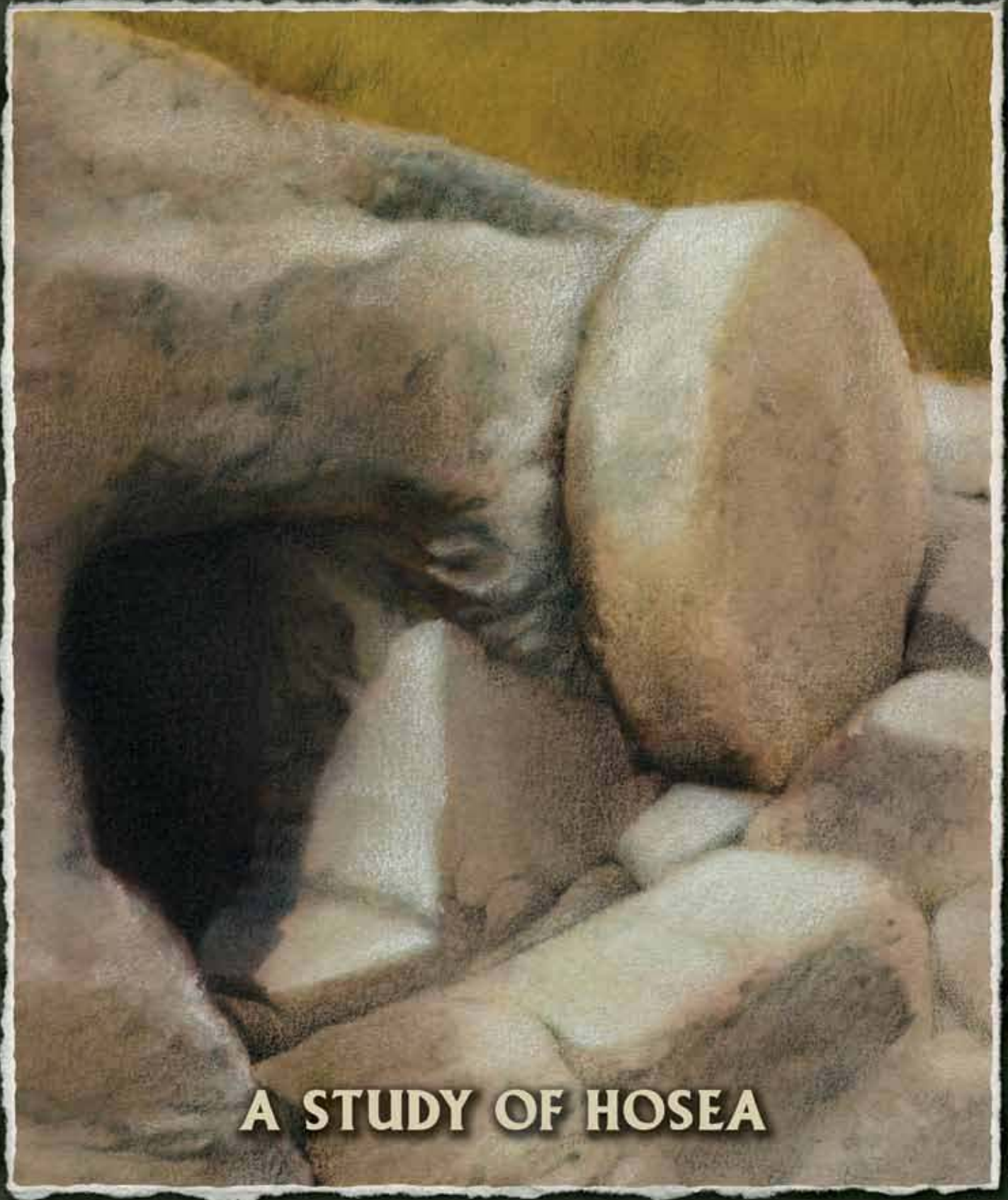


The Gospel in Hosea



A STUDY OF HOSEA

WRITTEN BY TOM KELBY

The Gospel in Hosea

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Written by Tom Kelby

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*To Tom and Arlene (Papa and Mamo),
I love you both and thank God for you. Your selfless love is seen
and admired and appreciated widely. Such love could only come
from Christ. May God give you his richest blessings.*

– Tom

*I dedicate this book to my brother-in-law, Jim.
Your love for the Lord is awesome and your
obedience to His call in your life is an inspiration.
I thoroughly enjoy having a brother-in-law
who is also a brother-in-Christ!*

– Mark

ABOUT THE COVER

Creating a cover illustration for this study was an interesting challenge. Tom and I talked about it at length. What would be an appropriate cover for a study of the book of Hosea? What image captures the essence of this Old Testament story? Certain images immediately jump to mind—none of them very pleasant. Do we depict the wayward actions of Hosea's wife, Gomer? Do we show her leaving her family for another man? Or selling herself for false love, food and money, or possibly show her being sold into slavery? Of course, there is the redemptive image of Hosea buying his wife back - which is truly symbolic of an adulterous people being bought back by God through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus. And that idea is what brought us to the final concept. While spiritual adultery is certainly a theme of the book, that isn't the essence of this book. Rather, this book is about the cure for Israel's spiritual adultery. We wanted to portray the cure rather than the problem. The cure is Jesus. (reflected here by the open tomb). This book, as you'll see as you study its contents, has no meaning apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is the hero of this story. This book, as with every book in the Bible, is meant to draw attention to him. As you study this book, our prayer is that you will be drawn to Jesus.

A disciple of the living God,



Mark Yaeger

INTRODUCTION

This study is about the book of Hosea—the first of the minor prophets. We will not be covering the entire book. We will be covering the first several chapters in-depth and skimming the remaining portions of the book. We will also take a few important detours along the way.

My prayer is that this study will do more than just introduce you to Hosea. I pray that this book would be a good entrance for you into all of the prophetic books—that these strange and inaccessible books would not be quite so strange or inaccessible by the time you have finished this study. Beyond this, I pray that this study will provide you with an introduction to biblical poetry, thus unlocking even more of the Old Testament to you. Beyond this, I pray that this will cause you to reflect on your own life and the way in which you're living. God's view of sin and idolatry is forcefully presented in this book. Our response is demanded. Most of all, my prayer is that, as you work through this study, your love for Jesus and your understanding of the great salvation we have in him will grow. He is the one about whom these prophecies were written. The prophecies are meant to turn all attention to him and to bring glory to his name.

May God do these things and more as we study his word together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The letters are stylized and connected, with a long horizontal stroke above the "T" and "M".

Tom Kelby
October 27, 2010

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

There are four parts to this eight-week study: Scripture reading, study questions to answer, study notes to read, and a weekly journal to record insights the Holy Spirit has taught you. All four are important. You will not get nearly as much out of this study if you skip any of the four. Here's how I would recommend using this book:

On day one of each week, read the verses in Hosea we have printed in the book (on two of the weeks, you will actually read study notes on the first day). We have printed the actual verses from Hosea in this study book for three main reasons. First, we believe you will be able to more freely write notes and questions in the margins, which is something you may not be comfortable doing in your "everyday" Bible. Second, most Bibles break down the verses for the reader, even titling the different sections. We have printed the verses without these breaks as it is important that you dissect the passage for yourself. Finally, many Bibles include study notes. These are helpful, but they can keep you from "wrestling" with the passage yourself.

Read the passage slowly. Once you have read through the passage, read it through a second time. God has a great deal he would like to show you in his word. As you read, ask the Lord for wisdom. Why is this passage significant? What is the truth the writer is trying to get across in this passage? How do the thoughts in this passage relate to those in the verses before it? We have printed the passages with enough spacing so that you have the room necessary to write your thoughts and questions regarding the passage, however, do not write your first time through the passage. Simply read the passage slowly. Your second read-through of the passage should be different. This time, pay close attention to the themes the writer is developing. Circle repeated words or phrases. Underline major themes. Much of Hosea is poetry. These poetic passages will demand close attention. Avoid the use of a Bible commentary or the notes in a study Bible at this point. Do the work yourself. The Lord will give you wisdom.

On days two through five, answer the study questions. The questions will often bring you to other passages that will further illuminate the verses you are studying.

On day six, read the study notes. These notes will give you my perspective on the passage. Sometimes in the notes you will find verses referred to, but not printed. These verses are important. Please take the time to look these verses up. It will help you in your overall understanding of Scripture.

Finally, after you've read the notes, write down any truths the Holy Spirit has taught you over the previous week.

Week One

INTRODUCTION

WEEK ONE

Introduction

DAY ONE

1. What did Jesus say about the Old Testament's message?

Luke 24:25-27

Luke 24:44-47

2. How should these verses impact how a Christian reads and interprets the Old Testament?

3. What does this tell you about the message of the book of Hosea? In other words, what should we expect this book to be about?

4. What did Paul say about the promises God had made (the promises recorded in the Old Testament)? *2 Corinthians 1:20*

5. What does this tell you about the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and Jesus?

DAY TWO

6. God's promises to Abraham (which were later repeated to his son Isaac and to his grandson Jacob) are important background to understanding the book of Hosea. What, exactly, did God promise to Abraham? *Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 22:15-18*

7. How does the New Testament portray these promises as being fulfilled?

Galatians 3:7-9

Galatians 3:13-14

Galatians 3:16-29

8. God's promises to David are also important background to understanding the book of Hosea. What, exactly, did God promise to David? *2 Samuel 7:1-17*

9. How does the New Testament portray these promises as being fulfilled?

Acts 2:22-36

10. What does this tell you about Jesus and the nature of prophecy?

WEEK ONE

Introduction

DAY THREE

11. God's commandments outlined in Deuteronomy are important background to understanding the book of Hosea. Outline the promises God made to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:20-28.

12. Outline the promises God made to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:29-31.

DAY FOUR

13. Read Hosea chapters 1-7, preferably in one sitting. Don't take any notes as you read, just take the time to slowly read the chapters. When you are finished, answer the following questions:

What is God saying about Israel in these chapters?

What is God saying about himself in these chapters?

How do these chapters apply to your life and to the church?

DAY FIVE

14. Read Hosea chapters 8-14, preferably in one sitting. Don't take any notes as you read, just take the time to slowly read the chapters. When you are finished, answer the following questions:

What is God saying about Israel in these chapters?

What is God saying about himself in these chapters?

How do these chapters apply to your life and to the church?

DAY SIX

15. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

WEEK ONE

Introduction

AN INTRODUCTION TO PROPHECY

How do you introduce a study of an Old Testament book? And this isn't just a study of any Old Testament book. It's a study of a book of prophecy.

A book of prophecy isn't meant to be read like a book that you might read while lying in a hammock with a glass of lemonade—a book that gently lulls you to sleep. Instead, you read a book of prophecy with your eyes wide open, many times terrified at what you are reading, often wanting to stop reading yet unable to put the book down. Prophetic books are horrible. And they are wonderful.

Hosea is the first of the 12 “Minor Prophets”. The Minor Prophets are not the equivalent to minor league baseball players (i.e., a cut below major league level). They are called Minor Prophets simply because their books are shorter than the “Major Prophets”. The Jews packaged the 12 Minor Prophets together, calling this collection of books “the book of the Twelve”.

Strong evidence indicates that the book has been carefully crafted to link the various chapters into an overall unity, beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, linking the various chapters into an overall unity. For example, a prophetic saying about the Lord roaring from Zion closes the prophecy of Joel (3:16 [MT 4:16]) and opens the following prophecy of Amos (1:2). Obadiah succeeds Amos and deals with Edom, which features in the last chapter of Amos (9:12). Jonah treats the repentance and salvation of Nineveh, Micah predicts the judgment of a proud Assyria, and Nahum consists of a series of oracles describing the fall of an unrepentant and incorrigible Nineveh.¹

Before we begin studying Hosea specifically, it will be worth making some very general observations about prophecy. I have listed nine here. The first three of these observations are the most important. Keeping these nine things in mind will greatly help us as we move through Hosea.

1. 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.

2. Jesus and the apostles clearly state that Old Testament prophecy finds its fulfillment in Jesus

What did Jesus and the apostles say about the message of the Old Testament? They said that it was all about Jesus.

Consider Paul's words regarding the promises God made in the Old Testament:

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 regard to understanding the Old Testament in general (and prophecy in particular) this is an extremely important and helpful verse. According to Paul, all of God's promises (the promises recorded in the Old Testament) find their fulfillment in Jesus. This should dramatically impact how we view the promises God makes in the Old Testament (i.e., the promises to Abraham, the promises to David, and the promises to Israel). We have already been told how these promises are fulfilled. Every promise, Paul says, must be connected to Jesus.

Or consider what Jesus said to two of his followers as they were walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

¹ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), 183.

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:25-27

Notice, Jesus used “Moses” (the books in the Old Testament from Genesis through Deuteronomy) and “all the Prophets” (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, and, with the exception of Lamentations and Daniel, all the books from Isaiah through Malachi) as his key witnesses in a discussion about himself! He used these books to talk about the fact that “the Christ should suffer these things”. He used them to talk about the Christ entering into his glory.

Later in that same day, Jesus said something similar to the disciples when he appeared to them.

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.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:44-49

It is worth noting that, in this passage, Jesus refers to a third section of Scripture: “the Psalms”, also referred to as “the Writings” (Ruth, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel). According to Jesus, the Writings, as with the books of Moses and the Prophets, are also about “the Christ”.

Summarizing the message of “the Scriptures”, Jesus said that they taught that “the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”. According to Jesus, then, the Old Testament is all about him and about the work he accomplished by his death and resurrection.

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 some way—is about him 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” (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. Much more could be said about the meaning of this book, but this “over-arching” theme should not be ignored.

WEEK ONE

Introduction

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 readers is to discover how this is the case. We discover how this is the case as we read the Old Testament through our New Testament lenses.

3. Prophecy shouldn't (necessarily) be interpreted "literally"²

Over and over in the New Testament, we see that prophecies are fulfilled in surprising ways. The way in which Jesus and the apostles interpret Old Testament prophecies demonstrates that we should not demand a one-to-one correspondence between a prophecy and its fulfillment. 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.

We must conclude that a method of interpretation that demands that the promises of the Old Testament be literally fulfilled, so that there is exact correspondence between what is promised and what eventually comes to pass, does not fit the evidence of the Bible. Of course, there are many details of fulfillment in the New Testament that exactly correspond to the promise. Such literal correspondence of a few details does not establish a principle of literal interpretation. Rather, it illustrates the different principle that God accommodates himself to human history when he reveals himself. If God chooses to reveal his purposes progressively, we can be sure that he has a reason and that it is for our good that he does so.³

Perhaps an illustration will help explain the progressive way in which Bible prophecies are spoken and later fulfilled. Imagine a two-year old boy asking his father for a new wagon. The father, let's say, is a heavy equipment operator. One of the machines he owns and operates is a dump truck. Someday, he plans to pass his dump truck on to his son. But his son doesn't know or understand this. In his mind, the greatest thing he can imagine is a new wagon. How does the father tell him about his plans to give him a dump truck in a way that the young boy will understand? He says something like, "Son, I promise to give you a new wagon someday. It will be so big that it won't even fit in a garage. It will be so big that you could carry a car in it!"

The father doesn't tell the boy that the "wagon" will have a diesel engine and hydraulics and an air horn. If he had, the boy wouldn't have understood. Nothing would have made sense to him. But his father's promise did make sense to him. The young boy, on hearing his father's promise of a giant wagon, would, in his mind, imagine the world's biggest red wagon. He would be right ... sort of. But he would also be wrong. He would realize, on the day he finally received the dump truck, that he had misunderstood the original promise. It meant far more than he could have ever imagined. That's the way biblical prophecy works. The promise is spoken in a way that the original hearers can understand. But we must not assume that the interpretation will exactly correspond to the original promise.

[T]he Old Testament revelation was the means of putting the people of its time in touch with the later reality of Christ.⁴

Ironically, the "non-literal" method of interpretation being advocated here is actually the most "literal" approach to interpretation.

The roots of evangelical interpretation lie in the Reformation, where the words *literal* or *natural* were used in another way. The literal or natural meaning of the text was what the text intended to convey to its original readers. ... Most significantly, however, the reformers did not see the literal meaning as being exhausted until it found its fulfillment in Christ. Thus, they recognized that the literal meaning at the Old Testament level pointed to a future event with a fuller meaning.⁵

4. Prophecy is urgent

The prophets spoke⁶ in desperate times. We need to keep this in mind. They weren't popular

2 If, by literally, we mean with exact one-to-one correspondence (i.e., "David" always means "David").

3 Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1991), 66-67.

4 Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 69.

5 Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 69.

6 The words of the prophets were first spoken rather than written.

theologians discussing minor issues of the faith to crowds of appreciative—and obedient—listeners. They were desperate God-followers standing in the middle of the city courtyards and shouting to a disinterested nation of (primarily) non-God-followers about the very existence of Israel. Israel had broken and was continuing to break their covenant with Yahweh. The prophets were Yahweh's spokesmen, warning Israel about the events that would soon take place because of Israel's disobedience.

