesus) and the people joyfully enjoying his rule (all those who are in Christ)!

<sup>212</sup> The ESV, for some reason, translates verse 7 in the following manner: "They shall return and dwell beneath **my** shadow". However, the word "my" is not in the Hebrew (MT) or Greek (LXX). Both the Hebrew and Greek say something like, "They shall return and dwell beneath **his** shadow". Yahweh is saying that the people of God, upon their return in the second exodus, will be dwelling beneath the shadow of their King! This is a reference to the people of God living under the care and protection of their King (see also the note at the end of verse 7).



## Hosea 14

they shall blossom like the vine;  
their fame<sup>213</sup> shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

8

O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?<sup>214</sup>

It is I who answer and look after you.

I am like an evergreen cypress;  
from me comes your fruit.

9

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things,<sup>215</sup>

whoever is discerning, let him know them;<sup>216</sup>

for the ways of the LORD are right,

and the upright walk in them,<sup>217</sup>

but transgressors stumble in them.<sup>218</sup>

---

<sup>213</sup> The Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX) both say “his fame”. This, again, is a reference to the Christ. There is a great deal of language like this concerning the Christ in the Prophets and in the Writings.

<sup>214</sup> Verse 8 does more than just summarize Yahweh’s feelings about Israel’s idolatry. It also demonstrates his desire to care for his people. This is an important verse for people today. God is the one who cares for his people. He has nothing in common with the many false gods we may cling to. God is calling his people to abandon their gods and to give themselves to him.

<sup>215</sup> This verse is a summary statement of the entire book. Wise people are those who hear the message of Hosea and who respond to that message.

<sup>216</sup> This is similar to Deuteronomy 32:29: “If they were wise, they would **understand** this; they would **discern** their end!”. Again, there are many connections between Hosea and the book of Deuteronomy.

<sup>217</sup> Hosea’s reference to the upright walking in “the ways of the LORD” demonstrates that rightly understanding this book involves much more than mere knowledge. It involves actions. Faith and actions always go together (see James 2:26).

<sup>218</sup> Ultimately, Hosea is written to two groups of people: the upright and transgressors. How we respond to his book demonstrates which group we are a part of.







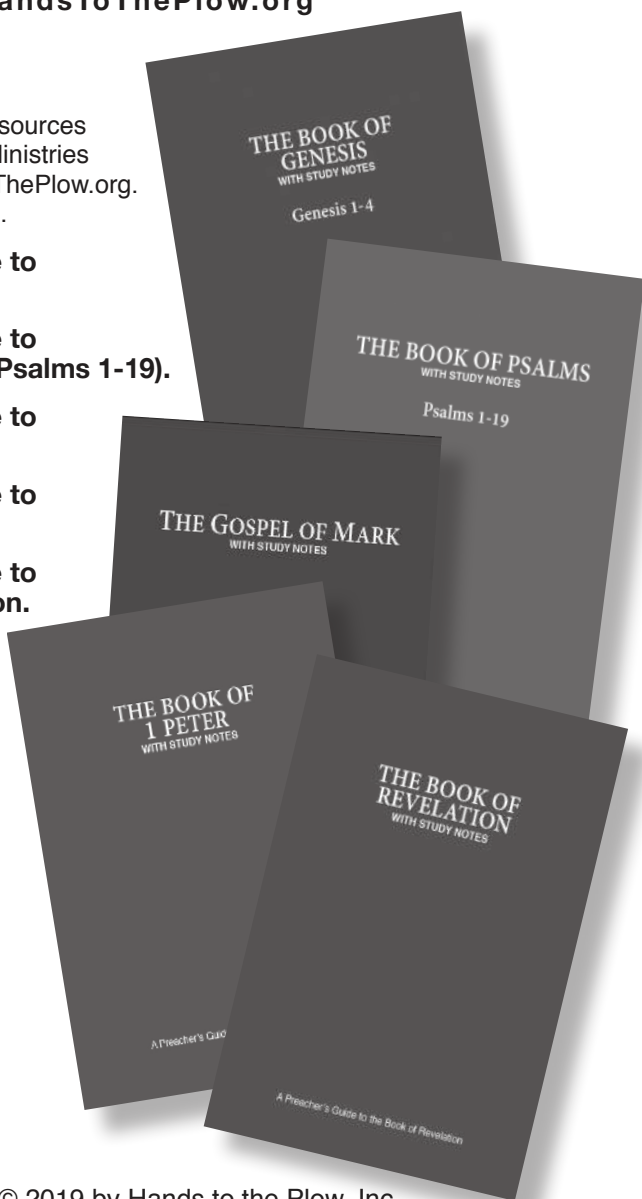


# HANDS to the PLOW MINISTRIES

**HandsToThePlow.org**

Additional Bible Study Resources from Hands to the Plow Ministries are available at HandsToThePlow.org. These materials include ...

- **A Preacher's Guide to The Book of Genesis.**
- **A Preacher's Guide to The Book of Psalms (Psalms 1-19).**
- **A Preacher's Guide to The Gospel of Mark.**
- **A Preacher's Guide to The Book of 1 Peter.**
- **A Preacher's Guide to The Book of Revelation.**



Copyright© 2019 by Hands to the Plow, Inc.



**HANDS to the PLOW**  
MINISTRIES

[HandsToThePlow.org](http://HandsToThePlow.org)