5. Prophecy is colorful

The prophets use metaphors. Lots of them. I have a friend who once told me, “When I was young, I could whip my weight in wildcats.” This is the language of metaphor. I know that my friend didn't whip any wildcats when he was young. He was trying to tell me that he got in a lot of fights with people. The metaphor, however, said a lot more to me than if he had simply said, “When I was young, I got in a lot of fights and won a lot of them.”

But what if I didn't know that my friend was speaking metaphorically? What if I imagined him using a real ten foot long whip to literally whip 180 pounds of wildcats? What if I imagined that he was saying that he was a circus performer when he was a young man? I would surely miss his point. That's a great risk in reading prophetic literature. We are, because of the heavy use of metaphors, always at risk of misreading the prophets and missing the message. The prophets were fluent in metaphors. We need to know this when we read their prophecies.

Prophets amplified their messages with mega-wattage systems, powering tiny tweeters and huge subwoofers. We are supposed to feel every beat. And the most important vibration to be experienced is God. Savor the soaring language of the prophets' vivid images.⁷

6. Prophecy is (usually) poetic

Most of the prophecy in the Old Testament is poetry. Poetry is far different from other forms of literature and should not be read in the same way that we might read, for instance, narrative. Poets are interested in conveying feelings to their readers. Feelings trump facts in poetry. Or, we might say that the feelings are the facts. Poetry is by nature more subjective than it is objective.

[B]y its very nature poetry is a performance rather than a series of propositions. It is the music of literature.⁸

It's important to know that the poetry of the prophets is not the type of poetry we're used to. For starters, it doesn't rhyme. This means we must learn how biblical poetry works. We'll talk more about poetry when we study Hosea 2.

7. Prophecy is (frequently) fuzzy

This isn't surprising: numbers 5 and 6 above naturally lead to this observation about prophecy. Metaphors, by their very nature, have a certain “fuzziness” about them. Poetry is equally unclear. As D. Brent Sandy puts it, “Imagery and metaphor in prophecy are *inherently translucent*”⁹ (i.e., like the glass in a shower door that is designed to be difficult to see through). Because of this, we should not expect the meaning of a passage to be transparently clear.

Reading prophecy is not like looking through clear glass and seeing the images on the other side of the glass with perfect clarity.¹⁰ It is more like looking through purposely cracked and stained glass and seeing the images on the other side in a distorted sort of way. The distortion, we must understand, heightens the feelings we have. Ironically, the distortion of prophecy allows us to see the horrors and glories spoken of in the prophecies more clearly than if they were presented in a straight-forward and clinical fashion.

⁷ D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 198.

⁸ Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 37.

⁹ Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 147.

¹⁰ See 1 Corinthians 13:12.

WEEK ONE

Introduction

But prophecy speaks to the heart as much as the head. If we think that by objectifying and exegeting every aspect of prophecy we can grasp the intent, we will have ignored one of the most important features of prophecy.¹¹

8. Prophecy's greatest value isn't (just) in predicting the future

People tend to think of prophets as men who predicted the future. Thus, their greatest purpose, many people suppose, was in preparing their own generation for what was to come. But was this their greatest purpose? Because of the translucent nature of prophecy, we must realize that it would have been very difficult for the original hearers of a prophecy to fully understand its message. *Thus, a given prophecy's greatest purpose may not have been to help people look forward to the time of fulfillment. Rather, its greatest value may have been in helping people look backward from the time of fulfillment.* In other words, prophecy is of greater value to those of us who read it today than it was to the original hearers.

We must understand that the prophets weren't just speaking to help those in their own generation. They were writing for the benefit of those who would read the prophecy after it had come to pass. They were writing about things about which they themselves had a fairly incomplete understanding.

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

This is not to say that prophecy wasn't to prepare people for the future. It certainly was intended to do just that. But the bigger value of prophecy seems to be in the way it builds the faith of those who live on the fulfillment side of the prophecy.

9. The prophet is just the messenger

Finally, we must keep our eyes on the prophecies and not their messengers. It is tempting to focus our attention on the prophets. After all, they live fascinating lives. Prophets are, at least in the minds of many, a lot like Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

Huckleberry was always dressed in the cast-off clothes of full-grown men, and they were in perennial bloom and fluttering with rags. His hat was a vast ruin with a wide crescent lopped out of its brim; his coat, when he wore one, hung nearly to his heels and had the rearward buttons far down the back; but one suspender supported his trousers; the seat of the trousers bagged low and contained nothing; the fringed legs dragged in the dirt when not rolled up.

Huckleberry came and went, at his own free will. He slept on door-steps in fine weather and in empty hogsheads in wet; he did not have to go to school or to church, or call any being master or obey anybody; he could go fishing or swimming when and where he chose, and stay as long as it suited him; nobody forbade him to fight; he could sit up as late as he pleased; he was always the first boy that went barefoot in the spring and the last to resume leather in the fall; he never had to wash, nor put on clean clothes; he could swear wonderfully.¹²

Like Huckleberry Finn, the prophets were colorful characters and they could, when needed, "swear wonderfully". But we must not be distracted by them. It is no accident that the Bible includes scant information about the prophets. True, there is a little bit of information about Jonah (but just about one episode in his life) and a little regarding Hosea. But, for the most part, we just don't know much about the prophets. We must assume that this lack of information was intentional. The Holy Spirit doesn't want us to focus our attention on the prophets. He wants us to focus our attention on the message of the prophets.

¹¹ Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 31.

¹² Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 50.

To recap, here are the nine observations we have made about prophecy:

1. The place to begin the study of any Old Testament book (and thus any Old Testament book of prophecy) is in the New Testament
2. Jesus and the apostles clearly state that Old Testament prophecy finds its fulfillment in Jesus
3. Prophecy shouldn't (necessarily) be interpreted literally
4. Prophecy is urgent
5. Prophecy is colorful
6. Prophecy is (usually) poetic
7. Prophecy is (frequently) fuzzy
8. Prophecy's greatest value isn't (just) in predicting the future
9. The prophet is just the messenger

There is much more that could be said about prophecy. However, these nine observations are enough to prepare us for what we will find in Hosea. May God give us his wisdom as we seek to encounter Christ and his glorious gospel in this strange and wonderful book.

Week Two

HOSEA 1:1-9

DAY ONE

Read *Hosea 1:1-9* through twice. The first time through the verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

HOSEA 1:1-9

¹ *The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.*

² *When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”* 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 while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.”* 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, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.”* ⁷ *But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”*

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 my people, and I am not your God.”*

DAY TWO

1. Hosea begins with a list of the kings who were in power at the time of his ministry. Which of the minor prophets (Hosea—Malachi) begin with a listing of the kings in power at the time of the prophet’s ministry?

2. Which of the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) begin with a listing of the kings in power at the time of the prophet’s ministry?

3. Based on the listing of the kings, which of the prophets, if any, ministered during the same time period as Hosea?

4. Why do you think the list of kings are important in prophetic books? What was this information intended to tell the reader?

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

5. Hosea 1:1 lists four kings of Judah and one king of Israel. Hosea's ministry was primarily directed to the kingdom of Israel. How does 2 Kings 14:23-29 describe King Jeroboam—the king in power in Israel at the start of Hosea's ministry?

DAY THREE

6. What did God command Hosea to do? *Hosea 1:2-3*

7. Why did he ask him to do this? What do you think this action was intended to accomplish?
Hosea 1:2-3

8. What had God promised would happen to the Israelites if they worshipped other gods?
Deuteronomy 4:15-28

9. Israel, at this time, worshiped a god called Baal. Use a Bible dictionary or study Bible to research Baal and briefly describe Baal and the practice of Baal worship.

DAY FOUR

10. What was Hosea to name his first child? Why was he to name him this?

11. Verse 4 describes Jehu and “the blood of Jezreel”. Who was Jehu and what happened in Jezreel? *2 Kings 9,10*

12. What was Hosea to name his second child? Why was he to name her this?

13. What would this mean for the nation?

14. What was Hosea to name his third child? Why was he to name him this?

15. In verse 9, Yahweh gives a name to himself that is connected to the name Hosea’s third child receives. What is this name?

16. What would this name mean for the nation?

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

17. Write out Leviticus 26:12 in the space below. Based on Hosea 1:1-9, why was this verse no longer true?

DAY FIVE

18. What do the first nine verses of Hosea tell you about Israel at the time of Hosea?

19. What do the first nine verses of Hosea tell you about God?

20. Assume you are an Israelite hearing Hosea's words here. Based on verses 1-9, complete the following sentence. *Hosea's prophecy means ...*

21. Hosea 1:1-9 relates to the ancient Israelites. How might these verses relate to a Christian living today?

22. Using this chapter as a basis for your answer, how would you respond to someone who might say, "It doesn't matter how I live. God is a God of mercy. He will forgive me."?

DAY SIX

23. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

HOSEA 1:1-9

As mentioned earlier, Hosea is the first book in “the Book of the 12”. These books were purposefully packaged together by an editor and were intended to be read together. There is a recurring cycle of “sin, punishment and restoration” within these books.¹

The book of the Twelve concludes the prophetic commentary. It contains twelve ‘chapters’, each consisting of the oracles of a different prophet, or, in the case of Jonah, one oracle imbedded in a story (Jonah 3:4). These books complete the prophetic commentary by emphasizing again the sin of Israel, the just judgment of God, and hope after the judgment. This hope finds expression in a number of features: a return to the land, a new covenant, a universal element, the renewal of nature, the prominence of the Davidic house (understood in both senses), and emphasis on repentance, and an eschatological ordeal such as a final battle or cosmic upheaval. Not every prophet in this collection predicts all these events, but the entire combination presents a more panoramic view of the future than is found in the previous prophets.²

As with fellow minor prophets Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah, Hosea begins with a list of the kings who were in power during the time of his ministry. Hosea, like Amos, lists kings from Judah and from Israel (although his ministry was primarily to Israel).

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. Hosea 1:1

The lists of kings in these books are a great help. By comparing the list of the kings in power (in this instance, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Jeroboam) to the description of those kings in 2 Kings (in the case of Jeroboam, 2 Kings 14:23-29), the reader is able to get a feel for conditions in the land during the time in which the prophet spoke.

Hosea’s ministry to Israel (often referred to as Ephraim in Hosea) began around 755 BC, give or take a few years. At this time, 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 divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom was made up of ten tribes and was called Israel (or Ephraim). The southern kingdom, comprised of Judah and Benjamin, was called Judah.³ Hosea was the last prophet to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel before it was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC.

1 Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 182 fn23.

2 Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 182.

3 See 1 Kings 12:16-24.

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

During at least the initial stages of Hosea's ministry, Israel prospered. The events of King Jeroboam's reign, as we learn from 2 Kings, didn't seem to indicate that the end of Israel was near.

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam and all that he did, and his might, how he fought, and how he restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, the kings of Israel, and Zechariah his son reigned in his place. 2 Kings 14:23-29

While Jeroboam increased Israel's land mass, it is important to see that 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, "[h]e did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat". The first Jeroboam led the Israelites into idolatry. Jeroboam II, the king referred to in Hosea 1, continued his namesake's evil practices.

This is the setting for the book of Hosea. We have a king—Jeroboam (although several other kings occupied the throne in Israel during Hosea's ministry)—leading the people into evil. We have a people—Israel—gladly following their king into evil. We have a god—Yahweh—who is being disobeyed. And we have a prophet—Hosea—called to bring a message to Israel. His message is that Israel's day of reckoning for its disobedience has come. Yahweh has finally had enough.

Important background to Hosea's words to the Israelites are Moses' 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 and were doing all the things Yahweh warned against here. 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 “near term” message: the scattering was about to take place. But Hosea also had a “far term” message: 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.

Hosea’s Marriage

While most of Hosea is poetry, the first chapter is narrative. Specifically, this chapter tells the story of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer. It begins with Yahweh commanding Hosea to take a wife.

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim and she conceived and bore him a son. Hosea 1:2-3

It is difficult to know exactly what “a wife of whoredom” means (remember observation #7 in last week’s notes: prophecy can be fuzzy). Gomer may have been a prostitute when Hosea married her. Others argue, and this is perhaps the better argument, that she wasn’t a prostitute but became promiscuous after Hosea married her.

Whatever the case may be regarding why Gomer is called “a wife of whoredom”, we must insist that, (1.) Hosea’s original audience knew exactly what it meant, and (2.) it really doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter because we’re told what Hosea’s marriage to Gomer symbolizes. In other words, we can arrive at the wrong conclusions about Gomer and still understand the message of the book. The prophet, remember, is just the messenger (remember observation #9). The message is what is important. Hosea, his wife, and their children are mere props in this story, important props, to be sure, but props nonetheless. Yahweh and Israel are the main actors.

While we cannot be certain about the exact nature of Gomer’s whoredom,⁴ we do know what it is meant to represent: “the land” (i.e., Israel) was committing “great whoredom by forsaking the LORD”. Yahweh and Israel were married. The covenant given at Mt. Sinai (outlined in Deuteronomy) was their marriage contract. The wife, however, has broken the contract. She has been a spiritual whore,⁵ loving other gods instead of her true husband Yahweh. It is significant to note that the word translated “whoredom” in verse two is plural. Thus, we are talking about something that is not a one-time event. Israel has been a consistently whoring wife.

It should be noted that Israel’s spiritual whoredom was not just internal. Her spiritual whoredom was acted out physically. 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, are a denial of Yahweh’s husbandly role as Israel’s provider. The wife—Israel—did not trust her husband to provide for her. By her actions she was demonstrating that she did not love him and that she did not trust him.

Gomer, then, is a sign to all Israel of what the nation is in Yahweh’s eyes—a whore. By Hosea’s words and actions, Yahweh is showing the people of Israel exactly who they are. But the sign of Gomer the whore isn’t the only sign that Israel is given. The command to Hosea wasn’t just that he marry. It was also that he “have children of whoredom”.

⁴ I would encourage you to examine several of the better commentaries on Hosea to further explore this issue.

⁵ “Whore” is a very strong word. Far stronger than “prostitute”. But it is an appropriate choice to convey the message of this book. Remember, like Huckleberry Finn, the prophets could “swear wonderfully”. They never flinched from using words that powerfully conveyed the message they had been given.

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

Hosea has three children with Gomer. All three children are given symbolic names. As with Gomer, the children, we must insist, are props (remember observation #9). For as much as we might like to know more about them, we are told nothing. Their significance lies in the names they are given. The names of the children will send a powerful message to the nation.

Gomer's first child

The first child Gomer conceives is a son.

And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." Hosea 1:4-5

The name Jezreel seems to mean several things here. First, it is tied to blood that was shed in Jezreel and relates to the king of Israel: "I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel". This name told the "house of Jehu" (of whom Jeroboam was the fourth king) that their days in power were coming to an end. They would soon be punished for the murders that their family had committed at Jezreel.⁶

Second, it is tied to destruction that took place in Jezreel and relates to the entire kingdom of Israel: "I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel". In the same way that Ahab's line (Ahab and his wife Jezebel were the preeminent Baal worshipers) was destroyed at Jezreel, all Israel was to be destroyed. They had become like Ahab and Jezebel and they would be utterly destroyed in similar fashion.

Finally, it is tied to the location of Jezreel and relates to the armies of Israel: "I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel". As a nation of Baal worshipers, Israel would, appropriately, be defeated in the place where Ahab's own "bow" had been broken.

Thus, the name "Jezreel" speaks of the destruction of the royal line and of the nation as a whole. It also speaks of the location where the final destruction would be accomplished. In other words, Jezreel's name was a sign-announcement that Yahweh was about to destroy Israel. It is significant to note that, as with Gomer's identification as a "wife of whoredom", the name Jezreel, because of its ties to Baal worship during the days of Ahab and Jezebel, should make the reader think of spiritual idolatry.

There are, it must be said, many interpretations about all that Jezreel means here. Scholars, particularly, disagree about what "the blood of Jezreel" means. But, no matter how these things are interpreted, as with Gomer's designation as a "wife of whoredom", we must insist that, (1.) Hosea's original audience knew exactly (or with a fair degree of certainty) what "Jezreel" meant, and (2.) it really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because we're told what the name Jezreel symbolizes. In other words, as with Gomer's designation as a "wife of whoredom", we can arrive at the wrong conclusions about Jezreel and still understand the message of the book.

Gomer's second child

The name of Gomer's second child has none of the ambiguity found in "a wife of whoredom" and "Jezreel". The name is as clear as it is horrible.

She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen." Hosea 1:6-7

⁶ As Yahweh clearly sanctioned the killing of Ahab and his family, the blood of Jezreel may refer to the murder of Ahaziah (Judah's king) and his family (see the events described in 2 Kings 9-10), which were not, it appears, sanctioned by Yahweh. In any case, some murderous event that Jehu's family perpetrated in or around Jezreel seems to be referred to here.

“No Mercy” is a stunning name, for Yahweh makes himself known as a merciful God. But he is not obligated to show mercy. Mercy is not owed to anyone. As he said to Moses, “I ... will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33:19).

Yahweh’s words here are a reversal of the words he spoke to Moses.

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 ...” Exodus 34:6-7a

He is not, at least to Israel, a merciful God any longer. He is not abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, at least to them, any longer. He is not forgiving their iniquities and transgressions and sins any longer. In other words, they are no different from any of the other nations.

But isn’t Yahweh obligated to do these things? What about the covenant that was made with Israel? What about God’s promises? Shouldn’t he have pity on his own wife to whom he is bound? Not if he she is no longer his wife. And that is precisely what is happening here. Israel has broken the covenant with Yahweh and Yahweh is given her a certificate of divorce. No longer would she enjoy her marital privileges of mercy and forgiveness. The next name will make this all the clearer.⁷

Gomer’s third child

The next child has the worst name of all.

When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” Hosea 1:8-9

“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:

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” Leviticus 26:12

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” Exodus 19:4-6

Consider how Moses spoke about the people’s relationship with Yahweh.

Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God.” 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.

Before we move on, 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). Jesus is God’s people. God is not ashamed to be associated with him. Keep this thought in mind, for the name of Jesus will ring louder and louder as we work through Hosea.

⁷ It is significant to note that a distinction is made between Israel and Judah in verse 7. Judah, unlike Israel, would still find mercy from Yahweh. He would save them (at least temporarily). This salvation, however, would not be by man’s military might. “I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen”. Instead, Yahweh promised to “save them by the LORD their God”. Salvation from the Assyrians would come from Yahweh himself.

WEEK TWO

Hosea 1:1-9

Yahweh's terrible new name

Yahweh has instructed Hosea to give his three children names in this chapter. It's important that we don't miss the name Yahweh gives to himself here. Immediately after he tells Hosea to name the boy "Not My People", Yahweh gives himself his own counterpart to that name: "I am not your God". The English makes it difficult to see exactly what is being said here. The Hebrew reads, "Call his name *Lo-ammi* (Not My People) because you are not my people and I am *Lo-ehyeh* (Not I Am) to you".

This name brings the reader back to the burning bush when Yahweh appeared to Moses. When Moses asked Yahweh what his name was, Yahweh said his name was, "*ehyeh who ehveh*" (I AM who I AM).⁸ In the book of Exodus, Yahweh progressively unfolds the meaning of that name for the Israelites. He loves them, redeems them, rescues them, and provides for them. He is, as *ehveh*, everything they need. Here, however, he takes his name back. No longer is he Israel's "I AM". They were now, like the rest of the nations, without God and without hope in this world.

The meaning of the son's name *Lo-ammi* (Not My People) is predicated on the claim that God is *Lo-ehyeh* (Not I AM) with respect to the Israelites. *Lo-ehyeh* is a pun on the tetragrammaton (*yhwh*) and depends on the account of the revelation of the divine name in Exod. 3:14. Put simply, YHWH is no longer *I AM* on behalf of Israel. As a result of Israel's faithlessness, YHWH's name is "reversed," i.e., changed to reflect the breaking of the relationship between him and Israel.⁹

Verse 9b is heightened because of the way Yahweh speaks. For the first time in this chapter, Yahweh addresses the people of Israel directly. Up to this point, he speaks through Hosea. Here, however, he speaks directly to the people: "You are not my people, and I am not *I AM* to you".

The terrible curses prophesied in Deuteronomy have 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."
Deuteronomy 31:17-18

God's promises to Israel, which were conditioned on keeping the covenant, have been rescinded.

"Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.'" Exodus 6:6-7

Israel has no more relationship with Yahweh. She has been formally divorced.

Obedience led to kinship; disobedience must lead to being disowned/divorced. Thus this message-name, Not My People, and the divine explanation in the rest of the verse, are unmistakable in their assertion that the covenant is now broken. Since Israel's very identity was that of a covenant people, they are now formally cut adrift.¹⁰

With this terrible news ringing in our ears, we will stop here. But why stop here? Why not continue to verse 10? We have stopped here for several reasons: (1.) the Hebrew text stops here, verses 10 and 11 are actually the first two verses of chapter 2, (2.) verse 9 marks the conclusion of this episode, (3.) it is good for us to feel the weight of this passage without instantly doing something to remove that weight.

⁸ See Exodus 3:14.

⁹ J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 97.

¹⁰ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC31; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 32-33.

Can you feel Israel's plight? If you can't, read the passage again. Do you see how seriously God takes idolatry? If you can't, read the passage again.

As a final note, we must not think that obedience is only demanded in the Old Testament era. 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 14:15-24¹¹

We must obey our Lord. 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 children today. We must know that God will not allow his children to remain in spiritual adultery. He never has.

¹¹ It is important to note that Jesus' words regarding obeying his commands are not imperatives, in other words, they are not commands. Jesus' words regarding obeying his commands are indicatives. An indicative verb states what is. Jesus' followers, by his grace, obey his commands. If they don't, it's proof that they are not his followers.

Week Three

HOSEA 1:10-2:1

DAY ONE

Read *Hosea 1:10-2:1* through twice. The first time through the verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

HOSEA 1:10-2:1

¹⁰ *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."* ¹¹ *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.*

¹ *Say to your brothers, "You are my people," and to your sisters, "You have received mercy."*

1. Write a brief recap of Hosea 1:1-9 in the space below.

2. Outline the specific promises and statements in Hosea 1:10-2:1 in the space below.

3. How do the promises and statements in Hosea 1:10-2:1 relate to the promises and statements in Hosea 1:1-9?

WEEK THREE

Hosea 1:10-2:1

WEEK THREE

Hosea 1:10-2:1

4. How would you, if you were an Israelite, have responded to these verses?

DAY TWO

5. The first promise in Hosea 1:10 would have reminded the readers of promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How is the promise stated in Hosea 1:10?

6. How was this promise originally given to each of the Patriarchs? For each reference below, write the name of the Patriarch to whom the promise was given and the text of the promise itself.

Genesis 13:16

Genesis 22:17

Genesis 26:3-4

Genesis 32:12

7. How, according to the following verses, was this promise fulfilled?

2 Corinthians 1:20

Acts 13:32-33

8. Luke, the writers of Acts, was greatly concerned about the size and the growth of the church (see Acts 1:15, 2:41, 2:47b, 4:4, 5:14, 6:7, and 9:31). Why do you think this mattered so much to him? How might the growth of the church be connected to the promise originally given to Abraham in Genesis 13:16 and re-confirmed in Hosea 1:10?

DAY THREE

9. What is the second promise in Hosea 1:10?

10. Paul refers to this promise in Romans 9:22-26. Read this passage carefully. To whom does Paul say that these verses apply?

11. Peter refers to this promise in 1 Peter 2:10. Read this passage carefully. To whom does Peter say that these verses apply?

12. What does this tell you about this promise in Hosea?

WEEK THREE

Hosea 1:10-2:1

13. How can the Gentiles be considered to be “sons of Abraham” (children of Israel)?

Galatians 3:7-9

Galatians 3:13-14

Galatians 3:22

Galatians 3:28-29

DAY FOUR

14. What are the two promises in the first sentence of Hosea 1:11?

15. If you were an Israelite, how would you have expected these promises to be fulfilled?

16. What do you think the apostles would have said about the fulfillment of these promises? When would they have said that Israel and Judah were joined together? Whom would they have said was their head? *Acts 13:32-33, 2 Corinthians 1:20*

17. The second sentence in verse 11 refers to Jezreel. It is a little difficult to know all that is meant by this phrase here (remember, prophecy can be fuzzy). However, it is helpful to know that the name means "God plants". What do you think is being said here?

18. Compare the way in which the word Jezreel is used in verse 11 with the way it is used in verses 4 and 5.

19. What does this tell you about God?

20. What does it tell you about the work of Jesus?

DAY FIVE

21. Compare Hosea 2:1 with Hosea 1:8-9 and Hosea 1:6.

22. What does this tell you about God?

WEEK THREE

Hosea 1:10-2:1

23. What does it tell you about the work of Jesus?

24. If you were restricted to using Hosea alone, how would you use Hosea 1:1-2:1 to preach the gospel?

DAY SIX

25. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

HOSEA 1:10-2:1

Typically, good writers end their chapters with the heroes in a harrowing situation. “How,” the reader wonders, “will they ever get out of this one?” Hosea 1:1-9, however, didn’t end with a cliffhanger.¹ The reader wasn’t left thinking that Israel had even the remotest chance of recovery. These nine verses ended with Israel’s—pick your choice of “d”-words here—destruction, death, and divorce. And all of this was Yahweh’s doing.

The reader is not to feel sympathy for Israel here. Israel has played the whore and she deserves everything promised in verses 1-9. Yahweh’s chosen people, the people he brought out of Egypt, have broken the covenant vows they made with him. They have been intimate with other gods, demonstrating their inner lusts by their external actions.

The perceptive reader shouldn’t be surprised that the “marriage” has ended in this way, for Israel’s “marriage” to Yahweh was never particularly healthy.

It is significant that the clearest marital images early in the story of the covenanted people are Israel’s whoredom and Yahweh’s jealousy in return. From the beginning, the marriage was strained. That tension will break out into open conflict in the prophetic literature.²

Hosea 1:1-9, then, marks the end of what has always been a deeply troubled marriage. Yahweh has been faithful, but the people have loved many gods. They have not trusted in his goodness, protection, or care. They have not been satisfied with his tender love. Because of this, they have been cut off. They are no longer his people. And he is no longer their “I AM”.

But ... what’s this? In the very next verse, we find these surprising words.

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 promised to destroy—to such an extent that they cannot 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. They will be joined together with just one leader.

Could there be a more dramatic turnaround? But how will this resurrection from the dead take place? And when will these things come to pass? What will their fulfillment look like?

Remember, in terms of how the promise is fulfilled, we should anticipate some expansion here. Based on how Jesus and the apostles explained other prophecies in the New Testament we should not demand that the fulfillment correspond to the promises in a one-to-one literalistic manner. We should be open to the fact that the fulfillment could look radically different from the promises.

Let’s take a closer look at individual aspects of these verses before we consider their fulfillment.

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. Hosea 1:10a

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Hosea 1:10-2:1

¹ Both the Hebrew text (MT) and the Greek text of the Old Testament (LXX) conclude chapter one with verse 9. Thus, the verses we will consider this week, Hosea 1:10-2:1 are, in both the MT and the LXX, found in Hosea 2.

² Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *God’s Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery* (NSBT2; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 45.

WEEK THREE

Hosea 1:10-2:1

Verse ten begins with the word “Yet”. This word marks the fact that the translators of the ESV (the translation we are using in this study) see the text as indicating some sort of break between the events of 1:9 and 1:10. No longer is Hosea talking about the Israelites in his day and age. Instead, he is considering the final (or eschatological) state of Israel.

The reference to “the children of Israel” being “like the sand of the sea” isn’t an image that originated with Hosea. Rather, it is a clear reference back to God’s covenant promises to Abraham. Here’s how this promise was originally given to Abraham (then known as Abram).

“I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.” Genesis 13:16

The promise was repeated to Abraham years later (substituting “stars of heaven” and “sand that is on the seashore” for “dust of the earth”).

“I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:17-18

This promise was repeated to Isaac.

“Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” Genesis 26:3-5

The promise was also spoken to Jacob.

“Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 28:14

Jacob later reminded God of this promise that he had made with him.

“But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’” Genesis 32:12

Hosea 1:10 indicates that this promise—in spite of the destruction and divorce spoken of in Hosea 1:1-9—will come to pass. True to his covenant promises, God will multiply Abraham’s offspring—“the children of Israel”—“like the sand of the sea”. How can he do this with a people who have been destroyed?

It may seem like a silly question, but it’s worth asking exactly who the children of Israel are in these verses. The promise of multiplication, after all, refers to them.

On the face of things, the answer is simple. The “children of Israel” are the exact same people referred to in Hosea 1:1-9—ethnic Israelites. However, and this should factor heavily in how we interpret the passage, Paul and Peter do not interpret this passage in this way (remember, the place to begin the study of any Old Testament book is in the New Testament).

Consider how 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

Paul sees this passage as having been fulfilled by both Jews and Gentiles! Thus, Paul considered that this promise had been fulfilled in his day. And somehow (and we’ll need to consider how Paul arrives at his conclusion), he finds reason to include Gentiles in this promise even though it was made regarding the “children of Israel”.

The meaning of the phrase “children of Israel” has been massively expanded by Paul. It must be said that Hosea’s original audience 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” won’t be, like the children of Israel referred to in Hosea 1:1-9, described as whores. Instead, in a reversal of the name of Hosea’s third son (“Not My People”), they will be called “Children of the living God”.

This promise is, like the promise about the “children of Israel” being “like the sand on the sea”, referred to in the New Testament. Notice how this passage is used by Peter in his first epistle. He addresses these words to Christians in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1):

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 drawn from Hosea 1 (and 2:23). Peter, like Paul, applies the promises in Hosea to the church! He, like Paul, considers the promise to have been fulfilled and that the fulfillment includes Gentiles!

Paul’s and Peter’s interpretations would not be expected if we were just looking at Hosea. But the fact that their interpretations don’t appear in the wording in Hosea shouldn’t make us think that the apostles absconded with these promises and reinterpreted them to suit their own purposes. Rather, we should see that God always intended to answer the promises in this way.

In the notes for week one, I made the following statement:

Over and over in the New Testament, we see that prophecies are fulfilled in surprising ways. The way in which Jesus and the apostles interpret Old Testament prophecies demonstrates that we should not demand a one-to-one correspondence between a prophecy and its fulfillment. 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.

I then went on to describe a two-year old boy being promised a wagon but being given a dump truck instead. The dump truck wasn’t originally promised to the boy because it was beyond what the boy could have imagined. The promise, therefore, was spoken in a way he could understand. This is precisely what happens in Hosea 1:10-2:1. Promises are spoken here in a way the Israelites 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, these verses are about you!

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

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Hosea 1:10-2:1

The simple answer is Jesus. Peter and Paul 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 hinge that transforms these promises 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. This is not what we see happening here. 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 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. Peter takes language that normally applied only to Jews (calling his readers “elect exiles of the dispersion”) and applies 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 this is a letter to the church!

Clearly, the believing Gentiles are “sons of Abraham”, but how is this so? How can they be called Jews?

The answer, again, 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. 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. But this is far from the only place where the Messiah (Jesus) is compared to Israel.

It is striking 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 is called God’s son—a name which was rescinded in Hosea 1:9. Jesus was called God’s Son (Mark 1:11)—a name which will never be rescinded. Israel’s male babies are targeted for slaughter by Pharaoh and are delivered. Jesus is targeted for slaughter by Herod and is delivered. Isaiah prophesies that nations will come to Israel and bring her gifts of gold and frankincense (Isaiah 60:1-6). The wise men fulfill this prophecy, recognizing the glory of Jesus and bringing gold and frankincense to him (Matthew 2:1-12). God calls Israel out of Egypt. God calls Jesus out of Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15/Hosea 11:1). Immediately after passing through the Red Sea (used in the New Testament as a picture of baptism), Israel is led into the wilderness where it is tempted for 40 years. Immediately after Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River, Jesus is led into the wilderness where he is tempted for 40 days. Jesus, it should be noted, responds 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 is comprised of 12 tribes. Jesus—the new “Israel”—designates 12 apostles. Israel is referred to by Yahweh—in a negative sense—as a vine that bears poor fruit. Jesus refers 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. Their actions were divinely intended to prepare people to recognize the true Israel. But Jesus, unlike the Israel in the Old Testament, perfectly keeps God’s commands and walks in his covenant. He 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.

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Hosea 1:10-2:1

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 is 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 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 is growing. Why did God inspire him to include this information? I would say 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, we must 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, is clearly interested in demonstrating that the children of Israel are growing. Why did God inspire him to include this information? I would say 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, 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. This chapter also says that the “children of Israel” will have a particular 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

By now, we should be anticipating 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 head. But there is enough here to whet the appetite of Hosea’s original audience. These words should have left them longing for a godly king. But these words aren’t just for Hosea’s original audience. They are also for us as we celebrate our King and see that his coming was promised long ago (remember, a prophecy’s greatest benefit might be to those who are looking backward to the prophecy).

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 (especially in Israel) led the people into sin. Would it always be that way? The book of Hosea tells us that a leader will come whom the people will embrace. This is not the last time Hosea will refer to the coming King.

Before we conclude this rather lengthy look at two little verses, let’s consider the final statement in verse 11.

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

This sounds positive, but what does it mean? Unfortunately, it’s not entirely clear (prophecy can be fuzzy). The name Jezreel, remember, 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, we find the name being used in a positive sense. How can what is negative be turned into a positive? That’s God’s specialty!

The name Jezreel means “God sows”. Thus, this *could* be saying that these things will take place when God “plants” new life in these people. When this happens, “they shall go up from the land”. There have been many opinions regarding what “they shall go up from the land” means. Perhaps the interpretation most consistent with the passage and the gospel is that this phrase refers to spiritual rebirth and the resurrection from the dead that accompanies it. The people of Israel, remember, were declared to be dead in verses 1-9. What else but resurrection—life from the dead—could save them?

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”
John 5:25-26

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 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.

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 all that he has promised! And he has, true to form, done it in a way that goes way beyond all expectations. I am

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Hosea 1:10-2:1

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). Peter's words, which are echos 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

Week Four

HOSEA 2:2-13

WEEK FOUR

Hosea 2:2-13

DAY ONE

Before reading *Hosea 2:2-13* read the study notes regarding Biblical poetry.

AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL POETRY

Hosea 2 is poetry. In order to understand this passage (and the rest of Hosea) it is important to understand how biblical poetry works. But this will not only help us in understanding Hosea. It's important for understanding a good percentage of the Old Testament, for, next to narrative, poetry is the most common form of writing in the Bible. 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 to a lesser or greater degree throughout the other Old Testament books. Without an understanding of biblical poetry, it is very difficult to understand or to feel the full weight of numbers of passages in the Old Testament (many of which are quoted in the New Testament).

Poets use concrete language. They paint pictures in our minds using metaphors (“Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger”)¹ and similes (“Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble”)². A metaphor makes a direct connection between two things. It says (to borrow a metaphor from Hosea), “You are a whore”. A simile makes the same connection but softens it a bit by saying, “You are like a whore”. In either case, the words are stronger than if Yahweh had merely said, “You have loved other gods”. There is a rawness to poetry (especially the poetry of the prophets) that draws out the strongest of emotions. It is intended to do this.

The concrete language so common in poetry differs from the type of language used in, say, a New Testament epistle. Notice, for instance, how Paul speaks of laziness in the following passage:

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

Paul's words are abstract. He is speaking about laziness as a concept. Notice how the same concept is addressed in a biblical poem:

*The sluggard says, “There is a lion in the road!
There is a lion in the streets!”
As a door turns on its hinges,
so does a sluggard on his bed.
The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;
it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.
The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes
than seven men who can answer sensibly. Proverbs 26:13-16*

Instead of an abstract concept like “laziness”, we are given concrete images. The poet describes a door turning on its hinges, a man who is too tired to bring his food to his own mouth from the dish, and a person making silly excuses about why he won't go out of the house to work: “There is a lion in the road!”

Paul and the poet are talking about the same topic (of course Paul goes further in his application).

1 See Isaiah 10:5.

2 See Isaiah 63:13.

But they are doing it in vastly different ways. Images are the bread and butter of the poet (I just used an image myself!). The use of abstract concepts—like laziness or lust—is, while present, kept to a bare minimum. Instead, the reader’s mind is filled with concrete images which convey the same message as might be found in an epistle but in a far more colorful and memorable way.

Since poets rely on images, the reader needs to be able to think as the poet thinks and to follow the poet where he goes. We must resist the urge to flatten the images of the poem and immediately turn them into abstractions. Instead, we should allow the images to wash over us. We must try, as much as possible, to feel what the poet is feeling. Of course, the concrete images are about abstract concepts. For instance, idolatry is one of the abstractions discussed in Hosea. But we must allow the concrete image Hosea uses to portray idolatry (a whore) to be painted in our mind before we “de-concretize” it. This is poetry. We must not turn it into prose. We must make every attempt to feel the poem rather than instantly trying to interpret it.

But while we must resist the urge to immediately interpret a poem’s images, we must, eventually, do just that. We must interpret the poem’s individual images and the poem itself. We must ask why the poet is using the particular images he is using. We must consider the images from many different angles. This is not easy. Poetry demands the reader’s full engagement if it is to accomplish its purpose. The reader must do everything necessary to fully enter the world of the poet—a world of whores and fortresses and bows made of bronze, but he or she must also do everything necessary to leave that world with a full understanding of the poet’s message. After all, the poet isn’t writing about, for instances, fortresses. He is writing about Yahweh. The fortress metaphor is a tool to force the reader to reflect on Yahweh’s strength ... and protective nature ... and stability ... and mercy for the weak, etc., etc., etc..

The first rule for reading biblical poetry, then, can be stated thus: *poetry is a language of images that the reader must experience as a series of imagined sensory situations.* The more visual we can become, the better we will function as readers of biblical poetry. In fact, our experience of biblical poetry would be revolutionized if commentaries made extensive use of pictures such as photographs and drawings.³

What, in addition to its preference for concrete images, distinguishes poetry from everyday speech? In a word, pattern. Poetry has a discernible pattern indicating that the piece in question has been written to fit within a pre-conceived structure of some sort. Helpfully, the editors of a modern version of the Bible indicate where poetry is being used by changing the formatting of the text. Notice, for instance, the formatting of Hosea 2:2-15. Stylistically, the editors of the ESV are indicating that this is poetry. Notice, however, that verses 16-20 are left justified. The editors are indicating that this is not poetry. (In the NIV, however, verses 16-20 are formatted as if they are poetry. The lines between poetry and prose are, at times, somewhat fuzzy.)

The pattern of poetry alerts the reader that he or she is reading poetry and should adjust his or her expectations accordingly. What is the pattern that distinguishes biblical poetry from, for instance, biblical narrative? It isn’t rhyming (and it’s a good thing it isn’t, for it would be hard to translate all of the poetry from Hebrew into another language if it rhymed). Instead, the poetry in the Bible is written in a verse form called parallelism. The Hebrew poets’ reliance on parallelism must be seen as a gift from God to the entire world, for this structure, unlike others which could have been used, is able to be passed, with relative ease, from Hebrew into any other language.

Parallelism is a structure in which one line (called, by some scholars, a *verset*⁴) says something, and the line immediately following it echoes and (usually) intensifies the first line in some way. Thus, these two (or sometimes three) *versets* are connected in an evident way and comprise one “line” in a poem.

For instance, consider the first poem in the Bible:

*“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh ...”* Genesis 2:23

³ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature ... and Get More Out of It* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), 91.

⁴ See, for instance, Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985), 9.

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Hosea 2:2-13

Notice how the first verset (“bone of my bones”) is echoed in the second verset (“flesh of my flesh”). The words follow the same pattern in both versets—“X of my X”.

We must not think of parallelism as just a restatement of the exact same thing for the sake of maintaining interest. After all, if the message of the second verset simply mirrors the message of the first verset, how could the poem maintain any sort of flow or rhythm? How could it go anywhere? Rather, the second verset, in its echo of the first verset, normally adds something to it. This results in a smooth progression of thought. The poem moves along as the second (or third) verset builds upon its mate.

What has been added in the second verset of Genesis 2:23? First, in the progression from “bone of my bones” to “flesh of my flesh”, there’s an obvious progression from inward skeletal structure to outer skin. But is that all the progression we see here? It’s difficult to know for sure. Poetry is more difficult to pin down than prose. But that’s part of the beauty of poetry. The structure forces us to stop and think about the statement. In these versets, the poet (Adam) has moved from the impersonal skeletal structure of his wife (bones) to talking about something more personal about her—her skin (flesh). Bones are hard. Flesh, however, is soft and pliable. It is not the bones that we find attractive in another person but the flesh. We don’t identify with the bones of another person but we identify with their flesh. There is probably more being said here (could Adam, for instance, be hinting at his attraction to her emotional makeup in the second verset?), but it is enough to note that there is definitely some level of progression or intensification between the two versets.

The progression is easier to see in some versets than others. Consider the following line of poetry:

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

Here, we have two main words in each verset: “rebuke” in verset one corresponds with “discipline” in verset two, and “anger” in verset one corresponds with “wrath” in verset two. We see progression in both of these pairs. A rebuke can be short term, but discipline gives an idea of something more drawn out. It is not over as quickly as a rebuke. A rebuke is often unplanned. Discipline, however, brings to mind something that has been planned. We see progression in the other pair of words as well. Anger is manageable, but wrath has a somewhat wild and uncontrollable edge to it. It is like anger on steroids.

The progression between the versets is easy to see when numbers are used. For instance, consider the following example from Hosea 6 (a highly significant verse which we’ll be considering in much more detail in weeks to come):

*After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him. Hosea 6:2*

Notice how the number referred to in the second verset is one greater than the number in the first verset. This is typical. The second number is greater than the first. And the progression is not only by ones. Sometimes, the progression is by thousands.

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. Rather, this is classic biblical poetry. The second verset has intensified the first. (That’s not the only progression in this passage. Notice, also, the progression between something Yahweh “hates” and something that is an “abomination” to him.)

The type of word used in the first verset is often more ordinary than the word used in the second verset. In other words, language seems to progress in terms of complexity. Sometimes the language progresses in its “grade level” (of course, that’s a modern way of putting it). The first line may be written, so to speak, at a 6th-grade level, but the second line at a collegiate level. Sometimes, an ordinary term in the first verset is replaced with a metaphorical alternative (called a “kenning”) in the second verset.

For instance, consider the following passage:

*“he has washed his garments in wine
and his vesture in the blood of grapes.”* Genesis 49:11b

Here, “the blood of grapes” is the second verset’s counterpart to “wine”. This seems to be more than just a creative substitute for “wine”. Notice, “blood of grapes” introduces thoughts of violence and death to the line—thoughts that “wine” alone wouldn’t naturally bring to mind. This may be introducing the thought that the person being discussed in this poem (Jesus!) will violently overpower his enemies.

As you have probably noticed by now, synonymous parallelism, as this mirroring and intensifying form of verse is called, does not demand that every word in a verset be mirrored in the following verset. Sometimes the poet/prophet focuses his attention on one particular word, using the second verset to draw out and intensify this single word.

Another way that the poet intensifies the message of the first verset is by “loaning” its verb to the second verset. For instance, consider the two lines in the following poem (I have numbered the lines here):

1. *Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your fathers?*
2. *Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,
and their children to another generation.* Joel 1:2b-3

In line one, there is no verb in the second verset (“or in the days of your fathers”). It is relying on the verb from the first verset. The same is true of line two. The third verset borrows the verb from the second. What does this “borrowing of verbs” accomplish? It tightens the verset. By removing the verb, the reader has one less thing demanding attention. In addition, removing the verb frees up space within the verset allowing the poet to use more words, if necessary, to flesh out the area in which he is focusing.⁵

As you will quickly recognize once you start considering the poetry in the Bible, parallelism can take several different forms. It is not always “synonymous”. That is, the second verset isn’t always a strengthened and intensified version of the first verset. Sometimes, the parallelism is “antithetic”. This form of parallelism is being used when the second verset in some way negates the first verset. The following two lines from Hosea feature antithetic parallelism.

*“She shall pursue her lovers
but not overtake them,
and she shall seek them
but shall not find them.”* Hosea 2:7a

Notice how much stronger this image is than if the poem simply said, “you will not overtake your lovers”. The antithetic parallelism here leaves us with the pathetic image of a desperate prostitute running, as hard as she can, after her clients but not being able to catch them. She looks for them everywhere, but can’t find them anywhere. We are left with the idea that the “lovers” don’t want to be caught! They are running away from her. She may love them, but they don’t love her.

Another form of parallelism is “climactic parallelism”. Here, the reader will find an incomplete phrase in verset one which is built upon and completed in verset two.

Finally, some lines in biblical poetry have no apparent parallelism within them whatsoever. This “non-parallelism” is called, strangely, “synthetic parallelism”. The lines are connected, to be sure, but the words themselves are not connected in the ordinary way parallel lines are connected. Poet’s, like all artists, oftentimes break their own rules.

⁵ See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 24.

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Hosea 2:2-13

It is worth asking, as we conclude our introduction to biblical poetry, why God inspired the prophets to rely so heavily on poetry. (We could also ask why he didn't move Paul and Peter to write their epistles in verse form.) Perhaps the best answer is that the nature of their message demanded poetry. Poetry, with its concrete images, is well suited to driving a point home. After all, if someone calls you a whore, you'll probably remember it far longer than if they said that you have wandered from God. Poetry demands reflection. But perhaps the nature of the audience also demanded the use of poetry. At a time when most people were illiterate, the message of the prophets came in a form that they could repeat and remember. They could get the gist of the message even if they didn't get all the particulars.

There is much more that could be said about biblical poetry, but this is enough to allow us to begin appreciating and understanding the poetry we will encounter in Hosea. But my prayer is that it will do much more than just help us through Hosea. I pray that this brief introduction to biblical poetry will open entire books of the Bible to you. May you, perhaps for the first time, appreciate and enjoy the poetry you find throughout the Bible.

DAY TWO

1. Read and interact with Hosea 2:2-13. As much as possible, avoid reading this as straight narrative. Remember, this is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Draw pictures, if necessary, to illustrate the message of this poem. Highlight any metaphors that are used. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines (I have numbered the individual lines of poetry here—my numbering may differ, in places, from the numbering others would propose). How does one verset build upon its counterpart? (For instance, in line 1, wife and husband are connected. How does the phrase “I am not her husband” change or intensify the phrase “she is not my wife”?)

1. *“Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—*
2. *that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts;*
3. *lest I strip her naked
and make her as in the day she was born,*
4. *and make her like a wilderness,
and make her like a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.*
5. *Upon her children also I will have no mercy,
because they are children of whoredom.*
6. *For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.*
7. *For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers,
who give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’*
8. *Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.*
9. *She shall pursue her lovers
but not overtake them,*
10. *and she shall seek them
but shall not find them.*
11. *Then she shall say,
‘I will go and return to my first husband,
for it was better for me then than now.’*

- 12. *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.*
- 13. *Therefore I will take back
my grain in its time,
and my wine in its season,*
- 14. *and I will take away my wool and my flax,
which were to cover her nakedness.*
- 15. *Now I will uncover her lewdness
in the sight of her lovers,
and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.*
- 16. *And I will put an end to all her mirth,
her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,
and all her appointed feasts.*
- 17. *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.'*
- 18. *I will make them a forest,
and the beasts of the field shall devour them.*
- 19. *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."*

DAY THREE

2. Review Hosea 2:2-13. What is the overall message of this poem?

3. Using this poem, describe Israel at the time of Hosea as completely as possible.

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Hosea 2:2-13

4. Using this poem, describe Israel's lovers as completely as possible.

5. Using this poem, describe Yahweh as completely as possible.

DAY FOUR

6. Based on Hosea 2:2-13, complete the following: *Israel went into captivity in Assyria because ...*

7. How might this poem be used to speak to the church today?

8. Yahweh considered his relationship with Israel to be a marriage. In the same way, Paul saw earthly marriage as a picture of the marriage between Christ and the church. How does Christ relate to his church? *Ephesians 5:22-33*

9. How should the church relate to Christ? *Ephesians 5:22-33*

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Hosea 2:2-13

DAY FIVE

10. Reread Hosea 2:2-13 and complete the following: What we do as *Christians matters to God* because ...

DAY SIX

11. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

HOSEA 2:2-13

A feature of Hebrew prophecy is that it frequently flips between negative and positive statements regarding the fate of Israel (or Israel and Judah together or just Judah alone). This cycle repeats itself over and over in a book. Such is the case in Hosea. Hosea 1:1-9 was negative. It foretold the destruction/death of Israel. Hosea 1:10-2:1 was positive. It spoke of Israel's resurrection to life and great multiplication under a chosen leader sometime in the future. But things turn negative again in Hosea 2:2-13 (they will turn positive again in Hosea 2:14).

This flip-flopping between negative and positive makes more sense when we consider the nature of Hosea's book. We must understand that Hosea wasn't writing a book with a beginning, middle,

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Hosea 2:2-13

and an end. Rather, this book captures what Hosea said during the years that he prophesied. This book captures his “oracles”—his preaching. Thus, during the years of Hosea’s ministry, sometimes he proclaimed words of woe, and sometimes he spoke words of hope. These oracles were gathered together by an editor (not necessarily Hosea) and published as one collection of oracles.

As background to Hosea 2:2-13, it is worth taking a little time to consider Baal, the rival god worshipped by the Israelites. 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 married to Yahweh, were having an affair with another god, whom they called “husband”. The Israelites did not see Baal as an evil alternative to Yahweh. Rather, they saw him as a vitally important deity. The Israelites needed Baal. His actions were seen as critical to the success or failure of their harvests.

The singular form, apparently referring to an idol, was used by Hosea, (cf. 2:8) in keeping with the typical Canaanite understanding of Baal as the lord of the storm, who is pictured wearing a bull-like helmet, wielding a thunder-bolt with a spear-sharp point in one hand and a battle mace in the other.¹

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 series of stories about Baal is preserved in Ugaritic literature, and the more than fifty years of research since the discovery of those texts at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) in northwest Syria have aided our understanding of the nature of Baal worship, as Hosea viewed it. Salient to our study are the accounts of Baal’s victory over Yamm, the sea-god, who represents chaos and its constant threat to destroy order, and of Baal’s on-going struggle, in which he needs the help of his sister-wife, the goddess Anat, to keep Mot the god of summer-drought and death at bay, lest fertility fail and Baal’s sovereignty be overthrown. Central to that fertility is Baal’s sexual encounter with Anat, who gives birth to a calf. Cultic prostitution seems to have developed in imitation of that cosmic act of intercourse between Baal and Anat, although extra-biblical evidence of ritual sexual activity in Syro-Palestine is scarce. Hosea is the best single source we have. The connection between myth and ritual, nevertheless, is well attested in the ancient Middle East. The myth told the basic story and the ritual was designed to keep it happening.²

Trust in Baal was (to use my own antithetic parallelism), distrust in Yahweh. Yahweh, as Israel’s husband, had promised to provide and care for his wife. It was part of his covenant with her.³ 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. This chapter is his response to her trust in Baal. (Remember, this is poetry. It’s important to see and reflect on the metaphors and the parallelism in this poem.)

1 David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea* (TOTC24; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1989), 89.

2 Hubbard, *Hosea*, 89.

3 Israel is called a “she” here. Later in the book Israel will be referred to as a “he”. Remember, this is poetry. Poets specialize in breaking rules of literature!

*“Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—” Hosea 2:2a*

Yahweh doesn't refer to Israel as his wife any longer. He doesn't even speak to her directly. Instead, he calls his ex-wife's children (the individuals making up Israel) to call their mother (the nation itself) to repentance.

Notice the way the poetry works in this verse. Yahweh first says that Israel is not his wife. The parallel verset expands this thought: he says that he is not her husband. She had wandered from him for hundreds of years, but, through all that time, the prophets were calling her back to her true husband. Even though the relationship was rocky, there was still some semblance of a relationship. Here, Yahweh says that he is not her husband. Since Yahweh is not her husband, he has no obligation to care for her in any way. She has been cut adrift.

What are the children to urge their mother to do?

*“that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts ... ” Hosea 2:2b*

Yahweh insists that Israel has been whoring. It is evident from her face. She looks like a whore. Her eyes are painted like a prostitute's eyes. She is always leering and looking for different lovers. But she does more than just look like a prostitute. The parallel verset indicates that she uses her body—“her breasts”—to satisfy those lovers.

*“lest I strip her naked
and make her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and make her like a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.” Hosea 2:3*

If she doesn't put her whoring away, Yahweh will “strip her naked”. She will have nothing. Like a baby, she will be absolutely helpless, crying out for someone—anyone—to care for her. Notice the strong parallel here between this passage and Ezekiel 16 (words that were spoken regarding Judah).

Again the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

“And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.” Ezekiel 16:1-7

This is the state to which Israel will be returned! Like an unwanted baby, Israel will be abandoned.

It was the legal responsibility of a husband to provide food, clothing and marital rights for his wife (Exod 21:10). Israel's unfaithfulness has violated the responsibility for the marital rights; now even the food and clothing will be taken away. Here the parallels to Ezek 16 are strong. At birth, Israel was a helpless abandoned infant, on whom Yahweh graciously bestowed his loving protection. Now in her maturity, she has forgotten his love and openly cheated on him. But though she does not realize it, she has been utterly dependent on him all along, and he can quickly return her to helplessness by abandoning her ...”⁴

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Hosea 2:2-13

She won't just be like an abandoned baby. She 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".

*"Upon her children also I will have no mercy,
because they are children of whoredom.
For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.
For she said, 'I will go after my lovers,
who give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'" Hosea 2:4-5*

Like mother, like children. Yahweh sees no difference between the individuals in the land and the country as a whole. They were conceived, he says, by acts of "whoredom".

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. Unfortunately for her, she will no longer be able to find those lovers.

*"Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.
She shall pursue her lovers
but not overtake them,
and she shall seek them
but shall not find them." Hosea 2:6-7a*

Yahweh will act so that Israel will no longer be able to find her lovers. Her normal methods of finding clients will be blocked by him. Normal prostitutes have clients who come to them. They stand on street corners and wait. Israel, however, chases after her clients. She will chase and chase, 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—a prostitute desperately running through the streets looking for someone ... anyone ... to sleep with her. But her former lovers don't want her. They have used her and find her repulsive. She is all alone.

And then, in her aloneness, she has a thought ...

*"Then she shall say,
'I will go and return to my first husband,
for it was better for me then than now.'" Hosea 2:7b*

What a wonderful thought! Yahweh must be so pleased that she finally wants him! We imagine her, still sweating and out of breath from her race after her former lovers, coming to the realization that Yahweh will take her back. He always, after all, has taken her back in the past. The adulterous wife is calling all the shots. 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 versets 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.

*"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*

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.

How does Yahweh respond to Israel's newfound desire to return?

*"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.
Now I will uncover her lewdness
in the sight of her lovers,
and no one shall rescue her out of my hand."* Hosea 2:9-10

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.

*"And I will put an end to all her mirth,
her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,
and all her appointed feasts."* Hosea 2:11

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.

*"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."* Hosea 2:12

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 her attention. Israel wouldn't be rewarded for her "partial" allegiance. She would be punished.

*"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

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Hosea 2:2-13

Israel's punishment is terrible. She has been cut off from Yahweh and she will be cut off from her lovers. She will be left naked and alone. The last two verses 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 a terrible poem. How does it apply to Christians today?

1. It provides Christians with an explanation of why Yahweh acted as he did toward Israel at the time of Hosea. It explains why Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. It explains why they were scattered over the whole world. They were being punished. I am not to feel pity for Israel as I read this. I must not see her as the victim. The poem paints Israel in the worst possible light. She is a lewd whore and deserves everything she will get. 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. He wouldn't tolerate adultery in Hosea's day, and, 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, 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.

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

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

We are, if we are Christians, married to Christ. We cannot be married to him and whoring after the world at the same time. That is adultery! Yahweh will not share his love with anyone.

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 God is providing for us is an offense against him. 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 a whore and am deserving of the same punishment Israel received. I have run after other gods (with different names than Baal). 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 to me have nothing to do with me.

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. 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 our next lesson, in how he forgives a wayward people.

Week Five

HOSEA 2:14-23

DAY ONE

Read and interact with Hosea 2:14-23. As much as possible, avoid reading this as straight narrative. Remember, this is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Draw pictures, if necessary, to illustrate the message of this poem. Highlight any metaphors that are used. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines (I have numbered the individual lines of poetry here—my numbering may differ, in places, from the numbering others would propose). How does one verset build upon its counterpart? Make any additional notes in the margins concerning the message of this poem.

HOSEA 2:14-23

1. *“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.*
2. *And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.*
3. *And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.*
4. *“And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ 5. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. 6. 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. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 7. 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.*
8. *“And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth,*
9. *and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow her for myself in the land.*
10. *And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”*

DAY TWO

1. Hosea began with negative words (Hosea 1:1-9), changed to positive (1:10-2:1), returned to negative (2:2-13), and has changed to positive once again (2:14-23). Why do you think God would ordain that this book be written in this way? What benefit might this repeated flip-flopping of messages bring to the readers? What does it bring to you?

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

2. Review Hosea 2:2-13 and write a brief recap of these verses in the space below.

3. Outline the specific promises Yahweh makes in Hosea 2:14-23 in the space below.

4. How do these promises relate to the promises spoken in Hosea 2:2-13?

5. How would you, if you were an Israelite, have responded to these verses?

DAY THREE

6. How will Yahweh address Israel's lack of love toward him? *Hosea 2:14*

7. Verse 15 refers to the Valley of Achor? What was this valley? What happened there? *Joshua 7*

8. What might the phrase "Valley of Achor", when used in a poetic sense, have been meant to say to the Israelites?

9. Into what would Yahweh transform this valley?

10. How could Yahweh take this picture of sin and wrath ("the Valley of Achor") and turn it into something wonderful ("a door of hope"). *Think carefully, how might this line of poetry be related to your life, Jesus, the cross, and the events that took place at Calvary?*

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

DAY FOUR

11. How will Yahweh deal with Israel's love of the Baals? *Hosea 2:16-17*

12. How is Israel's idolatry dealt with in Ezekiel 36:24-27?

13. What do these two passages teach about mankind's ability to turn from his love of idols?

14. How effective will Yahweh's solution to Israel's problem with idolatry be? *Hosea 2:16-17*

15. What confidence should this give the Christian in his/her fight against sin?

DAY FIVE

16. Outline the promises God makes in verse 18.

17. What does this tell you about the effects of the gospel?

18. How does Yahweh describe the way in which he will “betroth” Israel to himself in verses 19 and 20?

19. Describe Israel’s promised marriage to Yahweh. How will it differ from that described in Hosea 2:1-13?

20. What confidence do these verses give you about your relationship with Christ?

21. Verses 21 and 22 refer to grain, wine, and oil. Notice, Israel’s desire was for these very things in Hosea 2:1-13. Where are Israel’s affections directed now?

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

22. Compare Hosea 2:23 with Hosea 1:1-9. How are these counterparts to each other?

23. Compare Hosea 2:23 with 1 Peter 2:10. How does Peter see these promises being fulfilled?

24. If you were restricted to using Hosea alone, how would you use Hosea 2 to preach the gospel?

DAY SIX

25. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

HOSEA 2:14-23

Hosea 2:2-13 was entirely negative. The poem described Yahweh's punishment upon Israel because of her adultery. Those 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” ties Yahweh's actions to Israel's adulteries. Her 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, he has decided to “bring her into the wilderness” and persuade her. He will, in other words, win her love with romance. While the word “wilderness” was used in a negative sense in Hosea 2:3, here it is positive, for it is in the wilderness that her true lover will win her to himself.

*“And there I will give her her vineyards
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.” Hosea 2:15a*

In the wilderness, Israel would be given the things for which she had longed. She would be given vineyards by Yahweh. It's significant to note that she threw herself at the Baals so that she might have vineyards. The desire for vineyards wasn't wrong. It was the way in which she wanted to attain them. Yahweh is the one in whom all her desires will be met. He is the one who will give her her vineyards.

Notice the second verset in line one of Hosea 2:15: “and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope”. 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 cryptic, 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. 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. Here's how the stoning of Achan is described:

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor. Joshua 7:22-26

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 her. 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?

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

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.

This time, Yahweh’s people would not resist him. Rather, they would follow him as they followed him when they came out of Egypt.

“And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.” Hosea 2:15b

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. But she would not follow him reluctantly. She would follow him as her beloved husband.

“And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’” Hosea 2:16

Israel had, from her very earliest days, mixed her love (if it can be called that) of Yahweh with love of other gods. In this day to come, however, she would love Yahweh alone. What would prompt this newfound affection for Yahweh? The following line of poetry tells us.¹

“For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.” Hosea 2:17

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. It happens because of his mercy and kindness. He, not we, 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

¹ For some reason, the ESV does not mark verses 16-20 as poetry. The NIV, NASB, HCSB, and NLT all mark this passage as poetry.

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.

But Yahweh’s promises aren’t just about the love that he will bring about between him and his people. 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.

“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.” Hosea 2:18a

This is remarkable! The work that Jesus has accomplished spills over to impact all created things. 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

The gospel will impact even more than the creation.

“And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.” Hosea 2:18b

Yahweh promises to “break” (that’s the way the Hebrew reads) the bow and the sword and even war itself. Because Yahweh has broken the weapons of war, there can be no more strife among peoples. It is no longer possible. There will be peace.

But what is to prevent backsliding? 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. 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.

WEEK FIVE

Hosea 2:14-23

The final lines of chapter two speak of the glory of this marriage.

*“And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
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’;
and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’” Hosea 2:21-23*

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. Consider the following:

*“The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.” Joel 2:24*

*“And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah
shall flow with water;
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Valley of Shittim.” Joel 3:18*

*“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when the plowman shall overtake the reaper
and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.” 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.² That is why John says that, in this miracle, Jesus “manifested his glory” (John 2:11). He showed, through this miracle, exactly who he was—the fulfiller of these great promises; the one who would bring Israel the prosperity which she had been promised. Without him, there was no wine. With him, however, the best wine flowed freely.

Notice, Hosea 2:22 brings us, once again, to Hosea 1. We’re brought back to Hosea 1 by the word spoken by “the grain, the wine, and the oil”. They answer—or perhaps shout—“Jezreel”. This is, again, poetry. We’re supposed to think about why grain, wine, and oil would answer in this way. 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’s difficult to say (again, this is poetry). However, it seems that the grain, wine, and oil might be, as they use this word, giving a shout of victory. They might be saying something like, “It’s here! The great day of Jezreel has arrived! We’re proof that Yahweh keeps all of his promises!”

Verse 23 undoes everything that we read about in Hosea 1:1-9:

*“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’;
and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’” Hosea 2:23*

² See John 2:1-11.

Yahweh had promised, remember, to uproot Israel from the land. Now he will plant her,³ he says, “for myself” in the land. She will be his. He will show her mercy and will joyfully proclaim that she—apart from all other peoples—belongs to him alone. She has been chosen by him. God’s people will not dispute this claim. They will gladly agree, shouting, for all the world to hear, “You are my God”.

This is a wonderful gospel passage. It doesn’t seem to be about Jesus or the cross or the church, but that is what this passage is all about. As was mentioned in week three, the New Testament writers must be our guides to the interpretation of these passages. Peter applies the very verses we have been considering 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 we say that these things have come to pass when, clearly, there is much that has not come to pass? After all, God’s people haven’t been “planted” in their land yet, right?

Actually, the New Testament proclaims that they have. 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.

But what about the wine? The mountains, after all, are not currently dripping with wine (and, even if it they were, many believers wouldn’t dare drink it!), right?

Actually, for the believer, the mountains are dripping with wine. 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!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who 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 2 Corinthians 1:20), including the ones spoken of here. In Christ, all has already come to pass. Now, we see the fulfillment of these promises by faith. One day, however, 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.

³ Israel is called a “he” in verse 23.

Week Six

HOSEA 3

DAY ONE

Read Hosea 3 through twice. The first time through the verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

HOSEA 3

¹ And the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman 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.” ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. 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.” ⁴ For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. ⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

DAY TWO

1. Hosea 3 brings the marriage of Hosea before the reader once again. Compare this chapter with Hosea 1. What seems to have happened?

2. What does Yahweh command Hosea to do?

3. Why is he to do this?

4. What commands did Hosea give to Gomer when he bought her back?

WEEK SIX

Hosea 3

5. Why did Yahweh tell him to do this?

6. How will the children of Israel relate to Yahweh after this time period?

DAY THREE

7. Verse 5 indicates that the “children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king”. This statement would have reminded Hosea’s audience of God’s promise to David recorded in 2 Samuel 7:8-16. What, specifically, was this promise?

8. How do the following verses demonstrate that Jesus is the one who fulfills God’s promise to David?

Matthew 1:1

Matthew 2:1-6

Matthew 9:27

Luke 1:31-33

Luke 1:68-79

Acts 2:22-36

Acts 4:23-31 (this includes a quotation from Psalm 2 regarding God's Anointed king)

Revelation 22:16

9. When did Jesus begin ruling and reigning?

Acts 2:22-36

Luke 22:69

DAY FOUR

10. According to Hosea 3:5, when would this prophecy regarding the children of Israel coming to David their king be fulfilled?

11. When did the New Testament authors think that “the latter days” would begin?

Acts 2:16-18

1 Corinthians 10:11

Hebrews 1:1-2

Hebrews 9:26

James 5:3

1 John 2:18

12. The prophecy in Hosea indicates that the “children of Israel” would come to Yahweh’s “goodness” in the latter days. When do believers come to God’s goodness? Acts 3:20, Ephesians 1:3

WEEK SIX

Hosea 3

13. If you asked a believer in the early church when this prophecy from Hosea would be fulfilled, what do you think they would say?

DAY FIVE

14. If you were restricted to using Hosea alone, how would you use Hosea 3 to preach the gospel?

15. How would you use this chapter to discuss the person of Jesus and how the Christian ought to relate to him?

DAY SIX

16. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

HOSEA 3

Hosea 3 brings us back to the story of Hosea and his troubled love life. It appears that in the brief time we've been away from him and his "wife of whoredom"—just one chapter!—something has gone terribly wrong in Hosea's household.

And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman 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." Hosea 3:1

Gomer is gone.¹ We are not told how this happened. However, based on the deliberate parallel that was made between Gomer and Israel, it seems likely that Gomer, like Israel, ran from her husband and pursued another lover (or other lovers). Whether she did this once or repeatedly is not known. While we might like more information about the events that led to Gomer's departure, this is all we are given. Ultimately, the details about Hosea's marriage really don't matter (although they obviously mattered to Hosea!). We must remember that the prophet's life (or wife!) is not the main point. The main point is what Yahweh wants to teach us, and we've been given enough information to see that.

Yahweh tells Hosea to "love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress". He doesn't refer to this woman as Hosea's wife. Indeed, he doesn't refer to her by name at all. As with Yahweh and Israel, there seems to be no legal connection between Hosea and Gomer at this point. She has left him and Hosea has not gone after her. He may be glad that she is gone! But now, by Yahweh's command, he must go get her back!

I can just imagine the people of Israel saying to Hosea, "Why would you run after her? She has publicly humiliated you. She has been nothing but trouble. She is an adulteress." His answer, I imagine, would be something like: "She is just like you. Yahweh commanded me to go after this woman because he wants you to see that, even though you are an adulteress, he loves you and he will come back for you."

In the same way that Hosea is pursuing Gomer in spite of her infidelity, Yahweh will love the children of Israel even though they have turned to other gods and "love cakes of raisins". This final statement about raisin cakes demonstrates Israel's true depth at this time. She isn't thinking in deeply theological ways, carefully comparing the merits of the gods she is running after with Yahweh. She doesn't really love foreign gods. She doesn't love any god. She loves raisin cakes (which were, perhaps, used in the worship of the Baals). It sounds pathetic, doesn't it? But that's what spiritual adultery is. People run after the pleasures of this world because they seem so alluring at the time. One of Paul's co-workers, a man named Demas, deserted Paul and the Lord because he was "in love with this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). We're not told what Demas's "raisin cakes" were. It really doesn't matter. He was captured by the wonder and joy of something equally silly. As with the Israelites, it was a poor trade. Raisin cakes—for all their "glory"—cannot compare to the love and joy found in knowing Yahweh.

But in spite of being traded off for raisin cakes, Yahweh chooses to love Israel. Hosea is a picture of that love—he plays the lead role in the play being enacted by Hosea and Gomer for the sake of Israel. That's why Hosea needs to bring, by whatever means, Gomer back to himself. In order to "love" Gomer again, Hosea is forced to buy her.

So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.
Hosea 3:2

Was Gomer a slave at this time and Hosea bought her from her master? Did he buy her from her lover? It's not clear (and, again, it really doesn't matter). What is clear is that Gomer was not worth much. No one really wanted her. I'm not sure Hosea really wanted her, either. He's not doing this out of love for Gomer, but out of obedience to Yahweh.

Gomer will not, when she returns, stray again. She won't be allowed to stray. Hosea isolates her with tight restrictions. He does this because Yahweh is going to do the same thing to Israel.

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." For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Hosea 3:3-4

¹ It should be noted that the name "Gomer" is not used in this chapter. While it is possible that this is another woman, based on the parallels being made between between Gomer and Israel in Hosea 1, this seems unlikely.

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Hosea 3

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”). This parallels what would happen to Israel. Yahweh would take Israel back, and he would restrict her in such a way that she would not have relations with other gods or even with himself.

She would be left without all 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. Like an addict in a treatment center, Israel would be left with none of her old vices to bring her comfort. She would be longing for her promised consolation—waiting for the promises 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.

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. Hosea 3:5²

This verse marks a remarkable turn of events. No longer would the whore be seeking other lovers and their raisin cakes. Instead, “the children of Israel” would seek “Yahweh their God”. They would be running after him! More than this, they would seek the true king—David. They would no longer flaunt their disobedience. Rather, they would “fear” Yahweh and would, finally, experience his goodness. This would all happen “in the latter days”.

Two phrases in verse five demand closer examination: “David their king” and “in the latter days”. To what are these statements referring?

First, let’s consider “David their king”. This prophecy, at first glance, seems to be saying that David himself—the shepherd who had killed Goliath and later ruled over Israel—will be ruling over Israel “in the latter days”. Is this what we are to expect? No. Both the Old and the New Testaments are clear that one of David’s *descendants* will rule over Israel forever. That’s why the NLT translates Hosea 3:5 as follows:

But afterward the people will return and devote themselves to the Lord their God and to David’s descendant, their king. Hosea 3:5a NLT

One of David’s descendants—not David himself—will rule over Israel as king. Yahweh himself had made the promise to David through Nathan the prophet that one of David’s descendants would rule forever:

“Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of

2 This passage in Hosea is an echo of the promise God made in Deuteronomy 4:

“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 4:29-31**

his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:8-16

The New Testament writers go to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus is the king to whom these verses in 2 Samuel refer. The first verse of the New Testament indicates that Jesus is “the son of David” (Matthew 1:1). Near the end of the final chapter in the New Testament, Jesus declares that he is “the root and the descendant of David” (Revelation 22:16). In between these verses, the New Testament writers carefully and consistently point to Jesus as the Son of David, God’s appointed eternal king.

The angel Gabriel announced Jesus’ birth with the following words:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:32-33

The wise men came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2a). They are told to go to Bethlehem, because, as the prophet Micah wrote in Micah 5:2, “from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel” (Matthew 2:6). Jesus, we learn here, is Israel’s ruler. He is the one who will shepherd her.

People stopped Jesus in the streets, calling him the “Son of David” (Matthew 9:27). The children shouted in the temple “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matthew 21:15). Every time he was called by this name, it accented that he is the one who would fulfill the promise given to David. Jesus was also called “the Son of God”. This, like the designation “Son of David”, harkens back to the prophecy in 2 Samuel 7, for Yahweh said, regarding this future king, “he shall be to me a son” (2 Samuel 7:14).

Jesus, not David, is the one to whom Hosea 3:5 refers. But when would the children of Israel come to Jesus their king? Hosea 3:5 indicates that this would happen “in the latter days”. At first glance, these words may seem to suggest that this is something that takes place sometime in the future. In other words, these days are still coming. But this isn’t necessarily so. What was future to Hosea and his immediate audience isn’t necessarily future to readers of Hosea in the 21st century. As we can’t be certain when “the latter days” are based on Hosea alone, we would be wise to consider how the phrase “in the latter days” (or phrases like it) is used in the New Testament.

In Acts 2:17, Peter, in speaking about the events that took place on the day of Pentecost, quotes from the prophet Joel, indicating that Joel’s prophecy had been fulfilled by the events that took place that morning. Notice, particularly, the beginning of Peter’s quotation:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh ...” Acts 2:17a

Peter says that this prophesied event—something that was to take place in “the last days”—had occurred that very morning. In other words, a “last days” event happened nearly 2,000 years ago! Or consider the following verses:

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 1 Corinthians 10:11

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. Hebrews 1:1-2

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Hosea 3

... for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Hebrews 9:26

Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. James 5:3

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 1 John 2:18

The last days, according to the New Testament authors, began when Jesus rose from the dead. We are living in them now. We must not insist, therefore, that Old Testament prophecies talking about things that will happen “in the latter days” are necessarily future to us. The prophesied events were future to the original audience. That is not necessarily the case for today’s readers.

Let’s now return to the prophecy in Hosea 3:5.

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. Hosea 3:5

When was Jesus (referred to as “David their king” here) anointed as the eternal king? When did he begin to reign? Or, if it’s off in the future, when will this happen? According to the New Testament, he has already begun reigning! This may be seen in many different ways. Consider, for instance, how the early disciples reacted when they were persecuted. They quoted Psalm 2—a Psalm declaring that God had established his king on his “holy hill” and that resistance to him was not only futile but also dangerous:

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

*“Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—*

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:23-31

The believers’ confidence in the face of persecution was based on the fact that they knew that Jesus was already reigning. They knew that the events described in Psalm 2 had already come to pass.

Notice how the apostle James speaks to the church in Jerusalem. In this conversation, he is trying to persuade the church that the Gentiles have a place among believers because, as he notes below, “the tent of David that has fallen” has been raised up again.

And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

*“After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,
that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’*

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God ...” Acts 15:12-19

James is quoting from the prophet Amos here (see Amos 9:11-12). He insists that God has already raised up David’s fallen tent (this is metaphorical language to describe the kingdom of David). Thus, James is not waiting for a future king that he might follow. He declares that God’s king is already reigning.

Peter declares the same thing to the crowds on the day of Pentecost. He insists that Jesus is, as he speaks, ruling.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,

*“I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’*

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

*“The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.’*

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Acts 2:22-36

Peter’s comments are littered with quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. The entire point of his message on this day is that Jesus is the Son of David and that he is currently reigning. What does Peter do now that he has declared that Jesus is the promised eternal king and that he is reigning? He tells the people that they must turn from their sins and begin following him.

WEEK SIX

Hosea 3

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:37-41

When, we may ask, did the “children of Israel” come to “David their king” and the goodness of Yahweh? The answer should be obvious by now. They began coming to him as soon as he began reigning! They began coming to him as king 2,000 years ago! 3,000 people, for instance, came to “David their king” on the day of Pentecost. The phrase “in the latter days” shouldn’t make us think that this is solely future. Nor should it make us think that this happened all at once. It has happened and it is happening now. The “children of Israel” have come and they are coming to “David their king”. They have “come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days”.

If you had asked any first century Christians when this prophecy would be fulfilled and when they would return to David their king and to the goodness of Yahweh, they would have looked at you quizzically. They would have said, “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.

It should be noted—and we can’t state this enough—that this passage in Hosea is not just talking about ethnic Jewish people coming to David their king. The New Testament does not allow us to interpret this passage in this way. 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.

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

He is the promised eternal king. In him, all of God’s goodness is brought near to us. Aren’t you glad to be living in the latter days?

Week Seven

HOSEA 4-8

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

DAY ONE

1. Read Hosea chapters 4-8. After reading and reflecting on the message of these poems, answer the following questions:

Which line(s) of poetry impacted you the most and why?

What is God saying about himself in these poems?

What is God saying about Israel in these poems?

How do these poems apply to your life and to the church?

DAY TWO

2. Read and interact with Hosea 4:1-6. As much as possible, avoid reading this as straight narrative. Remember, this is poetry. Think in pictures. Try to visualize what is being said here. In the margins and in the poem itself make any notations that help you grasp the way this poem is working. Draw pictures, if necessary, to illustrate the message of this poem. Highlight any metaphors that are used. Connect corresponding words within the individual lines (I have numbered the individual lines of poetry here—my numbering may differ, in places, from the numbering others would propose). How does one verset build upon its counterpart? (For instance, in the first verset of line four, “the land” is portrayed as mourning, but the second verset of line four no longer refers to the land but to the people within the land. How does the change from the land to those who dwell in the land intensify the message of this line?)

This poem, it should be noted, is the presentation of a lawsuit or a legal case by Yahweh against Israel. He is the prosecuting attorney and the judge. How does he present his case? What are his main arguments? How does he, as judge, decide this case?

1. *Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy¹ with the inhabitants of the land.*
2. *There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land;*
3. *there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*
4. *Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish,*
5. *and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.*
6. *Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest.²*
7. *You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.*
8. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me.*
9. *And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.* Hosea 4:1-6

3. Outline Yahweh’s legal case against Israel here.

4. What does Yahweh promise to do in light of Israel’s transgressions?

5. Line 8 reads “I reject you from being a priest to me”. How might Yahweh’s words in Exodus 19:6 apply to this line? What is Yahweh saying here?

1 This word could be translated “lawsuit” or “legal case”.
 2 The NIV reads “for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest”.

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

6. 1 Peter 2:9, Peter refers to Christians as “a royal priesthood”. How can this be the case if, as we see in this poem, God rejected his people from being his priests?

7. What applications can you take from this poem and apply to the church or to your life?

DAY THREE

8. Read and interact with Hosea 5:3-6

1. *I know Ephraim,
and Israel is not hidden from me;*
2. *for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore;
Israel is defiled.*
3. *Their deeds do not permit them
to return to their God.*
4. *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.*
6. *With their flocks and herds they shall go
to seek the LORD,
but they will not find him;
he has withdrawn from them. Hosea 5:3-6*

9. What does this poem tell you about Israel?

10. What does this poem tell you about Yahweh?

11. Based on this poem, why is it impossible for Israel, in its own strength, to return to Yahweh?

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

DAY FOUR

12. Read and interact with Hosea 5:11-15

1. *Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth.*
2. *But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah.*
3. *When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound,*
4. *then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king.*
5. *But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound.*
6. *For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah.*
7. *I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.*
8. *I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.* Hosea 5:11-15

13. How does Yahweh describe himself in this poem?

14. What does this tell you about him?

15. What hints of the gospel do you see in line 8?

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Hosea 4-8

16. What is Yahweh looking for from those who would come to him?

DAY FIVE

17. Read and interact with Hosea 6:1-3

1. *“Come, let us return to the LORD;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.*
2. *After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.*
3. *Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;*
4. *his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.”* Hosea 6:1-3

18. Who is speaking in this poem?

19. How does this poem relate to line 8 of the last poem we considered? Specifically, what is the manner in which Israel should return to Yahweh?

20. Paul refers to line 2 of this poem in 1 Corinthians 15:4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and answer the following questions:

In what context does Paul refer to this line of poetry?

What does Paul's use of this passage say about the message of this poem? In other words, according to Paul, what is this poem in Hosea all about?

How can Paul take a reference to Israel and apply it to Jesus? What does this tell you about Jesus?

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

HOSEA 4-8

Our study of the book of Hosea is drawing to a close. We won't be able to study each chapter in as much detail as we've studied the first three chapters. This week, we are examining several key passages in chapters 4-8. Next week, we'll conclude the study by looking at key passages in chapters 9-14.

In Hosea 1-3, Israel was compared to a "whoring" wife. In chapters 4-14, Israel's spiritual adultery is presented in many different ways. Israel is compared to, among other things, a dove, a heifer, a vine, and a cloud.

Before we look at these chapters, it should be noted that, as is common in prophetic books, there often seems to be no rhyme or reason to the order of the oracles in this book (this doesn't, however, mean there is no actual rhyme or reason to their arrangement). The message of Hosea (and other prophets) is not so much like a typical book you might read. It doesn't, like a story, necessarily have a beginning, middle, and an end. You keep thinking, after reading a particular section, what happens next? But next is usually more of the same. The story doesn't seem to progress. That's because reading a book of prophecy is more like flipping through a family photo album than reading a story book. Obviously, there is a story being told in a photo album, but it's being told in a different way from how a typical book might tell the story.

For instance, if you were to look through one of my family's photo albums, you'd see us doing similar things in a lot of different settings. Emma (my middle child) would—almost always—be making a goofy face. Sarah (my wife) very rarely makes a goofy face, although, on occasion, she

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

can pull out a doozy. You see changes in people in a photo album, but the changes normally are a progression. My hair, for instance, is progressively graying and disappearing. My wife's hair, on the other hand, magically stays the same color.

There's not necessarily a story being told in the photo album. It just is showing you what is. You keep thinking, as you look at a certain picture, "I've seen that same picture before." Birthday parties, for instance, start to blur together. Reading the prophets is a lot like that. You keep seeing different pictures of the same things.

In Hosea's photo album we see pictures of Israel and we see pictures of Yahweh. The pictures of Israel are all bad. Think of leering prostitutes, rotten grapes, wispy clouds that don't produce rain, and lazy and fat farm animals that refuse to work. The pictures of Yahweh—which would surprise people from the "God-would-never-hurt-a-flea" camp—are of dangerous or destructive things—a roaring lion, a moth, or dry rot.

There are also, scattered throughout the album, glorious pictures of what will be one day (there are seven of these sections in this book: 1:10-2:1, 2:14-23, 3:5, 6:1-3, 10:12, 11:8-11, 14:1-8). These positive pictures appear, seemingly, out of nowhere. Imagine seeing pages and pages of terrible images in a photo album—pictures of mom being put into a squad car, of dad lying drunk on the floor, of teenage children standing before a judge, of all the kids crying—and then, in the midst of these depressing pictures, imagine seeing a picture of the entire family (neatly dressed and smiling no less) at the college graduation of one of the children. This picture speaks of great days to come. But, you wonder as you are looking at the photo album, how could this happen in such a dysfunctional family?

In today's lesson, we'll consider four snapshots from Hosea 4-8. These are not necessarily the most important four snapshots from these chapters. They are merely representative of the whole. These passages are poetry, therefore, we'll want to pay close attention to the metaphors being used. It will be important, as we consider the following poems, to remember the principles we considered in week four:

Since poets rely on images, the reader needs to be able to think as the poet thinks and to follow the poet where he goes. We must resist the urge to flatten the images of the poem and immediately turn them into abstractions. Instead, we should allow the images to wash over us. We must try, as much as possible, to feel what the poet is feeling. Of course, the concrete images are about abstract concepts. For instance, idolatry is one of the abstractions discussed in Hosea. But we must allow the concrete image Hosea uses to portray idolatry (a whore) to be painted in our mind before we "de-concretize" it. This is poetry. We must not turn it into prose. We must make every attempt to feel the poem rather than instantly trying to interpret it.

But while we must resist the urge to immediately interpret a poem's images, we must, eventually, do just that. We must interpret the poem's individual images and the poem itself. We must ask why the poet is using the particular images he is using. We must consider the images from many different angles. This is not easy. Poetry demands the reader's full engagement if it is to accomplish its purpose. The reader must do everything necessary to fully enter the world of the poet—a world of whores and fortresses and bows made of bronze, but he or she must also do everything necessary to leave that world with a full understanding of the poet's message. After all, the poet isn't writing about, for instances, fortresses. He is writing about Yahweh. The fortress metaphor is a tool to force the reader to reflect on Yahweh's strength ... and protective nature ... and stability ... and mercy for the weak, etc., etc., etc..

Of course, with biblical poetry, we can't just look for metaphors (or similes). We must also consider the parallelism in the poems, looking for how the poet (in this case, Hosea) expands his thought from verset to verset.

With these things in mind, let's turn to this (mostly unhappy) photo album. I have numbered the individual lines of the poem (some would differ with the distinctions I have made) so we can follow the parallelism more closely. The line numbering I have chosen, it should be noted, differs from the verse numbers in your Bibles.

1. *Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel,
for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.*
2. *There is no faithfulness or steadfast love,
and no knowledge of God in the land;*
3. *there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery;
they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*
4. *Therefore the land mourns,
and all who dwell in it languish,*
5. *and also the beasts of the field
and the birds of the heavens,
and even the fish of the sea are taken away.*
6. *Yet let no one contend,
and let none accuse,
for with you is my contention, O priest.*
7. *You shall stumble by day;
the prophet also shall stumble with you by night;
and I will destroy your mother.*
8. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being a priest to me.*
9. *And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children. Hosea 4:1-6*

Line 1 - These are Yahweh's words here. This poem begins with a call for the children of Israel to hear Yahweh's word to them. This poem is like a legal proceeding. In fact, the word translated "controversy" here can mean (and perhaps would be better translated) "lawsuit" or "legal case". Yahweh is presenting his legal case—and it's a strong case—against the children of Israel. He is the prosecutor. He is also the judge. He will not allow, as we'll see in line 6, Israel to defend itself. Israel is, at this point, forced to listen to Yahweh's presentation of the facts.

Line 2 - The evidence against Israel is weighty. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love anywhere in the entire land. No one in the land even knows God. Notice, "knowledge of God" in verset 2 corresponds to "faithfulness" and "steadfast love" in verset 1. In other words, one's knowledge of God is demonstrated by his or her actions. 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).

Line 3 - Instead of steadfast love and faithfulness and knowledge of Yahweh (which should have been present among the Israelites), there is all manner of evil (which shouldn't have been present). All of Yahweh's laws have been broken by this people.

Line 4 - Because of the good that is missing among the people (see line 2) and because of the evil that is present (see line 3) the land and the people of Israel are suffering. The people would probably say that Yahweh is not keeping his promises to them. He, however, declares that their terrible condition is their own fault.

Line 5 - It's not just people who are suffering. The condition of the people has impacted the animals! Everything is suffering—even the fishing!—because of the things that the people have and have not done.

Line 6 - Scholars are not in agreement, as may be seen by the different English translations of this line, regarding how this line ought to be translated. The difficulty rests in the third verset, which the editors of the ESV have rendered as: "for with you is my contention, O priest" (see also the NLT, HCSB, and NET). This has caused some to think that Yahweh has turned his attention to the priests in Israel at this point. I'm not sure that this is the best translation. The NIV translates this verse as follows (see also the NASB):

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

*“But let no man bring a charge,
let no man accuse another,
for your people are like those
who bring charges against a priest.” Hosea 4:4 NIV*

If we adopt the NIV’s rendering (which more closely reflects the MT (Hebrew) and LXX (Greek)), the text is saying that the people of Israel are like people who would resist their own priests—something that was expressly forbidden in Deuteronomy.

In all likelihood this accusation reflects a Deuteronomic concept in which the people were warned to comply with the decisions of the priests and judges in all legal disputes (Deut. 17:8-13). Anyone who did not was put to death (v. 12). Hosea asserts that the people of his day are like those who do not humbly accept the decisions of their spiritual leaders. The people have a hard and rebellious spirit and are prone to protest their innocence.³

Line 7 - No matter when or where they go, the children of Israel will stumble. They will stumble because Yahweh will make them stumble. Even the prophets (the false prophets) will stumble along with the Israelites. No one will be able to walk without tripping because Yahweh will not permit it. Stumbling may seem, at first glance, to be a rather benign punishment. It’s not. This stumbling results in the destruction of Israel—“I will destroy your mother”.

Line 8 - Yahweh’s people are destroyed (by Yahweh!) because of a “lack of knowledge”. They don’t know, as we saw in line 2, Yahweh. This is not talking about knowledge of some principles about him. It is talking about having a relationship with him and the knowledge and intimacy that go along with such a relationship! The children of Israel do not Yahweh or his ways. They have rejected him and his law. Therefore, he rejects Israel from being his “priest”. Israel was referred to as a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6) early in its history. This is no longer true. Yahweh will not relate to the children of Israel as his priests any longer. Instead, he promises to destroy them.⁴

This line of poetry should be considered in tandem with 1 Peter 2:9. While this passage in Hosea says that the Israelites were no longer Yahweh’s priests, Peter declares that Christians are “a royal priesthood”. Thus, Jesus’ death and resurrection exalted God’s people to the place from which Israel had been, because of their sin, removed.

Line 9 - The people of Israel have forgotten Yahweh’s laws. His laws, it should be noted, correspond to the phrase “your children” in the second verset. Because the inhabitants of Israel have forgotten Yahweh’s children (his laws), he will also forget their children.

Picture #2—Hosea 5:3-6

- 1. I know Ephraim,
and Israel is not hidden from me;*
- 2. for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore;
Israel is defiled.*
- 3. Their deeds do not permit them
to return to their God.*
- 4. 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.*
- 6. With their flocks and herds they shall go
to seek the LORD,
but they will not find him;
he has withdrawn from them. Hosea 5:3-6*

3 Thomas Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1998), 60.

4 It should be noted that this verse is often used out of context. This verse isn’t a call for Christians to learn more about the Bible lest we be destroyed by Satan. It is a declaration of the destruction Yahweh would bring upon Israel because they rejected him.

Line 1 - Yahweh knows Ephraim (this is the name of Israel's largest tribe and is often used to refer to all of Israel). He knows who and what Ephraim is. Israel (i.e., Ephraim) is not hidden from Yahweh. Israel can't keep his (masculine pronouns are used in relation to Israel throughout this passage) guilt from Yahweh. He sees all of it (could there be a faint echo of Adam and Eve hiding in the garden here?).

Line 2 - Ephraim has, as we've seen in earlier chapters, "played the whore". These actions have resulted in Israel's current condition of defilement.

Line 3 - Israel's whoredom is such that the people cannot "return to their God". Israel is stuck in its sins. Even if the nation wanted to return to God, he could not do so, for his deeds will not allow him to return. This is true of all mankind without Christ. No one is able to come to him without assistance from him.⁵

Line 4 - Far from being presented as a pro-Yahweh people who have somehow stumbled into sin, Israel is presented as an anti-Yahweh people who are inhabited and controlled by a "spirit of whoredom". This, not holiness, marks who they are and what they do. Israel does not, in any way, "know" Yahweh.

Line 5 - Israel's pride (which he maintains in spite of his detestable nature) testifies against him. It demonstrates that the hardened nature of a whore resides within him. Israel will stumble in his guilt. But Israel is not alone here. We see Israel's counterpart to the south—Judah—enter into the picture here. Judah will stumble along with Israel. We are left with the assumption that Judah—even though he has behaved in a slightly better manner than Israel and has had an appearance of godliness—is just like Israel. Everything that has been said about Israel, we are left to assume, is also true of Judah.

Line 6 - Israel and Judah will seek Yahweh. They will try to find him. They will take their flocks and herds so that they might offer them in sacrifice to him, but, even with these sacrificial gifts in tow, they will not find him. They won't find him because Yahweh doesn't want them to find him. He "has withdrawn from them". In the same way that we saw Israel chasing after its lovers but not finding them in Hosea 2, here we see Israel and Judah chasing after Yahweh but not finding him. We are left with the terrible truth that Israel and Judah are helpless. Unless, somehow, Yahweh changes his disposition toward Israel and Judah, they will never find him. He no longer tabernacles with Israel and Judah. The reader is left wondering when God will, once again, tabernacle with man.

Picture #3—Hosea 5:11-15

1. *Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment,
because he was determined to go after filth.*
2. *But I am like a moth to Ephraim,
and like dry rot to the house of Judah.*
3. *When Ephraim saw his sickness,
and Judah his wound,*
4. *then Ephraim went to Assyria,
and sent to the great king.*
5. *But he is not able to cure you
or heal your wound.*
6. *For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
and like a young lion to the house of Judah.*
7. *I, even I, will tear and go away;
I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.*
8. *I will return again to my place,
until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face,
and in their distress earnestly seek me.* Hosea 5:11-15

⁵ See John 6:44.

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

This poem is notable for the terrible and destructive ways in which Yahweh describes himself and for the hope presented in the last line.

Line 1 - Life for Ephraim is terrible. He is oppressed (we must assume that this is from within and from without) and crushed by the judgment of Yahweh. These things have come upon Ephraim because he “was determined to go after filth”. Ephraim’s sin is not presented as something into which he stumbled. He was determined to go after it.

Line 2 - Like a moth feeding on a wool garment, Yahweh will “eat holes” in Ephraim. Like dry rot eating its way through the timbers holding up a house, Yahweh will be the rot that eats away at the house of Judah. These two things (moths and rot) are alike in that they both bring silent destruction. The work of a moth and the progress of rot are slow. Their effects are not immediately evident ... but they are deadly. Ironically, the very one who was to be, from ancient times, the help and salvation of Israel (Yahweh) has now become its greatest enemy.

Line 3 - Israel and Judah weren’t ignorant of their respective conditions. Ephraim saw that he was sick. Judah knew that he was wounded.

Line 4 - But rather than go to Yahweh to be cured, Israel ran to Assyria—the great world power at that time (based on the wording, it is evident that Judah is referred to here as well). Ironically, Israel sought help from Assyria’s great king—rather than from the Great King of Israel!

Line 5 - But Assyria and her great king will not be able to cure Israel or heal Judah. Why?

Line 6 - Assyria won’t be able to heal Israel or Judah because, like a lion, Yahweh will attack Israel and Judah.

Line 7 - Like a lion ripping and tearing at a deer with its claws—only to be leave the carcass once the damage has been done, Yahweh will rip and tear the flesh of Israel—and abandon it. When an animal kills another animal and doesn’t eat it, we wonder at its actions more than if it kills and eats. We know that hunger didn’t drive the animal to act in this way. It acted out of cruelty or rage or anger or self defense. In the same way, the way in which Yahweh tears Israel and leaves the carcass forces us to think about Yahweh’s actions. In the second verset, Yahweh compares himself to a young lion carrying off its prey. Because of his strength, no one will be able to rescue Israel from Yahweh.

Line 8 - Yahweh will destroy Israel and Judah and return to his place (his den?). He no longer tabernacles with them. He has, in a sense, gone home. Israel and Judah will be left in distress. But ... what’s this? There’s a ray of hope here! Yahweh says that he will remain in his place “until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me”. (The Hebrew here means something like, “until they have paid for their sins.”) There’s hope! The implication is that Yahweh will return from his place if Israel and Judah repent. We should see this as a reference to the hope held out in the gospel. We should also note that this is a picture of true repentance.

Picture #4—Hosea 6:1-3

1. *“Come, let us return to the LORD;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.*
2. *After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.*
3. *Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;*
4. *his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.”* Hosea 6:1-3

Line 1 - These are not Yahweh’s words. These are Hosea’s words, calling Israel to do exactly what Yahweh had said in Hosea 5:15. Hosea has heard the glimmer of hope in that verse and he calls

the people to respond: “Let’s do it! Let’s return to Yahweh”. Returning to Yahweh must be seen in the context of 5:15. To return to him, the people of Israel must “acknowledge their guilt and seek [Yahweh’s] face, and in their distress earnestly seek [him]”. This is exactly what we see happening in John the Baptist’s ministry (see Matthew 3:2-6).

Yahweh has torn Israel (like a lion?). But he is also the one who will heal him. Israel’s only hope comes from the one who struck him down. The ESV’s choice of the word “that” (“he has torn us, that he may heal us”), indicates that Yahweh tore the Israelites for the purpose of healing them, but this may be saying more than Hosea intended here. Other translations simply use the word “and” (HCSB), “but” (NIV/NASB), or “now” (NLT). The NIV reads: “He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us”.

The very one who struck Israel down will bind him up. Israel’s hope is found in the very one who has hurt him. We should think very carefully here about how this “striking down” was fulfilled in history. It obviously happened in Israel at this particular time (they were struck by the Assyrians). But, in a far greater way, this also happened to Jesus. Jesus, the true Israel, was struck down by God (see Isaiah 53). The next line confirms that this reading is correct.

Line 2 - Here, we see a typical use of numbers in biblical poetry. Verset two takes the number used in verset one (two) and increases it by one (three). The implication is that in a very short time (“two days”) Yahweh will revive Israel. The next verset amplifies this statement. On the third day, Israel will be raised up again. Yahweh will do this so that Israel might live before him.

This is a promise that Yahweh will restore Israel in a short period of time. How did this promise come to pass? This is a clear reference to the work God did in raising Jesus from the dead. Remember, Jesus is Israel. After two days, God revived him. On the third day, he raised him from the dead. And because Jesus is raised, all who are in him are raised with him. This line of poetry was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead! This line of poetry is referred to in 1 Corinthians 15 by Paul when he reviews the facts of the gospel with the church in Corinth:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures ... 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

When Paul says that Christ “was raised on the third day in accordance with the *Scriptures*”, we need to know that he is referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. He is referring to this very passage in Hosea! Who could have known, based on this passage in Hosea alone, that this is how God would fulfill these promises?

Why did he do this? He promised to raise Israel up (and this happens via the true Israel—Jesus—being raised) so that “we might live before him”. Jesus’ death and resurrection needed to take place so that we could live with God. The striking and raising of Jesus allows God’s people to live before him in holiness and righteousness!

Line 3 - The promise of Israel being raised up moves Hosea to encourage the people again: “Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD”. He says, in effect, “We must not give up! Things look bleak now, but Yahweh will, by his work, allow us to know him once again!” The children of Israel might have wondered whether such a turn of events would ever take place. It will take place, Hosea insists. It is as guaranteed as the next sunrise!

Line 4 - In the same way that the showers bring life and growth to the earth, Yahweh will bring life and growth to Israel. He brings, as Acts 3:20 indicates, “times of refreshing” to his people. All sorts of blessing will accompany the striking down and raising up of Israel (Jesus).

We should see all of these things as fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. His death has brought about the resurrection and life of all those who are in him. Like the spring rains, God has blessed his people with great growth (for instance, the fruit of the Spirit) because of what he has done through the gospel!

WEEK SEVEN

Hosea 4-8

We've examined just four portions of the poetry found in Hosea 4-8. I would encourage you to spend more time in these chapters and to read them as poetry. There is much more here just waiting to be read and considered and believed and acted upon. Israel has been raised! We can, because of this fact, live before God!

Week Eight

HOSEA 9-14

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

DAY ONE

1. Read Hosea chapters 9-14. After reading and reflecting on the message of these poems, answer the following questions:

Which line(s) of poetry impacted you the most and why?

What is God saying about himself in these poems?

What is God saying about Israel in these poems?

How do these poems apply to your life and to the church?

DAY TWO

2. Read and interact with Hosea 10:1-2

- 1. Israel is a luxuriant vine
that yields its fruit.*
- 2. The more his fruit increased,
the more altars he built;*
- 3. as his country improved,
he improved his pillars.*
- 4. Their heart is false;
now they must bear their guilt.*
- 5. The LORD will break down their altars
and destroy their pillars. Hosea 10:1-2*

3. How is Israel described in this poem?

4. This is not the only passage describing Israel in this way. How do the following passages describe Israel?

Psalm 80:8-16

Isaiah 5:1-7

5. How does Jesus describe himself in John 15:1-11? Why do you think he uses this particular metaphor? Was he intentionally comparing himself to Israel?

6. Based on this passage, how is Jesus similar to Israel? How is he different?

DAY THREE

7. Read and interact with Hosea 11:8-11

1. *How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?*
2. *How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?*
3. *My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.*
4. *I will not execute my burning anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;*
5. *for I am God and not a man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.*

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

6. *They shall go after the LORD;
he will roar like a lion;*
7. *when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west;*
8. *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. Hosea 11:8-11¹*

8. Line 2 mentions two places. What happened at these places? *Deuteronomy 29:23*

9. Why doesn't Yahweh totally destroy Israel?

10. What is the result of Yahweh's compassion?

11. What do these verses tell you about Yahweh? How do they bring comfort and encouragement to you?

DAY FOUR

12. Read and interact with Hosea 13:14-16

1. *Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from Death?*
2. *O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.*
3. *Though he may flourish among his brothers,
the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come,
rising from the wilderness,*
4. *and his fountain shall dry up;
his spring shall be parched;*
5. *it shall strip his treasury
of every precious thing.*
6. *Samaria shall bear her guilt,
because she has rebelled against her God;*
7. *they shall fall by the sword;
their little ones shall be dashed in pieces,
and their pregnant women ripped open. Hosea 13:14-16*

¹ The Hebrew text (MT) of chapter 11 ends after verse 11.

13. What happens in this poem?

14. Why does this happen?

15. In lines 1 and 2, Yahweh tells Death and Sheol to have their way with the Israelites. How does Paul use these verses in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58?

DAY FIVE

16. Read and interact with Hosea 14:4-8

1. *I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.*
2. *I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;*
3. *his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.*
4. *They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;*
5. *they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*
6. *O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.*
7. *I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit.* Hosea 14:4-8

17. What does Yahweh promise to do to Israel in line 1?

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

18. What does this tell you about Israel's ability to heal itself?

19. What does this tell you about the nature of salvation?

20. Why, according to line 1, does Yahweh promise to do these things?

21. How is God's anger turning from Israel connected to the death of Jesus? See *Romans 3:25* and *5:9*

22. How could you use these verses to preach the gospel?

DAY SIX

23. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

HOSEA 9-14

This will be our last week in the book of Hosea. Last week, we looked at portions of poems in chapters four through eight. Before we consider portions of a few of the poems in chapters nine through 14, let's take a few moments and review five main points we have seen emphasized repeatedly throughout this book.

1. The book is based on the premise that Israel's relationship with Yahweh is a marriage. Yahweh considers that his relationship with Israel demands fidelity.
2. Israel is whoring after Baal (or the Baals).
3. Yahweh sees Israel's adultery and abhors it. He carefully chronicles Israel's sin and promises to punish Israel for its sin. These punishments should not have taken the Israelites by surprise (although it's clear that they did), for before the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land, they were warned that Yahweh would punish them if they forgot his covenant and worshiped other gods (see Deuteronomy 4:20-28).
4. Because of his love for his people, Yahweh promises to, after a period, bring his people back to himself. This, like the promise to punish Israel, was also prophesied in Deuteronomy 4 (4:29-31).
5. It is important to know that the promises to gather and to restore Israel were kept—and are being kept—in and through the person of Jesus.

Chapters nine through 14 do not deviate from these main points. The poems in these chapters, however, do present these main points in new and fresh ways.

With this in mind, let's look at four snapshots from Hosea 9-14.

Picture #1—Hosea 10:1-2

1. *Israel is a luxuriant vine
that yields its fruit.*
2. *The more his fruit increased,
the more altars he built;*
3. *as his country improved,
he improved his pillars.*
4. *Their heart is false;
now they must bear their guilt.*
5. *The LORD will break down their altars
and destroy their pillars.* Hosea 10:1-2

Line 1 - The reader is presented with a beautiful picture of Israel as a healthy grape vine loaded with fruit.

Line 2 - We see two things happening at once here. In verset 1 we see fruit proliferating on this vine. Clusters of gorgeous grapes are everywhere! In verset 2, our eyes are turned from the vine to the country itself. The land of Israel, like the vine, has "grapes" growing all over it. The "grapes" growing in the land, 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.

Line 3 - 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. Like the altars Israel built (line 2), these pillars were used in worshiping false gods. Again, idolatry abounds in the land.

Line 4 - The people do not love Yahweh. Their heart is false. They are guilty of great sin. Because of this, the punishment for their idolatry will rest upon them.

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

Line 5 - Israel's "fruit"—its altars and pillars—will be broken down by Yahweh. He will destroy the tools of idolatry in Israel. While this poem doesn't say it, we know from other passages in Hosea that not only will he remove the tools of idolatry, he will remove the love of idolatry as well.

The vine metaphor is used in regard to Israel in a number of different Old Testament. It is notable that all of these passages portraying Israel as a vine are negative. Here are two of the references to Israel as a vine:²

*Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.
And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?
When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?
And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briers and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry! Isaiah 5:1-7*

*"Yet I planted you a choice vine,
wholly of pure seed.
How then have you turned degenerate
and become a wild vine?" Jeremiah 2:21*

These two poems are typical of all of the verses comparing Israel to a vine or a vineyard. Not one of the comparisons of Israel to a vine or a vineyard is positive. Israel never produced the fruit for which it had been planted. This wasn't the fault of its planter. The fault rested in the vine. With this in mind, consider Jesus' reference to himself in John 15:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken

to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:1-5

If Israel is a wild and degenerate vine, Jesus is just the opposite. Once again, we see Jesus filling a role that Israel was to fulfill. Jesus is not a false vine. He is the true vine. Apart from him, there is no other vine. As the true vine, he fulfills the “fruit bearing” purpose Yahweh always had for Israel. As we read this poem in Hosea with gospel saturated eyes, 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.

Picture #2—Hosea 11:8-11

Here, Yahweh tells Israel his innermost thoughts about them. These thoughts betray his true feelings—feelings which are, based on other things he has said, perhaps surprising in their tenderness.

1. *How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?*
2. *How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?*
3. *My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.*
4. *I will not execute my burning anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;*
5. *for I am God and not a man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.*
6. *They shall go after the LORD;
he will roar like a lion;*
7. *when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west;*
8. *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. Hosea 11:8-11³*

Line 1 - As Yahweh considers giving up Israel, he is torn. How can he give up the one he loves? How can he hand him over to his enemies?

Line 2 - Admah and Zeboiim are two cities that Yahweh “overthrew in his anger and wrath” (Deuteronomy 29:23). He considers destroying Israel in similar fashion. The nation deserves such a punishment. But how can he do it? Israel is his beloved.

Line 3 - Yahweh’s heart recoils at the thought of destroying Israel. He cannot do it. Instead of wrath rising against Israel, feelings of compassion rise in Yahweh’s heart.

Line 4 - Compassion has won out! Yahweh will not destroy Israel. His burning anger will not be poured out on Israel as it was poured out on Admah and Zeboiim.

Line 5 - The reason Yahweh will not pour out his wrath lies solely within him. He will not exercise his burning anger because he is God! Man would not act like him, but he is not a man. He is the Holy One, and he, because of his compassion, promises not to come in wrath.

Line 6 - Israel will return to Yahweh. We see that, in spite of Yahweh’s compassion, they have been scattered by him. But he will, because of his compassion, bring them back. He will call them to himself with a roar like a lion. His call to himself will be so powerful that it cannot be ignored.

3 The Hebrew text (MT) of chapter 11 ends after verse 11.

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

Lines 7-8 - When Israel hears this calls, they will come to Yahweh. They will be trembling as they come, but they will, nonetheless, come. They will come, we will see, from all directions. They come from the west. They come from Egypt. They come from Assyria. And Yahweh promises to return them to their homes. The poem ends with the phrase “Declaration of Yahweh”. This statement is Yahweh’s seal on this promise. He will accomplish this thing. Like a king’s seal (only far more binding), the phrase “Declaration of Yahweh” stamped at the end of this poem guarantees its complete fulfillment. He will call his people to himself with a roar and they will come to him.

There is much in this poem to consider. Yahweh chooses to reveal his heart here—something we could never know unless he chose to display it. We see him moved with the deepest of feelings for his people. Anger calls for their total destruction. Compassion calls for their forgiveness. Which will win? God is not, of course, a conflicted being, but he allows us to see the depth of emotions within him. He is not cold and heartless. He has warm and tender compassion for his people. I’m not sure we often see God in this light. We readily see him as the divine Judge. But do we also see him as the one whose “compassion grows warm and tender”? Clearly, as may be seen in the poems below, Yahweh wants his people to know the depth of his love for them.

*“Can a woman forget her nursing child,
that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.”* Isaiah 49:15

*“Is Ephraim my dear son?
Is he my darling child?
For as often as I speak against him,
I do remember him still.
Therefore my heart yearns for him;
I will surely have mercy on him,
declares the LORD.”* Jeremiah 31:20

Yahweh’s decision to not execute his burning anger and completely destroy Ephraim is not because Ephraim deserves compassion. Yahweh’s reason rests totally within himself. He acts as he does because he is God. He is not moved out of our goodness (for we have none), but out of himself.

Finally, we should consider Yahweh’s promise that he will roar like a lion and that his children will come trembling to him and that he will return them to their homes. When, we might ask, will this prophecy be fulfilled? Remember 1 Corinthians 1:20? This promise, as with all of the promises of God regarding Israel’s restoration, was fulfilled in Christ. Yahweh roared at Calvary. That roar has been echoing for two thousand years now. And each time the gospel is preached, his roar is heard once again, calling people to come to him. Yahweh’s children have been coming to him by the millions. They have streamed to him from all over the world. They will continue coming to him until the very end. He will bring all of them home. Just as he promised.

Picture #3—Hosea 13:14-16

- 1. Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from Death?*
- 2. O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.*
- 3. Though he may flourish among his brothers,
the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come,
rising from the wilderness,*
- 4. and his fountain shall dry up;
his spring shall be parched;*
- 5. it shall strip his treasury
of every precious thing.*
- 6. Samaria shall bear her guilt,
because she has rebelled against her God;*

*7. they shall fall by the sword;
their little ones shall be dashed in pieces,
and their pregnant women ripped open. Hosea 13:14-16*

Line 1 - As with the last poem we considered, here we find Yahweh asking himself questions. He is wondering if he should save the children of Israel from the power of Sheol (the place of the dead) and if he should redeem them from Death. Death is capitalized here because it is personified here as a personal being.⁴

Line 2 - Yahweh makes up his mind. He won't save Israel from Death or from Sheol. Yahweh calls Death to bring its plagues upon Israel and he calls Sheol to "sting" Israel. But what about Yahweh's compassion? Surely he will save the children of Israel here. He will not do so. His compassion is hidden from his eyes. Israel is going to get what it deserves. (Paul uses this line in a very surprising way in 1 Corinthians 15. We'll consider his use of this line shortly.)

Line 3 - Starting in line 3, we see a list of terrible things happening to Israel. Even if Israel prospers, Yahweh will send a wind that will ruin the country.

Line 4 - All of the good in the land will disappear. Water will dry up.

Line 5 -The national treasury will, like the fountains, be completely drained. All of Israel's bounty, from water to wealth, will dry up.

Line 6 - This will happen because of Samaria's sins (Samaria was Israel's capital city). Israel has rebelled against Yahweh and will have to "bear" its guilt for doing so.

Line 7 - The people of Israel will be violently attacked and overthrown. No one will be spared. Everyone, even infants and pregnant women, will pay the price for Israel's rebellion against Yahweh.

It is interesting to consider a poem like this so shortly after looking at a poem that (seemingly) contradicts it! How can Yahweh have compassion on Israel (in Hosea 11:8-11) and, at the same time, not have compassion on Israel? We must know that Israel did experience all that Yahweh proclaims here. Because of its guilt, Israel was invaded and her wealth was taken by others. The Assyrians, the ones who conquered Israel, were known for their great cruelty. While they didn't kill all of Israel's people, they had no qualms about killing even the most helpless of people. But, even though this is all true, Yahweh also had compassion on Israel. He didn't, because of his compassion, totally destroy Israel. He saved some.

Line 2 is worth deep consideration. These verses are loosely quoted in 1 Corinthians 15, but not in the way they are used in Hosea. Consider how Paul uses these verses here:

*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?"*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who
gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57*

In a stunning reversal of the way in which these verses are 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 through our Lord Jesus Christ!

⁴ This is also the case in Revelation 20:13-14.

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

Picture #4—Hosea 14:4-8

1. *I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.*
2. *I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;*
3. *his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.*
4. *They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;*
5. *they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*
6. *O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.*
7. *I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit.* Hosea 14:4-8

Line 1 - Israel's "apostasy" (i.e., Israel's turning from Yahweh to false gods) will be healed by Yahweh. His anger will turn from Israel and, because he is no longer angry with them, he will love them freely.

Lines 2-5 - From this point on—from the point in which Yahweh's anger is turned from his people—Yahweh's blessing on rests on them. Notice the images of life and health and growth. These are images that would have spoken deeply to people who worked the land. Yahweh is like the dew. The people are like a beautiful garden or vineyard or forest. All that was ever promised of this people will come to pass when Yahweh's anger turns from them and he heals their apostasy!

Lines 6-7 - From this beautiful scene we turn, once again, to the subject of idolatry. Yahweh reminds the people that he and the Baals have nothing in common. The Baals do not provide for the people. They are not like the dew to the people. They have not caused them to prosper. Yahweh alone is the one who answers Israel's prayers. He is the one who looks after Israel's people. From Yahweh alone comes Israel's "fruit".

Line 1 of this poem is worthy of deep reflection. This line demonstrates that Israel does not heal its own apostasy. Yahweh—via the death and resurrection of Jesus—heals Israel's adulterous heart. We must know that, because of our brokenness, we could never turn to God. He alone heals us from our love of idols.

This line also demonstrates that Yahweh is able to love Israel freely *because* his anger is turned from Israel. What, we must ask, has turned God's anger from Israel? Has he just decided to forget about Israel's sins? How can a holy and just God overlook the sins that have brought forth his wrath? He can't. Sin brings wrath. And that's why God's wrath was poured out on Jesus on the cross! Because his wrath has been poured out and has been satisfied, Yahweh is able to love his people without his righteous wrath standing in the way! Jesus is, as Romans 3:25 says, our "propitiation" (i.e., the sacrifice that turns aside God's righteous wrath). Prosperity (lines 2 through 8) is only given to a people from whom God's anger has turned and upon whom his favor rests.

These four poems are not the only poems we could consider in Hosea 9 through 14.⁵ But we have seen enough to get a good feel for the message of these chapters. That message is no different from the message of this book. That message is, in a word, Jesus. He is the one to whom this book—in every chapter and in every poem—points. Israel's idolatry is ended in him. God's wrath is

⁵ We could have, for instance, considered Hosea 11:1-7. Matthew 2:15 indicates that Jesus' departure from Egypt was a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son". This verse, as we have previously discussed, highlights the fact that Jesus' life is a replay of Israel's life. Unlike Israel, however, Jesus perfectly obeyed his Father in everything, thus fulfilling God's purposes for Israel in himself.

turned aside in him. God's love is made known to Israel through him. Israel's "fruit" is produced by him. The covenant Israel is to keep is kept by him. The prosperity of Israel is found in him. In reading this book we are to think of Jesus.

Of course, this shouldn't surprise us. For this is exactly what Jesus said to his disciples.

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." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Luke 24:44-48

WEEK EIGHT

Hosea 9-14

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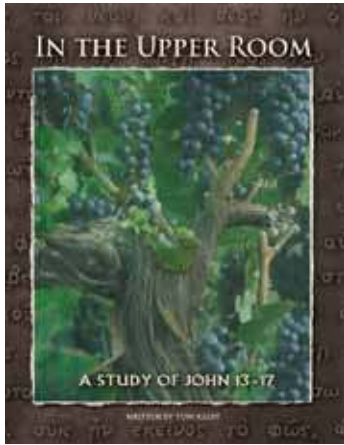
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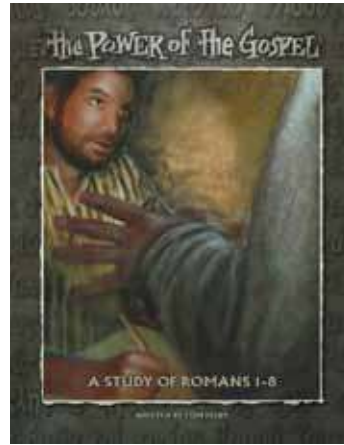
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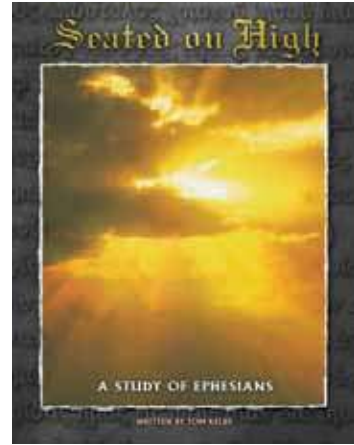
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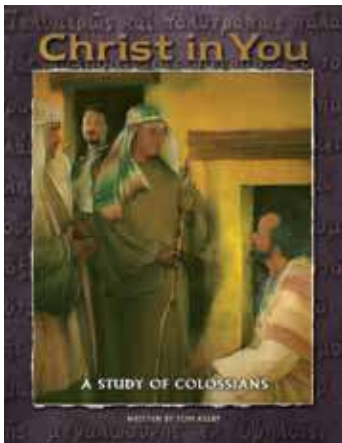
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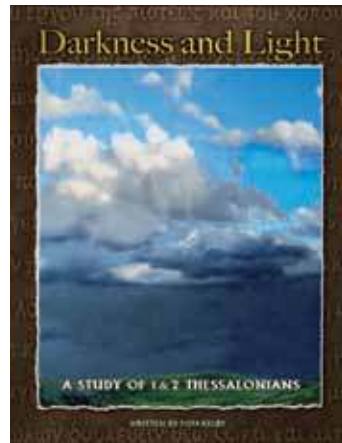
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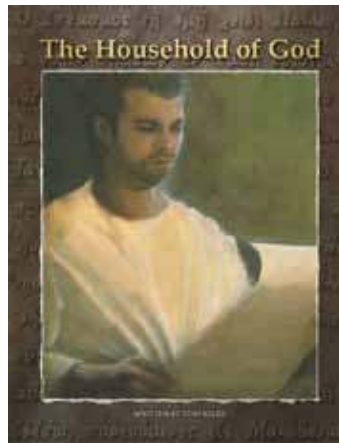
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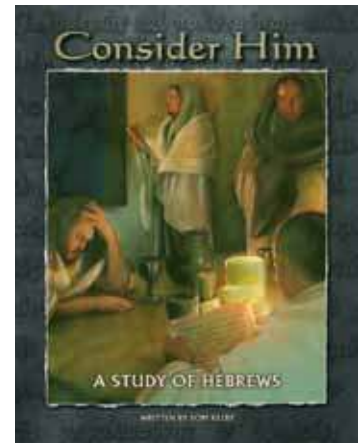
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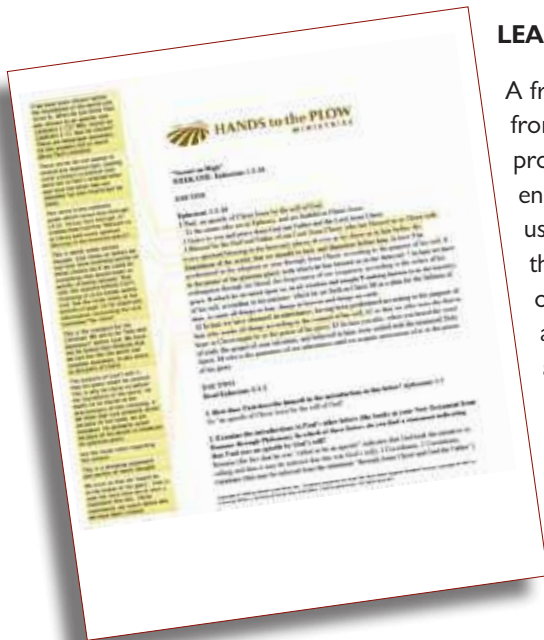
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